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AUGUST 1929

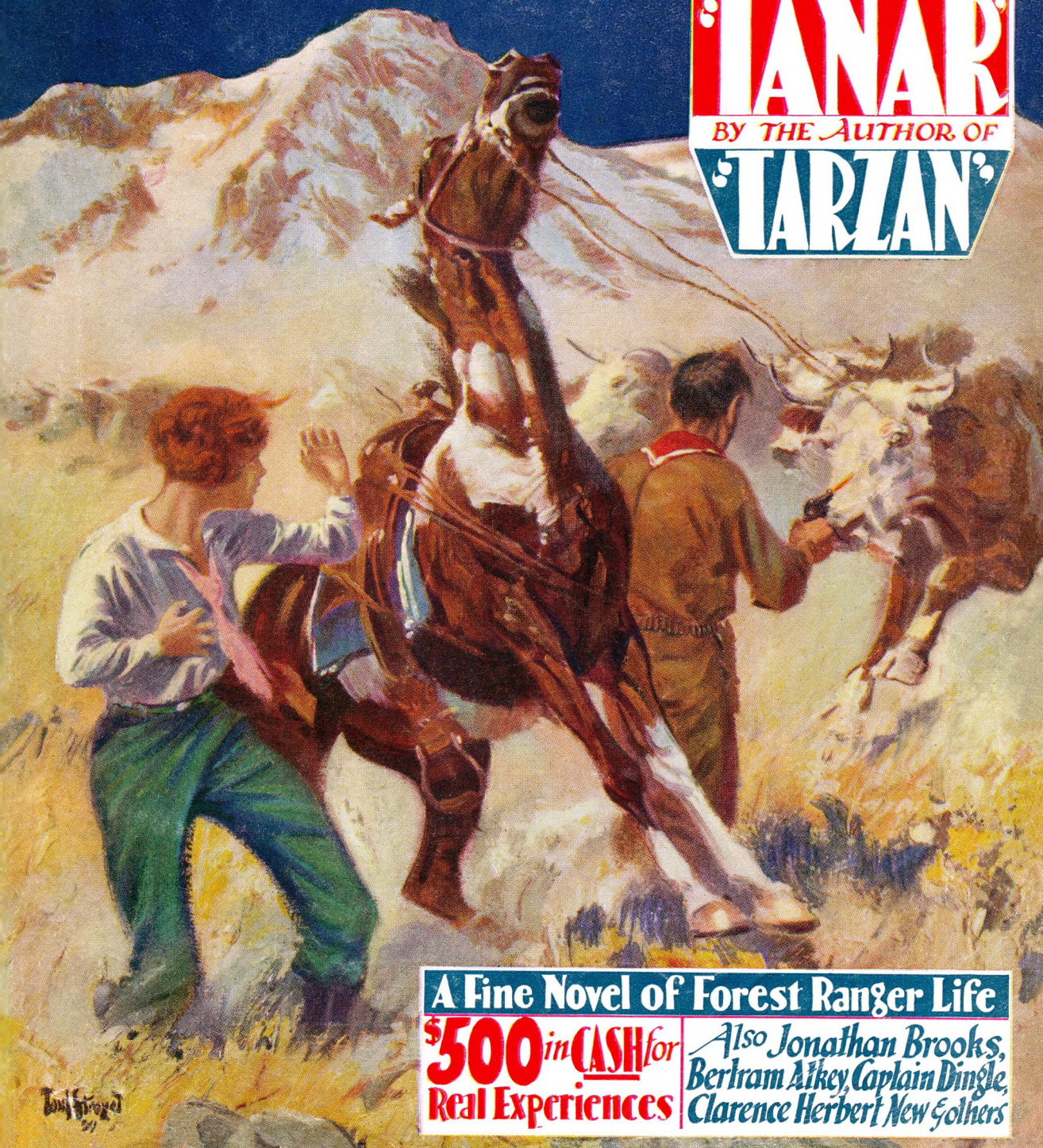
# THE Illustrated BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

N.S.E.

## TANAR

BY THE AUTHOR OF

## TARZAN



A Fine Novel of Forest Ranger Life

$500 in CASH for Real Experiences

Also Jonathan Brooks, Bertram Atkey, Captain Dingle, Clarence Herbert New & others

*Another*
*Romance of the Incomparable*

# "TARZAN" has been written by
## EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

The first thrilling chapter will appear in the next issue of

# THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

There never was another fiction hero quite the equal of Tarzan. There has never been another land of romance quite so fascinating as Pellucidar—that world within the world which is the scene of the exploits of Tanar which you have been following to their climax in this issue. And now Mr. Burroughs combines these two attractions—Tarzan journeys to Pellucidar in this splendid novel which begins—

*In the next, the September, issue*

The Consolidated Magazines Corporation, Publisher, 36 So. State St., Chicago

# Last Year's Pay Looks Like Small Change to These Men Today!

**A 300% Increase!**

From $75 a month to $300 and more per month—that's the jump N. B. Scholes made through N. S. T. A. Credits N. S. T. A. training with his success, and N. S. T. A. Employment Department for his present big pay job.

**Doubled His Pay**

A. Robitaille found in N. S. T. A. training "a lifetime of selling experience. My earnings have jumped to 100% more than I got at the time I began studying your course."

**Worth $5,000 To Him**

"I wouldn't take $5,000 for what you've done for me," writes C. B. Sterling. "Your training has actually increased my income over 900%." Shortly after enrolling, he led the sales force of his company.

**Here Are Six Men Who Were Formerly Caught In The Hopeless Treadmill Of Low-Pay Jobs. Today Every One Of Them Report Earnings From $4,000 Up To $10,000 A Year! Right Now—The Same Opportunity That Changed Their Lives So Completely Is Open To YOU! Don't Fail To Read Every Word Of This Vital Message!**

When a man who has been struggling along in a low-pay job suddenly steps out and starts earning real money—$5,000, $7,500, or $10,000 a year, he usually gives his friends quite a shock. It is hard for them to believe that he is the same man they used to know. Take one of the men whose pictures appear on this page—J. M. Huppert, for example. Huppert was a plumber's apprentice at $23 a week. If he had predicted that he was about to make two years' pay within a period of three months, his friends would have thought he was joking. But he knew what he wanted and he set about getting it in the shortest possible way. "The Secrets of Modern Dynamic Salesmanship" opened his eyes to the opportunities in the selling profession. This book proved that Master Salesmen are made, not "born." It told facts and secrets about money-making that were a positive revelation. And best of all, it outlined a simple plan that enables men from all walks of life to quickly reach the top without spending years on the road—without losing a day or a dollar from their present positions!

## A Few Weeks—Then Bigger Pay

Huppert seized the opportunity to qualify as a Master Salesman, and has richly profited by it. He now reports an increase of many times his former weekly wages, and his future possibilities are unlimited. Some of his friends perhaps say he was "lucky." He was. But his "luck" lay in his decision to cast his lot with the N. S. T. A. Thousands of other men have been similarly "lucky." Some report increases ranging up to 900%. They have forgotten the days when they were caught in the rut—but they never forget that they owe a great part of their success to N. S. T. A. training.

**National Salesmen's Training Association**
**Dept. K-32, N. S. T. A. Bldg., Chicago, Illinois**

**Earns 2 Years' Pay In 3 Months**

J. M. Huppert, a $23 a week plumber's apprentice, found selling furs easier and more profitable than fixing leaks, after N. S. T. A. training. In his first three months he made more money than in two years at his old job.

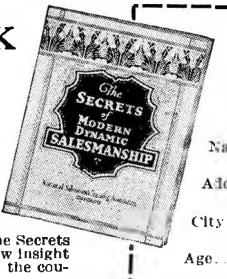
**His Own Boss — At Doubled Wages**

"I'm my own boss now" proudly writes W. Hayes, an N. S. T. A. graduate. "Since taking this course I have more than doubled my income." In one week recently three other concerns tried to hire him away from his present job.

**$5,000 A Year!**

Ask J. A. Ferland if N. S. T. A. training pays. A French Canadian railroad man—little education in English. N. S. T. A. training won him a sales managership at $5,000 a year to *START*.

## Send for This FREE BOOK




You may have doubts in your own mind about how salesmanship can help you to solve your own problem. If so, we cannot urge you too strongly to read the same fascinating message that inspired Huppert, Farland and Scholes, and the thousands of others who took this remarkable short cut to success. If we were asking two or three dollars a copy for "The Secrets of Modern Dynamic Salesmanship," you might hesitate. But it is now FREE! See for yourself what salesmanship has done for others—and what the National Salesmen's Training Association stand ready to do for you. No matter what your present thoughts on selling are, "The Secrets of Modern Dynamic Salesmanship" will give you a new insight into this fascinating and highly-paid profession. Mail the coupon for your Free copy NOW!

**National Salesmen's Training Association, Dept. K-32, N. S. T. A. Bldg., Chicago, Ill.**

Without cost or obligation I will accept a copy of your book, "The Secrets of Modern Dynamic Salesmanship" and details of your System of Training and Free Employment Service.

Name.....

Address.....

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

Age.....Occupation.....

# THE BLUE BOOK

EDWIN BALMER, Editor
DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor



Cover Design: Painted by Paul Strayer to illustrate "Mountain Men."
Frontispiece: "Songs of Sea and Trail: II—'Leave Her, Johnny!'" Drawn by William Molt.

## *Two Fascinating Serials*



## *Memorable Short Stories*



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# MAGAZINE

AUGUST, 1929

**Special Notice to Writers and Artists:** Manuscripts and art material submitted for publication in The Blue Book Magazine will only be received on the understanding that the publisher and editors shall not be responsible for loss or injury thereto while such manuscripts or art material are in the publisher's possession or in transit.





## Edgar Rice Burroughs

Creator of Tarzan, the champion adventurer, who comes back to you next month in the story of the most amazing exploit even he has yet achieved—a journey to the strange world of Pellucidar at the earth's core. You will find a novel thrilling indeed when you turn in the next, the September, issue to—

"TARZAN AT THE EARTH'S CORE"

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IMPORTANT NOTICE: Do not subscribe for THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE through an agent unknown to you personally, or you may find yourself defrauded. Many complaints are received from people who have paid cash to some swindler, in which event, of course, the subscription never reaches this office.

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE is issued on the first of the month preceding its date (August issue out July 1st), and is for sale by all newsdealers after that time. In the event of failure to obtain copies at news-stands or on trains, a notification to the Publisher will be appreciated.

Advertising forms close on the third of second month preceding date of issue. Advertising rates on application.

# In 16 years we have not published *a more dramatic story than this*

This is the story of a man who almost threw $10,000 into the waste basket because he did not have curiosity enough to open the pages of a little book. (How much curiosity have you? Have you read one single book in the past month that increased your business knowledge or gave you a broader business outlook?)

The scene took place in a bank in one of the southern cities of California. The Vice-President, who had sent for a representative of the Alexander Hamilton Institute, said to him:

"I want your help in making a little private experiment among the junior officers of this bank. We have got to appoint a new cashier. I hate to bring a man in from the outside, and yet I am not at all sure that any one of our younger men is ready for the position. Here are the names of five of them. I want you to send a copy of 'Forging Ahead in Business' to each one, but without letting them suspect that I have had a hand in it. Then call and tell the story of the Institute's training to each one separately and let me know how he receives it.

"I enrolled for your Course in New York years ago," he explained. "It gave me my first real knowledge of the fundamental principles of business. It meant everything to me, and I have an idea that there is no better way to test a man's business judgment than to see how he reacts to the opportunity it offers."

The five copies of "Forging Ahead in Business" were mailed, and a few days later the representative of the Institute called. One of the five men was on a vacation; three had tossed the book into the waste basket. They "knew all about it already"; they were "not interested." The fifth had his copy on his desk unopened. To that fifth man the Institute representative said:

"You may not suspect it, but there is a check for $10,000 in that little book."

The following morning the Institute man was called on the 'phone. "I think I found that $10,000 check last night," said the man at the bank. "If you're down this way to-day, drop in. I'd like to enrol."

A few months later the directors of the bank appointed him cashier; his upward progress had begun. One of the first friends whom he notified of his promotion was the Institute representative.

"It gives me a cold shudder," he said, "to remember that I was just on the point of throwing that little book into the waste basket—$10,000 and all."

Here is the Institute's function in a nutshell: It first of all awakens your interest in business, stimulates your desire to know, makes business a fascinating game. And second, it puts you into personal contact with leaders, thrills you by their example, makes you powerful with their methods. Is it any wonder, then, that Institute men stand out above the crowd?

Thousands of men will read this page. Hundreds will turn aside, or cast it into the waste basket, as those three men in the California bank threw their copies of "Forging Ahead in Business" into the waste basket. But a few hundred will be stirred by that divine emotion—curiosity—which is the beginning of wisdom. They will send for "Forging Ahead"; they will read it, and, like the fifth man, will find a fortune in its pages.

## Announcing Three New Management Courses

The rapid developments in modern business have brought increasing demand for an extension of Institute service.

To meet this demand the Institute now offers three new Management Courses in addition to its regular Modern Business Course and Service. These are a Course and Service in:

**1—Marketing Management.**

**2—Production Management.**

**3—Finance Management.**

These new Courses are of particular interest to younger executives who want definite training in the management of the particular departments of business in which they are now engaged.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON INSTITUTE
882 Astor Place New York City

Send me at once the new revised edition of "Forging Ahead in Business," which I may keep without charge.


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Please write plainly
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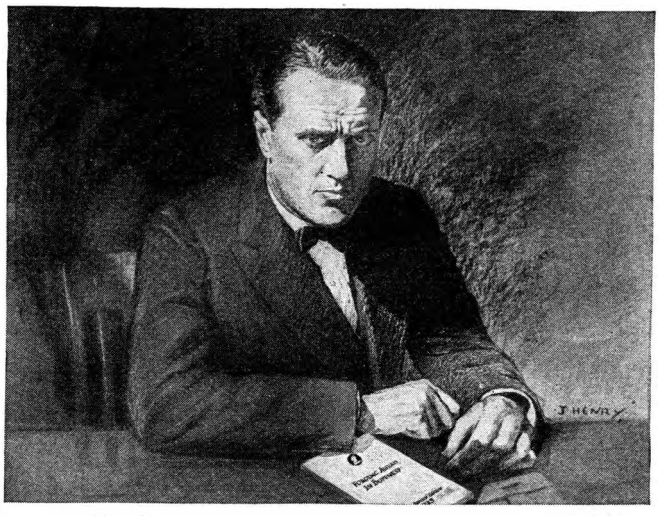


*"I said to him, 'There is a check for $10,000 hidden in that book.'"*

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 49 AUGUST, 1929 No. 4

# TARZAN Comes Again

NEXT month Tarzan, premier adventurer in the fiction of our time, comes back to us in the most powerful and thrill-crammed story that even Edgar Rice Burroughs has ever written.

For this extraordinary novel combines two unique attractions: Tarzan himself, who probably has a stronger hold upon the affections of American readers than even Tanar or any other fiction character; and that strange fascinating world of Pellucidar at the earth's core. In other words, Tarzan journeys to Pellucidar in this remarkable romance; and the adventures which there befall him are even more exciting and colorful than the amazing exploits which have already made his name known all over the English-speaking world.

How Tarzan makes the tremendous journey from the wilds of the Dark Continent to the uncharted regions of the world at the earth's core is in itself a story of the deepest interest—a story such as only the fertile creative genius of Edgar Rice Burroughs could produce, and which you are sure to enjoy to the utmost; and it is only a small part of this great romance. Count upon the most engaging fiction of the year when you begin "Tarzan and Pellucidar" in the next, the September, issue.

As usual Tarzan will have widely varied but consistently entertaining companions. The climax of Harold Wire's vivid novel of Forest Ranger life in the high Sierras, "Mountain Men," is engrossing indeed. The next episodes in the Labors of Hercules, as brought down to date by his admitted descendant Bertram Atkey, is especially diverting. And "Air Mail," a lively novelette of airplane adventure by Leland S. Jamieson, the Army pursuit pilot who gave us "The Episode of the Juxacanna" and, in this issue, "Storm," is just about the most arresting story of its type we have ever published.

CLARENCE HERBERT NEW, of course, will be represented by a Free Lance story—and a particularly good one, too; the increasing power and authority of his work is notable. Warren Hastings Miller, likewise, will give us a stirring tale of the Hell's Angels squad of the Foreign Legion. And there will be many other fine stories by writers new and old: detective stories, a splendid sea story, an unusual baseball story, among others. And from the Real Experience narratives, which our readers contribute with such generous enthusiasm, we have assembled a group that rounds out a magazine that we believe unmatched in diversity and interest.

—*The Editors.*

## SONGS OF SEA AND TRAIL

### *II—"Leave Her, Johnny!"*

**Solo: Heave about the pump-bowls bright—**
**Chorus: Leave her, Johnny, leave her!**
**Solo: No sleep there'll be for us tonight.**
**Chorus: It's time for us to leave her.**

**Solo: Heave about or we shall drown—**
**Chorus: Leave her, Johnny, leave her!**
**Solo: Can't you feel her settling down?**
**Chorus: It's time for us to leave her.**

**Solo: The rats have gone, and we the crew—**
**Chorus: Leave her, Johnny, leave her!**
**Solo: It's time, by God, that we went too.**
**Chorus: It's time for us to leave her.**

# *The* REBELLION *of Constable Kitt*

*A stirring and individual story of the Royal Canadian Mounted, by the recognized historian of that noted force.*

## *By* T. MORRIS LONGSTRETH

Illustrated by W. O. Kling

TAKE this afternoon, when the boys were grousing at stables as per customary: you'd think this outfit was a disease nobody could get over too soon. I guess you gathered that the Mounted Police was run by a bunch of apes, didn't you now? With old Frozen-face for the particular head baboon!

Well, all that jaw's just a sign of health, showing they've still got an interest in living. I like to hear them shoot off their face, so long as the talk's on the O C's ways, where it can't do much harm. But when they start bumping Frozen-face for merely acting as a sergeant-major should, I feel like wanting to tell them a thing or two.

I agree with them, of course, that Frozen-face is an old model. He joined up with this outfit when the West was a horse country and the price of oats was the overpowering topic. They tell me he was one of those hard seeds that nobody knew where he came from and nobody dared inquire. But he looked useful, with that map. Even a recruiting officer could see he could make an easy living robbing trains. He admitted right off that he could ride anything with hair, as the saying goes. And not like so many admitters, he made good. He didn't shine up to anybody, though, even then, and you only got to know him by mistake.

I'll not forget the day I first made that mistake. I'd just come down from the training depot at Regina, and I was probably the greenest article they ever crated out. Along with the handicaps usual to a recruit, I'd brought some special blemishes. One was a swelled head from winning a bunch of money at the races. Another was the idea I was all right with the girls. But the worst, in the sergeant-major's estimation, was my views on horses. I didn't love 'em, to be frank. I wanted my horsepower canned and ready to go when you let in the clutch. Valeting horses three or four hours a day in a cold stable had strained our relations; and when it came to the riding-school, there wasn't a square yard of it I didn't know by personal introduction, and there wasn't a nag in it I couldn't have said good-by to without tears. If I had to smell, I preferred to smell of oil and gasoline.

FOR that was my crime, gasoline—what with the race money and the girls, I'd developed a neat little taste in roadsters. But everybody did. Even the cheapest immigrant had a prairie Lincard in his shed; if you asked a girl out, she looked at your wheelbase before she looked at you. The date you could make with a horse and buggy wasn't worth making.

But old Frozen-face had never been broke to women, I guess, and he wasn't concerned with dates. His heart was sewed up in horseflesh. He was still living in the days of the poets when the hush of silence hung over the plains and you did the chores with Government mules. So when I arrived and didn't fall down and worship horses whenever I saw one, it hurt him bad. The little feelin' I had against the brutes must have shown in my face, or maybe he suspected it from the fact I didn't have bowed legs. Anyway, being a good sergeant-major, he ordered me off on a horse patrol.

Now, you know sergeant-majors by this time, and how it's easier to chum up with King George than with a good one. Why, even today I'd risk telling His Majesty his crown's not on straight rather than suggest

to an S. M. that I think he's not perfect. It doesn't go, not a little ways. So you can savvy what happened when I advised Frozen-face that I could accomplish his old patrol quicker and better on a motorcycle.

He didn't speak, at first, so I went on to tell him where I could borrow one. Even then he didn't speak the way an angry man should—for I saw he was angry; but after a long cold stare, he began one of the grandest choke-offs that ever ascended in a slow blue cloud.

"IS it possible, Constable Kitt," he said, "is it possible that you've been on the strength here for a week? Have I grown so careless as all that? You arrived last Monday. On Tuesday you were observed to hurry through stables in order to get into trouble downtown. Strutting along Main Street, you were so engrossed with one of these modern, half-dressed, hand-painted, warmed-up apologies for women that you passed Inspector Tagget without saluting. On Thursday you again hurried through stables to engage in a game which is not only forbidden to members of this Force but is generally considered unwise for fools. You were reprimanded. Today I give you an order, and you venture to suggest that I do not know my business.

"Did they teach you no manners at Regina? Were you never told to express your regret at having to put your sergeant-major in his place? Having been in the Force only twenty-three years, I cannot boast of your ripeness of judgment nor your advanced methods. But I am still unhappily responsible for the discipline at this post. You, still more unhappily, are elected to obey the orders given you. Do you hear?" His eyes went a curious shade of green. "If I catch you shirking stables again, watch out. If you mention motorcycle to me once more, you wont even have time to watch. Unfortunately I'm not always in a good temper and I might resent your obvious efforts to improve the Force and educate me. That will do."

You might think it would. I went out smoking hot, with those words burned on.

"He'll see," I said bitterly to a girl I'd met the day before. "That scrawny buzzard'll see if motors wont run his horses out of business."

"Mercy, Ed, what a rough way to talk of my uncle!" she said.

"That bird your uncle! He don't look it, with that face."

"I like Uncle Howard," Rena went on. "He's so interesting. He's a living contradiction."

"I'll say he is!"

"Listen till I tell you, Ed. You've only heard his growl. He's strict like that because he's so wrapped up in the Force. Really he is—the way his superiors were strict with *him*. Anything else, he thinks, would show that the Force is going down, and that'd kill him. He's in love with it, but naturally he's got to hide all that. It's just his way, Ed."

"It's a hell of a way to show you're in love," I said, still sulking.

"You talk just like a little boy."

"Well, isn't it? That crankcase never knew what love is."

"Wrong again," she said quietly. "He was in love with Mother once. But she chose Dad."

"Congratulations."

"There's no use talking to you, Edward Kitt."

"Right. That cuckoo's talked enough for the family. If he's got the Force so close to his warm heart, why can't he tell when progress goes dusting by? How about that bunch of customs-beaters, the Duff gang? Why did they give Sergeant Geary the dust? Because you can't catch an eight-cylinder car with a one-cylinder horse. Now, can you?"

"A garageful of cars wouldn't have caught the Duff gang that time, Ed. They jumped back across the border too soon."

"Isn't that what I'm telling you? Men like them with a reward on their heads wont wait. There's a poster on our bulletin-board in barracks with their pictures, and every time I see it I wish I'd been after them with that bus I had at Regina. I hate to see the outfit thrown down by dopers simply because we're too slow."

"You do love it, don't you, Ed?"

"Next best to a certain girl somewhere."

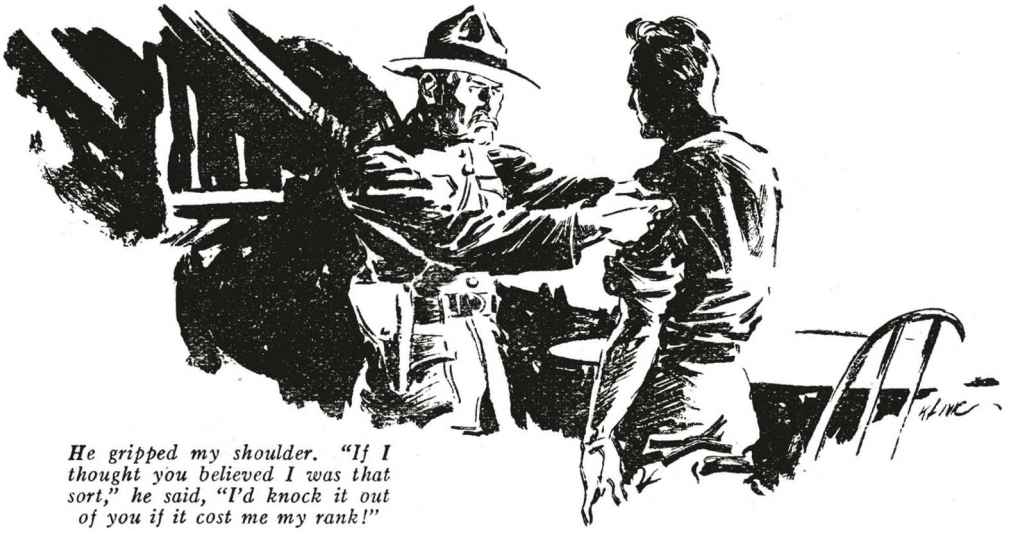
"You should love it ahead of any girl."

"Hypocrite!"

FOR that she smacks me, most agreeable, on the cheek, and runs away, but I could see I'd made a dent; and believe me, that girl Rena was worth starting for. She was sound, with just enough style to raise a nice breeze. She didn't have to shoot a fellow to get his money, but she didn't want his money—a new one on me. She made you feel like a spring morning to go with her. Lots of times I couldn't work

for making plans, and I'd be all uneasy until I was with her, and then I was uneasy. A hell of a nice feeling, you understand, though uncomfortable; and it made all other girls and women seem like last year's. I just naturally had to tour in her direction. . . . .

One day I was down emptying ashes for the Inspector's wife, a gabby lot if I do have no right to remark it, when she says:



*He gripped my shoulder. "If I thought you believed I was that sort," he said, "I'd knock it out of you if it cost me my rank!"*

"Do you know anything about cars? My husband's wont start. Nobody around here seems to understand it. You'd think the Government would have more self-respect than to send us a thing like that."

Well, she didn't know what she was doing for me. The moment I stretched out under that pile of junk, I was as happy as a tourist asking questions. It wasn't a car, rightly speaking, but a warning, and it sounded like a stone-crusher in action. You couldn't have sold it for its tires, but it ran, after I'd nursed it along, and you bet I had to give it some expensive tryouts, with Rena in to tell me the names of the stars. Those were happy times, with dusk on the plains and glory overhead, but I don't think they helped Frozen-face's temper when he found out. Of course he couldn't come down on me very heavy, seeing as I was doing a favor for the Inspector, but being a good sergeant-major, as I said, he had other ways of putting on the brakes. It occurred to him to find out if I knew anything about his other hobby, the constables' manual.

Perhaps you haven't looked into that little testament of ours. It's a terror. It's a book they've made up so that we constables can compete with the law on its home grounds. It's hot with the latest news on warrants and arrests and summary convictions and exciting things like that. But the real smacker is the chapter on giving evidence. Now, slovenly riding was one thing that Frozen-face hated good and hard, but no worse than to see a buck constable ball up a perfectly good case by giving faulty evidence. That was one of his bad dreams, and he took good care that we shouldn't furnish him with that nightmare. The day he discovered I didn't know the difference between a summons and a subpœna was another milestone of misunderstanding between us. My temper was pretty well shot, too, when I came out of that interview, only I had to keep it to myself. I'd have asked for a transfer that afternoon but for one little circumstance, which was Rena. I found out I had, sometime in the past, ceased to be a free man. I couldn't break away!

A FEW evenings later, just at "lights out," my chum Draughty Macklin tells me there's a boy wants to see me out by the corral.

"What the high do I want with a boy out there?" I asked him.

"I don't give a fried potato what you want; I'm just telling you," says Draughty.

I couldn't figure it, so I dragged my boots on again and sneaked out, and I was in a fair rage by the time I noticed

a slender chap standing in the shadow by the gate. "What the hell—" I began.

"It's Rena, Ed," she said, "and don't swear so! I've risked coming here to tell you something serious."

It was Rena, all right, dolled out in her brother's clothes. "Why this rig?" I asked.

"Because I had to see you, and if you were caught with a girl, it would go even harder with you than it is going."

"What do you mean, 'is going?'"

"I'm worried, Ed. You see, you don't seem to know where you stand. I heard somebody saying that he'd heard Uncle Howard telling a person, no matter who, that he was tired of having Regina send him brick-heads who didn't know the first thing about court procedure, and that he was going to shoot them back with you heading the column. I couldn't bear that to happen, Ed."

That sent me cold, and I said: "What in blazes does he want? How can I memorize his blooming manual if he keeps me riding circus ponies all day?"

"Now you're just making excuses, Ed."

"You're starting to sound like a bum sergeant-major yourself."

"Listen, Ed: You've *got* to learn that manual, and if you can't do it yourself, you've got to be taught."

"You've doped it. I'll wire Vancouver for a teacher in the morning."

"Silly boy, why do you make it so hard for me? I could teach you."

"That's service," I said, still sarcastic, "especially when you and me are poison if seen together."

"We needn't be seen," she said, very low. "Draughty Macklin is stable orderly, isn't he? And there's a light always in the little room, isn't there? And if you can come down tonight, you can come other nights, can't you? Besides—"

Oh, she knew her powers all right, and how a chap was lost if he got within a length of her. I was only hard starting, anyway, because I hadn't thought of it first. "I expect you'll find me terrible dumb," I told her.

"I know how dumb you are," she said, and left me there like a light blown out.

THE plan ran smoother than I thought. You might suppose that girl had been studying the statutes since she could dress herself. "Now, Ed, tell me again, what is a writ of habeas corpus?" And I, naturally knowing nothing about it, would try bluffing. But you couldn't bluff her any better than a sergeant-major, and before long I could tune in on any chapter she said.

The joke came one day when I put a J. P. straight to the effect that a dying declaration couldn't be used as a deposition. This miracle got to Frozen-face's ears. He said something very decent to me, being square at heart, and when I broke the news to Rena, she let me almost kiss her. Only almost, though, for our meetings had been as cold and businesslike as a cash-register. She sure didn't let her feelings double-cross her, but I was like one of these Indian kids in the agency Sunday-school, jammed with mischief but afraid to show it.

We had been going for weeks and were well along to the back cover when the inevitable knock developed. We'd got careless, and one night I forgot to fix the shutter over the window, and I was just shooting to Rena the fine points of a coroner's inquest, when the door opened and who should it be but that walking icicle, old Frozen-face himself. The lamp flared, and he didn't see everything at once, but he recognized me and said, "Rolling the bones again, Kitt?" and his voice was so fake pleasant you might almost have forgot to worry.

Rena dragged up a little laugh from somewhere and said: "You guessed just right, Uncle Howard. We *are* gambling. We've been taking a chance that Mr. Kitt would learn his manual before you found us out."

"But we didn't quite make the grade," I added for company's sake.

HE paid no attention to the remarks, but stood over us, quiet as a drum before you wallop it, staring down at her pretty boyishness. He couldn't seem to take it in that it was his niece there. When he did speak, it wasn't loud. "Is it actually you here, Rena, with this—this—big noise?"

"Yes, Uncle Howard. We've been studying."

"Studying what?"

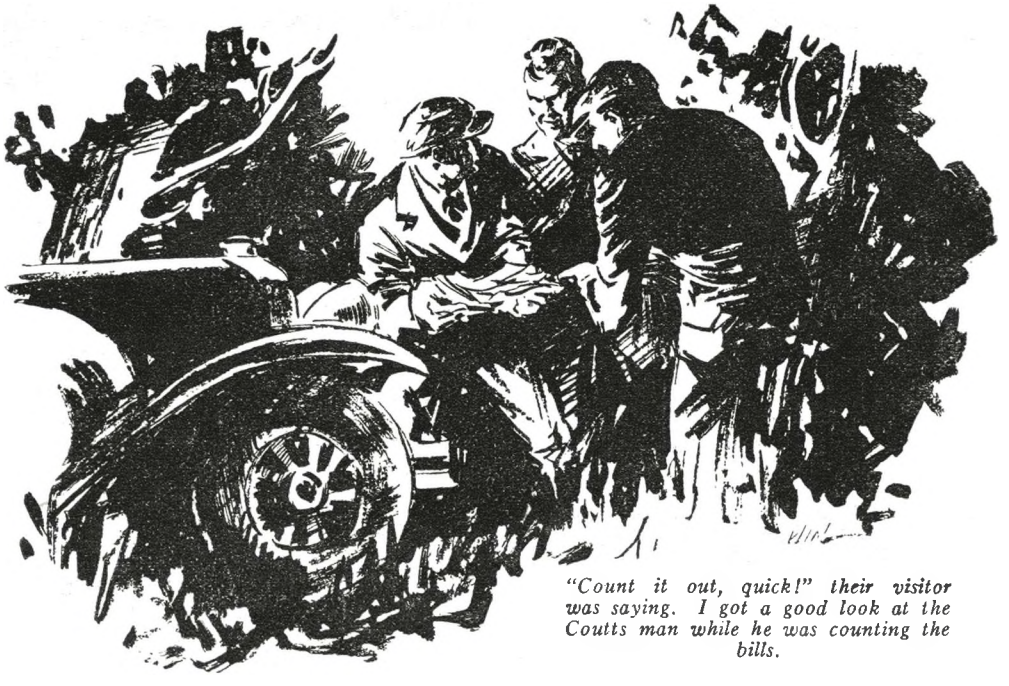
"The manual, I told you, Uncle Howard." Her voice lost its steadiness.

"Don't Uncle Howard me!"—sternly.

"But don't you understand?"

"Only too well." And he meant his tone to hurt.

I was on my feet now. "Don't you talk to her that way, sir," I cut in. "It's as



*"Count it out, quick!" their visitor was saying. I got a good look at the Coutts man while he was counting the bills.*

she says, and we've been on the square. She's kept me on the square."

"The guardroom for you," he threw at me. He was furious.

"If you punish Mr. Kitt for studying his manual," cried Rena, "I'll—"

"You'll leave the stable, certainly." And he took her by the arm.

I felt as if I'd caught fire, I was that mad. I started after them, ready to knock him over, though it would take some knocking. I didn't think a little more insubordination would matter much. But she threw me a look that said "Leave him to me," so plain I stopped still. It was one of those looks a fellow can get only once, for it gave the show away. I knew then she was my girl, even if miles ahead of anything a chap like me should hope for.

I stood there entertaining a lot of thoughts and not noticing it was minutes before Frozen-face came striding back. But he was as changed as if she'd been reading him the law. He didn't even smoke at the nostrils. I stood to attention, out of habit, but not because I was feeling respectful, and he says: "So this is how you come to know about dying declarations!"

"Yes, sir, she coached me in that."

"Remarkable!"

"For the good of the Force, sir."

"Oh, clearly!"

"Well, didn't it work that way?" My heat was rising.

"Clearly, I said. How long have you been at it?"

I couldn't think quick enough to suit him. Just one date stood out, and I was fool enough to spout that: "Since the Duff gang got away the last time, sir."

He turned his stare on me. "You've got the nerve of Judas!"

"Why do you call me that?" And then the temper boiled: "You'd better mind what you call me! Have I ever sold the outfit? Have I ever given it away—to a herd of horses? I know I'm just a buck constable, and you think you made the Force; but maybe you aren't the only one thinking for its good. You and your damned horses! Would that gang have thumbed noses at us if we'd been burning after them in a twin six? But no, we've got to stick to the geegees. Who's Judas now? I suppose you'll throw me in the clink, you're that blind and unjust, but I'd sooner that than let you get away with something I don't deserve."

IT wasn't the way to still the ruffled waters, but as he didn't say anything, I went right on: "And one more thing: Whatever you do to me, you needn't bring her into it. You can get back at me enough without that."

Lord, the water was boiling in my radiator. I was just reaching to wipe the sweat out of my eyes when he surprised me cold. He put his hand on my shoulder

and gripped me as if he was going to shake the lights out of me, but that wasn't in his mind. No. He looked straight into me, and I had to notice his eyes, the first time I'd got a close look at them in my life. They were stern all right, but the eyes of a white man. You can't pick up eyes like that. You have to grow 'em, slow, by looking at a lot of life and looking at it square. They held me to a standstill, those eyes, and when he spoke, it might have been my dad.

"Do you think I'm that sort?" he said. I couldn't make a sound, and he went on: "If I thought you believed I was that sort, I'd knock it out of you if it cost me my rank! It's a good thing for both of us, Constable Kitt, that there are no witnesses tonight. If you ever get your stripes, you'll realize what you've said. But I provoked it, unwittingly, and I propose to consider it unsaid. You will remain confined to barracks. Now pick up that book and get to bed."

So of course I went, but not to sleep. "If you ever get your stripes," he had said. Then he didn't class me with the dirt I supposed. And that glimpse of the real Frozen-face—you couldn't dismiss a surprise like that by turning over! I saw that I'd have to size him up all over again, and maybe cut down my own proportions a bit. You wouldn't want to be less white than somebody else. After I'd hit on that, I fell asleep.

BUT the next day was long. To have our meeting-time come and know I wasn't going to sit by Rena, nor see her, didn't help any, but the bean-spiller was a note I got that evening, saying:

*They've found out and are furious. I'm to visit Aunt Jennie in Macleod for a long time. They're going to try and have you transferred. I'm too low to cry. I never knew what it was to be lonely before. But be good, Ed dear. Don't tear anything, for the Force's sake. And do study a little more on Indictable Offenses. I'm so anxious for you to get along fast. You'll be one of the officers some day. Please write tonight in our time.*

That note didn't lead me to any shrine of peace, believe me. Maybe I might be an officer some day, about ninety years off, and in the meantime who would hoist Rena into the seat beside him and tread on the gas? For she wasn't theft-proof, not a bit. I never saw a worse chance to grow an old maid. When the first week went by and she wasn't engaged, it surprised me.

That week was no heaven. I did try my darnedest to please Frozen-face, which pretty well took up the day. But that left the nights. I didn't feel like rushing anyone else, and the stars were flat without her to show me their good points. I began to see how that girl was miles ahead of any uniform. When no letter came for two days, I was half sick. I fancied her walking out with our men in Macleod—with Corporal Gadshill, the speed-king with the ladies. Or I imagined her Aunt Jennie giving parties. Or why didn't I get word? Perhaps you've never been a fool over women and can't hear what I'm saying, but by the tenth day I wasn't hitting at all.

It's funny how deciding cleared my head. I did my work all day without getting Frozen-face's goat once, and thought out all my plans. I pretended to have an errand to the Inspector's—knowing he was in Calgary conferring about the Duff gang, but not knowing how soon he'd be back. And sure enough the gabby wife told me all about it and that he wouldn't be back till the early morning train. That suited me fine. I filled his car with oil and gas, which was all right too, since I'd be expected to meet him at the station, and looked to the tires.

Somehow it came hard trying to swallow supper. I found that the barracks made mighty good scenery. I'd always liked most of the boys, but never thought about it much; and now the idea of cutting away from them hurt me in the throat. And once when I saw old Frozen-face stalking into his mess, I could've laughed, I was that near crying. After all, he'd been white, and what was I going to do but hit him below the belt? "What the high," I told myself; "you can't suit everybody in this crazy world!"

I made out I had a bad headache and was going to bed early. I stuck a bundle of papers under the blankets with a handkerchief over its face so the orderly would think I was sleeping, and stole away. An hour later I sailed into Macleod with my heart jumping like a school of fish. Would she see level with me and go along, or would she make me go alone? For I'd have to go anyway, now.

IT staved off the worry to have to hunt for Aunt Jennie's, and when I got there, luck had my girl sitting alone reading. At least she had been reading, and the magazine had lost out to her thoughts, for she was staring ahead as if looking at some far-off

*Somebody caught me from behind; I saw all the stars shoot together, and the sky closed in.*

place. I whistled our call, and laughed to see the brightness cross her face; then she ran quietly to the door, whispering: "Is that you, Ed? Ed, is that you, really? *Sshh!*" And I had her in my arms with no need for questions.

"But, Ed," she said presently, "what terrible thing have you done?"

"Does it feel so terrible?"

"But it will be terrible to think you're in heaven and wake up to find it Macleod."

"When you wake up, sweetheart, it wont be Macleod." And I broke it to her what I wanted us to do and what we'd be in for.

It must have taken her off her feet, for she just leaned against me, stroking my head and quivering. That touch of hers would have swung even Frozen-face off his base, I'll bet, and if I'd had any qualms before, I laid them to rest now. My cue was to get her away and then add up the score; and she fell for it. We even laughed a bit as we tiptoed around, getting her things and leaving a note in the coffee-pot where it couldn't be found before breakfast, even if her aunt did wake up. And so before a single second thought entered either of our fool heads, we were sliding out of Macleod, the two suddenest elopers that ever slipped off under a setting moon.

There was one thing not so good: to make a quick get-away toward the border we had to double back through Lethbridge and strike south for Coutts. Not that I was leery of them catching us, even though I'd kept on my uniform, not wishing to ask for a pass, but I wondered how Rena would feel clipping so close by her home. It made me nervous, like having a skunk in the road, and I began to think about my own home; and gosh, if those barracks didn't pull like a tow-rope! We were mighty quiet in our home streets. Before we got well away, the moon had set.

Funny, how a feeling hangs on. I calculated that my spirits would hit the top again as soon as we turned south, but the dark seemed to have soaked in through my skin. Nothing more than just a shade, you know, nothing you could grab and wring its neck, but a dim and doubtful feeling, like not having had your dinner. It made me sore. What did that want to come over me for when I'd just got everything I asked for and was headed for freedom? There I was, with a thousand berries on my hip, the niftiest girl at my side, and behind me those cursed stables and calls and choke-offs from Frozen-face. Yet I wasn't so damned happy, not even at being rid of him. Funny, as I say.

RENA wasn't acting as if it was any carnival, either. She cuddled up close against my shoulder, saying nothing at all. So I started in prophesying, bearing down good and hard on the high times ahead. But I guess they didn't sound too impressive, since she knew I didn't have much idea myself of what was ahead of Coutts, after we'd left the Inspector's car. For naturally I wasn't going to start married life by stealing anything besides the girl.

Seeing that the future wasn't going too well as a topic, I switched to the past. It was old Mounted Police country we were running through, every mile of it. Every coulee had some tale of its own. We crossed the Pot-hole country by Fort Whoop-up, the scene of the first Police

doings. Then a little farther on was where Buffalo Heeney had rounded up a lot of cattle-lifters by straight bluff, by just talking rougher than they could. Over toward the mountains was Indian Charcoal's hunting-grounds, where he'd killed Sergeant Wilde; and others came to mind, fine fellows all. And suddenly it swung over me that I was giving up a big thing in dropping the outfit, running away from the best bunch on earth. Not that I was getting cold feet over Rena so soon. That was fixed, inevitable. But I wanted the fellows, too, and every mile that clicked off only proved it.

But there wasn't a hell of a lot I could do about it by then, not with that little girl leaning against my shoulder. If I'd been running over the edge of the world, I couldn't have thought of a way to let on. "Happy, sweetheart?" I whispered. "Pretty happy," she whispered back, being game, all right, like that Greek chump who hugged the fox while it gnawed him.

One thing I'll say for our old stone-crusher, the cool night air made it run like a watch. I let it roll along smooth and even and do everything but pick the trail, for it was about two A. M., and the old bean pretty well primed for sleep, when Rena grabs my arm. "What's that?"

I WAS too busy with the narrow road to see. All I got was one flash of a low gray speed-wagon parked by the cut-off to West Coutts, and a man pouring water in the radiator with the light catching him up the side of his head. "Honeymoonin's in the air, it looks like," I said.

"No, Ed. They were all men. Did you ever see such a face as that man's?"

"I have, somewhere," I said; but I'd run around the curve for a minute before I remembered—that long side-face and funny ear, curving in instead of out, the bulletin-board poster: *"$1,000 reward for information leading to the capture and conviction of Samuel Duffer, alias Simpson Duffer, alias Slinker Duff."* Like a struck match the whole thing shone up clear and lit up what I should do. Without even thinking, I pulled up along the road and put an arm around my girl.

"Rena dearest," I said, "I've got to—there's something I've got to—"

"Yes, Ed?" I could feel her shiver, but she was helping me.

"I've got to start you trusting me right now."

She was silent, but she pressed closer. "I do," she said.

"I've got a job to do on that car."

"Oh, Ed!" And she held me tight.

"It's the Duff gang, Rena; and while I'm in this rig, I'm still a policeman."

"I know."

"You wont be scared waiting here in the car?"

A moment of nothing, and then what do you suppose? She threw her arms around my neck and started laughing, not the crazy laughing, but the glad, relieved kind. You might think we'd run into a clergyman instead of a parcel of bandits. "Did you dream I would, Ed darling? Did you really think I'd stay behind, dear? I'm going with you, where you have to go. Let's get turned around, quick."

The tone of that "quick" gave her away. It was the idea of getting turned around that hit her so pleasant, bandits or no bandits; and though I was politer about it, I felt the same. The only hole in the road was that I had no side-arms, so the party couldn't be guaranteed safe. In fact Duff had a reputation all the other way. No sir, I wasn't going to risk our happiness that easy. "Listen, sweetheart, what'd you think I was aiming to do? Walk into his arms and say 'Take me'? If I had a gun, it'd be different. I'm just going to ease back and look things over."

With that all nicely explained, she lets me fade off into the night, and it didn't take long to cut across the little ridge to where they still were. A breeze was blowing, making little noises, and I crept close enough to get the odd word. They were waiting for something, another car, and not too patient. Duff had climbed back beside the man in front and there was a third in the rear. "Lord, what a haul!" I thought, and for the first time I wished for old Frozen-face to rush them with me. Even Sergeant Head, at Coutts, would've been helpful, and it was then I got the big idea.

In ten minutes I was back, sitting by Rena, getting my breath. "I'll watch 'em," I said, "and you bring him. Get me?"

Being a Western girl, I didn't have to write out the instructions. She knew. "Keep them for twenty minutes," she said, all business now, "and we'll hand them over as a going-away present."

"Twenty minutes," I said, and she was gone.

I hadn't any more than crept back to

the Duffs when I saw they had company. The car they'd been waiting for had arrived, and they were all busy transferring the goods. In a way that was plumb satisfactory, but supposing they cleared out in five minutes—or ten? There wasn't a chance in Alberta of our catching them if they got their piece of lightning to sliding good.

I crawled right up close, behind a bush, thinking and listening, and the first thing I heard was miles from being good news. "Count it out, quick," their visitor was saying. "The sergeant's patrolling tonight. I want to slide in before he sees me."

They stepped in front of the car and I got a good look at the Coutts man while he was counting the bills, then he starts the engine.

I was in a jam, now, wondering what to do. Five minutes hadn't gone yet, and they'd be off in two. It didn't seem fair to step out, and it did seem yellow not to. I was on the fence ready to jump either way when the other man calls he's stuck and needs a push. Duff wasn't for going, but the other two went, and Duff joined them in a rage, pretty soon, saying they couldn't stay there all night no matter how many fools got bogged up.

Things couldn't have fallen better, for I slid out in the dark, raised the hood, jerked out the rotor arm of the distributor and threw it behind a rock, and was halfway to the bush again when my luck gave out. The other car moved, its lights caught me like some wild animal posing for a night photo, and somebody yells. I straightens up just like I'd always meant to be there, and they swarms up.

If you've ever seen the look on a rat's face as it greets the terrier, you've got the expression on Duff's map when the scarlet caught him in the eye. He stiffened up; his lips drawn back—the catch of the year. I knew then I wasn't going to let him slip. I knew I was constable first and lover second. The other two beans rolled up, but didn't figure. Duff asked:

"Who in hell are you?"

"It's plain enough who I am, or maybe you're blind," I said.

"No, I'm not blind, but perhaps deaf. How'd you get here?"

"On my gallant steed," says I sarcastic, thinking of Frozen-face. "They haven't given us boys individual cars yet."

"Where's your horse?" asked one of the fellows.

"Have we a rope?" I heard the other say to Duff.

"My horse is waiting." And I points into space, hoping they'll waste time hunting. "But I'm thinking of riding back with you fellows. Samuel Duffer, alias Slinker Duff, I put you and your party under arrest."

Duff's funny ear wiggled as he said: "Haven't you forgot something? You state no reason; you serve no warrant; and you've left your revolver home."

"Never you mind about all that—" I began.

"The rope, boys," calls Duff to the two who were looking for it.

I knew then I was in for a bit of bango, but ten minutes was up and I hoped to keep 'em interested the other ten.

"Submit to be tied," says Duff, "and that's the worst'll happen. Resist, and there may be an accident, a fatal accident."

"Not to me," says I, brighter than I felt.

THEY grabbed me, at that, and it didn't take a second to get all worked up, scuffling in and out of the headlights, getting dirt and bruises and near knock-outs pretty general. I jumped once for the Duff man's chin, and thought I got it right on the point. But he didn't fade like he ought. Both the other bums took care to come at me at the same time, and I plastered 'em several biffs, getting a few horse-kicks on my own person. But it couldn't last, and I wished old Sergeant Head would hurry. Then it happened. Somebody caught me from behind, and I saw all the stars shoot together, and then the sky closed in over me.

I don't know how long I was under the influence. It must've been some time, for they'd been trying to get their car to go and had found out why it wouldn't. I don't blame 'em for being mad. There they were, all nicely loaded up with enough dope to give 'em a maximum sentence in the pen, all set to glide, and she wouldn't glide. And dawn coming. So they turned to me, and I guess that fatal accident might've occurred, they was that mad, only it was necessary to keep me alive long enough to tell where I'd misplaced the rotor arm.

I know how I was brought to—my ribs, where they'd been kicking me, told me. I opened a lazy eye to find Duff shaking me. "Where is it?" he snapped out, ferocious.

For a minute I hadn't an idea what he was talking about, so he made it plainer

with another shake. "Where in hell've you hid that rotor arm?" he asked.

"What is that?" I stalled. "If it aint on a horse, I don't know it."

"You know it, all right." And drops of sweat stood out on his thin mug. "Give it up or I'll kill you."

They was fairly dancing around, what with wanting to cut me up into little pieces for rage, and yet not daring to get rid of this here lost-and-found on legs until I'd told all.

"Cough it up," said Duff, squinting in his violence, "or I'll tie you to a bush and pour gasoline on you so you'll burn faster."

"Then you'll get hanged."

WITH a dirty oath he turns to the boys. "Give him a turn and see if he'll talk!" And for all I could do, being still a shade dazed, they had my hands tied together behind my back, and started to raise me by 'em. Say, that hurt! Just as they began again, I thought I saw a flash in the distance, and I prayed for Head to come. But he'd have to be quick, for no flesh and blood was going to stand that agony long. "Going to tell?" asked Duff, and I give in, thinking I could stall till Head arrived; so I nodded toward the wrong rock. "Find it," Duff orders, and they strikes matches while I grubs for what aint there. It might've been funny at another time.

"He's fooling," yells Duff, soon. "Give him another dose." That was the worst moment for me. If that flash I'd seen had been the car, she'd've come. Maybe Rena had had an accident, or was waiting for the patrol to come in. I felt low as hell. They give me such a wrench then that I let out a yell. Duff slapped me across the mouth. "Will you find it?" he screams. "Will you find it, this time? Once more, boys! Pull it out of him."

"Stand back, you curs!" said a voice from the dark near by.

"Stick up your hands!" It was Rena's voice, hoarse and strained; a revolver banged, and the bullet sent the glass of the wind-shield flying all over us. *"Stick —them—up!"*

They did. For the flying glass had cut two of them about the face so they was blinded with blood, and Duff himself didn't show the nerve to face a gun that could do damage like that: his hands went up while I got mine loose.

"Take it, Ed." And she pressed the gun into my hands. In another minute it was all over; we had them searched; Duff was tied; the boys had mopped the blood off their faces and was repairing the distributor. Rena—well, Rena was crying!

Meanwhile, where was Sergeant Head? Still patrolling. You see, Rena'd found nobody to the detachment. That paralyzed her for a minute, she said. But she come to when she saw a spare gun over Head's desk; the cartridges were in a drawer. She was in the car, and the big idea in her mind, all in five minutes. She knew I'd *got* to be backed up, but she didn't savvy how necessary until she'd left the car down around the curve and walked over to our lights. She hadn't meant to let off that shot that killed the windshield; it just went. But I told her that was the best shot ever fired in Alberta and was glad to see she stopped crying. All my usual feelings was coming back in a mob. I wanted to laugh, but it didn't seem quite the time.

The boys had finished now, and how to hand 'em over was the next puzzle. If we took them to our detachment at Coutts and left them with Sergeant Head, he'd ask questions and I'd be arrested, and that meant a spell in the clink. . . . .

I could see myself relying on Frozen-face's mercy. And after a spell in jail, I'd be fired. Either way, I lost the outfit. That was my lowest moment. Then I heard Rena speaking. "Oh, Ed, Ed," she said quietly, "I'm so proud of you I don't know what to do. It's simply splendid."

"What is? This mess?"

"Mess? Nothing of the sort. You'll be the biggest man in the division, dear, for landing these men."

"Yes, the biggest behind bars!"

"Oh, Ed!" It was clear she had never thought of that. "But they *can't!*"

"Can't they! Watch old Frozen-face break out into a smile for the first time in his life. But I don't care. It's you I'm thinking of."

"If you ever think of me, Ed, I'll never speak to you again. You mustn't, dear. While you're in uniform you're a policeman. You said so yourself. You— Oh, it's all my fault!" She began to sob.

IT was a long drive back, Rena taking the wheel and me sitting behind with the Duffs, one on each side, while the third ran their own car, just ahead, too scared by my hints of our artillery to try any monkey-shines.

A long drive, and ticklish, but we made it. I guess it was close to six o'clock and broad daylight when we pulled into the barrack square, and a funny procession we made: three opium salesmen escorted by two elopers who now knew better, and one of them a deserter returning on a flat tire. Yes sir, a mighty comic procession—from the side-lines. As we stopped, I heard a train whistle, and I had to laugh. I was supposed to be meeting the Inspector with his car.

The whistle put an idea into Rena's head. "If I could catch that train, Ed, I might get back to Aunt Jennie's without being seen."

"This is what we're going to catch instead." And I pointed to a figure striding towards us—Frozen-face, and in his least human mood.

We hadn't time to frame up any good story—Rena and I. She just squeezed my hand, and then I got down and stood at attention. I could tell by his gait that if our capture didn't melt him, all the anti-freeze in the world wouldn't help. As he reached me I said:

"The Duff gang, Sergeant-major."

It didn't feaze him. He glanced at my prisoners as if they were so many tame cats, then fastened his eyes on me. "What's the meaning of this, Constable Kitt? I got a phone call from Macleod just now stating that my niece has not been home all night—and here you come rolling into the square with her. What have you to say?"

"I needed her assistance, sir, in making the arrest. This is the Duff gang, sir."

"I see the Duff gang." But his eyes kept eating into mine. "I fail to see how this accounts for my niece leaving her aunt's."

"I shouldn't have these prisoners here, sir, if it hadn't been for her."

"Remarkable!" he snapped. "More than remarkable! As I remember, you enlisted her assistance once before, contrary to all discipline. Where did she and you happen to run into these?" He nodded at my prisoners.

*"Stick up your hands!" It was Rena's voice, hoarse and strained. "Stick—them—up!"*

"Two miles this side of Coutts, sir."

"Coutts!" A new shade of sternness came into his voice. Till then he likely thought that we had just been joy-riding. "Coutts, you say? At the border! Kindly inform me what you were doing there without leave."

MY tongue wouldn't move in my mouth. How could I explain—to him! And his searching eyes killed any excuses. They seemed to know so much. I believe he read in my face what we had done, or rather failed to do. Standing at attention is exposure itself, or feels like it. I was only able to look back into his eyes. It was Rena who spoke for me. "Listen to me, Uncle Howard," she said quietly, "Constable Kitt couldn't help going. But he couldn't help coming back, either. And it was all right my being along. He and I are engaged, and as soon as he comes out of jail, I'm going to marry him."

"Jail?" said Frozen-face, as if he couldn't connect.

"Absence without leave, sir," I explained.

"You still persist in advising me how to act?" he began, and said something else I didn't catch, for a taxicab came buzzing up and out of it hopped a mad Inspector.

"What does this mean, Sergeant-major? No car to meet me!"

"Sorry, sir. The car was in use."

"How could it be in use? Who was using it?"

That was the big moment, with Frozen-face, looking like a piece cut off the Judgment Day, opening his jaw to pronounce hell on me. But all he said was: "The car was used in capturing these men, sir."

The Inspector turned to look at them. "Who are they?"

"The Duff gang, sir."

IT was great to watch the Inspector wilt.

"The *Duff* gang!"

"Yes sir. Captured early this morning by Constable Kitt, assisted by my niece."

The Inspector looked at Rena and nodded approvingly.

"I was about to congratulate them, sir, when you drove up."

"Naturally! Quite right! It isn't every morning we arrest the Duff gang before breakfast. How was it done?"

"With your permission, sir, I shall give you the particulars later. Constable Kitt and I had best march the prisoners to the guardroom now."

I stood there dumb, shaken. To think he had bust his own principles and taken our side! Not a word about deserting, or the rest! There wasn't the power in me to thank him as we locked up the prisoners, and he didn't give me the chance. He clicked back into being sergeant-major so quick that I couldn't believe that he'd just been human, except for the results. . . . .

Sorry. There's first post sounding, and no time to tell you the rest. What do you suppose Frozen-face tried to do? Resign. Asked to be let out. Said he wasn't fit to keep discipline as he should, but wouldn't explain. White, you see, if frozen solid. Of course they wouldn't let him go. I got my stripes out of it, and the reward, both on his recommendation, as I found out. So you don't wonder I'll not stand for the youngsters yapping too loud just because he's acted as a sergeant-major should.

What'd Rena get out of it, you say? Why not step around to the house and take a look at our boy? Then you could ask her.


# *STORM*

*By*

## LELAND S. JAMIESON

THE Rock Springs tornado was followed by the newspapers with credible accuracy from the time it howled down upon the little isolated village in the hills until the last one of the injured was laid safely in a hospital in San Antonio, yet the most dramatic note of the whole affair was sounded in a way that few people realized.

Rock Springs, being situated upon a low bald hill in a wide valley above the source of the East Nueces River, offered no resistance to the shrieking, tearing wind that whipped down from the dusk of a spring evening and smashed it into ruin. At seven forty-four in the evening, as tired ranchers were sitting down to their usual late suppers, the air was calm; at seven fifty-one the storm lashed out of black clouds and ripped every building from its foundation; at eight o'clock there came a lull, a period of perhaps ten minutes when not a breath of breeze flicked at the dust of crumbled stone that lay strewn across the streets. The murderous force lifted itself back into

*A vivid and very real story of airplane adventure — by the professional pilot who gave us "Altitude" and "Crash Pilot."*

Illustrated by
Paul Lehman

the heavens, leaving over Rock Springs the inky blackness of scudding clouds above, and the far echoes of the whirling wind as it sighed into the distance.

The sixty houses of the town were flattened to the earth when the wind had left them, and for a moment after the storm died there was no sound, as though the people who still lived were stunned into muteness. Then, almost immediately, there arose the cries of terror and anguish and desperation of two hundred people. Women groped in still fear for their children, calling names into the thick night, fumbling in delirium through the ruins of their homes, afraid to hope. Men sought their wives, sometimes to come upon a huddled form, silent and unmoving.

A breeze stirred ominously and dispelled the heavy air; and shortly afterward a booming rain whipped down in torrents of black water. The uninjured struggled on in their search tirelessly, frantically; night wore itself along, adding, minute by minute, to the suffering and grief. Lightning thrashed down in vicious tongues of livid flame, and in these eerie flickerings the search was carried on. . . . .

Mary Collins, the telephone operator in Rock Springs, was trying to get a call through to Uvalde when the storm beat down upon the village. She heard the Uvalde operator answer; then the line snapped as the sweeping wind struck it. She was trying to reëstablish the connection when she heard the buildings on the other side of town clatter into fragments. The next instant her own building was down around her; she was in darkness as the storm passed on.

Stunned, groping her way out of the débris in blindness and fear, she heard the cries and shrieks and supplications of people all around her.

With a stab of torment in her mind she scrambled over the débris toward her home. Her parents—what might have happened to them! She fought her way, falling over splintered boards and timbers. In the terrible quiet following the wind she heard and felt the agony on every side of her.

How she got to her father's house she never knew. She heard a voice which she recognized as her mother's, and she hurried in that direction. By a flicker of lightning she saw her father stretched upon the ground, unnaturally—her mother bending over him. He groaned.

"Mamma!" the girl gasped in anguish.

*"Daddy!"* She was in distraction. "Oh, what are we to do?"

"Mary?" Dr. Collins asked. "I'm not bad—a timber got me on the leg—it's broken." He did not add that two ribs were splintered and that he felt himself bleeding internally. He was a doctor—the only one in Rock Springs. As with most medical men his own injuries caused him no more emotion than those of other people. He looked at them objectively.

"The town's wiped out!" cried Mary. "There are no lights—what shall we do?"

Suddenly Dr. Collins was speaking in his professional voice.

"Mary, you must go for help!" he exclaimed, with remarkable self-possession. "I'm hurt—we need a doctor quickly. Get to a telephone and call Uvalde—have them send a doctor. Tell them what's happened—they'll have to get medical supplies from San Antonio — serum and instruments. These people are suffering terribly! You must hurry!"

"But you—"

"Don't think of me! I'll get along—we'll get to shelter somewhere. Hurry!"

The girl thought immediately of the car, and a lightning flash revealed it where it had been standing before the wind struck. But it was not a car now—it was a heap of metal on its side in the middle of the street. With a sob of anxiety for them, she kissed both her parents and started toward the road that led out of town, seeing her way by streaks of lightning that burned themselves out before her eyes.

The rain boomed down suddenly and beat at her, but she fought her way. The blinding whip of flying water cut at her face and body; the wind, rising again, sought to drive her back, but she went on. One mile, two, three. She knew that the nearest telephone by which she could call Uvalde was liable to be nine or ten miles down the rocky road. Ten miles through this storm! Dimly she wondered how far her strength would carry her.

For countless hours, through a torture of mud and water and driving wind, she struggled on, following a road that was at times beaten smooth by the fall of water, and at other times was a raging wash. She reached the limit of human endurance, and still fought her way along the road; she came to the time when she thought she would collapse from exhaustion, but the thoughts of human suffering there behind her goaded her to greater efforts.

Lightning, sheets and strings and chains of it, thrashed down on every side of her. Ordinarily she would have been afraid of it, but now it caused her no concern.

So when a bolt leaped down fifty feet in front of her, at the top of a hill, she paid it no attention. She passed that point, went a few steps beyond, and the second bolt struck. Unconscious, she pitched forward on her face. . . . .

At three o'clock in the morning Mary Collins staggered up to a rancher's house near Camp Wood and beat feebly against the door. Presently the rancher appeared, holding a kerosene lamp above his head. He stared at the apparition in amazement.

"Storm—at Rock Springs!" the girl moaned. "People dead—dying! Get doctors—medicine! Hurry!"

After that she gabbled to him in delirium. He finally got a few disconnected facts about the storm. He tried the telephone, and at last Uvalde answered. He gave his orders quickly. . . . . When he turned back to Mary Collins she had collapsed upon the floor.

NICK WENTWORTH, chief pilot of the Air Patrol, in San Antonio, was called out of bed at four-thirty in the morning by Doctor Wilson, from the Grayson Hospital. Grumbling a little, and somewhat startled by the urgency with which the man presented himself, Nick opened the door and let him in.

Wilson introduced himself in two words. He explained his presence quickly.

"Rock Springs—wiped out in—a storm!" he panted. "The hospital is sending me—my mother was visiting there. It'll take me five hours to drive in my car—can you take me, by air?" He asked the question as an order. "They've got to have a doctor—quickly!"

Nick, dull and heavy-eyed with sleep, considered the possibilities of getting through. He could not take Wilson in his own plane, because it was a single-seated affair, built for speed and endurance in the air. Scott, his assistant, was gone, hence Scott's plane was not available. Two of the Patrol's ships were undergoing motor overhaul. There was only one plane left that Nick could take—an antiquated Vought, a spare, seldom used.

"I'll go," he decided. "Just a minute till I dress." Before he dived back into his room he called the flying-field. After a per-

sistent ringing, the telephone was answered by a field mechanic. Nick gave him quick instructions.

"She'll be on the line tunin' up when you git out here," Barnes, the mechanic, replied. And then, quickly: "Hey, wait a minute! You can't take that ship—it's got a leaky radiator—we just discovered it yesterday."

"Can't take it? I've got to take it! You put it on the line, and have it started when I get there!"

Barnes grumbled something. Nick rushed into his room to dress, and Wilson paced back and forth in the other room of the apartment. The Patrol pilot returned three minutes later, buttoning up his coat. He stopped to get an extra helmet and a pair of goggles for Wilson.

"Let's go!" he called. "I'll have you there a few minutes after daylight—if that ship will fly at all."

"What is it?" Wilson asked nervously. "What's wrong with your ship?"

"Nothing that'll stop us!"

But the physician was not satisfied. "This is important, Wentworth," he warned; "if you have any doubts about getting me through, say so, and I'll drive my car. It would be better to take a little longer and be sure about it. Those people must have medical aid—and my mother—I tell you, I've got to get there!"

"You'll get there!" Nick declared.

IN the Patrol pilot's car they raced through the dark of early morning toward the flying-field. Overhead it was cloudy, and the moon, although almost full, did not show through the bank of heavy vapor. On the road, as they shot through the darkness at nearly sixty miles an hour, they ran into a light ground fog, and Nick had misgivings. That light scum of mist might be the forerunner of a heavier fog as dawn approached.

Twelve minutes after they left the apartment they stopped by the side of the Vought, on the flying line. In the dim light the mechanics looked like ghosts crawling up around the motor. The ship had not been started.

"What the hell's wrong with you?" Nick snapped at Barnes. "Let's get out of here!"

"You'll have trouble if you take this ship out without gittin' that radiator fixed," Barnes predicted. "That leak's considerable. I wouldn't try it, if I were you!"

In the pale yellow light of the hangar beacon Wilson looked at Nick inquiringly.

"I promised you I'd get you through," Nick reassured him. "What if we do have to land for water once or twice—I can beat driving time by two hours!"

Wilson nodded, satisfied.

He took his medical supplies and instruments from the car and passed them up to the mechanic in the cockpit, who stowed them away in the baggage compartment behind the rear seat. He was nervous and agitated, despite Nick's assurance that they would get through all right.

Nick examined the radiator leak carefully. He was surprised that it was so large, but felt certain that the plane would stay in the air nearly an hour before a landing for water would be necessary. He nodded to Barnes to start the motor.

"Damn a storm like that one!" Wilson suddenly muttered. "You know, Wentworth, Nature's a cruel thing sometimes. No telling—"

The motor blurped into a roar, red flame spurting from the short exhaust stacks and turning blue as it struck the air. Barnes gunned it up to twelve hundred revs and warmed it quickly.

"What will happen, Wentworth?" Wilson yelled. "What will we do when the radiator runs dry?"

"You spit on the motor—keep it cool!" Nick smiled grimly. He saw the look of blank dismay that Wilson shot at him.

Wilson had never been up in an airplane before, much less at night in a ship that apparently was not entirely safe. But he made no comment when Nick told him to climb into the rear cockpit.

Nick stepped into the front cockpit and settled himself in the seat. He did not bother with a test of his motor; he waved the blocks away, and when the mechanics did not see his hand because of the darkness he bawled at them vociferously:

"Pull 'em! What're you waitin' on?" The mechanics jumped forward behind the whirling propeller and yanked the chocks away.

Nick buckled his belt as he was taxying down the field. He whirled the plane around in the darkness and gunned the motor, lifted the tail on the take-off, and was gone into the night, the blue and red of the motor's exhaust flickering away to the northwest.

It was so dark that he could not see the ground when he got into the air. The

ground fog that he had feared had not materialized, for here and there, sprinkled out over a wide area, were a few lone lights; far off to the right, dwindling rapidly, was a bright cluster that marked the location of San Antonio.

Nick did not discover that the clouds were at a thousand feet until he climbed into them unwittingly—and simultaneously felt the wet mist on his face and saw the lights wink out below him. That wasn't so good! There were hills ahead of him that reared rocky summits into the base of that thick mat of mist! He changed his course a little, swinging to the southward to stay away from the highest peaks.

Now and again he held his hand out one side of the cockpit or the other, his glove removed so that he might feel the stinging spray of water that whipped up in the propeller blast and spewed back beside the cockpit. The radiator was leaking more than at first he had suspected! He would have to land at least twice for water.

As he felt the constant, undiminishing spray come back and wet his hand he knew that he would be forced down, the first time, within twenty minutes. The ship wouldn't stay in the air, from the time of the take-off, more than twenty-five or thirty. And the thing that worried him was that it would not be light enough to land for at least forty-five minutes!

He wished, now, that he had gone ahead with his plans to have wing-lights installed on this ship. But he hadn't—he hadn't thought it necessary. If he had had landing lights he wouldn't have given a forced landing a second thought. But as it was, he did—several thoughts. He had had a forced landing once when he couldn't see the ground well enough to pick out a field. Some of the pieces were still there.

NICK wasn't greatly concerned about himself. He didn't care particularly, for he had been subjected to so many dangers in the air during the past ten years that he had grown almost immune to fear for his own life. But he was worried about Doctor Wilson. He had promised to get the doctor through.

Perhaps he should have let Wilson drive, as the doctor had suggested. He had been too sure that he would get him through. He was almost as sure, now, that he wouldn't! He knew that when this type of plane went to pieces it went all at once and with astonishing completeness. The wooden fuselage would buckle up like wheat straws if you put her in hard, and if the fuselage did break in two there was more than an even chance that one or both of them would get a longeron stuck through their backs!

He was glad it hadn't rained in San Antonio for several days—he wouldn't have to worry about mud if he got down in a fresh-plowed field. He turned a little more toward the south, skirting low over the foothills that he knew were there, although he couldn't see them. He tried to think of some way out of the predicament; he considered, presently, the wisdom of turning back to the landing-field and landing by the floodlights. But he couldn't do that; he would be out of water long before then.

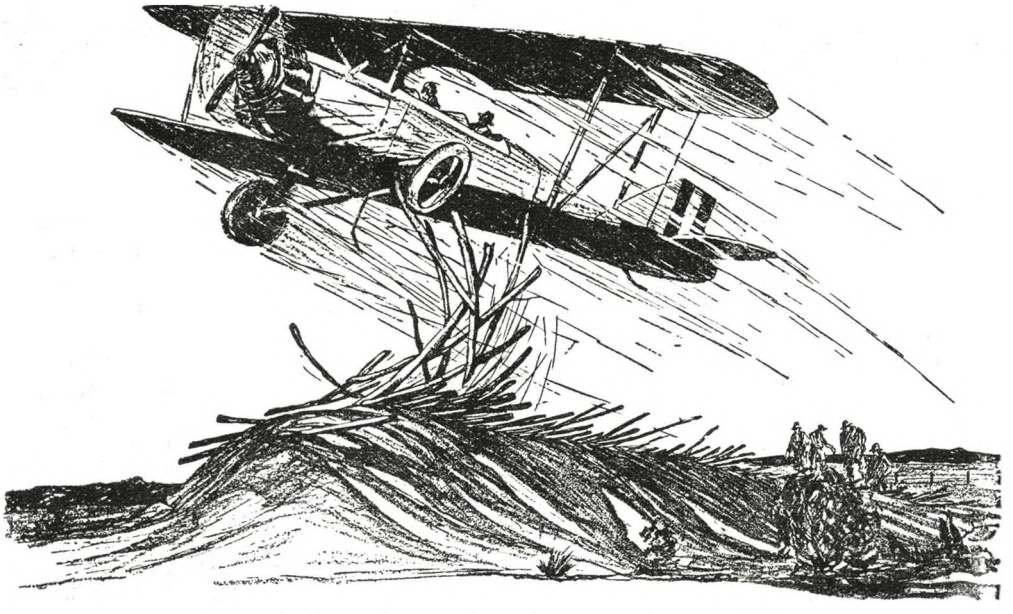
The temperature gauge—the centigrade—did not show a rise for some minutes after the ship was in the air, for the morning was cold, and Nick gradually opened his shutters as the water was exhausted. But after they had been in the air a little more than twenty minutes the rise did come, slowly at first, then faster; and finally with a rush that sent the needle whirling up around the dial to the hundred mark, where it hesitated a moment and plunged back down to eighty. A minute later it rose suddenly and hit the peg again, only to drop once more. Nick knew that the next time it came up it would stay—the water would be boiling.

It was time to find a place to land, although the real emergency would not come until the motor began to lose revs due to the heat. But below, wherever the ground was, there was nothing to be seen but the black nothingness of night. In the east there was no light, for the thick clouds hid the glimmer of the dawn.

Nick was afraid he was still flying over the foothills. He turned sharply south, hoping that his compass was correct and that he would find an open field when the radiator forced him down.

Suddenly the needle of the centigrade spun upward and struck the peg again. It dropped slightly for an instant and then slammed up and hugged the peg and stayed there. The time had come! Nick heard the faint metallic knocking of the motor above the pound of the exhaust; he smelled the stench of burning paint. He cut the gun, and when he did a piston stuck and the motor froze. They were down!

But where? The first dim light of day was hardly visible in the east; below, a short thousand feet, the ground looked



*The Vought bounced nearly forty feet, and before it could settle back Nick fought it into control.*

blank in darkness. It seemed impossible that Nick could pick out a field down there —and after he had picked it, land upon it. He muttered, grimly: "I can't judge my distance from the ground within fifty feet! We'll pile up sure as hell!"

He shouted a warning back over his shoulders to Wilson: "Hang on, fella! Get your goggles off your eyes! We may pile up!" He couldn't see whether the doctor did as he was told. He heard a muffled shout behind him, but the words were whipped away by the rush of wind.

When the flame of the exhaust was no longer in front of him, Nick discovered that he could see a little; his eyes gradually became accustomed to the dark. He had lost nearly five hundred feet of precious altitude, wandering aimlessly, before he picked a field; and then all he could see was the dark gray outline against an inky background. He started a broad turn, cutting in sharper as he neared the ground.

"Get your arms in front of your face!" he shrilled at Wilson. "Sit tight!"

He whipped the plane out of the bank and leveled it out on the last straight shot into the field. He was coming in too fast for a normal landing, but purposely, for he meant to "feel" the ship down and let it settle in after one bounce—provided he hit the field. As he neared the ground the field seemed to lose its lighter color and blend into the shade of the darker stuff surrounding it. Nick knew that the dark stuff was mesquite.

"What if it's all mesquite?" he exclaimed "It wouldn't be the first time! I'm a prize fool!"

The outlines of the brush and trees weren't even visible as the plane slipped swiftly over them. Nick had seen the outline of the field for a few seconds only; now he was coming in practically "blind." And he was coming in at more than eighty miles an hour!

He knew, before he reached the spot where he thought the edge of the field was, that he was too high to get quickly on the ground. He knew there was danger of "overshooting" the field—and piling up in the trees at the end of it. So, without knowing how far he dared slip the ship, he rolled it up with his ailerons and let it slide He tried to see the ground, but couldn't judge his distance accurately. With a sudden fear that he had gone too far, he kicked the plane out with his rudder and continued straight ahead.

Suddenly there was a soft impact against the wheels. The tires seemed to sink deep; the plane shuddered at the strain. It bounced high into the air, and as it settled back to earth Nick pulled the tail down.

But he still could see little of the ground. He couldn't even see the horizon in front of him! There were no lights near by, and he didn't have time to look at the instruments in the cockpit. A wing went down, and although he could feel it, he couldn't get it up before they hit the ground again —on one wheel and the wing-tip! The tail-

spin skid bit into the soft sand, the ship spun around crazily, and for an instant it seemed that it would cartwheel and go over on its nose. But Nick prevented that; he fought the controls and whipped the wing up out of the dirt.

Doctor Wilson, ignorant of the narrowness by which Nick had prevented a serious accident, asked, unperturbed:

"What's wrong—out of water? How long will this stop take?" It apparently did not seem strange to him that the ship was safely on the ground, even though he could not see across the field because of darkness.

"Yeah. Get out and see if you can find a windmill near here, or a farmhouse. I thought we'd get a lot farther than this before that radiator ran dry," Nick replied.

WILSON jumped to the ground and struggled out of his parachute, then hurried off into the darkness. Nick got out and looked at the damaged wing. He tore away the portion of the fabric that was ripped open and would start a larger rent when the ship got into the air again.

If it did! The tires were sunk deep in the soft sand of the field—clear up to the rims of the wheels. Nick had been lucky to find a field at all in the darkness before dawn, but he had put the Vought into a place where the sand would suck the ship down when the take-off was attempted. He wasn't sure that he couldn't get into the air again, but he knew that the odds were all against him. He wished, fervidly, that he had allowed Wilson to make this trip by car.

And another new problem, which he had not foreseen before the take-off, had arisen when he learned that the radiator was good for less than thirty minutes in the air: Between the point where he had landed, and Rock Springs, there was an area of perhaps ninety-five miles of nothing but hills and tortuous creek beds. Nowhere in this area was a landing possible without completely wrecking the plane. And with the radiator as it was, the Vought could remain in the air only half long enough to cross these hills! Suddenly Nick heard the doctor's voice in the darkness, across the field.

"House over here!" Wilson yelled. "Over this way."

Nick ran in that direction, his shoes sinking deep into the sand.

"There's a light off through the mesquite," the doctor declared, when Nick reached him. "I think it's a farmhouse." He led the way.

A thin gray light was beginning to break over them as they reached the house. Nick explained the circumstances quickly.

"We need water for the radiator," he told the farmer. "And when we get that we've got to figure some way to get the ship out of your field."

"I reckon as how we might take a fence down for you on that far side of the field," the farmer proposed. "That would maybe give you a longer run."

"Take too much time to do that," Nick objected. "We're in a hurry. Have you got any old fence posts, or logs, around here?"

The farmer considered this with exasperating slownesss.

"Yes, I reckon you could find a pile of old posts down there near where you're at now—just across the fence. I'll call my boys and they can help you. What good'll fence posts do you?"

"I'm going to build a ramp at one end of the field—to throw the ship up into the air. That's the only way we can get out."

The farmer got a ten-gallon milk can and filled it with water, and Nick and Wilson carried it to the ship. The problem of getting the Vought safely across that forbidding ninety-five miles was causing the Patrol pilot a great deal of concern; he disregarded the difficulty of the take-off for the moment. Suddenly he exclaimed:

"It'll work! We'll make it!"

"What?"

"Never mind—I can show you quicker than I can tell you."

THE Vought that Nick was flying—like all the other planes in the Patrol service—was equipped with a "center-section" auxiliary gasoline tank, placed in the center of the upper wing. The capacity of this tank was twenty-five gallons.

With a small wrench and a pair of pliers from his tool kit, Nick quickly detached the gravity feed-line from the "three-way" valve that led to the carburetor, taking care to turn the cut-off valve at the base of the center-section tank to the "off" position. This feed-line was about three feet in length, and when Nick bent it forward toward the top of the radiator he saw that it lacked about ten inches of being long enough to reach.

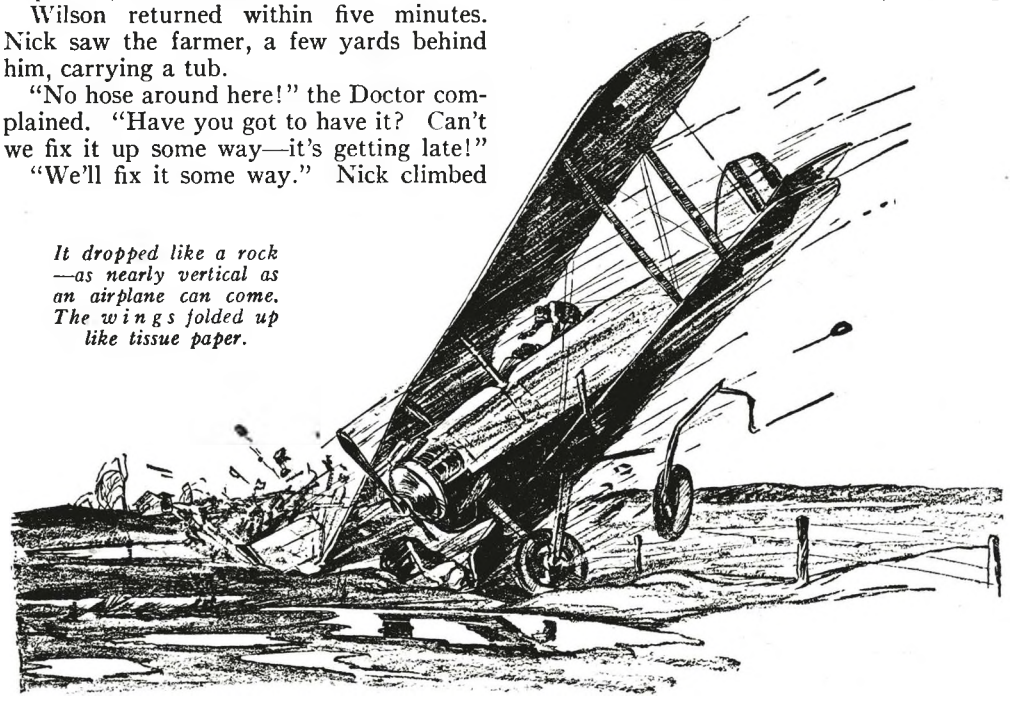
"Run back to the house and tell that farmer he can have twenty-five gallons of

good gasoline if he'll get cans down here to hold it," Nick called to Wilson. "Tell him to get those kids of his down here—I'll put 'em to work building that ramp. See if you can't pick up a piece of rubber hose about a foot long while you're there—and step on it; it's six o'clock now!"

Wilson returned within five minutes. Nick saw the farmer, a few yards behind him, carrying a tub.

"No hose around here!" the Doctor complained. "Have you got to have it? Can't we fix it up some way—it's getting late!"

"We'll fix it some way." Nick climbed down from his perch above the motor. He cut off about two feet of the radiator overflow tube, and fitted one end of it into the lower end of the gasoline feed-pipe. Then, with his handkerchief he bound the joint tightly, and, bending the line to one side of the fuselage, drained the gasoline out of the upper tank into the tub.



*It dropped like a rock —as nearly vertical as an airplane can come. The wings folded up like tissue paper.*

While the fuel was draining out, Nick put Wilson and the farmer and the two boys to work building a ramp at the south end of the field. He would have to take off the short way of the field, by having it there, but he would be going into the wind—a primary essential in getting an airplane into the air.

At six-thirty Nick had carried enough water to fill the radiator and the gravity tank in the center-section. He had stuck the end of the feed-line into the filler neck of the radiator, and plugged the neck with a wadded-up piece of his shirt. The feed-line was in place—wired there—so that when Nick turned the valve at the base of the gravity tank water would run down into the radiator; he had defeated those ninety-five miles of bad land.

He was ready to go, but the ramp was not completed, and for fifteen minutes more, while the water dribbled from the leak in the radiator, he worked furiously with Wilson and the other men, shoveling sandy soil up upon the built-up incline. When this work was completed the ramp looked like a huge V laid flat on one side. Beginning a few feet from the fence, it sloped with increasing steepness toward the south. At its highest point it was four or five feet above the level of the field.

IT was full daylight, gray with drifting clouds, when Nick and Wilson started out again. The Patrol pilot taxied as far back in the field as he could get and made a running turn to get as much room as possible for the take-off. The wheels hurled sand as the turn was made, the ship straightened out and roared down toward the ramp.

The Vought picked up thirty miles an hour before it hit the slope. When it struck the incline it seemed to be catapulted into the air, so violently did it ricochet. It struck the ramp a crushing blow and bounced nearly forty feet above the level of the mesquite trees, and before it could settle back Nick fought it into control and held it in the air. They had made it!

They were in the air, yes. But that shock against the ramp had done something to the landing-gear! Nick felt it give way —and knew that at least one wheel was out of commission.

With this knowledge Nick realized he was almost helpless to prevent a serious crash when he reached Rock Springs; he felt a profound regret that he had attempted this journey in the first place: he knew that Wilson would in all probability be of no value to the sufferers of the storm after he got there!

But Nick did not turn back to San Antonio, knowing this. He circled the field; then swung toward the northwest and settled the ship on its course. He believed that he still had one wheel of his landing-gear intact, and if he did he might get down without serious injury to himself or Wilson.

Fifteen minutes after he had taken off, the motor began to heat, and he reached up and turned the valve at the base of the gravity tank. Water ran down through the tube to the radiator, and a large part of it spewed from the joint in the pipe and was flung back into Nick's face. The needle of the centigrade swung down to normal after a few minutes, and Nick shut the water off.

He was well into the hill country when, far ahead of him, he saw the clouds breaking. The storm had passed on, and the clouds were sweeping away to the southeast, leaving the clean, washed-blue that follows rain. Five minutes later they hit the wind. They had been flying in comparatively calm air, making ninety miles an hour over the ground, but when they struck the "norther" their ground speed was cut to sixty—they were bucking a thirty-mile wind. And seventy miles to go!

HE dived the ship to two hundred feet, and for ten minutes flew along just above the rounded tops of hills, trying to keep as low as possible to avoid the stronger wind at higher elevations. But as the plane bored through the air mile after mile he realized that the wind was becoming stronger, even at the ground. He pulled up, then, and climbed five thousand feet, checking as closely as possible the speed the ship was making over the ground. The velocity of the wind at five thousand feet was more than fifty miles an hour!

He went on up, fighting the little ship into the blasting cold of the upper reaches at ten thousand feet. But still the wind did not diminish; they seemed to crawl along, making hardly any progress whatsoever. He dived back down to a level with the higher hills.

The motor began to heat again, and Nick drained more water from the tank above his head. He estimated that he was half way there—forty miles to go—and the tank was almost empty.

"Never make it!" he muttered. "We're down in these hills just as sure as hell!"

They should be there now, it seemed to him. They had flown an hour and a half since the last take-off. He checked the map in his hand, but the country below was shown as a blank space, with nothing to identify the hills from one another. A creek slipped under them, but there was no creek shown upon the map.

The centigrade showed the motor heating once more, and with a forlorn hope Nick reached up and let the last of the water run down to the radiator. As much leaked out as went in—half of it streamed out at the joint under the handkerchief—otherwise there would have been enough to get them through.

MINUTES passed, counted off against the miles; there were more minutes than there were miles. The ground crawled back behind them in agonizing slowness.

The centigrade went up again, slowly, as it had on each first warning. They could fly perhaps five minutes more—and then a welter of destruction!

Then, far ahead of them, a blot on the top of a rounding hill, Nick saw Rock Springs. Ten or twelve miles away, and close, from the standpoint of an airplane, yet utterly unattainable.

The motor began to knock slightly, increasing until it sounded like the hammering of loose pieces of metal in a heavy can. The needle of the centigrade was glued to the peg.

Ahead of them a half a mile or so was a winding road, a scar that twisted through the hills; and beside this trail a little field was snuggled. Too small for a normal landing—far too small—yet it was better than going down in a maze of brush and trees on a rocky hillside. Nick turned a little and headed for it. He throttled down a little, hoping that the con rods of his motor would stay with him half a minute more. The distance was cut to a quarter of a mile, and the metallic clinking of the motor grew in volume. It was seconds now.

The motor dropped two hundred revs, and labored under protest to hold fourteen hundred. A blast of hot water spewed violently from the shortened overflow and trailed away in a white mist to the rear. Suddenly, with a chug of torment, the propeller stopped—vertical.

"Of course it'd be straight up and down!" Nick complained. "Wrap it into knots with the rest."

He dropped the nose and came in toward the field in a slow glide, the little Vought bouncing in the rough air. Nick yelled to Wilson again to get his goggles off.

The little field lay in the lee of a high hill, and as the ship slipped down below the sweeping current of air that poured over the lip of this hill, the wind dropped it. It did just that—literally. Where the Vought had been gliding into a thirty-mile wind, almost standing motionless above the ground, it was suddenly gliding into no wind at all—and still hanging almost motionless above the ground. It dropped like a rock, barely clearing the edge of the brush. It came down fifty feet as nearly vertical as an airplane can come, and it hit on the remaining undamaged wheel, the bottom of the radiator and the right wing-tip—a perfect "three-point landing."

The fuselage broke in two just behind the front cockpit, and Doctor Wilson, sprawling grotesquely, was hurled out of his seat, to be brought up abruptly sitting in shocked semiconsciousness on the ground, ten feet away. The wings folded up like tissue paper and the folds of fabric billowed up in the little currents of air that slipped down over the brow of the hill ahead.

"Wentworth!" Wilson cried anxiously, when he realized fully what had happened. "Wentworth!"

There was no answer. The Doctor plunged into the midst of the débris and pulled Nick out. He was not seriously hurt, although he was unconscious; an indentation on the leather-ringed cowling and a swelling welt on his chin showed Wilson what had happened to him.

NICK regained consciousness in the back seat of a battered touring-car that wound its way at great labor over the rocky, washed-out road half a mile from where the wreck occurred. He found Doctor Wilson sitting beside him holding a bottle of something by his mouth—something that made his nostrils burn and his eyes smart.

"Get that stuff away from here!" he objected vigorously. "Where are we? Damn that radiator! Did we pile up?"

The girl in the front seat of the car looked around, and Nick noticed with startled surprise that her face was bruised, and that she had a wide bandage around her forehead.

"I'm so glad you weren't hurt," she said seriously. "And thank you so much for bringing Doctor Wilson out here."

Wilson introduced them. "This is the girl who got the word outside—she walked ten miles through that storm last night to get to a telephone!"

*"Walked?"* Nick exclaimed. "Ten miles—in a storm like that one must have been?"

"Shore she did," the driver of the car volunteered. "It shore must 'a' been a trial, too! She come right along this road, with the clouds a-pourin' lightnin' an' rain an' hell's puppies! I tell you, it was a-stormin' like sin, even when she got to my place at three o'clock this mornin'. I'm just now takin' her back to Rock Springs—she don't know yit what's happened to her folks."

"My mother was visiting there," Wilson explained soberly. "You didn't hear of her did you—Mrs. Wilson?"

"No, I didn't hear about her," Mary Collins admitted sympathetically. "But I wasn't there long after it happened—I went home, and—and then I started right out."

The car labored up a slope, and thus out upon a hilltop, and they all looked down upon the desolation of Rock Springs, half a mile in front of them. Doctor Wilson had grown a little pale. The car pitched down the grade, the grizzled driver dodging débris as he wound his way into the town.

THAT night Nick went with Wilson to a consultation which the latter had with Doctor Collins.

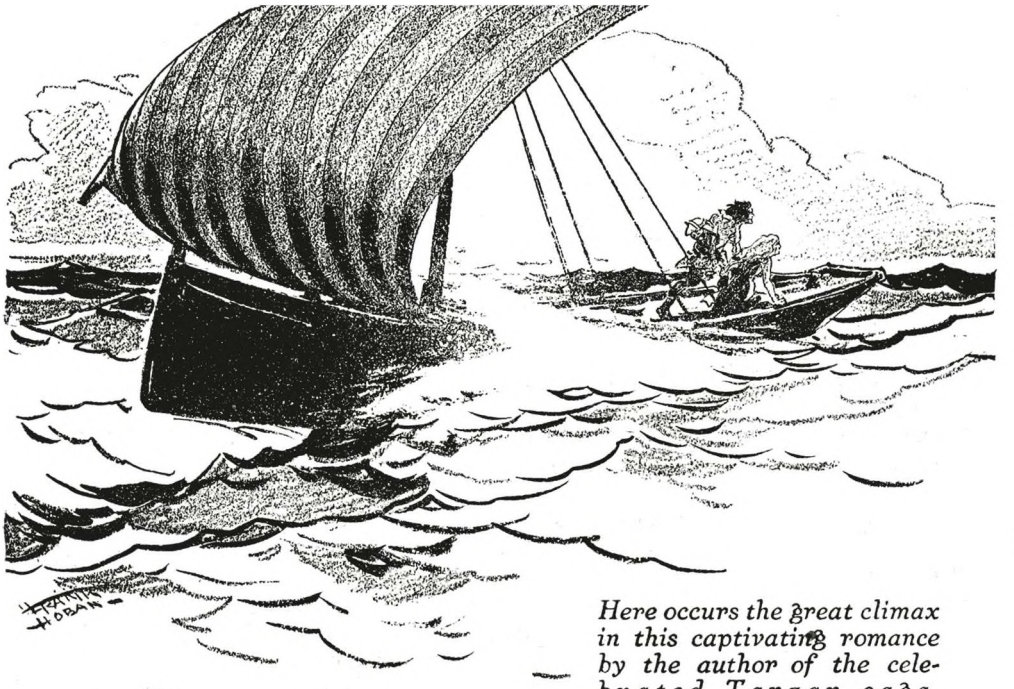
"Your mother?" the Patrol pilot asked, as they threaded their way along. He had not seen Wilson since they reached the town.

"Went down to Uvalde the morning before the storm. Man, you know that's a relief, to learn a thing like that!"

They were silent, finding their way cautiously. Suddenly Wilson exclaimed: "You know, Wentworth, I can't get over the bravery of that girl! Think of starting out in a storm like that! Just think of it!"

Nick rubbed his swollen jaw.

"She got there, too!" he commented. "But the doctor she was going for almost didn't. She ought to be glad she didn't have to make it in an airplane!"




*Here occurs the great climax in this captivating romance by the author of the celebrated Tarzan saga.*

# TANAR of Pellucidar

## By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

*The Story So Far:*

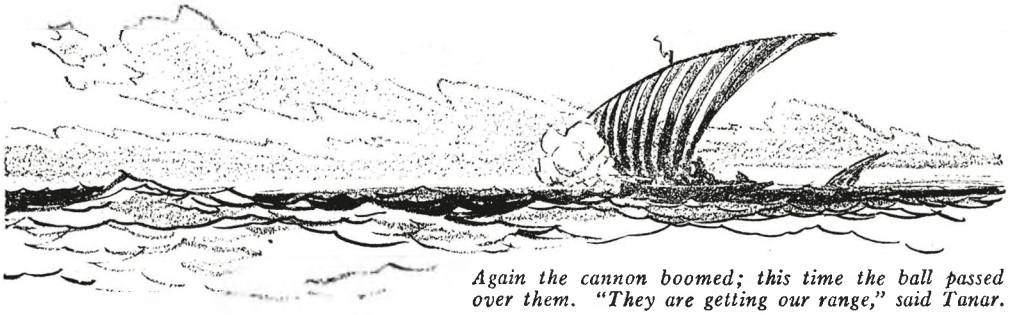
TANAR and his primeval companions lived in a strange exciting world of the cave-bear and the saber-toothed tiger; of the Buried People, a strange half-blind savage folk who dwelt in caves; of those able intrepid seamen the Korsarians, who sailed far and harried many a distant coast; of the Place of Awful Shadow, and of many another strange region.

To this world of Pellucidar in the hollow center of this our earth had penetrated two men of our own external world and time—David Innes and Abner Perry; while experimenting with a tremendously powerful "iron mole," a boring device designed to prospect in the earth's crust for valuable minerals, David and Abner lost control and presently, after terrific adventures, found themselves in this strange, primitive, reversed cosmos of Pellucidar.

There their adventures had been no less terrific. They had aided the Pellucidarians in their war with the terrible Mahars, vicious winged prehistoric monsters; and contriving to manufacture gunpowder and crude firearms, they had all but exterminated the enemy. But now a new menace threatened:

A powerful raiding armada of a strange semi-civilized white race, the Korsarians, had landed on the coast of Pellucidar and sacked many towns. Retreating at last in their high-decked Elizabethan ships, the Korsarians—a picturesque red-sashed gang armed with medieval arquebuses and led by a burly buccaneer called the Cid—carried off with them the young chieftain Tanar as hostage. And David Innes, giving instructions to the Pellucidarians to build a fleet and sail in pursuit when it was ready, himself set out in a small boat with one companion and a captive Korsarian as guide in a forlorn hope of effecting rescue.

Meanwhile on the Korsarian ship Tanar met the lovely Stellara, supposed to be a daughter of the Cid, but in reality a captive



*Again the cannon boomed; this time the ball passed over them. "They are getting our range," said Tanar.*

stolen in childhood from the beautiful island of Amiocap. And Tanar won at least the gratitude of Stellara when he rescued her from the attentions of the brutal Korsarian sub-chief Bohar.

Shortly thereafter a violent tempest scattered the Korsarian armada. The ship of the Cid was all but foundering, and the Korsarians took to the boats while Tanar and Stellara, unobserved, remained with the ship; and drifting unguided, the vessel was washed up on the shores of Stellara's native Amiocap.

The people of Amiocap, however, refused to accept Stellara's claim to kinship with them, and they were about to be burned alive as a warning to intruders, when the village was attacked by a troop of mastodons, and in the confusion Tanar and Stellara made their escape into the forest.

There, coming upon a lone hunter about to be overtaken by a tandor he had crippled but not killed, Tanar went to his aid and rescued him. And what was the joyful surprise of all three when Fedol the stranger recognized Stellara as his long-lost daughter.

For a short, happy time Stellara and Tanar dwelt in Fedol's village. Then one day when Tanar was out hunting, the Korsarians under Bohar, who had likewise been cast away upon Amiocap, raided the village and carried off Stellara. Tanar went valiantly in pursuit and came up with the Korsarians, but to escape their firearms he had to take refuge in a cave, and there was made captive by a band of the hideous Coripis, weird sightless hardly human folk who dwelt underground.

From these, after a savage struggle, Tanar contrived to escape along with a fellow-captive named Jude. Then, overtaking Bohar before he had embarked in the boat the Korsarians were building, Tanar managed to kill him in single combat. But his joy and triumph were short; for the treacherous Jude, a native of the neighboring island of Hime, carried off Stellara while Tanar slept, and placing her in a canoe, embarked with her for the island of Hime.

Awakening, Tanar discovered his loss, set out in pursuit and after many perilous encounters with wild beasts at last attained the island of Hime. The Himeans proved a brutal, savage folk—all save one girl named Gura, who aided Tanar, so that finally he came up with Jude and Stellara, rescuing her. And then—pursuing Korsarians overtook them in overpowering numbers, and with Stellara and Gura he was placed on board a ship and taken captive to Korsar.

A fine medieval maritime city Tanar found his captors' capital to be. But he had little opportunity to see it, for he was kept in close confinement. In his prison a surprise awaited him, however—he was welcomed by David Innes, who likewise had fallen into the hands of the Korsarians, and so was his predecessor in captivity. Innes agreed to teach the Korsarians how to make gunpowder on condition their lives were spared, and under pretense of searching for better material, obtained considerable liberty for himself and Tanar. And thus, with Stellara and Gura they were able to make their escape and to set out overland back toward Tanar's native Sari. For many days then they journeyed through divers perils—only at last to be overtaken by the Korsarians. And Tanar, to save Stellara's life, was obliged to submit to recapture. (*The story continues in detail:*)

MANY of the Korsarians were for dispatching Tanar immediately, but the officer in command forbade them, for it was the Cid's orders that any of the prisoners that might be recaptured were to be returned unharmed. "And furthermore," he added, "Bulf is particularly anxious to get this Sarian back alive."

During the long march back to Korsar, Tanar and Stellara learned that this was one of several parties that the Cid had dispatched in search of them with orders never to return until they had rescued his daughter and captured her abductors. They also had impressed upon them the fact that the only reason for the Cid's insistence that the prisoners be returned alive was because he and Bulf desired to mete to them death commensurate with their crime.

During the march back Tanar and Stellara were kept apart as a rule, but on several occasions they were able to exchange a few words.

"My poor Sarian," said Stellara upon one of these, "I wish to God that you had never met me, for only sorrow and pain and death can come of it."

"I do not care," replied Tanar, "if I die tomorrow, or if they torture me forever; for no price is too high to pay for the happiness that I have had with you, Stellara."

"Ah, but they *will* torture you—that is what wrings my heart," cried the girl. "Take your life yourself, Tanar. Do not let them get you. I know them, and I know their methods, and I would rather kill you with my own hands than see you fall into their clutches. The Cid is a beast, and Bulf is worse than Bohar the Brutal. I shall never be his mate—of that you may be sure. If you die by your own hand, I shall follow you shortly. And if there is a life after this, as the ancestors of the Korsarians taught them, then we shall meet again where all is peace and beauty and love."

THE Sarian shook his head. "I know what is here in this life," he said, "and I do not know what is there in the other. I shall cling to this, and you must cling to it until some other hand than ours takes it from us."

"But they will torture you so horribly," she moaned.

"No torture can kill the happiness of our love, Stellara," said the man, and then guards separated them, and they plodded on across the weary, interminable miles. How different the country looked, through eyes of despair and sorrow, from the sunlit paradise that they had seen when they journeyed through it, hand in hand with freedom and love!

But at last the long, cruel journey was over, a fitting prelude to its cruel ending, for at the palace gate Stellara and Tanar were separated. She was escorted to her quarters by female attendants whom she recognized as being virtually her guards and keepers, while Tanar was conducted directly into the presence of the Cid.

As he entered the room, he saw the glowering face of the Korsarian chieftain, and standing below the dais, just in front of him, was Bulf, whom he had only seen once before, but whose face no man could ever forget. But there was another there whose presence brought a look of greater horror to Tanar's face than did the brutal countenances of the Cid or Bulf, for standing directly before the dais, toward which he was being led, the Sarian saw David, Emperor of Pellucidar. Of all possible calamities that could have befallen, this was the worst!

WHEN the Sarian was led to David's side, he tried to speak to him, but was roughly silenced by the Korsarian guards; nor were they again allowed to communicate with one another.

The Cid eyed them savagely, as did Bulf. "For you, who betrayed my confidence and abducted my daughter, there is no punishment that can fit your crime; there is no death so terrible that its dying will expiate your sin. It is not within me to conceive of any form of torture the infliction of which upon you would give me adequate pleasure. I shall have to look for suggestions outside of my own mind." And his eyes ran questioningly among his officers surrounding him.

"Let me have that one," roared Bulf, pointing at Tanar, "and I can promise you that you will witness such torture as the eyes of man never before beheld, nor the body of man ever before endured."

"Will it result in death?" asked a tall Korsarian with cadaverous face.

"Of course," said Bulf; "but not too soon."

"Death is a welcome and longed-for deliverance from torture," continued the other. "Would you give either one of these the satisfaction and pleasure of enjoying even death?"

"But what else is there?" demanded the Cid.

"There is a living death that is worse than death," said the cadaverous one.

"And if you can name a torture worse than that which I had in mind," exclaimed Bulf, "I shall gladly relinquish all my claims upon this Sarian."

*Tanar saw himself being lowered through an opening in the floor. Then they let go of him and he dropped.*

"Explain," commanded the Cid.

"It is this," said the cadaverous one. "These men are accustomed to sunlight, to freedom, to cleanliness, to fresh air, to companionship. There are beneath this palace dark, damp dungeons into which no ray of light ever filters, whose thick walls are impervious to sound. The denizens of these horrid places, as you know, would have an effect opposite to that of human companionship, and the only danger, the only weak spot in my plan, lies in the fact that their constant presence might corrupt these criminals of their reason and thus defeat the very purpose to which I conceive their presence necessary. A lifetime of hideous loneliness and torture in silence and in darkness! What death, what torture, what punishment can you mete out to these men that would compare in hideousness with that which I have suggested?"

AFTER he had ceased speaking the others remained in silent contemplation of his proposition for some time. It was the Cid who broke the silence.

"Bulf," he said, "I believe that he is right, for I know that as much as I love life, I would rather die than be left alone in one of the palace dungeons."

Bulf nodded his head slowly. "I hate to give up my plan," he said, "for I should like to inflict that torture upon this Sarian myself. But"—and he turned to the cadaverous one—"you are right. You have named a torture infinitely worse than any that I could conceive."

"Thus is it ordered," said the Cid. "To separate palace dungeons—for life!"

In utter silence, unbroken by the Korsarian assemblage, Tanar and David were blindfolded; Tanar felt himself being stripped of all his ornaments and of what meager raiment it was his custom to wear, with the exception of his loin-cloth. Then he was pushed and dragged roughly along, first this way and then that. He knew when they were passing through narrow corridors by the muffled echoes and there was a different reverberation of the footsteps of his guards as they crossed large apartments. He was hustled down flights of stone steps and through other corridors; at last the bandage was jerked from his eyes, and he saw himself being lowered through an opening in the floor by his guards, who seized him under each arm.

The air felt damp, and it smelled rankly of mold and must. Then they let go of him, and he dropped a short distance and landed upon a stone flagging that felt damp and slippery to his bare feet. He heard a sound above his head—a grating sound as though a stone slab had been pushed across a stone floor to close the trap through which he had been lowered. Then he found him-

self surrounded by utter darkness. He listened intently, but there was no sound, not even the sounds of the retreating footsteps of his guards. Darkness and silence! They had chosen the most terrible torture that they could inflict upon a Sarian—silence, darkness and solitude.

FOR a long time Tanar stood there motionless, and then slowly he commenced to grope his way forward. Four steps he took before he touched the wall, and this he followed two steps to the end; there he turned and took six steps to cross before he reached the wall on the opposite side; and thus he made the circuit of his dungeon and found that it was four paces by six paces—perhaps not small for a dungeon, but narrower than the grave for Tanar of Pellucidar.

He tried to think—to think how he could occupy his time until death released him. Death! Could he not hasten it? But how? Six paces was the length of his prison cell. Could he not dash at full speed from one end to the other, crushing his brains out by the impact? And then he recalled his promise to Stellara, even in the face of her appeal to him to take his own life: "I shall not die by my own hand."

Again he made the circuit of his dungeon. He wondered how they would feed him, for he knew that they would feed him because they wished him to live as long as possible, as only thus might they encompass his torture. He thought of the bright sun shining down upon the tablelands of Sari. He thought of the young men and the maidens there free and happy. He thought of Stellara, so close, up there above him somewhere, and yet so infinitely far away. If he were dead, they would be closer. "Not by my own hand," he muttered determinedly.

He tried to plan for the future—the blank, dark, silent future—the eternity of loneliness that confronted him—and he found that through the despair of utter hopelessness his own unconquerable spirit could still discern hope, for no matter what his plans they all looked forward to a day of freedom. He realized that nothing short of death ever could rob him of this solace, and so his plan finally developed.

He must in some way keep his mind from dwelling constantly upon the present. He must erase from it all consideration of the darkness, the silence and the solitude that surrounded him. And he must keep fit, mentally and physically, for the moment of release or escape. And so he planned to walk and to exercise his arms and the other muscles of his body systematically to the end that he might keep in good condition and at the same time induce sufficient fatigue to enable him to sleep as much as possible, and when he rested preparatory to sleep, he concentrated his mind entirely upon pleasant memories. And when he put the plan into practice, he found that it was all that he had hoped that it would be. He exercised until he was thoroughly fatigued and then he lay down to pleasant day-dream until sleep claimed him. Being accustomed from childhood to sleeping upon hard ground, the stone flagging gave him no particular discomfort, and he fell asleep in the midst of pleasant memories of happy hours with Stellara.

BUT his awakening! As consciousness slowly returned, it was accompanied by a sense of horror, the cause of which gradually filtered to his awakening sensibilities. A cold, slimy body was crawling across his chest. Instinctively his hand seized it to thrust it away, and his fingers closed upon a scaly thing that wriggled and writhed.

Tanar leaped to his feet, cold sweat bursting from every pore. He could feel the hairs upon his head rising in horror. He stepped back, and his foot touched another of those horrid things. He slipped and fell, and falling, his body encountered others—cold, clammy, wriggling. Scrambling to his feet, he retreated to the opposite end of his dungeon, but everywhere the floor was covered with writhing, scaly bodies. And now the silence became a pandemonium of seething sound, a black caldron of venomous-sounding hisses.

Long bodies curled themselves about his legs and writhed and wriggled upward toward his face. No sooner did he tear one from him and hurl it aside than another took its place.

This was no dream as he had at first hoped, but dark, horrible reality. These hideous serpents that filled his cell were a part of his torture. But they would defeat their purpose—they would drive him mad! Already he felt his mind tottering, and then into it crept the cunning scheme of a madman. With their own weapons he would defeat their ends. He would rob them quickly of the power to torture him further! And he burst into a shrill, mirthless laugh as he tore a snake from around his body and held it before him.

The reptile writhed and struggled, as slowly Tanar of Pellucidar worked his hand upward to its throat. It was not a large snake, for Pellucidar, measuring perhaps five feet in length with a body about six inches in diameter.

Grasping the reptile about a foot below its head with one hand, Tanar slapped it repeatedly in the face with the other and then held it close to his breast. Laughing and screaming, he struck and struck again, and at last the snake struck back, burying its fangs deep in the flesh of the Sarian.

With a cry of triumph Tanar hurled the thing from him, and then slowly sank to the floor upon the writhing, wriggling forms that carpeted it.

"With your own weapons I have robbed you of your revenge," he shrieked, and then he lapsed into unconsciousness. . . . .

Who may say how long he lay thus in the darkness and silence of that buried dungeon in a timeless world? But at length he stirred; slowly his eyes opened, and as consciousness returned he felt about him. The stone flagging was bare. He sat up. He was not dead, and to his surprise he discovered that he had suffered neither pain nor swelling from the strike of the serpent.

He arose and moved cautiously about the dungeon. The snakes were gone. Sleep had restored his mental equilibrium, but he shuddered as he realized how close he had been to madness; and he smiled somewhat shamefacedly, as he reflected upon the futility of his needless terror. For the first time in his life Tanar of Pellucidar had understood the meaning of the word *fear*.

As he paced slowly around his dungeon, one foot came in contact with something lying on the floor in a corner—something which had not been there before the snakes came. He stooped and felt cautiously with his hand and found an iron bowl fitted with a heavy cover. He lifted the cover. Here was food, and without questioning what it was or whence it came, he ate.

## CHAPTER XIX

### The Darkness Beyond

THE deadly monotony of his incarceration dragged on. Tanar exercised; he ate; he slept. He never knew how the food was brought to his cell, nor when; and after a while he ceased to care.

The snakes came usually while he slept, but since that first experience they no longer filled him with horror. And after a dozen repetitions of their visit they not only ceased to annoy him, but he came to look forward to their coming as a break in the deadly monotony of his solitude. He found that by stroking them and talking to them in low tones he could quiet their restless writhing. And after repeated recurrences of their visits, he was confident that one of them had become almost a pet.

Of course in the darkness he could not differentiate one snake from another, but always he was awakened by the nose of one pounding gently upon his chest, and when he took it in his hands and stroked it, it made no effort to escape; nor ever again did one of them strike him with its fangs after that first orgy of madness, during which he had thought and hoped that the reptiles were venomous.

It took him a long time to find the opening through which the reptiles found ingress to his cell; but at length, after diligent search, he discovered an aperture about eight inches in diameter, some three feet above the floor. Its sides were worn smooth by the countless passage of scaly bodies. He inserted his hand in the opening, and feeling around discovered that the wall at this point was about a foot in thickness; when he inserted his arm to the shoulder he could feel nothing in any direction beyond the wall. Perhaps there was another chamber there—another cell like his; or possibly the aperture opened into a deep pit that was filled with snakes. He thought of many explanations, and the more he thought, the more anxious he became to solve the riddle of the mysterious space beyond his cell.

Thus did his mind occupy itself with trivial things, while the loneliness and the darkness and the silence exaggerated the importance of the matter beyond all reason until it became an obsession with him. During all his waking hours he thought about that hole in the wall and what lay beyond in the Stygian darkness which his eyes could not penetrate. He questioned the snake that rapped upon his chest, but it did not answer him and then he went to the hole in the wall and asked the hole. And he was on the point of becoming angry when it did not reply when his mind suddenly caught itself, and with a shudder he turned away, realizing that this way led to madness and that he must, above all else, remain master of his mind.

But still he did not abandon his specu-

lation; only now he conducted it with reason and sanity, and at last he hit upon a shrewd plan.

WHEN next his food was brought and he had devoured it he took the iron cover of the iron pot, which had contained it, and hurled it to the stone flagging of his cell, where it broke into several pieces. One of these was long and slender and had a sharp point, which was what he had hoped he would find in the debris of the broken cover. This piece he kept; the others he put back into the pot, and then he went to the aperture in the wall and commenced to scratch, slowly, slowly, slowly, at the hard mortar in which the stones around the hole were set.

He ate and slept many times before his labor was rewarded by the loosening of a single stone next to the hole. And again he ate and slept many times before a second stone was removed. The time passed more quickly now, and his mind was so engrossed with his labor that he was almost happy.

During this time he did not neglect his exercising, but he slept less often. When the snakes came he had to stop his work, for they were continually passing in and out through the hole.

He wished that he knew how the food was brought to his cell, that he might know if there was danger that those who brought it could hear him scraping at the mortar in the wall, but as he never heard the food brought he hoped that those who brought it could not hear him and he was quite sure that they could not see him.

And so he worked on unceasingly until at last he had scratched away an opening large enough to admit his body, and then for a long time he sat before it, waiting, seeking to assure himself that he was master of his mind, for in this eternal night of solitude that had been his existence for how long he could not even guess, he realized that this adventure which he was facing had assumed such momentous proportions that once more he felt himself upon the brink of madness. And now he wanted to make sure that no matter what lay beyond that aperture he could meet it with calm nerves and a serene and sane mind, for he could not help but realize that keen disappointment might be lying in wait for him, since during all the long periods of his scratching and scraping since he had discovered the hole through which the snakes came into his cell he had realized that a hope of escape was the foundation of the desire that prompted him to prosecute the work. And though he expected to be disappointed he knew how cruel would be the blow when it fell.

With a touch that was almost a caress he let his fingers run slowly over the rough edges of the enlarged aperture. He inserted his head and shoulders into it and reached far out upon the other side, groping with a hand that found nothing, searching with eyes that saw nothing, and then he drew himself back into his dungeon and walked to its far end and sat down upon the floor and leaned his back against the wall and waited—waited because he did not dare to pass through that aperture to face some new discouragement.

IT took him a long time to master himself, and then he waited again—but this time after reasoned consideration of the matter that filled his mind.

He would wait until they brought his food and had taken away the empty receptacle—that he might be given a longer interval before possible discovery of his absence, in the event he did not return to his cell. And though he went often to the corner where the food was ordinarily deposited, it seemed an eternity before he found it there. And after he had eaten it, another eternity before the receptacle was taken away; but at last it was removed. And once again he crossed his cell and stood before the opening that led he knew not where.

This time he did not hesitate.

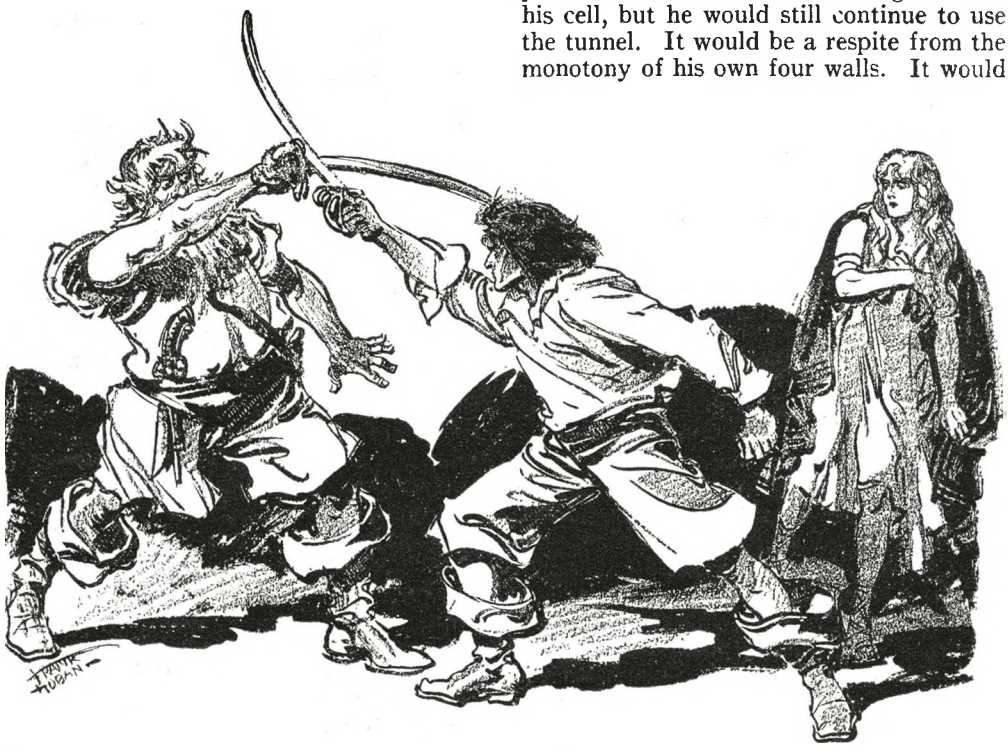
One after the other he put his feet through the aperture until he sat with his legs both upon the far side of the wall. Then, turning on his stomach, he started to lower himself, because he did not know where the floor might be, but he found it immediately, on the same level as his own. An instant later he stood erect and if not free, at least no longer a prisoner within his own cell.

Cautiously he groped about him in the darkness, feeling his way a few inches at a time. This cell, he discovered, was much narrower than his own, but it was very long. By extending his hands in both directions he could touch both walls, and thus he advanced, placing a foot cautiously to feel each step before he took it.

He had brought with him from his cell the iron sliver that he had broken from the cover of the pot and with which he had

scratched thus far toward freedom. The possession of this bit of iron imparted to him a certain sense of security, since it meant that he was not entirely unarmed.

Presently, as he advanced, he became convinced that he was in a long corridor. One foot came in contact with a rough substance directly in the center of the tunnel. He took his hands from the walls and groped in front of him.



*"You said that no one could hear Stellara's cries for help from this apartment," taunted Tanar. "So why do you think that they can hear yours?"*

It was a rough, coated cylinder about eight inches in diameter that rose directly upward from the center of the tunnel, and his fingers quickly told him that it was the trunk of a tree with the bark still on, though worn off in patches.

Passing this column, which he guessed to be a support for a weak section of the roof of the tunnel, he continued on, but had taken only a couple of steps when he came to a blank wall—the tunnel had come to an abrupt end.

TANAR'S heart sank within him. His hopes had been rising with each forward step and now they were suddenly dashed to despair. Again and again his fingers ran over the cold wall that had halted his advance toward hoped-for freedom, but there was no sign of break or crevice, and slowly he turned back toward his cell, passing the wooden column and retracing his steps in utter dejection. But as he moved sadly along he mustered all his spiritual forces, determined not to let this expected disappointment crush him. He would go back to his cell, but he would still continue to use the tunnel. It would be a respite from the monotony of his own four walls. It would extend the distance that he might walk and after all he would make it worth the effort that had been necessary to gain ingress to it.

Back in his own cell again he lay down to sleep, for he had denied himself sleep a great deal of late that he might prosecute the work upon which he had been engaged. When he awoke the snakes were with him again, the friendly one tapping gently on his chest—and once again he took up the dull monotony of his existence, altered only by regular excursions into his new-found domain, the black interior of which he came to know as well as he did his own cell, so that he walked briskly from the hole he had made to the wooden column at the far end of the tunnel, passed around it and walked back again at a brisk gait and with as much assurance as though he could see

plainly, for he had counted the paces from one end to the other so many times that he knew to an instant when he had covered the distance.

He ate; he slept; he exercised; he played with his slimy, reptilian companion; and he paced the narrow tunnel of his discovery. And often when he passed around the wooden column at its far end, he speculated upon the real purpose of it.

ONCE he went to sleep in his own cell thinking about it, and when he awoke to the gentle tapping of the snake's snout upon his breast he sat up so suddenly that the reptile fell hissing to the flagging, for clear and sharp upon the threshold of his awakening mind stood an idea—a wonderful idea—why had he not thought of it before?

Excitedly he hastened to the opening leading into the tunnel. Snakes were passing through it, but he fought for precedence with the reptilian horde and tumbled through headfirst upon a bed of hissing snakes. Scrambling to his feet he almost ran the length of the corridor until his outstretched hands came in contact with the rough bole of the tree. There he stood quite some time, trembling like a leaf, and then, encircling the column with his arms and legs, he started to climb slowly and deliberately aloft. This was the idea that had seized him in its compelling grip upon his awakening.

Upward through the darkness he went, and pausing now and then to grope about with his hands he found that the tree trunk ran up the center of a narrow, circular shaft.

He climbed slowly upward and at a distance of about thirty feet above the floor of the tunnel, his head struck stone. Feeling upward with one hand he discovered that the tree was set in mortar in the ceiling above him.

This could not be the end! What reason could there be for a tunnel and a shaft that led nowhere? He groped through the darkness in all directions with his hand and he was rewarded by finding an opening in the side of the shaft about six feet below the ceiling. Quitting the bole of the tree he climbed in to the opening in the wall of the shaft, and here he found himself in another tunnel, lower and narrower than that at the base of the shaft. It was still dark, so that he was compelled to advance as slowly and with as great caution as he had upon that occasion when he had first explored his tunnel below.

He advanced but a short distance when the tunnel turned abruptly to the right, and ahead of him, beyond the turn, he saw a ray of light!

A condemned man snatched from the jaws of death could not have greeted salvation with more joyousness than Tanar of Pellucidar greeted this ray of daylight—the first he had seen for a seeming eternity. It shone dimly through a tiny crevice—the light of heaven that he had never expected again to behold!

Enraptured, he walked slowly toward it, and as he reached it his hand came in contact with rough, unpainted boards that blocked his way. It was through a tiny crack between two of these boards that the light was filtering.

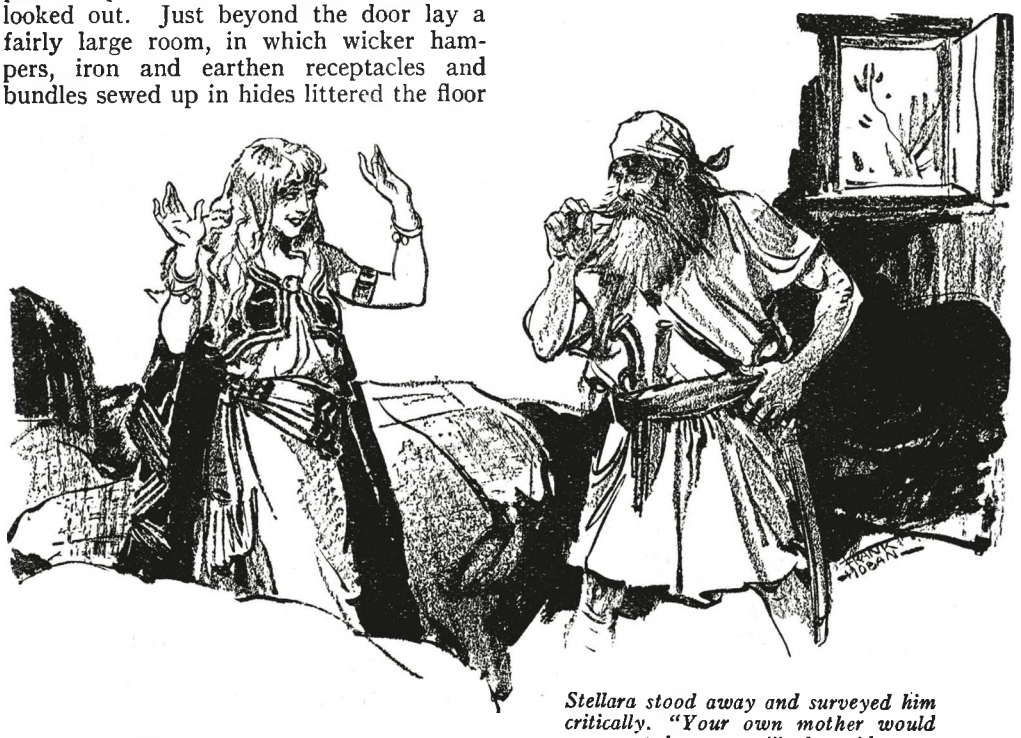
Dim as the light was, it hurt his eyes, so long unaccustomed to light of any kind. But by turning them away so that the light did not shine directly into them, he finally became accustomed to it, and when he did he discovered that as small as the aperture was through which the light came it let in sufficient to dispel the utter darkness of the interior of the tunnel, and he also discovered that he could discern objects. He could see the stone walls on either side of the tunnel, and by looking closely he could see the boards that formed the obstacle that barred his farther progress. And as he examined them he discovered that at one side there was something that resembled a latch, an invention of which he had been entirely ignorant before he had come aboard the Korsarian ship upon which he had been made prisoner, for in Sari there are no locks nor latches. But he knew the thing for what it was and it told him that the boards before him formed a door, which opened into light and toward liberty. But what lay immediately beyond?

HE pressed his ear to the door and listened, but heard no sound. Then very carefully he examined the latch, experimenting with it until he discovered how to operate it. Steadying his nerves, he pushed gently upon the rough planks. As they swung away from him slowly a flood of light rushed into the first narrow crack, and Tanar covered his eyes with his hands and turned away, realizing that he must become accustomed to this light gradually, or he might be permanently blinded.

With closed eyes he listened at the crack,

but could hear nothing. And then with utmost care he started to accustom his eyes to the light, but it was long before he could stand the full glare that came through even this tiny crack.

When he could stand the light without pain he opened the door a little farther and looked out. Just beyond the door lay a fairly large room, in which wicker hampers, iron and earthen receptacles and bundles sewed up in hides littered the floor and were piled high against the walls. Everything seemed covered with dust and cobwebs and there was no sign of a human being about.



*Stellara stood away and surveyed him critically. "Your own mother would not know you!" she said.*

PUSHING the door open still farther, Tanar stepped from the tunnel into the apartment and looked about him. Everywhere the room was a litter of bundles and packages: articles of clothing strewn about, together with various fittings for ships, bales of hide and numerous weapons.

The thick coating of dust upon everything suggested to the Sarian that the room had not been visited lately.

For a moment he stood with his hand still on the open door and as he started to step into the room his hand stuck for an instant where he had grasped the rough boards. Looking at his fingers to ascertain the cause he discovered that they were covered with sticky pitch. When he tried to rub the pitch off, he found it was almost impossible to do so.

As he moved around the room examining the contents everything that he touched with his left hand stuck to it—it was annoying, but unavoidable.

An inspection of the room revealed several windows along one side and a door at one end.

The door was equipped with a latch similar to that through which he had just passed and which was made to open from the outside with a key, but which could be operated by hand from the inside. It was a very crude and simple affair, and for that Tanar would have been grateful had he known how intricate locks may be made.

Lifting the catch, Tanar pushed the door slightly ajar and before him he saw a long corridor, lighted by windows upon one side and with doors opening from it upon the other. As he looked a Korsarian came from one of the doorways and, turning, walked down the corridor away from him. A moment later a woman emerged from another doorway, and then he saw other people at the far end of the corridor. Quickly Tanar closed and latched the door.

Here was no avenue of escape! Were he back in his dark cell he could not have been cut off more effectually from the

outer world than he was in this apartment at the far end of a corridor constantly used by Korsarians; for with his smooth face and his naked body, he would be recognized and seized the instant that he stepped from the room. But Tanar was far from being overwhelmed by discouragement. Already he had come much farther on the road to escape than he had previously dreamed could be possible, and not only this thought heartened him, but even more the effect of daylight, which had for so long been denied him. He had felt his spirit and his courage expand beneath the beneficent influence of the light of the noonday sun, so that he felt ready for any emergency that might confront him.

Turning back once more into the room, he searched it carefully for some other avenue of escape. He went to the windows and found that they overlooked the garden of the Cid, but there were many people there, too, in that part of the garden close to the palace. The trees cut off his view of the far end from which he had helped Stellara and Gura to escape, but he guessed that there were few, if any, people there, though to reach it would be a difficult procedure from the windows of this storeroom.

To his left, near the opposite side of the garden, he could see that the trees grew closely together and extended thus apparently the full length of the enclosure.

If those trees had been upon this side of the garden he guessed that he might have found a way to escape; at least as far as the gate in the garden wall close to the barracks, but they were not, and so he must abandon thought of them.

There seemed, therefore, no other avenue of escape than the corridor into which he had just looked; nor could he remain indefinitely in this chamber where there was neither food nor water and with a steadily increasing danger that his absence from the dungeon would be discovered when they found that he did not consume the food they brought him.

Seating himself upon a bale of hide Tanar gave himself over to contemplation of his predicament and as he studied the matter his eyes fell upon some of the loose clothing strewn about the room. There he saw the shorts and shirts of Korsar, the gay sashes and head handkerchiefs, the wide-topped boots, and with a half smile upon his lips he gathered such of them as he required, shook the dust from them and clothed himself after the manner of a Korsarian. He needed no mirror, though, to know his smooth face would betray him.

He selected pistols, a dirk and a cutlass, but he could find neither powder nor balls for his firearms.

THUS arrayed and armed, Tanar surveyed himself as best he might without a mirror. "If I could keep my back toward all Korsar," he mused, "I might escape with ease, for I warrant I look as much a Korsarian as any of them from the rear; but unless I can grow bushy whiskers I shall not deceive anyone."

As he sat musing thus he became aware suddenly of voices raised in altercation just outside the door of the storeroom. One was a man's voice; the other a woman's.

"If you wont have me," growled the man, "I'll take you!"

Tanar could not hear the woman's reply, though he heard her speak and knew from her voice that it was a woman.

"What do I care for the Cid?" cried the man. "I am as powerful in Korsar as he. I could take the throne and be Cid myself, if I chose."

Again Tanar heard the woman speak.

"If you do I'll choke the wind out of you," threatened the man. "Come in here where we can talk better. Then you can yell all you want for no one can hear you."

Tanar heard the man insert a key in the lock and as he did so the Pellucidarian hid behind a pile of wicker hampers.

"And after you get out of this room," continued the man, "there will be nothing left for you to yell about."

"I have told you right along," said the woman, "that I would rather kill myself than mate with you! If you take me by force I shall still kill myself—but I shall kill you first."

The heart of Tanar of Pellucidar leaped in his breast when he heard that voice. His fingers closed upon the hilt of the cutlass at his side, and as Bulf voiced a sneering laugh in answer to the girl's threat, the Sarian leaped from his concealment, a naked blade shining in his right hand.

At the sound behind him Bulf wheeled about; for an instant he did not recognize the Sarian in the Korsarian garb, but Stellara did and she voiced a cry of mingled surprise and joy.

"Tanar!" she cried. "My Tanar!"

As the Sarian rushed him, Bulf fell back, drawing his cutlass as he retreated. Tanar saw that he was making for the door lead-

*The man felt the gold in his palm. "Very well," he said gruffly; "go on about your business and be quick about it."*

ing into the corridor, and he rushed at the man to engage him before he could escape, so that Bulf was forced to stand and defend himself.

"Stand back," cried Bulf, "or you shall die for this." But Tanar of Pellucidar only laughed in his face, as he swung a wicked blow at the man's head, which Bulf but barely parried, and then they were at one another like two wild beasts.

Tanar drew first blood from a slight gash in Bulf's shoulder and then the fellow yelled for help.

"You said that no one could hear Stellara's cries for help from this apartment," taunted Tanar. "So why do you think that they can hear yours?"

"Let me out of here!" cried Bulf. "Let me out, and I will give you your freedom!" But Tanar rushed him into a corner, and the sharp edge of his cutlass sheared an ear from Bulf's head.

"Help!" shrieked the Korsarian. "Help! It is Bulf! The Sarian is killing me!"

FEARFUL that his loud cries might reach the corridor beyond and attract attention, Tanar increased the fury of his assault. He beat down the Korsarian's guard. He swung his cutlass in one terrible circle that clove Bulf's ugly skull to the bridge of his nose, and with a gurgling gasp the great brute lunged forward upon his face. Then Tanar of Pellucidar turned and took Stellara in his arms.

"Thank God," he said, "that I was in time."

"It must have been God Himself who led you to this room," said the girl. Then she added: "I thought you dead. They told me that you were dead!"

"No," said Tanar. "They put me in a dark dungeon beneath the palace, where I was condemned to remain for life."

"And you have been so near me all this time!" said Stellara. "And I thought that you were dead."

"For a long time I thought that I was worse than dead," replied the man. "Darkness, solitude and silence—God, that is worse than death."

"And yet you escaped!" The girl's voice was filled with awe.

"It was because of you that I escaped," said Tanar. "Thoughts of you kept me from going mad—thought and hope urged me on to seek some avenue of escape. Never again shall I feel that there can be any situation that is entirely hopeless—after what I have passed through."

Stellara shook her head. "Your hope will have to be strong, dear heart, against the discouragement that you must face in seeking a way out of the palace of the Cid and the city of Korsar."

"I have come this far," replied Tanar.

"Already have I achieved the impossible. Why should I doubt my ability to wrest freedom for you and for me from whatever Fate holds in store for us?"

"You cannot pass them with that smooth face, Tanar," said the girl, sadly. "Ah, if you only had Bulf's whiskers!" And she glanced at the corpse of the fallen man.

Tanar turned, too, and looked down at Bulf, where he lay in a pool of blood upon the floor. And then quickly he faced Stellara. "Why not?" he cried. "Why not?"

## CHAPTER XX

### Down to the Sea

"WHAT do you mean?" demanded Stellara.

"Wait and you shall see," replied Tanar, and drawing his dirk he stooped and turned Bulf over upon his back. Then with the razor-sharp blade of his weapon he commenced to hack off the bushy, black beard of the dead Korsarian, while Stellara looked on in questioning wonder.

Spreading Bulf's headcloth flat upon the floor, Tanar deposited upon it the hair he cut from the man's face. When he had completed his gruesome tonsorial effort he folded the hair into the handkerchief and, rising, motioned for Stellara to follow him.

Going to the door that led into the tunnel, through which he had escaped from the dungeon, Tanar opened it and smearing his fingers with the pitch that exuded from the boards upon the inside of the door, he wiped some of it upon the side of his face and then turned to Stellara.

"Put this hair upon my face in as natural a way as you can. You have lived among them all your life, so you should know well how a Korsarian's beard should look."

GRUESOME as the plan seemed, and though she shrank from touching the hair of the dead man, Stellara steeled herself and did as Tanar bid. Little by little, patch by patch, Tanar applied pitch to his face and Stellara placed the hair upon it until presently only the eyes and nose of the Sarian remained exposed. The expression of the former were altered by increasing the size and bushiness of the eyebrows with shreds of Bulf's beard that had been left over, and then Tanar smeared his nose with some of Bulf's blood, for many of the Korsarians had large, red noses. Then Stellara stood away and surveyed him critically. "Your own mother would not know you," she said.

"Do you think I can pass as a Korsarian?" he asked.

"No one will suspect, unless they question you closely as you leave the palace."

"We are going together," said Tanar.

"But how?" asked Stellara.

"I have been thinking of another plan," he said. "I noticed when I was living in the barracks that sailors going toward the river had no difficulty in passing through the gate leaving the palace. In fact it is always much easier to leave the palace than to enter it. On many occasions I have heard them say merely that they were going to their ships. We can do the same."

"Do I look like a Korsarian sailor?" demanded Stellara.

"You will when I get through with you," said Tanar, with a grin.

"What do you mean?"

"There is Korsar clothing here," said Tanar; "enough to outfit a dozen, and there is still plenty of hair on Bulf's head."

The girl drew back with a shudder. "Oh, Tanar—you cannot mean that!"

"What other way is there?" he demanded. "If we can escape together is it not worth any price we might have to pay?"

"You are right," she said. "I will do it."

When Tanar completed his work upon her, Stellara had been transformed into a bearded Korsar, but the best he could do in the way of disguise failed to hide entirely the contours of her hips and breasts.

"I am afraid they will suspect," he said. "Your figure is too feminine for shorts and a shirt to hide it."

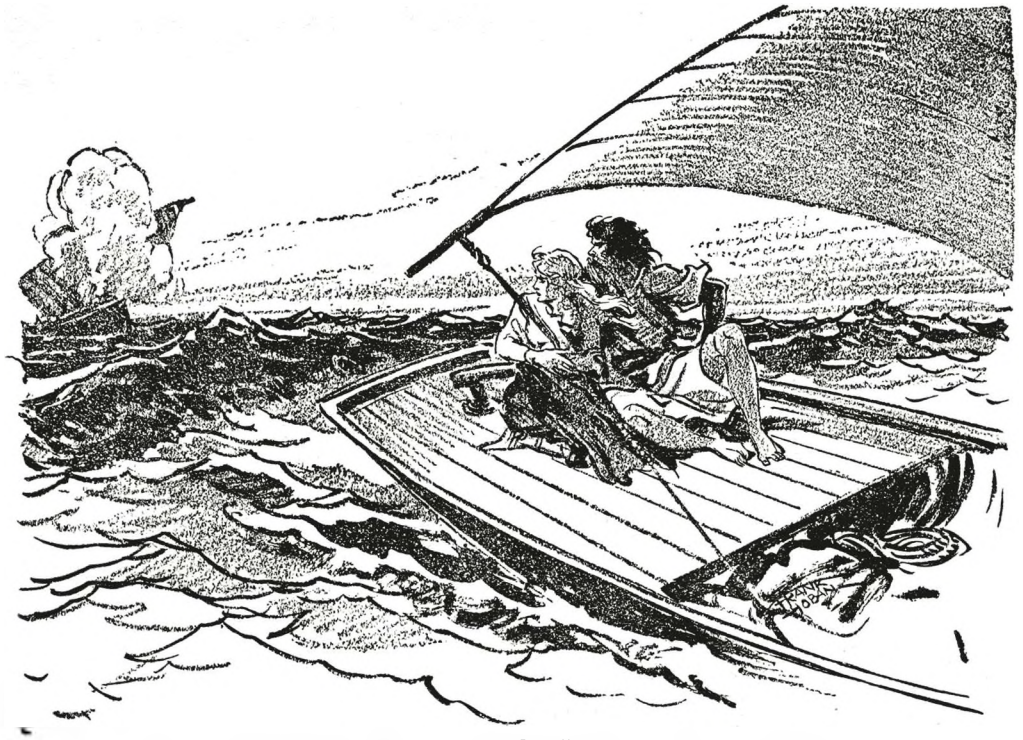
"Wait," exclaimed Stellara. "Sometimes the sailors, when they are going on long voyages, wear cloaks, which they use to sleep in if the nights are cool. Let us see if we can find such a one here."

"Yes, I saw one," replied Tanar, and crossing the room he returned with a cloak made of wide striped goods. "That will give you greater height," he said. But when they draped it about her, her hips were still too much in evidence.

"Build out my shoulders," suggested Stellara, and with scarfs and handkerchiefs the Sarian built the girl's shoulders out so that the cloak hung straight and she resembled a short, stocky man, more than a slender, well-formed girl.

"Now we are ready," said the Sarian. Stellara pointed to the body of Bulf.

"We cannot leave that lying there," she



*There was a terrific explosion from the direction of the raider that had been firing on them—an overcharged cannon had exploded.*

said. "Some one may come to this room and discover it and when they do every man in the palace—yes, even in the entire city—will be arrested and questioned."

Tanar looked about the room and then he seized the corpse of Bulf and dragged it into a far corner, after which he piled bundles of hides and baskets upon it until it was entirely concealed, and over the blood-stains upon the floor he dragged other bales and baskets until all signs of the duel had been erased or hidden.

"And now," he said, "is as good a time as another to put our disguises to the test." Together they approached the door. "You know the least-frequented passages to the garden," said Tanar. "Let us make our way from the palace through the garden to the gate that gave us escape before."

"Then follow me," replied Stellara, as Tanar opened the door and the two stepped out into the corridor beyond. It was empty. Tanar closed the door behind him, and Stellara led the way down the passage.

They had proceeded for but a short distance when they heard a man's voice in an apartment to the left.

"Where is she?" he demanded.

"I do not know," replied a woman's voice. "She was here but a moment ago and Bulf was with her."

"Find them and lose no time about it," commanded the man, sternly. And he stepped from the apartment just as Tanar and Stellara were approaching.

It was the Cid. Stellara's heart stopped beating as the Korsarian ruler looked into the faces of Tanar and herself.

"Who are you?" demanded the Cid.

"We are sailors," said Tanar quickly.

"What are you doing here in my palace?" demanded the Korsarian ruler.

"We were sent here with packages to the storeroom," replied Tanar, "and we are but now returning to our ship."

"Well, be quick about it. I do not like your looks," growled the Cid as he stamped off down the corridor ahead of them.

TANAR saw Stellara sway slightly and he stepped to her side to support her, but she quickly regained possession of herself, and led Tanar through a doorway into the garden.

"God!" whispered the man, as they walked side by side after quitting the building. "If the Cid did not know you then your disguise must be perfect."

Stellara shook her head, for even as yet she could not control her voice to speak.

There were a number of men and women in the garden close to the palace. Some of

these scrutinized them casually, but they passed by in safety and a moment later the gravel walk they were following wound through dense shrubbery that hid them from view and then they were at the doorway in the garden wall.

Again fortune favored them here and they passed out into the barracks yard without being noticed.

Electing to try the main gate because of the greater number of people who passed to and fro through it, Tanar turned to the right, passed along the full length of the barracks past a dozen men and approached the gate with Stellara at his side.

They were almost through when a stupid-looking Korsarian soldier stopped them. "Who are you?" he demanded, "and what business takes you from the palace?"

"We are sailors," replied Tanar. "We are going to our ship."

"What were you doing in the palace?" demanded the man.

"We took packages there from the captain of the ship to the Cid's storeroom," explained the Sarian.

"I have never seen either of you before."

"We have been away upon a long cruise," replied Tanar.

"Wait here until the captain of the gate returns," said the soldier. "He will wish to question you."

The Sarian's heart sank. "If we are late in returning to our ship, we shall be punished," he said.

"That is nothing to me," replied the man.

Stellara reached inside her cloak and searched until she found a pouch attached to her girdle. From this she drew money which she slipped into Tanar's hands. He understood immediately, and stepping close to the soldier he pressed two pieces of gold into the fellow's palm. "It will go very hard with us if we are late," he said.

The man felt the cool gold within his palm. "Very well," he said gruffly; "go on about your business, and be quick about it."

Without waiting for a second invitation Tanar and Stellara merged with the crowd upon the Korsarian street. Nor did either speak, and it is possible that Stellara did not even breathe, until they had left the palace gate well behind.

"And where now?" she asked at last.

"We are going to sea," replied Tanar.

"In a Korsar ship?" she demanded.

"In a Korsar boat," he replied. "We are going fishing."

Along the banks of the river were moored many craft, but when Tanar saw how many men were on or around them he realized that the plan that he had chosen, which contemplated stealing a fishing boat, most probably would end disastrously, and he explained his doubts to Stellara.

"We could never do it," she said. "Stealing a boat is considered the most heinous crime that one can commit in Korsar, and if the owner of a boat is not aboard it you may rest assured that some of his friends are watching it for him, even though there is little likelihood that anyone will attempt to steal it since the penalty is death."

Tanar shook his head. "Then we shall have to risk passing through the entire city of Korsar," he said, "and going out into the open country without any reasonable excuse in the event we are questioned."

"We might buy a boat," suggested Stellara.

"I have no money," said Tanar.

"I have," replied the girl. "The Cid has always kept me well supplied with gold." Once more she reached into her pouch and drew forth a handful of goldpieces.

"Here," she said, "take these. If they are not enough, I have more, but I think that you can buy a boat for half that sum."

QUESTIONING the first man they approached at the river side, Tanar learned that there was a small fishing boat for sale a short way down the river, and it was not long before they had found its owner and consummated the purchase.

As they pushed off into the current and floated downstream, Tanar felt that his escape from Korsar had been effected too easily; he must be dreaming.

Borne down toward the sea by the slow current of the river, Tanar wielded a single oar, paddlewise from the stern, to keep the boat out in the channel and its bow in the right direction, for he did not wish to make sail under the eyes of Korsarian sailors and fishermen, as he was well aware that he could not do so without attracting attention by his bungling to his evident inexperience and thus casting suspicion upon them.

Slowly the boat drew away from the city and from the Korsarian raiders anchored in midstream and then, at last, he felt that it would be safe to hoist the sail and take advantage of the land breeze.

With Stellara's assistance the canvas was spread, and as it bellied to the wind the craft bore forward with accelerated speed, and then behind them they heard shouts

*"They dare not go back without us," said Stellara, "or they would never risk that surf." "There goes one of them on the rocks!" cried Tanar.*

and, turning, saw three boats speeding toward them, while across the waters came commands for them to lay to.

The pursuing boats, which had set out under sail and had already acquired considerable momentum, appeared to be rapidly overhauling the smaller craft. But as the speed of the latter increased, the distance between them seemed not to vary.

The shouts of the pursuers had attracted the attention of the sailors on board the anchored raiders, and presently Tanar and Stellara heard the deep boom of a cannon and a heavy shot struck the water just off their starboard bow.

Tanar shook his head. "That is too close," he said. "I had better come about."

"Why?" demanded Stellara.

"I do not mind risking capture," he said, "because in that event no harm will befall you when they discover your identity, but I cannot risk the cannon shots for if one of them strikes us, you will be killed."

"Do not come about," cried the girl. "I would rather die here with you than be captured, for capture would mean death for you and then I should not care to live. Keep on, Tanar, we may outdistance them yet! And as for their cannon shots, a small, moving boat like this is a difficult target and their marksmanship is none too good."

Again the cannon boomed and this time the ball passed over them and struck the water just beyond.

"They are getting our range," said Tanar.

The girl moved close to his side, where he sat by the tiller. "Put your arm around me, Tanar," she said. "If we must die, let us die together."

The Sarian encircled her with his free arm and drew her close to him. An instant later there was a terrific explosion from the direction of the raider that had been firing on them. Turning quickly toward the ship, they saw what had happened —an overcharged cannon had exploded.

"They were too anxious," said Tanar.

It was some time before another shot was fired and this one fell far astern, but the pursuing boats were clinging tenaciously to their wake.

"They are not gaining," said Stellara.

"No," said Tanar, "and neither are we."

"But I think we shall after we reach the open sea," said the girl. "We shall get more wind there and this boat is lighter and speedier than theirs. Fate smiled upon us when it led us to this boat rather than to a larger one."

AS they approached the sea, their pursuers, evidently fearing precisely what Stellara had suggested, opened fire upon them with arquebuses and pistols. Occa-

sionally a missile would come dangerously close, but the range was just a little too great for their primitive weapons and poor powder.

On they sailed out into the open Korsar Az, which stretched onward and upward into the concealing mist of the distance. Upon their left the sea ran inward forming a great bay, while almost directly ahead of them, though at so great a distance that it was barely discernible, rose the dim outlines of a headland, and toward this Tanar held his course.

The chase had settled down into a dogged test of endurance. It was evident that the Korsarians had no intention of giving up their prey even though the pursuit led to the opposite shore of the Korsar Az, and it was equally evident that Tanar entertained no thought of surrender.

ON and on they sped, the pursued and the pursuers. Slowly the headland took shape before them, and later a great forest was visible to the left of it—a forest that ran down almost to the sea.

"You are making for land?" asked Stellara.

"Yes," replied the Sarian. "We have neither food nor water and if we had I am not sufficiently a sailor to risk navigating this craft across the Korsar Az."

"But if we take to the land, they will be able to trail us," said the girl.

"You forget the trees, Stellara," the man reminded her.

"Yes, the trees," she cried. "I had forgotten. If we can reach the trees I believe that we shall be safe."

As they approached the shore inside the headland, they saw great combing rollers breaking among the rocks and the sullen boom of the sea came to their ears.

"No boat can live in that," said Stellara.

Tanar glanced up and down the shoreline as far as he could see and then he turned and let his eyes rest sadly upon his companion.

"It looks hopeless," he said. "If we had time to make the search we might find a safer landing-place, but within sight of us one place seems to be as good as another."

"Or as bad," said Stellara.

"It cannot be helped," said the Sarian. "To beat back now around that promontory in an attempt to gain the open sea again, would so delay us that we should be overtaken and captured. We must take our chances in the surf, or turn about and give up."

Behind them their pursuers had come about and were waiting, rising and falling upon the great billows.

"They think that they have us," said Stellara. "They believe that we shall tack here and make a run for the open sea around the end of that promontory, and they are ready to head us off."

Tanar held the boat's nose straight for the shore line. Beyond the angry surf he could see a sandy beach, but between lay a barrier of rock upon which the waves broke, hurling their spume far into the air.

"Look!" exclaimed Stellara, as the boat raced toward the smother of boiling water. "Look! There! Right ahead! There may be a way yet."

"I have been watching that place," said Tanar. "I have been steering straight for it. If it is a break in the rocky wall we shall soon know it, and if it is not—"

The Sarian glanced back in the direction of the Korsarians' boats and saw that they were again in pursuit, for by this time it must have become evident to them that their quarry was throwing itself upon the rocky shoreline in desperation rather than to risk capture by turning again toward the open sea.

EVERY inch of sail was spread upon the little craft and the taut, bellowing canvas strained upon the cordage until it hummed, as the boat sped straight for the rocks dead ahead.

Tanar and Stellara crouched in the stern, the man's left arm pressing the girl protectingly to his side. With grim fascination they watched the bowsprit rise and fall as it rushed straight toward what seemed must be inevitable disaster.

They were there! The sea lifted them high in the air and launched them forward upon the rocks. To the right a jagged finger of granite broke through the smother of spume. To the left the sleek, water-worn side of a huge boulder revealed itself for an instant as they sped past. The boat grated and rasped upon a sunken rock, slid over and raced toward the sandy beach.

Tanar whipped out his dirk and slashed the halyards, bringing the sail down as the boat's keel touched the sand. Then, seizing Stellara in his arms, he leaped into the shallow water and hastened up the shore.

Pausing, they looked back toward the pursuing Korsarians and to their astonish-

ment saw that all three boats were making swiftly toward the rocky shore.

"They dare not go back without us," said Stellara, "or they would never risk that surf."

"The Cid must have guessed our identity when a search failed to reveal you," said Tanar.

"It may be also that they discovered your absence from the dungeon, and coupling this with the fact that I, too, was missing, some one guessed the identity of the two sailors who sought to pass through the gate and who paid gold for a small boat at the river," suggested Stellara.

"There goes one of them on the rocks," cried Tanar, as the leading boat disappeared in a smother of water.

The second boat shared the same fate as its predecessor, but the third rode through the same opening that had carried Tanar and Stellara to the safety of the beach and as it did the two fugitives turned and ran toward the forest.

Behind them raced a dozen Korsarians and amidst the crack of pistols and arquebuses Tanar and Stellara disappeared in the dark shadows of the primeval forest.

THE story of their long and arduous journey through unknown lands to the kingdom of Sari would be replete with interest, excitement and adventure, but it is no part of this story.

It is enough to say that they arrived at Sari shortly before Ja and Gura made their appearance, the latter having been delayed by adventures that had almost cost them their lives.

The people of Sari welcomed the Amiocapian mate that the son of Ghak had brought back to his own country. And Gura they accepted, too, because she had befriended Tanar—though the young men accepted her for herself and many were the trophies that were laid before the hut of the beautiful Himean maiden. But she repulsed them all, for in her heart she held a secret love that she had never divulged, but which, perhaps, Stellara had guessed and which may have accounted for the tender solicitude which the Amiocapian maid revealed for her Himean sister.

## Conclusion

AS Perry neared the end of the story of Tanar of Pellucidar, the sending became weaker and weaker until it died out entirely.

Jason Gridley turned to me. "I think Perry had something more to say," he said. "He was trying to tell us something. He was trying to ask something."

"Jason," I said, reproachfully, "didn't you tell me that the story of the inner world is perfectly ridiculous; that there could be no such place peopled by strange reptiles and men of the stone age? Didn't you insist that there is no Emperor of Pellucidar?"

"Tut-tut!" he said. "I apologize. I am sorry. But that is past. The question now is what can we do?"

"About what?" I asked.

"Do you not realize that David Innes lies a prisoner in a dark dungeon beneath the palace of the Cid of Korsar?" he demanded with more excitement than I have ever known Jason Gridley to exhibit.

"Well, what of it?" I demanded. "I am sorry, of course; but what in the world can we do to help him?"

"We can do a lot," said Jason Gridley, determinedly.

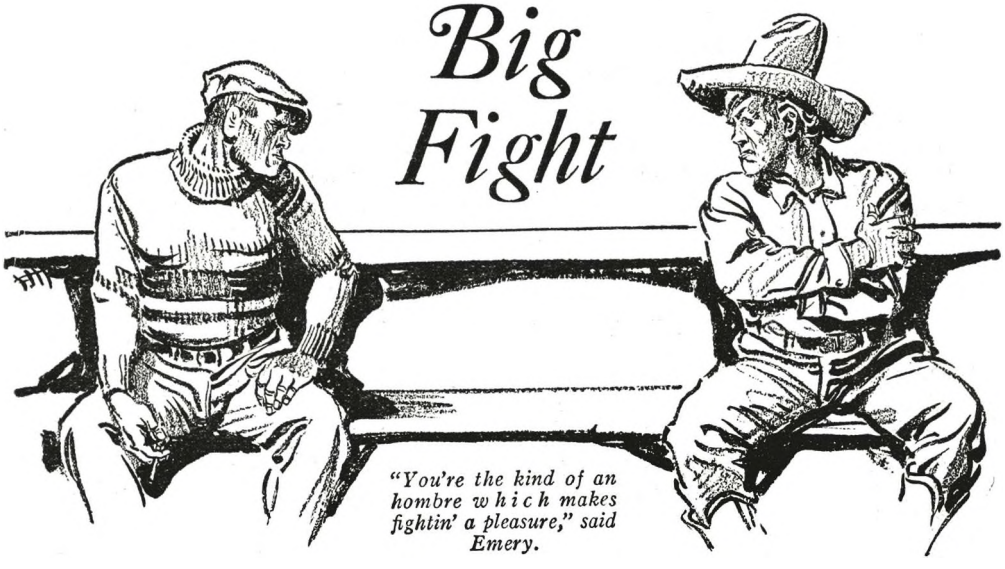
I must confess that as I looked at him I felt considerable solicitude for the state of his mind, for he was evidently laboring under great excitement.

"Think of it!" he cried. "Think of that poor devil buried there in utter darkness, silence, solitude—and with those snakes! God!" He shuddered. "Snakes crawling all over him, winding about his arms and his legs and his body, creeping across his face as he sleeps, and nothing else to break the monotony—no human voice, the song of no bird, no ray of sunlight. Something must be done. He must be saved."

"But who is going to do it?" I asked.

"I am!" replied Jason Gridley.

# The Big Fight



*"You're the kind of an hombre which makes fightin' a pleasure," said Emery.*

## By BUD LA MAR

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

*A Rodeo rider turns box-fighter and sundry other exciting events occur in this joyous saga by the author of "Cossack and Cowboy."*

KNOWLEDGE is a great thing; you can pack a heavy load of it around for years and think it is only a burden to you until an emergency arises wherein you realize it is mighty handy. But if you have not got it, you are put in the same position as the old Colonel who drew to royal flushes for forty years —and when he finally made one, everybody passed.

To illustrate this point, I will proceed to relate the strange case of Emery McCoy *versus* the Wild African Gnu.

A gnu is a queer animal, a cross between a Missouri mule and a Brahma steer. Its natural haunts are not in Africa, and its name would lead you to believe, but in zoo's and circuses. And although I know this is an antigogling way to tell a story, I will state the moral of it first: Never mess with a gnu against his wishes or he will cause you trouble!

EMERY and me were partners, engaged in the Wild West business and in pursuing this noble occupation we sallied back and forth over the country, sometimes traveling great distances from one show to another.

At the time of the following happenings, we were drawing wages from the "Stupendous Spectacle Shows and Big Three-ring Circus."

Ever since the day we had joined the show, Emery and me had been very intrigued by this gnu; we used to stand by his cage and argue about him for hours. One day, while we were so engaged, we found ourselves the center of an interested crowd of sight-seeing natives, and to hear one of the fellows talk you would have thought he had punched gnus all his life.

Now, I have had pretty much to do with cud-chewing bovines and even if this was a species unknown to me, I did not like for a skinny pelican like him to be telling *me* things about a misfit ox.

"Listen, Mister," I said to this man, "all your 'therefores' and 'consequentlys' only mean to me that you have run out of words. Viewed from behind this animal might resemble a horse, but you can't get away from the fact that it is equipped with a pair of horns—which, as anybody west of the River will tell you, makes it a cow-brute. And to prove my point, I will bet you this sixty dollars that my partner, here, can take this gnu by the horns and lay him flat on his side in less'n twenty seconds."

"No, no, my dear sir!" exclaimed the man. "Bulldogging a gnu would be a physical impossibility!"

"Money talks!" I retorted. Then I ad-

dressed Emery. "Emery, how much money have you got?"

"Why, I got this here eighty dollars," said Emery, pulling the money from his pocket. I grabbed it.

"Now," I continued, "I will bet you one hundred and forty dollars that this man here can bulldog the gnu!"

"Oh, well," sighed the stranger, "you will have your way! But don't ever say that I didn't warn you!"

"Now see what you done," whispered Emery, "with your big talk and careless remarks! How do you know I can do this? Now I ask you! And my eighty dollars too, what—"

"S-h-h!" I cautioned him. "There's nothing to it, you great big baby! I bet you could eat that thing up with one hand tied behind your back!"

"Mebbe so, but—"

The bulldogging of the wild African gnu took place right after the afternoon performance, under the big top and during a special concert arranged for the occasion. Twenty-five cents' extra admission had been charged, and according to the large crowd which remained to witness the thrilling spectacle, it was pretty much of a drawing-card.

The boss' eyes were bogged out with glee and he announced that thereafter there would be a great gnu-bulldogging after each and every performance.

The gnu trotted out, careless-like, unaware of the danger which was lurking behind him in the shape of Emery mounted on a top saddle-horse. Emery made a flying tackle from the back of his running horse, threw one arm around the animal's neck and began twisting one horn down.

This made the gnu very wroth.

He planted both front feet in the sawdust, came to a stop and proceeded to stand on his head. Then with great deliberation, he elevated both hind feet high and brought them down again with a sweeping motion.

The back of Emery's shirt and the seat of his pants suddenly became attached to one of the flying hoofs. The gnu waved the torn clothing around in the air like a battle-flag; then, having much faith in his scratching tactics, he did the same thing again, to Emery's great discomfort.

A GNU is an animal which is well able to take care of itself. But Emery, who is a tenacious *hombre*, did not become convinced of this until he had been raked four times across the back. Then he let go, willing to let matters rest.

However, the gnu felt that he had suffered a great wrong which must be washed in the blood of the perpetrator. Radiating indignation, he took after Emery's fleeing form.

Emery realized the danger he was in, and he raced across the tent in a brisk manner, the angry animal right on his heels. Reaching the fence he gracefully hurdled it and lit *crash bang*—smack into a row of fascinated onlookers.

There was a loud yell of alarm, then an awful crash. The gnu had followed Emery—and the bleachers collapsed under the shock. The confusion which followed this unlooked-for development could not possibly be set down in detail. It was terrible!

I saw Emery hiding behind an elephant pedestal and after fighting our way out of the stampede we decided that this would be a good time to tear ourselves away from a job which, after all, did not pay very much money.

"What about my eighty dollars?" asked Emery as we trotted towards the town.

"I wish you would quit harping on that, Emery," I told him. "You should be glad to be alive!"

"What'll we do now?"

"Let me do the worrying," said I. "I'll find a way to get us to Buffalo where we can join another show I know about."

"What about railroad fare? What about eats? What about—"

"Leave it to me," said I confidently. "Aint we always et?"

WE came walking down the street, anxiously scanning the horizon for the promise of a meal, when golden opportunity suddenly smote me in the eye with great force. And I said to Emery:

"Emery, this is just what we have been looking for!"

My partner let out a sigh and rolled his eyes, a helpless and resigned look on his face.

"Violence again!" he exclaimed sadly. "There should be a law preventin' you from thinkin' up schemes whereby I allus get it in the neck!"

"Now, Emery," I explained with patience, "the way I figure this thing out, there will be no danger whatsoever."

"That's what you said when you arranged for me to bulldog the wild African

gnu," put in Emery. "And look at us now!"

"Well!" I exclaimed, very indignant. "For goodness' sake! How was I to know that the crazy thing could scratch his ears with his left hind hoof? Because a gnu turns out to be an acrobat, you blame me for it!"

"Let it go!" said Emery. "I'd just as soon forget the incident. —If I take it right you propose to enter the prize-fightin' game. Now, it's perfectly all right with me, if you're the one aimin' to be mopped around a two-by-four inclosure. As for me, I have no taste for it."

"Emery," said I, "if the occasion demanded this sacrifice from me, I would never be the one to turn my back on it. But if you will look closely you will see that the sign reads, plain as anything: *'Heavyweights wanted for preliminary bouts preceding the fight between Tarantula Harry and Pouncing Max. Information inside.'* Now, I ask you, do I look like a heavyweight?"

"No," answered Emery. "I guess you're kinda shrimpish for a heavyweight."

"Exactly! Anybody could see that! While here you are, a great big roughneck who thinks nothing of jumping onto ferocious Texas steers. Why, I'll bet you don't even know your own strength!"

Emery is kinda unreasonable in some ways, but after we had argued back and forth for a spell, he finally agreed that it wouldn't do any harm to go inside and see what the proposition was.

"Now don't forget!" I cautioned him. "I am your manager. All you're supposed to do is look mad and make growling sounds way down in your stomach. I'll do all the talking."

"By golly, my stomach *is* growlin'!" muttered Emery as we stepped inside.

THE room in which we found ourselves was a kind of office which had not seen a broom or a mop since Carrie Nation retired from the cleaning business. Three rough-looking persons were setting on the back of their necks, chewing black cigars and passing the time of day.

"Howdy, cowboys!" said a fat, greasy-looking one, setting behind the desk. "What can I do for you?"

"Why, we happened to be passing by and saw your sign outside," I answered, very important. "My friend here is the famous Gorilla McCoy. Most likely you have recognized him, from seeing his picture in the papers so often."

"No," said the fellow, not looking as impressed as he should. "Can't say I have. I only read the sporting news."

"Well, what do you think this man is? The ax-killer?" I yelped.

Just then one of the other cigar-chewers put in something.

"This guy don't look so bad," he said. "Can he fight?"

"Can he *fight!*" I exclaimed in a shocked tone of voice. *"Tsk, tsk, tsk!* Listen!" And I drew closer to the group, looked around very mysterious and whispered: "That's the reason we are traveling *incognito*. . . . . He killed a man! One little punch—*pft!*—that's all there was to it!"

I uttered this statement with a great imitation of pained sincerity and they looked at each other kind of funny. Maybe I had made it too strong, I thought.

"Of course," I added. "He only gets out of bounds when he becomes exasperated. Ordinarily, he is gentle and loving and would not hurt a fly."

The three men were by now examining Emery sharply and they seemed to be quite taken with his appearance.

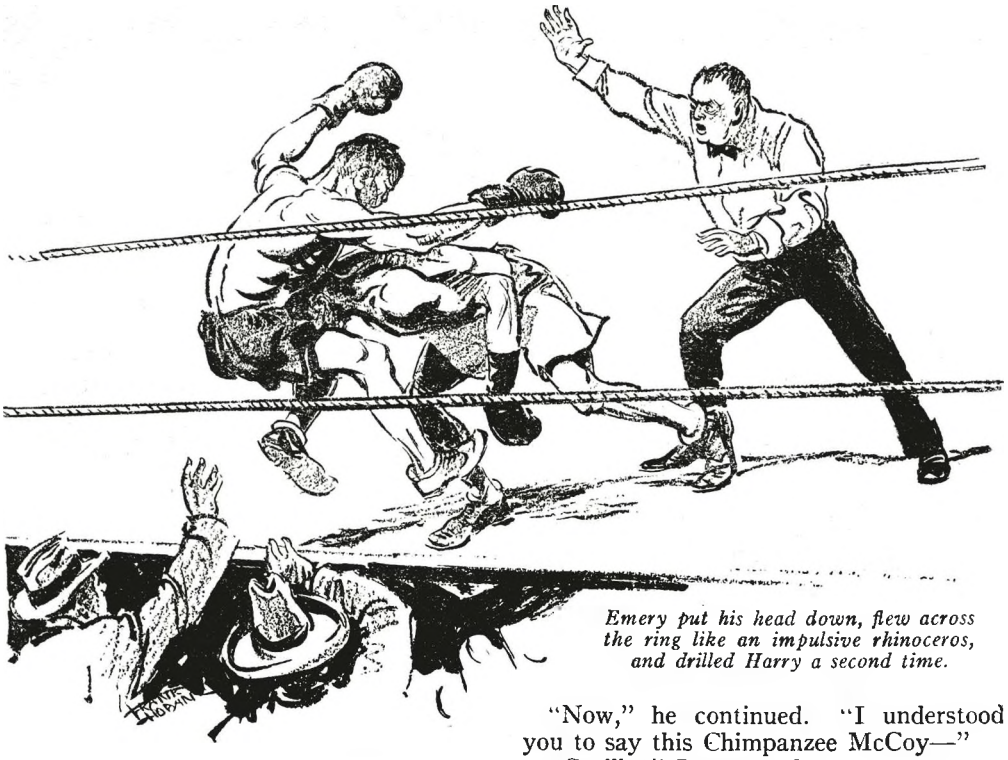
My partner had seated himself on a bench and assumed a bloodthirsty expression. His arms were folded across his barrel-like chest and he regarded the scene with the pleased outlook of a bulldog from which a bone had been snatched away. He was a big burly devil and had suffered several setbacks in his numerous encounters with wild and frisky steers. One of these steers had ducked once without giving proper notice, and Emery had slid on his nose for some distance in a bed of coarse cinders. The organ had kind of worn out in the process and never regained its proper dimensions and original shape. This alone gave him a ferocious appearance which belied his real peace-loving nature.

The man at the desk was about to pass judgment when a little short fellow rushed into the room, waving a telegram and wailing like a hound-dog deprived of her pups.

"Oh, dear, dear, dear!" he shouted, fluttering around and looking distressed, "we're ruint! This is the end!"

"Here!" said the fat fellow. "What's the trouble? Let me see that thing!"

"Trouble!" screamed the little man. "Trouble! It's that big crook of a Pouncing Max! He can't wait for Saturday night to come here and get knocked coo-



*Emery put his head down, flew across the ring like an impulsive rhinoceros, and drilled Harry a second time.*

coo! No! He goes out and slams trucks around! And what happens? Well, I ask you, what should it be when you slam a truck by the front end? You get squashed flat, that's what! *Ooooh!* Never a thought for the gate-receipts! The dirty crook! The big pudgy coward!"

Instead of getting excited, the fat man had sunk deeper in his chair and was squinting sharply at Emery.

"We got to do something quick," he said quietly. And now all four of them were regarding my partner. The befuddled bearer of bad news had sat down and was making little clucking noises and wringing his hands in agony.

"We can't run in one of them bums from around here," continued the promoter. "They're too well known. The East-side Monks'll be here in force and they'd tear down the house. We'll have to bring in a stranger with some kind of a reputation. I can frame the rep' and I think that with a little fixin' we can build up a pretty reputable ten-round go. Call Joe Skedick and tell him to come here right away, and for him to bring Harry along."

One man hurried to the telephone. The promoter addressed himself to me.

"You and me are going to talk a bit and make a little deal," he said.

"Yes, sir," said I.

"Now," he continued. "I understood you to say this Chimpanzee McCoy—"

"Gorilla!" I corrected.

"Gorilla then—have it your own way. Well, this monkey is the champion heavyweight boxer of the celebrated state of Nevada, we'll say. We have induced you to sign him up with the local terror, Tarantula Harry, because we thought that the public would never get their money's worth watchin' a tramp like Max. To do this we have gone to terrific expense, spent thousands of dollars to bring this marvel into our midst. Am I right so far?"

"Yes sir," I answered, feeling very happy with the way things were turning out.

"Now don't kid yourself!" he added. "You get two hundred and fifty dollars and you'd better put on a show too! I'm doing you a hell of a big favor, and you know it."

"What if this boy whips Tarantula Harry? What then?" I inquired.

"No chance. As it is, I'll have to frame the thing so it'll go six rounds. But I'll agree to hand you five hundred dollars if you get a decision—which you wont if I can help it! This Harry is an old-experienced bruiser, plenty shrewd, and he's got a punch. Besides, you aint here to win fights."

JUST then the door opened and Tarantula Harry and his manager joined the conference.

"Howdy, Joe!" called the promoter to Harry's manager, getting up from his chair. "Come into the other room; I want to dish you out an earful."

The two men left, followed by the little nervous man, and Emery began scowling at his opponent like he thought he had cut the cinch on his old grandmother's saddle.

This Tarantula Harry was a very uncouth kind of person; you could tell at a glance that he would hit you when you wasn't looking. His head had suffered some terrible shocks which had left visible marks on his surface. His ears looked like a couple of enlarged dried peaches and the rest of his features were sadly in need of expert plastic surgery. He wore a small cap pulled over one eye and a turtle-neck sweater with bright-colored bands which encircled his manly bosom. He took no apparent interest in the proceedings, and paid no attention to Emery.

"All fixed, boys!" called the promoter, emerging from the secret chamber. "And now all we got to do is sign the articles. Knock out a contract, Murph!"

Murph busied himself punching the contract on a typewriter and the promoter, whose name, it developed, was Miller, introduced the hands all around.

"Mr. McCoy," he said jovially, "I want you to meet Mr. Harry, your capable opponent."

"Howdy," said Emery. "You're the kind of an *hombre* which makes fightin' a pleasure."

"Wot?" growled Harry. "Don't get cute!" He wrinkled his brow and looked as if he was about to commit a murder right there. However, there was no danger, as we found out later—he would no more think of fighting out of a ring than of writing a book on the uplifting influence of amateur ping-pong playing.

And now that I have explained how Emery and me were flung into the prize-fighting game, I will proceed with the surprising and exciting events which followed this occurrence.

The press was duly informed of this change for the better in the program and every day we repaired to a gymnasium where Emery peeled down to a small pair of trunks. Before an admiring audience he exhibited his manly form (only a trifle bowlegged) and repeatedly swatted a large leather bag, which had a regrettable habit of bouncing back on his nose until he learned to duck and cringe away from it.

Articles appeared in the local newspapers announcing the oncoming fight and bestowing fancy titles such as the "Desert Wolf," and the "Wild Man of the Sierras," on my bewildered partner.

It would have been better for him if he'd never learned to read. As it was, he spent most of his hours of leisure learning these articles by heart and making scowling faces at himself in the mirror. Then he would strike a crouching pose and launch a series of wild haymakers at the atmosphere, a performance which he called shadow-boxing—although he did not rightly know the difference between a right uppercut and a kick on the shin. This looked very stunning and efficient—fighting shadows—but I could not see what was to keep the other fellow from walking around him and kicking him sharply in the pants while he was busy making hissing sounds in the air with his fists. In fact, I warned him of this, telling him he would do better to keep one eye open for hostile moves. But he had developed temperament and took himself too seriously to pay much attention to me.

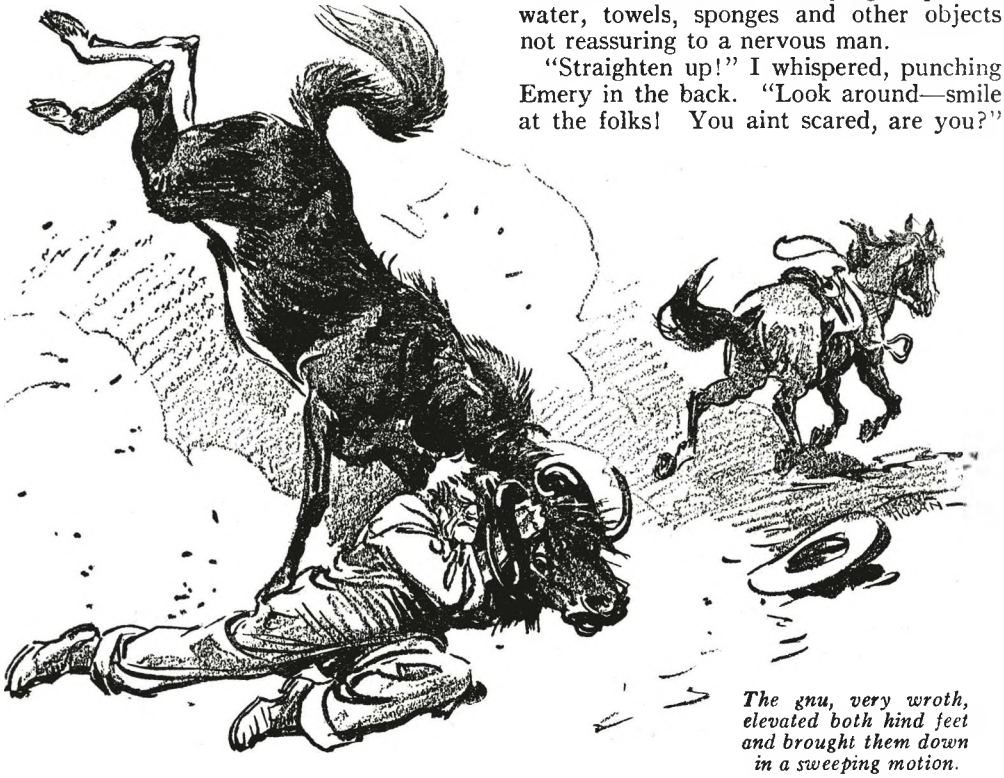
"You just wait," he would say. "I'll show that there Centipede Harry that a man of his age shouldn't go friskin' around with vigorous young cowboys in the flower of their manhood! Did you read that piece in the *X-Ray?*"

BUT on the evening of the big fight, this cocksure feeling began to evaporate. According to the signs and preparations it did not look like Tarantula Harry would get scared at the last minute and leave town. As far as could be made out from late reports, Harry fully intended to be among those present and nobody could sincerely say that he was greatly concerned about the outcome. This lack of interest on the part of a man about to be pounded in a manner too gruesome even to think about, did not look so good to me and I noticed that Emery barely touched his supper.

He was just beginning to realize that it took two persons to make a successful prize-fight and that the party of the second part would most likely take steps to protect himself—not counting the nasty things said party of the second part would probably do whenever it looked favorable.

Long before the preliminaries were due to start, the crowd began filing into the building. The so-called East-side Monks

arrived in a body and proceeded to amuse themselves with a great show of impulsive abandon. They took possession of the best seats in the house and commenced making their presence known by creating a fearful din, tramping their feet and bellowing a snappy ballad of the back alleys.



*The gnu, very wroth, elevated both hind feet and brought them down in a sweeping motion.*

Two ushers unwisely attempted to remonstrate politely with the headstrong youths and were promptly and expertly bounced on their ear for their trouble. Three policemen then started out to take up the argument where the ushers had left off. They walked down the aisle swinging their arms and looking belligerent. About halfway down—with nobody running yet—they executed a military about-face and answered the call of duty elsewhere.

We weren't to come out of our dressing-room until we were called, and we spent some pretty anxious minutes listening to the uproar which threatened to attain cyclonic proportions any minute. Emery's face had become the color of stale pastry and it was only with great determination that he kept his teeth from knocking like a bunch of valves in a wornout engine.

Mr. Miller had assigned us a couple of seconds whose duties were to keep Emery's *morale* in condition and resuscitate the body between spells of bloody encounter.

At last our signal came and Emery started out, showing all the vim and enthusiasm of a horse-thief being led to a shady spot. I followed in his wake, while behind us came the seconds carrying a pail of water, towels, sponges and other objects not reassuring to a nervous man.

"Straighten up!" I whispered, punching Emery in the back. "Look around—smile at the folks! You aint scared, are you?"

"Who's scared?" demanded my partner in a faint tone of voice. "What right you got to say I'm scared, huh? I aint scared! It's the climate. I aint used to it. Wait till I get goin'!"

"That's the spirit!" I encouraged him. "You'll have something to read in the papers tomorrow! *'Western Tiger K. O.'s Local Champ!'* That's something to look forward to!"

But Emery had other things to worry about besides newspaper articles. However, he managed to keep his head up and the crowd burst out in lusty bellows of welcome as we picked our way down the aisle toward the ring.

"Who's all right?" shouted the East-side Monks to a man.

"Gorilla McCoy!" was the vociferous answer from the same side of the house.

Evidently the hoodlums had bet their

money on us and it looked like the best thing to do under the circumstances would be for Emery to win first place.

WE were first to enter the ring and while the seconds set up a stool in a corner, Emery performed a few bending exercises and took a look at his surroundings. This was no place for a man with pacifist inclinations. Most of these people had come to see somebody land on his back with a resounding smack and they would not be denied, even if they had to take a hand in the process.

Tarantula Harry and his party made their appearance and pandemonium broke loose again. The Monks announced with great sincerity that they did not think much of this fellow—he was a bum, a robber of blind men and a strangler of children! He had led a salty life and his male parent had been a man afflicted with a roaming disposition.

But the man had his own backers and they also used no restraint in casting aspersions of a similar lurid nature—which, on the whole, created quite a feeling of get-together sociability.

The referee followed Harry's gang over the ropes and a gentleman who was pointed out to us as the announcer held up his hand for silence. About ten minutes later, with no change in the situation in sight, he decided to make his oration regardless of the good it would do. If they did not want to hear it, that was their hard luck!

"Laaaa-dies and gentle-men!" he squalled, pointing his finger at Emery, "I take great pleasure in introducing to you Gorilla McCoy—undefeated champion of Nevada and suburbs!"

Emery rose from his stool and took a bow.

"And in this corner," continued the screaming announcer, "is a man whom you all know well, Tarantula Harry, defending the local championship in a ten-round bout according to the Markee of Queensberry's rules and variations!"

The announcer retired from the field, a man who had done his duty regardless of conditions. Then the referee called everybody into the center of the ring and mumbled something which sounded like: *"Mmmm — Blaaaa-blah — mmmm . . . .* and don't none of you guys forget it, either!"

He was no shrinking lily himself and looked like a man who could take care of himself in the face of strenuous competition.

All but the fighters retired from the ring; a bell rang—and the fight was on!

They approached each other in a cautious manner and began circling around, looking for an opening. Emery slammed his foot down on the canvas with a loud smack and Harry jumped four feet backward, looking alarmed. This only served to make him more cautious and he continued to look for an opening.

The crowd began passing gruff remarks.

Seemingly it was desired for Emery to make the first hostile move—and my partner finally reached the decision that after all somebody should do something, and it might as well be him. Both arms swinging wildly, he rushed his adversary. But Harry apparently thought that an opening had not yet been provided, so he politely stepped aside and let the storm go by. Emery came to an abrupt stop against the ropes, looked around, puzzled, and repeated his stunt. That time Harry was not quick enough. He did make an effort at dodging sidewise but was caught unawares. There was a flurry of gloves, then Harry jumped in, clenched Emery's head with his right arm and squeezed with great force.

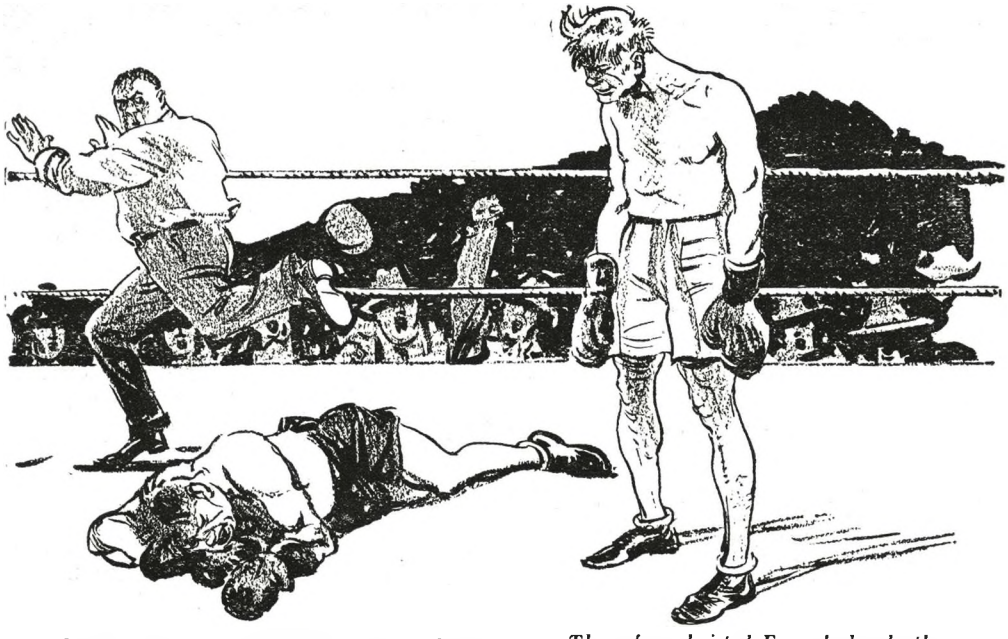
The referee interfered and separated the struggling warriors. Emery rubbed his jaw with his glove, looking slightly irritated. He had not figured on squeezing tactics. He thought he was being imposed upon, and did not like it at all.

"You better look out!" he said warningly.

Whereupon Harry saw the long-hoped-for opening and rudely nailed him one on the jaw. Emery's head snapped back and he pawed at the air to keep his balance. But a second terrific right uppercut connected with his sensitive chin and he flopped on his back.

*"One!"* called the referee swinging his arm. *"Two! Three! Four!"* The place was almost silent. *"Five!"* Emery got one elbow under him and pushed hard. His head came up and he blinked rapidly. *"Six! Seven!" Dong!* went the bell—and none too soon!

THE seconds ran out, grasped Emery under the arms and dragged him gently to his corner, following which they propped him up on the stool and began administering first aid. One squirted water in his face and the other slapped him with his



*The referee hoisted Emery's hand; then he dived from the platform and lost himself in the crowd.*

open hand. It looked hopeless, but a faint spark of life answered the vigorous fanning. Emery suddenly stiffened up and opened both eyes.

"By golly," he exclaimed, "he hit me!"

"You wanta watch that guy," cautioned one of the seconds. "He'll do that! Keep away from him till your head clears up."

Emery was squinting at the opposite corner, looking very dangerous and mad.

"This thing is gonna reach momentous proportions," he said sharply. "And I warned him, too!"

The bell rang for Round Two and the fighters sallied out again. Harry had been warned to take it a little easier. The promoters did not want the fight to end so soon. Emery was following his second's advice. If an opening was something which was needed to start things going, all right. But he wasn't going to be the one furnishing it. He had made that mistake once and his head still hurt from it. And so a fancy exhibition was put on of what is called the backward advance.

The spectacle became very wearisome to the crowd and a whisper arose that shook the rafters.

Tarantula Harry realized that a little action would not be amiss at this time and he reached out and hit Emery a resounding slap on the flank which knocked him spinning half way across the ring.

*"Ha-a-ah!"* went the crowd.

Encouraged by his success, Harry followed up and gave Emery another squeeze on the head for good measure.

"Don't do that!" said Emery, a strange light in his eyes.

Whereupon Harry made the mistake of leaping in again and giving Emery's head another squeeze against his wishes.

"All right!" said Emery, charging across the ring with his head down. "You wouldn't listen to me. Now get out of here!"

His heavy skull struck Harry squarely in the middle and the Tarantula was violently propelled through the ropes, into the laps of the ringsiders.

The referee was not quite sure whether this was legal or not, but he decided to think it over while he was counting. At the count of six, Harry began climbing back into the ring looking like a man whose evening had been spoiled.

Emery, proud of his accomplishment, had retired to an opposite corner. Just as Harry's feet were once more inside the ropes, Emery put his head down again, flew across the ring like an impulsive rhinoceros and drilled him a second time.

Then he leaned over the ropes and said: "There's no use of you tryin' to come back up here. I'm mad at you!"

The house was now divided into three sections: first, the East-side Monks, who cared not so much about ethics as they did results; second, Harry's backers, who were quite certain that all was not well; third, the folks who had not bet any money

but had come to enjoy themselves. This form of entertainment was highly pleasing to this last group and they allied with the Monks in demanding no change in the present methods.

The referee was now convinced that two glaring indiscretions had been committed. But he had an ear for statistics and knew that the *pros* greatly outnumbered the *cons*, and anyway, he had not brought his book of rules with him. So long as nobody pulled a knife, or got rough, he was willing to let matters slide.

The bell rang, ending the round just as Harry was again going over the top, which was the only thing that saved him from another violent expulsion—for the time being.

HARRY'S manager leaped into the ring and started a furious argument with the referee. The Monks yelled lustily that Gorilla McCoy was an all-right guy—and a wild time was had by all until the bell ushered in the dawn of the famous third round.

Tarantula Harry was not the same uninterested man that he had been. A large red spot had appeared on his stomach, plainly demonstrating that this was a soft spot with him, and he looked pale and distressed.

However, the fight was not over. Emery crouched like a foot-racer, hurled himself through space and drilled the Tarantula again with great accuracy.

Harry uttered an exclamation distinctly understood as *"oof!"* as he sat down. His features assumed a worried expression and he rose slowly, remonstrating with the referee.

"This aint nice!" he stated. But the words were hardly out of his mouth when Emery, who had withdrawn for another formation, suddenly banged him again in the larder, oblivious to all objections.

There was not enough air left in the man's lungs to create another *"oof."* He merely lay on the canvas, undulating gently.

It was clearly evident that he was all unstrung and that he would remain that way for some time—he had no wish to continue under existing circumstances. The referee counted up to ten as a matter of course; then after looking around for divine inspiration, he walked up to Emery and hoisted his hand high. Following this, he dived from the platform, grabbed his hat and lost himself in the crowd.

IT was a lucky thing for us that the Monks had taken possession of the ringside seats, for they took the brunt of the ensuing rush and repelled our attackers with courage and enthusiasm. A riot-call was turned in, and an army of police appeared on the scene, each man proceeding to use his club right and left, with great disregard for privileged characters.

Escorted by a cordon of these jolly protectors of the peace, we reached the street and finally wound up at the office.

Mr. Miller and his bunch were already there and they did not look very happy.

"Well," said I, smiling, "here we are!"

"I see you!" said Mr. Miller petulantly.

"We won, didn't we?" I continued.

"Yes, you did," replied the promoter. "But you better take a tip from one who knows, and rattle your bunions out of this town—and don't linger too long packin' your other shirt! Believe me, prize-fighting is all washed up around these parts, from now on!"

"Did we ever sign any papers expressing a desire to become citizens of this community?" I asked. "Of course, we're leaving! We'll be out of your eye as soon as you hand over our prize money. I believe five hundred dollars was the sum previously mentioned. Am I right? Stop me if you heard this before."

"Yeah, an' here's your money. . . . . Good-by! Take care of that boy; don't never let him out in the night air without his hat on. He might catch cold and suffer a softening of the cranium!"

LOUNGING in the luxurious comforts of a parlor car one hour later, I said to Emery:

"Emery, this game is just what we have been looking for."

"It is not!" put in my partner with much conviction. "It's too rough and dangerous. I'll bet you my jaw is sore for a week! From now on I'll follow my calling, which has to do with bedding-down steers and riding bronc's. You and your fancy ideas might just as well take a vacation!"

Emery is funny that way. He is very unreasonable and I always have to talk to him at great length to convince him that he should do things for his own good.

After a little he spoke again.

"I'd sure like to read the article they'll have in the paper tomorrow!" he said wistfully. "I'll bet you they think I'm a wild man from the Sierras—now!"

# Mysteries of Today

## By CULPEPER ZANDTT

*"The Disappearance of Randolph Gordon" deals with one of the most interesting bits of detective work ever described.*

Illustrated by William Molt

THEY had grown up and gone to the same school in one of the towns on Cape Cod. When she went to Boston for a course in a business college, he was studying art there. Meeting ten years later in front of Trinity Church at the head of Wall Street, she had asked him if he was still painting—and Normanton had suggested that she come around to his studio, on the twenty-fifth floor of a Broad Street skyscraper, for lunch. While his smiling Cantonese was adding an extra portion to an appetizing meal, she stood in the great mullioned window looking out over the Upper Bay—then turned about for an inspection of the sketches on the walls: the arms, armor and "props" which gave the place atmosphere.

"Bart, what's the idea of those five sketches from the same model—all those different expressions?"

"Well, that illustrates one branch of my activities at which I make more than I do by portraits. You see, I drifted accidentally into the field of criminal investigation—tackling murders and other mysteries which had proved too much for both the police and the newspapers. One of the preliminary methods I frequently use is sketching the face either of the victim or the supposed criminal under the influence of five different emotions—pleasure, mental or physical distress, hate and fear, suspicion, brooding over some problematic action which may or may not be criminal in effect. Such sketches, made from the best obtainable photographs of the person, usually give me a clue as to his thinking processes—how he would react under certain conditions, in certain circumstances. More than once such sketches have convinced me as to the person's absolute innocence of the suspected crime—and several times the sketches have indicated a person's guilt when there was no evidence of it."

"But it is *you* who draw the expression into the faces—not the man himself! How do you know he would look as you make him look under the influence of those five emotions?"

"From the fact that each of those facial expressions is produced by the contraction or relaxing of the same facial muscles in every person. From a good photograph I first outline the face, then very lightly sketch the underlying muscles which give the appearance in the print. The emotion of fear contracts some of those muscles, relaxes others. Obviously a larger muscle in one face or a smaller one in another will produce a different facial contour when actuated by the same emotion. When I've

bunched the muscles to produce that expression, I rub out the muscle-lines and show the smoother surface contour over them. Same process with all the other expressions. Beyond all that, comes the expression of the eyes—brooding, with the lids half closed—partly closed, with the pupils glancing suspiciously out of the corners—lids wide open, pupils distended, hair of the head partly raised from the scalp by capillary excitement around the roots—eyelids and pupils normal, softened expression with considerable depth, and so on. You can easily visualize the different combinations produced by such methods in a sketch or portrait."

"Why, Bart, it's rather wonderful, isn't it? I'd no idea you could really dig out a person's inside thoughts that way! And you've actually worked out criminal mysteries by such methods?"

"Those, added to pure scientific deduction—yes, quite successfully. Now—what are you at? Judging by what I've learned of such things, those clothes of yours indicate prosperity."

"For the last five years I've been Randolph J. Gordon's confidential secretary—with a very comfortable suite of three rooms in his lovely home, out beyond Port Jefferson—two hundred acres of woods, dunes and pebbly beach around it."

"Gordon—eh? The financier and Wall Street operator who built up a fortune in chemical manufacturing?"

"Mr. Gordon is himself an expert chemist—started as a druggist's assistant in one of the Ohio towns, kept reading and experimenting, going to lectures on the new discoveries. He patented an antiseptic formula which is now used all over the country, drifted into the manufacture of specialties, consolidated half a dozen big companies—and doesn't bother with anything but financial matters now, though he has a wonderfully equipped laboratory out at the Long Island house and does private experimenting when he's in the mood."

"Married man?"

"No. Says he never had the time and isn't a ladies' man anyhow—which is pure applesauce. He's only thirty-eight—and handsome in a big way—strong features, forceful manner, but naturally a gentleman. Mrs. Darnton is the housekeeper, a capable Englishwoman—she hires the servants, and runs the place like clockwork. A widowed stepsister occasionally visits him with her two boys—all three of them charming. But a cousin with one flapper daughter, out there for the last month, are different propositions altogether. It doesn't require any guessing to see that Mrs. Bowring is determined to have Mr. Gordon marry her flapper, Daisy, and she tries to run the house whenever she's there. But Mrs. Darnton's position in the house is definitely fixed and is even stated in his will—Judge Farwell, his counsel, would back her up in Mr. Gordon's absence. Aside from him, I'm the only one from whom she takes orders, because I have become his personal representative in pretty much everything—the only other person besides the Judge who knows the laboratory-door combination. The Bowrings hate me like poison—they're positive I mean to marry him myself—"

"H-m-m—well? Do you?"

"Not unless he asks me—certainly not; and he isn't likely to! If he did—but let's quit talking nonsense! I'm awfully fond of him—why shouldn't I be?"

DURING the next three months, Rose lunched with Normanton occasionally, or stayed in town to attend a show with him. Then one morning—scareheads in the papers announced the mysterious disappearance of Randolph Gordon, multimillionaire. He had not come in on the yacht with Miss Nickerson as usual, and it was discovered that nobody had seen him since the previous evening.

Miss Nickerson failed to get the least trace of him, and finally decided to notify both the police and the newspapers. Upon the morning after that, the papers came out with another sensational development:

RANDOLPH GORDON MURDERED?
SECRETARY A SUSPECT

An automatic pistol from which two shots had been discharged, admitted to be her property, found in cockpit of speed launch in which Rose Nickerson is known to have gone out on the Sound during the evening when Gordon disappeared.

Man resembling him seen by a neighbor coming down from the house to the yacht-dock shortly after nine P. M. and getting into the launch. Nickerson woman seen by magnate's cousin, Mrs. Bowring, coming down five minutes later, getting into launch and running it out into the Sound.

Miss Nickerson is known to have returned about midnight, alone. Said to have taken legal advice concerning suit against Gordon for breach of promise. Her arrest and detention without bail expected at any moment.

Normanton's first action after reading this item was to hail a taxi and go up to

Police Headquarters as fast as he could get there—asking for an interview with the Commissioner. As he was the sort of private investigator who worked with the police instead of against them, when he could, and was not averse to giving them a little more credit than they usually earned, he was promptly granted the interview.

He rapidly outlined the exact status of Mrs. Bowring and her daughter in the Gordon household, her evident designs for the daughter and her usurpation of a position not recognized by anyone else in the house, also the unquestionable authority of Miss Nickerson, as Judge Farwell would confirm if asked. Then he added:

"I'm taking this case, Commissioner, both on Gordon's account and for Miss Nickerson, whom I've known since she was three years old. She never dreamed of such a thing as a breach-of-promise suit!

"I don't believe for one moment that he has been murdered. There's a mystery about the whole affair which indicates a sudden dropping-out on his own initiative for some reason which nobody can guess, or else abduction with the idea of forcing some unknown information from him or attacking his stocks while he's out of the market. What I want you to do is give strict orders that Miss Nickerson is not to be interfered with in any way, and somehow pull a wire or two so that the local police in Port Jefferson will let her alone. I'll need her help and I'll be responsible for her. She wont skip—she isn't that kind!"

"All right, Normanton—that goes. For a reasonable length of time, of course. You've given me an entirely different impression from that which our men got from Mrs. Bowring, whom we naturally assumed would be in charge of the house during Gordon's absence. Wait a minute! I'll just call up Judge Farwell's office!"

After five minutes' talk over the wire with the missing man's counsel, the Commissioner nodded and turned back to Normanton. "He confirms everything you have said. . . . . Say! You're a friend of Bill Strachey and Tom Raynor! Better get hold of them and give the newspapers a little different slant on this before they tear that girl's reputation all to bits!"

AFTER Normanton had done this, he started in to locate Rose Nickerson by telephone. In a moment or two her voice came quietly over the wire from the Gordon offices, and he hurried down there at once. When he was shown into her private office, adjoining that of the financier himself, she greeted him with a tired smile though her manner was calm.

"Mighty good of you to look me up, Bart. I don't know how soon that woman will succeed in having me jailed, so I've been getting things in shape to run along here at the offices during my indefinite absence. But I do wish I knew what has become of Mr. Gordon!"

"That's what you and I are going to find out—if you've no objections!"

"You mean you're going to quit work and try to help me? But this isn't an everyday police affair, Bart—there's something pretty serious behind it! Are you sure you can handle anything of the sort?"

"I can certainly do more than the police or newspapers—so far, I haven't failed on any case I've tackled; there's always a loose end to begin on if one can find it. I'd take the case for the mere interest of working it out, unless you and Judge Farwell prefer not having me butt in."

"Hmph! We want all the expert assistance we can get—and I'll certainly feel a lot easier to have you working on this while I'm in jail—"

"I doubt very much if you ever go to jail. You certainly wont for some time yet—the Commissioner promised me that an hour ago when I told him a few things about Mrs. Bowring. Now I want to ask some questions and then go out to Port Jefferson just as soon as you're ready to accompany me. First—how did you happen to go out in that launch the other evening? Do you do that occasionally?"

"Yes. Mr. Gordon and I went out rather frequently on moonlight nights when we could see some distance over the water—and I occasionally run the launch out alone. However, Bart, I haven't been out in that launch or in any other boat, at night, for over three weeks! Sandy Evans, the chauffeur who looks after the launches and the smaller boats, would probably be able to find some evidence which he'd consider proof that I wasn't out that night."

"Hmph! That's just about what I thought! Somebody tried to frame you as soon as it was known that Gordon had disappeared. Fortunately, that sort of thing is pretty easily traced. . . . . Which would be the nearest your build—the Bowring woman or her daughter?"

"Daisy. Her mother is a good two inches taller—a regular grenadier."

"Any young fellow in the neighborhood with whom Daisy travels around—more than others?"

"Yes. Tony Waldon has rather a crush on her—she's trying to hold him in reserve in case she slips up on Mr. Gordon. When Gordon's home, Tony isn't permitted to come around much; at other times, he gets a good deal of encouragement."

"Good! Tony's due for a little third degree. How about that pistol? Is it yours?"

"Yes. I've a permit because I sometimes come home late with a lot of money or securities. I've a specially made holster for it which straps on my leg. With these short skirts we're wearing, I can get at it instantly if necessary. I took a couple of shots at a tin can on a floating log the last time I was out—almost ran the launch onto the log and had to throw the wheel over—hard. Probably dropped the gun on the deck-planking under the wheel, and forgot it. Usually wipe the metal with oil, but I'll bet there's enough rust on it now to prove that it wasn't used within a couple of weeks, if it's been lying in the launch all that time. Of course if somebody found it and carried it off, it would be in better condition."

"H'm. . . . . I think I'll take down some plaster of Paris—might find it useful."

WHEN they reached the estate, beyond Port Jefferson, Normanton's first move was to ascertain from Evans, the chauffeur, that he had been down the morning after his employer disappeared to overhaul the boats and launches and was quite sure that since that time nobody had been on the dock except Miss Nickerson—going to and from the yacht—and the sailing-master, when he came ashore. A hundred feet from the boathouse, on each side, an eight-foot iron-spiked fence ran back from beyond low-water mark to the sand-dunes and along behind them—forming a private bathing inclosure with a padlocked iron gate. The wharf was shaped like a letter "F," the outer end bent around to form a sheltered dock, with a float—the boathouse arched over the shore-end.

Back of the stringpiece on the dock-side, blown sand had drifted to a depth of four or five inches and packed there with the salt moisture. In this little strip of sand, near the hinged ladder from the float, was the print of a woman's rubber-soled canvas sneaker with a sharply marked pattern in the rubber. Evans said it had not been there on the afternoon before Mr. Gordon disappeared. Normanton poured a little oil over it, then mixed some plaster in an old bailing-pot and gently poured it into the footprint. When it had hardened sufficiently, he carefully lifted out the cast and brushed off the few grains of oily sand adhering to it. Placing this in a pasteboard box, he then went up to the house and called Mrs. Darnton into the library.

"Mrs. Darnton," he said to her, "you've read the papers, of course—possibly may have heard some of the talk between Mrs. Bowring and the police. Do you believe that Miss Nickerson went out in the launch with Mr. Gordon and shot him?"

"That'll be quite absurd, sir, in my opinion! I'm almost positive I saw Miss Nickerson going into the laboratory from Mr. Gordon's living-room on the second floor shortly after nine—which would be after the time Mrs. Bowring said she had gone out in the launch. You see, sir, I just happened to glance through the hall door as I was passing. Really, you know, that story can't be taken seriously! I told the constable so when he came to see Mrs. Bowring, after she'd telephoned—told him Miss Nickerson had a permit to carry a pistol and might easily have left it in the launch some time before—forgetting all about it. Mrs. Bowring insisted that Miss Rose should be taken in custody at once. But I fancy what I said to the constable prevented his taking any action at the time. Miss Rose and I are quite well known in the county. I don't hold with the way Mrs. Bowring is talking, at all! She has no grounds for it whatever!"

"I was pretty sure you'd feel that way, knowing Miss Rose as long as you have. Are Mrs. Bowring and her daughter in the house?"

"No sir—they'll be at the Gildersleeve mansion for afternoon tea, I fancy."

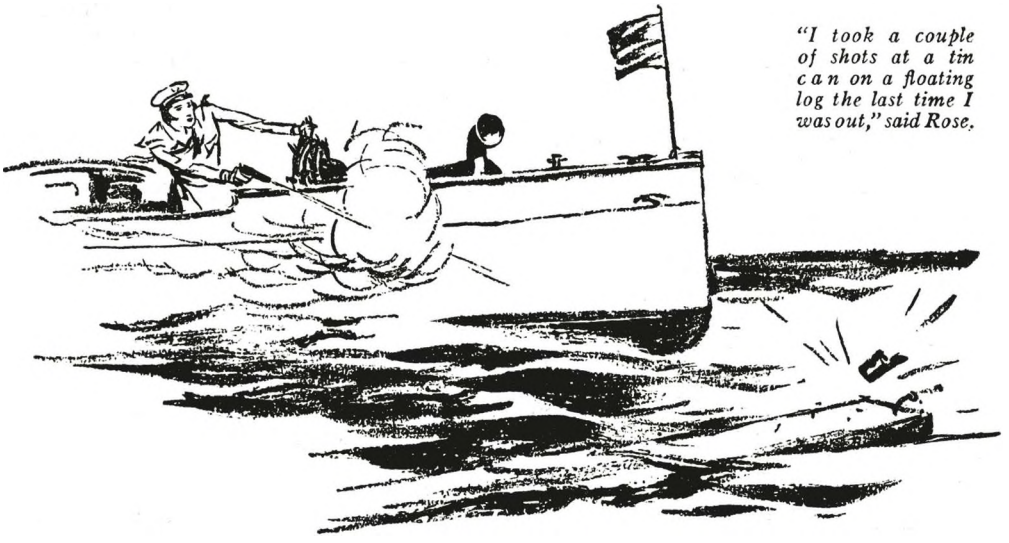
"Well, I'd like to have you do something for me to clear up this lie against Miss Nickerson—and possibly help in tracing Mr. Gordon himself. Will you go to Miss Bowring's room and fetch me any pairs of her sports shoes you can find there? Then look into Mr. Gordon's dressing-room and see if you can tell whether any suits of his clothes—top-coats, rain-coats, felt hats, or caps—are missing. You would probably remember the suit in which you saw him last."

The housekeeper was gone about twenty minutes, and returned with two pairs of sneakers. The rubber pattern on the sole

of one exactly matched the cast, when Normanton compared them.

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Darnton. Kindly put the others back exactly where you found them, and say nothing. Now—how about Mr. Gordon's clothes?"

"He didn't dress for dinner the night he disappeared, sir—because it was too late when he returned, I fancy. Just wore the grey Scotscloth suit he put on in the morning. The top-coat he wore with it is still



*"I took a couple of shots at a tin can on a floating log the last time I was out," said Rose.*

in the hall closet where Bagshot placed it—but his Fedora hat is gone. Aside from that, there seems to be nothing missing but a tweed mackintosh he fetched from London—one he often wore about this neighborhood in the evening—and the cap which matched it. They're both gone. Everything else seems to be in its usual place."

"That information helps quite a lot, Mrs. Darnton. Obviously he did not wear the mackintosh and cap—or he wouldn't have taken along the Fedora—which he undoubtedly did wear, with nothing in the way of a top-coat. This also disposes of any theory that he might have intentionally disappeared. In that case, he certainly would have taken more clothes and clean linen with him. It was chilly that night—he wouldn't have gone out without a top-coat if he were going any distance, or unless he was forced to go against his will. H-m-m—would you ask Evans to step in here?"

In a few minutes the man came into the room with a somewhat anxious expression on his face.

"Sit down, Evans," said Normanton. "I don't think we referred to my business here—down at the dock. I'm an old friend of Miss Nickerson's, but I also happen to be conducting an investigation into Mr. Gordon's disappearance. I don't believe you think she shot him. So you ought to be willing to help us in finding where he is and clearing her of any such ridiculous charge. Er—you didn't tell me whether or not you found anything on the deck-planks of the launch when you overhauled it."

"No sir, you didn't say anything about being here officially," said Evans. "I did find something in the launch—this gun-metal cigarette-case with gold trimmings." He drew it from an inside pocket. "I knew it didn't belong to anybody in our house—never saw it before. And I didn't know of any man being in the launch except one or two college boys in the neighborhood. If there were any inquiries about the thing, I expected to return it, of course. If there weren't any, I thought I'd like to keep it myself—pretty nifty-looking case, you see."

"It's pretty darned good circumstantial evidence, anyhow. I can take it from you on that ground—but I think I should even up a little for your honesty in telling the truth about it. Will you accept twenty-five dollars for the case? That'll buy another about as good."

"Sure I will, Mr. Normanton! I'm much obliged to you!"

"Guess the obligation's mutual—here's the money. Please don't tell anybody about finding it."

When he had left the room, Normanton

showed Miss Nickerson the gold monogram in the gun-metal: *"T.W."*

"That's all I need to clear you absolutely, Rose—and also to get Mrs. Bowring out of this house, which I think you'd better do tonight. That woman is dangerous anywhere you put her! If she stays here, she's sure to egg on the police to smashing in that laboratory door and keeping a man in charge of it, messing round—which might easily destroy a good chance for my tracing Gordon. Judging by the look of that brick extension from the outside, there's no way of getting into it except through the door from Gordon's living-room on the floor above this? That right?"

"Yes—and the door is of three-inch iron-bound oak, sliding on ball-bearings into a close-fitting recess. It's fastened with a combination-lock, like that of a safe—and there's a secret spring besides. Only Mr. Gordon, Judge Farwell and myself know how to get in or out. The ceiling is fifteen feet above the floor—no skylight or windows, but concealed ducts keep the place ventilated with pure air. By means of electric blowers fresh air is forced through under pressure when the fumes get a bit thick. In one corner there is a steel shaft with a dumb-waiter and combination safe-doors, leading down to the space underneath, where a motor-truck can be backed in to unload chemicals or other supplies. That basement space also has a heavy oak door which is always kept closed after the truck has been driven out again."

WHEN Rose had taken Normanton into the laboratory and closed the door, he was shown how to open it from the inside in case he ever got caught there. Looking about the big room, he marveled at its perfect equipment for everything in the way of chemical experimentation. There was a small forge with forced draught, discharging into the chimney—electric furnaces, retorts, cylinders of gas under pressure, flasks of various chemicals, small dynamos, motor-driven, mouth and tank blowpipes, acetylene torches, a cabinet of metal flasks amply strong enough to hold various gases under high pressure. In another corner was a steel cabinet which she unlocked to show him a number of strong little flasks, each labeled in chemical symbols and Latin terms which he understood perfectly.

"I think I'd win a bet that those are what he's been working upon most of the time for the last year or so!" he exclaimed.

"Why do you think that, Bart?"

"Because I dipped into chem a good bit in high-school and have never lost my interest in it. Have to keep somewhat posted on account of my criminal work. Lock that cabinet up again! Don't so much as unlock it for a while unless compelled to by an order from the court! If I'm right in my impression, the gas from one of those flasks, small as it is, would kill you before you could get out of this place if the stuff just happened to get loose! And that knowledge, I think, puts us several steps ahead in tracing Gordon. Tell me anything you know about people who come to see him about purchases of chemicals in bulk from his various companies. Do you recall any foreigners upon such business?"

"Why—yes, I do. Of course our offices, here aren't the proper place for business which should be handled with the managers of the various plants. But several of the big men from the other side wont have anything to do with subordinates. There's Von Growitz, for one. One of my newspaper friends, who knows a lot about Berlin, says Von Growitz is close to the government there—is backed by it in various enterprises.

"Then there's Zanetti, at the head of big manufacturing companies in Genoa, Naples and Trieste—Tarnovief, who spends millions of gold rubles on American supplies for alleged Russian enterprises. And Ramon Blanco—same type of man in Barcelona. Then there is Rudolf Sundermann—same type of man as Von Growitz—same crowd over there. He's immensely wealthy, and maintains houses in several different cities with a staff of German servants in each. Bought land out on Long Island, beyond us, and built a small German castle on it.

"These are about all I can remember who bother Mr. Gordon in his offices. But they don't gain much by it. He just refers them to his company managers."

"When did Sundermann build his castle down on the Island?"

"Sometime before Mr. Gordon employed me—and that was nearly five years ago. I've a dim recollection that it was about a year after our place was purchased, but the two men never met until the second year I was there."

"Does he know any of your neighbors?"

"Oh, some of the flappers and college boys motor down to see him for an afternoon or evening—they like the beer, the dancing and the unconventional girls. One hears of pretty lively parties when Sunder-

mann is in the mood to bring down some of the women he knows, in his yacht. Before Daisy Bowring came, Tony Waldon was down there occasionally."

"Did Gordon do any business with the Government?"

"Our companies sell bulk chemicals to the departments of Agriculture and Commerce. On three or four occasions Mr. Gordon has sent down special flasks and drums to Colonel Wahlgren at the Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland—we went down there once in his private car, the Mongoose."

"Was Gordon acquainted with any of the foreign embassy people in Washington?"

"Of course! He's a man of pretty wide acquaintance, all over the world. Several of the foreign diplomats, he met abroad—others in Washington."

"Well—I think I'm beginning to grasp the general facts of Mr. Gordon's interests and activities—have something to go upon in beginning to trace him. I'm fairly confident that he's still alive, but he may not be a few weeks from now, because if what I vaguely suspect comes anywhere near the truth, he wont give the scoundrels who kidnaped him any satisfaction and they'll consider him too dangerous to leave alive."

"Do you want any of his photographs, or those of men he knows?"

"No—this isn't a case where they'd give me information which I haven't already got. It's more one of scientific deduction and probability. What I do want is a heap more information about some of the people you've mentioned! May I use this branch-telephone? Private wire to your New York offices, I suppose?"

"Between nine and five. At all other hours it's switched directly into the Dey Street Telephone Building."

GETTING the *Herald-Tribune* on the wire, Normanton was fortunate enough to catch Long Bill Strachey—their chief reportorial ace—in the city-room. Giving him certain names Miss Nickerson had mentioned, Normanton asked his friend if he could drop everything to do some digging in the Public Library.

After this he told Miss Nickerson that he'd like to have Evans drive him over to the Waldon estate for an interview with Tony. This gilded youth he found on the tennis-court—and he waited until the sets were finished before introducing himself. As Normanton was a man of fine appearance, with charming manners, young Waldon had no suspicion of his errand, but took him over to a summer-house at the edge of the shrubbery and sent for drinks.

"Mr. Waldon, I'm spending the night over at Mr. Gordon's house," said Normanton, "and happened to find this cigarette-case. Some of them thought it might be yours—seems to have your initials on it—"

"Sure it's mine! Daisy Bowring recognized it, I suppose. Awfully good of you to fetch it over, Mr. Normanton!"

"No—it wasn't Miss Bowring. I haven't met her or her mother, yet—they're out somewhere for the afternoon. But it didn't seem as if the case could belong to anyone else—with those initials. And I thought I might take back Mr. Gordon's mackintosh and cap after bringing this to you."

"Why—sure! But—say! Who told you I had Gordon's cap and mackintosh?"

"Nobody. I just—er—inferred it."

"Look here, Mr. Normanton! You say you're spending the night at the Gordon house—but Gordon has disappeared—the Bowrings are out this afternoon. Who had authority to invite you there for the night?"

"His secretary—Miss Nickerson."

"The woman who shot him that night—in the launch!"

"Oh, come, Waldon—what's the use? You've admitted the cigarette-case is yours—admitted it in such a way that you can't deny it now. Miss Bowring left a clean-cut print of her sneaker in the drifted sand on that dock near the top of the float-ladder. It wasn't there on the afternoon before Gordon disappeared, but it was the next morning. Miss Bowring took his cap and mackintosh from the hall closet and fetched them out to you on the terrace, where you put them on—and easily might have been mistaken for Gordon, at night. He may have followed you down to the dock—stopping only for his soft hat. Two men and a woman were seen going out in that launch. One man and the woman came back about midnight—but only the woman was seen going up to the house. Your cigarette-case was found next morning in the cockpit of the launch. If you'll consider these related facts carefully, it wont be difficult to get the inference any jury in the world would draw from them. You see, it's known that you wore Gordon's mackintosh and cap in that launch."

TONY WALDON moistened his lips with his tongue, and with trembling fingers tried to light another cigarette.

"I—I suppose you're one of those—infernal dicks! You—you believe that—that Miss Bowring and I—shot him. That it?"

"Pretty strong circumstantial evidence, Waldon. I happen to be a private criminal-investigator in the employ of Gordon's estate. Did you imagine for one moment that as bright a girl as Miss Nickerson would let you and the Bowrings get away with any such frame-up as you've been trying to put across? Merely as a matter of argument, I personally don't believe that you and the girl killed Gordon—but the chief of police *will* believe it as soon as he gets these facts! My suggestion is that you write out a sworn statement of everything you and the girl did that evening between dinner and midnight. If you write the exact truth, concealing nothing,—and you can produce any evidence to back up your story,—it may postpone your immediate arrest, but I can assure you that nothing else will. When you've written the statement and I, as a notary, have witnessed your oath to it, you can give me that cap and mackintosh also—then keep your mouth tight shut until later developments. Another point which occurs to me—"

"Nothing to do with Gordon's murder, I hope! Really, Mr. Normanton—he didn't come down to the dock with us and wasn't in that launch for one second!"

"Who found that pistol?"

"Miss Bowring did—next morning. *Said* she did, anyhow—and she wouldn't lie about it. The supposition is that Gordon was out in that launch after we came in. Nobody knows when he left the house!"

"Miss Bowring does. So does her mother. There's a lot about this affair which hasn't come out yet! You haven't told me all that you know about it—and you don't mean to write it if you're fairly sure I wont spot the omissions! Now—I'll put a supposititious case up to you. Suppose you happened to be heavily in debt—creditors hounding you for payment."

Normanton saw from the corner of his eye that Waldon's fingers were trembling again. "Suppose that some woman you know down here on the Island suggested that you could earn some money pretty easily—not a piffling one or two hundred but, say, a thousand in cash. Wanted you to manage somehow to let her know when Gordon was at home and fix it so that she could be let into the house without ringing the bell, and step into his study. Knew that you and Daisy Bowring were pretty thick—and that she'd probably help you for a couple more hundred on the side. The inference being that there was something between the woman and Gordon which she wanted to go over with him, privately; your part in the transaction not to be known. You'd fall for it, wouldn't you—if the creditors were getting ugly and you had to have money at once?"

"I—I don't know whether I would or not! Of course nothing of the sort happened—impossible to prove it, anyhow!"

"It will be a very simple matter for the local chief of police to find out whether creditors are pressing you—even if only for gambling debts. Perfectly easy to find out what sums of money you have recently deposited—what allowance your father gives you. We can prove the need for money—show what's in your bank, or has been, recently—the inference is obvious, isn't it? Where did you get the money?"

"From selling one of my cars!"

"And if it's shown that none were sold up to an hour ago?"

"Well—what's the matter with a friend paying up a poker-debt he owed me?"

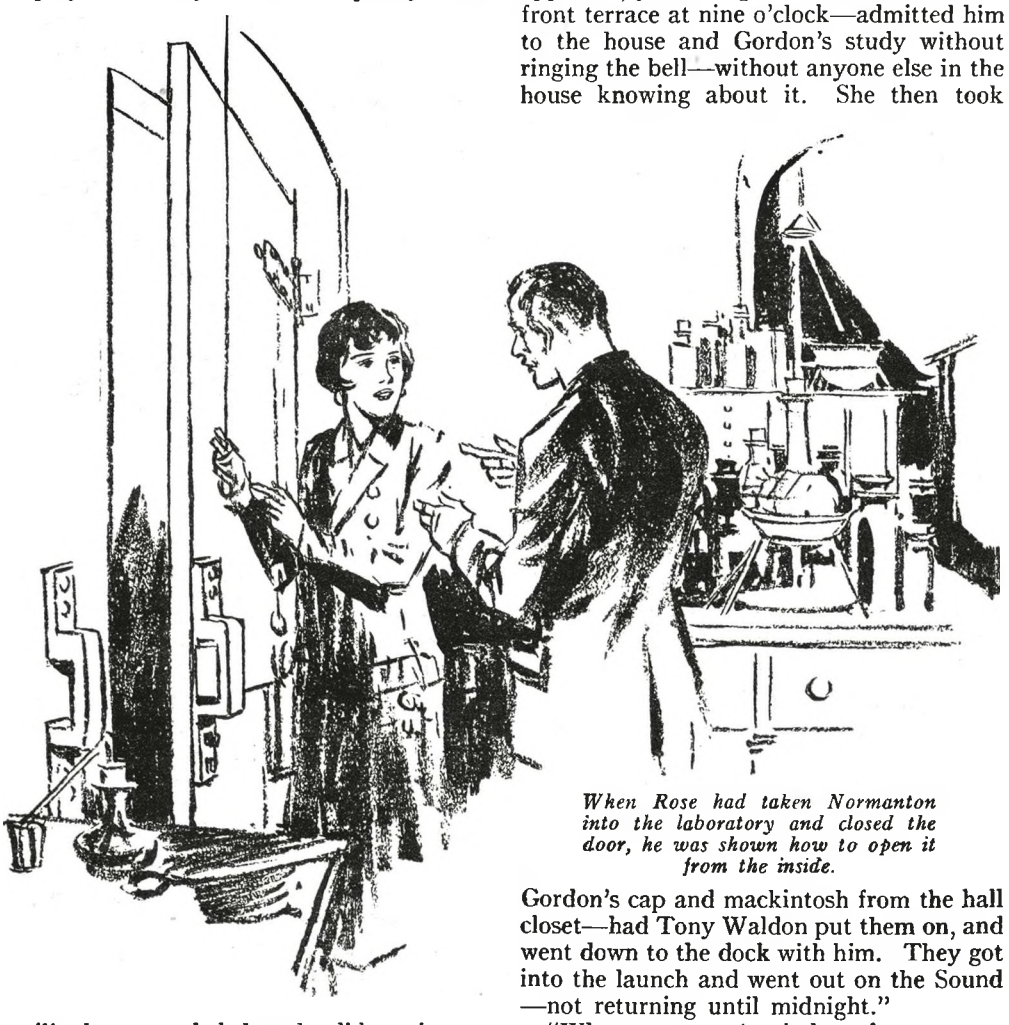
"In cash—or check? You'd have to name the friend—he'd have to explain where he got so much money in a lump. No use, Waldon! The more you say, the worse you're tangled up! You've told me what I wanted to know—you needn't say another word, and my advice is that you don't, until some smart lawyer digs it out of you on the stand. It would help us a lot if you told me who paid you that money—but I suppose you're afraid of having your throat cut if you do—eh?"

Tony nodded, glumly.

"All right—I'll get at that point in some other way. Daisy was out on the terrace waiting to let the man or woman in without ringing, wasn't she?" An almost imperceptible nod. "Then she quietly collects Gordon's cap and mackintosh while the other party was talking with him in his study, and gives 'em to you—eh?" Another nod. "Well, write out your statement and then fetch me the mackintosh. I think you'd better cover these last points in your statement—it'll help your position with the police if you do."

NORMANTON returned to the Gordon house before dinner and was introduced to Mrs. Bowring, who said she was sorry she couldn't invite him to stay—she and her daughter were too much upset

to entertain a guest. He coolly replied that he was staying—as a criminal-investigator employed by the Gordon estate. She said that she represented the estate and had employed nobody in that capacity. He



*When Rose had taken Normanton into the laboratory and closed the door, he was shown how to open it from the inside.*

smilingly responded that she did not in any way represent the estate, that he was most assuredly dining there, and spending the night. She grew excited—said she would telephone the local police at once.

This time Normanton's smile was absent; there was grim seriousness in his voice as he assured her that neither she nor her daughter would leave the dining-room until he had finished with them, whether they ate anything or not; but inasmuch as she was presumably leaving the house in a short time and had a hard night before her, it might be as well to eat her dinner.

After the meal, he said sternly:

"Now, Mrs. Bowring, I'll give you a few facts which I've managed to dig out. Afterward you can use your own discretion as to what you do—barring any further stay in this house. On the night Mr. Gordon disappeared, your daughter met a man on the front terrace at nine o'clock—admitted him to the house and Gordon's study without ringing the bell—without anyone else in the house knowing about it. She then took Gordon's cap and mackintosh from the hall closet—had Tony Waldon put them on, and went down to the dock with him. They got into the launch and went out on the Sound—not returning until midnight."

"What utter rot! A lot of most outrageous lies to shield that murderess—for which I'll have you jailed! The idea!"

"I have here a pair of your daughter's sneakers—and a plaster-cast made from a print of one in drift-sand on that dock—that night. Waldon's cigarette-case was found in the cockpit of the launch next morning. He recognized and claimed the case before knowing how I came by it. The absence of rust on the pistol shows that your daughter must have had it in her possession for at least two weeks. The mackintosh and cap are in that bundle on the chair. Waldon gave them to me a couple of hours ago—with a sworn state-

ment as to all his movements that night—here it is. Can't you see where these facts put you and your daughter?"

"But—but Tony wasn't up here at the house! He couldn't have known anything about Daisy's admitting the man!"

"But you're admitting it right now, Mrs. Bowring—before a highly creditable witness! Thanks for the slip—I was mainly guessing, before. Well—I have no warrant for your arrest, and I'm not officially connected with the police. But the local chief and one of the best men from Center Street are to meet me here at ten o'clock; they'll be given all the data obtained so far, and Waldon's statement will be published in the morning papers. Raynor of the Associated Press will be out here tonight. We've got to clear Miss Nickerson's name, you know—without any delay. The story isn't much to your credit any way you look at it, even without the criminal conspiracy implication in connection with Gordon's murder. You can imagine what the neighbors are going to say over their morning papers, at breakfast. If you've any sense at all, you'll see the strong probability of your being under arrest without bail as soon as the chief gets here. If you two can bribe Evans to run you into the city in one of the cars, at once, I don't think a charge of complicity can be lodged against Miss Nickerson. I think that's all I have to say to you—but I wouldn't risk registering at a New York hotel, if I were in your place."

THE two Bowring women had disappeared with most of their luggage before the local chief of police came in with one of his sergeants. Raynor arrived in his own car a few minutes afterward—and the facts learned thus far were laid before them. The chief readily grasped what had been already demonstrated, but he couldn't seem to make head or tail of what might lie beyond them. Even Raynor confessed himself puzzled. The chief presently looked up from his notebook:

"You think, Mr. Normanton, that Gordon went out somewhere with the man who was let in to see him—and was then kidnaped?"

"I think that Gordon walked out of this house with a gun jabbed against his ribs at every step. He was permitted to take his hat, but no coat. There were no servants in the hall when he went out."

"What boat are you referring to—the launch?"

"No—Waldon and the girl had gone off in that. When we find out where they were for three hours, we'll know quite a lot more about the case. Another boat, presumably a fast launch, had been run up on the pebbly beach at high-water mark about five hundred feet west of the dock. The mark of its keel was still there this afternoon. Had it been a little farther out, the ebb-tide would have obliterated it. Your men have checked up all cars seen in this neighborhood that night, pretty successfully—there doesn't seem to have been one not accounted for. Which leaves, obviously, no way he could have been taken off other than a boat. It either went across to the Connecticut shore, up or down the Long Island shore, or to some craft anchored out in the Sound. Nobody remembers seeing any craft at anchor offshore within a five-mile radius. But a fast yacht easily might have slipped down from the Block Island entrance and hove-to off here when signaled—to take a man aboard—or several of them."

"What's your theory, Normanton? I don't mind admitting I was a little sore when I got a phone from one of the political bosses to go slow on arresting Miss Nickerson. I thought you were one of these smart private dicks butting in without knowing as much as we did about the case—but now I'm damn' glad you did butt in! I'd have been up against a charge for false arrest if you hadn't! I apologize both to you and Miss Nickerson. What do you think did happen to Gordon?"

"The theory of disappearance for some reason of his own is ruled out; it doesn't match the facts," said Normanton. "That leaves abduction or murder. But for what reason? Ransom? I think Gordon might have paid any reasonable sum at once—just to be free and take measures for getting back at the scoundrels. Looks to me like something a darned sight bigger than that—but I'm not going to give you pure theory until I've something more to go upon. One thing I do want—four or five of your men staying in this house every day and night for the next month. It's hardly supposable that Gordon has left any memoranda of value, or any chemical compound which can be accurately analyzed, in his laboratory. Miss Nickerson says he's pretty careful that way. But frankly, I'm expecting an attempt any night to force an entrance into that laboratory and do one of two things—either discover something

*Normcnton rested the muzzle of his automatic on a stick of wood, and fired. In less than a second there was a blinding glare and a concussion.*

which Gordon may have left in there, or else burn the place up so effectively that no scrap of his experimentation is left. I can use eight men better than four, because they'll have to work night-shifts—and I'll guarantee the estate's paying them each ten dollars a day as long as they're here. But their presence mustn't be known—you must take very careful precautions against that. If you have force enough, there are two families in the neighborhood whom it might be advisable to shadow. If you haven't the men, I'll get some down from the city. I want, particularly, to know whether Tony Waldon has been seen with any woman who is frequently a guest at some other house within a ten-mile radius—and whether he has in his possession a flashlight that will throw a beam for a thousand feet across water."

"What's the idea of that?" interjected Raynor, with a puzzled frown.

"Well—if a man understands code at all, he can signal pretty clearly across water for more than five miles with a thousand-foot flashlight. Somehow—I have a hunch that during those three hours he was out in that launch with the girl, he did signal to somebody, and had to run the launch several miles to do it. Otherwise—if Gordon was abducted a few minutes after they left—there doesn't seem to have been much point in their staying out so long."

FOR the next three days, the Gordon estate and the surrounding neighborhood were more or less quiet. Tony Waldon's name was not mentioned in the papers, but the main facts of his sworn statement were—the story being that it was Miss Bowring and one of her men friends who had been out in the launch—that Miss Nickerson's pistol had been left in the launch and found by Miss Bowring some three weeks before.

The papers further stated that Miss Nickerson had been proved to be in the house during the entire evening, and that the Bowring girl was now known to have been spitefully jealous of her. The story reflected upon the two Bowrings so unpleasantly that no surprise was felt at their sudden disappearance.

Presently—on Friday night between two and three A.M.—three men got into the house through one of the drawing-room windows, went silently up to the second floor and started boring through the three-inch laboratory door. The sudden switching on of a blinding automobile-lamp which had been connected with the house-current through a transformer put them at the mercy of the police, who were covering them. They foolishly showed fight and commenced blazing away with shots which went over the heads of the police on the floor. In the return fire, their leader was instantly killed—and the other two were winged so that they dropped their pistols. Rose Nickerson had been looking in through the hall door, and thought she recognized the man who had been killed. Stepping in for a closer look, she said in a low tone:

"I don't understand this, Bart! This dead man was Tarnovief—the Russian government agent who has spent millions in this country for exports to Russia—was undoubtedly a millionaire himself! Why should a man of that standing break into a house as a common burglar? There's something a good deal bigger behind all this than I get at all!"

"The bigger it looks, the more positive I am that one of my hunches is right. Logically, it's got to be right! The only uncertain point is which of three equally possible places may be where they're keeping Gordon. If I make a mistake in one, of course I can go on to the others in turn —but while I'm doing it they may kill him. This crowd wont stop at anything! Will the railroad people accept your orders and haul us down to Washington in Gordon's private car tomorrow, Rose?"

"Considering that I'm temporarily in charge of a fifty-million-dollar syndicate, I can assure you there'll be no question as to that! Until Mr. Gordon turns up, what I say goes!" she replied spiritedly.

CAREFUL search of the surrounding grounds revealed a high-powered car backed under the pines and cedars near the entrance-gate. On the rear seat was a medium-sized black-leather bag, which one of the police was about to open when Normanton stopped him.

"If that bag has what I think it has inside, Brady, you don't even want to peek at it! Fetch the thing down there on the beach and be mighty careful you don't jolt it. —Sellers, you take one of those lamps off the car and fetch down the battery with it."

Setting down the bag at the water's edge and turning the powerful lamp on it from a distance of a hundred feet, Normanton ordered all the others about twice that distance away—a good two hundred and fifty feet—and told them to lie flat on the top of the sand-dune. Then he rested the muzzle of his army automatic on a stick of wood—and fired. In less than a second, there was a blinding glare—a cloud of black smoke sixty feet in diameter—a concussion which was felt across the Sound on the Connecticut shore—and a shower of pebbles flying over their heads in every direction as they ducked. When they began to recover their hearing, Brady was muttering something about "ten candles to the Blessed Virgin!" —and Normanton was laughing at him.

"Just as well you didn't open that, Brady! When I saw those men were Russians, I figured they'd try to blow up the laboratory if they had too much trouble getting in through the door—in fact, they'd doubtless have done it anyhow. Hmph! Tarnovief lost out altogether—and his two men will get at least ten years. All of them were provided with guns, knives and chloroform—which materially increases the penalty."

BILL STRACHEY came aboard the Mongoose as they passed Manhattan Transfer about ten in the morning, and handed his friend several sheets of typewritten biographical data which Normanton studied until they were nearing Baltimore.

"This stuff confirms my first hunch, Bill —I think we're on the right track. Come along with us for a talk with the Secretary of the Treasury when we get in! He's an old friend of Gordon's."

In the secretary's private office, Normanton and Rose Nickerson gave a brief account of what had happened in the affair up to that time—supplementing what he had read in the papers. Then the artist said he wanted ten secret-service men from the Treasury Department in Port Jefferson the following night to raid a certain private house for a large supply of liquor which had been smuggled direct—not bootlegged. Also, a duly executed warrant issued by one of the Federal judges.

A puzzled expression came into the secretary's face.

"Perhaps I'm a little stupid this afternoon, Mr. Normanton. For the last half-hour, you've given me the inside facts on Mr. Gordon's case to date—in which of course I'm personally interested. And then you abruptly switch to a request for a liquor-raid! Is there any connection?"

"That's something I don't know myself, Mr. Secretary. Let's consider a bit: The liquor-raid is perfectly legal, isn't it—on a warrant sworn out upon 'information and belief'?"

"No question whatever as to that!"

"Any resistance to that raid upon the part of the householder puts him clean outside of the law—doesn't it? If he shoots and kills anybody, it's first-degree murder —no defense whatever?"

"You've stated it correctly, sir."

"On the other hand, if I and some other men force an entrance into that same house without a warrant, we're technically guilty

of burglary and may be killed by the house-owner in defense of his life and property—as I understand the law—no matter what or how good our actual object may be before it is proved?"

"Correct."

"Even the local police have no right to break into that house without a warrant?"

"No sir—they have not."

"Well—that covers the situation. I want to get into that house and see everything in it—particularly in its cellars or any hidden vaults there may be. And I know there's a large private stock of liquor in them—which the owner might or might not sell to neighbors. Do you begin to catch the idea?"

"Upon my soul I believe I do, Mr. Normanton! Would you mind telling me what under the canopy directed your suspicions that way? I never would have dreamed of suspecting such people! Why—the man is a national figure in his own country—a multimillionaire—in the counsels of his own government!"

"That's exactly the point! It was equally the point with four other immensely influential foreigners and at least four ambassadors here in Washington. (We killed one of those same foreigners in Gordon's house last night.) But this particular man appears to have just a shade the best facilities at his immediate disposal. I think he was fully aware of Gordon's ability as a chemist five years ago—thought he might work out some formulæ of such overpowering value that any nation possessing them would have all other nations at its mercy—and commenced laying his plans to get possession of those formulæ for his own government even then. The point didn't really occur to me as a possibility until Miss Nickerson took me into that laboratory and, as one with some knowledge of chemistry, I saw what Gordon appeared to have been working upon in spare hours during the last year. His visits to Colonel Wahlgren at Edgewood seemed to confirm the impression. (I only hope that he has already shown the Colonel his formulæ—or given them to him!) Well—my hunch is that at least four powerful nations suspect what I do and mean to have those formulæ or kill Gordon before he can get them into the hands of this Government. Now—how about that liquor-raid to-morrow night—starting from the Gordon house?"

"Most certainly. . . . . You get the men and the authority without fail—at any time or place you say! Give you a couple of hundred if you need them!"

"Ten first-class men ought to be enough—all of them good shots. The local chief of police will want to be in the affair as far as he legally can—and will fetch several more. But none of the local judges would issue a warrant for him—this man is far too big a whale, politically and financially. Somebody would certainly tip him off. We'll just collect the chief and his men as we go along."

SO well did the secret-service men keep under cover—arriving in their own cars, dressed in golfing or yachting clothes—that nobody suspected their presence in the neighborhood. The chief and half a dozen men came along in two cars without being spotted by the few reporters who were still hanging about the town. Silently the cars were parked behind the dunes near Sundermann's German castle—and the party stole around it in the darkness. When a butler opened the door, he was pushed aside, and raiders walked quietly down the hall, and into the dining-room, where Sundermann with several guests were still lingering over their coffee and cigars.

Handcuffing the men and leaving two officers to watch the women,—just in case,—the rest started to search the house. A large store of wines and liquors was found in the cellars. Behind a great wine-cask, they found a small but very strong door in the stone wall. It had to be smashed, but they had brought a number of tools with them and presently got it open. In the second vault beyond they found the missing Randolph Gordon—noticeably thinner than when he had disappeared, and physically weaker, but with an indomitable spirit which hadn't been broken.

Rose Nickerson—in riding-breeches and boots, with an automatic hanging from her belt—had insisted upon accompanying the party, regardless of possible danger. She took Gordon in her arms, kissed him, cried over him—led him slowly up into the fresh air. . . . . Two days later they were quietly married.

Sundermann got twenty years in Atlanta. But he had too much influence to stay there—worse luck. (We'll learn, some day—we'll learn!) Gordon's formulæ are now the property of the United States Government, so he's presumably safe from molestation until he again gets to working along similar lines.

# The Drifter

*A Regular Army colonel here gives us a remarkable story of shipboard adventure in Philippine waters.*

By
WILTON WEST

Illustrated by O. E. Hake

*Then I saw Granger, two guns blazing in his hands as he fired into the lower cabin.*

I SAW him first as I climbed up on deck from the little prau in which two native Moros had rowed me out from Malabang. The hot sun of the Sulu Sea poured down viciously; and my feet, in riding-boots, felt almost burned as I walked down the deck toward the cabin at the rear—I should say "stern," but I'm a cavalryman and not a sailor-man, and have to use landlubber ways of talking about ships. He was lying prone on one of the closed hatchways, his arms flopped over the edge and his breathing heavy—drunk. I turned away in disgust.

"His usual condition," drawled the stalwart, handsome young Captain Ormsby as, arm and arm, my old friend and I entered his cabin. "I've known him, off an' on, for five years—and I don't believe I ever saw him sober."

"Who is he?" I asked, lighting one of the Captain's excellent cigars from a sandalwood container. Outside came the steady *chug-chug* of the great engines, driving us over the eighty miles to Jolo.

"He's one o' them drifters, a 'remittance' man, Major," replied the Captain, stretching his long legs to the table-top and sipping from his tall glass. "Queer duck, that bird. Seems to have all the money he wants, but I've never seen him doing any sort of work. Mostly drinks himself to sleep. English. Owns a fast little motor-boat and seems to make a sort of headquarters over on that little island thirty miles south of here—Juga Island, on the map. Nobody else lives there, so far's I ever heard. Never been there myself, but often felt curious, seein' him headed that way now an' then."

"Got a name?" I casually inquired, my curiosity somewhat aroused, though we saw lots of remittance men around the South Seas.

"Oh, he calls himself Gordon Granger," answered my friend, carelessly. "They all have some name or other—never their right ones, as you know. Guess when their families ship 'em down here on an allowance, with orders never to go back home, they make 'em all promise never to tell their family names." The Captain grinned as he glanced forward at the prone figure. "But we'll get 'im out o' this damned sun, anyway; he's been lyin' there for an hour." He clapped his hands and gave the native

boy orders. I saw several of the crew lift the man and carry him into one of the cabin staterooms down the deck.

BY evening the cool breeze had come up, and as the Captain and I were sitting under the awning, up came the remittance man and dropped languidly into a long wicker steamer-chair; he smiled at us pleasantly and lit one of the Captain's cigars. He had bathed and dressed, and now appeared as a very handsome man around thirty—splendidly built, with clean-cut face, fine gray eyes and well-kept little mustache. He showed no sign of the spree and I marveled at his powers of resistance—five years of it, the Captain had said!

"On your way over to Singapore this time, Mr. Granger?" asked the Captain casually, as he puffed at his cigar.

"Yes, Captain," replied Granger, smiling and leaning back in his chair, smoking slowly. "Pearl business, this time. I handle them occasionally, you know."

"We've got a big shipment of 'em aboard this time ourselves," laughed the Captain. "Morton and Company up in Manila have been havin' their agents gather the best ones in for the last month—Overton, Malabang, Cottabatto, Parang, Jolo—all the usual places. Must be a hundred thousand dollars' worth aboard this trip."

"Where in the world do you keep them, Captain?" I asked, knowing this was a cattle ship.

"Oh, we've got a strong box down below, Major," he replied. "Now an' then we gets shipments like that, an' we're always out for business. This time our cattle's only a blind. If the Moro pirates knew of this shipment, we'd be raided quick, an' it'd be good-by to this old *Alvarante.*"

Granger lay back quietly smoking, apparently not interested. Slowly he sipped from his tall glass, eying his cigar and gracefully knocking off its ashes into the big brass receiver. Then he turned with a little friendly smile.

"Insured, Captain?" he asked.

"Oh, sure—we always insure heavily on a shipment like this. Got caught once, about six years ago—ship went down in a storm when he had fifty thousand dollars' worth of pearls aboard."

LATE into the night we sat chatting there, and I found myself listening intently to the many South Sea tales of Gordon Granger and the Captain. I had been down here but two years and was keenly interested as these two experienced men talked. Overhead the moon shone brightly, and the stars studded the heavens like countless electric lights strung from an invisible net. The glimmer of the moonlight on the rolling waves made me sleepy, and glancing at my watch, I saw it was approaching two o'clock in the morning. I rose and tossed my cigar overboard.

"Goin' to turn in, Major?" laughed the Captain. Then he too tossed his cigar over the rail. "Guess I'll be doin' the same. We're due at Jolo at nine in the mornin'."

We turned together to go to our cabins. Gordon Granger smiled up at us and then, with a wave of the hand, stretched out in his chair.

"Guess I'll curl up out here—it's so cool and comfortable. I'll take another hour of this first."

In my cabin stateroom I kicked off my riding-boots and undressed. I leaned over and switched off the electric light above the berth and drew a sheet over me, for the electric fan in the corner was a bit too strong. Soon I was sound asleep.

SUDDENLY I awoke with a start and sat staring into the dark of my stateroom; out on deck I heard running, bare feet and hoarse voices; then came shots.

I leaped out of bed and pushed the electric-light button, at the same time reaching for my gun under my pillow. With one jump I was at my door and jerked it open. Face downward on the floor in the narrow hallway, almost against my door, lay the Captain, a little stream of blood oozing from his temple. I turned him over—dead, I thought. With a shudder I stood up and glanced down the dark passageway. Not a human being, not a sound, but still those rapidly running footsteps out on deck, and now and then a hoarse voice speaking rapidly, as with authority. I turned to step out on deck, and several dark figures rushed by me as I reached it, and more shots came from up forward. Gun in hand, I turned that way. And as I walked, I was conscious the ship was wallowing in the sea—no guiding hand at the wheel. I rushed forward; the wheel stood there in the moonlight, its brasses shining, and beneath it I saw a huddled figure, the steersman—and leaning over, I saw that he too had been killed—knifed in the back.

As more shots now came from the darkness of the forward part of the deck ahead, I slipped into the shadow and ran on, this time crossing to the opposite side of the deck. Then I saw Gordon Granger. He stood crouching, two guns blazing in his hands as he fired down into the lower cabin. A light streamed upward from that cabin, and by its brightness I saw Granger's face—fierce, cold, steady, a slight grin on it—the face of a fighting man in action. Just beyond him were three others, apparently native Moros; each man held two guns and was firing into the open lower cabin in a steady, determined way.

AMAZED, I ran up beside Granger and laid a hand on his arm; he turned swiftly, glanced into my face and grinned again.

"We're about through, Major," he said softly, turning back to the open cabin hatchway. "Did they get the Captain?"

"He's shot—dead—back there beside my door," I replied. "What is it—who did it?" Suspicion must have sounded in my voice, and been evident in the way I held my gun.

"Tell you later, old man," replied Granger, firing twice down the hatchway steps. "Got one more of them that time," he added, shoving fresh cartridges into one of his guns. "Boys,"—and he turned to the three men near him,—"come on! we'll rush 'em now." He leaped for the steps just as shots from below sounded and a bullet whanged past my head. Granger halted and whirled to his men: "Stevens, take the wheel; head for the Island." Another instant, and he, with his remaining two men, leaped down the steps into the volley of shots that met them from below.

As I stood there, the man Stevens took the wheel, and I felt the ship quiver and slowly glide back into its course; then saw the bow turn more and more until headed southward, and I sensed he was driving for Juga Island. I looked down into the lower cabin—pitch-dark now. But suddenly it blazed again with light, and I too leaped down the steps, my gun ready.

At the bottom I stopped in amazement; Granger was standing against the wall of the cabin, his two guns covering a group of native Moro men who huddled back against the opposite wall. Granger's two men were tying the Moros' hands behind their backs and tossing the men's guns on a long table in the center.

"Killed four, Major, and got all the rest," said Granger. "Lock 'em up, boys!"—to his men. Then he holstered his guns, and taking my arm, led me back up the steps. "We'll take a look at your friend the Captain, Major—maybe they didn't kill 'im. He's too good to lose like this—scrapping a bunch of Moro pearl-pirates!"

We lifted the Captain and laid him on my berth, and with amazing skill Granger cleaned and dressed what proved to be but a scalp wound in the Captain's head. As I watched, I saw my old friend's hand move; then his lips and finally his eyes opened. I knelt beside him and took his hand. He muttered:

"You damned English dog—you drunken beast—tryin' to shoot me, are ye?"

"They shot 'im just as I was running down the passageway shooting at 'em," Granger said quietly. "He saw only me." He laughed. "My men carried me aboard yesterday, apparently gloriously drunk, as usual. Just my way of keeping my job under my hat, Major. I'm of the Intelligence." He flipped back his torn shirt, and I saw the Intelligence badge pinned to his undershirt. . . . .

When dawn came, our ship lay before the little island and we went ashore in one of the small boats, taking the Captain with us; he was now conscious, but glared at Granger with suspicious eyes. There had been no time for me to tell him anything, and Granger had been busy all night with the ship and the prisoners.

"You've been captured, Captain." And I smiled down at him.

"Captured! Captured! Hell's bells, Major, it's—it's murder! An' they got me before I could draw; been wearin' both my guns for days. Knew I couldn't depend on that damned Moro crew."

"Well, Captain," I laughed, patting my old friend's hand, "we're captured by our Intelligence corps—Granger's their chief. The pearls are safe, and the Moro bandits in jail—or whatever you sea people call your hoosegow. He shot four of 'em first, too. Don't worry any more, old-timer."

Slowly the Captain's expression changed as he stared up at me.

"What, that drunken sot?" he said incredulously. "Well, that's sure a good one on me, Major. I never guessed."

Just then Granger came up, smiling, with two men—native Moros.

"Captain, we're going to take you into the shack and fix your wound a bit." He

motioned to the two natives, and lifting the Captain, they followed Granger and me.

BACK among the dense jungle growth we came upon a clearing and entered a very attractive little bungalow. To my astonishment, we were met in the doorway by a charming young woman. Her cordial courtesy made us feel quickly at home. The men laid Captain Ormsby on a couch and vanished. She and Granger knelt and readjusted the Captain's bandage; then she brought us tea and cake.

"My wife, gentlemen," said Granger. "I forgot to introduce you—thinking of the Captain's head." He laughed pleasantly. I found myself liking him better and better—and envying him his lovely wife.

That evening we all sat about chatting. Granger was filled with wonderful stories of these South Sea Islands and vied with the Captain, now sitting up in a chair. I can hear their amusing arguments yet, over some bit of travel about the Sulu Seas. Finally Granger and his wife rose.

"Well, friends, time we were all in bed, and the Captain's head must be aching a bit. Good night. We'll see you both in the morning."

I helped my old friend to bed a few minutes later, after we had partaken of one more of Granger's excellent mint juleps.

"I'm feelin' fine, Major, now," grinned the Captain as I switched off the light. "Here I've always been thinkin' Granger was just a drunken remittance man! An' the pearls, Major? Where are they?"

"Oh, they're all right, Captain," I laughed, as I slipped under the fresh sheet. "Granger's locked 'em all up in his safe here. He found your safe open, but got the pearls before those Moro pirates could take 'em. Some fight, that!"

When I awoke next morning the sun was shining high, and the Captain, up and dressed, sat on the couch smiling pleasantly. He still had the bandage on, but evidently felt all right.

"Let's get up, Major; they'll think we're never goin' to wake up. I heard 'em early this mornin' gettin' breakfast, but didn't get up because my head was still some sore."

After we had bathed and dressed, we strolled out into the big living-room of the bungalow; beyond, we could see the breakfast table all set, and as we went in, we found freshly cooked bacon and eggs, toast and coffee at our places—but nobody around. We strolled out on the front porch. Nobody. Silence reigned supreme.

"Guess they'll be back soon, Major; anyway, they evidently have eaten and mean that breakfast for us. Let's tackle it."

After we had eaten we walked outside again. Still no one in sight. Idly we strolled down to the little beach, thinking they might be there. Our ship lay at anchor within a hundred yards of the shore, and we could see our men on the deck, working as usual. Sunny, bright, the day was really wonderful and the sight charming. As we stood there, we saw one of our smallboats put away from the side of our ship and come toward the beach. Three of our native men were rowing, and one other sat in the stern, steering. As he saw us, he waved. Soon the boat beached just below us and the man who had waved sprang out and came up to us, grinning and bowing. He handed the Captain an envelope, and spoke to him in native tongue.

"The white man left this for you, this morning, before they went away in their motorboat, Captain." He salaamed low, in the usual native way, and went back to the smallboat.

With a surprised expression the Captain tore open the envelope; I saw his face change into amazement; then he silently handed me the note. I read:

"Thanks, Captain, for the pearls. Hope your head is better. You'll find fresh bandages in the cupboard beside the fireplace."

We sprang into the smallboat, and the Captain roared out orders to row fast. We leaped onto the deck of our ship a moment later, tore down the steps of the companionway to the Captain's little office, rushed to the safety box behind the wall—and stood staring at its open, empty interior.

ONE month later the Captain and I stood on the deck as we dropped anchor before the little island. Curiosity swayed us. We stood up in the bow of our smallboat as it swept up to the beach; we jumped out and walked, our hands on our guns, toward the little clearing, several of our boatmen following with rifles. The Captain's grim face was set sternly and his eyes glittered. The insurance had not wholly covered the loss.

We went through the bungalow; it stood just as we had left it—furniture, rugs, tables, the cigars still in the box of ivory on the table and, on the dining-room table, our empty dishes just as we had left them.

Deserted! We ransacked the place from stem to stern for evidence—nothing, not a scrap. Finally the Captain, his lips straight and grim, stood looking at the house from the outside. Then he pulled out his match box, kicked a bunch of old magazines against the doormat and struck a match.

"Anyway, Major, we'll not leave 'em this to come back to—if they ever come, damn 'em!" he growled.

As we rowed back toward our ship, we saw the flames above the tree-tops of the jungle.

"I'd heard that yarn 'bout a white man havin' a bunch o' Moro pirates, but I never believed it, Major. Guess a man's never too old to learn." He grinned savagely. "But we'll get 'em, some day."

A WEEK later I sat in the club up in Manila reading home news a week old and wishing for the shows back in 'Frisco. A Chinese house-boy handed me a cable, and I tore it open. It was from the Captain, sent from Singapore.

"Got some news for you. Got back most of the loot. Better come down to Jolo. Bring your gun."

I wondered what his story would be. . . . .

And a few days afterward, under orders to go south and make an investigation of another matter, I headed from Manila for Jolo, wondering if I would run into my old friend and learn his news.

As we entered Jolo bay and swung toward the little wharf six days later, I saw the *Alvarante* lying at anchor, and after we docked, I had some natives take me over to my friend's ship. I found him lounging in a big wicker chair under the awning of the aft deck, smoking a long native cheroot; as he saw me come aboard, he stroked his mustache and grinned. I dropped down into another chair beside him and welcomed the sight of his Jap boy with a tall glass. For a while the Captain smoked in silence; finally he asked:

"Major, remember those two who got our pearls, over on that little Juga Island?"

"Couldn't well forget that, Captain," I replied. "What's the next chapter? I got your cable."

"Well, Major," he slowly replied, "I'm glad you're down here again. If you've nothin' on for tonight, I'll show you some fireworks that'll make our Juga Island trip seem like two dollars Mex. Those people went over to Singapore, hunted up my old friend Chino Charley there and offered him the pearls. Charley's some slick *hombre*, Major—deals with all sorts of people for pearls, jade, whatever they have to sell. Made a pile of money, too, Charley has. Well, he keeps those pearls of ours all night, studyin' 'em. The man and woman wouldn't leave 'em with 'im, so he lets 'em sleep in a little room he keeps behind his shop. The room's like a Chinaman's joint—has no windows, only one door and the usual wall slits for peepin' in. 'Bout midnight Charley's eye was stuck to his peephole; the man and girl were havin' a hell of a row—talkin' mad an' a bit loud.

"Charley could hear it all. Seems she isn't his wife at all; she's his sister, and she was beggin' him to go home to England and give us back our pearls. Seems he's the second son of a second son of some lord or duke or something over there, and she'd grown up in America. Well, Charley listened—he had the pearls in his own safe; and finally Granger busts out of that room, leavin' the girl cryin'. Charley slips back behind some barrels and watches; Granger comes along soft-like to the safe, and with ease opens the safe door and reaches in for the pearls. Charley picks up a club, and Granger hears 'im and swings on his jaw. Charley says that when he woke up, Granger was gone.

"He crawled to the little room—and the girl was gone too. But, queer thing, all the pearls were there except eight big ones, the best. Charley gave me back the pearls, with the eight missin'. Crooked as that old Chinaman is, Major, he's always been straight with me. So, I'm still huntin' Mr. Granger, second son of a second son—and that sister of his."

IT gave me a deep thrill to learn that beautiful girl was not a drifter's wife.

"She wore no ring, Captain, I remember now," I remarked.

The Captain gazed at me with a little quizzical scowl.

"Guess you cavalrymen are all alike, Major," he said. "I'm tellin' you about them pearls, an' all you're thinkin' of is a woman's hair and eyes." He laughed softly. "But it isn't the end o' this story yet, Major. I got news, an' I told you that you'd have a pretty wild night if you're game to go with me."

I laughed; going with the Captain generally meant something worth while.

"Major," the Captain continued, "they came back; they went down into a little

village called Taba Manok—twelve miles through the Mindanao jungle, back o' Zamboanga—and got old Datto Tubig to hide 'em for a while. Tubig's been one of our worst Moro pirates, he an' his wild son and his tribe—and it's plain that Granger's been gettin' his men from him. Last night I got word from a couple of natives I know—and pay damned well, too—that Granger an' his sister's still there. I'm steerin' for Zamboanga this evenin', an' I'm aimin' to trot out to old Datto Tubig's village 'bout midnight and fetch our friend Gordon Granger an' his sister back—and the eight pearls. A cell up in Bilibid, in Manila, will about fix that fellow."

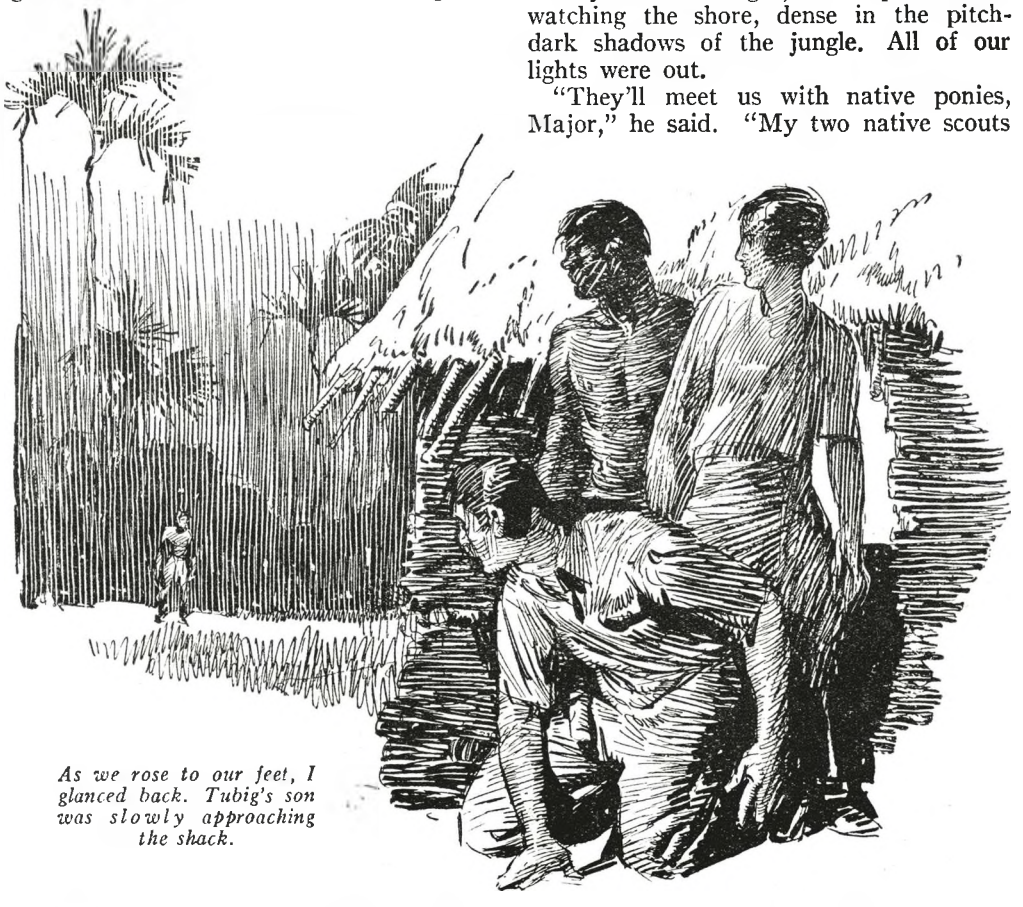
"How many are you taking with you, Captain?" I asked.

"Well, Major, too many's a crowd, when travelin' through them jungles, an' Moro ears are mighty keen. I was plannin' goin' it alone, just with my two native scouts, Major, but if you want to go, I'll be glad of your comp'ny. And," he added, his face thoughtful: "Old Tubig's son's after the girl, my scouts tell me; that's needin' quick work, Major."

I listened, conscious of a stirring in my blood. "What time do we start, Captain?" I asked.

As we steamed down the Mindanao coast shortly after midnight, the Captain stood watching the shore, dense in the pitch-dark shadows of the jungle. All of our lights were out.

"They'll meet us with native ponies, Major," he said. "My two native scouts went on ahead to arrange that; they know the way. But don't expect 'em to scrap old Tubig's men; they wont. We'll have to do all the scrappin' ourselves, if there's any. I'm aimin' just to get Granger an' his sister an' skip back to the ship with 'em. An' it'll take mighty quiet crawlin'."



*As we rose to our feet, I glanced back. Tubig's son was slowly approaching the shack.*

Silently as a shadow our smallboat slipped into the water, and half an hour later its bow softly scraped against the sand of the shore. As we stepped from the boat to the beach, two dark forms slipped toward us; the Captain signaled with his hand as they came up, and the two natives led us back into the jungle to where four native ponies were tied to trees. In single file, the two natives ahead, we rode for two hours—appalling darkness, an occasional

weird howl of an owl, mud underfoot, sometimes a curse from the Captain as his pony slipped.

Suddenly my pony's nose shoved against the tail of the Captain's pony, and I saw we had halted. We tied our ponies to some trees, then a whispered moment with the natives as we all stood bunched close together in the dark.

Then—a slow crawling forward. Ahead, dimmed by the jungle, we heard the slow, rhythmic beating of a drum—a village! We had arrived! I saw the Captain slip his gun out, and I pulled my holster around in front of my right thigh, ready. The two natives beckoned; we crawled and crawled, slowly, parting the jungle growth with careful hands lest a slight noise alarm the keen ears in the village ahead.

AFTER ten minutes' crawling through the muddy slime, we dropped beside an open space and peered ahead. The drums had ceased. Here and there a tiny light twinkled in a nipa shack, but most of the stilted houses were pitch-dark, mere outlines. The moon slithered through, here and there, and we could now see fairly well. The Captain turned to the two natives and whispered a moment; then he beckoned, and again we crawled, this time circling the fringe of jungle. We stopped again in the dark, behind two nipa shacks. There was a light streaming forth from the front of one of them, its door evidently open, and now, as we lay still, we heard a bottle and the clink of a glass, then an English voice softly cursing. I felt the Captain's hand on my arm.

"He's in there, Major, where the light is; the girl's in the other one, sleeping—or tryin' to. She'll sure be glad we've come, I expect. For God's sake, don't stub your toe from now on—they'll get us sure then. Follow Nito an' Togo."

We slipped forward on hands and knees; I saw a knife gleam between the lips of one of the native scouts—Togo's; Nito's eyes glittered as he glanced at us, and I saw the moonlight on his naked, shiny back for an instant as he crawled forward. Behind the shack with the light, we halted and rose to our feet. We heard Granger's voice cursing as his bottle clinked against his glass. We heard the man drop into a wicker chair. . . . . Finally Nito beckoned, with a grin, and with his face close before ours, imitated, in silence, the moving lips and closed eyes of a sleeper; we understood; Granger had now fallen asleep in his chair. Nito slipped his knife into the damp, soft nipa wall of the shack and silently cut out a square about two feet on a side, close to the ground, and laid it beside us. I peeped inside—Gordon Granger sat asleep in his chair, his legs stuck out in front of him, and an oil light burning on the table beside the bottle. Like a cat the Captain crept into the room, slipped around the wall and closed the nipa door; then we stood over Granger, staring into his half-drunken face.

Swiftly we lifted him and whirled toward the opening at the rear; Togo had enlarged it to door size with a few quick slashes of his barong. Outside, before Granger could grasp what had happened, we thrust him down on the ground; the Captain spoke softly:

"Get 'er, Major—in that next shack. Take Nito."

The native and I slipped behind Miss Granger's shack; silently, as before, he cut out a wide opening in the nipa, and I looked inside; the girl was sleeping, and her head was within reach of my hand. I touched her face, softly. Her eyes suddenly opened; and then, with a stare of recognition at me, she sat up. I smiled and whispered:

"Come quickly—don't make a noise. Your brother's with the Captain."

Then I felt Nito's hand on my arm; he pointed to the open space out beyond. There, standing erect in the moonlight, stood the tall, naked figure of a Moro, staring in silence at the shack.

"Tubig's son—after gal—long time. We go now, quick," whispered Nito.

THE girl heard, and evidently understood; her face blanched; then swiftly she slipped through the opening and joined us, fully dressed in riding-clothes. Again, on hands and knees, we three crawled back to the trail, Nito in the lead, then Miss Granger, then I. As we rose to our feet in the dark trail, I glanced back. Tubig's son was slowly approaching the shack, his head thrust forward warily, listening. Turning, we slipped along the trail toward the ponies.

We had gone about a hundred yards—almost to our ponies—when suddenly, from the village, came a wild yell, then a pistol-shot, then a cry, then again silence for a moment. I heard a crash behind me, and leaping to our feet, we rushed to the ponies, I half-leading, half-dragging Miss Granger and shouting now at Nito to get our

*The forest seemed screaming with native yells as the Captain staggered to the boat; he held Granger over his shoulder.*

horses. As we mounted, we heard the Captain's voice roaring; a moment later he appeared beside us, clutching Granger's arm in a mighty grasp; the man was trying to fight.

"Mount, damn you!" hoarsely ordered the Captain, half-lifting Granger into one of the saddles. He jumped into the other saddle and yelled to me: "Go on, Major; ride like hell!"

We dashed away down the slippery trail as fast as our ponies could go, and right here let me record my respect for the Mindanao pony over slippery, pitch-dark trails through the jungle. Nito and Togo had disappeared, and I never saw them again. A sudden glare arose behind us—the great torches in the village had been lighted, and now I heard the shouts of many natives back there.

"Faster, Major!" shouted the Captain, lashing Granger's pony ahead of him. I drove my heels into my pony's sides and wished for my spurs, back in the Captain's cabin. The girl rode just behind me, and I could hear her occasional gasps as her pony rushed through the rutty filth of the dark trail. I glanced back and caught, for just an instant, a glimpse of Granger's face —angry, staring; I did not know that his feet had been tied beneath his pony's belly by the Captain. Behind, yells rose—we were being followed by Datto Tubig's men.

JUST as we dashed out on the little beach and toward our small boat I heard a cry of pain; I could not stop then, for I saw Miss Granger was almost falling from her saddle. I leaped down, lifted her from her pony and placed her in the stern seat of the little boat, and with a great shove pushed the boat into the water; the two native rowers sat with oars raised, staring. Behind us I heard the Captain's voice, hoarse, hard; then his pistol as he fired at the figures coming out of the jungle. The forest seemed screaming with native yells. The Captain staggered to the boat, and I saw he held Granger over his shoulder; he dropped the man headlong into the bottom of our boat and sprang in.

"Row like blazes!" he shouted at our two oarsmen, and they swept our boat rapidly away from the shore.

I saw dark forms rushing along the water's edge, and a long bamboo spear hurtled past my head and splashed into the water beside the boat; then another struck the side and ricocheted off into the water. The Captain turned and fired rapidly back. My own gun blazed with his, but the dark forms on the beach danced and yelled defiance. Then the dark of night closed about us. I could not see Miss Granger's face, there in the stern of the boat. Her figure loomed darkly, bent forward as she stared down at her brother's still form.

As we floated beside our ship a few minutes later, the loud cries from shore died away. Granger, lying in the bottom of our small boat, had not stirred and I gazed down at him in curiosity—probably drunk! The Captain saw my look and spoke:

"They got 'im through the back—a spear."

WE laid Gordon Granger on one of the berths in the main cabin as the steamer slowly started on our trip back to Jolo. Miss Granger sat beside her brother, her hand smoothing his hair. The spear had gone clear through the chest, from rear to front. The handsome face was still, distinguished, now.

"Had to pull it out, back there," slowly said the Captain. "I saw Tubig's son throw it—got 'im with my first shot, but it was too late." He gently lifted the sheet and laid it over Granger's face.

About three in the morning, as the Captain and I sat under the awning on the aft deck, Miss Granger came slowly towards us. Her face was even more lovely in its tired little expression. She handed the Captain a handsome leather belt.

"The pearls are in there, Captain," she said quietly. "He—he made me carry the belt after we left Singapore."

Captain Ormsby slowly opened the pockets of the belt and drew out the eight missing pearls—all large, lustrous, valuable. Then he put them all back into the pockets and held up the belt toward Miss Granger with a little smile.

"He's gone, Miss Granger—your brother's paid. Better keep 'em for yourself." His gray eyes grew moist as he saw her tears.

But the girl slowly shook her head and did not reach for the belt. She smiled wanly.

"I have plenty, Captain," she said, her voice low and gentle. "We both had plenty, always—he just loved adventure." She sank down into a chair as we stood beside her.

"You should know the story—now, Captain," she said. "We are both English. He was wild, always, and went to America; I followed, thinking I could help him; he had come down here, and after living with an aunt in New York until she died, I wrote him and he cabled me to join him down here—four months ago. Our people back in England had died, and he was all I had left. We both had plenty of means. Our island home, which you burned, was our only home; he built it, with some of Datto Tubig's men. Now—now I have no home, and—and Gordon's dead." Her eyes filled again, and her hands clasped tensely in her lap as she stared at the moonlit sea. The twinkling lights of Jolo gleamed two miles ahead. . . . .

On the little dock at Jolo we waited until the Captain stepped ashore after giving some necessary orders; I was being more and more overwhelmed with Miss Granger's gentleness, her sweet womanliness. The Captain came down the gangplank and joined us.

"I have to take my ship on to Singapore tonight, Major," he said, slowly. "And—I'll either take Miss Granger and—and her brother with me, or she can go up to Manila with you; no use reporting anything about this, now, Major. He's dead—an' we got our pearls. Everything's cleared up." He looked into Miss Granger's face.

She stepped closely beside him and laid her hand on his arm, her expression very gentle.

"I—I'd rather go on with you, Captain; and we can arrange—about Gordon—over there."

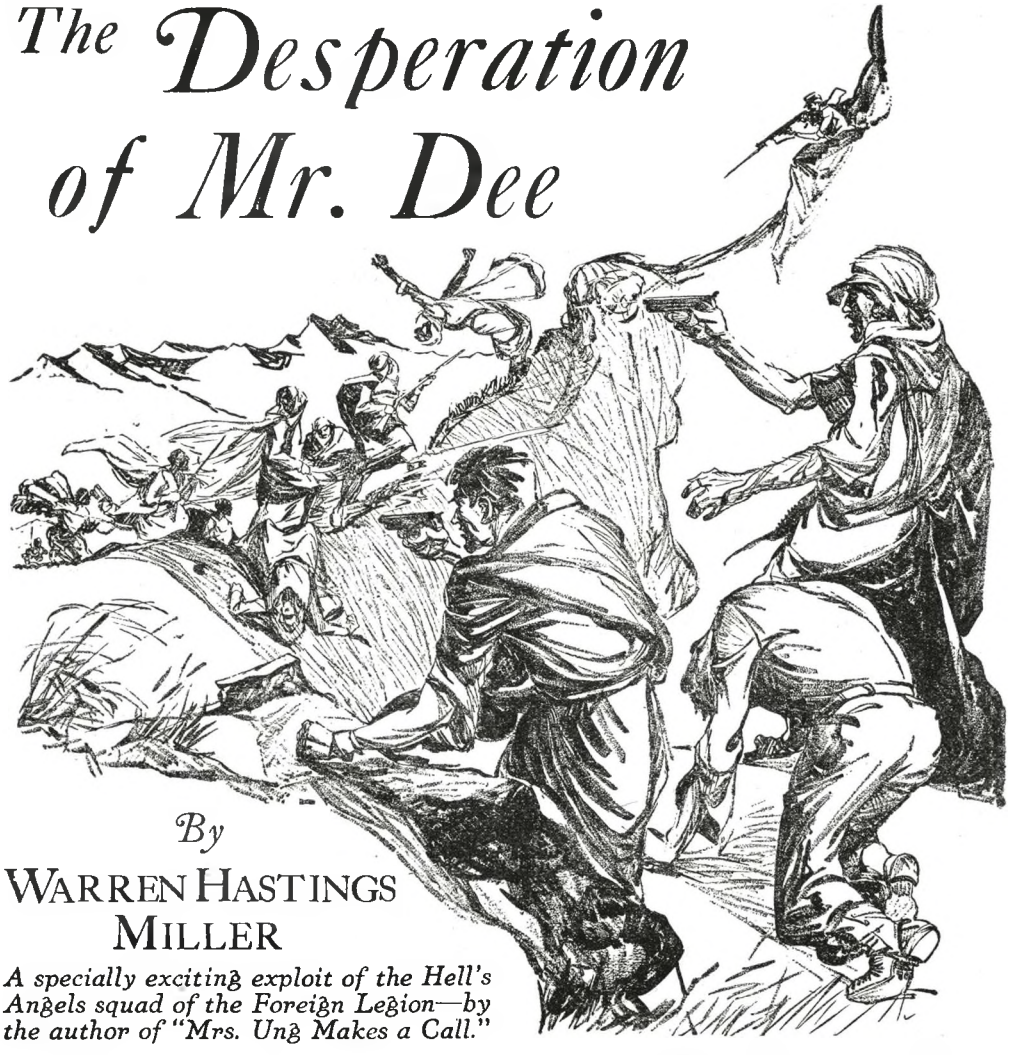
As they stood on the deck of the *Alvarante,* looking down at me, the Captain smiled. Miss Granger, standing beside him, slowly lifted her handkerchief and waved to me a second; then the ship swung out to sea, and I hunted up the officers' club and got a bath. It was almost morning, and I realized I was tired. I still had a week's work to do in Jolo before I could go back to Manila. . . . .

Just as I was boarding the little army transport at the end of the week an orderly came up the gangplank and handed me a cable—from Singapore. I tore it open, wondering what the Captain had written:

Then I sat staring at this message:

*Married today. Have leased Juga Island. Come visit us next time you are down this way.*

# The Desperation of Mr. Dee



*Ike and Criswell leaped to the attack.*

By

WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

*A specially exciting exploit of the Hell's Angels squad of the Foreign Legion—by the author of "Mrs. Ung Makes a Call."*

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

IT was dark under the canopy of brilliant stars that overhung the Grand Atlas—but there was no mistaking that tall and burly figure, nor the five narrow gold stripes that encircled his kepi. Commandant Knecht, commanding the third battalion!

*"Houp! Gardez vous! C'est le Commandant!"*

There was the rustling snap of arms to salute. Hell's Angels squad was off duty and straggling in the general direction of the canteen, where a concert by a wandering Spanish troupe was scheduled; but they too stopped and drew up at attention.

The Commandant paused before the group and deliberately switched the leather loop of his riding-crop under their noses. *"Salut, mes garçons!"*

Ike and Hell's Angels obeyed, dumfounded. Never had Knecht, their grand old man, behaved that way before! Was he turning martinet, now that the Riff War was over and they were in barracks at the post of Tizi Boroudj that commanded the great route over the Atlas from Ksabi to Rich in the Tifalelt?

*"Hem!* The soup, she was good this morning?" the Commandant inquired.

Murmurs of stupefaction. "But yes, *mon Commandant!*" came a confused mutter. *Cafard!* It had got the Commandant, at last! That was the wild thought that swirled through the heads of those Légionaires at attention. Who ever heard of him asking their opinion on the soup! He had the best regimental chefs in North Africa, the battalion was ready to swear.

"You fellows are not difficult, *nom de Dieu!*" pronounced the vast figure standing indistinctly in the gloom before them. He craned his neck forward in scrutiny. "Ah! It is you, Corporal Criswell? The key of the armory, please!"

EXTRAORDINARY! Sar-Major Texas Ike pulled at his black forelock in uneasy perplexity while Criswell was fumbling in his pocket for that key. Gosh-all! It was the *cafard,* all right! It hit a man without warning, that lunatic craziness, dissatisfaction, rebellion at everything military. But Knecht was the last man Ike could imagine as subject to it! Urbane, genial, never disturbed in mind, even in the heat of battle when everything seemed going wrong. Must be lack of let-up!

For their battalion had had no rest. Directly after the assault on Kef el Ghoul that ended the Riff War, they had entrained for Missour at the rail-head in the Moulaya Valley between the Middle and Grand Atlas. They had marched four days over the passes and relieved a Senegal battalion there. Beyond, over the mountains, was the long valley of the Ziz reaching down to the Sahara, all of it in a state of turmoil, clear to Tinghar. All their work of the Sahara Campaign to do over again! And only two days before their arrival a *harka* of seven hundred guns had raided Khasbah Mechara, not twenty miles away, and had burned it to the ground. The turbulent Tifalelt was enough to make any commander go *cafard,* thought Ike!

Knecht had seen that gesture of Ike's at the forelock. *"Prut!* Five days for that, Sergeant!" he said, and strode off twirling the armory key on a finger. "Besides, your uniform is too clean!" came a parting shot as he went toward the lighted canteen.

The squad looked after him, speechless. They saw him stop to chuck one of those Spanish dancers under the chin, and there was the feminine squeal, *"Finissez, monsieur!"* as she turned and ran, confused, charmed that the Colonel had noticed her.

"Goddlemighty!" gasped Ike. "Am I under arrest or aint I?" he demanded with indignation. "Whatever's struck the ol' boy?"

"It's the *cafard!"* declared Anzac Bill, his iron face drawn and troubled. "That's what comes of working a willing horse too hard," he added pityingly.

"What gets me," rumbled the huge and burly Criswell, "is what in tarnation he wants of the armory key?" Criswell's tones were injured, for the giant Michigander was the most dependable man in the battalion, and Knecht had signalized it by giving him charge of the armory—a job that Criswell loved. Oil, cleaning materials, reloading machines, powder-testing apparatus, all came under the vast and somewhat physically lazy Criswell. He haunted that armory. Its polished rifles were kept in racks, with a padlocked chain running through all the trigger guards—a necessary precaution where tribesmen would risk almost anything to break in and carry off one!

"He don't know what he's doin', that's what, fellers!" said Ike in answer to Criswell's plaint. "Let's ooze over to the canteen and sorter keep an eye on him. I may be under arrest, but—"

The squad agreed with him, and hurried to the crowded canteen. About thirty soldiers had risen at salute when those five *galons* on the kepi had stalked in on them; they were sitting down again, wondering, as Hell's Angels entered. Unheard-of, this visit to the men's quarters, when Knecht was generally busy over papers at his office at this hour!

THEY spied him seated in an obscure and dim corner, a few friendly natives in brown *gandourahs* standing against the wall behind him. The Commandant was ordering wine. *"Du vin, garçon! Un bouteille à un franc!"* he declaimed into the Arab waiter's cocked ear.

Anzac Bill nudged Ike. "That isn't Knecht at all, if you don't mind!" his gurgly whisper blew like a walrus in Ike's ear. "He never takes anything but Imperial Kebir!"

"Mebbe," said Ike, chewing solemnly with his eyes fixed on the Commandant. It was a startling thought, that suspicion of Anzac Bill's! But there was the bushy black beard, the brown eyes—above all, the kepi, and over one arm the familiar night cape that the Commandant always wore. "They aint nawthin' but *vin ordinaire* in this dump!" Ike reminded Bill.

"Granted. But why the *one franc?"* insisted Bill. "He may have the Commandant's kepi, but he hasn't the Commandant's purse, my word! Us impoverished bloomers never have more than a franc on us by any chawnce!"

Ike continued to watch. The concert was beginning now—guitars, a bull fiddle,

an accordion, alleged Spanish mountaineers seated in a circle around the small stage. And then a señorita came out, clapping castanets, pirouetting, whirling alluringly, a fantasia of mantilla and fan. She had a painted face, and lawless hazel eyes that missed no soldier in the hall.

They applauded hilariously. Ike saw the Commandant sit up and take notice. And at about the third glass, he was becoming conspicuous in his corner, clapping, joining her in her song, dominating the whole entertainment. A sort of relaxation went over the hall, since the Commandant was acting up with this Spanish dancer and seemed to have thrown his dignity and their discipline to the winds this night.

HELL'S Angels drew compactly together. If Bill was right, some one was impersonating the Commandant there, and that some one had got hold of the armory key! And was it mere accident that those tribesmen were standing behind him? Ike was cudgeling his brains as to what to do. The man was drunk as a lord, now, and Ike could see nothing of the key, either on him or on the table. It had a wooden tag and leather loop. The last he had seen of it was the key whirling about the Commandant's forefinger when he had left them before the guard post.

"Beat it for the armory, Criswell," Ike turned to whisper. "If that's the ol' man, he's makin' an exhibition of hisself what aint nawthin' like him nohow! And whar's yore key? Most anybody could git it away from him now!"

Criswell nudged him and went out. The dancer was now throwing roses across the hall at the uproarious Commandant. Gold! That was what those five *galons* meant to her! He had risen to his feet and was lurching toward her, upsetting tables and the canteen in an uproar of applauding soldiery. *"O sole mio!"* he had begun, drunkenly.

"Do we pinch him now, or wait for Lieutenant Hortet or Ressot to show up?" growled Ike. "Looks like this squad orter put the Commandant to bed afore that hussy picks him clean! Aint it our duty?"

They moved forward to intercept him, respectfully but firmly. And then came a disturbance, a sheeted Arab woman entering the canteen and beckoning to one of the tribesmen to come out in a hurry. The Commandant turned on her, pinned her against a table, was pulling at the *yashmak* that covered her face to the eyes.

"For why you got da bigga disharag across you' face, *hein?"* he was demanding in English of a sort. "For why da—"

*"Gawd!* It's the Count what's gone *cafard,* boys!" yelped Ike—and led Hell's Angels' rush upon him. The black beard came off at the first yank; Ike was frantically rifling his trouser pockets for that key, but it wasn't there. Bill had off the "Commandant's" kepi. And the canteen was now yelling with laughter, for without them, "Mr. Dee," as they called their Italian count, stood revealed his familiar self!

It was a curious freak of the *cafard,* this escapade of the Count's in fooling the whole battalion as their commanding officer. But it was very serious, Ike felt. Knecht might pass it off as a forgivable joke—but not with that armory key gone, no man knew where! Mr. Dee had probably demanded it of Criswell to have the laugh on him later; it was all in line with his sentencing Ike to the guardhouse for having his uniform too clean, and making them all salute him, and then raising Ned at the concert. He might have carried it off if he hadn't gotten drunk, that Italian practical joker!

He was still drunk, shouting: *"Pan-pan! —Ça ira!"* and struggling to reach the Spanish girl again. Ike started him for the guardhouse between Anzac Bill and young Honorable Jeff, the Englishman of the squad; then he jumped onto a table and shouted: *"Houp! Attention!* Guard the doors, comrades!"

They were too late! Not a tribesman was left in the canteen. That wall space where they had been standing, looking on, was vacant! The woman had gone. And through the tense, inquiring silence, Ike heard outside on the parade-ground shouts of excitement in Criswell's voice, then the ringing notes of the bugle.

"Fall in, you birds!" shouted Ike in answer to its summons. "This aint no foolin'! Git to your companies! *Pas double!"*

The news met them outside. Every rifle in the armory was gone!

AT the inquiry next morning Knecht's manner was kindly and he used the Count's title as one gentleman to another.

*"C'est le cafard, Di Piatti?"*

Cafard was the best defense, for much could be forgiven that queer mental seizure that overtook the best of men in the monotony of barrack life and sometimes appeared after a strenuous field campaign. The Count stood before his Commandant, sober

and penitent now, a tall figure of a Florentine, tall as Knecht but slender, his black eyes flaming with indignation at himself and burning with a desire for expiation.

Sergeant Ike stood beside him, eyes red with lack of sleep, face drawn and haggard with fatigue. What a night! Criswell's key had nothing to do with the armory door, which was generally open; but it unlocked the padlock of the long trigger-guard chain. That had been deftly withdrawn and all the rifles passed out by a ladder over the wall. Three or four tribesmen had managed it, carrying a dozen at a time in that inhuman way that Arabs have of picking up enormous weights with ease. A rain of musket-butt marks at the foot of the wall, plenty of sandal prints dispersing down the hill slope, those were the last clews of those rifles. Squads armed with sentry and guard-post rifles had scoured the hills as far as they dared without finding a single further trace.

Di Piatti drew himself up in answer to that kindly hint of Knecht's to plead *cafard*. His thin lips had the ghost of a smile as he replied: "It was not *le cafard*, my Commandant. It was a—a rare opportunity. . . . . Balbuti, your Sudan orderly, had put out your cape and kepi to air. There was cleaning fluid and leather polish, sir, with which the black was embellishing your riding-crop that you carry when off duty. And there was a mattress-carding machine, with piles of black horsehair. . . . . So? All of these domestic utilities Balbuti had left unguarded, for a moment, good soul!" Di Piatti grinned. "And I have in my first-aid kit the broad strip of surgical tape. 'For why not impersonate the Commandant and go for the little promenade?' says the little devil who lurks in the Italian's soul. *Pouf!* It is done! The horsehair, she sticks to the tape, and we have the abundant beard. The kepi, the cape, the swagger-stick. —*Hem! Hem! Gardez vous!* But, alas! I get drronk in the canteen!"

He was priceless in that mimicry of his scene, was Di Piatti, and the Commandant held his sides and roared. He did not ask the Count why he had demanded that cherished key of Criswell, knowing that there is more affinity between an Italian and the practical joke than between a kitten and a warm brick. Ike roared with him. They had all saluted Mr. Dee most respectfully, and he had given them a bad half-hour besides with his admirable tomfoolery! How deliciously he had carried it off!

Knecht scratched his head. "If it were not that we have lost our rifles. . . . . An official report, Di Piatti; how can I explain the culprit? *Le cafard!* They will be lenient—perhaps a dozen years on Devil's Island. Otherwise it may be death, your little joke."

Di Piatti's eyes grew stern. Once more he was the Count, looking at himself and his propensity for practical jokes as a plain soldier with the severity of one who had commanded a regiment back in Italy.

"I demand leave, sir, to make expiation in my own way!" he appealed. "Through my foolery they got hold of the armory key and made off with our rifles. *Bien!* It is for me to recover them, I alone! Leave for special duty, sir, I beg!"

"*Heu!* It *is le cafard!*" said Commandant Knecht mournfully. "Have you lost your mind, Di Piatti?" he shouted. "You, alone? Murdered in the first *bordj* you visit! Take him to the guardhouse, Sergeant! I must do the best I can with this case."

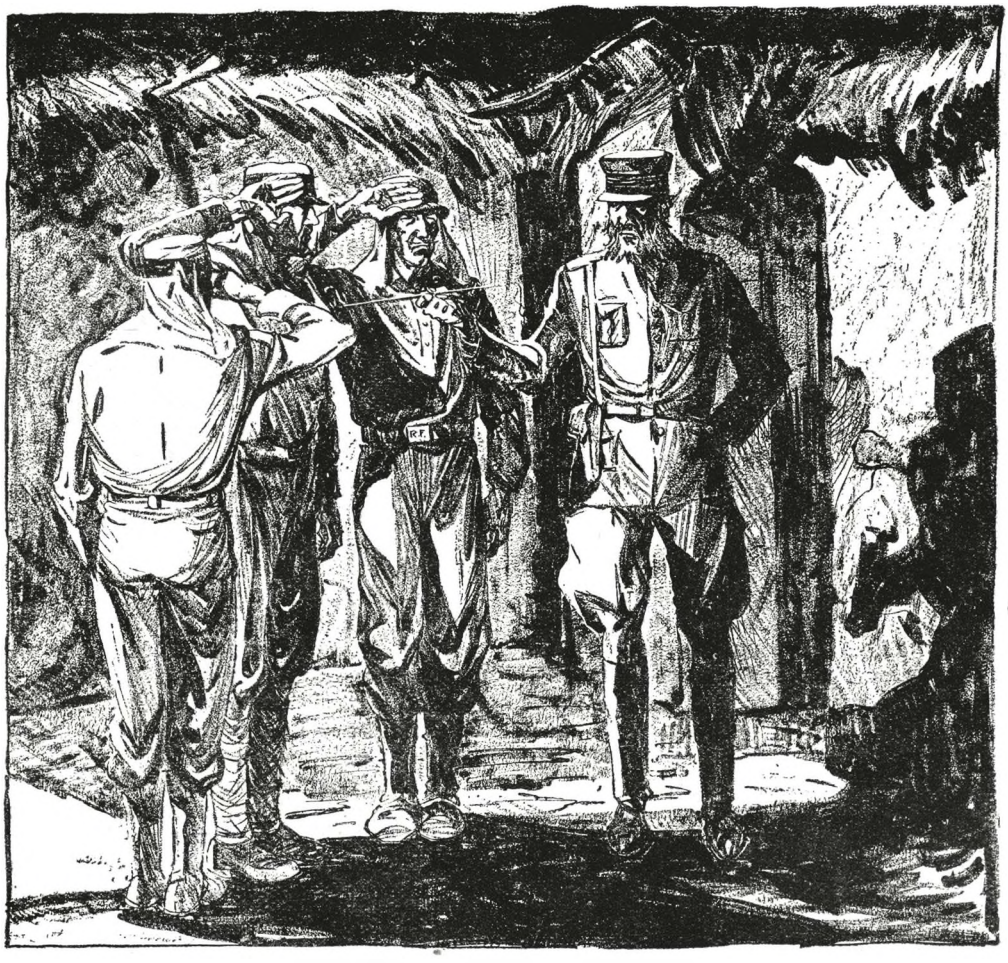
He picked up a paper and waved them out brusquely. Ike laid a paw on Mr. Dee to carry out orders. Knecht's intelligence had certainly been insulted by that last wild proposal of the Count's!

JUST then there was a disturbance at the headquarters office door and two sentries came in, bringing between them a tribesman under guard. That gentleman was a tall, a calm and emotionless customer, with a straggly black beard encircling a hard face. He wore a brown *gandourah* of camel's-hair with its hood thrown back forming a cape, a tight brown turban of camel's-hair cord, and his dark legs were bare from knee to red sandals. He was draped with belts and sling-straps carrying a sheathed yataghan, a dagger and a gourd with an immensely long stem like a pipe. He had grounded a long Arab gun, taller than he was, as he stood between the sentries, salaaming respectfully at Knecht.

"Praise be to God, the One!" he began the customary salutations. "Salute to the Seigneur, the honorable, the venerable, the magnanimous, the affable—whom may the compassion and the benediction of Allah encircle forever!"

Knecht listened silently. One had to endure these bizarre and lengthy perorations. He would get down to business presently.

"Touching on the rifles, Ya Sidi," went on the tribesman then. "They are of no



*The Commandant paused. "Salut, mes garçons!" Hell's Angels obeyed, dumfounded.*

use to us." He tapped that gourd with the long stem, evidently his powder-horn. "The Beni Abbarat pray, through me their messenger, that the merciful and generous commander of the Roumi will exchange for them four kegs of powder." He held up four fingers to emphasize the number.

Knecht looked at him without a spark of expression on his face. The nerve of the native! A successful raid was a successful raid, in their naïve philosophy. This man saw nothing bizarre in coming here to treat over property that was now theirs. And they would much prefer four kegs of powder. Of course, from his point of view! The Lébels, without cartridges, were just so much useless plunder, but the long guns were always hungry for more powder. However, they made a good basis of exchange.

A man not used to dealing with tribesmen would have told him to go to the devil, then and there; but Knecht was more subtle than that. Besides, he had caught an appealing glance from the Count. It was an opening for that expiation of his, however in the name of God he would manage it!

"Good," he answered. "My salutes to Sidi Bou Nzala, the illustrious, the Caïd el Abbarat, the favored of Allah."—Knecht rolled off a whole string of honorifics, beating the tribesman at his own game. "This man will go with you to count the tally of the rifles." He indicated Di Piatti, who returned a grateful look for the chance. Game was the Count; he had good prospects of never coming out of it alive, but it was meat to his damaged soul. Ike looked on, disturbed and hungry to get into it too. He tried to catch the Commandant's eye but seemed to be ignored.

THE tribesman's eyes gleamed. A hostage! All the better. He looked at the eager Ike and then at the Commandant. Two of them would suit him better yet. And there was still that little matter of mak-

ing the exchange without possibilities of violence on both sides. They had thought that out, evidently, for:

"Let the four kegs be placed on the *gara* of the Teniet el Telghemt," said the tribesman. "We will bring the rifles there. Your man will signal that the tally of the carabines is true. Then each takes his own and departs in the peace of Allah."

Again the nerve of him! "Each takes his own!"—those rifles had been stolen from the Légion only the night before!

Knecht pawed his beard and considered. These *garas* would be called mesas in America. They were flat table-tops of rock in these stratified hills, isolated by water action. That well known *gara* in the defile of El Telghemt would be entirely commanded by long guns during the exchange! It was going to be difficult to get back *both* the rifles and the powder without a pitched battle on the mesa top—in which his own party of men would be annihilated by sniper fire, with no chance of getting off the mesa burdened with about a hundred and fifty rifles. But that powder was kept at the *poste* for serving out to friendly *goums* and Knecht had no idea of giving it away to their traditional enemies. There was much guerrilla warfare contained in those four kegs!

"It is agreed," he said finally. "On the *gara,* then. Four kegs in exchange for our rifles. This man shall signal us that the tally is complete. When the sun is over Ari Aïachi shall be the time." Knecht waved an arm in the general direction of that snowy peak to the west, twelve thousand feet to its summit and dominating the valley. It was a sun dial that the tribesman could not mistake, as he surely would any such abstraction as four o'clock.

They were parting, with more honorifics and more smiles behind the enmity—and Ike's urgent signals to be allowed to go along too had brought nothing but a swift frown from the Commandant.

THE minute they were gone, Knecht's whole attitude changed. He had sprung for a clothes-closet and out of it was hurling at Ike a *burnous,* and oaken stave, a *gandourah,* sandals. "Follow, my cowboy!" he hissed energetically. "Get off your puttees. Bare legs, remember! You have your automatic?"

"Shore, sir! Turnin' Ay-rab for the pesky Count, am I?" grinned Ike as he shifted swiftly into the disguise.

"Keep them in sight. I'm sending others after you. We'll have a chain of spies back to the *poste, ma foi!* You have a helio glass?"

"Yessir. Send Criswell next arter me, Commandant. He talks the lingo," said Ike, rising to his feet. "Ready, sir!"

He made a fine sheik, did Ike, with his tall stature and black eyes and bony bare legs under the ragged *burnous.* With his staff he could go anywhere in these hills without comment. And they had the sun for signaling. A party with grenades could even take the *bordj* holding those rifles if guided by the chain of scouts. Knecht could not spare the few armed men he had left from the post, but he could send on a storming-party. Ike felt that the situation had delightful possibilities in it.

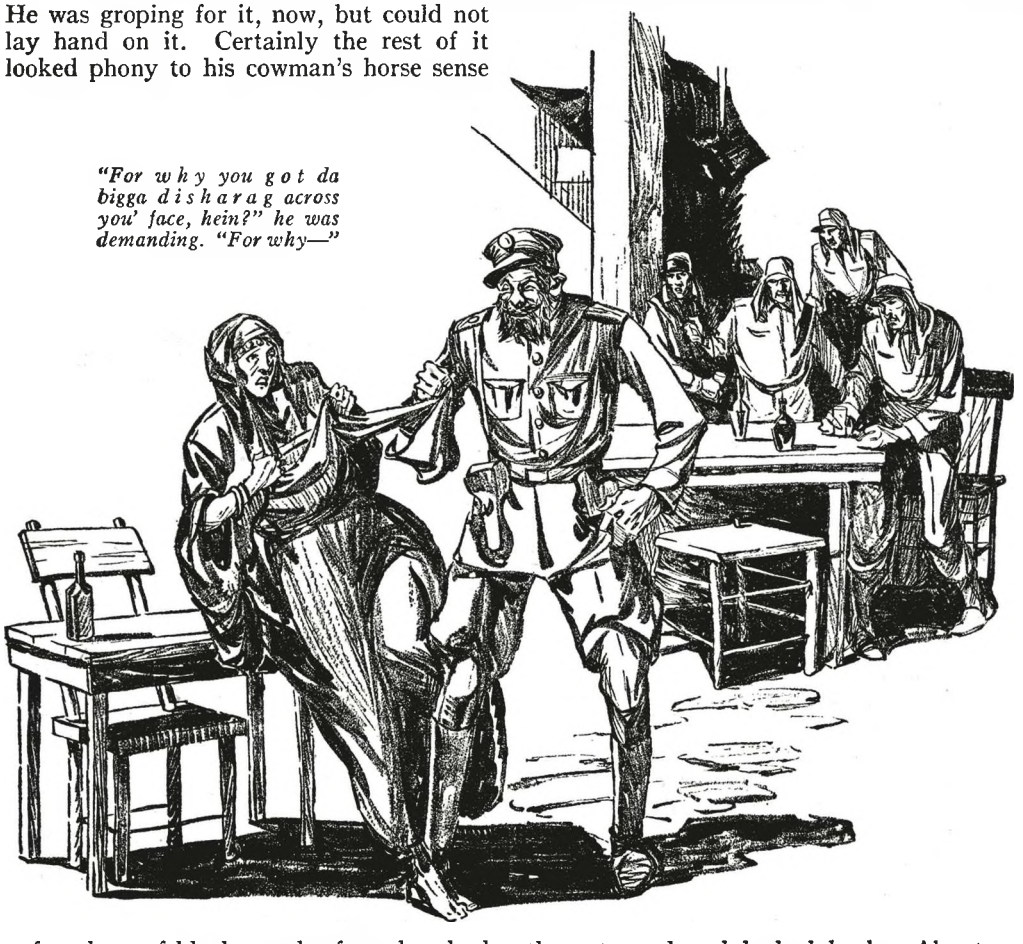
"Di Piatti's safety first, my Buffalo Bill!" cautioned Knecht in parting. "Do nothing till you are sure of him. The rest is for your fertile invention. I shall act here as I receive reports. After you and Di Piatti have located the rifles— *Alors,* God protect you—and him!"

They were shaking hands. The Count's *cafard* seemed forgotten entirely in that emotional moment. It was nothing but a prank, compared to the stark courage he was showing them now. God only knew what the tribesmen would do with him when they got him within their gates!

ALONG the military road to Rich, Ike set out. It was easy to keep Mr. Dee and his tribesman guide in sight. They were about a mile ahead, visible for long intervals on this mountain road that went up and down grades in great loops and bends as it wound through the hills. Ike himself would attract no suspicious attention, for he had plenty of company, the usual native road-travelers, pattering donkeys with panniers of vegetables for the fort, pilgrims to Fez, the Holy City four hundred miles to the north, occasional caravans of thirty and forty camels bearing the famous Tifalelt date. He greeted these travelers gruffly.

Ike ruminated on the theft as one kilometer stone after another was left astern. It was no casual thing, but had been planned for the night of the concert, he decided—and Criswell would have been murdered for his key by one of those "friendly" mountaineers loafing within the walls if the Count had not got hold of it under that prankish impulse. The ladder

was there, a native contraption of bamboo that had been hauled over the wall. There must have been a gang of them outside. And two camels could have carried all that load of rifles. But Ike felt that there was a hole in the scheme somewhere. He was groping for it, now, but could not lay hand on it. Certainly the rest of it looked phony to his cowman's horse sense



*"For why you got da bigga disharag across you' face, hein?" he was demanding. "For why—"*

—four kegs of black powder for a hundred and fifty good Lébels!

"Nope!" said Ike. "She don't look right to this ol' hoss-thief! Why didn't they try for a few ca'tridges? The magazine's jist under the armory."

One went down a stair and came to a locked door. The Commandant had the key to that. As ammunition in hot countries deteriorates rapidly, either Knecht or Lieutenant Ressot for him visited it daily and made powder tests with the index samples. That door had stopped the rifle thieves. Or perhaps the few men in the armory had had only time enough to pass out the rifles and get them up that ladder before Criswell came back. Anyhow, they couldn't have missed the location of that magazine. Nope, there might be more to this than just an exchange of rifles for black powder, Ike decided cannily. . . . .

The Count and his guide were turning off the road to the right. Ike noted the nearest kilometer-stone to them and then stopped and looked back. About a mile down the road was a species of walking hogshead draped with a *burnous*. There was no mistaking Criswell—he was bigger than any Arab who ever wore sandals! The second of Knecht's *liaison* chain. Ike marked an arrow on the road for him and then took to the rocks, for he could not follow now where that guide could look back and see him.

A goat-path led upward irregularly around that immense promontory that abutted on the road. Ike went along it hurriedly. There were flocks of goats and sheep tended by lethargic shepherds. A pastoral region; leather, cheese, and plunder were its three principal industries. The turn of the mountain revealed an

ascending gorge below, with a grim stone *bordj* at the head of it. Others of these mountain citadels were perched on inaccessible ridges all about, just as high as they could get. Ike discovered the Count and his guide trailing up a footpath in the bottom of the ravine. He stopped and effaced himself in cover. No use going on, since his vision now commanded everything in this valley.

It was a typical mountain lair. The *bordjs* might have been medieval castles, out of which sallied armed men when plunder was afoot. Goats fed on the slopes; an occasional donkey was being ridden somewhere; women were toiling along the trails with water-jars. Ike shook his head over the Count's chances.

"Bozo, if this trade business is jest a ruse, what wont they do to *you!*" muttered Ike as the pair continued mounting up toward that *bordj*. The mountaineers were pouring out of their castle now, about thirty of them. They all wore the same brown *gandourah* of camel's hair—but what was electrifying was that each man had a short Lébel strapped on his back instead of their usual long gun! Ike drew his glasses to find out if there were bandoliers too. No; they probably had a few cartridges apiece, though. Ike grunted his conviction that they had no intention of giving up those rifles. This whole business of sending in that imperturbable messenger was some obscure scheme for raiding the post again for its ammunition!

And the Count's reception was not reassuring. They gathered about him and the messenger; then all were roaring with laughter, derision. Ike could see the tiny figures holding sides, jeering, pointing at Mr. Dee with bent knees and doubled-over bodies, capering about with glee. The pantomime was unmistakable! Then he was being slapped and kicked and was presently seized and dragged within the *bordj* by a brutal party of guards.

IKE looked about, disturbed and uneasy. He was Knecht's eyes, now, and the eyes were seeing things that did not jibe in the least with that agreement for exchange! Those rifles had not been piled anywhere as useless metal; they had already been distributed. And all they lacked was—cartridges! Ike wondered what scheme the Commandant had devised by way of counter-plot. Whatever it was it would be wrong; in fact, it would fall in exactly with the tribesmen's plans for another raid. Knecht had been neatly tricked, whatever he did!

Ike heard a low whistle behind him, and Criswell came up on his answering signal. He had caught up while Ike had been observing, and announced: "Jeff's back near the road, Sergeant; Anzac Bill's halfway atween him and the *poste*. Anything to report? Jeff can helio it back if there is."

"Waal, it don't look so good, Jim," began Ike as they crouched together in the bushes. "Them birds is wearin' our rifles, right now. They haint no idee of givin' them up, nohow! They just gave the Count the grand laugh up yander, and then they hustles him into that *bordj*. Pore wop! Thinks I, they aint goin' to be no trade of powder-kegs over on that *gara* this afternoon! —What's Knecht doin'?" Ike broke off to ask.

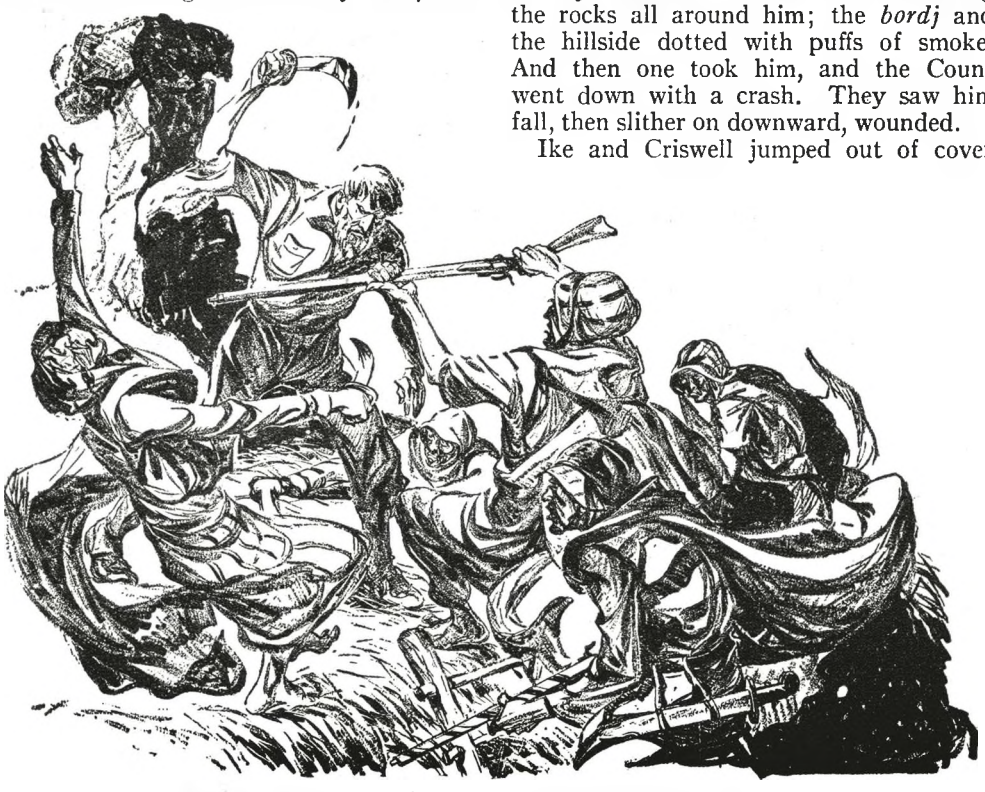
"Slick scheme! He's taken most of the outfit to that *gara*. Hortet and twenty picked grenade-men has the kegs. The idee is to bust 'em with a rush on them rifles, while the rest of the boys piles up out of ambush and arms theyselves in the scrimmage. They has plenty cartridges. They'll have no trouble fightin' their way back to the *poste*. Ressot's holding that, with twenty-five men what still has rifles."

"My Gawd!" ejaculated Ike, distressed. "See their game, Jim? Jist what they want! Get Knecht an' most o' the outfit over to the *gara* three miles away, then rush the *poste*. Take a message quick! Jeff to Anzac Bill: 'Tell Ressot to recall Knecht. Hold every man at the *poste*. Gara scheme a ruse to raid us for ammunition. They've got the rifles on them.' Got that, Jim? Tell Jeff to come hyar when he's through. Us birds gotta do what we kin for the crazy dago—"

He was interrupted by a forceful, "*Cripes!* Look at the *bordj*, Ike!" from Criswell. "He's gone *cafard* this time an' no mistake! *Lookit* him!"

Over on the *bordj* roof an eruption of tiny whirling figures were battling like demons. A forked atom of a lone Légionaire leaped and slashed in their midst, all over the roof, lunging and parrying, in bright steel flashes, with a yataghan Mr. Dee had got hold of somehow. It was a mad and desperate dash for freedom, but it could have but one ending. Ike had not realized the frenzy of mind the Count must be in. His own conjectures were but a shrewd guess; the Count knew for a cer-

tainty, and—just like him—it had driven him to this mad attempt to escape at any cost! They watched him with pent breaths. He had the reputation of being the best swordsman in the Italian army, and was showing it brilliantly now, but there were too many of them and more kept pouring up on the roof. The only reason he was not shot down was that he was valuable as ransom.



*A lone Légionaire leaped and slashed in their midst, lunging and parrying.*

Criswell had all he could do to keep Ike from jumping up, then and there, and giving away the whole show in some equally mad dash to his rescue. Futile! And that message wasn't sent yet, correct guess or not, he kept reminding the frantic Ike. And then Mr. Dee made a last furious attack where they had him cornered in an angle of the roof, then turned and dropped swiftly off the wall. It was a twenty-five-foot drop, but he made it without a broken leg, and was running like a moose along the opposite hillside. Even then he was miles within a hostile country and hadn't a chance in the world—for rifles began to pop and men were waving and yelling from the roof to those outside below.

The Count sprinted on, leaping downward in a long slant for the protection of the ravine. It was a magnificent gesture that was worth a medal, knowing what he knew! All alone he was attempting it, that dash to warn the garrison somehow, at any sacrifice! Bullets were streaking the rocks all around him; the *bordj* and the hillside dotted with puffs of smoke. And then one took him, and the Count went down with a crash. They saw him fall, then slither on downward, wounded.

Ike and Criswell jumped out of cover in a single yell. They had no time for that message now! They were in a race against a dozen mountaineers who were running down at top speed to recapture him. They opened fire with both automatics as they reached the bottom of the ravine, and were fired at in return, but that pause was in their favor, for they got to the Count fifty yards ahead, and the rush on him stopped, at bay.

Criswell worked over Mr. Dee while Ike drove the nearest of his assailants to cover. His leg smashed, Mr. Dee lay groaning and unconscious; he was going to be a difficult burden to get out of here with. But they had respite for a few minutes, while the astonished tribesmen were shouting at them in Arabic from cover. They were still puzzled over these two obvious goatherds rushing to the aid of this infidel dog—and firing on the tribesmen with Roumi pistols to boot!

Criswell got the leg dressed with his first-aid, then started the retreat by dragging Mr. Dee farther down the ravine. Ike kept his post, a spare clip ready in his left hand. The automatic still held six shots, but they were firing into his lair again now. Soon there would be a concerted rush, and it would be all up with him. Gloom! Ike did not see how any of them were ever going to get out of this. Even three, in this valley of hostiles, were hardly any better than one! Rejoin Criswell and dig in, decided Ike. They could do that anyhow.

He rose and fired at as many heads as he could see, demobilized two of them, and then turned and made a six-foot jump down into the ravine bottom. And there a bullet took him, spun him around, flung him with a crash against the rocks.

Ike grabbed for his left shoulder and lurched on. "Praise Gawd, 'twarn't me shootin' wing!" he muttered, and stumbled on down into Criswell's arms. They were among massive boulders here, stream-bed rocks that no torrent could move. It was a protection that would take some smoking out; but it was also in the bottom of nowhere. They would all pass out, right here, eventually, without ever a chance of communicating with Knecht's chain of helio men! Ike admitted that thought was about right while Criswell was dressing the flesh-wound in his shoulder.

Criswell grunted stolidly. "Maybe, Ike. It's a cinch, though, I aint goin' to leave you two. Give a hand with the wop, and we'll work farther down. They'll git below us if we wait here."

SOLID sense, as usual with Criswell. They made a progress over huge and smooth boulders for two bends down, then were stopped by the smash of a bullet from below that pelted them with chips and flew screeching off into space. Criswell lunged into a cranny between two great stratified slabs, dragging the inert Count and Ike with him. "World series is over, Ike!" he smiled grimly. "That one sure busted our little rally! You tell 'em!"

It meant that Criswell was out of further ideas for the present, and depression claimed Ike. It was added to by the Count's coming to and beginning to plead, right off: "Leave me, boys! One of you go climb da hill, queek! Please, please! Beeg *rezzou* on da *poste!* They leave one hour ago!" He was feverish, and there was no quieting him. Ike felt a helpless desperation possessing him as he fitted that fact into the rest of it. One hour ago! Why, they were near the *poste* right now! And Knecht away with most of the battalion at the *gara*—and Ressot with only twenty-five men to defend it—by God, he and Criswell too would go *cafard* unless something was done about it!

"Ladders!" raved Mr. Dee. "All our rifles! Now our ammunition! Let me go, Sergeant Ike! *I* go! I crawl! I creep! Up da hill! *Queek!*"

Gosh, he was hard to hold! And the fire that was animating him, even in a semi-delirium, was spreading to both Ike and Criswell. There sure was no stopping the wop! And at any cost, it was their duty to get up that hill where they might be able to helio Jeff back near the road.

"Come on, Jim!" said Ike solemnly. "One of us goes, then t'other. If neither makes it, then that's that! Me first. You're a whole man and can help him up if I git any kind of cover."

THEY had gathered, from Mr. Dee's mutterings, that it was straight goods, all right. He had been jeered at, spat upon, cuffed—and told the whole ruse. And then, in the *bordj* court, the madness of desperation had seized him and he had snatched a yataghan and made for the roof up its stone sentry-steps. The rest they had seen.

Ike loaded in his spare clip and said good-by to Criswell. It was almost certain death to venture out of that crack in the rocks. The tribesmen had them surrounded and were simply—waiting. Something would emerge from that burrow presently!

And then the familiar whip-crack of a Lébel rang out up on the hillside above, and Ike paused. "That way covered too?" his eyes asked Criswell's hopelessly. Mr. Dee was beginning to struggle again. "Up da hill!" he moaned, fretfully urgent as ever.

"Yass, purty soon, old-timer!" Ike soothed him. That way was closed, though, and he and Criswell were at their wits end. Again the Lébel rang out, and this time a groan and a crash in the bushes right near them answered it. They heard that, mystified. Who in hell was—

*"Whop-po! Shootin', what?"* called out a cheerful voice above—Jeff's! Ike and Criswell punched each other with glee. Trust an Englishman to muddle right into a thing like this! Jeff had evidently got lonesome, had heard all the firing, and had decided to come and investigate!

"I say, are you there, Sergeant?" came the voice again. "Poisonous row, what?"

"For God's sake, lay low, Jeff!" whooped Ike in reply through cupped hands. If they got *him,* the last chance for communication was gone!

"Listen, Jeff—" he began earnestly, and then all hell broke loose in that valley. Recklessly the tribesmen broke from cover, their rifles whipping and cracking. There was just one man up there, but he and his rifle commanded every attempt to creep up on the Roumi in the rock crevice, and they were out to get him. They went over the stream-bed like a pack of hounds as Ike and Criswell leaped out to the attack. It was a running fight uphill, both automatics blazing, the steady *whang—whang—whang!* from Jeff up above, like a man puffing a pipe, cool and nonchalant as ever.

And Mr. Dee was with them, hand-and-knees, any old how, weeping and swearing his persistent: "Up! Up! *Up!* Must be!—Helio da *poste!*"

They reached Jeff and between them broke that attack. Once more the Beni Abbarat had taken to cover. Ike was content to stop and consider what to do next, but the Count would not stay with them. He was headed for the ridge above and begging: "Up! Time is everything now, Sergeant—I beg!" He was crawling on impetuously. As he would get shot presently, Jeff said: "Cheerio! He's balmy, but we've got to cover him, what?"

Ike explained him the situation as the three followed. After a time they had reached the crest of the ridge and were over it. And up there Ike sat for a moment, stupefied. Across the intervening peaks and ridges was the *poste* itself, in a direct air line, a tiny white cube of masonry some five miles off!

"You see?" grinned the Count. "I note it from the *bordj* slopes! This hill-crest alone in the way. Queek, Sergeant, your helio mirror!"

NOW the gang exploded with delight. Not one of them had realized the significance of this hill, that it might command a wide prospect of the rugged Atlas landscape! But the Count had, from the heights around that *bordj.* No wonder it had driven him into a berserk frenzy when coupled with that jeering information! It explained, too, his craze to get up this hill, leg or no leg. Brainy devil, that Count!

They pounded him with the rough enthusiasm of soldiers, and then Ike helioed the fort direct.

They were not in what followed—being occupied in carrying Mr. Dee out of an unsafe neighborhood—but they saw and heard it a-plenty. Knecht made a forced march direct from the *gara.* They saw his column crossing the road a couple of miles down when they reached the next ridge. And they heard his smashing attack on the rear of that mass of Beni Abbarat that burst whooping on the fort out of the gorge El Hamra—the Red Gorge. Its name acquired an additional hue that day! For the *poste* was ready for them with machine-guns planted on its walls, and Knecht's grenade attack on their rear settled it. The battalion got back its rifles, with about a hundred captured mountaineers thrown in!

IKE brought in their wounded *cafard* and appeared with him before the Commandant that evening. "Hyar he is, Giner'l, crazy as ever!" announced Ike, grinning. "Danged ef he didn't put another one over on us birds, too! 'Twas him what got us up that hill where we could signal the *poste!*" And Ike told it graphically.

Knecht eyed the culprit with the appreciation of one leader for another. "Eh? Ah, son of Italy—that will have his joke on the battalion when Balbuti is careless with my *tenue de campaign!*" he began with that quizzical tone when entirely delighted with one of his men. "And he has one devil of a *cafard* when he learns that his Commandant is tricked and the poste doomed! *Oui!* The *cafard* that snatches the one chance, if it means to fight through a whole tribe of experts with the yataghan! Eh, Sergeant Ike? Now, a man who is poor in spirit, who has not the little devil in him, would have done—*nothing!* Eh, Sergeant Ike? But this one *voilà,* he wins yet another palm to his Croix for his *cafard!*"

The Count lay on the stretcher before him, feverish, haggard, his eyes like coals. He managed a sort of salute; but there was still appeal in those burning, imperious, almost Napoleonic eyes. Knecht was quick to guess what he wanted—reinstatement, right now, before the battalion, most of whom knew all about his escapade of the night before but nothing of his expiation. Di Piatti was game to go through with it; wanted to, before the doctors got him.

"*Now!*" barked Knecht. "Sound for parade, Sergeant Ike! We decorate this last *cafard!*"

# MOUNTAIN MEN

*High in the Sierras this exciting drama of the 1929 West—of conflict between Forest Ranger, cattle-men and homesteaders—develops with increasing power.*

*The Story So Far:*

DUSK was falling over the high Sierras that June first when Tom Cook, district ranger for the Inyo Forest, looked up as a young man knocked at the open door.

Gordon Breck was the name the newcomer gave, and he wanted a job—preferably the job of Jim Cotter, who had been found murdered not long before.

"Cotter and I were pretty close friends in college," Breck explained. "And in the war he—did a big thing for me. I owe him something. I'm looking for the man who killed him."

Cook's gray brows lifted. "Know the man, do you?"

"He's one of a certain gang. I do know that."

"How?"

Breck drew a letter from his coat pocket, folded it at one paragraph and stood up to switch on a light. "This is the last word I had from Cotter, seven months ago. I'll read a part.

" 'There's something brewing up here, Gordon. A white-mule outfit is making straight poison for all the country; but that's out of my department. I did make one arrest. The fellow was freed and back here in less than a week. All I got out of the deal was an enemy. But when a gang of men find they can get away with one law, they throw down all of them. Things have been happening—too much to tell you in a letter. I'm going out tomorrow on a live hunch and hope to know the facts by night!' " Breck folded the letter.

"Cotter was killed that day," he said quietly, "as near as I can figure it."

Breck got the job—and at once got into trouble also. For he attended a cowboy dance that night in town, and was much taken with Louise Temple, a typical ranch-country girl who had been running her

*One rider, racing at an angle in front, turned in his saddle and fired a last shot. Breck felt a slash of fire along his cheek.*

## *By* H. C. WIRE

Illustrated by W. O. Kling

father's outfit since he had been crippled. Art Tillson, youngest of the Tillson clan,—leaders of the tough element in the region,—resented Breck's attentions to Louise, and a fight followed that only ended when the place caught fire.

Next day Breck started up into the mountain forest with an old ranger called Sierra Slim as his instructor in the season's first work of repairing trails and telephone lines. An attempt was made to shoot Breck from ambush as he rode alone one day; and later as Breck lay concealed in a cabin loft, he overheard a quarrel between the Tillson brothers, when Art reported that his bullet had purposely missed Breck. "I aint shootin' in the back like you do!" Art retorted, when Hep Tillson, second of the brothers, sneered at his marksmanship.

Shortly thereafter the forest was opened for grazing, and the neighboring ranchmen appeared with their stock. Each was allowed a definite number of cattle, and it was Breck's job to count them as they were driven in. Each ranchman tried to exceed his allotment, and feeling ran high against Breck when he refused them. Louise Temple told him:

"I am allowed six hundred head on my permit, but I think there are seven hundred."

Breck turned with a short laugh. "I can let you have six hundred—and twenty for good measure, as we've allowed the others."

"And what about the other eighty?"

Breck shrugged.

"My, aren't you a hard-boiled ranger!"

"Very!" he agreed.

*(The story continues in detail:)*

AS the day wore on, Breck saw the girl now and again, though he was not near enough to talk.

His mount Kit had gone lame, and Breck obtained one of the pinto, or "paint," ponies for his riding-horse, relegating Kit to the pack-animals.

It was early afternoon when Breck again found himself near Louise, and on a sudden impulse, he joined her.

They had not ridden far together, when she suddenly turned in her saddle, looking up the right cañon bank. Breck followed her eyes. A bunch of animals had left the main drive and were working toward a side coulee.

The girl cupped her hands. "Palo!" An Indian boy started toward her. She waved him to go back, but he only halted. The strays swung up the coulee at a run. "Oh, Lord!" Her horse sprang beneath her and raced upward behind the cattle.

IN order to circle around and get in front of them she must jump a narrow creek that had cut its steep banks along the coulee bottom. Breck watched as she dashed to the stream's edge. The horse refused to make the leap there. She forced him farther on and back to the bank again. He hesitated an instant, lost momentum in that wavering, and when he sprang, legs clawing the air, his rush was spent. His belly struck the opposite rim. He reared, hind feet in the stream, forefeet pawing at the bank top for one tense second before he became overbalanced backward and fell.

Breck dropped his pack-line and wheeled his pinto Dan toward the coulee. He saw Louy slip from the saddle and hurl herself across to the rim from which she had started. The falling horse missed her.

Breck's breath escaped in a thankful gasp. Then his eye caught a black shape flashing through the pines along the cañon bank. The Indian boy had sent his dog—was yelling at him now to come back, but too late. The black beast circled the herd, turned them, sent them down as he raced in, with jaws snapping at the raggards.

Breck was not conscious of gauging distance. He only knew that the first of the steers was still above Louise. He lashed his horse toward her, saw there was no time to help her mount, and swung to the ground with the red flood not fifty yards away. They came in a wedge, a huge white face in the lead. That was his target. He fired twice, and the steer felt.

Others behind that one parted, but only for a few steps. Dan danced from the oncoming lines and snorted at the carcass in front of him. With one arm, Breck held the girl between his body and the horse's flank and as the drive poured about him, fought to shield her from the crush. The first wave passed—hoofs pounded within a yard of his feet; shaggy red coats brushed him; tossing horns grazed within a hand's breadth of his back. Then came one brute that would not give over.

His low broad shoulder charged into Dan's, swung out a little from the impact, then raked on full length of the horse. Breck pushed out against it. The shoulder-bone missed him, but he caught the whole force of the puffed barrel. His arms yielded. He was crushing the girl's body. For an instant it seemed they were being mashed together. The steer rushed on.

"Louise?" Breck gasped.

She raised her head, but was speechless. Seeing the pallor of her face, he forgot his own bruises in sudden fear. He put her upon Dan, mounted the saddle himself and lifted her into his arms. Gently he ran his fingers down her side.

"Nothing broken," she whispered. "But I'm—I'm pretty sick." She relaxed and lay back against his breast.

Before he had reached the drive another rider raced up, reining his horse in suddenly. "What's happened here?" he demanded. "Louy, you hurt?"

Breck looked over the top of the girl's head into Art Tillson's arrogant eyes. "She's had a little trouble. I'm taking her to Rock House."

"The hell you are! If she's hurt, I'll go back with her to Temple's camp."

Breck rode on. "I don't think it's that serious. Anyway, my station is closest."

Art drew in his horse and shifted to one stirrup. His mouth tightened with swift fury. "I—"

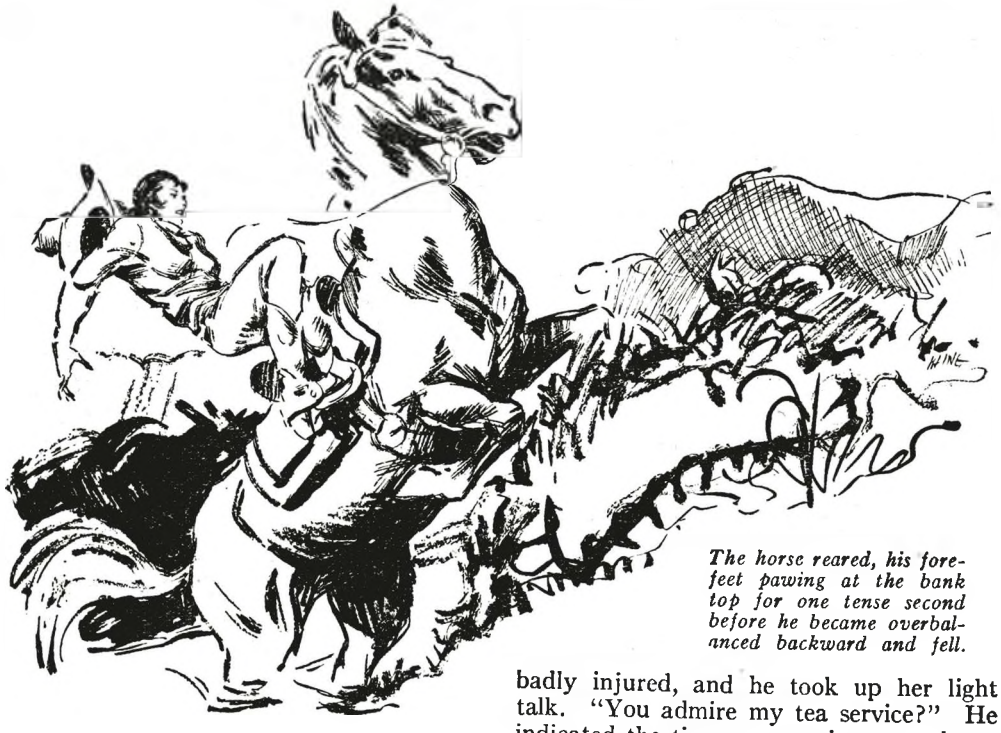
"Save it!" Breck cut in. "This is no time for a row!"

Half a dozen other men rode up. Breck repeated the same thing. "Not badly hurt. I'm taking her to Rock House." Then gathering up his packs, he herded them onto a ridge and down the crest until they were ahead of the drive. Coming again to the bottom of Long Cañon, he sent Dan homeward at a fast walk.

AN hour later they passed the narrow entrance to Rock House Meadow. Abruptly the wide bowl spread before them. Emerald-green grass sloped up to the dark pine rim, and at the western edge stood the cabin. If there had ever been a rock house, it had crumbled back into granite of the range, for this one was of logs, high peaked, windows painted in the first glow of sunset.

Louise glanced up, speaking for the first time. "Looks awfully good to me—and you must be dead."

"No, I'm all right." Breck approached the cabin with a queer mingling of thoughts. It was his station, his home. But he had never pictured himself riding to it with a girl in his arms. . . . .



*The horse reared, his forefeet pawing at the bank top for one tense second before he became overbalanced backward and fell.*

He unlocked the one room, spread a canvas on the boxed pine-needle bunk inside, and placed the girl there.

"Keep quiet awhile," he advised her. "You were pretty badly jolted in your fall, and then that steer—" He paused, gingerly feeling his own sides. "They look like balloons—but Lord, they're hard!"

He built a fire in the stove, brought in a kettle of water from the stream, then left her while he went out to take off his packs. When he returned, bringing tea and canned soup for a quick meal, he discovered that even a mountain girl is forever feminine. She was propped up against the end logs rearranging her hair.

They were alone here in the cabin. She thought nothing of it, apparently. But he did, and was a little disturbed for not feeling equally as casual. To hide it, he worked hard at boiling tea water and warming tomato soup; even made toast, holding slices of bread over the wood fire.

With things ready he moved a table over to the bunk and sat opposite her while they ate. She remained silent for some time, until he wondered if the accident had hurt her more than she admitted.

"How do you feel now?" he asked.

She smiled across her tin cup. "Very much a lady. It has been a long time since anyone served me afternoon tea!"

If she could smile like that, she was not badly injured, and he took up her light talk. "You admire my tea service?" He indicated the tin cups, granite-ware plates, knives with wooden handles into which was burned US.

"At least your set is monogrammed," she answered. "Those in our camp are not." She paused, stirring her tea speculatively.

Breck waited. To hear a girl's banter was a pleasant treat. He groped for something of mutual interest to lead her on. "I'm sorry I had to shoot that steer."

Louise shrugged. "Nothing lost. We'll have to have meat for the boys tonight. One steer wont go far with fifty cow-hands."

SHE gave the information without interest. Breck hesitated, then tried again. "How long have you been in this ranch country?"

"Born here. And that was a long time ago—ages. But we don't have to talk cows, nor horses, nor how much it will rain this summer—unless you really want to."

Breck laughed. "What then?"

"Anything!" She spread her hands in a little gesture that bordered on despair. "Anything but me. This toast for example. I didn't know a man could make it less than an inch thick! Where did you learn?"

Sierra had said this girl once studied painting, "As far back as New York City!" Breck deliberately gave the name of a Village club, a gathering place for student artists, where he had often gone with friends—"The Old Soak's Cellar."

She lifted her eyes, color flowed into her cheeks, but she said nothing and turned from him to stare out of the window.

It faced west, down a stringer of the meadow that broke through a narrow notch, framing the triple peaks of the Kaweah's, many miles across the range. Mist of the cañons caught each shade of sunset, violet deepening into vibrant red, and the Kaweah tops themselves rising golden against an opal sky.

The picture was paintable and Breck said so. Louise faced him sharply, lips parted in a breathless question. "You don't —don't paint?"

"No. Sometimes I wish I did. I certainly would paint this range. Why is it so many people study the coast? It is beautiful, but so much the same—always blue water, brown rocks, fans of white surf. But this, out there—look at it!"

She shook her head. "I can't."

Breck averted his eyes from hers, aware that he had probed something deep and painful. He would have turned their talk to something besides pictures, but her own words rushed across to him.

"You may think I'm silly! But you've just expressed what I have always wanted to do—paint the High Sierras. I tried to and had to give it up. . . . .

"Out here I wear a lass'-rope and wear chaps, but I've got an old orange smock down at the ranch—" She broke off, staring at him through the dusk that almost hid her face.

"I think I understand," he said quietly. "You have an old smock—some day you'll go back to it."

"Do you think so? Do you? Oh, if I could believe that!"

With sudden impulse Breck leaned across the table. "You must believe it, Louise."

The girl started. Her dark eyes met his searchingly. "Why?"

At once Breck realized there was no explainable reason for his assurance. He hesitated and Louise spoke first.

Her voice was low and controlled. "I don't know why I talked to you like that. I wish I hadn't met you. Somehow you bring up thoughts I considered buried for good. Please don't invite me to any more tea parties."

Breck said nothing.

She gave a little shrug of impatience, as if to throw off their silence. "No pity, thank you. I didn't fish for that. I'm a ranchwoman now, and I'm going to make money at it. Sometimes I think that's the most important thing anyway."

Breck answered bluntly from the depths of his own experience. "It isn't!"

She leaned back from the table and away from him. Color of excitement had left her cheeks, and her eyes held only their level gaze. "Who are you?" she asked. "Why are you here?"

With regret, Breck felt their warm contact of interest slip away. "I'm a forest ranger," he said, "working at my job."

OUTSIDE a thunder of hoofs sounded from across the meadow. He stood up and opened the door. The drive was coming through the opposite cañon notch, spreading in a great dark wedge over the bowl until the leaders reached the drift fence and halted.

Louise left the bunk and watched beside him. "I guess your job has come," she said, "and mine too."

"I'll turn my cabin over to you tonight," Breck offered. "You'll rest better."

"Don't you think of it. I've learned to rest with my back on a pile of rocks, if only my face is to the stars!" She smiled, adding: "Thanks just the same. An Indian boy is bringing my camp pack. I always spread it near the creek above this station. Cow-hands camp on the meadow."

The boy came before dark, leading a mule and the girl's blue horse. Breck watched her ride upstream until her small figure vanished in a shelter of pine. He felt strangely dissatisfied, as if he had missed something, yet did not know what. Though there was work to be done, his thoughts were more upon this girl.

For two hours, while he moved his possessions into his room, he could hear the rumble of cattle entering the meadow. It was eight o'clock before the last of the drive poured in and cowboys' fires began to pierce the shadows. After arranging his equipment, he turned his pack-animals into the pasture, but kept Dan saddled for the night's patrol.

BY nine full dark had come. He went to the telephone hung in its iron box on a post just outside the cabin door, cranked four rings to call headquarters, and when Cook answered, gave his report. "The drive is in, Dad. I'm going out now and take a swing around."

"All right," the ranger's voice returned. "One circle ought to be enough. Show

yourself in a few camps to let them know you're at it."

Breck hung up, mounted his horse and sat scanning the meadow bowl. Campfires were mostly around the farther end, near where the black mass of cattle lay against the drift fence. His eyes swept around them, then, continuing back of the station, fell upon one alone and not far away. Even as he watched, the light blinked as one figure crossed in front of the flames, then another. He wheeled his horse, stopped. None of his business who was up there. He ought not to see the girl again tonight. But that feeling of dissatisfaction was still upon him, dully irritable. He moved ahead, reasoning he would only ride by on patrol.

At his side the stream talked noisily, human in its wide range of tone, from low guttural voices to silvery laughter. It covered the sound of his horses' hoofs, and also any words that might have come from the camp, until abruptly a man's quick snarl broke through, anger in its very suddenness, a threat in the ensuing silence.

With no hesitation, Breck pushed his horse past the thicket and came into the firelight of the girl's camp. He saw Louise sitting on her saddle, chin propped in both hands, Art Tillson standing before her. Tillson whirled as he approached and on his face was blind, jealous rage.

Breck looked at the girl. "How are you, Louise?"

"She's all right!" Art cut in. "Don't need anything now." With scoffing sarcasm, he added, "Thanks, Ranger, for comin' around!" Then he turned his back expressively.

Louise looked up, but Breck could not read through the shadows upon her face. She might be telling him to go.

"Well?" Art flung up.

Breck dismounted, dropped his reins and looked casually about. The girl had a comfortable camp: bed-roll laid on dry pine needles, a small fire for cooking lighted between two rocks and a larger blaze for warmth. When his eyes turned to Art Tillson, he saw a set determination come across the boy's face.

"If you've been sneakin' around," Art blurted, "I suppose you heard what I said just now."

Breck had heard only indistinct words and the heated retort, but replied: "If you don't want the whole meadow to know your business, don't yell so loud."

ART took a step toward him with fists doubled. "All right, I meant what you heard. Suppose we settle it right here! Just take off your badge and I'll muss up that smooth face of yours. There aint anyone to pull the lights out on us like they did down below. We'll go through with it."

Breck guessed what he was supposed to have overheard. Some jealous boast before Louise. He looked at young Tillson, more amused than angry. There was little enough to be jealous about. Even if there were a good reason, what could be settled by a fist-fight?

Louise stood up. He shifted his glance to her, met her eyes and searched them, yet felt nothing in their level gaze.

"Look here, Art," he said at last, "you and I have nothing to settle with fists. One of us gets whipped tonight—tomorrow things are back where we started."

"Yeah, but some one hereabouts would know who's the best man!"

Breck laughed. "She can probably tell you that without a battle. And if you want to ask her I'll be on my way." He paused, one foot lifted to his stirrup. "Just one thing: don't say you backed me down. You'd have to prove that later."

Art shrugged indifferently. Argument had cooled him somewhat and had drawn the flush of rage from his face. He rolled a cigarette, also went to his horse and picked up the reins.

"You're pretty good at talkin', Mister," he flung back. "I guess I'll have to go packin' a dictionary instead of a six-gun!"

He mounted in a lithe spring, doffed his hat to Louise, let his horse rear once and dashed away, proudly erect and showing his full sense of victory.

As Breck reached the saddle, Louise crossed the firelight and looked up with grave eyes. "You did a fine thing just now, Gordon Breck, and I thank you for it. Don't consider why I say so—you might only make a wrong guess."

WITH that she turned away, and Breck rode from her camp. She had thanked him for keeping out of trouble with Art. She had thanked him for Art's sake! In spite of her asking him not to, he did consider why she had said it, and guessed the only thing possible. She was in love with the boy. He shook off a stab of jealousy. Why shouldn't she be? Art was handsome, hot-headed, looking for trouble

most of the time, but no fool. Probably would make something of the cattle business if he had the chance. He wondered if Louise knew about the other business. Of course she did.

Truth came suddenly. She knew and was trying to pull him out!

Breck tried to turn his thoughts to other matters. He guided his horse along a ridge above the meadow, dipped into a cañon, climbed again with lights winking below and the forest a black roof overhead.

Why shouldn't she pull young Tillson out? Why shouldn't she love him?

His hands dropped to the saddle-horn, he spoke as if between two selves. "What's this to you? You didn't come for a girl!"

He had ridden preoccupied, with sight dimmed by visions of a small dark face, until now, abruptly, something pulled him back to his job. His horse, going for a time unguided, with keen instinct had followed fresh marks that would have been undiscovered from the saddle.

Breck's first warning was an odor of dust and sweat that pierced the fragrance of pine. He halted, peering ahead. The ridge had come to a short notch, with Rock House Meadow down on the left and a stringer of grass running into broken, wooded country to the right. Wind was blowing across it, bearing that unmistakable stench of cows, though there was no sound of their movement. But when he rode out on the strip of grass, where trees parted and starlight filtered through, the tracks of many animals were easily seen.

He followed in the direction they had gone, saw the stringer begin to widen, with pines swinging away and a stream forming itself from boggy ground, then came suddenly to the edge of a small pothole meadow. A black huddle of steers showed against the grass.

Breck approached slowly, circling to pick up the night rider. The animals were too well-quieted to be alone. He shifted in his saddle, and then like a trumpet-blare in the silence, an old cow bawled at him.

TUMULT followed. White faces swung in his direction, horns tossed above the dark mass. It moved suddenly, like a great pool beginning to whirl.

Breck spurred Dan upward to prevent the drive from going over the saddle. Simultaneously a rider broke from herd and dashed into the nearest pines. Breck raced after him. Blackness of forest closed in. He could hear the other horse scrambling over rock, tried to follow, came to a granite wall. A game trail must be there, but it was a blind thing, and he knew the folly of attempting to go farther. Besides a stampede was starting in the meadow.

He wheeled, cut back across the upper end as a wave of cattle reached it, and plunging into them, turned the rush downward. Once on the move they were easily handled. As they quieted to a walk, he flashed a light over the flanks of those nearest. The brands were varied, yet one appeared on more than half the lot: JGJ. Satisfied, he fell back, pushed the bunch rapidly down the cañon and in an hour shoved them into the main herd at Rock House.

Campfires still glowed there. He rode into one close by, swung off and squatted with half a dozen cow-hands.

A gray-whisker offered greetings for the lot. "Howdy, Ranger." At once he turned to the boy at his side. "Cut off a steak, Dud, and stick it on the fire. Reckon you're hungry, aint you, Ranger?"

"Thanks," said Breck, "but I ate awhile ago." And to the boy, "Don't bother, son." He traded news a moment before asking, "Whose outfit is the JGJ?"

He could feel the swift glances shot up at him, though when he turned all seemed concentrated on watching the flames.

"JGJ? That's Jackson. John G. Looking for old John G., are you?"

"Yes," Breck answered. "I'd like to see him. Camped near here?"

A lean worn figure pointed into the night. "Yonder. See a fire next that rock? That's him."

Breck did not rise at once, wanting the companionship of these men and a share in their talk. But none spoke; no one looked his way. Presently a cowboy stood up, went to a bed-roll and began to pull off his boots. Another followed.

"Well," said Breck, moving over to his horse, "sorry I wasn't hungry. Thanks again."

After he had ridden a short distance from camp, he looked back. The two cowboys had left their bed-rolls and were returning to the fire.

He found J. G. Jackson sitting with his back against a granite boulder, alone, a gray-haired veteran of the cow country, hard-faced in the flicker of firelight. But when he dismounted and came close to the man, that hardness was gone. Lines were

*She was in the middle of the drive, cutting out with the best of the punchers, in effortless ease.*

there, cut deep into his brown face and about his eyes, yet they were the marks of determination mingled with a slow easy humor. Breck at once placed him in a class with Dad Cook. Not a man to cross, yet one that could be approached openly.

HIS greeting was the same. "Howdy, Ranger. Have you et?"

Breck sat down across the fire from him, laughing. "This sure is a well-fed country. I've just turned down one meal."

"Aint no call for a man to go hungry up here." Jackson paused over lighting his pipe. "No matter who he is."

For a moment Breck hated the thought of duty. Here was friendliness, a time for listening to an old-timer's yarns. Devil take the bawling cows! Yet the job drove him.

"Jackson," he said, "I just brought down more than a hundred head from the saddle."

The old man's eyes twinkled over his pipe bowl. "That so? Hell! You oughtn't to have took the trouble."

"I guess they're strays," said Breck.

"Yeah, I reckon so."

"With a night rider behind them."

Jackson put down his pipe. "Meanin' which?"

"They were being shoved out of Rock House before the count."

"Any of my stuff among 'em?"

"More than half the bunch."

A low chuckle rumbled from the cowman. "By the Lord! That was better than I thought." He ended suddenly, squinted hard, then asked, "You mean you brought 'em back? Look here, Ranger, I've got a thousand head yonder in the meadow. My permit calls for eight hundred and fifty. Somebody's figures has got to be wrong."

"Not this year," Breck replied. "Don't blame me, Jackson. I'm following orders, that's all. But tomorrow I'm bound to go by the count."

"Just how come," Jackson demanded slowly, "this sudden stickin' to rule?"

"Too many rules being broken in these mountains, I suppose," Breck offered. "I'm new, but Cook's old in the game, and he must know what he's about. We have to start somewhere. As far as we can do it, rules are going to be enforced to the letter."

Jackson surveyed him speculatively. "All of 'em? That includes the Sulphur country?"

"Along with the rest."

"Well," said Jackson flatly, "I don't believe it. You'll count us poor devils on our cattle but when it comes to law enforcin' in other parts, that's another thing. They've got money!"

"There's no answer to that," Breck admitted, "except, wait and see. You have my word for it, and if you don't know me, you do know Cook."

Jackson nodded. "Cook was a cattleman once," he said, as if that statement carried a meaning of brotherhood.

"Then you'll admit he's right in following the limit rule?" Breck asked.

"No! Some years there aint enough feed on these meadows. Again there's too much. Take all you can get, while you can get it—that's what I say!"

"And in a short time have the mountains bare," Breck added, bringing up a lesson he had learned from Cook.

"What of it?" Jackson retorted. "Aint no money in the cattle business anyway!"

"These mountains aren't only for the cattle business," Breck argued. "If you clean off the grass, what have the tourists got?"

"To hell with them dudes!"

BRECK laughed through the smoke of his own pipe. "This forest is reserved for everybody. Jackson, if you had ever been jammed in a city, you'd know what it means to get up here, even for one week's vacation."

"You can't talk dudes to me," the cowman broke in. "Give me my way and I'd tear out every damned tourist pasture and make it open season on pack-trains!"

For a time they smoked together in silence. Breck could hear the restless movement of the drive and the lonely chanting of nightmen. Far across the meadow a coyote barked; a new-born calf bawled. Campfires were dying out around the bowl, and under the big blue stars, the range stood cold and gray in brooding mystery.

At last Breck knocked out his pipe and stood up.

"So you're enforcin' the permit rule tomorrow?" Jackson asked.

He nodded.

The cowman shrugged a pair of lean shoulders. "Maybe you know I've been elected range boss for this summer, and so I speak for all the outfit. You've started somethin'." He delivered this statement without anger, wholly matter-of-fact.

Breck answered the same way. "Yes, and we're going to see it through."

## CHAPTER X

"IF a man makes trouble this year, his permit wont be granted for next. That's your order."

"All right, Cook." Breck cut off his connection and closed the telephone's iron box. He had called headquarters to learn his exact authority for this day's work. Cook's answer was plain enough.

Turning from the instrument, he looked off across the meadow. Dawn had scarcely broken through the night, with only a faint gray over the eastern summit, yet breakfast smoke drifted up from half a hundred camps and wranglers were loping out to gather in the horses. Soon came a thunder of running hoofs as the animals raced down from the slopes and were made unwilling prisoners in the corral. Other men approached afoot, roped their mounts, saddled and trotted away. Sticks beating against tin pans echoed from camp to camp, and then the call: "Come and get it!"

Breck hurried through his own meal, feeling a keen excitement and eager to begin. By the time he had caught up Dan from the pasture, the cattlemen were already at their job of cutting out.

The whole herd had been centered some distance back of the wire drift fence that divided Rock House Meadow midway. Cowboys plunged in, each for his own brand, urging one animal at a time from the main pack to the outer edge. There, other punchers darted behind the "critter" selected and rushed it off to a distant part of the meadow where a lone rider would do the holding.

The groups grew steadily. Men shouted. Cattle bellowed; the brown mass began to mill, sending up a pall of dust that hung in a breathless sky. Sunrise struck it and for one moment turned the cloud to gold.

Breck rode to where a short runway of logs broke through the drift fence, tied Dan and mounted the top bar. Here he would make his count as the bunches passed. His glance went over the riders, picking out young Tillson astride his chestnut, Jackson, the range boss, sitting his horse on a knoll and keeping an eye on the work, and then the one he was really looking for.

She was in the middle of the drive, cutting out with the best of the punchers, rope swinging; at times indistinguishable from the men save by the smallness of her figure. With increased wonder Breck watched the movement of her blue horse; sudden lunges ahead, a wheel to the right, back again, following every sharp turn of a cow that refused to leave the pack. Through it all she sat in effortless ease.

It was more than an hour before any of the bunches showed signs of being completed. Then Jackson rode to the fence.

"Well, Ranger," he said, "guess I'm set."

"All right," Breck answered. "Let's go." He sprang down, pushed back a pole that had blocked the runway, and Jackson came through. Together they climbed to the top log and sat side by side. Breck took out a notebook, reading Jackson's brand and number—850. From his pocket he drew a short pine stick and mechanical counter. Jackson waved to his punchers and the first lot of animals moved to the fence.

They bunched at the runway, heads

down, holding back. A cowboy rode in, lashing the first ahead, and with the leader started the herd followed two abreast through the narrow space between the logs. Breck counted rapidly, reached ten, passed the stick to Jackson. At the same time he pressed the mechanical trigger.

Two by two. Ten. Jackson returned the stick to Breck, who pushed the button, counted, passed the stick again. So it continued endlessly. His eyes saw nothing but the stream of brown backs, white backs, red backs. Rancid dust rose to his nostrils.

In time he looked at his recording instrument. Eighty showed there, meaning eight hundred, for he had pushed it only once every ten animals. Eighty-five came. He held it out to Jackson. The old man's face tightened. Eighty-six; then eighty-seven. Twenty over the limit. There was a momentary break in the stream. Breck leaped down and dragged the pole across the runway.

Slowly Jackson descended beside him. "There aint any use talkin', I suppose?"

The deep concern in the old man's face moved Breck. "I'm sorry as the devil," he answered. "But I've got to do it. You know what's happened here on this range; you know we've got to close down every rule, or quit the job."

JACKSON looked beyond the drift fence to where half a hundred steers still remained on the wrong side. The work of cutting out had stopped and other men were riding in. They halted off a distance, faces set, eyes hard on him. But none spoke, for Jackson was the appointed range boss, and all outfits must go by his word.

Breck knew what might be done. He was alone against the lot. They could easily stampede the whole drive past him and scatter it over the range. He saw sudden gestures among a few of the men, watched them draw together in heated talk and knew they were arguing for that way. Yet if Jackson had the same thought, he gave it little consideration, for if they did, next year grazing would be closed.

Presently he mounted his horse and without a word rode over to the group. Breck saw him shake his head. In a moment they separated; one alone came to the runway, tied his horse, climbed to the top log. "I'm next."

The count went on. Most of the brands were within their limit, only the larger ones running over. Those animals Breck turned back were pushed off to one side, where the herd began to take on size.

In a lull between counts, Louise Temple rode her horse to the fence, halted and surveyed him intently. From his position his eyes were level with hers, meeting them across the top of a handkerchief tied against the dust.

"Do you know what you're doing?" she asked.

Breck, glad to see her, had smiled, but now turned serious. "If you mean my job," he answered, "yes, I know exactly what I'm doing."

She jerked down her handkerchief impatiently. Breck saw the desperation in her face. "No," she said, "I don't mean your job. You've got your rules and you've probably studied them. I mean do you know what you're doing to these men? They can't turn their cattle back!"

"Then why did they bring them up here?" he asked pointedly, for he had seen a form letter that Cook had sent out in the spring. It had said with emphasis: *"The permit rule will be enforced this year."* "They all had warning," he persisted, "why did they do it?"

The girl shrugged, meeting his eyes with a flash of defiance. "Everybody gets by the Forest Service!"

She did not mean to insult. It was simply a statement of fact. Inwardly Breck gasped.

There was something of her defiance in his own voice when he answered. "Sort of game up here, is it? Putting things over on the ranger!"

"Don't be foolish."

"I'm not; I'm dead serious. You must have received one of Cook's letters, saying the rule would be enforced. Do you expect me to sit here and do nothing now? A fine egg I'd be!"

For one long minute her eyes searched him, and he believed she saw his point. But when it came her turn to go through the count, she sent Palo, the Indian boy, to sit beside him on the fence. In the end he refused eighty of her steers and they were added to the growing band.

BY noon he had counted thousands. Bunches that had been passed were vanishing up the cañons toward their various meadow ranges. Only a few more outfits remained behind the Rock House fence, and of these, the greatest number wore the Tillson brand.

They came up for count almost at the end of things and it was Jud who climbed up to check with him. Neither spoke as the stream flowed by. Breck wondered if there would be some extras in this lot, and doubted it. That didn't seem the Tillson way. Too small a matter for them. His eyes burned, he was dizzy from looking down upon that endless movement; no one had stopped for a mid-day meal.

The end came. One thousand. He looked at the notebook, found the brand, checked the number. Then he faced the other man.

"What's this, Jud? Your permit calls for fifteen hundred."

"I know. We figured that many but didn't bring 'em."

Breck waved toward the band of outcasts, suddenly relieved. "Then you'll have to let that lot go in your range."

"Sure," said Jud. "Sure, they can—if they want." He climbed from the fence and strolled over to his horse.

BRECK saw Jackson not far off and beckoned to him. "I've got range for your left-overs," he stated, when the man came. "Tillson is short."

For a brief interval the old man surveyed him with squinting eyes. "Thanks. Might as well feed 'em to the coyotes in the first place!"

He rode off to a group of his men, halted there, talking.

"Well?"

Breck turned at the voice. Jud Tillson stared up at him, half-smiling. "Do they want to come?"

"Seems not."

Jud climbed to the bar, saying quietly: "I've got some cash in my pocket, Ranger. Two thousand." He paused.

Breck shook his head. "You had my answer the other night."

"What I was saying," Jud continued, "I've got two thousand dollars that isn't working." He raised one arm, waving across to Jackson. "Come over here."

The cattleman rode up. "What is it?"

"I been estimating that hang-over bunch," said Jud. "About two hundred. Are they for sale?"

Gray eyes looked out evenly. "Not on your credit."

"I'm talking cash."

"How much?"

"Any part or all for ten dollars a head."

Old Jackson's hands gripped angrily about his saddle-horn. "Damn' robbery! They cost twenty-five dollars down below."

"All right, take them back there then." Jud moved to depart. Breck had remained out of the deal, turning away while the two talked. Now he felt Jackson's eyes boring into him, and facing the man, it was as if he had been struck. No eyes had ever viewed him with such scorn.

They burned into his face for a moment, then went back to Jud. "Pay me."

Two thousand dollars in yellow bills were counted out, then Jud rode off to claim the herd.

Jackson rolled up the money and stuffed it into his pocket with slow tense fingers.

At last he faced Breck, hard-eyed, tight-lipped. "I've seen some graftin' Government men," he began, "but you do beat 'em all to hell! You with your talk of keepin' rules and playin' these mountains fair for everybody. By God—"

"Just a minute," Breck cut in. "Do you mind explaining what this is all about?"

"Explain hell! Don't need more than a blind man to see what it's about. How come Tillson to have this cash so handy? Of course you didn't throw in with him! Hell, no! You hold out our stuff and he just *happens* to have two thousand dollars ready!"

Breck started to speak, but there was little enough for him to offer. He couldn't go into details of the bribe. That itself would need considerable explaining, and would only add a queer story to what these men thought against him.

"Jackson," he said, "you're branding me with a lie. In time I'll prove it!"

Breck mounted Dan and sat alone while the last of the herds vanished out of Rock House Meadow. No man came near him, nor the one figure he watched intently. She gathered up the cattle he had allowed to pass and rode her blue horse beyond the bowl without a look backward.

## CHAPTER XI

AT sunrise the next morning Breck ran up the Stars and Stripes in front of his cabin. About seven he opened the iron box and checked into headquarters.

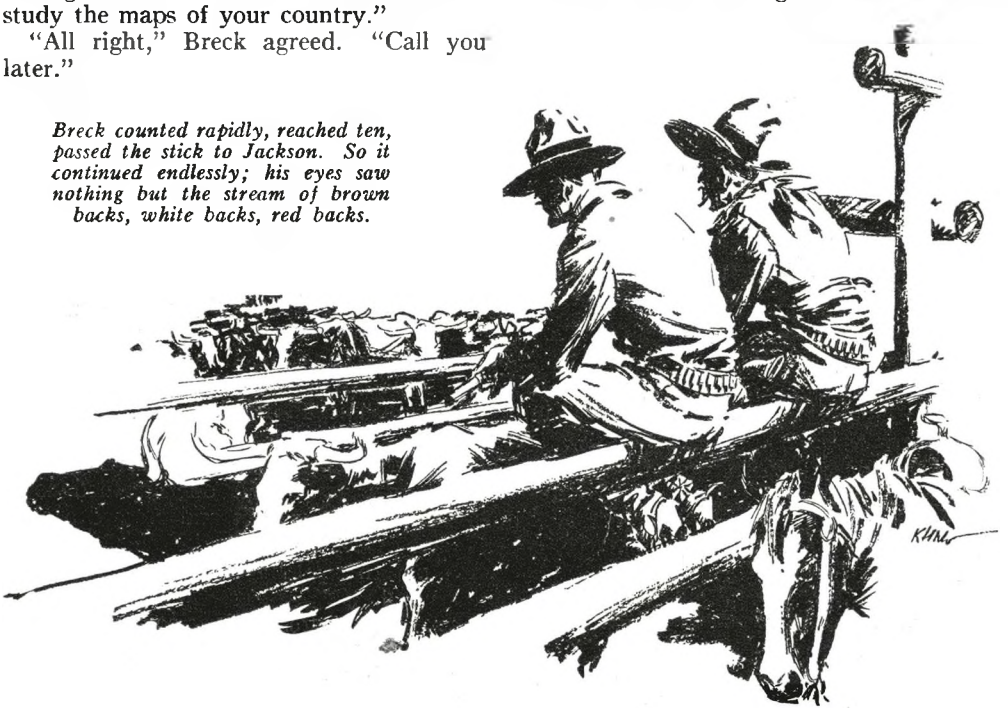
"How does the world look to you now?" Cook asked.

"Better," answered Breck. In his report last night he had told the ranger of his deal with the cattlemen, and had cursed the job

that forced him to make enemies. "What's in line for today?" he continued. "Patrol?"

"No; I'm not sending you on the trail until tomorrow. Look over your fire tools, sharpen up your axes and brush-hooks and get things in good shape. You might not have time later. Get yourself settled and feeling at home. Also it wouldn't hurt to study the maps of your country."

"All right," Breck agreed. "Call you later."



*Breck counted rapidly, reached ten, passed the stick to Jackson. So it continued endlessly; his eyes saw nothing but the stream of brown backs, white backs, red backs.*

He spent the day with grindstone and files, putting a razor edge on double-bitted axes, and making the long curved brush-hooks fit for any man's war. At noon his horses and mule came to the fence gate near by, thrust their necks over the top and said something about lunch. He fed them oats and they went off to nibble at flower tops. Before night he had his tool box arranged for action.

With the sun down a wind came over the range, bearing the chill of ice from Whitney's glacier. Breck chopped up the end of a log and carried it to the stove, cooked his supper and then sat close to the red glow. It was pleasant; more than bodily warmth. He lighted his pipe and relaxed comfortably. The rush of work had given him little time to consider things, but tonight brought an awareness of being here, alone, high in the Sierras, with a badge on his shirt pocket that said he was a forest ranger. He looked at it and smiled quizzically.

His eyes went about the log room as if seeing it for the first time. His cabin. He had not thought of it in terms of possession before. Those saddle-bags. His too. He liked their worn useful look. What trails they had seen, and would see! And that gun. . . . .

With holster and belt, it hung on a peg near the door. His glance was arrested there and at once his peace of mind was gone. He thought of Cotter. How often he must have rested just like this, contented, slowly smoking, boots upon this same shelf!

Breck sprang up, unable to throw off the desperation that rushed upon him. He could hear Cotter's voice in the stream outside, laughing, then low and earnest. It lulled.

Pines overhead continued the whispered conversation. He strode out, leaving the gun on its peg, and tramped across the moonlight space to the corrals. Emotions were deep within him; he was not a man to be moved by sentimental thought, but he was swept now into a vengeful tempest.

When he turned at last to more calm thinking, he had gone a mile over the meadow, and back at the cabin found the fire burned out, the room chilled.

NEXT morning, talking to headquarters, he asked Cook to send him on patrol to Sulphur Creek.

"Take your time, son," the ranger answered. "We're not ready for that. Today you might as well ride the Kern River trail. Look over the country west of you —all that lying between Sulphur and the Potholes. There's your worst fire hazard. You'll find some tourist camps on the river. Go in and say howdy."

Breck obeyed orders, inwardly revolting, though he knew the old ranger was guided by wisdom of experience. So, day by day, he was forced to put down his impatience and work at the forest job.

He explored his district west and south, talked with tourists over their midday fires, climbed high peaks and from that vantage studied the maze of streams and interlocking ridges. He learned to strike across country from trail to trail and know his position at any moment; his eyes became sharpened to every track upon the ground; the Gordon Breck from down below was fast becoming a mountain man.

THE approach of July meant spring in the top country. Days were warm, though nights remained close to freezing. Now he rode through meadows purple with larkspur, and climbed long rock ridges in a blaze of red snowflowers. At dusk he returned to his cabin with evening primroses opened in yellow cups underfoot, filling the air with sweet delicate perfume.

Deer had shed their winter coats of blue and were like patches of dim sunlight flitting among the pines. And then he knew that spring had surely come, when, riding into a gooseberry thicket, he jumped a new-born fawn, white-spotted, with ears like broad trumpets, too weak to run far on such slender legs.

Repeatedly he found his thoughts traveling eastward beyond the bowl of Rock House. His gaze went often to a trail that led up the notch to a certain camp fifteen miles distant. It seemed as if Dad Cook had read his wish when he gave the order one morning: "You had better swing around by Temple Meadow today."

There was a blazed trail from Rock House to Temple's camp, but Breck was in a hurry somehow and rode Dan up a ridge and along its crest on a route of his own. It was still half an hour before noon as he crossed the last summit and rode down into Temple Meadow. It spread below in a long strip of grass land, dotted with Temple's herd and enclosed by dark wooded slopes. A stringer ran up toward the end he was approaching. From an isolated clump of trees came a flag of cabin smoke. He descended rapidly.

Two cabins stood in the trees, one old with logs weathered almost black and a low sheet-iron roof, the other new within the past three years, for hewn surfaces still showed their yellow scars. Red-and-white checked curtains in the window of this last, told that a woman lived in it, and the look around the outside was of a woman's neatness, with saddle-gear hung on wooden horses, lariats coiled, pack canvas folded and piled in the shelter of a pine.

The other was as plainly a man's shanty, where a man could kick things about as he pleased and enjoy the mess. One pane was broken and stuffed with a gunny-sack. A black bear pelt, freshly skinned and salted, was nailed on the logs of the front end. A low bench stood near the door, with tobacco cans littering the ground under it. A broken bridle and a half-braided horsehair head-stall hung on nails within easy reach.

It was from this cabin that Breck saw the smoke rising. A door opened as he came out of the trees and crossed a short clearing. He recognized Louise Temple, but not the girl he had been picturing in his mind.

She wore a dress today; something short, dark green like the forest, with the red of snowflowers in it; and he felt he was meeting her all over again. He dismounted and took off his hat. She smiled, holding out her hand. "Hello, Ranger. Sorry I didn't see you after the count."

He wondered if she really meant it. "I was pretty busy," he said, as if the explanation should come from him. "Things were happening that day."

"Yes, weren't they, though!"

Breck met the dark eyes. "You think—"

LOUISE checked him with an impatient wave of her hand. "Sometimes I find it best not to think at all."

"One's mind is never blank."

"Mine is—often!"

"But you're bound to think once in awhile," Breck insisted, "and I don't want you to believe what Jackson said of me."

A searching look came swiftly into the girl's eyes. "The cattlemen think it—and that's what you ought to consider."

"Let them," Breck answered. "Right now I'm considering your opinion, not theirs."

"Mine is the least important, Gordon Breck. Don't you understand that? You can't work up here with these men against you. They may be wrong but they're powerful. If you're a square-shooter, you've got to prove it."

She spoke in a quiet voice and her meaning was not lost to him. It was almost as if she were asking that he prove himself to the cattlemen—and to her. But he wanted to hear her say so.

"Why do you talk to me like this?" he asked.

Abruptly she lifted her face to him and broke into a quick laugh. "Because you're so helpless!"

HE had the impulse to kiss her and then spank her. Helpless! So that was it? Where had he shown himself helpless?

"You take a big chance, young lady," he said, "telling a six-footer that! Do I look so very weak?"

She answered lightly, with brown eyes sweeping over him. "No, I can't say you do!"

They both turned as a horseman broke through the timber and rode toward them. Then the girl darted into the cabin. Breck heard a rattling of stove-lids and saw smoke increase from the chimney.

"That's Buster," she said on coming back to him, "hungry as a coyote and on time to the dot. He's my father. Maybe you've heard him called Tom Temple."

Remembering that Temple was an invalid, Breck watched with considerable wonder as the man halted at the tie-rack, threw himself from the saddle and reached the ground on one foot, while bearing most of his weight with a grip in the horse's mane.

"The old dear," Louise said devotedly. "He does get around."

She waved as her father looked up. "Come along, Buster! Steak's on the fire and we've got company for dinner."

Temple turned his horse into the pasture, picked up a cane and approached across the clearing. "Howdy, Ranger," he said, extending his right hand with no word of introduction. "I was thinkin' you ought to come and give us a call."

"Glad to do it," Breck returned, and at once he knew where Louise gained her strength of personality.

Tom Temple was the sort to be marked in any gathering. Although an injury to his left hip drew him a little to that side, he still retained a vigorous bearing, and when he sat upon the bench, showed none of his handicap. But the lines of his face, even when he smiled, told of suffering, and his hair was snow white. Breck could sense the battle of a hard-working man suddenly reduced to camp chores.

"If you men don't come and get it, I'll throw it away!" Louise had entered the cabin ahead of them. She stood now in the door, an apron over her dress, threatening with a bread-knife.

Temple laughed. "She means that too! We'd better go and eat."

Dinner was set on the bare boards of a slab table. A platter full of thick steaks, a bowl of mashed potatoes, then canned fruit, and big round loaves of home-made bread. Grub for a man! Breck suddenly felt that food had never looked so good.

He sat across from Louise, Temple at the end, and they talked of many things, but not of cattle and grazing. There was a reason, Breck surmised, though if the man held any hard feeling over enforcement of the permit rule, he covered it well beneath a genuine hospitality.

The manner Louise had with her father gave him a new perception of herself. She was sympathetic, understanding, yet never once pampered him in ways that would only have emphasized his crippled condition. When the water-pail was empty, Temple pushed back his bench and reached for it. Breck started to get up himself but caught a quick look from Louise, so remained seated while the other man went out to the stream.

AND Temple was proud of his girl. His eyes followed her, bright with a strange eagerness. Over their dessert he said: "You wont find many cow-hands like the one I've got, Ranger!"

Breck met the girl's eyes, smiling into them, though serious. "I'm beginning to believe it," he said.

"Aint no man on the range can beat her ridin' or ropin'," Temple went on. "Just you wait till we have a rodeo after saltin' time—always in the top money, she is."

"Now, Buster," Louise checked him. "Be careful. You know last year—"

"They judged you wrong, kid!" Temple asserted hotly.

"Where do you have this rodeo?" Breck asked.

"Here on the meadow—end of this month or first of August. Every outfit in the mountains rides a man or two. Better aim to be on hand."

Breck promised he would.

"And that isn't all this girl does," Temple continued. "Wouldn't think she could paint a picture, would you? She used to work at it, but decided there's more fun in cattle-raisin'."

For an instant Breck could not look at the girl. But when he glanced up, her face showed nothing of what he knew she felt. "More fun in the cattle business." Tom Temple believed it. She hid from him completely the truth that she still wanted to paint. Plucky girl! All at once Breck wanted to tell her so; wanted to tell her more than that.

"Louy," Temple was saying, "get that one you painted of this cabin. Let the ranger see it."

"Oh, Buster, he doesn't care about my pictures."

"Why, yes—" Breck began. But Louise told him with her eyes that he did not.

"It's just an old smear," she insisted.

Temple muttered something about it being right pretty, then was satisfied to fill his pipe and talk again of the rodeo.

THEY sat at the table until the sun had passed the door and was beginning to slant through a western window. Reluctantly Breck thought of the trail to Rock House.

"Hate to do it," he said at last, "but I'll have to move on."

As the girl's father stood up and walked out, Breck lingered with Louise, and helped clear the table. Then they went outside.

Temple was not around, but Breck saw a thick canvas roll tied on his saddle skirt, and knew it was the cattle-country's good-will offering—a present of fresh beef. He could count this man his friend.

After untying his horse, he walked with Louise toward a gate in the fence that enclosed the clearing. Her face was averted and she did not speak as they approached the opening. Breck reached to pull back the bars; lifted one and put it down.

His free hand sought the small arm close at his side. "Why did you say I wouldn't care about your pictures, Louise?"

She looked at him evenly, honest in her wonderment. "Do you care?"

"I'm afraid I do—and for more than your pictures."

He slipped his hand down over hers and the pressure of his fingers was answered. He could have taken her in his arms, but she gently moved away and pushed back the poles for him. It seemed a gesture for him to go and he accepted.

Mounting, he rode through, said good-by and passed on toward the forest. At its edge he shifted to look back. She had remained near the gate. The poles were still down. The very poise of her body showed how intently she watched him, and when he turned, she waved with a quick eager movement of her whole arm.

## CHAPTER XII

IN the morning Breck found his telephone dead and patrolled the line until midday before discovering the break. Returning to Rock House late afternoon, he was halfway across the meadow when he caught a movement in the pines around his cabin. A horse whinnied, and a moment later Louise rose from the log where she had been sitting and came to meet him.

He swung down beside her happily. "I didn't expect a visitor, or I would have left the cabin unlocked. How are you, Louise?"

"Oh, able to be about."

There was but a momentary warmth in her greeting, then her manner was again casual as she said: "I came this way to tell you something that is really none of my business."

"What?"

"There's to be a meeting tonight in Jackson's camp at Bear Trap. I rode that way coming up from Potholes, and talked to J. G."

"A cattle meeting?" Breck asked.

"Of course."

He frowned. A meeting of cattlemen was not his affair. They would not welcome him, uninvited. He said so.

The girl shrugged. "All depends on how you go into it. But there, I really knew you probably wouldn't be interested." She moved toward her horse.

"Louise!" Breck caught hold of her with his hand and turned her about until she faced him. "Tell me—be wide open for once—is this something I ought to have a hand in?"

"It isn't on the ranger books," she answered, "but it is something you ought to have a hand in, very much." She

paused, then finished gravely: "You could do a lot tonight—or nothing. I wonder—" Abruptly she gathered her reins and mounted. Then in the instant before she wheeled her horse and loped away, she looked down and completed her thought: "I wonder if I have judged you right."

Breck lost no time in making a decision. He would take the girl's advice and go to Bear Trap, though she had not said what the meeting was about, nor why he should have a hand in it.

He fed Dan, cooked a hasty meal, and in half an hour was headed into the Bear Trap trail. Dusk closed the forest about him, bringing a sense of loneliness.

His horse clattered on up the ridge. Breck thought idly of Louise, until suddenly in glancing about, he was swept by the feeling that he had just become awake. Louise must have ridden miles out of her trail if she had come this way. She cared enough to do that! She believed he could prove himself one of the men.

"Idiot!" he thought. "You didn't even say thanks!" Impulsively he wanted to wheel Dan and follow her. He looked up through pine tops at the stars, seeing a strange new beauty in them. Moonlight and shadows lay in soft lace patterns underfoot. Swiftly a yearning possessed him. More—there was a great deal more he could tell her tonight!

He turned upon himself. "You fool, I believe you love that girl! You'll do well to keep your head on one job at a time."

ABOUT midnight he rode onto the tableland of Bear Trap and was guided to Jackson's camp by a solitary point of light. He approached the cabin, but even before he could dismount, the door opened a crack and a voice demanded: "Who's there?"

"Ranger," Breck answered. He swung to the ground, secured Dan to a tree and moved toward the chink where J. G. peered out. "Howdy, Jackson," he said casually; "how's everything?"

He felt the cattleman's steady scrutiny, then the door opened. He entered and at once a dozen faces confronted him, some questioning, others openly glaring.

*Breck drew out his gun, put it on the table. "Well, now, by God!" said old J. G. "Boys, let's get along!"*

They sat about the room, all occupied in a similar manner. That was what Breck saw first. Guns were out, being cleaned, assembled, loaded; six-shooters mostly, though some had rifles. Unopened boxes of cartridges lay on the table; enough, Breck observed, to equip this band of a dozen men for a long battle. Rags littered the floor. An odor of oil and grease mingled with cigarette-smoke. The room had turned uncomfortably silent.

Jackson spoke first. "Grub's yonder, if you're hungry. We've had ours."

"Thanks," said Breck. "I've had mine too." He crossed to the stove, held out his hands to warm them, then turned abruptly to face the gathering.

"What's up, Jackson?"

About the room, men put down their guns, and sitting motionless, waited for their range-boss to speak. The old man moved nearer the stove. "It's business," he began, "plumb serious, maybe, and you oughtn't to have come riding into it." He

paused. Behind him, the men took up their jobs of gun-cleaning. "You oughtn't to have come," he repeated, "because you can't stop us."

There was a grim tenseness in the room. Breck knew the antagonism against him and weighed his next words carefully.

"Can't we get on the same level, Jackson?" he said at last. "You placed me wrong at the count. I understand. From your angle of things I looked bad. Take my word when I say all that is going to be explained, and right now meet me wide open. Will you?"

SLOWLY the other man's expression changed. "You seem wantin' to be on the square, sure enough," he admitted, "and for the time being I'm takin' your word. But what I said, goes. You can't stop us! Tonight we're goin' out to do a little fence bustin', up behind Black Mountain where the forest boundary ends and the Middle Fork range country begins. Anything been said to you about that fence?"

"No," Breck answered.

"Well, it aint within a mile of the forest line. True boundary takes in the whole of Black Mountain, but the drift fence was put up along the backbone. That was five years ago and we didn't think much of it at that time. I guess the big fellows that own Middle Fork ranch had something to do with the wrong survey. Anyhow, years have been dry lately and up there is a grazing strip a mile wide and several long that belongs in my permit."

"Why hasn't the fence been moved?" Breck asked.

Jackson gave him a wry look. "You're sure new in the Government! Startin' three years ago I've tried to have it done. Hell! I reckon my paper aint got through the first office yet."

"But I think Cook—"

"Cook's all right," Jackson broke in. "Aint his fault. He's got to wait for the supervisor, and the super has to wait for some one else, and God knows when any action will be done. Meanwhile we're short of grass. Well, what do you say? Aint three years long enough to wait?"

Breck nodded.

"We've got three hundred head on a shelf this side of Black Mountain," the other man continued. "We're ridin' up there tonight, and come dawn we'll have that bunch pushed through the fence and scattered on top where one man or two can hold them this season." He glanced around the room at his men before finishing. "Maybe the Middle Forkers know what's comin' off. If they try to stop us there's goin' to be shootin', that's all."

Breck's decision was made by the time Jackson ended his argument. He knew Government methods. In another five years, with luck, the drift fence would be ordered moved and the permittees given their full measure of range land. Meanwhile cattlemen on Government meadows were losing money.

He felt the dozen faces turned toward him, and recognized the drama of this moment. The whole thing appeared as a stage; the men with lowered, shadowed faces. Their guns. The dim lamplight. The closed door and blackness outside the windows. Yet, looking into J. G. Jackson's determined eyes, Breck knew this was a drama of real life—and death if need be.

His next movement was no gesture of the stage. He drew out his gun, put it on the table, then pushed out a seat and sat down. Without a word a man at his elbow offered cleaning-rags and oil.

"Well, now, by God!" said old J. G. "Boys, let's get along!"

WEST from Bear Trap Meadow, the range rose toward the high, rounded top of Black Mountain, and up this wooded slope, shortly after midnight, rode a line of men who went with no words spoken between them. Breck found himself in a position near the lead, with J. G. Jackson's broad back next ahead. They climbed steadily, passed the first slope and came on to a more level shelf-like part of the mountain. Here a distant sound came into the pad of their horses, increasing, until, emerging from the woods into an open space, he caught the restless tramp of hoofs and low crooning of men.

Jackson halted the line and rode on. Two figures met him before he reached the herd and after a moment he came back.

"All right so far," he offered as his cowhands gathered around him. "Now then, we've got to cut the wire first. No use cripplin' up any of these critters if we can help it. Some of us will have to stay here and help Jeff and Wade push the bunch across. Johnny, you for one, trot over there."

"Aw, hell, J. G., let me go up in front!" a young voice burst out in protest.

"Time enough for fightin'," Jackson told him. "Get along now. Tell Jeff to start right behind us and keep comin'. We'll have the fence down before the bunch gets there." He named three others to accompany the boy. They rode over to join the men already holding the herd. The rest of the party skirted the animals and continued up the mountain.

Breck glanced over the dim mass of backs in passing. The cattle were quiet enough now, but once get them on the move they would be hard to stop. That was Jackson's plan. Cut the fence. Start the stampede upward. Spread his animals on the disputed grass land before the Middle Fork outfit could turn them back.

"Looks like we aint been discovered yet," the man observed, riding close.

THEY went on in silence. Presently Breck put a question that had been growing in his mind. "Will you hold your men back while I go up to the fence?"

"For what?"

"To do the job of cutting. I'm a Government man. I'll take the responsibility and answer for what happens tonight."

Jackson's oath came across the dark between them. "Damned if that aint white of you, Ranger! But you're riskin' too much."

"My job, you mean?"

"Hell, no, your neck! Those Middle Forkers are a hard lot."

"Perhaps they don't know as much as you thought," Breck insisted. "They aren't here or they would have stampeded your cattle from the shelf before this. I'm going ahead anyway."

Jackson did not answer. In a moment he held up one hand, checking his line of cow-punchers. "All right, Ranger," he said, "You go up. We'll wait here. The fence is just as you top the rise."

Breck moved on in the dark, climbing until timber ceased and the slope began to level onto the open grass-covered dome of the mountain. Here the fence, four barbed wires stretched on posts close together, ran lengthwise along the ridge. He sat for an instant listening, and even as the pad of his own horse ceased, he heard the sound of others approaching rapidly from beyond and below him.

With no time to lose, he swung off, clipped the four wires at the nearest post, then leading Dan, ran to the next. Three sections of fence were cut and the wires on the ground before a spurt of flame flashed out of the black shadows ahead.

He straightened, and in the silence that followed the gun's crack, his voice burst sharply:

"Ranger here!"

A sudden rush of hoofs and a rattle of pistol-fire all but drowned the answering shout: "To hell with the Ranger!"

After that guns crashed from everywhere. As he sprang to his horse and faced the opposite edge of woods, Jackson and his cow-punchers charged up behind him. He leaped Dan in with them and they swept across the bald dome.

At the forest's edge the two bands came together, and there the real fighting began. Jackson, astride a tall gray horse, was suddenly engulfed between two forms. Breck whirled Dan that way and caught a blow from a knotted rope between his eyes. He struck up with his gun barrel to ward off a second swing.

Figures thudded together, drew apart. Lariats whirled. A loop caught one horse by the forefeet; he plunged headlong and a man's body turned twice in midair. Cow-punchers from each side were too closely packed to allow guns. Firing had ceased. There sounded only the swish of ropes, grunted curses, one voice shouting as if that mass could obey his command.

Then suddenly above all else rose a thunder of cattle on the run. They had come through the break in the fence and now, in one wave, were sweeping down across the open ground. Breck caught sight of them through the trees, wheeled Dan from their path and with other men, left the fight to dash from that wild rush.

One rider, racing at an angle in front of him, turned in his saddle and fired a last shot. The range was no more than twenty feet. Breck felt a slash of fire along his cheek, then knew the full fury of fighting blood. The figure entered a lane of trees, and he followed at a run down the long mountain spur with only a few yards between them.

Over Dan's lowered head, as swift and regular as clock ticks, he shot, aiming a little to the left of the man, wanting a prisoner rather than a corpse. The automatic held ten shells in its clip. Until six were fired the figure ahead showed no signs of halting. At seven he wavered in his saddle. At nine he threw up his hands, bracing himself as his horse stopped with all feet dug into the earth.

Breck rode down beside him.

The fellow turned, gaping with wonder. "For God's sake, what're you shootin'? I counted 'em. Nine and still goin'!"

"There is one more, and that's plenty," Breck answered. "Now you face front there and keep your hands high."

He reached across, lifted the man's gun, then drove him upward to a point where they could climb back to open ground. The herd had spread out by now; he could hear calls, and voices answering from near the fence. Presently a fire guided him.

Jackson's tall gray horse came first into sight, then he recognized one of the cow-punchers and rode to where they were gathering. The old cattleman was sitting on a log, trousers rolled up from a bloody leg.

Breck ordered his prisoner to the ground and dismounted. Only six men were at the fire. "Aint all here yet," said Jackson. "We're just waitin'. Likely some of us will have to go hunt pretty soon."

THE little group stood in silence. One by one others rode in, reached the ground, questioned with their eyes but said nothing. Soon there were ten.

"Mac's yonder," the last arrival reported, pointing further along the fence. "Leg's broke."

"You, Fred," Jackson ordered, "take him a horse." He straightened from dressing his own wound and looked around the group. "Ten here. Mac makes eleven. Who's missin'?"

"Where's Johnny?" some one asked.

Before an answer could be given the distant crack of a gun broke through the night. Three shots came slowly, telling of deliberate aim.

Breck leaped to his horse, flinging back as he lunged away: "Hold that prisoner here!"

But before he had gone far, Johnny came loping upward, gun alert as he questioned from a distance: "Ranger?"

"Yes. Are you all right, son?"

The boy approached. "No, I aint! Three shots just like that—and I missed him!"

Back at the fire, with all men accounted for and no signs of renewed attack now that the cattle were scattered over the mountain, Breck faced his prisoner. "Whose outfit are you from?"

The fellow looked up sullenly. "Brown's, of course."

"All right, you're going back to Brown and you're going to tell him that his line ends west of Black Mountain, at the creek. Tell him it's open season on any of his cattle found this side of it. Understand? Now get out!"

WHEN the Middle Forker had ridden away, quiet fell over the group, broken at last by Jackson's announcement: "Let's get along, boys. Soon we'll be too damn' stiff to move."

It was a wordless line of men that rode down Black Mountain in the first light of dawn, and a weary lot by the time they reached Bear Trap. Still wordless, they threw off saddles and clumped into the cabin. But in a short time over cups of black coffee and thick slices of unbuttered bread, their spirits rose and talk began.

Stretched on Jackson's bunk, squatting on the floor, they fought the battle over again, each giving his own version of it.

"Didya see that jasper I had—"

"Hell, when them two—"

"—and then I throws down—"

So the fight raged. A cow-hand turned to where Breck was sprawled on the floor with two others. "Well, Ranger, they done initiated you!"

In time the cow-punchers finished their coffee and one by one went where they could lie down in the sun and sleep. Breck felt the same desire, but knew he must get back to telephone connection with headquarters. When he rose, Jackson walked with him as far as the screened meat safe outside his door. Halting, he drew a ten-pound chunk from its hook. "Here," he said, wrapping it in a gunny-sack, "take this and help yourself whenever you come through."

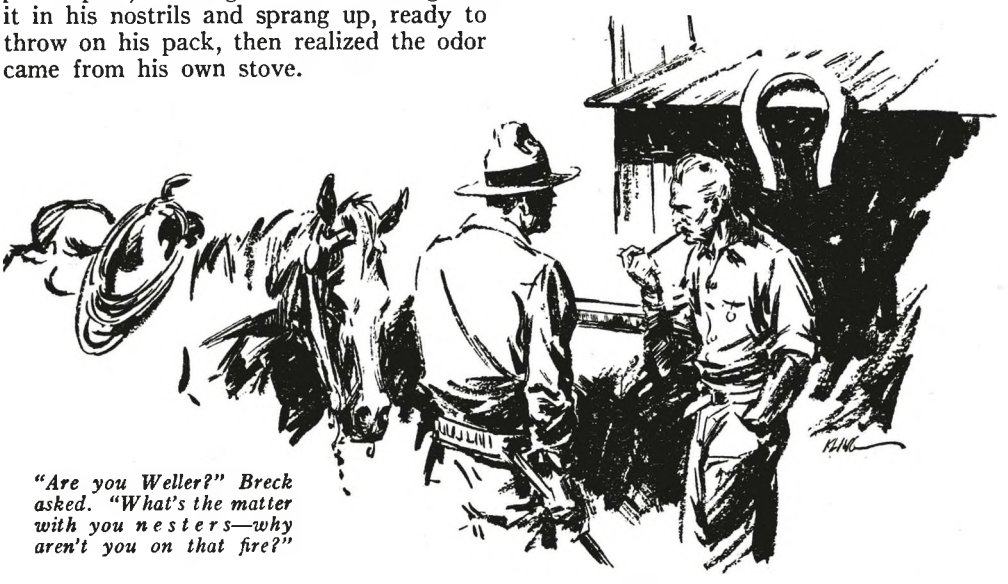
Though Breck had meat left from what Temple had given, he took it gladly; it was the cow-country's offering of good-will.

## CHAPTER XIII

THE trip to Bear Trap was Breck's last ride away from Rock House Station for some time. Upon Cook's order he remained close to the telephone, for day by day the first week of July passed and then half the second, with no sign of rain to break the drought that had settled over the Sierras. The grass meadow began to turn brown. Needles under the pine trees became tinder.

Three times each day he talked with the lookout on Kern Peak, making certain the line was clear and getting Donny's report. Always it was the same. "Not a cloud. Humidity hasn't changed half a degree."

"Any smoke?" Breck would ask. That was the thing in mind these days. He began to see smoke in every patch of light, and once, sitting on a log near the telephone post, he caught a definite tinge of it in his nostrils and sprang up, ready to throw on his pack, then realized the odor came from his own stove.



*"Are you Weller?" Breck asked. "What's the matter with you nesters—why aren't you on that fire?"*

When Cook called from headquarters they talked of nothing else. "Looks bad," the ranger said. "Dry as a match over here; same with you, I suppose. Things will be all right if we get rain in the next storm. But if it's lightning we'll earn our money!"

That was Wednesday evening. As Breck stood at the telephone he glanced up to the unbroken heavens where stars hung like clear blue gems. Later he went out again and found that even since the time he had talked with Cook, something had formed up there. Black patches had appeared. A high, broad arm covered the area south of Rock House.

He returned to his bunk and fell asleep with thoughts of an approaching storm, and dreamed endlessly of blazes and brush-hooks and then of a fireball that swung over the forest. It descended lower and lower until it touched the pine tops. They burst into flame with a queer sound. Ringing. . . . .

Breck leaped from his bunk and walked while still half asleep. It was daylight outside. The telephone-bell clamored beyond his door. He jerked open the iron box and answered. "Rock House. Yes. All right, Donny, I've got you."

"Fire to the south of you, Rock House," the lookout called down. "Reading one-seven-five."

"Just a minute," said Breck. He ran into the cabin, drew his map from a shelf, unfolding it as he returned to the phone.

The reading Donaldson had given him was in degrees from a circle about Kern Peak; north being zero. His own map was marked with a corresponding circle. Now he took the direction of one-seven-five—a little east of south. "One-seven-five," he repeated. "How far?"

"Head of Lost Horse Creek."

Breck studied the map, found Lost Horse, saw at once by contours that it was in steep, broken country. Then looking further he discovered something more. "That's near the Potholes, Donny," he called. "What sort of a fire is this?"

"Lightning, I think. Struck in three places. I've watched a storm since midnight."

"O. K," Breck finished.

But another voice broke in before he could hang up the receiver. "Rock House!" He recognized Cook. "Get on the trail as soon as you can," the ranger continued. "It will be noon anyway before you reach Lost Horse. Take grub for a week—no telling."

"What do you think of this fire?" Breck asked. "Lightning?"

"Maybe; though it's mighty close to the Potholes. Make up a crew from the nesters there. You'll find a tool box near Weller's place. I'll keep Donny on the line and if things don't look better by afternoon, Slim will come. Now hop onto it!"

THE Potholes lay some twenty-five miles to the south and a little east of Breck's station; a country of small round meadows sunk below steep ridges, connected by narrow ravines, and all occupying a hollow where the Sierra roof began to break into lower levels. Nesters had come there and settled, a man to a meadow, before the district was made a federal forest. Now Government land surrounded them, yet they remained independent of the reserve.

This much Breck had learned from Cook when he first came on the job, along with the ranger's statement: "God knows what they live on! They don't graze cattle and they don't farm. They handle Tillson's stuff some and get their thirty-five cents an hour fire-fighting. They'll bear a look any time you're in that part."

Leading his pack, Breck could make only four miles an hour along a trail that climbed and descended and climbed again. Long before he came within sight of the Potholes he saw a mushroom of smoke above that area. It grew steadily, black at first, showing the fire was in brush, then took on the gray of burning timber. When he topped a rise about eleven o'clock and looked into the hollow country, the whole basin was obscured in a cloud.

The main blaze seemed farther east of the Potholes, centered on the flank of a cone-shaped peak. Here an occasional curl of red flame burst up through the smoke. He turned in that direction, dipping downward in order to pass the nester settlement. It came into view hazily, half a dozen weathered buildings, store, blacksmith shop, a few houses scattered at the forest's edge.

A group of men loafed in front of the shop. Breck rode there at once, saying as he halted, "Is Weller here?"

It took no more than a glance to put them down as a shiftless lot. They wore overalls mostly, unwashed since the day they left the counter, ragged shirts, and stared with sullen indifference from bearded faces. He repeated: "Where is Weller?"

One jerked a thumb toward the smithy. Breck swung off and strode to the door. Immediately he was confronted by a thin-bodied, thin-faced man who appeared out of the black interior. His eyes were small and close, and his nose seemed wrinkled in perpetual animosity.

"What do you want, Ranger?" It was a blunt demand.

"Are you Weller?" Breck asked.

"I reckon."

"What's the matter with you nesters? Why aren't you on that fire?" Breck whirled from the door. "Come on now and get a crew!"

Weller followed at a slow pace. "Can't fight with no tools, Mister."

"There's the box. Nothing to stop you." Breck waved a hand toward the service chest that stood under a tree not far off.

"Sure, there's a box," Weller agreed. "Help yourself."

Breck flung back the cover. Space inside was empty save for one shovel and a rusted brush-hook without a handle.

"Aint that too bad, now?" said Weller, casually stuffing his pipe. "We can't do a thing."

"How about tools of your own?" Breck demanded.

"Aint got none, Mister."

WELLER lied and Breck knew it. He surveyed the group of men, puzzled. Why this backing away from a fire when usually they wanted Government money?

A roar of fire burst from up the mountain. He pushed the one shovel to Weller. "Take that. I've got an extra ax. Get a horse and come with me."

Weller shook his head. "No horse here. You see—"

"Walk, then!"

Breck turned and mounted, deliberately ignoring what might go on behind his back. He heard a muttered conversation, then Weller's sullen call: "Kid, fetch Pete!"

In a moment a boy came from the blacksmith shop riding a dun burro and leading a brown mule. He halted near Breck, looking at him with serious old-man's eyes. Breck returned the glance, seeing a boy of perhaps ten, barefooted, dressed in cast-off cow-country shirt and breeches. But his face was not ten; having more the solemn lines of a long hard life.

The expression moved Breck. He smiled and reached one hand across to him. "Hello, son. Going to fight fire?"

His grip was returned sturdily. "My name's Jack. That's a Luger gun you got, aint it?"

Breck laughed at the abrupt questioning. He drew the weapon from his holster. "Ever see one before?"

"Yep. In a window down at Lone Tree. A soldier brought it home from the war. Was you a soldier?"

"For a while," Breck affirmed.

Two brown eyes surveyed him with unconcealed worship. "I'd sure admire to go fire fightin' with ye, but Pap aint allowin' of it."

"Is Weller your Pap?" Breck asked, returning the gun to his belt.

Jack nodded.

"Then I'll ask him to let you go."

Instantly the solemn face lighted. "Would ye now?"

Weller approached from the group and mounted his mule without a word. Breck wheeled away. The boy started to follow, timidly, his eyes upon the other man. Seeing him, Weller snapped, "You, kid! Get out of here!"

Breck turned in his saddle. "I'm hiring him to tend camp." He met Weller's glare evenly. "Come on, Jack."

He did not realize the full extent of the job that confronted him until he came upon the fireline. Two men and a boy against more than a mile front of blaze!

The only way was fire against fire. Upon approaching as near the front as possible he halted at a stream, threw off the pack and left the boy there to make camp. Then taking Weller, he continued upward, circled the blaze and came to a belt of thin pine half a mile above it.

Weller had remained silent during their climb. Now he swung one leg over his mule's back and squinted down the mountain.

"Figurin' to start your backfire here, eh?"

Breck studied the spot. It seemed right. An afternoon wind had not yet sprung up to carry the lower flames rapidly.

"Yes," he answered. "Anything wrong with it?"

Weller shrugged. "Suits me. You're the ranger."

Breck would have given much for advice. This was his first fire. But the expression of the nester's face foretold that any question would be useless.

He swung from Dan, tied him and then with shovel and brush-hook went furiously to work. There was nothing furious about Weller's method. Breck presently began to realize the wisdom of slower effort. At the rate he started, his strength would be spent long before a sufficient backfire had been built.

Foot by foot they cleared a path and lighted it on the down side, until by midafternoon they had made considerable of a fireline. Resting a moment, Breck wiped the grime from his face and stared through burning eyes along the mountain. In a few hundred yards he would have the main blaze completely paralleled. He hoped Donny could tell from Kern Peak that the fire was almost under control. A surge of victory swept him. With brush-hook and ax he plowed on through the belt of yearling pine. His body took on the rhythm of some perfect machine, overcoming fatigue, ignoring thirst and hunger, giving all power to the swing of his arms.

But at three o'clock the wind changed. He heard Weller shout: "Better get out of here! We aint goin' to make it!"

A RUMBLE like distant cannonading rolled up the mountain. Breck saw a wave of flame curl into the pine tops, though at his position the air was still motionless. The wave broke, spread, leaped high in its own draft and then swept up toward him in a solid red front. A hail of burning twigs fell about his shoulders. He beat them off. The next instant the wind's full force was in the brush at his feet and countless spot-fires were fanned into life. He saw Weller run back into the area they had cleared. It was the only way out. He followed.

In less than ten minutes his backfire was engulfed, the main blaze ran around the end where he had not yet completed a line, and watching from a distance, he saw his hours of labor overcome in a moment. A sense of defeat weakened him. Fatigue deadened his muscles. He realized his hunger. Yet the fire before his eyes, having become concentrated in a cañon bottom, was like a red monster writhing upward—something that must be killed. He grabbed his ax.

A plan came suddenly. He ran to Weller who had gone on to their mounts. Pointing up the ridge, he shouted: "We'll begin there this time."

"Not me," the nester broke in. "I've got a bum foot and need rest."

"Man, you can't quit!" Breck retorted.

"Got to rest," Weller repeated doggedly. "Done put in my four hours."

Breck stood measuring him with his eyes.

"Weller," he said, "you aren't quitting because you're tired, and I know it. You're throwing in with the wrong side—all of you Potholers. Better come across the line before it's too late."

Weller shrugged. "I don't get your meanin', Mister."

"That's a lie," Breck answered. "Do you think I'm blind? You and the Tillsons can't hold off the Government forever!"

He saw a look of apprehension come across the other man's face. Weller turned a little from him; his shoulders fell. In his whole attitude, with body slumped and mouth drawn tight, he seemed for a moment, driven, helpless before something beyond himself.

"Now do you know what I mean?" Breck urged. "I'm giving you a chance. Let's get onto that fire."

Visibly the nester made an effort to draw himself up. He straightened, but then hesitated, shoving his hands into his pockets. "You aint talkin' to me!" he blustered. "Not any!"

Breck knew further words were futile. It was not in his power to force the fellow. He sprang upon Dan, and wheeling away, rode alone into the red flood upon the mountain flank.

HIS first backfire had failed because of poor judgment in gauging what distance the main blaze could advance. He would not fall into the same error twice and now rode far up the slope to where a granite ledge, thrown part way across the burning cañon, formed a natural break in the timber. He left Dan, and starting beyond the granite protrusion, once more plunged into the job.

Yet he had spent his strength on the fight that afternoon. Smoke strangled him. The ax weighed tons. He drank the last water from his canteen, believing the boy would soon come up with more. An hour passed without relief. Then time slipped from his memory. It was will that carried him on through the brush, clearing, firing, clearing again, long after his body would have refused. Always the red head of that writhing monster crawled upward along the cañon bottom.

He started as if from sleep when a voice called, "Ranger! Ranger!" Dusk had come. "Here!" he answered. Soon Jack rode his burro out of the smoke.

His old man's face was drawn with fright and a bloody welt lay along one cheek. He spoke breathlessly, throwing a pack of rations and two canteens from his shoulders. "Tried to get 'em here sooner. Pap whipped me. Goin' to whip me again if he finds out. Don't you tell him, will you?"

Breck dropped to the ground and drank before asking, "Where's your Pap now?"

"Gone below. Says he's sprained a foot. Sure the devil he is, but he don't get drunk, he don't. Say, can I see that Luger gun again?"

Breck handed over the weapon and then broke into a ration bag. While he ate from a can of beef, Jack tried the Luger in his belt, squinted down the sights and at last returned it reluctantly.

"You wont be telling Pap?" he repeated.

"No," Breck promised. "I wont."

"Then I better be gittin' along. Some one's afollerin' me and I can't be seen." The boy moved off.

Breck gripped his arm. "Some one following you? Who is it?"

"Don't know." Jack stared up, fear in his eyes. "Let me go, Mister."

But Breck held him. He believed Jack knew, and taking a chance, said confidingly, "I'm not going to let the Tillsons hurt you. Don't be frightened."

"Aw, I aint afeard it's them," was the innocent reply. "They left yesterday." The boy hesitated, then turned a puzzled face. "Mister, how'd you know they was here? You aint supposed to."

Breck released the small arm. "Then you haven't any idea who this is?"

"Nary a bit. Just heard 'em. One horse, I reckon. Yonder." He pointed north.

Breck considered. It might be relief from headquarters. "Jack," he said, "let's make a bargain. I wont tell your Pap that you brought some grub to me, and you wont tell anyone that I know the Tillsons came to the Potholes yesterday. How about it?"

The boy's hand clutched his. "There's my mit, Ranger. Now can I go?"

Breck walked a few steps with him, adding, "And Jack, if you ever need help, come to me. Will you?"

The reply burst eagerly. "I sure will!"

JACK sent his burro scrambling along the mountainside. Breck returned to the fireline. There, again swinging the brush-hook, he considered what the boy had inadvertently told him. Things were

*"Weller," said Breck, "you aren't quitting because you're tired, and I know it. You're throwing in with the wrong side —all you Potholers!"*

plain enough. Even if Tillsons had not started this fire, they had ordered the nesters to keep out. What was their hold on the crowd down there?

A horse nickered suddenly from a distance. Back on the mountain slope Dan answered. Breck held the brush-hook in mid-air and stood listening. Yet after the first call nothing came save the crackle of his backfire and the deeper roar of the main blaze below.

Instinctive warning urged him to move out of the red light where his body offered a good target to anyone approaching in the dark. The silence puzzled him. Relief from headquarters would not have halted. He stepped toward the shadows of deep timber, hesitated, stopped. The rumble from down the cañon was like a commanding voice. He saw the fire leap with a gust of wind, and whirling back, sprang again to his job.

His judgment in using the granite ledge for part of a break was good, but he still had a long path to clear from the rock's end to the opposite ridge. He fought to gain the advantage of a certain hour. At ten o'clock, he knew, this early wind would die. Then before eleven the night change would come, blowing down. That was his one chance—get the backfire completed by the turn of the wind.

By nine o'clock he had reached the cañon bottom and was firing his line up the side. But strength was gone from his arms. Breath came in thin gasps, hot and lifeless. His body burned as if from some dry fever. He began to see red spots. Savagely he brushed them away, but one remained. It grew even as he looked, lengthening into a ribbon there on the cañon bank above him.

He stared, then suddenly knew. Relief had come! That was a backfire being built toward his position. He swung on with hook and ax. The line ahead advanced, until, in the calm of ten o'clock, the two were almost joined. He shouted through the brush: "Slim! Cook!"

IF there was an answer, the snap of flames drowned it. He cut through a wall of chinkapin. A voice met him and he halted, speechless, gaping into Louise Temple's smoke-lined face.

"You here?" he managed at last.

"On the job, Ranger! Cook telephoned to the meadow asking for help. I came." She relaxed on her shovel-handle.

Breck moved back from the heat and sat down, all at once sick and cursing himself for being so weak. The girl came to him.

"Don't mind me," he said. "I'm a fine ranger!"

Louise held a canteen to his lips. "What do you expect, after a fight like this? Now sit here. It's all right. See? The wind has shifted."

Breck looked through half-blind eyes. The change had come. His backfire was sweeping down, licking into the line below. A wave of flame shot up as the two met. It fell at once, broke into isolated sections and vanished with incredible swiftness.

Only snags of standing timber were left to blaze against the night.

"And that's that," said Louise, beside him. "We wont even have to watch those snags. It's going to rain; I felt a mist when I came over the ridge." She held up her hands. "There!"

Breck turned his face to the sky, feeling a moist breeze descend as the heat of the fire subsided. He stood up, taking the girl's arm. "I've got a camp lower down. We'd better get under cover."

Even as they reached their horses and rode to the stream, the mist became a drizzle. In camp, Breck hung a tarpaulin between two trees, pegged one end of it back to make a lean-to and built a fire in front. His bed-roll he threw inside for a seat and then went down to a pool to wash.

When he returned, Louise had started a meal, and though the rain was falling about him he halted to watch her. She sat on a saddle close to the fire, the red light upon a pensive face, her small figure bent. A coffeepot steamed over the coals, and something fried in a pan she was holding.

IT was a picture he would not soon forget; the gaunt pine trunks, the brown tarpaulin, smoke rising; and picked out in high lights in the center of it, his packs, his saddle, Louise. The scene was too real, too natural. She belonged there. It was as if she had been with him like this always, they alone, with the night and the storm drawing them close.

She looked up, smiling, when he approached. "It is cozy, isn't it?"

He paused in reaching for a towel. "I didn't say anything!"

"No, but you thought it."

"How did you guess?" He squatted beside her, drying his hands at the fire.

"I heard you."

"Heard me thinking?"

"Of course. Don't you believe in that? It's part of this country and you'll learn if you stay long enough. Why, I've ridden all day with Buster and never said a word, but thoughts have passed between us. He thinks about taking a certain trail, and I take it."

"People must be pretty close to know each other's thoughts."

Louise stared silently into the frying-pan and Breck realized how much meaning might be put in what he had just said.

He remained silent until Louise announced: "If you're hungry enough, you can begin on this Government mule. I'm starved!"

With tin plates on the blanket-roll, they sat opposite each other, their saddles for seats. Breck tried to capture again the feeling that they belonged like this always. He wanted to forget the Tillsons, the nesters and the troubles of his job. But a puzzling thought had come.

Why had she not been surprised at finding him alone? She had not asked about a crew, nor mentioned the Pothole people.

THEY finished roast beef from the can, had chocolate bars for dessert and continued with cups of coffee. Beyond their shelter the rain fell with soft rustling through the pines, then drifted on. Clouds parted and the stars came out. Breck looked at his watch. Two o'clock. Dawn would break in another hour. He must leave her then and go down to the Potholes.

"When did Cook call your camp?" he asked, leading their talk to the nesters.

"About the middle of the afternoon. He and Slim were to start, but they'd be a day on the trail."

"I hope Kern Peak can head them off, now that it's over," Breck continued. "Didn't Cook think I had help from the Potholes?"

"He didn't say." Louise stirred up the fire and hunched herself closer to it.

Breck pushed their plates from the bed-roll and sat next to her. "Louise," he asked, "can you tell me what I'm thinking about now?"

Her lips began a smile, parted, closed. Then she answered with a slow shake of her head.

"Well, I'm thinking of the Potholes, and of what kept the nesters from coming onto this fire. It will be daybreak in another hour and I must go down there. You're going back to Temple Meadow, I suppose. Will you try to get Cook on the line and let him know about this fire? Tell him I'll call later."

She avoided the request. "Why are you going to the Potholes?"

"I'm afraid that's asking my business, isn't it?"

"Yes. I meant it that way. But I'm sorry; my mistake. I somehow thought we had reached a point where we could talk openly."

The fire, unheeded, had died to coals. A soft red glow lay across the girl's face,

touching her cheeks, her forehead, her lips with light, but with dark shadows bringing to her expression a look of pain.

Breck dropped his hand upon both of hers, resting in her lap. "I was short, Louise. Forgive it. I am going to the Potholes to prove a suspicion."

Still with her eyes upon the coals, she asked, "You think they started this fire?"

"I'm not certain. I do know some one drove them from helping on it."

"The Tillsons?"

Breck nodded.

Louise turned to him. "I can tell you about this fire, exactly. Lightning started it."

"Of course. Lightning always starts them!"

"It's true this time."

"You seem to know. How?"

The girl hesitated. She released her hands. "We're talking openly—no misunderstanding; is that right?"

"Yes."

"Then Art Tillson came to our camp day before yesterday. That was before the fire started. He stayed all night—the night it started, and I talked with him. Now do you see?"

"Too much!" Breck bit off the words, striving to conceal the temper that flared within him. He was jealous, foolish, and yet helpless to stem the burst of feeling the name had aroused.

"What if they didn't start the fire?" he demanded. "The Tillsons are holding a threat over the nesters. It's time for a cleaning and the trail starts down there!"

LOUISE did not speak. He sensed a swift tension of her body, though the only visible sign was of her fingers clasped tight about one knee.

Suddenly she lifted her face to him. "Gordon Breck, I know the rules. A girl should never plead with a man. I'm not pleading—I merely ask. Promise me you will not go there now."

She was so close at his side. He felt her quick breath and knew she spoke in desperation. And yet—

"You ask me to ignore a ranger's duty?"

A note of defiance came into her voice as she replied: "What is a ranger's duty if it isn't to use his head? You have nothing on the nesters—you can get nothing. That isn't the place to begin. You'll think I'm begging for them. I guess I am. I know some of the families, the women, and I don't want to see them driven out. Give me a chance with them, wont you?"

"A chance for what?"

"To talk with Weller some time."

"I've talked with him already. It's useless. I'm through with words!"

"Oh, you men are stupid!" she flared. "Stupid! All you think of is strapping on a gun and going out to shoot. Is there never another way to settle?"

"Not this," Breck asserted. "At least not for me. I have more than a ranger's duty here."

"How have you?"

"Did you know the man who had this job before me?"

"Jimmy Cotter? Yes, I knew him well. He was killed and you've come to retaliate."

Breck frowned, asking: "Who said so?"

"No one said it. But you're wearing his Luger. I knew that meant some connection."

Surprised, Breck said nothing.

"You see," Louise continued, "I understand many things in these mountains—too many. I understand the nesters' position, and Art Tillson's, and yours."

In sudden impulse her hand clasped his, warm, throbbing.

"Gordon! Don't you see? Cotter lost his life and gained nothing; threw it away on a chance. It's terrible, all of it. Something will happen, I know. But you, you must not be the one to pay needlessly. Wont you consider it like that for your own sake?"

Swept by the girl's own fervor, Breck drew her madly into the circle of his arms. "And for yours?" he asked, holding her close. "Louise!"

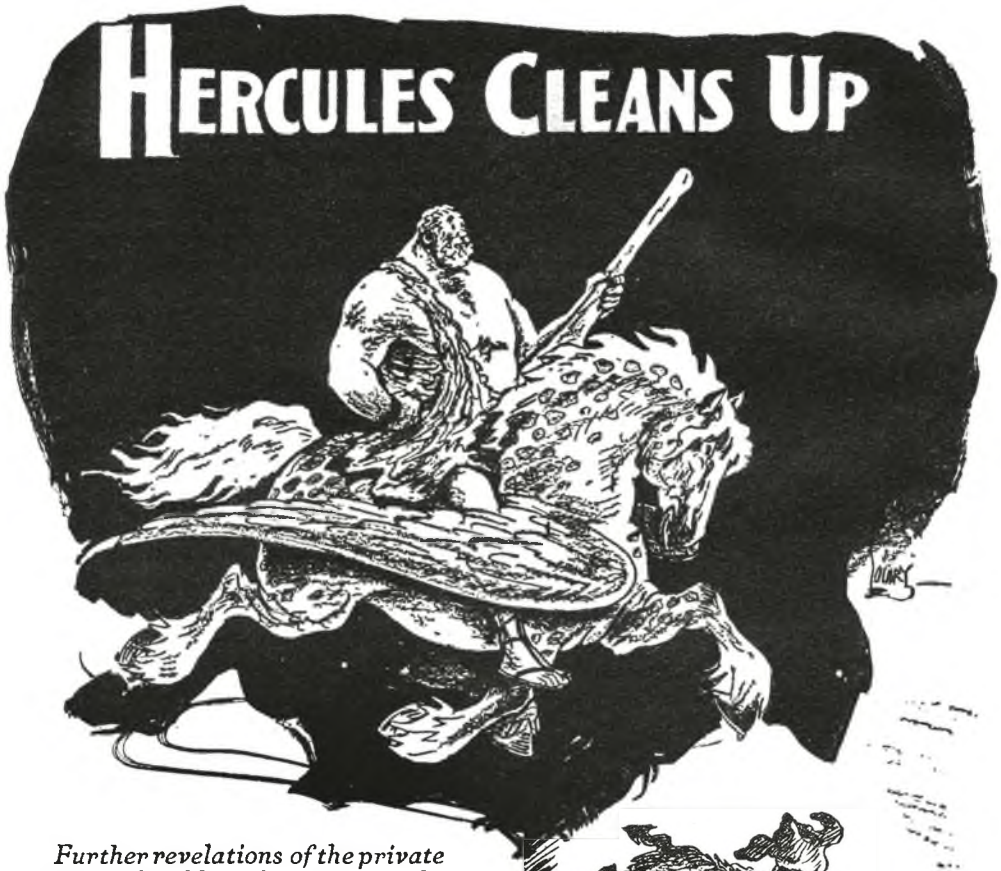
She yielded only for an instant as he kissed her, then held her head away while her eyes searched deep into his. "I cannot answer you, not now. But I want your trust. Promise me that."

He nodded, bending his head until it touched the softness of her hair.

Their moment slipped on; for in the knowledge that tomorrow and days to follow were still unsolved, the crest of their emotion passed as swiftly as it had come. With the dawn they rode north together, and parted on the ridge where Breck's trail struck west toward Rock House.

**The great climax in this stirring novel of the modern West occurs in the next, the September, issue.**

# HERCULES CLEANS UP



*Further revelations of the private life and public achievements of a great hero, by the author of the Easy Street Experts stories.*

By BERTRAM ATKEY

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

THE Atkeys (explains the author) are descended in a more or less direct line from Hercules, and thanks to the recent discovery of certain ancient documents in the family archives, Bertram of the clan is able to throw a good deal of new light upon the life and labors of the great Greek hero.

The facts in the case of Hercules, it now appears, are as follows: His godfather, a very influential party named Zeus, apparently being under some obligation—of which no record is left—to the father of King Eurystheus of Mycenæ, entered into a contract that the boy Hercules, when he grew up, should enter Eurystheus' service for a period of twelve years.

Herc was straight. When he grew up, and was some eight feet tall, he went of his own free will to King Eurystheus and placed himself at the King's disposal. The various little services which Hercules rendered the King are fully described in these stories. We have read of how he killed the ferocious Nemean lion, and of how he descended into Hades and came back with the three-headed dog Cerberus. Here follows, for the first time, the accurate account of how Hercules cleaned up the Augean stables.

*By tea-time Hercules had crossed the frontier and was urging the leg-weary Pegasus across the park.*

KING EURYSTHEUS was worried—worried and annoyed. So completely did he appear to have lost his usual habit of placid good temper and calm that he was taking practically no lunch—except perhaps a little more than his usual generous allowance of wine.

The butler had rather nervously asked if the dishes were not to his liking, and had been given the cryptic reply:

"The lunch is all right. I only wish the other departments of my domestic affairs were up to anything like the form of the culinary department. Fill my goblet, and take all this food and yourself away!"

The butler had hastened to fill the goblet, and had then silently and wisely withdrawn.

Left to himself, Eurystheus took out a letter, already well-thumbed, and grumbling to himself, as a man will, reread it. Like most of the letters delivered at the king's country place, it was addressed from Tiryns, and was from the Queen.

" 'I presume,' " he read aloud from the letter, "I presume that you and your gentlemanly companion Hercules imagined that you were playing a pleasant little practical joke when you sent me that triple-headed monstrosity (stolen from Hades) Cerberus, in response to my request for a good dog to exhibit at the recent dog-show. At least, I cannot bring myself to believe that it was your intention to insult your wife—but the great brute you sent has come near to making me the laughingstock of Tiryns.' "

Eurystheus pulled nervously at his beard.

"Why?" he demanded. "What for? I never saw a better sort of dog in my life! Hang it all, it was three dogs—and well-bred 'uns in one! She said she wanted something special. I suppose she thinks old Hercules went to Hades for a joke—that's it, a practical joke—to fetch the dog!"

He controlled himself and read on.

" 'Had I but seen the monster,' " he continued, " 'before arriving at the show, it would not have been so serious. At least, the insult would have been private, and I and our daughters are inured to your private slights. But Hercules, with his usual intelligence, took the beast straight to the show-bench reserved for it, and having chained it and removed its muzzles, carelessly left the building.

" 'It should be hardly necessary to say that the awesome brute promptly broke its chain and, the attendants naturally being afraid of it, killed most of the beautiful little dogs on show and devoured many of them! It is not the expense of replacing these dogs, large though it will be, which annoys me so much, as the thought of what the populace will say. Straws show which way the wind blows, and perhaps you will realize that your clownish practical joke will do little to increase your already waning popularity when I tell you that the Princess Admete, when riding this morning, was actually hooted by an inebriated weaver, whom, naturally, I have had decapitated, limbed and flayed. I shall have more to say about this matter when you return to the city. The brutal monstrosity Cerberus completely fiascoed the dog-show, and I shall insist upon an explanation.

" 'Meantime, there is another matter: There was a very pointed letter this morning from Augeas of Elis, in which he complains that you have taken no steps to carry out your promise to have his stables and stockyards cleaned out. Even you, absorbed as you are in your hunting, cannot have forgotten your contract to do this as part payment of his last year's bill for oxen supplied the Mycenæan army. This should be done at once. Augeas has been most patient; and let me remind you that recently his boy, Prince Phyleus, has shown a quite noticeable liking for Admete. It would be a very good match for Admete, who is no longer a child, and I assume that you have your own daughter's interests sufficiently at heart to keep friendly with Augeas. If you haven't, I have.

" 'You are never tired of boasting of the great strength of Hercules. Very well, then: let him clean the stables. It would save great expense, and might teach him not to presume on the favor which you—most unwisely—have shown him. I have already sent word to King Augeas that you are willing to do this. Kindly, therefore, see that it is done.' "

EURYSTHEUS put down the letter with a good old-fashioned Greek oath.

"There's a wildcat for you!" he spluttered, clawing at his beard. "What d'you think of *that?* There's a bit of pure Greek gratitude for you, if you like. Hercules goes down into Hades—Hades, mind you!—to get a dog just to satisfy a mere whim of hers; and because the dog isn't the right breed, nothing will satisfy them but that he should become a stable-cleaner—just to humiliate as willing a lad and as straight a rider to hounds as ever I took wine with! If she wasn't my own wife, I'm damned if I shouldn't call it low! Anyway, it's catty. I—I'm dashed if I know how to put it to the poor old chap!"

He flung the letter on the floor and began to pace up and down, muttering, periodically pausing to drain and replenish his wine goblet.

Whether he did this absently, or whether he was endeavoring to screw his courage up to breaking the unpleasant news to Hercules (when that individual returned from a visit to the kennels) it is impossible to say, but it is certain that when, an hour and a half later, Hercules strolled in, with Cerberus at his heels, King Eurystheus was, regrettably, in a condition which made the breaking of the news a matter of no difficulty whatever.

He greeted Hercules demonstratively.

"'Lo, Hercules," he said, "There's ba' news—sorry say—'stremely ba' news!"

He pointed to the letter.

"No doin's mine—nothing 'tall do with me, Hercules! Don't run away with tha' idea! No 'fair mine—not 'tall. Read tha' le'r. Read tha'—an' tell me wha' you think of sush wildca' trick. Queer wife o' mine. Nothing say agains' her. Bes' li'l wife all the world. Nashly. But read tha' le'r. Wildca' trick to play on frien' o' mine!"

Hercules read the letter.

HIS face hardened a little as he finished it. Then he looked at Eurystheus. He perceived at once that the King was really upset and distressed about it, and like the sportsman he was, he permitted his face to resume its normal sunny expression, as he flipped the letter down on the table.

"My dear old chap, you don't mean to tell me that you're going to allow a silly little feminine pin-prick like that to upset you—what?" he said.

The sheer surprise of it steadied Eurystheus considerably. He had quite decided that Hercules would be furiously angry.

"But dash it, old boy, there's thousands of stable-cleaners!" he stammered. "I could send a fatigue party of the troops over there—anything. Why should she insist on you, Hic-ules?" he concluded, rather cleverly disguising the slight hiccup, and adding *"ules"* thereto.

Hercules laughed.

"Temper, old man," he suggested.

"But—what will people say—what—"

Hercules suddenly smote the table with a fist like an anvil.

"I've got it, Eurystheus! Make a bet of it. Tell people I've backed myself to clean out those bally stables in one day, and that you've taken me. See? Sound scheme, that. What? It's a wager. When I've done it, send for some of those Tiryns poets, and tell them to commemorate it in verse!"

Eurystheus stared at him, his face slowly brightening.

"Old top," he said, solemnly, "you've hit it!"

"Absolute, bally bull's-eye. What?" And so saying, Hercules touched the bell, and ordering a large goblet to be brought, sank down upon a couch with the air of a man who has done a good day's work.

Eurystheus joined him.

AS usual, Hercules lost but little time in making his arrangements. He started for Elis next day, riding Pegasus, the old weight-carrying hunter which he had won from Eurystheus, with the awesome Cerberus, who seemed to have become devoted to him, accompanying him.

It says much for the genuinely sporting disposition of our hero that he had quite got over his temporary irritation at the deliberately intended insult of the Queen. He was no longer annoyed—and neither was Eurystheus. Beyond a pair of somewhat severe headaches, neither of them had brought to the breakfast-table anything remotely related to the darker side of the previous evening's trials.

Indeed, they had contrived, between them, to hit upon a scheme which, neither being a very brilliant business man, struck them as being extremely well thought up. Like many a king before him,—and since,—Eurystheus was not wealthy. He only seemed wealthy. Probably this was largely due to the fact that he left the conduct of his kingdom's finances to those whom, in his merrier moments, he was wont to describe as "the statistical coves" he paid to "add up the takings." When he required money, he commanded some to be given him. When there was none, he carried on "on credit." When he could not get any credit, he went without. It was very simple, but it had its disadvantages, and Eurystheus generally was distinctly hard up. Among other accounts outstanding, he owed King Augeas (one of the most successful and popular cattle-breeders in Greece), a very heavy bill for beef supplied to the army the year before, and as the Queen had reminded him, he had agreed that part payment, owing to great shortage of labor and several agricultural strikes in Elis, should consist of a thorough clean-out of Augeas' sheds and stockyards. Eurystheus so far had neither paid any money off the bill nor had he supplied the promised labor. Hence the Queen's opportunity to stir Her-

*"The awesome brute promptly broke its chain, killed most of the beautiful little dogs on show and devoured many."*

cules up against a distinctly cheerless "task."

But it had occurred to Hercules that he might, without much difficulty, come to a little arrangement with Augeas which should not be altogether unprofitable to himself, and he had said as much to Eurystheus.

"After all, old man, those stables haven't been cleaned out for thirty years, and it should be worth a good deal to Augeas to get them right. Why, half his cattle must be ruined every year with thrush, greasy heels and one thing and another. What? Well, now, suppose I can come to some sort of arrangement to charge Augeas for what I do—he's a bally business man—what? Charge him, say, ten per cent of his oxen, for instance. We could sell these to one of our army contractors, and that would give us a little ready money—enough to pay off some of the Hunt Club expenses, and get a few more good horses. What!"

Eurystheus had looked at him with an admiration that was almost reverent.

"By Zeus, Hercules, what a head for business you've got!" he had exclaimed. "Should never have thought of that myself in a thousand years!"

So they had planned it—and now Hercules was en route to carry out the ingenious little scheme.

STEADILY he kept on his way, ignoring, for once, all the various opportunities and excuses for lingering which, in those days, invariably presented themselves to the enterprising wayfarer.

Even Cerberus, the three-head, was sharply and sternly called to heel from every rabbit-chase he designed, so that by tea-time Hercules crossed the frontier, and an hour or so later was urging the somewhat jaded and leg-weary Pegasus across the park which surrounded the palace of the agriculturally inclined Augeas.

About halfway across the park he pulled

up sharply as an elderly gentleman of rather bucolic appearance, carrying a spud, stepped out from under some trees.

"Good evening," said Hercules civilly. "Do you happen to know if the King is in residence?"

"He is," replied the man in a bluff, hearty way. "I'm King Augeas; and if you aren't Hercules, you can call me no judge of a bullock!"

"Good man," said Hercules, and dismounted. "I've come to make some arrangement about these cow-sheds of yours."

Augeas nodded, chewing thoughtfully at a straw. "Ah, yes. King Eurystheus sent you, I suppose."

Hercules paused a moment before answering. Then, significantly, he said:

"Do I look like a man who can be *sent* anywhere—by anybody? What?"

Augeas cast his eyes over the gigantic stature of his visitor, taking in the size of his club and the appearance of his dog.

"No," he said frankly, "you don't. I suppose you've come of your own accord. But what for? Nobody would take on the work of cleaning out my stables for fun—or friendship. Is it another of your feats? They tell me you're going about doing these feats all over Greece—and if you want to do a feat in my stables, I'm sure I shall be very much obliged to you."

"I am afraid it will cost you a little more than that," said Hercules. "I shall want ten per cent commission. It would be more, but I've made a bet with a friend that I can do it in one day!"

AUGEAS stared.

"Clean out those stables in one day!" he echoed. "I wish you could. Man, it is impossible! I should like to share your friend's bet. Why, those stables haven't been cleaned out for thirty years!"

"If you want to have a bet about it," said Hercules, "I can accommodate you, and I haven't seen even the stables."

A gleam of bucolic cunning crept into the eyes of Augeas.

"You mean to tell me seriously that you will back yourself to clean out those stables in a day?" he said.

"In rather less, I should say; but call it a day—a fair eight-hour day."

King Augeas nodded. He felt that this was altogether too good a proposal to allow it to get past him.

"Well, Hercules," he said, "you know your own strength best, I suppose, but I am willing to lay you ten to one in anything you name that you don't do it!"

Hercules pondered. "How many head of stock have you?" he asked.

"Oh, perhaps five thousand along now," replied Augeas.

"Very well; I'll take you in steers," said Hercules. "You lay me five hundred fat steers to fifty. Will that do?"

"It's a bet!" said Augeas quickly, and turning to a young man who had strolled up with a bow on his shoulder, a javelin or two in his belt, and a brace of rabbits in his hand, he added:

"You witness that, Phil!"

"Yes, Father," responded the newcomer, who was none other than Prince Phyleus, the son of Augeas whom the Queen of Mycenæ had said she believed to be attracted by the Princess Admete.

"Good! It's a bet!"

They shook hands on it, and at Augeas' suggestion they moved along to the palace.

"After dinner, if you like, Hercules, you can have a look round the stables—I'll throw that in," said Augeas, generously.

"Good scheme! I will," replied Hercules.

And so, each very well content, they sent Cerberus and Pegasus round to the back, with strict orders that the horse was to have a well-deserved hot bran-mash, and the barb-tail a sheep or so, and went in.

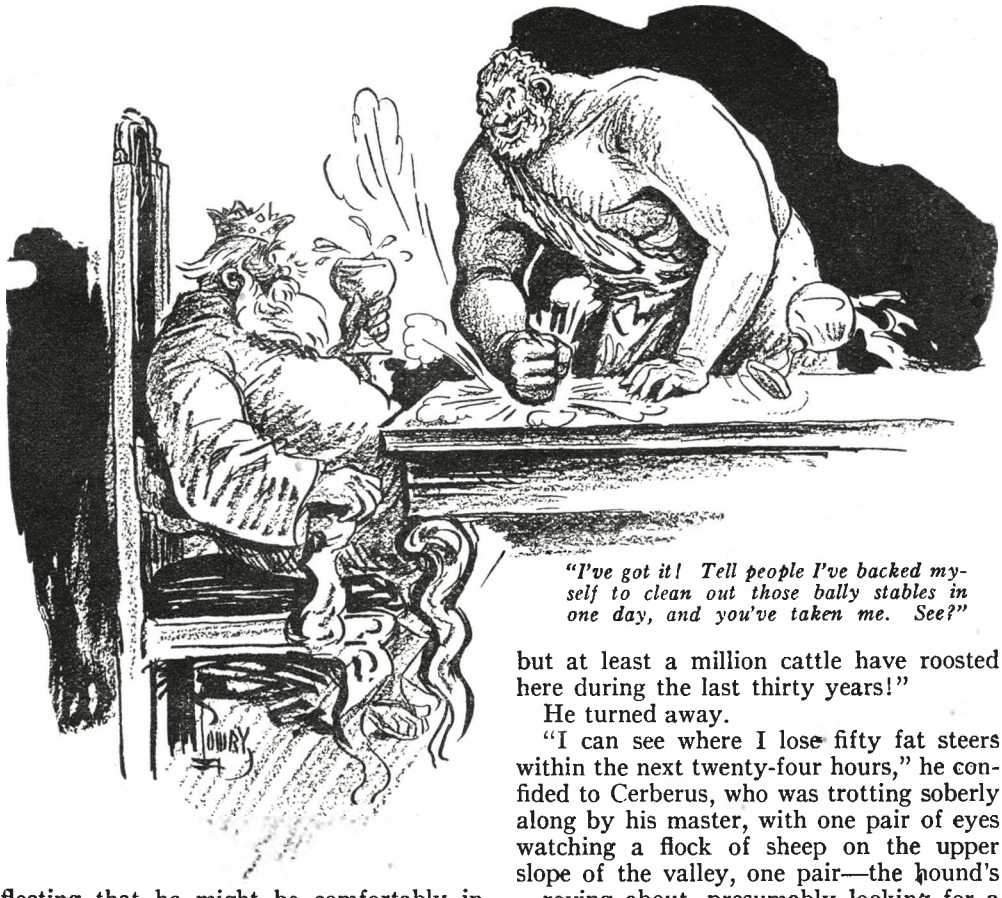
"We are plain folks here," said Augeas, as he put his spud in a corner of the entrance-hall, "but if good country fare and plenty of it is of any use to you, you have come to the right place. There's some good wine too—but no damned kickshaws!"

"You are a king after my own heart, sir! You and King Eurystheus would get on well together."

"Um—ah—yes! Should get on better if he would pay his bills, though. Always pay cash myself, and expect cash. Only way to get your proper discount!"

"Yes, there is that—never thought of that!" agreed Hercules, wondering what "discount" was. He and Eurystheus never bothered about discount.

KING AUGEAS, it appeared, did not dine until eight o'clock, devoting the time between five and eight to riding round his farms, and as, shortly after tea, Prince Phyleus had his horse brought round, to enable him to keep an "important appointment," Hercules found himself free to look at the scene of his next day's labor. Most of Augeas' family were at the capital. Re-



*"I've got it! Tell people I've backed myself to clean out those bally stables in one day, and you've taken me. See?"*

flecting that he might be comfortably in time for the evening rise, Hercules took his trout-rod and book of flies—without which he rarely traveled—with him, and fetching Cerberus, strolled out to the cattle-sheds.

Arriving there, he perceived, without straining his mental faculties in the slightest, that he had considerably underestimated the amount of work which a thorough cleansing of the formidable array of sheds called for. There was an enormous number of them. They were cheaply run-up, badly dilapidated erections of dried mud and thatch—huge rows of them, enough to stable twenty thousand oxen. They were built like a narrow street along the bottom of a shallow valley some miles long. The gangway between the sheds was choked with the accumulations of years.

Hercules surveyed it all with a growing feeling of depression.

"Augeas may pose as being a bit of a yokel," he said to himself rather ruefully, "but he seems to have the mind of an urban secondhand clothes merchant. What! That was a neat touch of his to convey the impression that he only had five thousand head of cattle. It may be all he has now, but at least a million cattle have roosted here during the last thirty years!"

He turned away.

"I can see where I lose fifty fat steers within the next twenty-four hours," he confided to Cerberus, who was trotting soberly along by his master, with one pair of eyes watching a flock of sheep on the upper slope of the valley, one pair—the hound's—roving about, presumably looking for a fox, and the third pair tightly shut—for the bulldog head was fast asleep.

Hercules walked to the upper end of the valley, putting his rod together as he went. He had learned that the rivers Alpheus and Peneus joined a quarter of a mile past the head of the valley, and he had always heard very good reports of the trouting below the junction.

It was a marvelous evening, and though few fish were rising when he arrived, it was quite obviously, in Hercules' opinion, the only way to spend the two or three hours remaining before dinner.

He perceived, some distance upstream, a rather attractive little cottage, and decided to work his way at leisure up to that cottage, and there enjoy a pitcher of the rough but stimulating wine of the country.

Hardly had he decided upon this when—*plop*—a trout rose like a wolf some thirty yards upstream.

"Ha!" said Hercules, and crouching low, stole up toward the broadening ring left by the fish.

He tried him with a "Charioteer,"—a fly of his own invention,—and the trout rose

at it without hesitation. Then ensued ten minutes of pure joy and five of abject misery as Hercules realized that he had foolishly forgotten to bring a landing net.

The fish, a good four-pounder, swam sulkily round in small circles, while Hercules pondered the problem of landing it. Then, just as he was at the point of sending Cerberus in to fetch it, rather than risk trying to lift it across the reeds, a musical voice behind him said:

"I have a net. Shall I land it for you?"

"Oh, I say, thanks—thanks awfully!" said Hercules. "It's fearfully kind of you."

The lady who had spoken—an unusually attractive girl of perhaps nineteen—deftly slid the net into the water. Hercules as deftly steered the fish over the net, which the girl raised skillfully at exactly the right moment; and so the trout came ashore correctly.

Then Hercules turned to thank her. Some five minutes' playful badinage revealed the facts that her name was Phlori, that she was the daughter of Augeas' general manager, that she lived in the cottage upstream, and seeing Hercules' plight with the trout, had hastened to his rescue with her papa's landing net.

She was very pretty, bright and graceful, and Hercules was charmed. With the capture of the big one, the very brief rise finished, and Hercules was at liberty to stroll with Phlori as far as the cottage, there to make the acquaintance of her papa and his wife. They walked along, chatting.

"It seems quite unreal to me that I should be walking along the river with the famous Hercules," said Phlori, with a sidewise glance at him. "I suppose you are the most famous man in Greece!"

"Oh, come, Miss Phlori, you're chaffing me, what?" said Hercules.

"Oh, but you are, you know. Your feats! The way you captured Cerberus—what a funny-looking creature he is!—was simply too priceless!" continued the girl.

"It's awfully kind of you to say so," said Hercules gratefully. "Do you like me, Phlori?"

"I think you are just too sweet—but here's Papa!"

Hercules looked up, to see that they had arrived at the gate. Sitting at a table in the garden was a grizzled, elderly Greek, apparently gazing into the heavens through the bottom of a glass jug.

"Papa," said Phlori, not without a very natural excitement, "here is a visitor—Mr. Hercules! He is wondering if you can spare a cup of wine!"

"Ay, lass, that I can, and nobody in this parish more welcome to it than Mr. Hercules," replied the old Greek, springing up. "Come in, Mr. Hercules. Come right in, sir, and set down. Set down in that chair, Mr. Hercules, sir, and make yourself right to home. Phlori, my dear, tell the maid to bring Mr. Hercules and me up a half-dozen o' that wine I bought at the sale. It's a very fine drop of wine, Mr. Hercules, and I'd be proud to have your opinion 'pon it, sir. Dear me, dear me, I'm right glad to meet you, Mr. Hercules!" And thus prattling, the hospitable old sportsman saw Hercules comfortably seated, and bawled for fresh goblets to be brought.

"I suppose, Mr. Hercules, you will be dining with His Majesty tonight, or, perhaps, mebbe you'd care to stop and peck a bit with us. We just cut a beautiful ham, a beautiful bit o' home-cured ham—a better bit of ham than what you'll be getting up at the palace."

"There's nothing I should like better," said Hercules, watching Phlori as she deftly set out the large two-handled glasses. "But I'm afraid it can't be managed. Augeas rather expects me, I fancy."

THE old Greek looked at him keenly as he filled Hercules the goblet.

"Well, Mr. Hercules, I'm a blunt man, yes sir, and I hope that you'll look out that they don't steer you into no dice-games up at the palace tonight. Nor no betting, either. For I'm bound to say that His Majesty and Prince Phyleus are very sharp-witted." He raised his goblet. "Well, Mr. Hercules, here's your very good health. Phlori, my dear, get yourself a little goblet and drink Mr. Hercules' good health, there's a good little gal!"

Phlori did so, she and Hercules clinking glasses. As they sat them down, a newcomer appeared—a young, sunburnt, good-looking man, very picturesquely arrayed, and carrying a lariat over his arm.

As he came up toward the table, Cerberus issued forth from behind Hercules' chair with a blood-freezing growl.

"Gee!" went the man with the lariat, staring. "Some pup! Whose is it?"

Laughing, Phlori introduced him to Hercules. His name, it appeared, was Red Bill, and he was the foreman of the cowboys engaged on the Augean ranch. He had come, he explained, to ask Phlori's

father about a rumor "the boys back at the bunkhouse" were discussing. Was it right, he demanded, that Mr. Hercules had bet fifty steers that he could clean out the sheds in one day, and was going to try it next morning? Because, if it were true, continued Red Bill emphatically, he was sorry to say that he guessed Mr. Hercules had been rather badly "skinned" by the King, and might certainly regard his fifty steers as being "up the flume for fair."

"Well, so be it!" said Hercules, rather ruefully. "I'm afraid you are right. It was a foolish bet to make—though, as a matter of fact, I had rather got the impression from Augeas that only about five thousand head of cattle had been kept here."

RED BILL and Phlori's papa and Phlori herself exchanged meaning glances. Then, sadly, the cowboy reached out a horny hand to Hercules.

"Shake, Herc, old man! They've got their fangs into you, too. Well, well, you're sure in good company. They've skinned me too—skinned everybody! Why, say, Herc, there aint nothin' going on two laigs on this ranch that they aint skinned—mebbe so for a half-dollar off their pay, or mebbe for their pile. Some sharps, them two royal gents, Herc, believe me! They sure are! Why, say, they aint never had less than thirty thousand head on this ranch as long as I been riding here!"

"It's a shame," said Phlori indignantly.

"Sure, Miss Phlori," agreed Red Bill.

Then up spake the general manager of that ranch—Phlori's papa, who had been sitting in glum and thoughtful silence.

"There's no manner of sense in getting all het up about this, boys," he said calmly. "Mr. Hercules here has been bit by them two rattlesnakes — providing he don't cleanse the stables tomorrow. But if so be he can cleanse 'em, then he wins out. Now, don't get all het up about it, but jest fill up your glass, Mr. Hercules, and you too, Red Bill, and listen to me.

"There's been too much of this sharp work going on. Why, no man's salary is safe till he's spent it, the way the boss and his boy carries on. I've never knowed either of them men lose a bet or a game, Mr. Hercules, sir! And if we can manage to hand 'em a lemon over this here bet, so as you can tear them steers away from the old man, it would hurt him so much that the old galoot would never bet again. It's the winnin' what keeps him hungry for more—and it's the losin' what will cure him. Now, Mr. Hercules, while I been setting down here I been thinking it over, and to my mind there's but the one way that little range o' sheds can be cleansed in one day. The river runs round by the head of the valley, don't it? And about a hundred yards back there's the dam what was put up years ago by Augeas' father, time o' the floods! Now, s'posin' Red Bill and a couple dozen of the boys in from the ranges got to work quietly on the dam wall tonight—there'll be a moon—and work through it jest far enough for it to hold till mornin', plastering up the holes with mud. Then, when Mr. Hercules here comes along tomorrow, to do his contract, he'll only need to put in a few good bats with his club—"

"I got that—I got it! Gee!" said Red Bill, rising excitedly. "Them sheds is going to be sure cleaned tomorrow!" He drained his goblet.

"You jest got to excuse me, Herc, right now. I'm hittin' the trail for the bunkhouse as fast as I can beat it, to rope in the boys," he said. "This is where we got their skin game beat—yes sir!" And with an elaborate bow to Phlori, he left on his mission forthwith.

"Well, Mr. Hercules, sir, what's your idees about it?" asked the old Greek.

HERCULES leaned across and solemnly shook hands.

"If I had your head on my shoulders, I shouldn't have to work miracles to get the price of a decent hunter," he said simply, but with an admiration in his voice that was as sincere as it was pleasant to hear. "I always was a bit of an ass at ideas—what!—and it's a pleasure to meet a man with his own share of brains and mine too!"

Then, from the direction of the palace, came the boom of the dinner gong, and with a hasty *"Au revoir,"* Hercules hastened back to dine with a sharp-set Augeas and his family. . . . .

In spite of an extraordinarily poor dinner overnight, Hercules rose and donned his lion-skin next morning in the highest of high spirits. He had something to be cheerful about—for King Augeas, ably assisted by Prince Phyleus, had managed to persuade him to treble the bet, so that Hercules now stood to win no fewer than fifteen hundred steers, or lose a hundred and fifty.

It had been agreed that the "day" should begin at eight sharp, and consequently, shortly before that hour, Augeas, his son and Hercules arrived at the vast collection of sheds in the valley.

Save for a number of the cowboys who were lounging about, chatting with a sort of repressed excitement, and the old general manager, there were no spectators, except Phlori, who was standing at the head of the valley, some distance from the sheds, at a place where she commanded a view of both the sheds and the dam.

The rustic-looking but sharp-souled Augeas seemed to be in a most generous mood, as he no doubt imagined he could well afford to be, and breaking the silence with which Hercules was surveying the work which lay before him, very kindly offered to provide him with any implements or tools he felt he required.

"There are plenty of stable forks and things, Hercules," he said, "and everything you require you are welcome to."

Hercules smiled and patted his club.

"Thanks very much," he said. "It is very kind of you—but I think I will pin my faith to my old friend here—what! The little club!"

They stared.

"Your club! But—how do you think you are going to cleanse those sheds with a club?"

"Why," said Hercules blandly, "I'll show you. It's quite simple, when one has the trick of it! I suppose all the cattle are out?"

Augeas nodded.

"Yes—I gave orders that the cattle and the men should be kept clear of the sheds today. I wanted everything fair and above board."

"Good," said Hercules. "I may as well get the work done. If you will keep your present positions, you will have a ripping view!"

He moved away in the direction of the dam, Cerberus at his heels, as usual.

"He's mad," said Phyleus. "He's going away from the sheds!"

"Mad as a hatter, I should say, my boy. But that's his affair," replied Augeas. "He's probably gone up there to fetch some patent shovel!"

THEY watched until Hercules disappeared round the head of the valley, then settled themselves down to wait until he returned.

The little group of cowboys on the opposite side of the valley were very quiet for the next half hour—and then, just as King Augeas and his son were beginning to think that Hercules had quietly bolted, and was now well on his way back to Mycenæ, a wild shout from Red Bill, who was prominent among the cowboys, startled them.

"Hyar she comes, boys!" he yelled, pointing up the valley.

Augeas and his son, staring in the direction in which Red Bill was pointing, heard a low and faint but gradually increasing roar, and they saw suddenly sweep into the valley a creeping brown wave which grew in speed, in height and in breadth with extraordinary swiftness. There had been a heavy rain in the night, and the rivers Alpheus and Peneus had swollen greatly.

Then, even as they wondered quite what was happening, a heavy crash sounded from the direction of the dam, and the roar of water redoubled.

The wave, rushing down the valley, suddenly grew into a wall of muddy water—and it was heading straight for the sheds.

King Augeas seized his beard with both hands. "The maniac has broken the dam!" he yelled.

Prince Phyleus grinned wryly. He had realized it a moment sooner than his father.

"We lose, Governor," he hissed. "Not only the steers, but the bally sheds and all!"

He was right.

Ten seconds after he spoke, the wave reached the first shed, foamed round it a little, and passed on. The shed went with it. The water, pouring down the slope, gained speed, and swept mud hovels down and away like straws.

Augeas ground his teeth; and at that moment Hercules, laughing uproariously and streaming with water, reappeared, hastening down to them.

"How's that?" he shouted. "Water! The finest cleanser, next to fire, in the world, what! By the end of the day you wont have a straw left in the valley!"

"No, you blackguard, nor anything else either," screamed Augeas. "Why, you maniac, you've done more damage in half an hour than I shall repair in six months."

Hercules stiffened.

"I will trouble you for less abuse, sir," he said coldly. "Nothing was said about damage. The bet was that I should cleanse the stables in a day. And if they aren't

*"Nothing was said about damage," Hercules said coldly. "The bet was that I should cleanse the stables in a day!"*

cleansed in half a day, why, you can call me no bally engineer. What!"

Phyleus was staring across the valley at the crowd of deliriously delighted cowpunchers, with a puzzled frown.

"What, in the name of Zeus, are they so delighted about?" he snarled.

"Why—look at the work I've saved them!" said Hercules. He pointed to the swirling flood. The hovels were collapsing like card houses.

"I think we can safely consider that I—er—win, I think," he continued politely.

His face mottled a curious purplish-gray, Augeas whirled on him.

"Win!" he ground out. "D'you call that winning? I wonder you didn't start a volcano or two in the valley just to make sure! You don't imagine that I intend to pay out a single steer on a deal like this, do you. I—I wouldn't do it!"

Hercules' face hardened.

"You wont pay!"

"Not a hoof—not a horn!" said Augeas flatly.

"Very well—I shall take the steers!"

"If you touch a steer on this ranch, I'll put your friend Eurystheus into court within the next twenty-four hours for the meat bill, and if he doesn't pay I'll sell him up, lock, stock and barrel!" said Augeas venomously.

Hercules reflected. He saw that the man meant it, and quite the last thing in the world he wished to happen was to see Eurystheus sold out. He and Eurystheus were very comfortable; the hunting was first rate; the shooting was not bad if a man was pretty nippy with his bow; there was some good jack-fishing, though trout were scarce; the cellar was well-stocked; and it was a thousand times better than the city palace at Tiryns.

Hercules thought of these things, and decided.

"Very well," he said. "We will let it go at that. I wont collect my steers until you collect your bill. But mark me—both of you: if I hear of any trickery, any attempt at breaking this arrangement, I'll come back here and collect those steers with compound interest. Understand?"

They nodded sulkily, and without wasting more time on them, Hercules waved a

friendly farewell to Phlori and Red Bill, and started forthwith to take the glad news to Eurystheus. He had lost his steers—but on the whole, as he told Cerberus, he had nothing to grumble about.

BUT in spite of the success which had attended all Hercules' efforts on behalf of his royal friend, affairs—financial variety—were not wholly satisfactory in the household. For the two friends, shortly after Hercules' return from Elis, found themselves face to face with one of those runs of thoroughly bad luck which seem invariably to come at the wrong moment. The outlook was black.

To begin with, Hercules' dog Cerberus, the barb-tail, had not only acquired the distemper for himself, but had communicated it, with all the liberality which usually distinguishes those with contagious misfortunes, to many of the hounds, several of which had already perished. Further, a few days before, the pack had run into—not the fox which Eurystheus and Hercules had fondly believed they were hunting, but a particularly agile and healthy hydra or nine-headed snake, each head possessing two very poisonous fangs. The hounds had torn the beast to pieces, but not before it had utilized its fangs with results truly lamentable. Also old Pegasus, Hercules' weight-carrier, had gone lame on two feet. In addition, Eurystheus had invited the King of Corinthia for a sporting week-end, and the visitor, spending the evenings in a quiet, gentlemanly way with the dice, had won from Eurystheus and Hercules, also in the most quiet and gentlemanly way, practically all the cash they possessed, including the sum which Eurystheus had kept by him for the Queen's birthday present.

The two friends were discussing these and other calamities one evening over their wine.

"No; we can't disguise it, Hercules," said Eurystheus. "Things are just about as bad as they can be—worse, if anything. It is absolutely important that we raise some money somewhere—absolutely. Why, the Keeper of the Privy Purse, damn his impudence, was actually complaining because the servants are grumbling that they haven't been paid for three months!"

Hercules stiffened.

"The insolent hound!" he said. "How in the name of Zeus can you pay them if you haven't got the money?"

"Why, that's exactly what I said, Hercules—practically my very words. But he just shrugged his fat shoulders. It annoyed me abominably. I boiled over completely at the rank injustice of it. 'Look here,' I said, 'you're the keeper of my privy purse! Not me. And I assure you that if you find the position too hard for you, no doubt it can easily be arranged for you to be superseded! What's the matter? Hang it,' I said, 'you can't be overworked at the task of keeping my privy purse. Why, there's hardly ever anything in it!' And that disposed of him, my boy—for a time, at least."

SLOWLY Hercules nodded.

"Can't you do anything with the Chancellor of the Exchequer?" he asked, without much enthusiasm.

King Eurystheus laughed bitterly.

"My dear man, what are you talking about? Everything I say to that miserly thief goes straight to the Queen—and instantly out comes a demand from Tiryns for an explanation. Explanation! That's it! 'Kindly explain why you need this money!' " he quoted sourly from letters of the Queen which evidently rankled still. "If I were to say that I was short of hounds or had lost money entertaining a royal pal, he'd simply say that all spare cash was earmarked for new sling-strings for the army slingers, or needed for this year's feather-crop for the archers' arrows or something of that sort. No, I shall get no more money from the exchequer until the next quarter is due."

"Can't you mortgage this place, then?"

Eurystheus smiled indulgently.

"Dear old priceless old Hercules!" he said. "It was mortgaged up to the ridge-tiles years ago. That chap in rusty black you often see hanging about the grounds is the mortgagee. He's been doing that for years—comes here after his interest. I usually refer him to the Keeper of the Privy Purse!" And so saying, Eurystheus refilled his goblet and roared with laughter.

"I saw some of those acrobats in the street the other day at Tiryns," said Hercules suddenly. "They were doing all sorts of ridiculous little tricks—but by Zeus, they were simply raking in money from the populace! Almost everybody who passed threw them a coin!"

Eurystheus looked interested.

"Really! That's rather interesting!"

Then his face clouded again.

"Well, but we couldn't do that in the streets. After all, I'm the king of the bally

country, even if I haven't got any ready money!"

"Quite so," said Hercules. "But couldn't we think out some new scheme to show the populace something unusual? They'd pay to see something novel. The wrestling business is pretty well played out—what! How about some real fighting? A man and a lion! Great Zeus! I've got it—a man and a bull! Myself, say! I'll get that mad bull that King Minos of Crete has offered a reward for, 'dead or alive, but preferably dead.' You remember! Then we'll have a ring built in Tiryns—a fatigue party of troops can do that—and I'll fight the bull in the ring—what! That will bring the coins of the populace simply whizzing out of their pockets—what! Of course, you needn't appear as one of the organizers—only as a patron. Besides, we don't know enough about business to organize such a thing. But I know who does!"

"Who?" asked Eurystheus, eagerly but ungrammatically.

"Why, that fat impostor, the Keeper of your Privy Purse—what?" cried Hercules.

"Magnificent, Hercules! How on earth do you think of these ideas? Nothing could be better! What a pity it is that the Queen didn't take a fancy to you. I'd have had you Chancellor of the Exchequer in twenty-four hours!"

He drained his goblet, and glowing with enthusiasm, shouted for his attendant.

"Ho, there! Send my purse-bearer to me!" he commanded, and forthwith the same was done. A fat individual with a faintly humorous gleam in his eye entered so quickly that he might have been waiting outside.

"Your Majesty desired—" he began, but Eurystheus stopped him.

"It's all right, Stefanopoulos; I waive ceremony *pro tem*. You have my permission to regard this as friendly little talk just as one man to another. It's business, you understand, Stefan. Get yourself a goblet off the sideboard, lock the door, and sit down."

Stefanopoulos did so, with astonishing alacrity.

"There's no need for a lot of ceremony between three sportsmen," said the King, "and I will say for Steve, here, that he's a grand rider to hounds, though everybody knows what a fat fraud he is really. However—to business. How's the purse, Steve? Honestly, now—no beating about the bush: it's business."

Steve put out his hands in a gesture of despair.

"What! Nothing at all!" exclaimed the King.

"Not an obolus—not even a brass chalcus!" said the Bearer of the Purse. "I turned it inside out not ten minutes ago to show the Tailor of the Privy Robes a worn place that needed patching!"

"Worn place! Ha-ha! That's good! Worn, forsooth!" And King Eurystheus laughed immoderately. "What wore it? Money? D'you hear that, Hercules? The Privy Purse has got—a worn place in it! Ha-ha! Bah! The mice must have been at it! I've never yet had enough money to wear out a papyrus bag, much less a royal purse! And they're going to mend it. What for? Do you think you're going to get something to put in it, Stefan?" he demanded sarcastically.

Hercules smiled. "Of course he is—you've forgotten," he said.

Eurystheus calmed down.

"By Zeus, so I had! Tell him, Hercules. Listen attentively, now, Stefan." And refilling his goblet, he settled back to listen again to the scheme which Hercules proceeded to expound in detail to Stefan.

The harassed Keeper of the Privy Purse leaped at the proposal like Cerberus leaping at a fat sheep, and so the trio went into the figures then and there. And when presently Steve was dismissed, he was a full man—full of figures, wine, joy and hope.

"HOW'S that?" demanded Hercules, triumphantly, as the Purse-bearer left the room.

"First-rate!" replied Eurystheus.

"Yes, it's topping," agreed Hercules, rising. "And now I must be getting to bed. I'll go to Crete to fetch the bull, via Elis."

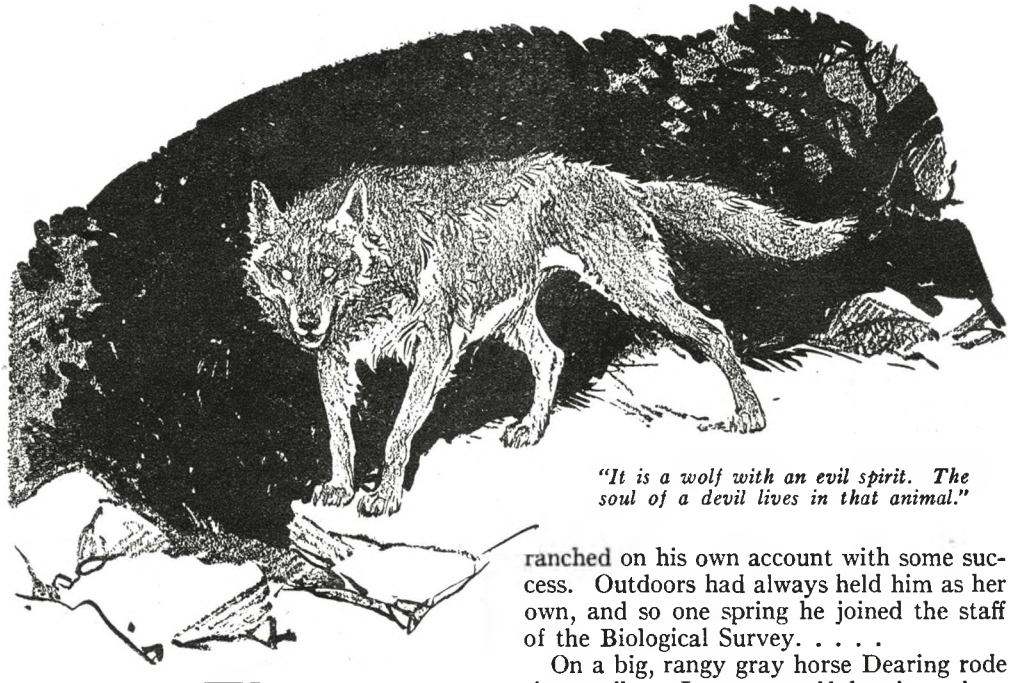
"Why?" inquired Eurystheus. "I thought things were a little strained between Augeas and ourselves?"

"So they are. But I sha'n't see Augeas. There's a man there I want to join us—a cowboy called Red Bill. I told you about him, didn't I? He was foreman of the cowpersons on the ranch—a fine fellow. He will be just the man to help us in the bull-fighting business."

"Good," said Eurystheus. "Carry on!"

And with that each deviously made his way to bed.

**Another blithe adventure of Hercules will be related in an early issue.**



*"It is a wolf with an evil spirit. The soul of a devil lives in that animal."*

# The Phantom Wolf

By

ARTHUR H. CARHART *and* STANLEY P. YOUNG

*The real life story of one of the last and most savage of the great buffalo wolves killed in Colorado.*

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

NORTH of the Colorado River, where it winds between the red walls of Ruby Cañon, and embracing much of the Big Salt Wash, lie the lands of the Flying W ranch. Its cattle winter in the open flats. In summer they find better picking in the high mountain pastures.

To this Salt Wash country, when it was still in the hands of the Utes, came W. J. Dearing. He was a bit of a kid then. But he stayed, weathered the tough winters and baking summers. Cow-punching engaged him for many seasons. He cattle-ranched on his own account with some success. Outdoors had always held him as her own, and so one spring he joined the staff of the Biological Survey. . . . .

On a big, rangy gray horse Dearing rode the trails. It was wolf-denning time. Riding along a ridge trail, he swept the green-gray slopes with keen eyes. Now and then the horse swung his head down to nip at a bit of fresh grass, then ambled on.

They reached a hilltop. The horse stopped, looked with round eyes at the gigantic panorama. Dearing did not protest the pause. His gaze roved, swung southward, rested for a moment on what appeared to be a lake. It was the first mirage of the new season.

Rocks rattled in the trail as they started on again. The horse continued to swing low his head to bite at tempting grass. A magpie flapped away from the trail, found a perch in a tree, chattered and cawed. A mile passed. Suddenly Dearing stopped the horse, got off, peered at the trail. He had caught the print of a wolf foot. He walked for a few feet, found another track, then mounted and rode.

Evening came. A half-grown moon with the shadowed side showing clearly in the deep blue of the heavens rode peacefully halfway up from the western horizon. The west skyline was edged with the blue-green afterglow that follows the clear hours of Western spring sun-days. It faded, blended, shaded until it fanned out into the deep blue in which the silver of the moon seemed like a metal inlay in some inverted bowl of old blue pottery.

Faintly, filled with the weird, chanting music of the wild, there came the yapping call of a coyote at a kill. Nearer at hand

an owl hooted in rhythmic monotony. . . . . Dearing turned his horse toward the cabin he called home.

The next morning Dearing was on the trail again. An old slicker lashed to the back of his saddle and a can of baked beans for emergency lunch, rolled in its folds, were the only equipment he carried against hunger and storm. His first stop was at the headquarters of the Flying W, several miles up the wash.

Unlike the cow-camp at which Dearing headquartered, the home ranch-house of the Flying W was in the midst of flat alfalfa fields, watered by the erratic waters of the big Salt Wash—an oasis in the gray hills. The buildings were long, low, with dirt roof and with walls made of piñon poles hewn on one side and then chinked with adobe. It was not the orthodox ranch-house of the movies or stage. It was headquarters of a real cow-outfit.

"Two more beef cattle killed night before last," reported one of the ranch hands. "Couple of long yearlings. Wolves did it."

"Where?" asked Dearing.

"Beyond the West Wash."

"How many wolves?"

"Maybe two. Didn't see sign of more. But they killed them two yearlin's just the samie."

"I found a dead doe a couple of days ago," reported Dearing. "Wolf work, too."

"Got any line on 'em?"

"Last night just before dark picked up a bunch of tracks leading away from a den. I'll find it in a couple of days."

LATE one afternoon Dearing located the wolf den. Carefully he sneaked away. With a spade and a pick, and in company with two of the boys from the Flying W, he returned next morning. The den was dug out by noon.

"Now for the old ones," said Dearing as he took one of the squirming whelps, slipped a collar on the little furry neck and staked the tiny wolf near the mouth of the den. "Old folks will come back."

Carefully he ringed the little wolf with traps.

"Can't get inside of those without lumbering into one or the other," observed the hunter, as they prepared to leave.

"Kinda looks impossible," agreed one of the cow-hands.

The next morning, however, proved it had been done. The mother wolf had returned and left.

What had happened when she had reached the baby could only be guessed at.

The little whelp had been ripped to shreds by the mother. Dearing shook his head when he viewed the strips of fur and flesh remaining in the collar he had so carefully fastened around the neck of the whelp.

"That beats the Dutch," he exploded. "My gosh, they can't content themselves with killing baby deer, little calves, beef stock. They murder their own babies! Some wolves don't have any heart, but they sure have some brain! Look at the way she got by those traps."

"Luck or something," agreed one of the cow waddies. . . . .

For days Dearing scanned the trails for wolf tracks. The hills dropped off. The existing wolf-tracks were wiped out by a shower. No new track appeared.

Fall came. The hunter made life a continual gamble for the coyotes that raided the white billows of sheep cascading down from the White River Plateau. At a sheep camp he met Tom Kelly, sheep-man.

To Kelly, Dearing told the story of the wolf that had eluded his best trap sets, had slaughtered her own baby, and had seemed to melt into thin air.

"It's the phantom wolf," declared Kelly with conviction.

Old Jesus Gonzales, wrinkled, stooped, brown-skinned sheep-herder, had listened as Dearing talked to Kelly. The aged Mexican looked sharply at both men, crossed himself, and moved quietly away, muttering some charm or prayer.

"There you have it," said Kelly, jerking his thumb at Jesus. "All the herders around here know of that wolf. Haven't you heard of her before?"

Dearing nodded. "Oh, something," he admitted. "Didn't put much stock in the stories, though."

"Well, they all talk it—or don't—depending on how superstitious they are. You know how afraid of a bear a Mex sheep-herder is. Well, they're just as leery of this wolf as of any bear that ever came out of the White River section."

"What do they say about this wolf?" asked Dearing.

"Oh, it's some cock-and-bull story. They say it's a sort of were-wolf—a wolf inhabited by the spirit of some bad man. It makes you creepy to hear these herders talk. Ask old Jesus about her; maybe he'll tell you.

"But don't let his ghost tales get your

goat, Dearing. We want that wolf killed. She's a reality. Nope, don't exactly mean that." Kelly paused thoughtfully. "All same mirage, Dearing. Something like the spirit of this God-forsaken country. Like a mirage, now you see her, now you don't. Kills one place one night, then hits another place miles away the next. Not a word for months. Then she'll come into a flock and play hell with the woollies. Just play hell!"

"And then disappear?"

"Like smoke."

DEARING rode thoughtfully away. From sheep-herders of swarthy skin, quiet, uncommunicative fellows, he had heard of this phantom wolf. Giving little heed to what he considered fairy stories, it had not occurred to him that he had trailed this famous renegade.

The following day he guided his horse to where he knew Jesus Gonzales was herding his flock. As Dearing approached, two furtive sheep-dogs came racing out from the little pyramidal tent where Jesus slept. They barked, scurried away, crouched, tried to wag their tails, indicating friendliness, but then were overcome by shyness, stuck their tails between their legs and scurried back toward the tent.

Old Jesus himself came out as Dearing prepared to dismount.

*"Buenos dias, Señor Dearing,"* he called. As a killer of coyotes, the protector of the flocks, the Biological Survey man was a friend of most herders, and understood their vernacular. *"Como le va?* How goes it with you, señor?"

*"Muy bien,"* replied Dearing. "Quite good, Jesus. But the long trail sometimes gets me doggone tired, too."

"It is the desert life," replied the old man gravely. "We all are tired after days of it. But there is no escape. We are of it."

"Was your season good?" asked Dearing.

*"Si.* But there was a bear, señor. One hell of a big bear in the gulch just beyond the edge of my forest allotment. He gave me worry."

"Any wolves this summer, Jesus?"

The old man looked sharply at Dearing, then turned to gaze far over the flats to the westward.

"No, no wolves this summer, señor."

"I've come to talk of them today."

"But this was a big bear, a very big one!"

"He didn't molest you, did he?"

"No . . . . No, but he worried me."

"If he didn't bother you, let's talk of this phantom wolf. I want to know more about her."

Jesus shuffled uneasily. Dearing knew that he was going to have a hard time getting anything which might be information from the superstitious old Mexican.

"Do you know anything about this phantom wolf, Jesus?"

*"Si,* a little."

"What sort of a wolf is she?"

Jesus' eyes were shifty, bright. "No wolf," he declared.

"Oh, I don't believe that. You're an *hombre muy sabio,* and you don't really believe such a thing."

"But I do, señor. This is no common wolf. It is a wolf with an evil spirit. There is the soul of a devil lives in that animal."

"That's all rot," declared the hunter. "You should know better than that."

"No common wolf could kill as this one. She kills and kills, drinks sheep blood, then flies away through the night without leaving a trail. She has been shot at. And who has shot at her has had trouble later. She whelps not wolves, but some form of devils. No one, señor, has ever found her den!"

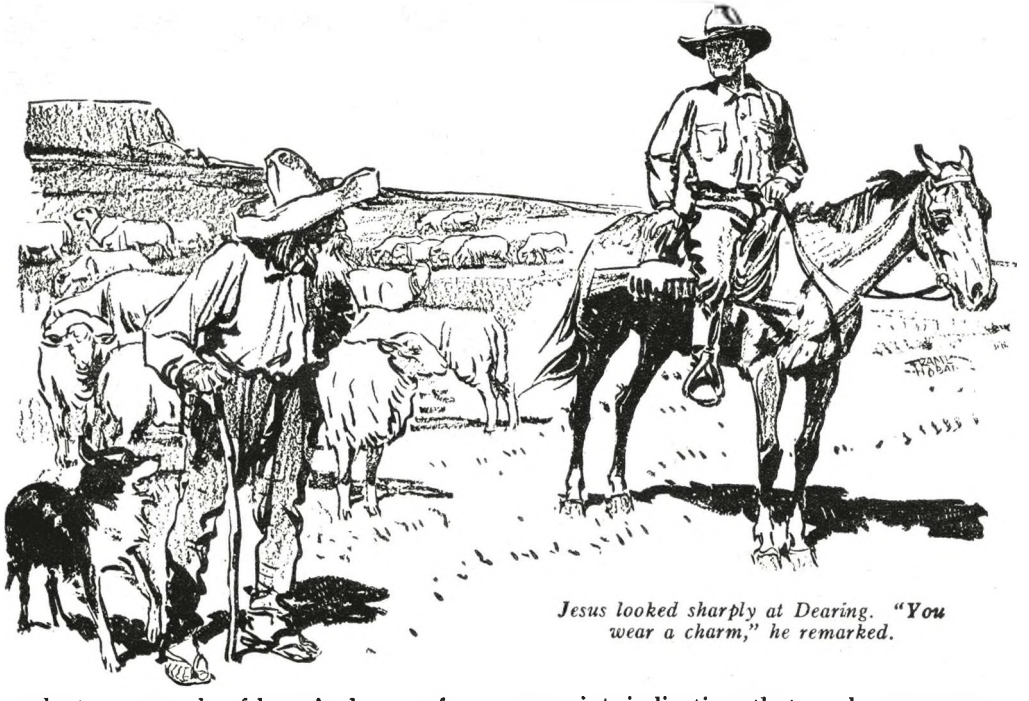
"Well, I'll blow up that story right now! I dug out her den last spring and killed her whelps. They were common wolves."

Jesus looked sharply at Dearing, looked away, whipped back his glance, peering keenly at the hunter.

"You wear a charm," he remarked. "Or else they were not this phantom wolf's whelps."

FALL had flung her banners over the higher hills. Purples lurked in the cañons, crept under the shadowy edges of the colorful plateaus and bathed the hazy La Salles. The cow-camp of the Flying W still was Dearing's headquarters. He was busy in his campaign against coyotes, mountain lions, bobcats. Dearing was not wholly satisfied with killing these lesser renegades. A bad wolf was loose in that vast sweep of country north and west. She would come back, perhaps.

It was a clear fall night with frost nip in the air when he got first warning. He had stepped to the door of the little cabin to look at the dark heavens to see if any flying clouds might have drifted into the uncharted seas of the night sky. The little



*Jesus looked sharply at Dearing. "You wear a charm," he remarked.*

cook-stove roared softly. A choppy, fragmentary wind whistled and sighed down the slopes.

High in the breaks back of the cow-camp broke that eerie call to the pack. Wildly quavering, filling the breaks with blood-chilling echoes, the howl sped down from the cliff where the wolf perched.

In spite of himself Dearing felt the lightest touch of awe. He shivered a little, perhaps from the chill night air, then turned and went back to his reading.

Wolf tracks appeared in the dusty parts of the trail. A new snow showed more. Poor, twisted steer bodies, the remains of a little fawn, slaughtered sheep on Kelly's range, all showed the work of the murderer of the Big Salt Wash.

Winter wore on. At times Dearing would not see a track for a week. Then he would find them in profusion. They would drop out of sight. A kill would again set him on the trail.

Whelping-time came and the wolves howled no more. But killing broke out afresh. A half-dozen yearlings would fall in one night, would be stiff by morning. Only a few strips of flesh would be torn off. The rest would be left for the carrion-eaters—magpies, coyotes.

Angry at being thwarted, Dearing set out on a systematic search of the old denning-grounds. He checked trails, carefully avoided giving alarm, and finally was rewarded by narrowing the trails down to a point indicating that a den was near. Then he found it. With a cowboy to help, he dug out the wolf pups.

"Goin' to set another little wolf for live bait?" asked the cow-hand.

Dearing shook his head. "Nope, she'd kill the poor little devil," he said. "She's that kind."

With renewed vigilance Dearing followed the trails. The phantom wolf was somewhere near. He placed blind sets, sets with scent, every conceivable sort of a trap. But suddenly the tracks appeared no more, and the kills ceased.

THE summer passed much as the previous summer. It would have been a period of discouragement for less determined men than Dearing. His fellow-hunters had succeeded, while he had not. Sagewa had trapped Bigfoot and Lefty. Whitey, raider in the old buffalo haunts of the Bear Spring Mesa, had been brought to range justice. Three Toes of the Apishipa had been trapped and her half-grown half-breed whelps had been tracked down and captured.

Dearing still trailed the Phantom.

Usually wolves keep to the same runways the year around. One killer wolf methodically crossed a certain point, almost at a fixed hour of the day, every nine days, each time traveling in a counter-clockwise manner. Wolf habits of travel on their regular runways generally will

vary somewhat more than his, but they follow certain runs. These habits make it possible for the hunters to lay plans for the capture of ordinary wolves.

But the Phantom was further proof that when one is trapping a renegade anything may happen. Usual wolf conduct, instinct, racial habit is thrown in the discard.

Now it was a question whether or not she would return to the Salt Wash.

Stanley Young came to visit Dearing, but could offer little to supplement the things Dearing had already done.

"Queer wolf," remarked Young at length.

"Spooky," agreed the hunter. "I think old Jesus Gonzales thinks she is no flesh-and-blood beast, but really a spirit."

"You don't believe that, do you?"

"I've got darned good grounds to believe it. But while she kills cattle the way she does, has real wolf whelps, leaves tracks in the trail, it'll take more than a Mex herder's stories to make me change my mind. I'll get her sometime."

They were silent a moment as both looked over the fall-touched landscape of grays, browns, soft-tinted purples and far haze. A mirage was shimmering over the flats.

"Kelly says she's just like that," said Dearing, pointing to the unreal scene that danced in the heat. "I swear, sometimes she does seem unreal. No one has ever seen her."

"I've been thinking," remarked Young after a moment, during which they had watched the mirage fade and a new one blossom at another point. "Maybe she comes here only to whelp. Maybe born here herself. And she comes back to the old home to have her babies. Now, if that's true, she'll be back again this coming mating season, or at least by whelping time."

Dearing nodded. "Just what I've thought."

"Well, Dearing, when you get her, I'll give you a boost in salary. Go to it!"

WINTER came again. Snows swirled over the flats; sheep found the low country, and cattle were being fed alfalfa at the stack-yards of the Flying W.

Early December found Dearing on the old trails, ready to act at the first sign of a wolf.

"She's back," he announced one day as he rode into the Flying W home ranch. "New wolf-tracks over by the East Salt Wash. Slaughtered steer, too."

The foreman looked glumly out over the brown stubble of the meadows. "Guess that means we're in for a loss again," he gloomed. "Dang it, Dearing, isn't there anything we can do to help you?"

Dearing shook his head.

"You may know I'm doin' my damnedest. You've given me all the help I could ask for. Only thing is to stay on the job. Sometime we'll outsmart her."

The new year came. In the breaks, riding over slippery trails, working out from the kills made, Dearing stalked the elusive lobo. Fresh killing brought new tales of the Phantom from the men at sheep- and cow-camps.

The two previous years the Phantom had traveled alone. Now entered a new factor. A mate was with her. Dearing placed some new scent sets. The dog wolf charged around them.

SEVERAL days later Dearing caught the mate of the Phantom. Thus encouraged, he spread his traps everywhere. Days passed with no results. Finally he tore up those sets and placed them at new points.

Meanwhile in the choppy cliffs of the Salt Wash, where wolves had denned since before white man's coming, the Phantom had her brood of killers.

Parent wolves start away from the den in a straight line. They go thus for several miles before they begin to scout. Returning, they circle, sniff the wind, are suspicious. A circling track means a wolf is working back to the den. A straight trail means it is traveling away from the den. Back-tracking on the straight trails, Dearing finally narrowed the possible locations of the den to a limited section.

Then one day he spotted the den, lay watching it for an hour, hoping to see the whelps playing around it. He ventured closer. Quickly the intuition of those who live in the open came to help Dearing. He somehow knew that the den had been abandoned.

Hurriedly he started circling, and verified his conjecture. Only some few hours before, the Phantom had led her babies away. Perhaps the experience of previous years caused her to move; perhaps she had seen Dearing in spite of his care.

Back on his horse, the hunter started to

*"Goin' to set another little wolf for live bait?" asked the cow-hand.*

follow the track of mother and whelps. For several hours he rode. Miles passed; evening approached. The horse topped a little ridge, dropped down a shallow arroyo, came out on a broad dry wash.

A flash of gray on the hillside caught the hunter's eye.

It was a running wolf.

His hand dropped to his gun, yanked it out. The wolf dodged out of sight in the brush.

Dearing felt his muscles bunch, his eyes strain. He prepared for the next break in the grim game.

Again, fleetingly, he caught the movement on the hill, saw the leaping gray body.

Suddenly he realized that this was the Phantom, the ghost wolf of the Big Salt Wash!

Dearing jumped from his horse, ran forward. His eye swept an open space across which the wolf would have to dash.

The fleeing wolf shot into view. Her rangy gray body swept along almost with the lightness of a flying bird.

Dearing threw the gun to his shoulder, pulled the trigger. The bullet whined of death, but spat harmlessly back of the fleeing renegade.

He fired again, and this time the bullet kicked up dust under the wolf. He hurriedly threw in a fresh cartridge, took a snap sight.

The third lead pellet ripped through the air, found its mark. Like a furry fury the wolf stumbled, rolled, clawed, got up, fell again, dragged her stricken body a few feet and then lay still.

The long quest was ended; he had shot the Phantom!

DEARING started forward on the run. As though the ground had exploded, there leaped from under his feet a scared little wolf. The whelp ran, dodged, huddled close to the ground, sought cover, and then suddenly ran to other shelter.

Dearing whirled from his run to the place where the Phantom was lying. Rifle in hand, he dived after the scared little wolf. The whelp yapped a little, dodged, twisted, then in sheerest fright ran straight for the mouth of a newly dug den.

Dearing again started toward the Phantom, leaping over the low brush as he ran.

Another little wolf jumped up, ran, his little body a leaping, scurrying fluff-ball.

Stumbling, running with all his might, Dearing turned and headed the little wolf. Down the hill they scrambled, back toward the den. A third wolf baby leaped from cover, circled, got in the way of Dearing, ran for his life, headed into the hole.

Three whelps were in the new den. Dearing scouted for more that might be outside. Usually the wolf litter is from five to eleven. He was certain that there were others.

Hurriedly searching, he kicked up another whelp, and rushed her into the den. For several moments more he hunted for others, but found none.

He blocked the entrance to the den. His heart pounded with the excitement and running. Anxiously he ran to find the dead Phantom.

His eyes searched the point where she fell. He looked at the rocks, the brush, the empty open space where she had fallen.

He brushed his eyes in perplexity. He would have wagered his worldly wealth that he had seen the wolf fall dead at the point where he stood.

Whatever had happened, one thing was certain.

*The Phantom Wolf was gone!*

FOR a long moment Dearing stood looking at the point where he had seen the killer stumble and fall. There was blood on the ground. But there was no dead wolf there with it.

A feeling of awe edged into Dearing's thoughts. Fight as he might, there crept into his mind all the unreality, the almost supernatural qualities ascribed by the herders to this wolf.

Angry, disgusted, yet unwillingly admitting that there was something of witchery around this magical disappearance, Dearing hurried back to the den. He blocked it more securely. Then he flagged it with his coat so no wild thing would come to molest it while he was gone.

Night had come when he finished. He started for help at the Flying W—and on foot; for his horse, as even a trained animal sometimes will, had become frightened at the shooting and the wolf-scent, and had made off.

As he traveled the rough trail he could not shake that tinge of awe that filled him following the curious, uncanny disappearance of the Phantom. Had he actually seen the wolf that afternoon, seen her stumble and fall—or had he really seen a vision?

He reached the ranch. He had traveled sixteen miles on foot since he left the den.

"Better stay until daylight," suggested one of the hands at the ranch.

"Can't," replied Dearing. "I'm not taking any chance of those whelps getting away. One wolf of that stripe on the range is enough!"

Back over the trail they plodded. Cowmen are some of the best coöperators the Survey hunter has, and one of the men of the Flying W accompanied him.

Footsore, tired—dog-tired—they reached the den at two o'clock in the morning.

They waited for sunup. Dearing did not sleep, for he was keyed to the slightest sound that might betray the return of the Phantom. Sitting quietly in the darkness, waiting, there seethed in his mind all of the old legends, the hearsay that had been woven around this wolf. . . . .

Rose, crimson, flame, burned in the heavens; then came the sun. Dearing took the brunt of the work. It was hard going. Rock, dirt, gravel were gouged out. By dint of digging and grunting labor the two men, by ten o'clock, finally reached the baby wolves huddling in the far end of the new den. Snarling, struggling, they were thrust into a sack by the hunter.

Dearing threw the bag of whelps over his shoulder, trudged three miles over a mountain to his pack-horse, where he had left it the day before. He loaded the whelps on the protesting horse. Leading the animal, he walked eight miles farther to his camp. Here he dumped the gunnysack of young wolves into his automobile, grabbed a hasty lunch, and then started for town.

He had been on the job for thirty-six hours with little sleep. Behind him were hours of trailing, nerve-tense hunting, grueling work. Yet he had failed—partially, at least.

Somewhere back there in the country where mirages shimmered, where wind elves had fashioned goblins out of rock, where the unknown mysteries of the semi-desert brooded and throbbed, the Phantom wolf was hidden in the enchanted land of the Big Salt Wash.

BACK again at his camp with but a day's rest from his trial of the trail, Dearing started again to hunt the Phantom. Carefully he worked out from the point where he had seen her fall. Tracks had been obliterated—if there had been tracks when that gray apparition had melted into nothingness.

Contrary to his expectations, he found no dead wolf. Then he started to sniff the winds that blew from every quarter in that little area near the Phantom's last den. A dead wolf would taint the breeze until he could follow the smell to the body.

But the winds carried no reek of carrion to his nostrils.

Summer wore on; the mirages danced between the Salt Wash country and the La Salles; the sage got dusty, the ground parched, and fall crept down mountainsides The cow-camp of the Flying W was

stocked with supplies. From this base fortress Dearing made new war against the whole motley army of animal killers.

When blue purples had flooded into the shadows of the hills, when days of autumn haze were followed by the clearness brought by the first frost, he rode the sage-land trails. On one of these one day he met the shepherd Jesus Gonzales.

"It is good to see you again," said the old Mexican. "And to see you well, señor."

Dearing laughed a little. He knew what was in the old man's mind.

"Never was in better health, Jesus. Can lick my weight twice over in wildcats."

"There is no other answer," declared the old man, half to himself and looking far away to the west. "You must carry the protection of some powerful saint—or a most powerful charm."

"Why?"

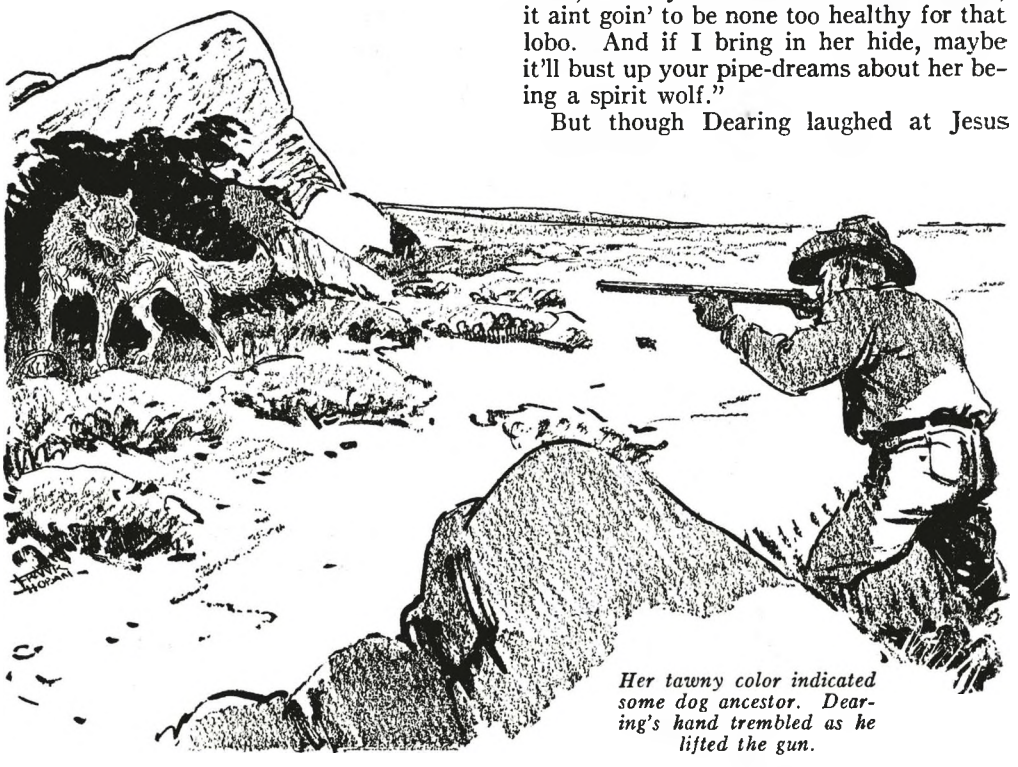
"Is it not true that you shot the Phantom wolf and knocked her down with a shot? And that you killed her cubs of this year?"

"*Si,*" replied the hunter. "And if she comes back, I'll do worse, or better, next time."

"Well, if your charm is so powerful, I hope it will protect the rest of us too, señor. That is a bad wolf, an evil spirit, and if aroused may do great damage, most awful damage. I fear for my flocks, maybe for myself."

"Cheer up, Jesus. If that old sinner is alive, she may be back. If she comes back, it aint goin' to be none too healthy for that lobo. And if I bring in her hide, maybe it'll bust up your pipe-dreams about her being a spirit wolf."

But though Dearing laughed at Jesus Gonzales and his superstitions, he wondered a little in spite of himself. . . . .



*Her tawny color indicated some dog ancestor. Dearing's hand trembled as he lifted the gun.*

On a clear morning early in December Dearing rode a sandy trail through a wash bordered by fretted and fluted walls where squat gnome shapes in rocks were scattered between dainty, colorful pagodas, temples, miniature castles, and hobgoblins of stone. His eyes swept the trail sign, for here was the story of the past few days written in the sand for those who might read it.

He reined in his horse, leaped to the ground, dropped to his knees, peered at the tell-tale track that had caught his eye.

It was the footprint of the Phantom!

Dearing could not have told how he recognized it. But he knew, with the first glimpse, that the old quest was renewed, that the Phantom still lived.

Back at the cabin he overhauled his wolf-trap equipment. He buried it in the

manure pile, waited two days for man scent to pass from the steel traps. Then with his other equipment wrapped in the de-scented setting-cloth and the traps dangling against the horse, he set out to throw down a network of steel traps such as he had never built before.

His work in previous years had given him some knowledge of the erratic habits of the Phantom. This fragmentary data he now put to the best use. In one wide side wash that swung westward from the Big Salt Wash there was a trail over which the Phantom sometimes traveled. Here he put a gang of traps with great care.

"I'll get her," he declared with conviction to the men at the Flying W, as they all sat one night at supper. "She's my wolf. I branded her last spring, and this fall I'll round her up."

GRINS passed around. Dearing met them good-naturedly. "Oh, I know what you're thinkin'," he chaffed. "That this is a ghost lobo. Let me tell you this is a real wolf, and she's my meat!"

"You've been at it a long time," observed one of the men. "Nigh a couple of years, aint it?"

There was a moment's pause filled with the clank of heavy ranch "silverware."

"Yeh, guess more than that," replied Dearing slowly. "Comin' on three year, aint it? But I've taken twenty-one of her whelps in that time, and that's nothin' to sneeze at."

"Nope, there's no kick on that," agreed the foreman soberly, for he knew what havoc each of those wolves might have caused if they had all lived. Roughly, they would have cost the stock industry around the Salt Wash in the neighborhood of forty thousand dollars if they had done the killing of stock accredited to average wolves. With the Phantom as their leader, they might well have doubled that cost to the cattlemen.

The Phantom, still at large, drove Dearing into the field, early, late, every day, rain, shine or snow. Beast, were-wolf, ghost —whatever this elusive killer might be— Dearing swore that he would meet her.

December twelfth came. He saddled his horse as usual. Thoughts of the three-year campaign against this miscreant filled his mind as he rode the sand-cushioned trail.

Wind whispered in the sage; late fall sun heat shimmered over the far plains. It soaked down into the arroyos until it routed the cold bite in the air.

The trail led by the side wash, the favorite route of the Phantom as she came in from the Uinta country in Utah.

The horse turned up this side wash. Some instinct flashed through Dearing, making his nerves tighten. The horse snorted.

Something called him to hurry on. He put spurs to the horse. The pony broke into a dog-trot. They passed the first wide stretch of the arroyo. They turned a corner, passed a twisty section, then rounded a bend. The horse dropped to a sharp walk.

Peace filled the land. Then like the ripping of stout fabric the quiet shattered. One instant Dearing was sitting relaxed in the saddle. The next he was pulling leather, quieting the snorting, plunging horse.

Like a buff spirit, unreal as tawny fog, there sprang from the sage the rangy body of a big wolf.

It was the Phantom!

Dearing's hand laid quick grip on rifle stock. He jerked it out, flung himself from the saddle, hurried forward.

Wildly the Phantom strained at the trap. Her tawny color, almost like that of a collie, indicated some dog ancestor. Perhaps it was this which had made her erratic, untrue to wolf tradition, and so knowing.

Dearing's hand trembled as he lifted the gun, sighted it, pressed the trigger.

The big wolf leaped, fell, lay still.

The Phantom had passed. In her place was—

A dead wolf!

"AH, but señor," protested Jesus Gonzales when he next met the hunter. "I have it all figured out. This is not the same wolf. You shot the Phantom last spring. That Phantom still roams the range. This is another wolf. You are still safe from witchery."

"Well, maybe," agreed Dearing. "But the scar of the bullet I shot through her eight months ago showed plainly on this wolf I trapped."

The old sheepherder looked up, belief and incredulity in mixed expression on his face.

"Perhaps it is the same," he said slowly. "And yet—I doubt it."

Dearing smiled indulgently. He knew his quest was ended. He had "got his wolf."

# *Free Lances in Diplomacy*

## *By* CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

Illustrated by William Molt

*"The Attempt to Cork Suez" deals in Mr. New's characteristically vigorous fashion with one of the most unusual and dramatic events described in recent years.*

AT the coaling basin across the Canal from Port Saïd H. M. S. *Crocodile* tied up, and a few minor repairs to some of the smaller units of machinery were taken in hand while a fairly equipped machine-shop was available. It was estimated that, in two days at the outside, she would pull out and steam down the Canal.

Meanwhile a party of some thirty "liberty men" were given shore-leave until noon of the following day, and were pulled across to the commercial basin in two of the cutters. In the lot, there were three warrant officers and a sprinkling of petty officers. These were for conducting an orderly sight-seeing tour, going on through the shops afterward. But the majority were ashore for action and wassail.

Bill Henson, a gunner's-mate, expressed his preferences to this effect, and a warrant officer, standing near, commented with a grin:

"That's perfectly proper, Bill, if you carry on without any trouble. But I've been in this dump before—and I'm telling you there'll not be a more dangerous place along any shore you'll touch than this same Port Saïd—especially if you prowl through the Arab Quarter! They'll knife you for ten francs—or drug you for less—beat you up for the mere pleasure of it! Load in a few rounds of drinks in the bars of the European hotels, here, before you start for the Arab Quarter; then don't eat or drink anything until you get back to this side. Have all the fun you wish, mates—but be down at the mole by noon tomorrow; and look sharp that some of you don't go west!"

The bunch gathered irresolutely; this was putting a severe crimp in their plans.

" 'E's a bloomin' pessimist, that's wot 'e is—a-tykin' all the j'y outa life!" exclaimed one dissenter. "Still-an'-all—'e might be right, at that! H'I votes we 'as a few h'in that there Metropole on tha Quai. Then w'en we're feelin' jist right, we tykes the tram an' 'as our go at that there 'dance-de-vahnty,' up h'in the brownies' diggin's."

"Right-o! Williams knows this 'ere gyme better nor wot we does!" another agreed; and this plan was adopted.

BUT as is usually the case with liberty-parties, this one began splitting up into smaller ones after they'd had three or four drinks to start the day. Some were content

to cruise through the shopping district. Ten of the lot finally did go out to the Arab Quarter, however, and ordered their *danse du ventre* according to schedule.

Always, in their wanderings, they found some Arab or Greek or Portuguese who spoke enough English to understand their wants. So now when they expressed a desire for a few top-notch girls, and music they could dance to, they were accommodated. Up a narrow alley, and around a corner—through a couple more, between stone houses with mud-stucco and tiny balconies overhead, with *mushrabiyehs* screening the slit windows behind them.

"Gor-blyme, Bill, these 'ere brownies aint got no proper idees h'on ventilation!" ejaculated one of the seekers after jollification. "A bit o' forced-draught, now, might make er difference—wot? Sort o' penertratin'-like—don't ye think?"

Eventually they were conducted down a flight of concrete steps into a good-sized cellar with a hardwood floor in deference to such foreign scum as never had learned to dance on pounded clay, in the Eastern way. Here they were pressed to drink, but refused. They would, however, pay an entrance fee of forty francs—and did—with forty more to each girl they danced with.

PRESENTLY some of them noticed that certain scowling men about the cellar were muttering to each other and stealing furtive glances toward a well-built Arab in a striped *burnous* who sat quietly smoking and watching the sailors from a table in one corner. In a few moments the ruffians began edging toward this corner. The Arab was well intrenched, with the heavy table in front of him—and he stopped them for a moment with a sharp order in Arabic to halt. There was a chorus of exclamations, apparently accusations, and a contemptuous response in Arabic from the man behind the table.

By this time, the sailors were standing motionless on the floor, watching the corner with interest.

In another moment the Arab's right hand came up from under the edge of the table with a service automatic. The crowd fell back a few steps. He moved from behind the table and motioned for them to get out of his way. But they only scowled, and did not budge; they knew he would hardly waste his ammunition unless they rushed him—and they could afford to wait. Then—he surprised them. With a pantherlike forward leap, he bowled over the end man in the semicircle, stunned the next with the butt of the automatic and dropped a third before they realized what was happening. This brought him close to a doorway on the farther side from the steps leading up to the street.

As he passed Bill Henson and Pat Riordan, standing near it with their dancing partners, they caught a low remark:

"Anyone can take a hand if they like, mates! Could you—er—drop a couple?"

With a howl of delight, Bill shot out a straight right and left, knocking two of the scoundrels against those back of them. Paddy accounted for two more; which was quite enough for the rest of the party, who executed a flank movement and smashed into the crowd regardless of drawn knives now thrusting wickedly at them. While attention was thus momentarily drawn away from him, the Arab caught Henson and Riordan by the arms and drew them behind a dirty Turkish rug which did duty as a portière in the doorway.

"This way, men—we've got to get out of sight before that lot come after us! My word! Your mates out there are doing us damned good service—and I'm under still greater obligations to you two."

"Blyme, sir—Paddy an' me wor fair sp'ilin' f'r h'it! Thanks be! Things wuz gittin' a bit slow—wi' nothink ter drink 'til we gits back ter tha Quai! Where do we go from 'ere, sir—an' wot breed o' man are ye, h'if h'I might arsk?"

"Born in Devon, mate. On His Majesty's service, if you must know—but you're both to keep close mouths as to that, d'ye see! An' you jolly well know why, of course—we're not out of the woods yet. That cursed little Greek got suspicious of me somehow; but none of 'em heard what I said to you, so they can't be sure they've not made a mistake after all—unless they run us down in this rabbit-warren."

AFTER twisting and turning until a landsman would have lost all sense of direction, the three came to a flight of steps leading upward and found themselves in what they supposed was a large ground-floor room, until they glanced through the *mushrabiyeh* in the farther wall and found they were on a level eight feet above a narrow alley, which seemed to lead toward the lake. Apparently this might be the living-room of the man who owned the dance-cellar—there were expensive rugs and some

good carved teak in it—but it was too dirty to indicate an Egyptian of high caste.

The Devon man listened for a moment, then whispering that they'd better get out while there was a chance to do so, he quickly swung the *mushrabiyeh* around and beckoned the others out upon the little balcony. Fastening the screen after them so as to leave no trace that they had passed through the room, he swung down until he was hanging from the balcony and dropped the remaining two feet or so to the mud of the alley, Henson and Riordan following.

Turning toward the lake, they ran along until the alley doubled around a corner to the right and another to the left—after which, they found themselves in a *cul-de-sac* with no outlet except a small door in the coquina wall, over which they could see the tops of some palms. The door was locked, but the supposed Arab produced from under his *burnous* a small bunch of skeleton keys and had it open in a moment.

Entering, they found themselves in a most attractive garden extending east along the shore of the lake from a good-sized *konak* of two stories. The garden paths were hidden among palmetto clumps and flowering shrubbery so that there was little risk of discovery from the building and an eight-foot coquina wall screened it from boats on the lake. The Devon man tried to estimate, from the contour of roofs they could see over the garden walls on two sides, where they were, and which way they had best try to get out. He was under the impression that they'd better not attempt it until after dark, when they couldn't be seen climbing over the wall. Then, to their amazement, their immediate plans were changed in a most unexpected way, for around the clump of palmetto a woman came silently—her *yashmak* of *crepe de chine* falling from the nose-bamboo below a rather fine pair of black eyes.

An Arab doesn't bow to women; that is beneath his dignity—he considers them inferior creatures, made only for his hours of ease. The Devon man, however, bowed and spoke to her quietly. His voice was more courteous than any she'd ever heard from any man. She hesitated. Her first impulse had been to scream—bringing eunuchs who would have tried to kill these violating *gaiours* in the shortest possible time. Instead of that, she fell for the handsome English devils—and fell hard.

She knew that if she were discovered talking to them her life wouldn't be worth a piaster. But she'd never had any experience with men, other than her father and her husband, Sulieman Bey—and she was intrigued by these strangers.

WHEN the Devon man calmly asked whose *konak* it was, the woman told him, noting with surprise the exceptionally pure Arabic he spoke. He explained that they had been set upon by thieves and murderers in a cellar where they had been dancing with some women to pass the time until they went back to their boat, described the way in which they had made their escape, and asked her advice as to how they should get out.

She said they certainly would be seen if they tried it before dark—while if they hid in the garden some woman might see them at any moment and let out a screech that would settle the matter as far as they were concerned. After her black eyes had studied each face in turn (Bill and Paddy were under thirty, and fairly good-looking lads) she asked if they would dare put on women's clothes and spend the day in the harem. She added that other women frequently visited them, and the eunuchs, if they saw them at all, would think nothing of strange women being in the place.

The supposed Arab became thoughtful.

"For myself, yes, beautiful Hanoum," he assented, with another flattering bow. "But my friends do not speak your language. If suspicion be aroused, they die—like rats in a trap!"

"Nay—but that will be as Allah hath shown me," said the woman eagerly. "In the harem there be one—a daughter of my mother's cousin—whose tongue was pickled in a grease-pot before she was born. When she speaks—others listen. That one shall be told that thy brothers have seen her through the bushes and long to possess her. It will be enough!"

"And the other Hanoums? Will they not also wish to know something of the Firenk Devils?"

"We will put something in the coffee of Ayesha, to make her sleep—then I will tell the others they must talk with thy friends—all the time—as she did. It shall be as I say—each shall have her chance."

The Devon man turned to his companions.

"Mates, I'm afraid I've gotten you into pretty deep water. Sorry, you know—damned sorry! The lady says it's impossible for us to get out of here before dark—

impossible to stay in the garden without being seen by some woman who'll put up a howl before stopping to think. She proposes that we all put on women's clothes, which she'll fetch us, and hide in the harem until midnight—says she's dead sure she can pull it off without discovery. But—if we *are* caught in there it's simply good-night—and not an easy death, either! We can go out the door we came in and take our chances of fighting through, but—"

"Lor' lumme, sir! W'y not tyke *this* charnce?" exclaimed Bill. "Paddy an' me'll be strong f'r h'it! Wot? Al'ays farncied h'I'd like ter be turned loose in a harrum! H'I s'y! Wot price a coupla gals fer each of us?"

"The biggest risk, Bill, is that the average harem isn't in the least what you fancy it is," the stranger explained; "and when you find you're disappointed in what you see, you're going to show it! Well—if you even so much as turn a hair in any expression of disgust, this same bunch of women—who really don't give a damn how far you go—will simply round on you! They'll turn you over to the eunuchs with screams of fake terror—and eat little French cakes while they watch you being cut up like sides of beef on a butcher's counter! Do you get it? Go as far as you like—little or no risk in *that*. But by the great jumping frog, mates, you'll have to look as if you like it—even if your stomachs are turning over inside! Just keep that in mind every bloomin' second! Now—d'you want to gamble—or don't you?"

"We'll charnce it, sir! Their faces is kivered up wi' them veils, anyw'y!"

"Yeah—but they *wont* be! An' it's what you're going to do when you see 'em that's worrying me!"

ZOBEIDE HANOUM had silently disappeared as soon as she saw they were agreeing to her proposition. At her suggestion, they concealed themselves in a corner growth of low cedars. In about twenty minutes, she was back with another and younger woman whom they were given to understand was Amina Hanoum. The two women were hiding under their clothes the inner-caftans and *ferejehs* (the outer cloak, covering the entire person, which is worn by ladies in the street) for the three men—also two-inch bamboo-sections and strings to fasten *yashmaks* over their faces. To get their feet into high-heeled French shoes worn by the women was simply out of the question—but as the *ferejehs* almost swept the ground there was little risk of their own shoes being seen. Bill and Paddy, being short but stocky and muscular, filled out the coverings until their contours were not too far from the Egyptian ideas of female beauty. The Devon man was an inch taller, but he wound his striped *burnous* around his waist and seemed much more naturally padded than he really was.

Fortunately, it was still cool along the Canal—otherwise the men would have sweltered under the extra garments. The two women assisted in putting them on—loosening their own in order to show where the inner caftans fitted snugly and where they were loose. As the Devon man wasn't fool enough to bungle a job upon which their lives depended, he hugged Zobeide Hanoum as if unable to resist her charms, and the two jackies followed his example, with the soft-eyed Amina.

Zobeide had primed the other harem women before bringing out the clothes—they all were eager to see these three women visitors who were so interestingly different. The eunuchs were summoned to fetch in a meal of *cabobs*, French rolls, sweets, coffee and narghiles, with fig and almond paste to nibble on during the rest of the afternoon. These strange women were of a distinction and must not think them lacking in hospitality. When the eunuchs were dismissed until the evening meal, nothing was farther from their minds than any suspicion of the visitors—the proceedings were entirely normal and customary. They knew that from habit all of the women would remove their *yashmaks* while eating, and leave them off for some time—which would amount to indecent exposure if the eunuchs or other men were in the harem.

If their new friend hadn't seriously warned them in advance, Bill and Paddy would undoubtedly have betrayed themselves when the *yashmaks* came off. Some of the faces might have been beautiful in earlier years but cosmetics, with a diet of sweets and pastry, had coarsened them. The features were heavy, the lips which were not thick, were cracked and congested, noses inclined to grossness, hair seldom if ever washed, and finger-nails dyed and blackened. The Mohammedan standard of beauty they found to be a study in the contours of obesity.

Henson and Riordan swallowed, once or twice—but they played the game. They were good sports at any time—and particu-

*The Arab's hand came up with an automatic, and the crowd fell back a few steps.*

larly when they were up against it. The most noticeable of their hostesses—and evidently the pride of the harem—was Fatima Hanoum. The name provoked muttered comment from Bill:

"Fat Emma Hannum! My Gord! The priest said a mouthful when 'e christened 'er, didn't 'e?"

NOW, Zobeide was temperamentally an extremist, but heretofore restrictions of the harem had rather cramped her style. Even showing her face to these men was her death-warrant if caught—while fetching them into the harem would have suggested lingering torture with boiling pitch, had the Bey discovered it. There could be no worse fate than already was booked for her in the extreme eventuality. So, in a spirit of sheer devilishness, she thought of a final offense which would lay over all the others. A Mohammedan rarely admits his women to conferences upon commercial, political, or any other matters, with his male friends. In some cases, however, when he has taken a beautiful new wife who simply carries him off his feet, he likes to stress his importance in the world—his superiority among other men—by having her witness some such conference from a vantage-point so carefully concealed that his guests cannot see it. High up in the stone wall in this harem there was a little cubicle reached by steps in the thick wall—a tiny chamber with a *mushrabiyeh* of small size and very close mesh.

As the "tender gazelle" of other days had outgrown her attractiveness, and died, the little oak door behind the Persian carpet on the harem wall had been locked up by the Bey, and forgotten for three or four years by everybody. But when Zobeide told the Devon man about it and wished they could get up where they might overhear a political conference then being held in the salamlik, he said he could open that door—agreed with her that it would top the whole joke on the Bey if they got out of it alive—but refused to attempt it unless she really wished to observe her lord and master for an hour or two among his cronies. She fairly danced up and down at the idea—so he muttered to Bill and Paddy what the scheme was—cautioned them to sit

tight and do anything the women wished except talk—then followed his hostess to the dark corner. Here they slipped behind the rug while the attention of the other women was concentrated upon the smiling faces of the lively pair who were making a big hit in spite of their inability to use a common language.

From the little closet overlooking the salamlik the Devon man instantly recognized, among five men seated around a dinner table just below, Saïd Fayal, a notorious Egyptian revolutionist—Emile De Roche, a French renegade with a post in the Khedivial Government, but secretly a revolutionist—Faroji Pasha, a commander in the Egyptian Army and a bitter Nationalist. Sulieman Bey he knew by sight only. The fifth man might have been either Arab or Moor, but seemed to be the best thinker of the lot. They addressed him as Zouche Effendi—plainly deferring to his opinions. All five were intensely anti-European.

Saïd Fayal was saying, in French:

"One of the most effective things we ever did, look you, was the cholera-germ cultivation a few years ago. It was put into the food and drink of the British, up and down the Nile. There were many more deaths than ever were reported. But the cursed English do not let an epidemic spread. Their wires were busy, from Upper Egypt down. They sterilized the food—and were able to check the epidemic. It taught the British and French, however, that we are by no means negligible—and I should like to work out something to intensify that impression. Could you make a suggestion, Zouche Effendi?"

At the question, the man called Zouche Effendi glanced around the circle of faces.

"Let us deal with facts and possibilities, *mes amis*—not vague theories of what we would like to do—but can't do. Eh? We would like to utterly smash Britain and France! Oh, yes—almost, we would give our lives to do that—but it is impossible. Both are far too powerful! Very good! What then is there which we can do by way of clearing the lot of them out of all Mohammedan countries? Well—that also is too large an order—for many years, I fear. Beyond that—would it be of advantage or satisfaction to us to make them lose billions—in good hard cash?"

"Mon Dieu! But how?" exclaimed De Roche. "That is something—*oui! Sacre nom!* . . . . It is much! But how shall we do that, *mon ami?*"

"Block the Suez Canal—so that it cannot be used for six months or more!" replied the other coolly.

"Name of a name!" gasped Saïd Fayal. "What could be done—that they would not repair in a few days?"

"*Attendez!* In the narrow parts—at the seventy and the hundred-and-forty kilometer-posts—the total width of the Canal on the surface is from sixty-five to one hundred meters—on the bottom, twenty meters—average depth, slightly over thirty feet. Most of the new cargo-boats now using the Canal run from six to eight thousand tons on a twenty-eight-foot draft, and are approximately five hundred feet long. Some of the latest passenger-liners run to fourteen thousand tons and a length of six hundred feet—against a surface-width in the Canal of one hundred and ninety-five to three hundred and thirty feet. Suppose that one of those big liners with its high superstructure were laid athwart the Canal anywhere in those two narrow stretches—the bottom blown out of her with some sort of a mine—and sunk there. How long would it take to raise and remove that obstruction? They could not get underneath to patch the bottom because her weight would settle her six or eight feet into the mud. All her cargo would have to be removed—and on a liner, that's not a high percentage of her weight. I doubt if she could be floated with pontoons in that narrow space with a good deal of the fairway silted up by the explosion. Just a case of cutting her up, piece by piece, and floating them away. It might be done in six months—more likely a year. And if a liner were sunk in each of those narrow spots, there'd be no transferring cargo around them for the simple reason that the congestion of stuff would bank up the Canal on both sides for the full hundred-and-sixty kilometers. Now—*attendez!* Figure up—try to compute—the number of boats on their way through the Mediterranean from Gibraltar to Port Saïd, on their way up the Red Sea from Aden—boats already too near to be diverted around the Cape at the moment the Canal is blocked, without prohibitive loss in time and coal."

DE ROCHE was figuring upon the tablecloth as he replied:

"From London to Bombay, the Canal saves more than five thousand miles under the Cape route; from Havre, about the same; Hamburg, somewhat more. If boats

were diverted at Colombo and Gibraltar, it would mean a coal or oil expense for five thousand additional miles—and the ocean freights either prohibitive or a dead loss. For boats already in the Mediterranean or Red Sea, the loss would be fifty percent more."

"Precisely! And there's another point: Russian propaganda may start a revolution in India at any moment. The British Army now billeted there is far too small to handle a revolution of even Mohammedans alone. At the first sign of outbreak the British Raj would immediately rush troopships with several divisions to reinforce the present Army of Occupation. By way of the Canal, it would take them four weeks to reach Bombay. If the Canal were unexpectedly blocked they couldn't meet those troopships on the Red Sea end with empty liners until their cargoes and passengers had been taken out of them so that the troops could be transshipped by marching them around the obstruction. Those transshipping liners couldn't be moved up to Suez ready to load the troops in less than two or three weeks at the least. To divert the troopships around Africa would add two or three weeks to the original four. And when a revolution once is fairly started, a good deal may be accomplished in four or five extra weeks. Altogether, I think a computation of several billions in money actually lost by the nations using the Canal would be a conservative estimate—from the time the Canal was blocked to the time it would be again open for maritime transportation."

"But, *mon ami,* would it not be a most frightfully expensive project to carry out—this so thoroughly blocking the Canal? It would mean, for example, the purchase of two large boats—preferably, passenger liners, because of their high superstructure. The purchase of mines or infernal machines and the expense of getting them shipped as case-goods in the lower holds. The employing of at least a hundred men for different parts of the enterprise. And while we are fairly well equipped in the way of funds, it would take a large amount of money which we can't afford to lose if something goes wrong with the scheme!"

"No—it would require very little money, as I see it. We will not purchase nor charter any boat of our own—we simply decide on some big liner to use for our 'plug.' Nobody connected with her would have any reason to believe that we had picked her out any more than hundreds of other craft. We have aroused no suspicion by attempts at mine-planting in the Canal. Yet it is an exceedingly simple matter to have our explosive very close to that liner at any moment we decide upon—and not so difficult to steer her into the opposite bank. In this way, nobody knows anything about our methods until the thing happens. We need employ no more than twenty or thirty men at the outside."

"But the details, man—the details! How could it be done as simply as all that?" De Roche's expression was one of incredulity.

"It isn't necessary to go into detail just now. I'll guarantee to do it when the time comes—or bear all the expense myself if it doesn't work. The only question is whether you consider it worth trying to cork up the Canal in some such way at a cost to us not exceeding a thousand pounds, Turkish—probably not much over half that?"

"*Mon Dieu,* there is no such question! It makes itself to be seen that such a thing would be most disastrous to all European nations alike—the greatest blow ever conceived by one of us! Should it be done immediately, think you, Zouche Effendi?"

"A hint from Moscow would decide that, one supposes. But I think they are most ready to move in India. Suppose that we meet here again in two weeks to perfect the details—that in the meanwhile, I undertake to prepare the explosive so it may be sent down the Canal at any moment? Eh? Perhaps, also, it would be of advantage if we select twenty men whom we know we can trust—and send them in two lots by first steamer out—ten to Marseilles and ten to Malta. They will then be where we may cable them instructions at any moment."

THERE was a good deal of further discussion, but the Devon man thought they had better be getting out of that little cubicle before any uncontrollable impulse made one of them try to stifle a sneeze. He could barely make out Zobeide's face in the very faint light which came through the *mushrabiyeh*—but, in pantomime, he easily made her understand that they were to sneak down, one cautious step at a time, without making the slightest noise. Two minutes later, they slipped out from behind the big rug in the shadowy corner, and none of the other women had the least idea where they had been—in fact, they had not been missed.

There was then a general discussion in guarded tones as to how the supposed women were to get away from the *konak* and its grounds without discovery. Zobeide Hanoum and Fatima—the two most influential favorites in the harem—occasionally took guests home to other harems or even the Port Saïd hotels in one of the Bey's motor-cars, with a eunuch driving it. But always this had been in broad daylight. Such a request might be refused after dark. There was a garden gate, opening upon a small boat-house—always kept locked and barred—in which a couple of boats were kept for the Bey's use when he wished to go out upon the lake, on moonlight nights. The eunuchs had the keys of the gate and boat-house, but Zobeide felt sure her guest would be able to manage the locks.

At this time of year it was dark by six o'clock. She had the evening meal fetched in as the light began to fade. As women from other harems occasionally spent the night when visiting, the eunuchs naturally supposed these three were doing the same. Harem favorites are rarely permitted to do this—but the discards and back numbers are kept on a looser rein.

After the meal, some of them wrapped Persian shawls around their shoulders and went out into the garden. There was no moon—no starlight. Presently Zobeide, Amina and the three men slipped into the shrubbery which concealed the boat-house gate. In three minutes they were through and had locked it behind them. A few minutes later, the outer doors of the boat-house swung apart; a boat glided out upon the glassy surface of the lake.

Henson and Riordan began pulling, with rags wrapped around the oarlocks, toward the boat-landing near the railway station at Port Saïd. Without a sound they glided down the lake until the sailors thought they were far enough away to get up a little more speed. There was no saying how soon their absence might be discovered—and the Devon man hoped to be at the mole of the Bassin du Commerce before any message was telephoned in from Sulieman Bey's *konak*. Suddenly, he began to wonder how Zobeide and Amina were going to get back without discovery—and asked them.

Both laughed; then they grew serious.

"We do not go back, O Ingiliz Effendi! For if we did, the sun would not shine upon our living faces in the morning. It may happen that when we are missed, Fatima will put fear into the hearts of the eunuchs, lest they be killed for admitting strangers to the harem. They know that she be the White Dove of Sulieman Bey—and is like his right hand. If the lie were between her and the eunuchs, it is she who would be the truthful one in the Bey's mind. So that this thing may come about: When the throats of those who talk may be slit—all are silent. There were no strange women in the harem—nobody observed Zobeide Hanoum or Amina after the evening meal—there is no knowledge concerning them."

"You two, then, will accompany us? Yet we have no harem for you—how will you buy food, clothing, or shelter?"

"Jewels are bestowed upon women of the harem, if their lord be pleased—and money, in their fortunate days, before they become thin and old. If they are wise, these things be kept—as much as may be. It is even so with Amina Hanoum and my father's daughter. See thou! . . . . We take with us not clothing, which might be seen, but the jewels bestowed upon us, and the little books showing money in the Ottoman Bank. In Egypt we cannot remain—but there be fair Islands in the East, it is said. In such a place, it may happen that there be enough for our wants."

"I will myself take thee to those Islands, Zobeide Hanoum, if it be possible—or I will send one in care of thee. And the British Raj shall promise that thou wilt be placed in comfort, with honor and substance. Now—if thou art to accompany us, we cannot go ashore near the Gare d'Ismailia—there be too many who might see. I will remove these women's garments so that I appear as a Tunisian Sheik, as when thou first saw me. If then we are noticed—who is to question a Sheik with four women of his harem?"

AFTER landing on the beach west of the railway station—out of sight in the darkness—the sailors walked out until the water was over their knees and gave the boat a powerful shove which sent it out into the lake, where it drifted about until struck and smashed by one of the Damietta ferry steamers. Then they walked, silently but at a fairly rapid gait, to the Bassin du Commerce, and around it to the long Quai Francois Joseph, at the outer end of which a large deep-sea yacht was tied up, with a gangplank across from her rail to the Quai.

It was by this time nearly ten o'clock—the various steamship offices along the Quai were closed for the night and such hotel-

*With a howl of delight, Bill shot out a straight right and left. Paddy accounted for two more.*

guests as were out seeing the town or at the café's concerts, had not yet returned. In the neighborhood of the big lighthouse, where the yacht lay, there was nobody near enough to notice who went aboard of her or came ashore.

After glancing about in every direction, the Sheik led his little flock of hens across the gangplank—muttered something to the deck-quartermaster who stood at the end of it—and made for the saloon-companion on the port side, away from the Quai. Here a steward met them, and was sent in with a message to the Owner—returning in a moment to usher them into the luxuriously furnished saloon of people who were thoroughly at home upon any of the seven seas.

A fine-looking man whose dark-brown hair was frosty at the temples, rose from his swivel-chair behind a desk in the starboard corner and came to meet them with outstretched hand:

"Captain Rainsforth? . . . . By jove! That make-up is top-hole, Ned! Who are your friends?"

"Zobeide Hanoum and Amina Hanoum —who have just escaped from the harem of Sulieman Bey with us and wouldn't last through the night if they went back. Bill Henson Hanoum and Pat Riordan Hanoum —from the harem of H. M. S. *Crocodile*, over yonder at the coaling-wharves! They came into one of my private fights out in a cellar of the Arab Quarter and have stuck by me ever since. I damn' near got 'em butchered, at that! —Get those women's rags off you as quickly as you can, mates —the steward will stow 'em somewhere. We may have people aboard pretty soon inquiring about you gazelles of the harem! —How soon can you pull out of here, Your Lordship? Which way are you bound?"

His Lordship, Earl Trevor, glanced at his watch.

"Singapore way—leaving in fifteen minutes if Earl Lammerford gets back by then. If not, he'll take the train and join us at Ismailia—but it'll hamper me less if he gets aboard here. You're expecting a bit of a row, are you, when the ladies turn up missing out there?"

"Well, I am—an' I'm not! Zobeide, here, has a good deal of faith that Fatima Hanoum, whom we left behind—partly because she'd have sunk the boat—will put the fear of Allah into those two eunuchs so they'll forget there were three women visitors in the harem this afternoon and no-

body will know anything. In that case, when the boat is missing, it will be supposed that these two rowed out on the lake, and somehow drowned. If the eunuchs blab, the Bey will probably phone in an' locate some one who saw a Sheik with four women. Now, there is—or was—a Sheik-al-Sab'a in Tunis. (We got into an argument; he threw a knife which missed my neck by a hair, an' then started to fire—but he wasn't quick enough.) He came here, you savvy, on a pleasure-trip—one of the Khedivial boats—fetching along his four best, from the harem. Old friend of yours. Came aboard here with his doves, this evening, to see his blood-brother or whatever you happen to be—an' then took 'em ashore again. You have some notion they're stoppin' at the Continental on the Rue du Commerce. That lets you out in good shape, doesn't it?"

"Perfectly—if the Sheik is now with Allah. But just why all the precautions?"

"Well—there isn't one chance in a hundred thousand for any suspicion that three Englishmen spent the entire afternoon in a Mohammedan harem—but if such a story ever does get out, it'll spread from here to Hongkong about as quick as radio—an' come damn' near startin' a jihad—not?"

"My word! If you three actually did that—yes! International complications all over the place! I say, you chaps!"—to Bill and Pat. "Did you catch Captain Rainsforth's point, just now? No Englishman or any other national could commit a more deadly insult and offense in the eyes of all Mohammedans than any violation of the harem whatever—it would mean a holy war if such a thing were discovered! If either of you ever is spotted as a man who did such a thing, you'll be followed all over the world and cut into small pieces! Do you get it? Well—any time you start to get full, ashore, just say to yourselves before the first glass: 'I'll never—*never*—brag about that experience, no matter how far under the guards I happen to be!'

"Now, Rainsforth, you'd best get out of that *burnous* at once an' into some of our yacht-togs. There's nobody in Cabin F this trip—go in there an' make yourself comfortable. I'll send the steward along with the kit. The ladies had best take Cabin H at once. Her Ladyship has just turned in—but I'll have her out and along to their cabin with an outfit of European clothes. She will also be able to change their facial appearance until there is no possibility of recognition. Do they happen to speak French?"

"Aye—very well indeed," said Captain Rainsforth.

"Then there's no diffic'lty in passin' 'em off as Frenchwomen from—well—Saigon. That will account for the somewhat darker complexion. (Ah! . . . . That'll be Lammerford's voice on deck, now!) I say, Bill! Would you prefer havin' our boat put you aboard the *Crocodile*—or go ashore on the Quai? If any of the lot who were in that cellar-scrap happen to recognize you, I'd say you'll be safer aboard your own ship."

"H'if your Lordship 'as the time to spare whiles you're a-castin' h'off, we'll tike it mighty decent of ye to put us h'aboard. I dunno 'ow Paddy's feelin'—but h'I farncy h'I must be barmy an' dreamin'! H'I nivver 'ad dreams like wot I seen this arternoon—not nowhere!"

WHILE the *Ranee Sylvia* was loafing along down the Canal, Lord Trevor and Earl Lammerford listened absorbedly to Captain Rainsforth's account of what he had overheard in Sulieman Bey's *konak*. Countess Nan, meanwhile, was changing the appearance of the two Egyptian women and improving it according to Western standards until they failed to recognize themselves in their mirror.

When the Captain finished his story, Earl Trevor said:

"You three had about as close a call, Ned, as a man ever lives through without bodily injury of some sort! After you got into the garden of that *konak* there wasn't a minute when you were more than one jump ahead of the Dark Angel! *H-m-m*—I've often wondered why some revolutionist hasn't thought up the scheme of corking the Canal! Of course, in these days of modern engineering, it would be merely temporary loss an' crippling of Europe's maritime trade—but, as that bounder said, it would run to a financial loss of billions.

"It's fairly clear what he means to do. Suppose they take a little three-hundred-foot cargo-boat on a month's charter an' start her down the Canal just ahead of a big liner—stop her engines an' swerve across the channel when t'other craft is close astern, movin' at six knots with all her momentum. Liner strikes the cargo-boat an oblique, glancing blow which slides her stem over to port until both are fairly across the Canal, alongside of each other. Crew of cargo-boat jump from her stern to

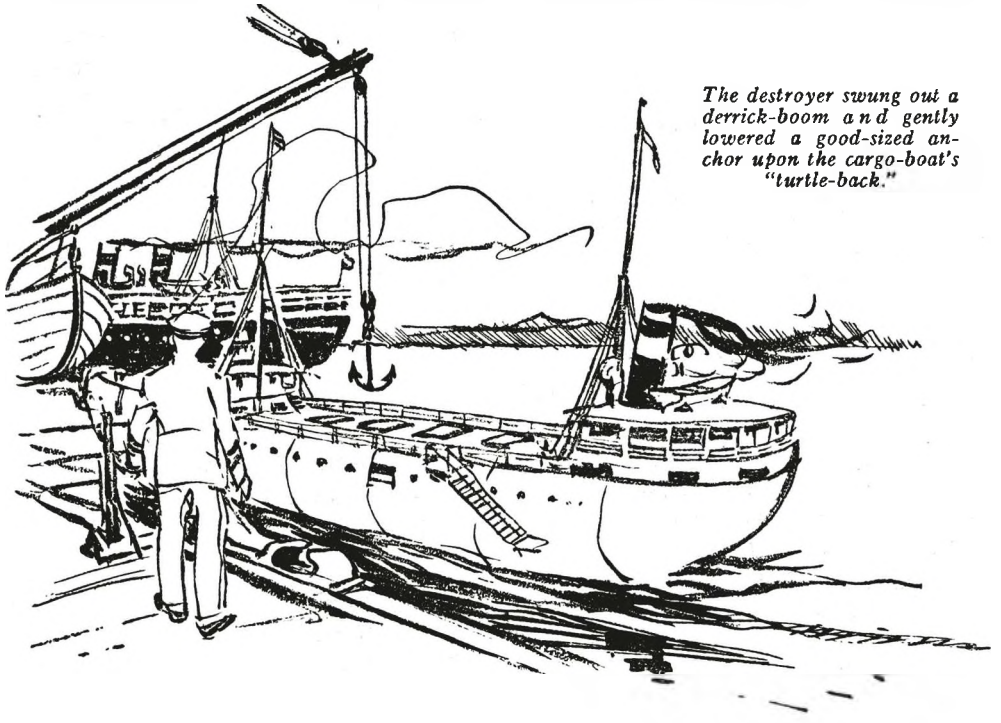
the bulkhead, leavin' a quick-fuse burning. Liner can't back away, cause her stern is up against the starboard bank now—and can't go ahead because her stem is against the port bulkhead. Got to just sit there until the mine in the cargo-boat's hold rips the bilge-plates out of both an' lets 'em down on the mud at the bottom.

"Another way is to have a small cargo-boat just astern of the liner and a dozen Egyptians booked second class on her. At six knots, any cargo-boat can keep right close under the liner's tail. Sometime after midnight, the dozen Egyptians swarm up on the bridge—kill one or two officers on watch and the quartermasters in the wheel-house—throw the wheel over and ram her bow into the port bulkhead of the Canal. Cargo-boat slides up alongside, scrapin' her plates, an' lets go with her mine. Easy? Why, if a boat's Master an' officers weren't on their guard all of the hundred miles to Suez, they might be caught in such a trap three times out of four! And it's a nice little question as to just how we can effectually prevent anything of the sort."

"My idea," said Rainsforth, "would be to block three or four of their attempts and give 'em the impression that they can't get away with it."

"Some risk that they will get away with it, old chap—an' try it again after we've gotten the Canal opened up."

"There's one good reason against their tryin' it more than once or twice: According to the original concession, the British and French Canal Comp'ny's charter expires in 1968—when the whole business reverts to the Khedivial Governm'nt. In 1909, the charter was renewed for another hundred years from 1968 on condition that the Comp'ny pays the Governm'nt a royalty on every ship an' every passenger going through the Canal in either direction—the Khedivial Governm'nt policing the banks of the Canal and bein' responsible for the safety of vessels in transit, as before. Of course that guarantee of safety isn't worth much in a case like this plot to block it, because the administration is much too full of graft to be fully efficient. Saïd Fayal takes the ground, as a nationalist, that this royalty received by the Governm'nt means nothing at all to the mass of the people—so it's immaterial to them whether it's wiped out for six months or more. Well—his following would back him in that until he has dealt a heavy financial blow to the European nations—but as those royalties actually are spent on public works to some extent, they'll not agree to have 'em wiped out indefinitely



*The destroyer swung out a derrick-boom and gently lowered a good-sized anchor upon the cargo-boat's "turtle-back."*

by repeated and eventually costly attempts at blocking."

"H-m-m—that point is a sound one, Ned. I fancy they wont. Very well! The situation at this moment is to oppose the brains of Downing Street and the Quai d'Orsay to the brains of those five conspirators. Quite so! An' we may assume that, since I'm one of the present Governm'nt, myself, we'll get quick action. We've got to have two F. O. men at Port Saïd—one French and one English—with two more at Port Ibrahim—to handle this immediate question entirely over the heads of the Khedivial Governm'nt Officials. We've the right to do that in the int'rests of the Canal Comp'ny. Very good! We'll just block out a brief synopsis of exactly what the situation is at this moment—then I'll code it—and in fifteen minutes they'll be takin' it down at the Radio Intelligence Departm'nt in Whitehall—addressed to Sir Austen himself, with instructions that he's to get it within the hour wherever he may happen to be. With the description of the situation, we'll put in a requisition for the French and English F. O. men to leave from Croydon before morning in a tri-motored plane, to reach here within forty-eight hours. Our men at Port Saïd and Port Ibrahim must be code operators—code-experts, in fact—with knowledge of all the shipping comp'nies, their routes and ports of call—including cargo-boats. Who would you suggest?"

"Leftenant Bob Smylie, for one—and I fancy he's available. He just returned from Nagasaki."

"Aye—he's one I had in mind. And I was thinkin' of Sir Ralph Inneslie—eh?"

"Capital! Rather better than Bob, if anything—hope we get him!"

"Fancy we will. An' by the time they get there, I'll have confidential information in the hands of Lloyds and every branch shipping-office in the world—we'll have the Board of Trade see that such messages are sent out in the morning. It seems small game for such heavy caliber—but the thorough preparation is merely proportionate to the amount of financial loss if those bounders win out in their scheme. We'd be fools if we minimized the risk!"

AS far as the five conspirators were concerned, the next four weeks were entirely uneventful—there was no indication that their plans were suspected.

Sulieman Bey's boat had been found smashed—mere floating débris—on the lake. It was supposed that the two women had been struck by some ferry-steamer in the dark, and drowned. The occurrence scarcely made a ripple of excitement in the household.

Meanwhile, however—in a building leased for the purpose on the Quai Francois Joseph—there were an amazing number of radio-messages coming in over aërials hastily erected on the west jetty, and as many being sent out over them. At Port Ibrahim, there was another building with the same activity in its upper rooms, and other aërials on the square jetties outside of the Port. Early during the evening of April 24th, one of Sir Ralph Inneslie's code-operators fetched in a sheet of typed memoranda which he carefully read through. Then he grinned.

"Fancy we may look for something betwixt this and Friday morning, Cardon—what? Well—let's go over 'em carefully! H-m-m—the big Messageries boat, *Hanoi*, left Marseilles with two hundred French—ten Colonial—eight Americans—twenty English—eighteen Germans—two Algerian Arabs. And she took on thirty Italians at Naples. Purser says he knows Arabs, Turks or Egyptians when he sees 'em—an' he has but the two. Fancy we'll not need to detain him. The *Conte Ruggiero* left Genoa with four Tunisian Arabs—men of substance—not revolutionists—among the other nationals. Has five Maltese and six Greeks in the second class who seem rather a rough lot. We'll look 'em over when they get here, but they don't sound very bad.

"On the new P. & O. boat, *Golconda*, however, we've something else again. At Malta, she took on fourteen mixed *fellaheen* and camel-wallahs by their looks, so the Purser says—pilgrims to Mecca by way of Aden, and then up-coast on an Arab dhow. Perfectly reasonable—right time of year—religious duty—passports regular; but somehow the Purser doesn't love 'em, by the tone of his radio to us. Well, that'll be our lot—wager you a pound to sixpence! What? The destroyer *Conyngham* is over yon at the oil dock, with bow an' stern derrick-booms rigged? Eh? Telephone 'em at once, Cardon! I'm quite sure that none of the cargo-boats already in the Canal will be the one—the 'joker' is prob'ly anchored outside the jetties until the *Golconda* passes in—but we'll also telephone the ninety- and one-hundred-an'-forty kilometer stations with

orders for the other destroyers to drift along this way until they meet her."

What happened during the next sixteen hours appeared to most of the *Golconda's* passengers merely a new kink in the usual red-tape. They saw nothing to arouse special interest in their passage through the Canal. But keen-eyed men along every kilometer of the hundred and sixty watched approaching craft in either direction. And somewhere along every kilometer, was a telephone—and a coil of steel-cable.

When the *Golconda* tied up for examination alongside the Quai—she needed no oil short of Colombo—certain passengers were hunted out and collected along the starboard gangway of the main-deck—two from the saloon—six from the second class—six from the steerage. Their passports were examined—and their luggage, which they had to fetch up into the gangway. No objection, apparently, was made to the large number of knives and automatics found in their luggage. But the fourteen were asked to step ashore—put into a station-bus—taken over to the railway station and given seats on the through train to Suez. They would have gotten out before it started—or else at Ismailia or other stations—but the train-crew smilingly informed them that they were merely being transported around the Canal and would be put aboard their steamer again at Port Ibrahim. An armed guard at each end of the car prevented their climbing out of the windows.

Meanwhile, a five thousand-ton cargo-boat from Smyrna—sufficiently coaled to make Aden comfortably—came slowly in between the jetties and tied up for examination, which appeared to be merely perfunctory—though four of the Canal officials went over her and unobserved cut out several feet of wire in the mate's room. She was then allowed to proceed. And H. M. S. *Conyngham* slipped along down the Canal after her.

HOUR after hour passed—west-bound boats tying-up to let others go by, at the Canal stations. In the narrow parts, the cargo-boat closed up behind the *Golconda* and the destroyer inched along up behind her—but the big P. & O. ambled along without swerving.

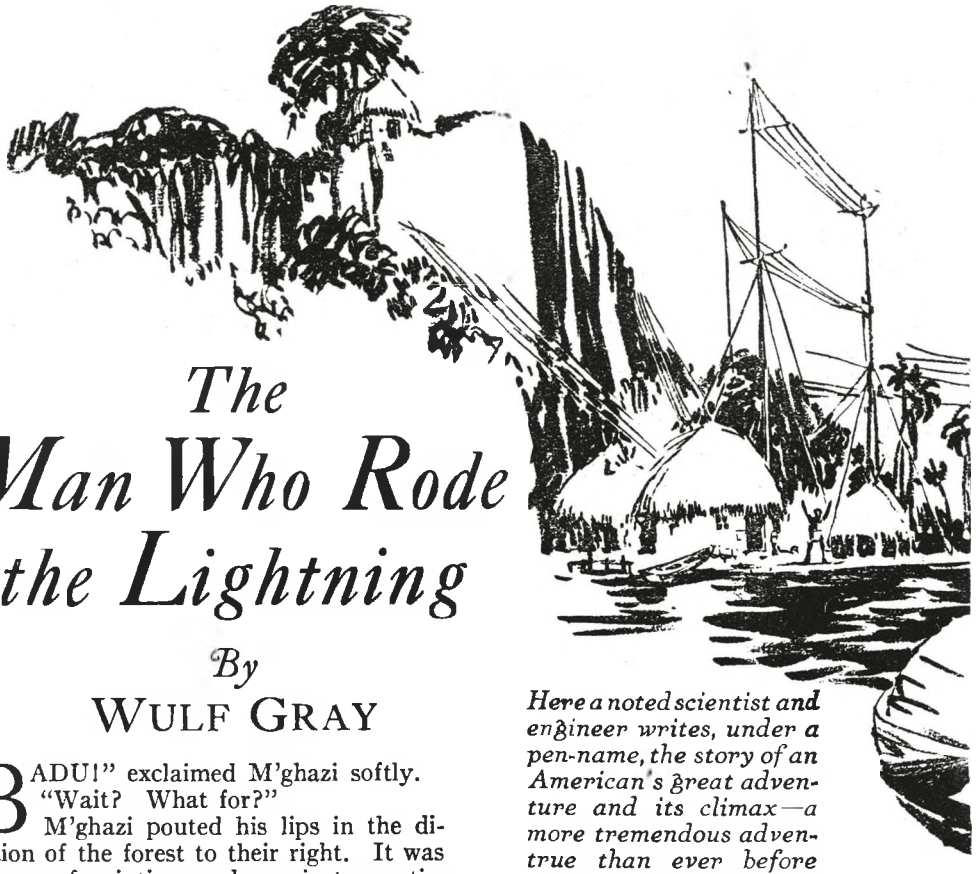
The Master of the cargo-boat began to suspect that there had been a hitch somewhere, and started something on his own initiative. He swerved to port, a little, and inched up alongside the liner. But the destroyer, while attention of all was concentrated ahead—had swung out a derrick-boom from her bow and gently lowered a good-sized anchor upon the cargo-boat's "turtle-back," where it caught upon a couple of cast-iron warping-bitts—and had then reversed her engines.

As these were much more powerful than those of the cargo-boat, the anchor-cable held her from gaining an inch ahead—she fell behind the liner several hundred feet.

Then they passed another station where a second destroyer lay at the other side of the Canal but headed in the same direction—having backed down and across. She cut in just ahead of the cargo-boat and, with the derrick rigged on her stern, laid another anchor on the Smyrna craft's forecastle-head. The game began to be ridiculous. The Master of the cargo-boat was prevented by machine-guns from meddling with either of the anchors on his bow and stern. No matter how much he cramped his rudder, the pull from the destroyers kept him straight on his own side of the Canal. He could have blown the bottom out of his craft but not in any way so that she would block up the fairway to through traffic. Like a squirming fish hooked from two poles, he was herded down the Canal and into shallow water, where the destroyers forced him aground on the mud. Then, lying off a mile in the main channel, one of them shot a six-inch shell into his craft amidships. The explosives stowed within let go—and that midship section was widely dispersed.

TWO more attempts were made to carry out the plans of Zouche Effendi. But owing to the radio check-up on every steamer bound through the Canal—information received days or weeks before they reached Port Saïd or Port Ibrahim—suspicious boats and passengers were spotted in advance. A few persisted in trying to go through with their attempt and were either badly hurt or killed. The Governments and the Canal Company were taking no chances. The risk and consequences would have been far too serious.

Bill Henson and Pat Riordan sometimes refer, in guarded tones—when nobody is within hearing—to their hectic afternoon in an Egyptian harem; but they have never guessed how much it had to do with what is rumored in the Navy about happenings along the big "Egyptian Ditch."



# The Man Who Rode the Lightning

By WULF GRAY

*Here a noted scientist and engineer writes, under a pen-name, the story of an American's great adventure and its climax—a more tremendous adventrue than ever before experienced by man.*

"BADU!" exclaimed M'ghazi softly.

"Wait? What for?"

M'ghazi pouted his lips in the direction of the forest to their right. It was his way of pointing, and was just as satisfactory as the white man's way, besides being less conspicuous.

Hansen looked, but saw nothing. "What sort of thing is it?" he asked.

"*Bambutti,*" answered M'ghazi.

"A pigmy, eh?"

"Yes, *Bwana:* if we wait he will come to us."

Hansen's porters, eight in all, not counting M'ghazi, set down their loads, and squatted around on their haunches. Only M'ghazi and Hansen remained standing. M'ghazi, whose name meant "The Bloody One," was a fine specimen of the Matabele race, far to the southward. Every line bespoke the Zulu blood in him. The porters were a mixed lot from East Africa, brave, some of them, but without M'ghazi's superb physique. In his travels up the coast M'ghazi had learned to mix a good deal of Swahili speech into his native Sintabele, and his conversation with Hansen was carried on in a variety of Kitchen Kaffir.

Hansen was interested. Not that he cared much about pigmies—not that, in this present frame of mind, he cared much about anything, except to wander and wander, and never see a white man again. In fact, he didn't much care whether he saw anybody or anything any more. (You do not need to be told his malady.) However, after all, there was something interesting in the idea of a pigmy. Everybody feels a certain interest in pigmies. So Hansen waited.

Charles Hansen was just twenty-five years old. Only three or four months previously he had quarreled with his sweetheart back in Boston, Massachusetts, and forthwith departed to Africa to hunt lions and be hunted by lions till the end of his days, which he rather hoped would not be long. But having shot several lions, and getting little relief from it, he had now decided to trek into the Congo. There were too many white men in Kenya! Several weeks of hard hiking had brought them into the Ituri Forest, and the borders of the pigmy country: so now they were to see a pigmy.

FROM the dark shadows of the giant trees the little fellow shyly advanced, bow in hand. He stood scarcely more than four feet high. He was clothed principally in

Illustrated by
William Molt

*"This, then," thought Hansen, "is the white witch-doctor's abode. I set him down as a radio crank."*

grass and dirt. Around his bow was wrapped a monkey-skin. He seemed to flit in a singularly invisible form from one tree to the next, approaching with a caution that he must have known to be quite unnecessary, but which was so habitual to the wild and primitive hunter that it could never be quite abandoned. At some yards' distance he dropped his bow, and standing on one leg with arm outstretched, said gravely and politely, *"Sjambo, Bwana!"*—the usual Swahili greeting to the white man.

*"Sjambo. Habari?"* responded Hansen gravely. "Greetings; how are you?"

A glance out of the corner of his eye at his squatting porters showed Hansen their expressions of disgust. No love is lost between the blacks and the pigmies. "They are not men, but wild animals," said one of them later. But the primitive dwarf was accustomed to the contempt of his taller brethren, and addressed himself only to Hansen and M'ghazi.

He stated that there were man-eating leopards on the road ahead, which had eaten three men of the next village. It was not safe to travel by night, and if they camped they should keep big fires until the morning.

Hansen was about to mutter something to the effect that he would prefer to be eaten by a lion, but a leopard would be a fair substitute, but checked himself. It was not wise to act that way in the presence of his porters. M'ghazi took up the conversation and demanded why the pigmy had gone to the trouble of coming to warn them. "On account of the great white

witch-doctor," replied the dwarf. "And who is he?" asked M'ghazi; but the little fellow made only evasive replies, and after a few questions disappeared again into the woods.

"Did you understand what he said?" asked Hansen of M'ghazi. But M'ghazi was equally evasive. Following the direction of the latter's eyes, Hansen turned and saw that his porters were all squatted together, and making figures in the dust with little sticks.

"What is this?" said Hansen.

"*Loki,*" replied M'ghazi. "They are consulting witchcraft."

THE proceedings did not take long. A few marks made with the stick on the dusty ground, a few blowings thereon with the breath, and all the natives moved back. Not a word was spoken. They seemed to be waiting for Hansen to begin.

"Well, what does *Loki* say?" he asked.

"We cannot go farther."

"Why not?"

"It is not propitious."

"Afraid of the leopard, eh?"

No answer.

"Pick up your boxes: we are going on."

No movement.

"Do you hear?"

"*Loki* says we cannot."

"*Loki* be—" said Hansen. "Pick up your boxes, or I'll kick your shins."

"*Bwana,*" said M'ghazi, "we cannot go, if *Loki* says not. I myself have killed many a leopard with my spear alone. But there is black magic on the road ahead, and we cannot go."

Hansen became suddenly aware that something besides leopards might be ahead. He remembered hearing of human leopards, marauders who dressed as leopards and killed their victims with cruel iron claws in the depths of the night. But that was in West Africa, surely. Was the same secret society at work here?

Again, what was that about the great white witch-doctor? Was there some renegade white man in this lonely forest organizing a human leopard troop? "I have warned you because of the great white witch-doctor," the pigmy had said. Did the pigmy mean that the witch-doctor had sent him to warn them, or was he warning them to beware of the great white witch-doctor? Hansen's knowledge of Swahili was not sufficient to decide. He appealed to M'ghazi. "Who is this white witch-doctor?" he demanded.

M'ghazi, instead of answering directly, replied: "We go to him now."

"What? Go to him? But you just said you could not go any farther."

For answer, M'ghazi pointed in the direction in which the pigmy had disappeared. A light dawned on Hansen. Evidently, if the leopards were straight ahead, and the doctor to the right, the doctor was not with the leopards.

"How far is it?"

"*Kachan bichan,*" said M'ghazi, relapsing into his southern tongue.

Hansen laughed. "Two sights and a right smart distance, eh?"

M'ghazi did not understand, but he grinned amiably.

There seemed no other course, and there was the chance of something interesting developing. Anyhow, Hansen told himself he did not care particularly which way he went. "All right, let's go!"

## CHAPTER II

HANSEN was about to lead off by plunging into the forest, but M'ghazi recalled him, pointing to the road leading backward. Then, seeing the surprise on Hansen's face, he made a circuitous motion with his hand, to indicate that they would go back a distance and then branch off to the left. At this point one of the porters observed that a pigmy might go through the forest, but a *man* would go by the path, adding: "The pigmies are not men, but wild animals."

"Well, it is all the same to me," thought Hansen. Evidently it was necessary at this stage of the game to resign a large part of his authority, and let the blacks go their own way. He wished he knew how far it was to the white witch-doctor's. He asked M'ghazi whether they would get there before nightfall. "Perhaps," was M'ghazi's noncommittal answer.

An hour's back-tracking brought them to a small stream of crystal-clear water issuing from the forest on their left. The undergrowth was thicker here, but, a few hundred yards beyond, the giant forest loomed up again, checking the growth of most of the forest carpet. Here a faintly marked trail turned off parallel to the stream. The blacks had noticed it earlier in the day and speculated among themselves as to its purpose. After meeting the pigmy they had concluded at once that it led to

the witch-doctor's abode. As they advanced in single file along it, the ground rapidly became rougher. Granite rocks began to show through the sandy surface, and soon the path was winding through a regular defile, ascending rapidly.

"Pretty good place for leopards, all right," thought Hansen, as the hills closed around them. The afternoon sun beat fiercely on them, as they emerged from the forest shade on to the sun-blistered rock. Gorgeous flowers adorned the crevices of the cliffs, whenever they could find a hold, evidently drawing what water they needed from the mists of the night time, for the little stream was now withered to a dry gully. The heat was intolerable, and the smell of the perspiring blacks was worse. However, Hansen was used to that now.

A mile ahead, the path, or dry stream-bed which served as a path, reached a pass in the ridge. Below them the ground fell suddenly away for some hundreds of feet. Below, the forest began again, and a mile away a considerable lake showed beyond the trees. A mile or two to their left the ridge on which they stood approached closely to the water, and the path evidently led down the cliffs in that direction. A rock-rabbit slipped over the edge of the precipice on their approach, and from a near-by pile of crags the bark of a baboon told that they were watched.

NOW they turned to the left, descending the cliffs by the only practicable route. It led simultaneously to a small freshet and the edge of the forest. Once in the speckled shadows of the forest the porters set down their loads and proceeded to lap up the water of the spring. They were not the only creatures that had recently made use of the water. The soft ground was full of the footprints of the wild forest hog, and M'ghazi pointed out to Hansen that a leopard also had been there. M'ghazi was more than casually interested in the footprints, which he studied for some time. His final comment was merely that: "The leopard tried to kill a pig, but the pig fought him off."

Hansen was not particularly interested. Of course, he said, if the leopard were a man-eater— But M'ghazi was positive it wasn't.

Hansen was tired and hot and hungry. He was glad of a short rest, and made no objection when one of his "boys" asked for a match, and proceeded to make a fire. He had hoped they were near the witch-doctor's place, however, and had supposed they would make no effort to camp until they reached it. It was scarcely more than three in the afternoon, and an unusual time to start cooking operations. The fire was lighted, but no effort was made to cook anything. The boys gathered round it, the nearer ones squatting, and two or three standing behind them. They seemed to be studying the glowing embers with great attention. One of them scattered earth from a leopard's footprint in the fire: various grunts and exclamations followed. M'ghazi went to make a circuit in the forest.

Hansen walked over to the group and stood and looked too. Some of the boys looked up at his advent, but made no comment, and returned their gaze to the fire, now dying down. Their faces were far from cheerful. Evidently the omens were not propitious. Hansen saw he had better put a brave face on matters.

"*Loki* again?" he asked, with a smile.

"Yes, *Bwana,*" came the reply.

"What does *Loki* say?"

"All die."

"Ha! ha! *Loki* is very encouraging! But I have no intention of obliging him." Inwardly Hansen felt a certain amount of amusement at his own contrariness. He had come to Africa with the notion, more or less, of seeking death, and was now, when *Loki* promised it, announcing his intention of fighting it!

"The *Bwana* will not die. But all the blacky boys will die."

"Not if I know it! Some one has to carry my boxes."

"The *Bwana* will disappear very suddenly, like the wild pig that vanishes silently."

"Where will I vanish to?"

"To the white man's country."

"Um!"

"But the blacky boys will die first."

Hansen stifled a yawn, then laughed contemptuously. "The black boys are a lot of big fools," he announced. "The white man knows that *Loki* is a bigger fool. If he tries any tricks here you will soon see how a white man deals with *Loki.*"

AT this point M'ghazi returned, and the porters at once resumed the journey. There was no visible trail that Hansen could see, but after while they came upon an elephant-path, with the great circular

footprints sunk twelve inches or more into the marshy ground. By and by Hansen became aware that the lake was showing through the woods to their right, while the steep line of cliffs was immediately on their left. The forested shore was reduced to a narrow strip some few hundred yards wide. The trees were very tall and straight. A troop of monkeys went swinging through their tops. Gray parrots screamed at them. They came upon numerous footprints of buffalo.

Suddenly the forest ceased. Once more they came out from the half-light of the woodland into the full glare of the declining day. They stood on the edge of a sandy plain half a mile wide, through the middle of which flowed a considerable stream descending through a gap in the cliffs to their left. Tufts of grass covered a considerable portion of the plain, which was in the nature of an alluvial cone, a sort of spillway from the granite hills beyond, and extending from the cliffs to the water's edge. The stream was evidently torrential in character, bringing down with every storm great quantities of sand, with which it was building a delta into the lake. Overhead white-headed sea-eagles circled majestically. Hansen counted a hundred crocodiles basking on the sand near the water's edge. Birds were pulling leaches out of the saurians' jaws.

The lake appeared more extensive now. The cliffs had cut off much of their view when they stood in the gap at the crest. It must have been a dozen miles long. A thunderstorm was gathering at the far end, and frequent lightning-flashes were commencing. The clouds formed level with the rim of the cliffs, which were considerably higher toward the distant end. The shadow of the near-by cliffs was now lengthening, and reached almost halfway across the sandy plain.

BUT the most surprising sight was hard by. Near the base of the precipice beyond the stream was an unequivocal white man's dwelling, a substantial dwelling, evidently of Kaffir workmanship, but more than Kaffir in pretentiousness—in short, a substantial "rondhovel" of stone and mortar and not less than twenty feet across, circular in plan, with a conical roof of thatch like a Kaffir hut and glass windows let into the walls. The eaves, instead of projecting all round, did so only on the east or lake side. The noonday sun could not shine on the northern or southern walls, and the shadow of the cliffs was thrown in the afternoon on the western walls.

But more surprising was the considerable array of tall flagpoles, with somewhat elaborate wireless aërials attached, that advanced into the sandy plain for several hundred yards, and the equally elaborate system of wires that extended back of the building up the face of the cliff almost to the top.

The building stood at the foot of a detached pinnacle of rock, almost as high as the main cliff, but separated from it by a narrow ravine, the result of the weathering of the granite along some jointing plane. This pinnacle seemed to have a regular network of wires upon it, and at the top was another rondhovel, also very substantially built, but not so ambitious, either as to size or as to windows. It seemed to be the regular Kaffir hut, windowless and having merely a narrow doorway, but constructed of stone instead of mud or poles. Obviously stone was more plentiful on the top of the pinnacle than clay or timber.

Near the house at the foot of the hill were several very ordinary native huts.

"This, then," thought Hansen, "is the white witch-doctor's abode. I set him down as a radio crank."

All this Hansen had taken in during the brief moment the party halted as they broke out of the forest.

"We have arrived," observed M'ghazi.

A native boy appeared from the back of one of the small huts, and noticing them, came to a full stop. He turned to the hut, and evidently made some remarks, for two or three other natives promptly appeared. They motioned to the new arrivals to go upstream and cross the plain at the foot of the cliff, which Hansen's boys at once prepared to do. In answer to Hansen's inquiry, M'ghazi observed that probably the plain or terrace was very soft in places, the stream changing its course with every storm as it spilled out from the hills to the lake.

As they approached the house, a white man came out to greet them. He was a man of forty-five or thereabouts, distinctly gray about the temples, and of no more than average height, spare of build and sprightly of demeanor, with merry blue eyes. He opened the conversation in Swahili and English: "Well, how's tricks? I didn't expect you for another hour or so."

"I'm fine: my name's Hansen—Charles Hansen, Lowell, Massachusetts, U. S. A.

*M'ghazi flashed the light, and Hansen fired —both barrels.*

My boys were scared by a pigmy this morning, and insisted on detouring through the forest and coming here. The pigmy said there were man-eaters—leopards, as far as I could understand—on the road ahead, and my boys all got cold feet. But who told you we were coming?"

"That is a question I prefer not to answer on such short acquaintance. But there is very little that goes on for many miles around here that I do not watch pretty carefully; I have found it very necessary of late. For the present, permit me to introduce myself: my name is Hill-Smith, Forster Hill-Smith, at your service. You will find somewhat primitive washing accommodation just around that rock; it is nearing sundown, and as soon as you are ready we will have dinner."

HANSEN felt that he certainly needed a wash. He would have preferred a swim, but the crocodiles by the lake shore discouraged the idea. What was his surprise then, on rounding the great rock to visit the "primitive accommodation," to discover the most magnificent natural bathroom he had ever seen. A narrow gap in the rocks opened into a considerable oval space some forty feet by twenty, surrounded by granite walls a dozen feet high. The farther half of the area was a natural swimming-pool several feet deep, and a little waterfall broke over into it, a fair substitute for a shower-bath. The whole was open to the sky, but to one side stood a wooden shelter with a washbowl on a wooden table, soap and towels.

"Perfect," said Hansen, and forgetting his hunger, he slipped off his clothes and splashed into the water.

The rapid darkening of the sky above warned him that the sun had set, and he repaired promptly to the big hut. The table was set in good European style, and Hill-Smith's cook-boy was evidently merely waiting for Hansen's appearance. Forthwith he arrived with a very savory roast guinea-fowl, and Hansen felt extremely content. After all, there was something to be said for a world where one could get tired and hot and hungry and then be presented with a bath and a square meal!

Around their campfires fifty yards away, his porters and M'ghazi were fraternizing with Hill-Smith's boys. The sky was cloudless, and the thunderstorm seemed to have subsided at the far end of the lake. The air was becoming cool and comfortable.

"You will no doubt join me in a little 'sundowner'?" said Hill-Smith.

"I really prefer not," said Hansen; "I know my countrymen have a reputation for dodging Prohibition whenever and wherever they can, and I claim no special virtues in that direction. But I have found it quite possible to dispense with liquor in Africa, and I prefer to do so."

Hill-Smith nodded. "I've no conscientious objections to alcohol myself, but I have never managed to acquire a taste for it, and have ceased to use it except on cere-

monial occasions. I have had a case of Scotch here since I arrived, and a suitable occasion has not yet presented itself. Looks as though I shall have to build a fleet of boats on the lake and devote the whisky to their christening."

"I am glad to find you take my attitude so well, Mr. Hill-Smith. And to change the topic—it seems to me I have heard your name somewhere. Forster Hill-Smith sounds familiar. I have spent the last half-hour thinking where I heard it. Was it somewhere in Kenya?"

"I doubt it, though it is possible. The folks in Kenya do not know of my presence here. In fact, even the Belgians do not know my exact whereabouts, though one of these days their scouting planes will no doubt locate my establishment. For some months past they have had all their planes down south, I believe, with trouble on the Angola frontier, but any day we may expect a plane to alight on the lake."

"How long have you been here, may I ask?"

"Two or three months."

"You seem to be a radio enthusiast."

"I have to keep in touch with my office."

"Your office?"

"Yes, or perhaps I should say offices, for I keep in daily contact with both London and New York."

Hansen looked a trifle surprised.

"I PICKED this place out over twenty years ago," explained Hill-Smith. "In those days the Belgians did not even know the lake existed. A curious chapter of accidents brought me to this spot in company with an old elephant-hunter. I was down with tick fever, and it was here he nursed me back to health. It was during my convalescence that I diverted the little stream into the bathroom. It is merely a trickle led off from the main stream a few hundred yards back in the hills. This year I put in a Pelton wheel and generator, so now we have electric light and power for the radio."

"Are you hunting elephants this time?"

"Oh, no, I haven't anything heavier than a shotgun with me. Latterly, I have wished I had."

"Why, what is the matter?"

"There are some bad niggers at the far end of the lake and beyond, and in particular a witch-doctor whom I suspect of being concerned in a number of mysterious deaths around here. There is a tiny village —two or three huts—on the lake a mile or so north of here, where two persons have recently died violent deaths, and others at villages on the road you were traveling this morning."

"Leopards?"

"On the face of things, yes."

"But actually murder?"

Hill-Smith laughed. "My friend Watson is very perspicacious." Then more seriously: "But I shall get the culprit one of these days. I am just now the only white resident within a hundred miles, or nearly, and although the matter is strictly one for the Belgians, I have no scruples about handling it myself. However, a gun might be useful. I see you have a couple of rifles; if the matter comes to a head during the next twenty-four hours you may find unexpected use for them."

THE conversation drifted over a variety of topics—M'ghazi's trustworthiness, pigmies, reminiscences of elephant-hunting. Hill-Smith was evidently unwilling to talk further at present about either radio or human leopards. About nine o'clock he showed Hansen his bedroom, which he desired to turn over to him whenever he was ready, observing: "It is now my business hour. I attend to my London affairs at night, and my New York ones in the morning. As yet it is still early afternoon in New York, and I do not attempt to do anything until my offices are closed for the day. The London office closed a couple of hours ago, and everything is now set out for my attention. After breakfast tomorrow it will still be the small hours of the morning in New York and a very convenient time for me to inspect their doings and leave instructions. I have to go to the top of the hill for the next hour or so, and will sleep there tonight. Make yourself comfortable here, and let M'ghazi sleep across the doorway."

There was a twinkle in Hill-Smith's blue eyes as he saw a look of perplexity come over Hansen's face at mention of inspecting his New York office in the small hours of the morning; but he offered no further explanation, picked up his hat, and a light raincoat, and departed.

Hansen sat for some time with a vague feeling of bewilderment. The name of Hill-Smith seemed to be familiar, but it was not recently he had heard it. Hill-Smith had a New York office: had he heard of him in America? Vaguely he imagined Mary had said something about him—but

Hansen did not want to think of her. Ignoring that, what was Hill-Smith doing here, all alone, and with all this electrical outfit? Was it really true that he was communicating with London and New York? Offhand, there was nothing remarkable about that, but why do it in the middle of the night? What was this system of espionage he maintained on the country round about? Did he mean simply that the natives brought him information, or was he hinting at something more startling? How did the Belgian authorities come to permit the erection of so powerful a wireless station by a foreigner in their territory? They could hardly fail to notice its signals. Hill-Smith evidently had enjoyed Hansen's mystification. Could it be a hoax? The little stream he had seen could not possibly generate the power needed for so impressive a network of wires. But who was there to hoax here in the wilderness? Was the man just crazy?

The hospitality of a madman—even a monomaniac—is apt to result in trouble. Hansen went out into the open. The night was moonless and very still. Some small animals were calling in the forest. The blacks were talking around their campfire. He walked a hundred yards towards the lake to obtain a better view of the hill, and to get away from the chatter of the blacks. He could see no light in the hut on the hill-top, but was it his fancy, or did he hear the sound of a typewriter?

HIS attention was suddenly diverted by a splash at the water's edge, a quarter of a mile below: there was a scampering of hoofs, a snort, and a couple more splashes, and silence. In the darkness it was not possible to see, even against the background of the lake. "Croc got one of them, I guess," thought Hansen.

He returned towards the house and the campfire of the boys. Maybe he would go as far as the face of the cliff. He paused at the fire.

"Is the *Bwana* on the hill-top?"

"Yes sir."

"Does he go there every night?"

"Yes, sir."

"And every morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who else goes there?"

"No one, sir."

"Doesn't some one go there to clean up?"

"No sir."

"Hmm!" Evidently the matter was not solely a hoax, but it did not prove anything about Hill-Smith's sanity or otherwise. Hansen turned to walk toward the cliff. The boys at once jumped to their feet and remonstrated.

"Do not try to go up the hill, sir. The *malama* will get you."

"I am not going up the hill; but what is the *malama?*"

"The *malama* is the brother of the leopard."

"Leopards all the time! What do you mean, brother of the leopard?"

"A *gwinyama,* sir, a beast of prey, like a leopard. But it is taller."

"Well, where is it?"

"On the hill, sir."

"M'ghazi, get my gun. We'll settle this leopard business."

"No sir, it is the white man's *malama.* It belongs to the white man. They love each other. You must not shoot."

WAS Hill-Smith keeping leopards? It seemed Hansen's worst fears were confirmed. And yet, why not? Other folks kept leopards in Kenya. They were rather nice pets, up to a point. More perplexed than ever, Hansen returned to the house.

"M'ghazi, I am going to bed. You sleep by the door. I shall have the *bunduki* loaded. If you need help, just yell, you rascal, see?"

M'ghazi grinned. It was a long time since his *Bwana* had called him *"skel'm,"* or "rascal," a term that he always took as a compliment.

"M'ghazi does not need a gun for leopards: a spear is sufficient."

"Good for you. But don't sleep too heavily, you rogue."

M'ghazi grinned again, rolled up in his blanket, and parked himself across the doorway. Hansen went to sleep. He dreamed that leopards were coming up out of the lake, hundreds of them. They stole silently past the house, they surrounded the hill. In dense columns they began to press up the steep slopes. Some lost their footing, and fell back. He saw Hill-Smith defending the top with his shotgun used as a club. No, it was not Hill-Smith, it was Mary with a golf-club, just as she used to be at the Cohasset Country Club. He awoke with a start, and nearly fell out of bed. His heart was beating furiously. He was angry with himself.

"Must be going down with fever," he thought. That reminded him that he had

not taken his quinine. "Maybe I'd better. Don't want to die of fever, when I have a chance to die of man-eaters!" He swallowed the tablets, and slept fitfully thereafter, till dawn.

## CHAPTER III

THE moon in its last quarter and the first streak of daylight across the lake combined in an eerie light as Hansen awoke. The lake itself was veiled in fog, which spread over the near-by forest and extended halfway to the house. M'ghazi was already awake, and gone to the campfire with the rest of the boys. Hansen thought of the swimming-pool, hurriedly pulled on his slacks and a pair of shoes, and dashed off around the corner of the cliff. As he burst into the enclosure, a cheerful voice welcomed him. Hill-Smith, his hair over his forehead and his eyes full of water, was swimming enthusiastically around.

"Well, Hansen, didn't expect you up quite so early. How did you sleep?"

The man sounded sane enough. Hansen forgot his suspicions and splashed into the pool too.

At breakfast he felt like himself again, and decided the best course was to inquire boldly about the *malama*.

"What's this leopard you keep on the hill?"

"Leopard? Do you mean the cheetah?"

"The boys called it the '*malama,*' and 'brother of the leopard.' "

"Oh, yes, that's Tim. Tim is a great pet. I've had him since he was a kitten. He's nearly grown now. I had a lot of trouble with him in London, at the Savoy. They wouldn't let me keep him in my bedroom. Tim wouldn't hurt anybody—at least not by daylight. I try to persuade the darkies he is fierce at night. I'll introduce you later."

"A tame cheetah, eh? That doesn't sound so very terrible. I thought you had some very dangerous beast up there from the way the boys talked. Well, did you transact all your London business?" Hansen was a little cynical about it, and the fact was not lost on Hill-Smith.

"Yes sir. I am richer by some thousands of dollars this morning." The man's effrontery was amazing. His merry eyes twinkled. Evidently he intended to keep up the farce. "And now I have to go to attend to my New York affairs. It is a little after midnight there now, and if I go at once, I can be through before it gets hot down here. You will no doubt excuse me for an hour or so?"

"Well, I am figuring I ought to start myself pretty soon. I suppose the boys have now got over their scare, and if we start at once, we can cross the granite and be in the forest again before the heat of the day."

"What's the hurry? Can't you stay a few days? I've a lot I would like to talk over with you, including some matters of importance to yourself. I'll not be gone more than an hour or two at the most."

"I appreciate your hospitality very much, but I don't wish to trespass on it. If the men are ready to go, I think I'd better do so. —M'ghazi!"

"Yes, *Bwana?*"

"Are the boys ready to go?"

"Cannot go today, sir."

"You lazy lot of scamps! What's the matter?"

"All die here, sir. *Shari ya mu' ungu:* it is God's business."

"Bah!"

M'ghazi grinned. His confidence that this was his last port of call did not seem to lie heavily on his shoulders. He had faced death at the hands of beasts of prey and hostile tribes too often to be worried about it. Like most blacks, he was not afraid of death in any familiar form. If he were threatened with drowning at sea, or some other unfamiliar death, he would have been terrified.

"All die here. Two—three days. All except the *Bwana.*" He looked at the fastenings of his spear, and walked back to the campfire.

Hansen turned to Hill-Smith. "What do you make of it?"

BUT Hill-Smith was not attending. With a far-away look he was listening to some distant sound. Hansen listened too. Faintly along the misty lake was borne the booming of native drums. Hill-Smith's face was stern and decided as he got up to go out. "Hansen, you stay right here till I get back," he directed; and then he hurried to his sentry-box on the top of the hill.

Hansen walked over to the natives, and demanded: "What did the tom-tom say?"

"Leopard kill three men last night," said M'ghazi.

"H'm! It's time I shot a few leopards."

The boy grinned. "Perhaps they will be here in a few days."

An hour later Hill-Smith returned, and asked Hansen to accompany him to the top of the hill. Once inside the "sentry-box," as Hansen had begun to call the hut on the hill-top, Hill-Smith dropped his air of secrecy.

"The situation around us is serious—worse than I had feared. It is necessary for me to explain exactly what I am doing here, and what all this apparatus is. Either or both of us may be killed at any time, and if I should be killed, it is desirable you should understand this outfit of mine, for it is your only chance to save yourself if things become any worse. There is no chance of shooting your way out.

"I am a financier, and do not completely understand all the things I have here, though I have studied the subject quite exhaustively. They are the inventions of Dr. Marchmont—Edgar Marchmont, of whom you may have heard. He is, I should think, one of the ablest men of the time."

Hansen nodded.

"For many years I have conducted my affairs from London, with frequent trips across the Atlantic by sea or air. But since Marchmont's inventions have reached their present development, it has become possible for me to realize an old ambition and return for a few months to this little African lake where old Martin nursed me back to life so many years ago.

"I came in by plane, with the permission of the Belgians, and landed my stuff. But the second day a heavy thunderstorm wrecked the machine, which now lies at the bottom of the lake. However, that doesn't worry me, or did not, because it is generally feasible to get another at short notice. . . . .

"Now I had better shut the door: the light outside is too bright."

Hansen himself shut it.

"You wonder how I transact my New York business. Well, here goes. Watch this screen."

HANSEN watched. There was a piece of opalescent glass a foot square, set level with the surface of a table. A low buzzing commenced, and the image of a typewritten letter appeared on it. Hill-Smith read it over Hansen's shoulder, and made a few comments on it as he did so. A second letter appeared. Again Hill-Smith made his comments. It seemed to Hansen he was dictating the outlines of a reply to blank space.

"What—" began Hansen; and as if by magic, the picture disappeared.

"You must not say a word," said Hill-Smith. "I am dictating to New York the answer."

"Well, but it is scarcely more than midnight there. Who receives it?"

"Dictaphones in my office, which the typists will listen to in the morning."

"You mean you are dictating to machines six thousand miles away?"

"About that."

Hansen gasped.

"There is nothing striking about that, surely," said Hill-Smith. "Its possibility must have been evident for years."

"I never heard of it."

"Well, back in 1927, wireless telephony became possible between New York and London. I could sit in London and talk to anybody in America. If I could do that, why can't I talk to a dictaphone there?"

"But why don't you talk to your parties themselves?"

"I do, in exceptional instances; but it is not economical. It takes too much of their time. A dictaphone's time doesn't cost much."

"How does the picture of the letter get here? I suppose the letter itself is on your desk in New York?"

"Not exactly. The letters and other papers that demand my attention are photographed in a kinematograph affair, and my whole day's business is kept on record in the form of a short reel of film. When I press this button, a machine in New York projects a picture of the film on a screen there, and it is this that is transmitted here by television."

"But why make a film? Why not transmit the letter as it stands?"

"It is just a matter of convenience. To arrange to pass a couple of hundred letters in front of the transmitting machine in New York without human assistance involves mechanical complications. But there is no difficulty in projecting a movie of twice that number. The letters themselves are already filed away, and the projecting machine and the television transmitter together occupy no more space in my office than a radio cabinet."

"I see," said Hansen. It was about all he could say. He was feeling a trifle confused.

"All this is very simple," proceeded Hill-Smith, "much simpler than transmitting a television of an opera where the movement is rapid and the light bad, and I am really here to help experiment in a much more ambitious project of Marchmont's, whereby not images but the *things themselves* are transmitted through the ether. But first I want to show you this. Watch the screen on the wall."

AGAIN the low buzzing. On the wall appeared an African scene like a moving picture. With a start Hansen recognized it as the spot where his boys had stopped by the spring to consult *"Loki"* the day before. The ashes of their fire were still there. A couple of giant forest pigs were just leaving the spot. Suddenly one of them sprang up. Hansen caught a fleeting glimpse of a spear driven into its belly, and a still more fleeting glimpse of a pigmy in the act of delivering the blow. Then there was nothing visible but the tiny stream and the sun-flecked forest floor.

"When was that taken?" asked Hansen. "It must be since we were there."

Hill-Smith laughed. "You saw that at the identical moment it took place."

"But how?" asked Hansen in perplexity.

"In a hollow tree on the spot I have one of these," said Hill-Smith, picking up from a shelf a little box something like a camera. It had a lens like a camera, and a rotating disk affair at the rear. "I have a score of these at strategic points around, and by their means I can watch the country fairly well for a distance of a hundred miles. They are television transmitting machines in a very compact form. The power that works them is sometimes a little dry battery, but generally it is power taken directly from the ether and generated right here in this hut. It is remarkable how well they work, even in the twilight of the forest. In fact, I can often see better what is going on in the village miles away than you could if you were on the spot. The great difficulty is that of preventing the natives from seeing me put the machines in place, and of preventing their discovery when they are in place. I have run some pretty risks to get them up, and so far, not even my own boys know anything about it. Watch the screen again."

THIS time the scene was a native village on the edge of the lake. In the foreground was the great log drum under its thatch shelter, a log a dozen feet long and three feet in diameter. Beyond were some score of huts of the regular African style. Some kind of ceremony seemed to be going on. Hansen could see women weeping and wailing vigorously, and a witch-doctor going through a weird dance.

"That is a village two miles along the lake shore. Human leopards got one of them last night. The natives are in confusion in their ideas about these fellows, and regard them as supernatural beings or devils. They are right, I guess, about their being devils, at least."

"What are these human leopards?"

"They are cannibals of several tribes who kill other natives with a tool having iron claws. They drag the body off into the bush and cut out the heart to make 'medicine.' They commonly eat some of the rest of the corpse, but whether solely out of a taste for human flesh or for some reason connected with magic and superstition, I do not know. They also take leopards' feet on sticks and stamp around the scene of the murder with these feet.

"Before the white man came, all these natives were cannibals of the worst type, and now that the Belgians' attention is all concentrated on the Katanga and Kasai districts, we seem to be getting an outbreak of old-time habits in this section."

"Do the Belgians know about it?"

"Yes, but there are nothing but black clerks left in the Belgian posts within a great distance. No planes are available. If danger threatens us personally, we can possibly get a British plane from Uganda, but the Belgians would not tolerate British planes here merely to stop their own black subjects from being eaten by human leopards."

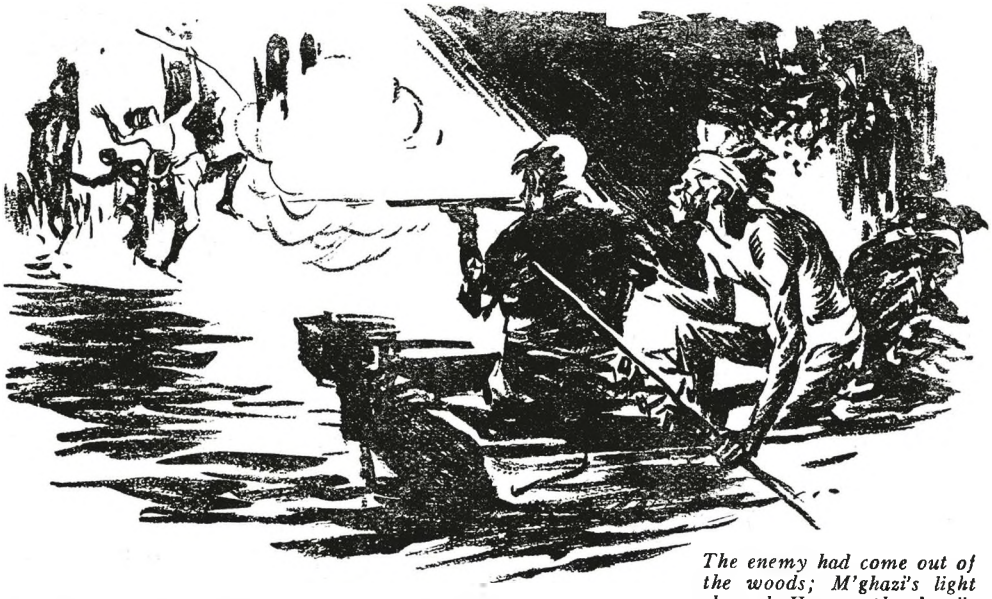
"I can see that," said Hansen. "But do you expect to be attacked?"

"Possibly, and I shall have to make preparations. But first let's examine the working of these machines."

HANSEN concurred, and together they went over the construction and technique of handling the different pieces of apparatus. Hansen had a fair knowledge of electrical devices, and he soon acquired a general idea of the principles involved. Soon after ten o'clock he was talking to London and seeing the people to whom he talked. There was nothing particularly novel about that, as Hill-Smith remarked, but Hansen felt rather

pleased to make the acquaintance of Edgar Marchmont over the television. A surprise, however, awaited them both when Marchmont announced that he was ready to try his latest invention, and actually to transmit a lump of salt by wireless.

Hill-Smith was all enthusiasm. At last the great day had arrived! He began to connect various pieces of apparatus on the table and around the walls of the hut.



*The enemy had come out of the woods; M'ghazi's light showed Hansen the hostile black. "Bang!"—and the native sprang with a shriek.*

"Now for the great original first and only materialization of spook-matter into concrete form!" he said, as he finally hitched into his circuit a big flat plate of silver. "Here's where the salt should form."

Hansen expected a spectacular performance—fireworks and sparks and vacuum tubes lit up with a ghastly glow. But nothing of the sort was visible. The place was lit by the plain light of day through the open door. There was not even the faintest buzzing. He watched the silver plate. He felt Hill-Smith's hand tighten on his shoulder. The bright plate was tarnishing in the center! It seemed to take on iridescent colors, and then it turned white, unequivocally white. Hill-Smith was quivering with suppressed excitement. The white stain grew—upward. It looked like salt. It grew and grew into a conical pile of powder. A clang of a bell announced the completion of the experiment. Hill-Smith dipped his finger in the pile and brought it to his lips.

"Salt, by Jove—genuine Cheshire salt!"

ALL afternoon they experimented, receiving small samples of sugar, gunpowder and tobacco. They forgot all about human leopards and the dangers of the African forest. At four o'clock African time, London rang off, Marchmont stating that he was leaving for New York on the next airship, but his assistant would continue the experiments next day, and try the more ambitious programme of transmitting complex substances such as potatoes, paper, cabbages, and the like, which he considered within the bounds of possibility.

"What is the principle on which this works?" asked Hansen, when at last the experimenting was over.

"Well, the basic idea is that you take the matter to pieces, atom by atom, and resolve each atom into its component parts—electrons or whatever they are—and by a process I do not thoroughly grasp, turn the electrons into quanta or parcels of ethereal waves. Then at this end we capture the quanta, convert them back into electrons, build the electrons into atoms and the atoms into molecules, and the molecules into their appropriate lumps of sugar."

"Is the sugar we get the same sugar as they began within London?"

"I don't know. Sugar disappears in London and reappears here, atom for atom,

an exact duplicate. I suppose it must be the same sugar."

At this point Hansen felt something big and soft and furry rubbing against his knees. He jumped up with a cry of alarm. Hill-Smith's look of consternation turned instantly to a broad grin.

"Why, it's Tim! Hullo, Tim, how did you get here? It isn't supper-time yet. Come here and meet Mr. Hansen."

SO this was Tim, a great upstanding cat as big as a leopard, and apparently as tame as a house-cat. Hansen made friends at once, though once more he felt a spasm of alarm as the great beast put its forepaws against his shoulders and stood on its hind legs—as tall as himself. They descended to the foot of the hill, and Hill-Smith tied the *"malama"* halfway down. "That will keep any black from going up there in the dark," he said.

At the camp they found a number of strange natives. They had come from the village by the lake-side, and besought the white men to make powerful medicine to drive away the leopards. Hill-Smith informed them that he and Hansen would undertake to kill any leopards that were pointed out to them, but he expected the blacks to find them. There was a momentary silence at this, and then one native, the chief of the village, as Hansen afterwards learned, stated that the leopards were never seen. He believed they were "from a man"—that is, sent by a wizard.

"Well," said Hill-Smith, "but who is this wizard, this *mulozhi?* Find him for us, and we will deal with him."

The blacks replied that their magic was not powerful enough to discover the sorcerer, and they again besought the white men to make powerful medicine and discover him themselves, for it is well known that the white man has very powerful magic indeed at his disposal.

"It is clear they intend to pass the buck to you," said Hansen to Hill-Smith.

"If I could get in touch with the pigmies, I could settle the thing," said Hill-Smith. "But it isn't possible at a moment's notice. We must play for time. Is M'ghazi dependable?"

"Absolutely, so far as my experience goes."

"Would you be prepared to sleep at the village if M'ghazi and my man Chirenzhi go with you?"

"Certainly."

"You may run serious risks."

"I do not care if I am killed."

"I hope it wont come to that." Then turning to the chief, he said: "Bring all the women and children from your village and make a camp in the middle of the plain here, where I can see all around it. Leave in your village only your warriors, and the young *bwana* will stay there with them tonight. You and the old men will stay here with me."

The arrangements were soon completed. A site in the plain two hundred yards from Hill-Smith's house was marked out for a camp, and the inhabitants of the village moved up to it. Hill-Smith held an inspection of the warriors, examining their skins very carefully for tattoo-marks. He also questioned the chief carefully about each of them, out of the man's hearing, and repeated the questions with the man himself. There were six of them altogether. Finally he expressed himself as satisfied, and told them to be prepared to return to their village immediately before sundown, along with *Bwana* Hansen, M'ghazi and Chirenzhi.

He took Hansen's arm, led him into the house and said: "Keep your eye on that fellow Moia Mwezi—'Bad Wind,' his name means. At some time or other he belonged to a cannibal society. It may be he still belongs, but if not, he knows something of the habits of leopard men. In either case, keep your eye on him. And don't tell either M'ghazi or Chirenzhi about it. The other natives may be all right, but don't trust too much to them. I am going to give you one of my canoes: it has an outboard motor, and you may need it if it comes to a fight on the water. See that either M'ghazi or Chirenzhi never leaves the boat, and do not let any of the others into it—that is, until you are absolutely sure they are on your side. Tomorrow I will build a stockade around the hill, for I think we are in for a reign of terror in this sector in the near future."

Hansen concurred, and placed his own porters in Hill-Smith's care. As he left, Hill-Smith remarked: "If you should see a pigmy, tell him I'll give him a present if he will come to me. Tomorrow I'll send out scouts to try to locate the pigmies."

HANSEN took his departure through the woods to the village, Chirenzhi paddling the canoe alone along the margin of the lake. Near the village the natives

pointed out to Hansen the footprints of leopards, and made him understand that they came down from the rocky ground above. They pointed out where the victim of the previous night had been slain, within a hundred yards of the village clearing. Hansen was not able to decide whether the leopards were animals or men from the scanty evidence.

He inspected the village thoroughly, and found nothing abnormal. The blacks lit a fire and cooked the evening meal as the sun went down. Chirenzhi and the canoe had not yet showed up. Hansen inspected his rifle, his carbide lamp and his flashlight. M'ghazi insisted that two fires be lit, "one for the women," because otherwise, said he, the leopards would know that only warriors were in the camp and would be very crafty.

Chirenzhi was late in arriving, and had such an affected air of indifference that Hansen knew he must have seen or done something of importance. On the pretext of getting something for the canoe, he drew Chirenzhi aside and inquired what the mystery was. It appeared that Chirenzhi, acting on Hill-Smith's instructions, had run a stout line of black twine, a foot above the ground, completely around the village clearing, and not another native knew of it. Hansen understood. A genuine leopard would smell the human scent on the twine and never touch it, and probably never cross it, nor would any other animal. A human leopard would trip over it. The ends of the twine came to pegs in the ground near the canoe.

Hansen had heard of similar devices being used for impounding bears and foxes in Norway, but this was a novel application. The idea looked feasible. There was, of course, the possibility that the human leopards might come by water, but it would be most unlikely that they would come within half a mile of the village in that way, for the forest offered so much better cover for a stealthy approach than the lake did. Moreover the natives had just told him that the leopards came down from the cliffs. No, the marauders would not fail to trip on the string, unless they walked on the beach by the water's margin. In that case it was for Chirenzhi to see them before they saw him. Chirenzhi agreed.

They all had their evening meal, and sat around the fire for an hour or two. Before they retired to the huts for the night, Hansen forbade any man to leave the village. He sent Chirenzhi to sleep by the canoe, dispersed the men to their several huts, and then with M'ghazi at his side, rolled up in his blanket a few yards from the fire and pretended to sleep.

M'ghazi planted two or three Zulu warspears in the ground within a couple of feet of him; Hansen had his rifle and a shotgun, loaded with buckshot, at his side. "The moon rises at one o'clock; anything that is to happen will probably happen before then," he told himself. "Guess I can keep awake till then; hope Chirenzhi can be depended on to stay awake too."

TIME passed slowly. Hansen could hear deep breathing from one of the huts, and soon M'ghazi also began to breathe heavily. Hansen felt disappointed; he had thought M'ghazi would remain awake. The fires were burning very low. Vaguely he could see the forest tops outlined against the sky. That was about all he could see. Even the huts were all but invisible, and the forest itself was an undifferentiated black mass circumscribing the clearing. It was black, sinister. The night-animals were calling. Once or twice a night-jar winged over the little patch of sky above him. Hansen figured that a rifle was not much use in such darkness; the shotgun was a better bet, for with that he might at any rate mark his man.

The time dragged on. M'ghazi turned over now and again. The fires were completely out. A whining like mosquitoes sounded in Hansen's ear, but nothing bit him. They were not mosquitoes, but almost microscopic bees, that fly both by day and night. Hansen wished they wouldn't whine so; he wanted to listen for other sounds. M'ghazi in his rolling about had half shaken his blanket off him. His face was turned away from Hansen. One brawny arm was quite exposed. Suddenly Hansen tautened: M'ghazi's arm was reaching silently for his spear. Hansen waited, breathless; he had disengaged himself from his own blanket; his shotgun was in his hand. He passed his flashlight to the Zulu, who understood how to use it. Hansen's heart was beating, *thump! thump!* It made him angry, for it seemed he could not hear another sound because of it. He strained his eyes to follow the Zulu's gaze into the impenetrable blackness.

Suddenly there was a wild yell from Chirenzhi, and a crash in the forest to their left. M'ghazi echoed the cry, and in-

stantly flashed the light on the forest. Hansen caught a faint glimpse of a fleeing object and fired—both barrels. The blacks came tumbling out of their huts.

"Did I hit him?" asked Hansen.

"I don't know," answered M'ghazi.

"Where is Bad Wind?" went up in a chorus. They went to his hut. Moia Mwezi was missing!

HANSEN was for lighting the carbide lamps and starting in pursuit, but M'ghazi was against it. "If he is finished, we find him in the morning. If he is hurt, he would groan. If he is not hurt, we cannot find him." Which was all quite true.

The blacks were talking excitedly. "What is the *indaba* about?" asked Hansen.

The boys replied that Bad Wind had no doubt other conspirators in the forest and had gone to join them. He had gone to tell them that the women and children and old men were at the white witch-doctor's camp. They thought they should take to their canoes and hasten with all possible noise to arouse the camp, for the sound of Hansen's guns would probably not be heard there, on account of the muffling effect of the forest and the intervening spurs of cliff. But the tom-tom would carry! Yes, the big drum would be heard! Two of them rushed heedlessly to the far end of the clearing to pound the giant log, which stood under its shelter hard by the edge of the forest.

"The fools!" cried Hansen.

"*Badu!* Wait!" yelled M'ghazi, and switched on the flashlight. But it was too late. The first man had at that instant reached the log. A shadowy figure leaped out from its hollow interior, and with one fierce snarl stretched the man senseless and fled into the forest. The second man was in Hansen's line of fire. With a rush he and M'ghazi sprang to the wounded man, who had three ghastly gashes down his back. M'ghazi searched the woods with the light, but it was impossible to see anything.

The other blacks came up.

"Sound the drum!" commanded Hansen. "Light the carbide lamps!"

Safe in the glare of the *balala* lights, they sounded the drum, while Hansen inspected the unconscious man. The scalp was laid open, and the blow had clearly taken effect chiefly on the head. Three great gashes extended from the shoulder to the loin. The loin-cloth was almost ripped off. The man, however, was not dead, and the bleeding was not so profuse as to render it likely he would die if the wounds did not become infected. Hansen knelt down, with his rifle handy, and rubbed a packet of permanganate crystals into the wounds.

The boom of the tom-tom ceased.

"What did the drum say?" asked Hansen.

"Leopard try kill us. One man hurt; we bring him to camp."

"All right. Pick him up and carry him down to the canoes."

At this point a great hissing noise was heard above them, and a bright rocket came soaring across the sky. In an instant it burst, a magnificent white star illuminating the whole landscape. For an instant the clearing and the huts, the forest, the cliff and the lake, stood out as if in the light of day. The blacks, who had half raised their wounded comrade to carry him, let him fall again with a thud, and themselves fell prone in terror on the ground.

Ordinarily Hansen would have laughed at their terror, or been angry at their dropping their comrade in so callous a fashion, but the events of the last few minutes had not been without their effect on him. There was, after all, something sublime and startling in that celestial apparition; a cold shiver ran down his spine.

"Get up!" he ordered. "That is the white witch-doctor's magic that tells us he has heard the drum."

M'ghazi, alert as ever, had used the momentary daylight to good advantage. He stooped down by the side of a tree stump a couple of yards away and picked up from among the grass what they had failed to notice by the carbide lights—a strange weapon of three knives, torn from the assassin's hand by the victim's loin-cloth as he fell. It was a cruel tool, designed to simulate the action of a leopard's claws. Blood was still dripping from the blades, and bits of scalp and flesh stuck to it. Hansen shuddered.

"Bring it with you," he ordered. Then turning to the other natives: "Pick up the wounded man—carefully, now!—and bring him to the canoes."

THE whole party now proceeded across the clearing to find Chirenzhi and the boats. A strange foreboding came over

Hansen. Chirenzhi had been left alone with the canoes two hundred yards from where the murder had been attempted. What if some of the "leopards" had come upon him unaware, while his attention had been distracted by the lights and the tom-tom?

The same idea seemed to occur to M'ghazi and all the rest of the party at the same instant, for with one accord all suddenly stopped stock-still and "froze." Was it the sound of paddles they had heard subconsciously? M'ghazi flashed his light along the water. The stealthy paddling turned to a vigorous splashing, and dimly in the distance Hansen made out a canoe speeding away from them with several men in it.

"Shoot, *Bwana,* shoot!"

Hansen fired, aiming as well as he could. There was a yell. He fired again, and again. The men leaped out of the canoe. Hansen thought he made out four distinct splashes.

"Get another canoe quick! Let's get them!" he called excitedly.

"Crocodile get them first," said M'ghazi nonchalantly. Then, sweeping the beach near them with the light, he added: "Chirenzhi, he dead."

"What!" exclaimed Hansen, aghast.

ON the beach by the canoe that Hill-Smith had provided was a great pool of blood. Footprints of men and leopards were everywhere. They laid the wounded man in the canoe, and Hansen set the remaining four men with spears to guard him while he and M'ghazi followed the bloody trail of Chirenzhi. It led along the bush a few score yards, and then into a patch of brush. Here they found Chirenzhi's body, clawed to ribbons. The heart had been ripped out. The sight sickened Hansen, but M'ghazi seemed rather pleased than otherwise. Perhaps it reminded him of goodly battles in days of old, before life had become so commonplace with the arrival of the white man.

"Can we carry him down to the canoe?" asked Hansen.

"Better let him stay here for bait," replied M'ghazi. "The leopards will return to eat the flesh of a man, and the spear of M'ghazi shall be red tomorrow."

Hansen decided that it was more important to succor the living than to retrieve the dead, and his first duty was to get the wounded man to camp and give him the best attention they could provide. With M'ghazi he returned to the canoe, started the motor and put out to sea. The first streak of moonlight was appearing in the east. It was not more than two and a half miles to camp, but there was a little headland to be rounded. The water was quite deep close inshore, and Hansen was heading to pass close by the headland. M'ghazi saw his intention and remonstrated.

"Stay plenty far from land, *Bwana,*" he advised. "A bad wind may send an arrow a long way."

Hansen cursed himself for a fool. There was, after all, no certainty that the four men on the canoe he had sent to the crocodiles were the whole of his enemies. He put the helm down and stood farther out to sea. At that very instant an arrow whizzed past, taking his hat with it as it went.

"By Jove! That was a narrow shave!" said Hansen as he opened the engine full out and headed for the middle of the lake. A second arrow fell short: they were drawing out of range. M'ghazi turned the flashlight on the headland, as Hansen suddenly stopped the engine and seized his rifle. The act was neatly timed. The enemy, in the hope of making a third arrow reach them, had come out clear of the woods and stood on the very point of the headland. M'ghazi's light showed Hansen both his own weapon and the hostile black.

*"Bang!"*

The native sprang into the air with a shriek, and fell headlong into the lake. A chorus of approval went up from Hansen's men. M'ghazi began to chant his praises, in extemporaneous song:

The *bwana* is a slayer of leopards, a killer of man-eating leopards:
The beasts of prey have known the terror of his shooting.
Only one shot is needed, by daylight or by nighttime,
The *bwana's* rifle speaks, and it is ended.

M'ghazi proceeded to explain at length in poetical fashion that the crocodiles would grow fat on leopard meat, and he dilated on the benefits that accrued to the world at large through the association of two such excellent men as himself and Bwana Hansen.

MEANTIME, having reloaded his rifle, Hansen took the motor in hand again and, rounding the headland, steered straight for the campfires burning on the plain in front of Hill-Smith's dwelling. A couple of powerful searchlights from the

wrecked air-plane were searching the waters and the edges of the forest bordering the plain. A shout of welcome went up as the glare first hit the canoe, and a crowd ran down to the beach to meet them. There was not a crocodile to be seen, and Hansen felt the oncoming chill of the small hours that presaged the formation of the morning mists. They dragged the boat up on the sand, and the porters helped to carry the bleeding and unconscious man to Hill-Smith's house.

Hill-Smith was outside directing operations with the searchlights, and now came to meet them. He asked Hansen to take charge outside while he attended to the wounded native, remarking that he was a "bit of a medico" himself. From the evident pleasure he showed at the prospect of fixing up the poor fellow, Hansen concluded he must be a fairly well qualified one; and in fact it appeared later that Hill-Smith had graduated from a medical school. Fifteen or twenty minutes later he joined Hansen again and asked for an account of exactly what had happened. Hansen told him from first to last.

"Was the man on the headland Bad Wind?"

"I don't know. The boys say that he wasn't."

"Well, if that was somebody else, Bad Wind must be still at large, unless he was one of the four men in the canoe who jumped into the water. Anyway, we don't know whether those four are alive or not. That makes five or six enemies, and probably the fellow that came out of the drum was another, and you can't tell how many more there are. It looks to me as if a whole tribe has broken loose since the Belgians withdrew their forces, and they have spies and confederates in various villages round about. We have killed one of them, but they have killed Chirenzhi and taken out his heart, and that will encourage them very much. They may think the other man is dead, and you brought him away to save his heart and 'meat,' and then they will think they have had very much the best of it tonight. They will make powerful spells as well, out of Chirenzhi's heart, and lay plans to attack in force tomorrow night or some time soon."

There did not seem to be anything they could do just then, so Hansen went to get a little sleep, after arranging that Hill-Smith should call him at daybreak and get a few hours' sleep himself. It seemed advisable for one of them to be constantly on the watch in case of a surprise attack. Hansen did not feel in the least ready for sleep after the events of the last few hours, but Hill-Smith insisted on his going to lie down at any rate, and he slept fitfully till daybreak, with visions of battles and blood continually disturbing his repose. He was glad when morning came, for he thought that work would not wear him out as much as that kind of sleep.

## CHAPTER IV

SEVERAL thousand miles away, in America, Mary Ferguson was not sleeping too well either. Since her quarrel with Charley Hansen some months before, she had not seen him or heard from him, and no one knew where he had gone. It appeared that he had sailed on the very next airship for Europe, without discussing his intentions with anybody, not even his mother, who had not received a line from him since he left. Mrs. Hansen was breaking under the prolonged suspense, for Charley could not be traced in Europe.

Mary condemned him for his inhuman treatment of his mother, and blamed herself for being the original cause of the whole trouble. She hated herself; she hated Charley; she hated everything.

She picked up the Boston *Transcript*. "Among those due to arrive at New York on the airship *Rooseveltian* this morning is Dr. Edgar Marchmont, the well-known inventor, who represents the Hill-Smith interests in the most important patent suit that has occupied the Supreme Court for some time—"

"Dr. Marchmont—Uncle's partner!" exclaimed Mary. "I'll go down to New York at once. He's awfully clever. He ought to know the best way to find Charley!"

Nothing could be simpler. Everybody knew there was very little Dr. Marchmont could not do. It was strange none of them had thought of writing to him before.

She rang the bell.

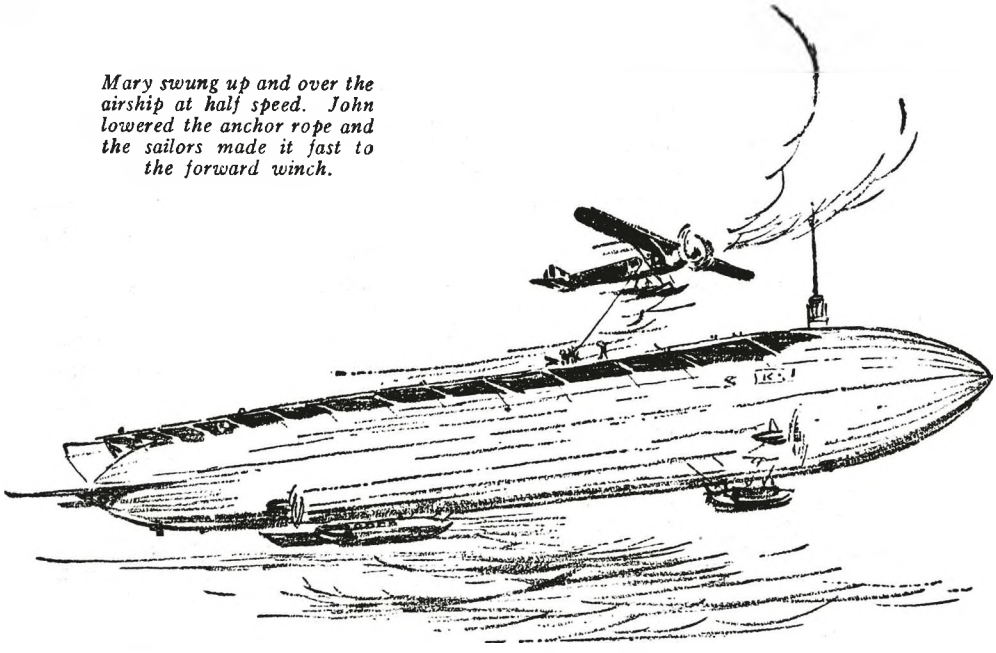
"John, is the *Kittiwake* ready for a run to New York?"

"Yes ma'am."

"If we start at once, can we get there before the airship gets in?"

"Yes ma'am, I think we could just manage it if you are ready to start now."

"I'll be ready in five minutes! Meet me at the boat-house."



*Mary swung up and over the airship at half speed. John lowered the anchor rope and the sailors made it fast to the forward winch.*

THE *Kittiwake* was reckoned a fast plane in those days. Her cruising speed was about two hundred miles an hour, and she was capable of two hundred and fifty at a pinch. They used to figure it was just an even hour from the Charles River to the Hudson, and in fact the popularity of this type of plane with Boston people was largely due to the fact that the makers of the plane advertised "New York in one hour." In appearance the *Kittiwake* was more like a miniature flying boat than a hydroplane, and like the seabird from which it was named, it was about as much at home when riding the waves as when launched upon the air.

In two minutes Mary Ferguson was tripping down to the garden path to the "boathouse." It was one of those old-fashioned seaplane garages, a shed thirty feet wide built over the end of an artificial canal some fifty yards long which opened into Walden Pond. There were scores of such inlets and similar sheds in those days. Mary crossed the gangplank and took her seat at the joy-stick. A touch of a button, and the great shutters in front of the shed rolled up; and John, removing the gangplank, took his seat in the hull.

The little auxiliary motor began to chug-chug, and cautiously they felt their way down the narrow inlet. The banks were high, breaking the force of the wind effectively unless it blew directly from the lake, and were sufficiently far from each other to leave a fair clearance for the *Kittiwake's* wings. Floating on the water was a double ramp of balsa logs, which formed a funnel-shaped fairway to keep the hull of the flying boat in the center of the channel.

A considerable wind was blowing from the southwest, and a cross sea met them as they approached the mouth of the inlet. Several other sea-planes took off ahead of them. Mary started the main propellers and gently taxied into the wind. A couple of blasts on the siren, and they rounded the bluff into the lake proper. The usual flock of canoes and pleasure boats were not in their way today—it was too rough. The *Kittiwake* seemed to revel in the swell.

"All clear!" called John, as he shut down the water-propeller and locked the water-rudder. Mary "stepped on the gas" —they still spoke that way, as if in the age of automobiles, although the gas-control could not be stepped on except by standing on one's head.

The *Kittiwake* surged forward. Two curling waves of spume went flying under either wing. She rose slightly in the water, hit the crests of two or three swells with a resounding smack, and was off into the air.

JOHN had never been entirely satisfied with Mary's driving. He always said women were not safe in the air. He was old-fashioned. Mary said he was an old fogy. She had been driving for four years and had never an accident. John said the credit should be given to Providence and

not to Mary. Mary only laughed at him, but John had persuaded her father to put in a dual control. "Some of these days it will be needed," he said darkly.

John sat by the second joy-stick now. He was reckoned one of the best pilots in New England, and in riding out rough weather he had few equals. Mary was surprised at the squally character of the air. The wind blew in gusts from several directions, it seemed. She was glad that John was along, though she intended to show him what a clever driver she was.

In a strong headwind the *Kittiwake* should have gained considerable altitude by the time they crossed the farther shore of the lake, but Mary was playing for speed rather than height. She shot across between two woods so low that a gust of wind almost carried them into the trees. A clever (or accidental) banking of the plane threw them just clear of the tree-tops. Mary laughed—she was feeling reckless—and immediately afterwards had to put the helm down hard to avoid a collision with the church at North Saugus. At two hundred miles an hour you cover half a mile in ten seconds.

"Perhaps we'd better go higher!" said Mary.

They climbed rapidly—on over the Saugus River and the Mystic. Below them the smoke of Boston went trailing over Massachusetts Bay. In the offshore wind the ocean looked relatively calm, and the freighters that dotted the seascape seemed as idle as in a picture. The air was usually full of planes over Boston at this hour, but today, in spite of the bright sunshine, they were scarce; Mary could not see more than forty or fifty at once.

Lexington lay below them to the right. On up the valley of the zigzag Charles River, higher and higher, over the Blackstone with Narragansett Bay on their left, and down the valley of the Quinebaug to the Sound. There was white water on the Sound today, but Mary's attention was not on that. Twenty miles ahead, nearly opposite New Haven, she thought she could see faintly the round outlines of the great airship.

"Is that the *Rooseveltian?*"

"Looks like it," said John. "We shall catch up with her off Bridgeport."

IN those days the Atlantic airships had just inaugurated the famous so-called "twenty-four-hour schedule." The idea was that a man might leave London at ten A. M. London time and arrive in New York at ten A. M. next morning, New York time. On account of the five hours' difference of time between the continents, this gave twenty-nine hours of flying time, and called for a speed, relative to the sea, of a level hundred miles an hour.

On the return trip they left New York at ten A. M. and reached London at ten A. M. next day, with only nineteen hours' of flying time, and maintained a speed of a hundred and fifty miles an hour. This schedule worked out pretty well, largely owing to the fact that there was nearly always a wind of about twenty-five miles an hour blowing from America to Europe. This helped the airships along on the eastward trip, precisely when they needed it, and held them back on the westward trip when plenty of time was available. Thus the prevailing wind helped greatly to cancel the effect of the five hours' difference in local time between New York and London.

The wind was appreciably more than twenty-five miles an hour today, but the airship had had fair weather in mid-Atlantic and was well on time.

The planes of a few dozen belated New Yorkers were struggling up the Sound toward the city. The dwellers along the north shore of Long Island had not yet learned the value of fast machines for rough weather. Boston was far ahead of them in that respect. Mary could see the looks of envy on some of their faces as the Boston plane went hissing by. Mary smiled, a little sadly. They were like tired pigeons beating their way wearily to the weariest city in creation, that awful wilderness of bricks that is Manhattan.

"I wonder if I could board her?" asked Mary.

"You might if you catch up ahead of the immigration officer," said John.

In those days the country had not yet learned how to deal with airship travel. They still treated airships much like ocean liners, and inspected them on arrival in America instead of on their departure from Europe. The customs and immigration officers used to board the airship off New Haven or Bridgeport, or sometimes Providence, and they would not be through for half an hour after the ship was moored in Brooklyn. Moreover, contact was so easily established by airplane with the ship all the way from Newfoundland to New

York that it sometimes happened that not half the complement of passengers was aboard when the inspectors arrived. Passengers would transfer off Newfoundland to planes connecting with the services for the Middle West. University students returning from a vacation trip to Europe would drop overboard in parachutes at Boston or New Haven. Distinguished visitors from Europe would be met at breakfast off the coasts of Maine or Massachusetts by reporters or American friends, and the inspectors would find a couple of score of "passengers" who had arrived on board the airship only an hour before themselves. The authorities winked at it; they handled the inspections informally, for the airship company gave them every opportunity if they believed they had any crooks aboard.

The public for its part seemed to regard the airships much as it had regarded hotel lobbies previously, as a convenient place to meet one's friends. It is said that the Prince of Wales set the fashion when he invited the premiers of Canada and Newfoundland to meet him at breakfast on his way to New York. After that, all the high society notables did the same thing, until it became recognized that the airship was public property from dawn to ten A. M. of the day of her arrival.

NOW, landing an airplane on the upper deck of an airship is tolerably easy, provided there is no great amount of cross wind, but it is not so easy to take off again, and a flying boat without wheels cannot take off again at all. It has to be thrown off over the stern on the slipway, a thrilling experience, though safe enough in a modern plane.

Mary stepped up the engine to two hundred and fifty miles an hour air-speed and rapidly overhauled the great liner. She switched on the radiographer and dialed the airship's number.

*"Hallo!"*

*"Hallo! Is Dr. Marchmont on board?"*

*"Yes, who's calling?"*

*"Mary Ferguson."* . . . .

*"Hallo! Marchmont speaking."*

*"This is Mary Ferguson. I'm in the plane alongside. May I come aboard?"*

*"Why, certainly; can you land on top?"*

*"I don't know: I have a seaplane, and suppose I may have to jump. Send some one up to catch me."*

*"Oh, we'll soon fix that. Just drop us a rope-end, and we'll make things fast."*

MARY swung up and over the airship, approaching cautiously from the rear at half speed. A couple of sailors appeared on the deserted upper deck. John lowered the anchor rope through the fuselage, and the sailors made it fast to the forward winch. As the rope tightened, Mary cut the engine speed till the airship was towing the plane, which swung sidewise, to and fro, a few feet above the deck. They hauled the *Kittiwake* to the mast forward and stopped the swing.

The "mast" was a hollow half-cylinder affair which normally lay flush with the deck. When erected, it formed a windbreaking device in which the nose of a plane (provided it did not have a central propeller) could be accommodated, and it was simplicity itself for Mary to hand over the controls to John, walk over the nose of her machine and down the little stairway in the "mast."

"Cast off—customs officer now coming aboard," called one of the sailors.

They paid out rope till the *Kittiwake* was well astern of the ship. John pressed the shears pedal with his foot and cut the rope, putting his nose down as he did so. He dived beneath the great airship a couple of hundred feet to gain velocity, opened his engines wide and came up ahead of her. The customs plane took her place on the deck.

Marchmont was on the deck to receive Mary.

"My, but how you've grown!"

"You've said that ever since I was in the cradle."

"You were a pretty baby—and you get prettier each time I see you."

"Now stop being silly, and listen!"

"I am all ears. Did you ever see me wiggle my ears?"

"Can't you be serious for once when I want to talk to you?"

"Life is real, life is earnest, this morning, evidently. What's the matter?"

"Charley has disappeared, and I want to find him."

"Charley who?"

"Charley Hansen, of course. I was sort of engaged to him."

"I thought you were a bit sweet on Jimmy Howe?"

"Oh, no, I wasn't, not really. That's what we quarreled over. And Charley said he would never see me again, and he has gone off somewhere, and nobody knows where he is, and his mother is nearly fran-

tic, and I feel as if it is all my fault, and the whole thing is a horrible mess."

"Well, well!"

"You don't seem to care. Maybe he's drowned, or even killed himself. I thought you were a friend of his. If he is all right, why doesn't he write to his mother, if he wont write to me?"

"You get so excited about it!"

"Oh, you don't care about anything but your stupid patent-suits and experiments. You're—detestable!"

"H'm! I'm very sorry!"

"Why don't you find Charley if you are so clever?"

"It never occurred to me."

DR. MARCHMONT'S face wore a quizzical smile. It began to dawn on Mary that the man would not be teasing her in this fashion unless he were tolerably sure that Charley was still alive.

"You know all about it! I know you do! You know where he is. Tell me at once! Where is he?"

Marchmont cleared his throat.

"Charley, my dear, is perfectly safe at present."

"Where?"

"In Africa—Central Africa—the Belgian Congo, to be precise."

"When did you hear from him?"

"I was talking to him all yesterday.'

"Oh, glory! What did he say?"

"He asked for a little salt."

"Oh, stop teasing! What did he really say?"

"He said: 'Send some more sugar.' "

"Yes, and what else?"

"I sent him some gunpowder."

"Gunpowder? What would he want that for? Do they use gunpowder in Africa?"

"I don't know, but I sent it."

"Is he in trouble?"

"Well, not exactly, except that a young lady has treated him very badly."

"Yes, that's what I am worrying about. I wish I could see him and explain."

"I'll put you through to him tonight or early tomorrow morning, if you'll promise not to speak to Mrs. Hansen. I should like to do that myself."

"I'll promise anything, Dr. Marchmont!"

MEANTIME it was already three P. M. in London and five P. M. in Africa. Almost another day had gone by for Hill-Smith and Hansen, but it had not been uneventful. From dawn onward the natives had labored to build stockades to defend themselves against a general attack. Hill-Smith feared they might have to encounter not merely the craftly nocturnal attacks of a small band of leopard men, but a general uprising of a powerful group of tribes throughout the section, hungering for cannibal food, and intent on a general slaughter and enslaving of the tribes in the immediate environs of the lake.

Hill-Smith had reported on the situation to London, and in view of the pressure of defence measures had delegated the handling of most of even his most important business to other officers of his company. He had arranged television cameras at a variety of places near the camp, where they could command a view from various angles of the battles he confidently expected to be staged; and he had so arranged his transmitting devices that the whole scene could be witnessed in London by a group of observers who would report back to him the movements of the enemy, which he could not himself watch. He must be with the defenders of the stockade, and his general staff would be in London. He arranged a pocket radio-set in his clothes and a pair of ear-phones over his head so that he could receive instructions from the watchers three thousand miles away.

Hill-Smith sent out several of his best scouts to try to get in touch with the pigmies: they went out unwillingly, asking if the *bwana* wished them to die before their time, for leopards kill by day if they feel so disposed, as well as by night. Up to the present none of the men had returned. Hill-Smith had told them not to return till they found the pigmies.

During the day canoes with delegations from two other villages on the lake arrived at the sand plain and besought Hill-Smith's aid. At each village a man had been killed by leopards during the night. They had heard Hansen's shooting and seen the sky-rocket, and concluded that the white witch-doctor was killing leopards. They begged for his protection, for they believed war was in the air. Hill-Smith invited them to transplant their villages temporarily to his camp, where he would afford them protection on condition that they did not quarrel with the rest of the party, and carried out his instructions. This they agreed to, and late in the afternoon they arrived with their women and children, goats and fowls, and such foodstuffs as they could carry, in a dozen dug-out canoes.

HILL-SMITH'S fighting force now amounted to nearly forty men, including Hansen's porters, who did not seem to relish the prospect, and M'ghazi, who was bubbling over with glee. He had sharpened his spears and recited innumerable tales of the wonderful executions he had done in far-off lands, and his boastful stories and evident enthusiasm were of immense help to the white men in dealing with natives whose morale had been shattered by a week of nocturnal maraudings on the part of unseen "leopards." A heavy thunderstorm broke just before midday, and added to the natives' depression.

"There are several things I would like to get over the telequant now," said Hill-Smith to Hansen. "One is a large supply of barbed wire, and another is provisions. We don't have the equipment as yet for transmitting more than a few ounces of anything, but I have urged them in London to hurry up with a powerful installation. With all these natives here we shall be starved, with a war on our hands, unless we can keep control of the lake, where fish are plentiful and hippo occasionally to be had. I wish you would go up to the sentry-box and experiment with the Londoners, and see if you can get a few ounces of beefsteak or beef-extract over the ether. I must stay here for the next hour or so."

Hansen spent most of the morning with the machine. He duly received a perfectly recognizable though very small piece of beefsteak, and grinned privately to himself while he scolded the Londoners for not cooking it before they sent it across. After that he received a hard-boiled egg. This was a success; shell, white and yolk were perfect, and still slightly warm, though the period of transmission was rather lengthy.

IN the afternoon, after the thunderstorm had subsided and the first party of additional natives had arrived on the sand plain, Hansen took M'ghazi and three or four warriors and set out to retrieve the body of Chirenzhi. They moved warily through the woods, combing them as completely as possible. Another man in a canoe made the journey by water, keeping abreast of them, as far as he could.

They reached the village clearing without seeing any trace of the enemy. A troop of monkeys scolded at them, and a couple of forest pigs rushed away. If the enemy was anywhere near at hand, that was sufficient to betray the white men to them.

They found Chirenzhi's body. Since they left it the night before it had been visited and several great chunks of flesh ripped from it. The sight was horrible. Hansen concluded that his enemies were still near at hand. The cliffs to their left looked inaccessible enough, but the natives had said that the "leopards" came down them. Hansen was anxious to pursue his foes while the daylight lasted, but the thunderstorm had washed out the footprints, and tracking was impossible. They laid the remnants of Chirenzhi's body in the canoe and sent it back to camp. Hansen decided to comb the woods for another mile or two. He himself took the position nearest the cliffs, where he would now and then command a view of the precipice, and hoped he might see something of interest.

Hansen could see M'ghazi, every now and then, moving silently through the trees a hundred yards away. They traveled a mile or more in this fashion, when Hansen became aware that M'ghazi was closing in on him, trying to head him off and at the same time attract his attention. Something was going to happen. Hansen's heart began to thump. He halted and looked carefully all around him. M'ghazi had stopped too, but there was nothing to be seen. There was not a sound to be heard—no significant sound, at least. He strained his eyes through the forest twilight in the direction in which M'ghazi seemed most interested. He could see nothing. The suspense was breathless. He feared that with all the attention riveted on one spot, an attack from another quarter might be attempted: he glanced around, but all parts of the forest seemed equally quiet.

M'ghazi was making signs. He wanted him to lay his gun down on the ground. That was about the last thing in Hansen's mind. Was M'ghazi himself about to turn traitor? As if reading Hansen's thoughts, M'ghazi at that instant laid his own spear down, and stood away from it a few paces toward Hansen. Puzzled to the point of bewilderment, Hansen laid down his gun, intending to pick it up in a hurry if the big Zulu came too close.

NO sooner had he laid down his rifle than to his astonishment he saw within a hundred feet of him a couple of pigmies, who dropped their bows and advanced at a run, but so silently that they looked more like shadows or wraiths. M'ghazi came to Hansen's side.

The usual words of greeting followed.

"Was the white man seeking the killer of the boatman?"

"Of course."

"He is behind you."

Hansen turned quickly. The pigmy smiled. "Not close," he added.

"Whereabouts?"

"Very near the village, and he has three others with him."

("The four men in the boat," thought Hansen.)

"Why didn't we see them?" asked he.

"The white man's eye is not keen, nor is the black man's. Only the pigmy sees with his eyes."

"If you will guide me to the leopard men," said Hansen, "I will kill you an elephant for meat, and another for every leopard man I kill."

The pigmies agreed, and went to retrieve their bows. Hansen picked up his gun, and M'ghazi his spear. At that instant two of Hansen's "deer-stalkers" arrived, breathless, with the alarming news that the remaining member of the party had disappeared and was undoubtedly killed by leopards. They could not say where it happened, but the last time they saw him was soon after putting Chirenzhi in the canoe. They had not heard a sound to indicate what might be happening to him.

"We shall have to go and find his trail," said Hansen.

THE pigmies went first. The black men followed, keeping their guides in view. Hansen, with M'ghazi, came last. They traveled much more rapidly than before. In fifteen minutes they were less than a quarter of a mile from the village clearing, and not far from the lake shore. The pigmies made signs for the others to wait, and disappeared like phantoms.

In a few minutes one pigmy reappeared alone, and beckoned to the others to follow him. He led them a couple of hundred yards to another dreadful sight. The missing warrior lay stretched upon the ground. His neck was broken and his throat lacerated in a frightful fashion. His body was ripped open and his heart gone.

Hansen was almost overwhelmed. It was incredible, but it was true. Men could be taken in full daylight from under his very nose, without a sound, without a sign of any kind. The diabolical cunning of these human leopards was beyond belief. Rifles were no match for it. He felt helpless—no, not helpless: there were the pigmies. If he could trust them, they were equal in skill to the enemy.

The pigmy pointed out the trail of the retreating leopard man. They followed it rapidly to the foot of the cliff. The ascent looked utterly impracticable, nearly a thousand feet of almost sheer precipice, but there was a narrow ravine or cleft in the rock face at this point. In places it resembled what Alpinists called a "chimney." Apparently it was up this cleft that the leopard men had retreated.

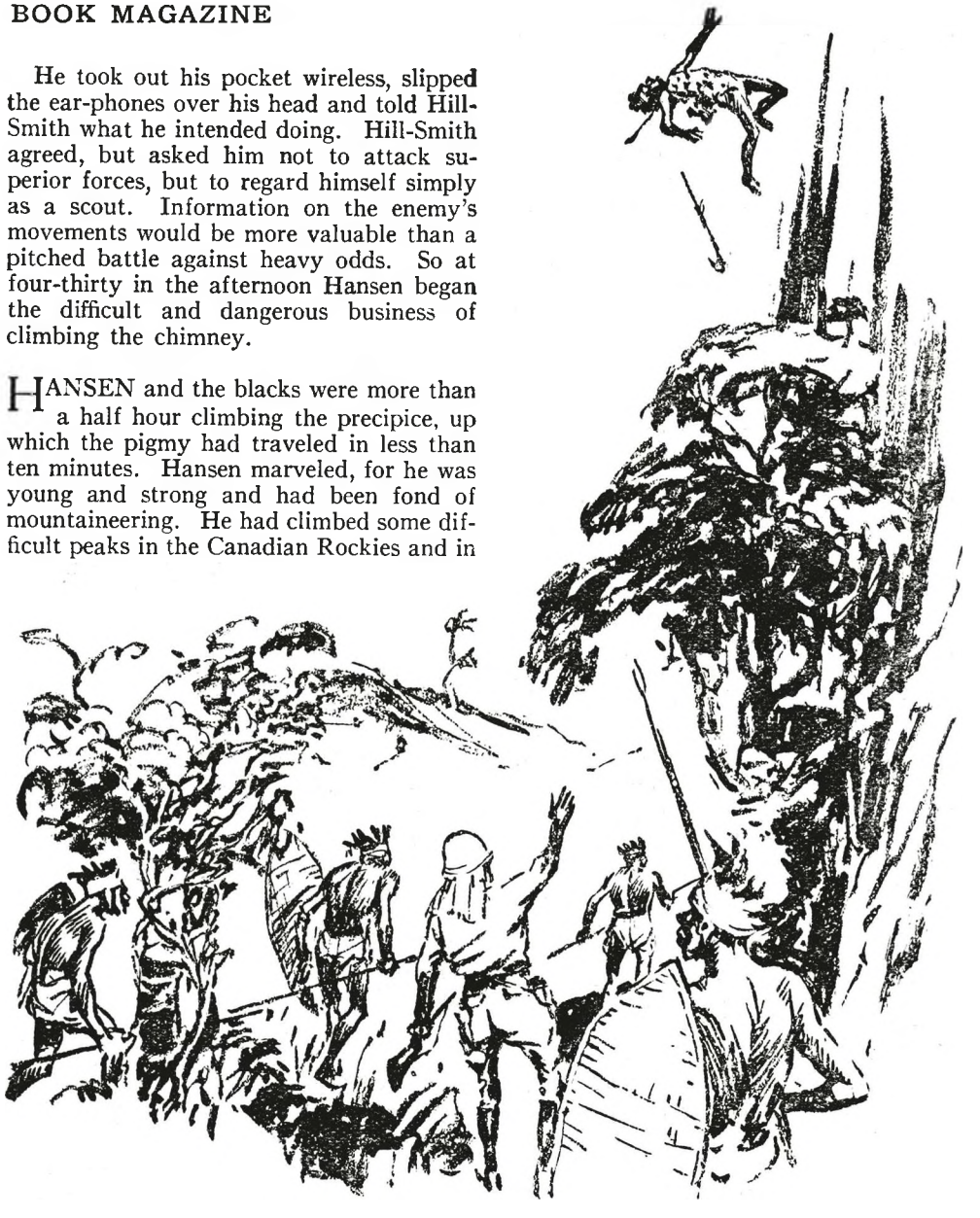
The pigmy stopped and pointed. High above them, near the top of the cleft already in this incredibly short time, the other pigmy was perched on a seemingly inaccessible ledge. He was in the act of fitting an arrow to his bow, a little flat-tipped arrow less than a foot long, but armed with deadly poison. They saw the tiny bow snap taut and the arrow whistle to its unseen destination. There was a yell from somewhere near the top of the precipice, and a moment later a heavy body crashed into the tree-tops. A dead branch and a few leaves of climbing vines came down to earth. High above them, caught by the foot in a tangle of vine, hung the body of a man in a leopard skin. Blood was spurting from his neck, where the tiny wide-bladed arrow point had punctured the jugular vein.

Hansen raised his rifle to put the fellow out of his misery, hanging there a hundred and fifty feet above the earth, but M'ghazi stopped him. "He is finished," he said, and so it appeared. One does not live long suspended by one foot, with a poisoned arrow in the neck, the jugular cut, and a back broken by a fall of six or eight hundred feet. The man gave one last fling with his arms, and it was over.

The pigmies explained to Hansen that all four of the leopard men had climbed the chimney since the thunderstorm, but three of them had gone up immediately after the storm, and the fourth, now dead, was quite alone. They believed the other three had gone to a great distance beyond the top of the precipice. Hansen decided to climb the chimney and establish himself on the plateau above if conditions look favorable: he had a notion that it might be good generalship to maintain a mobile force at the crest of the cliffs, particularly as the enemy would never expect him in such a place. Besides, he wanted to see what the country was like up there.

He took out his pocket wireless, slipped the ear-phones over his head and told Hill-Smith what he intended doing. Hill-Smith agreed, but asked him not to attack superior forces, but to regard himself simply as a scout. Information on the enemy's movements would be more valuable than a pitched battle against heavy odds. So at four-thirty in the afternoon Hansen began the difficult and dangerous business of climbing the chimney.

HANSEN and the blacks were more than a half hour climbing the precipice, up which the pigmy had traveled in less than ten minutes. Hansen marveled, for he was young and strong and had been fond of mountaineering. He had climbed some difficult peaks in the Canadian Rockies and in



*There was a yell from the top of the precipice, and a body crashed into the tree-tops.*

Switzerland, and thought he knew all the rules of the game. But now they were climbing without ropes or picks or tools of any kind, except their spears and guns, which were an encumbrance rather than a help. Yet the pigmies seemed to spring from ledge to ledge more like baboons than human beings, sure-footed as goats and agile as monkeys.

They reached the top and found themselves in forest again. They followed the trail of the three leopard men, which led away to the northwest. The going was difficult, for the forest was intersected by granite ridges at regular intervals of something less than half a mile, and these ridges were often difficult to climb, though not so bad as the chimney. Between the ridges the ground was often swampy. Hansen realized that it was across such country as this that he had proposed to travel after the first meeting with the pigmy two days before, and he now understood the force of the porters' remark:

"A pigmy might go through the forest, but a *man* goes by the road."

It was late in the day and Hansen had no time to proceed much beyond the first of the granite barriers, but the pigmies made him understand there were a succession of them. He decided that he was now satisfied that the leopard men had gone to a considerable distance, and would, in all probability, not return that night. The pigmies held that opinion very strongly, and seemed to lose interest in leopard men altogether. They were profoundly interested in some elephant tracks, which they explained were very recent, and that if they went a short distance southward along the ridge or through the glen they would undoubtedly overtake many large elephants, and Hansen could redeem his promise of "an elephant for each leopard man," for, said they, "one leopard man is already dead."

Hansen thought it might be good policy to keep his promise without delay, but he knew that once meat was in sight the pigmies would not want to leave the carcass till it was entirely consumed. On the other hand, if he had a dead elephant within a mile or two of camp, he could be sure of having a hundred pigmies at the carcass so long as the meat lasted, and he considered that the pigmies were valuable allies.

THEY stole cautiously through the forest, the pigmies leading the way. It was now possible to hear the herd ahead, breaking down brush, and rumbling internally. One pigmy wanted to borrow M'ghazi's spear, but the big Zulu refused to let it out of his possession, and referred him to one of the other warriors.

The herd was still unsuspicious and now very close, but the daylight was rapidly fading, and even at noon the light of the forest is scarcely more than a twilight. Suddenly the pigmy stopped and signified to Hansen that the elephant was immediately ahead. Hansen could see the bushes moving, but he could not see the beast. It was scarcely twenty yards away. Then a great snakelike trunk went curling into the air, and a huge head crashed through the saplings, seeming to tower right over them.

*"Bang!"*

Hansen's gun was not intended for such large game, and it is risky to provoke elephants with a small gun. But his aim was true, and at so short a distance, even in that poor light, there was not much chance to miss. The mammoth crumpled at their feet, almost falling on one of the pigmies.

At the explosion the whole forest seemed to come to life. A herd of twenty huge animals went crashing off in momentary panic. Then all was quiet, for the elephant soon settles down to a rapid but noiseless travel.

The elephant is held in terror by the natives, for he raids their *shambas* (plantations) and even pulls the roofs off their huts in search of grain. Hansen's natives were all delighted, in consequence, at the death of the mighty beast. But certain magical ceremonies had to be observed to appease the ghost of the animal, or at least to avert its wrath. They took care not to walk around the rear of the animal, and made a cleft stick, through which each man jumped to prevent the ghost following him, for the death of an elephant is the death of a person.

Hansen was more interested in the ivory. Both tusks were fair, but the left one was considerably more worn down than the right. Evidently this was a left-handed elephant. All elephants seem to use one tusk more than the other. The Arabs speak of the worn tusk as "the servant."

The pigmies now proposed that one of them should go and notify the rest of pigmyland, so that the whole tribe might feed on the fallen giant. The pigmies wander about the forest homeless, camping wherever a kill is made. They keep no flocks or herds or chickens, and do not cultivate the soil. For shelter they bend a few small saplings into a beehive-shaped hut, and cover them with palm fronds. They hunt or dig roots till the district is exhausted and then move on in a few days elsewhere. A camp by the side of a dead elephant is the most desirable of all, for there is much meat in an elephant, and it never gets too stale for the pigmy.

Hansen agreed to the pigmy's suggestion, —it was just what he desired,—but enjoined him strictly to avoid contact with the tall negroes in their villages, and to take care that they should not learn of a white man's presence on the plateau.

AFTER the one pigmy had gone, Hansen with M'ghazi and the other pigmy returned to the top of the chimney and waited there till dark to make sure that no leopard men went down. At nightfall they returned to the dead elephant, for a descent of the chimney in the night-time was im-

practicable even for a pigmy, and no leopard man would attempt it. They found a good meal of roast elephant-meat awaiting them, and Hansen was hungry enough for anything.

The night passed quietly, both with Hansen and with Hill-Smith. Soon after daybreak pigmies of all sorts began to arrive at the elephant camp. The women were scarcely four feet high and for the most part exceedingly ugly in Hansen's eyes. Some had little squirming babies, so small that they could easily lie in the palm of Hansen's hand. They had, it seemed to Hansen, a strange prehistoric appearance, grotesque and unreal. They set to work with a will to carve up the elephant and wasted nothing. Some began the construction of beehive huts. Every man had his tiny bow and some carried a long-bladed elephant spear.

The pigmies reported that a great gathering of blacks had taken place a day's journey away beyond the north end of the lake and that undoubtedly war was in the air. They believed that the war-chief M'bidi could take the field with many warriors, three times as many men as there were pigmies at the elephant camp (Hansen figured this at about two hundred warriors). Further, they believed the leopard men, to the number of about twenty, had allied themselves with M'bidi.

HANSEN decided to explore the plateau for some distance around, and see what practicable routes such a force would have for attacking Hill-Smith's camp. They might of course come by water, which was the easiest way, if they had sufficient canoes and did not care too much about secrecy. Hansen hoped they would. Then with Hill-Smith's canoe with the outboard motor, with a crew of pigmies armed with bows, and with his own rifle, he could have a naval battle about whose issue there could be no doubt.

But the hostile blacks knew of Hill-Smith's power-boat, and would in consequence prefer to come by stealth through the forest. Two routes were then open to them, one along the lake shore below the precipice, and the other along the road running parallel to the lake, a few miles to the west of it, the road where the pigmy had stopped Hansen with news of the leopards.

The chief of the pigmies was a little fellow not more than four feet three inches high. He had been elected chief on account of the fact that single-handed, with nothing but his spear, he had killed two elephants.

The chief promised Hansen all possible help, and detailed off six or eight of his best men, including the two Hansen had had the day before, to act as scouts. Hansen sent them out in pairs, two by the road, two by the lake shore and two, whom he and M'ghazi accompanied, went over the intervening plateau.

He talked to Hill-Smith with his pocket wireless. The latter was very strongly of the opinion that the main hostile force would march by the road, as being the only practicable way for numbers. He thought that the leopard men would not be with the main force, but would most likely cross the plateau by the way they went and descend by the chimney, probably just before dark. "You had better not go near the chimney after the middle of the afternoon," he advised, "but when you have located the main army and discovered whether they intend to attack us or somebody else, come down to camp by the path you used three days ago, when you first arrived. I expect the main army will use that path, if they are coming against us; so you must take care you get down ahead of them. Don't let them cut you off."

Hansen asked Hill-Smith if he knew of any other ways down the cliff face besides the path and the chimney, and Hill-Smith said no, not for many miles north and south. In fact he had never seen or heard of the chimney, and his "boys" had never known that it was practicable. The pigmies were the best authorities.

Hansen asked the pigmies about the cliffs. They were emphatic that there was no possible way to get down them north of the chimney. The cliffs became higher and fell sheer into the water, without any strip of land by the water's margin. To the south was the path Hansen had used, and beyond that, some considerable distance, were other paths, including some easy ones that the elephants used.

It was apparent therefore that the pigmy scouts below the cliff would find nothing, unless a party of the enemy had come by boat during the night to where the strip of land began. The party in the plateau wilderness would find nothing, unless they found the leopard men. The scouts that were to go by the road would certainly find the main army, but would not be able

to decide its destination until late in the day, when the enemy would either turn to the left up the ravine toward Hill-Smith's camp or continue south toward the south end of the lake.

TO come up the ravine would be the shortest way to an attack on the sand plain, and it was the most likely route. Hansen debated the possibility of attacking the enemy there, as they defiled up the ravine among the granite rocks. Such an onslaught would have the advantage of surprise, and would give the pigmies an excellent chance to use their bows and arrows. But if the leopard men intended to go down the chimney, he wanted to be there, for in spite of Hill-Smith's request to keep clear of the chimney after the middle of the afternoon, Hansen had his own ideas on the subject.

He told the pigmies, if they met any leopard men, who would naturally be wondering what had become of their comrade whom the pigmy had shot, to say that a poisonous snake, a black mamba, had bitten him, near the lake side. The pigmies grinned, for they liked the reference to their little black poisoned arrow as an adder. M'ghazi laughed out loud, saying that the leopard men would find many poisonous snakes in the forest that day, and that the leopard would rue the day that he measured himself against the snake and the lion. "The lion shall sink his fangs in the leopards' flesh this day," he said, and ran his finger appreciatively over the edge of his war-spear.

The scouts were a somewhat unnecessary precaution so far as a large attacking force was concerned, for Hill-Smith's television cameras commanded views at intervals of the road and of the lake shore. However, they might discover things the white men had overlooked and by spreading the story of the poisonous snake, they might lull the suspicions of the leopard men.

Hansen decided first to inspect once more the trail through the ravine, to see what chance it offered for dealing the enemy a demoralizing blow before they could even approach Hill-Smith's camp. He had several miles to travel across very rough country.

They traveled noiselessly through the woods, and suddenly the pigmies stopped and indicated something of interest ahead. *"Soko muntu!"* ("May be a man!")

Hansen was puzzled. Then crossing a glade ahead of them he saw a chimpanzee. It walked half erect, using the knuckles of its hands for support. Hansen had never seen a chimpanzee wild in the forest before, and wanted to watch it, but the creature disappeared in the bush. A little later it reappeared, followed by a mother chimpanzee with a baby in her arms, and the whole party proceeded to dig roots out of the ground. The baby's antics were most amusing, he looked so comical and old and wizened. Hansen would have liked to capture him, but it could only be done by shooting the old ones, and he had no heart for that.

SUDDENLY a forest pig, winding the men, burst forth into the clearing, scaring the apes and sending them in an instant into the trees. They swung up easily on the lianas and disappeared in the forest tops.

A little later Hansen came unexpectedly on a lone buffalo bull. Tracks of buffalo had been plentiful all morning, and the pigmies said they would surely run into the animals. It might be said more truly that the buffalo ran into them, for the first warning they had was when the beast charged them from behind. This is a vicious habit the buffalo has, when it winds a hunter. It is apt to make a circuit and come on him from the rear.

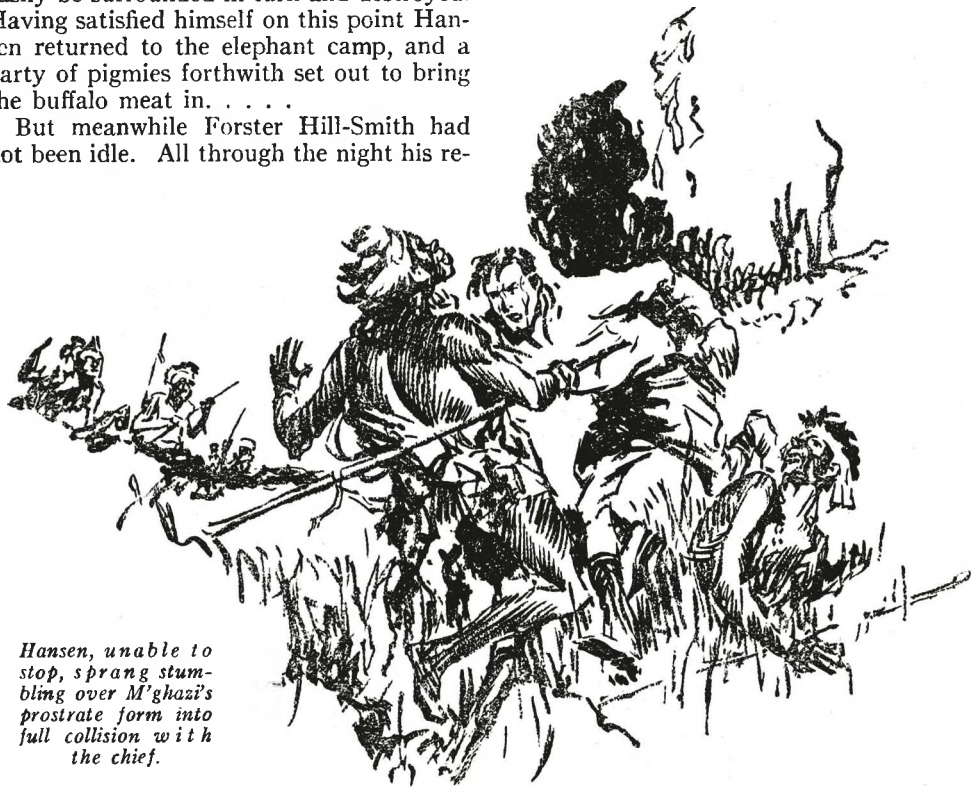
Hansen had no time to fire. He and the natives were just in time to jump aside as the fierce beast crashed by them. M'ghazi let out a blood-curdling Zulu yell and buried his spear in the animal's neck. One of the pigmies drove a spear into the creature's belly, and Hansen, recovering his balance as the animal passed them, sent a shot after it that entered at the root of the tail and broke its spine, bringing it to the ground. A second shot in the brain put an end to it.

*"Nyama! Nyama!"*—"Meat! Meat!" cried the gleeful pigmies. *"Nyama"* is about the only word that is understood from one end of Africa to the other.

The pigmies wanted to go back and get help to carry the meat to the elephant camp, but Hansen insisted on first exploring as far as the ravine. He hoped there would be no need of further shooting, for although the enemy were as yet probably miles away, he did not want to run the slightest risk of advertising his presence on the plateau.

They reached the ravine, and after a careful exploration Hansen decided that it would be best not to attempt to defend it, should the enemy advance that way. It was a good place for an ambush, but against such large forces the defenders' positions could not be held, and they might easily be surrounded in turn and destroyed. Having satisfied himself on this point Hansen returned to the elephant camp, and a party of pigmies forthwith set out to bring the buffalo meat in. . . . .

But meanwhile Forster Hill-Smith had not been idle. All through the night his research workers had been busy in London, and in the morning they began sending to him all sorts of strange articles. First came a pack of cards, in the box, still sealed. The transmission occupied only a second or two, and the reception was perfect. On opening the box all the printing inside was flawless. Then they began sending eggs, and soon Hill-Smith had a basketful. The thirteenth had just arrived, and he was about to pick it up, when he noticed it was cracked. The next instant the chick burst the shell open and staggered out. Hill-Smith was taken aback. A chorus of laughter sounded in his ears as the experimenters in London, who were watching on the television the results of their work, saw his consternation. Hill-Smith laughed with them at his own confusion, but the significance of the experiment struck him most forcibly. Here was something he had never thought possible, a living creature transferred instantly from one part of the earth to another, and the life went with it. It was annihilated in London: it reappeared in Africa. And seemingly it was as good as if it had never been destroyed!



*Hansen, unable to stop, sprang stumbling over M'ghazi's prostrate form into full collision with the chief.*

He asked them to stop, and watched the chick. It staggered feebly about. Was it well? He gently removed bits of shell from its down and beak. It was undoubtedly alive, but his medical knowledge suggested to him that something was wrong with the nerves of the heart, and he was not surprised when an hour later the chick died.

"My belief is," he told them in London, "that you need still more power and more instantaneous transmission if you want to send living creatures through the ether. Their whole body must be annihilated simultaneously—that is, in the fraction of a second; for if you send one end of a nerve at one instant, and the other end even a second later, then if a nervous impulse were traveling on that nerve at the time in question, something is going to be out of phase. You had the heart-beat of

the chicken all mixed up because the nerve from the brain to the heart which keeps the heart beating was set at cross-purposes with itself. Give us still more speed!"

MARCHMONT, back in New York, had learned of the state of affairs in Africa. In the afternoon after his meeting with Mary, Miss Ferguson had come to her uncle's office expecting to talk to Hansen. But Hansen had already left for the plateau, and although Hill-Smith could talk to him on the pocket wireless, and could, with some difficulty, have arranged to connect Hansen "through" directly to New York, he decided that Mary had better be content to talk only with her uncle for the present; it seemed to him that the exigencies of war warranted some delay.

"Hullo, Uncle, how are you?"

"Fine! How are you?"

"I'm all frightened to death. Is Charley with you?"

"There is a Mr. Hansen with me."

"He is my *fiancé*, but we quarreled, and he went away. Can I speak to him?"

"Oh-ho! So it was you that sent him tearing off here, was it? What a small world it is!"

"Is he there now?"

"Not just at present. We have a war on, and he is generalissimo of the mobile forces. He is some miles away up a precipice where no white man has ever climbed before. He has just had an encounter with a cannibal, who is now dead, and has camped on the mountain top so that he can intercept an attack on our camp."

"Oh-h! But isn't it dangerous?"

"Oh, no! Your friend Mr. Hansen is a pretty wide-awake young man, and he has a bodyguard of pigmies, a big Zulu, and a few other blacks. He has quite a reputation as a shot, and has just killed an elephant. Last night he killed another cannibal by flashlight, and prevented our camp being betrayed by a traitor, but I haven't time to tell you all about it now. Call me up again in about twelve hours' time. Let me speak to Marchmont now, will you? . . . . Hullo! Marchmont?"

"Yep!"

"How long have you been a Yankee?"

"Yankee, sir? What do you mean, sir? Gaw-blimey, sir, don't call me a Yankee, sir."

"Be quiet, you old cockney. Listen! The situation here is serious. Get through all the consultations you can on the patent suit during the next eighteen hours and then take the morning airship back to London. Get that telequant affair running with a hundred times your present power. I am afraid we cannot be sure of help from the Belgians: they have their hands full elsewhere. Get back to London with all speed."

"Good. In eighteen hours, if I keep the lawyers up all night, I can do a good deal here, and I can sleep on the airship all the way to England. I'll send you a new seaplane by wireless inside of forty-eight hours, old man!"

By this time the Belgian authorities had detached a seaplane, which they could ill spare, for the relief of the Englishman and American. It had over five hundred miles to travel, cross-country. During the afternoon it ran into a terrific thunderstorm and was completely wrecked a hundred miles from the lake. The news of the crash reached Hill-Smith via London late in the day. The Londoners sought permission of the Belgian Government in Brussels to send relief planes from Kenya or Uganda, but the cumbersome machinery of diplomatic deviousness was unable to secure an immediate reply. It was now four P. M. by African time and Hansen had returned to the elephant camp after his encounter with the buffalo. In New York it was nine A. M., and Mary was making ready to board the airship which at ten would start for London.

At four-thirty the pigmy scouts returned with the information that the main hostile force was advancing, as expected, by the road and the trail through the ravine. Evidently they were figuring on a night attack on Hill-Smith's camp. They were still in ignorance of Hansen's presence on the plateau and of the great force of pigmies there encamped.

At five o'clock other scouts returned with the news that a band of leopard men, twenty strong, and including Moia Mwezi the Bad Wind, were making for the chimney, which they would reach at sundown or a little earlier. On the equator the sun always sets promptly at six o'clock.

THIS was exactly the news Hansen had been hoping for, though he was somewhat surprised to hear that the leopard men were twenty strong. However, he believed he could handle the situation very nicely.

"M'ghazi, you old rascal, here is where

your spear shall drink the blood of many leopards!"

"I know, *Bwana*. This is M'ghazi's last fight, and the greatest of them all. M'ghazi has lived and wandered many years in search of this day, and he is content. Tomorrow night M'ghazi will not see the sun set, for the soul of the old lion will be pursuing the leopards in the spirit world. Ah! M'ghazi shall be the Bloody One once more this night!"

"Well, come on, then, you fire-eater. We have no time to lose."

IT was ten minutes' run from the pigmies' camp to the chimney. Hansen took his six pigmies, his two Bangala tribesmen, and M'ghazi, and hastened to the chimney. He sent M'ghazi and the blacks down the chimney to the foot of the cliff and hid himself with the pigmies near the top. M'ghazi accomplished the descent in less than twenty minutes, and announced his safe arrival at the foot by the agreed signal, three hoots of an owl.

A wait of twenty minutes followed, and just before sunset the leopard men appeared stealthily and silently at the top of the cliff. They were clothed completely in leopard-skins, and each had his hideous three-bladed claw-knife. A cold shiver ran down Hansen's spine at their sudden silent arrival. They seemed to arrive by a converging movement at the chimney top, as if they had searched the woods for a little distance around. Fortunately Hansen, at the pigmies' suggestion, had climbed a considerable tree in anticipation of just such a move, and the pigmies were in other trees. They were invisible in the darkening light, and their tracks could not be seen on the hard ground near the cliff fence.

Hansen counted the enemy: there were exactly twenty. They spoke not a word as they slyly peered over the cliff; everything was pitch-black and silent below. One leopard man disappeared into the cleft and began the descent. His ability was marvelous. He had been down the chimney many times. In less than ten minutes he was at the bottom. M'ghazi was waiting for him. As he slid the last three feet to earth in the inky blackness of the cleft M'ghazi drove an assegai-blade between his shoulders, piercing his backbone and heart at one blow. The man fell without a sound beyond a low cough. M'ghazi coughed like a leopard as he drew out his spear.

This seemed to be the signal the others were waiting for above. They all prepared to descend. Hansen waited until all but five had entered the cleft. This was the point agreed upon with the pigmies. The light was now very poor and Hansen could only just see his sights. Two of the men were close together peering down the cleft. Hansen was well above them.

*"Bang!"*

The bullet passed through the brain of one and the heart of the other.

*"Twang! Twang!"*

Six venomous arrows whistled into the bodies of the remaining three, and well-placed arrows they were, usually planted in the veins of the neck. One of them fell, like the two dead men, into the cleft, and dropping on the heads of the men below knocked them from their treacherous foot-holds. Five corpses hit the ground at the foot of the cliff simultaneously, two killed by Hansen's bullet, one by the pigmies' arrows, and two by being knocked from their hold.

Hansen fired again, killing one of the men remaining at the top, who, though wounded by an arrow, had turned to flee, and a second flight of pigmy arrows completely quieted the other one.

Hansen slid down the vines that trailed about his tree and posted himself at the cleft. The pigmies joined him there. He figured that five, or perhaps six of the enemy were dead, so that fourteen live ones were trapped in the chimney. As a matter of fact, only twelve remained alive. These, believing that their enemies were all above them, made their way as fast as they could to the bottom. They could arrive only one at a time, and M'ghazi was waiting with savage glee their unsuspecting arrival. The Zulu's keen broad blade cut through their neck-bones like a broad-ax; all that was heard was the leopardlike cough of M'ghazi.

SEVENTEEN men were now dead, and M'ghazi had not yet called for assistance from his black brethren waiting outside the cleft. Ten men he had killed with his own hand, and the ground was encumbered with corpses. As he raised his spear to smite the eleventh, his foot slipped in a pool of blood and he missed his aim. The man yelled and turned on him with his three-bladed knife. M'ghazi sprang back, receiving a severe wound on the shoulder. The man yelled to his two remaining companions and sprang out at M'ghazi, but the Zulu, though bleeding, received him on

his spear point. It was Moia Mwezi. They fell to earth together.

The other two leopard men sprang out simultaneously. They were received on the spears of M'ghazi's two companions. For a few minutes the fight continued in the inky blackness. Blows were exchanged at random. Spears and knives were alike useless, after the first assault, and the issue was settled with tooth and claw. M'ghazi crushed the life out of Moia Mwezi and turned to help his less powerful companions. One of them was already dead, killed by the first blow of the cruel leopard claw. But the leopard man himself was dying with the spear-blade through his vitals. The other pair were fighting it out with their fingers gripped on each other's throats.

M'ghazi made in the direction of the struggle, fell over a vine, and then over a corpse. He arrived too late; the leopard man had strangled his adversary. As he sprang up from him, he put his foot in a hole and precipitated himself into M'ghazi's arms. M'ghazi felt the leopard-skin and knew it for an enemy. The gigantic Zulu, weakened as he was from loss of blood, yet picked up the cannibal and flung him against the cliff face with such violence that the man never moved again.

M'ghazi tried to think. He could see nothing, but he was sure his companions were dead. He was not sure that all his enemies were. To begin with, he did not know how many had entered the chimney above, and he had almost lost track of how many he had killed. He knew that several had fallen from the top when Hansen had fired, but he was not sure how many. He was clear that less than twenty lay dead around him. Still, Hansen and the pigmies might have killed the rest before they entered the cleft. M'ghazi had lost his war-spear in the struggle with Moia Mwezi, and might, for all he knew, be standing unarmed in a circle of leopard men who only waited for him to move in order to locate him in the darkness, though he was fairly confident that he was the only living man in a ring of corpses.

He waited, holding his breath, striving to catch the slightest sound. He could not hear a thing. Hansen was doing just the same at the top. The pigmies with their primitive acuteness had reconstructed the battle from the sound of M'ghazi's coughs. One cough for each dead leopard! They had a fair idea of the struggle with the last three men, culminating in the thud of the last man's body against the cliff, and they drew the conclusion that only M'ghazi could have flung him in that fashion. Therefore M'ghazi was alive, and probably all the rest were dead.

They told Hansen their conclusions, and M'ghazi could hear them speaking.

"*Bwana,*" he called, "are they all dead?"

"I think so," said Hansen, and turned his flashlight down the cleft. A projecting rock cut off the light halfway down, but the upper half of the fissure at least was devoid of enemies. Hansen went nearer the cliff face, and tried to search the lower part with his light. He could see nothing, owing to vines and tree-tops, but the feeble rays enabled M'ghazi to size up the situation and retrieve his spear.

"*Bwana,*" he called, "everyone is dead but myself. I will go down to the lake and make my way by the shore to the white witch-doctor's camp, for I cannot climb the chimney now."

"Are you hurt?"

"Yes, *Bwana.* M'ghazi has lost much blood."

Hansen debated in his mind the idea of attempting a descent of the chimney in the dark, and of assisting M'ghazi into camp. It was impracticable. Besides, he wanted to gather a force of pigmies at the elephant camp and take the main force of the enemy in the rear. An inspiration came to him. He told M'ghazi to go the native village and wait for a boat which he would send. Then he called Hill-Smith with his pocket wireless, briefly outlined the fight at the chimney and M'ghazi's plight, and asked that men be sent in a boat with torches to the village where they would find M'ghazi —or if not, they were to search the woods between the village and the cleft, particularly the water-side, till they did find him.

HANSEN with the pigmies now commenced the march back to the elephant camp. While it was pitch black in the dense forest at the base of the cliff where M'ghazi lay, it was merely gloomy at the crest—where, owing to the rockier character of the ground, the forest was more open and intersected with glades. It was possible to proceed, so far as light was concerned, and with some difficulty to scale the barrier ridges of granite. The pigmies led the way with the utmost confidence, and in about twenty-five minutes they saw the fires around the dead elephant.

Hansen's pigmies gave a vivid account,

with elaborate pantomime, of the fight at the chimney. Hansen followed it up with an appeal to the chief to help him annihilate the main army. The chief promised to do so, on condition that Hansen should thereafter shoot him many elephants and buffaloes. Hansen of course agreed.

The enemy's forces had by this time descended the cliffs to the neighborhood of the sand plain, and Hansen began his pursuit. At the top of the cliff where the path began its descent, he left a dozen pigmies, with instructions to see that no enemy retreated that way, and that no more forces descended it. It was tolerably light on the cliff face away from the trees, and a more ideal place for defense by pigmy bow and arrow could not have been found.

By nine o'clock Hansen reached the spring at the edge of the forest, where his porters had consulted *Loki* for the second time. He now began the difficult march through dense forest toward Hill-Smith's camp. At the same hour the enemy opened their attack on Hill-Smith's stockades.

WITH searchlights and rockets Hill-Smith effectually deprived the attackers of much of the advantage of darkness; in fact, the first rocket struck terror into the blacks, and they retreated into the forest. But soon, perceiving that the rockets did them no harm, they returned to the assault. Hill-Smith had only one gun, and although London had sent him a machine-gun complete by telequant, there was something wrong with it, and it would not work. More useful was a coil of barbed wire which he had successfully received, with which he had made an entanglement that caused the attackers much trouble.

Hansen pressed on to the rescue, tripping over roots and stumbling into holes. The rockets sent an occasional ray of light through the tree-tops, and by that weird illumination Hansen could see the ghostly figures of the pigmies stealing like shadows through the forest all around him.

Soon the rays of the searchlights began to show ahead of them, and Hansen advanced to take stock of the situation. The yells of the attackers and defenders mingled with the crack of Hill-Smith's gun and shrieks of wounded men. Hill-Smith's forces were poor fighters, and the enemy had carried the first stockade, forcing the defenders uphill toward the sentry-box.

An open plain was no place for pigmies to fight. Their naked bodies would be at the mercy of the spears of the blacks. Their feeble arrows would be received on the shields of their adversaries. Pigmies are essentially for ambuscades, thought Hansen. If they were inside the stockade, they might do some good, but he had no means of getting them there.

Somehow he had to create a stampede of the enemy and drive them into the forest. He ordered the pigmies to take to the trees. Then with one solitary pigmy to carry his shotgun, and with his rifle in his own hand, he started to crawl across the sand plain as close to the beach as possible. He wished the searchlights and rockets would cease for a moment, but Hill-Smith seemed determined on illumination.

Hansen had just reached the northern side of the sand plain, when there was a sound of a boat grating on the beach hard by. A voice in a half-whisper was using some most impolite Zulu phrases. It was M'ghazi. Here was luck!

In a moment they had joined forces. M'ghazi, weak from loss of blood, but scenting another battle ahead of him, and excited both by the prospect and by his pain, was a terrible sight. His left shoulder was torn to ribbons, and blood was running down over his left arm and leg. His right arm, like his spear, was dyed with the blood of his enemies. Four of Hill-Smith's bravest canoemen were with him, and each man had his war-spear. Hansen and the pigmy brought the force up to seven.

Now Hansen had an idea. The outboard motor was in a boat close by. He fetched it and gave it to a black to carry, and then moved up through the forest as near to the battle as he could. He strapped the engine to a sapling, set it to backfire as much as possible, and started it off. The racket was terrific, reverberating between the forest and the cliff. At the same time he opened rapid fire with his rifle, while M'ghazi let off a few harmless cartridges from the shotgun. The whole party of seven shouted and yelled, then rushed to the attack. Hill-Smith seized the psychological moment to explode a mine he had laid in the morning. Sticks and stones flew in all directions. The attackers, momentarily terror-stricken, fled, pursued by Hansen's bullets and M'ghazi's awful oaths. As they entered the forest to the south, the woods rang with the diabolical yells of the pigmies, and arrows rained down from the tree-tops.

M'ghazi's blood was up. He raced after

the retreating foe, brandishing his spear. Hansen raced after him and tried to trip him up. If the excited Zulu reached the woods, he might be struck by a pigmy's arrow. The young American's speed greatly exceeded that of the wounded black, but M'ghazi had a good start, and was immediately behind the flying enemy. He had singled out the war-chief M'bidi for his personal attention. The chief stumbled and

fell at the edge of the woods, and M'ghazi fell with him. The chief was first to his feet, and turned on the Zulu. Hansen, breathless and unable to stop, sprang stumbling over M'ghazi's prostrate form into full collision with the chief. He felt the spear of the Azande thrust through his ribs, as his own fist landed on the chieftain's teeth. The impact was terrific, and both men fell to the ground.

The Zulu and the Azande sprang up together, each a little dazed, and each weaponless. For the second time that day the Zulu settled the issue with his naked fists. Then, as he turned to pick up Hansen, he fell senseless from loss of blood.

At that instant a bright light appeared over the eastern shore of the lake, and then another and another. The British planes from Uganda had arrived.

"*Bula Matadi! Mula Matadi!* The Belgians!" yelled the fleeing blacks, who supposed that all airplanes were Belgian. They took to the woods, and such as were not slain by the pigmies in the trees or on the cliff top ultimately reached their villages with a profound distaste for war.

The relief force and Hill-Smith gathered in the wounded. They collected some thirty of the enemy and nearly as many of their own. Accommodation was sadly lacking, and Hill-Smith was obliged to devote most of his time to the telequant, beseeching London to send tents and medical supplies. Two of the planes returned to Kampala for further assistance.

Hansen's condition was desperate, as was M'ghazi's, and Hansen's porters were dead.

M'ghazi recovered consciousness in Hill-Smith's house, and saw the pigmy chief standing thoughtfully by his side. The joy of battle came once more into his eyes.

"Tell the *Bwana* it was a good fight. The lion and the snake have taught the leopard his place. The spirit of M'ghazi shall pursue them in the bush." M'ghazi was still a good pagan, and believed that after death his bush-spirit, in the shape of a lion, would wander in the forest devouring leopards, the bush-spirits of the leopard men.

"The lion shall roam the forest," answered the pigmy, "and the tooth of the snake shall never harm him. The snake and the lion shall lie down together, and the *Bwana* shall feed them on the meat of mighty elephants."

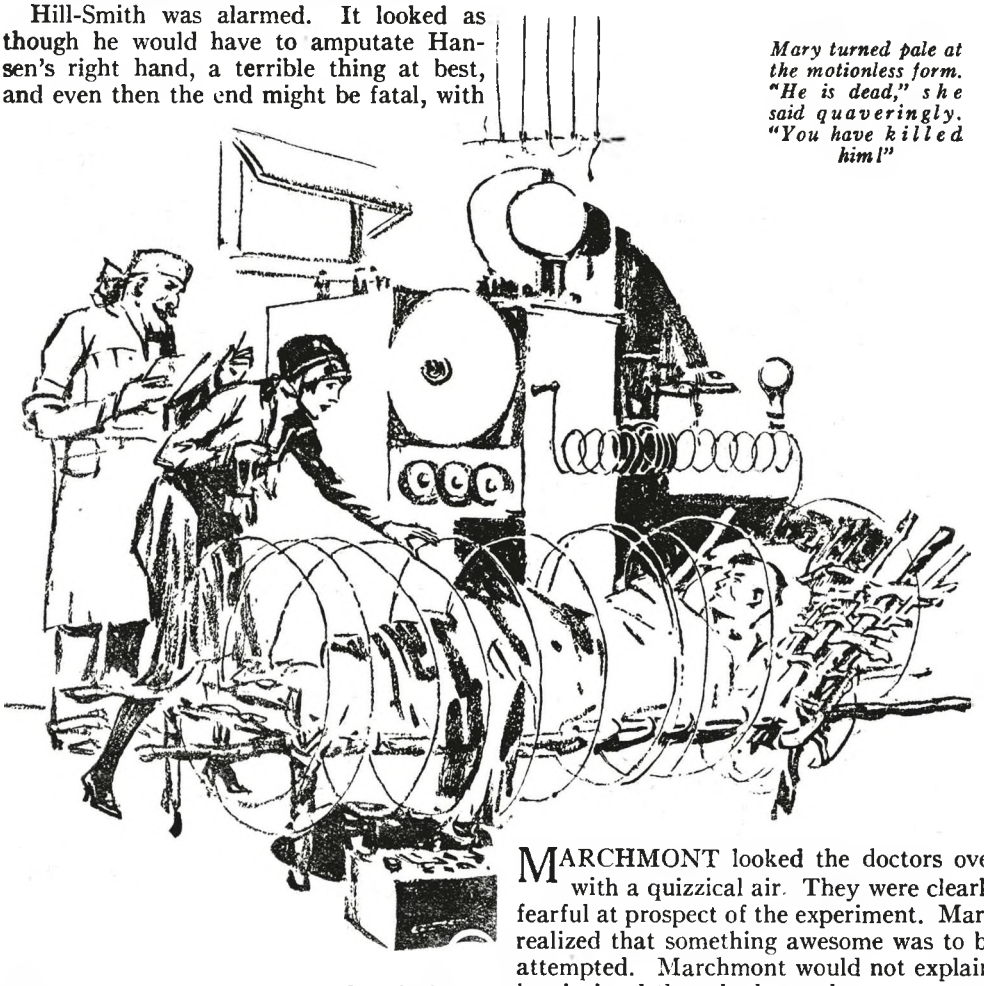
And so, as the light of morning broke over the mist-wreathed lake, the spirit of M'ghazi returned to the wilderness.

MORNING found Hansen feverish and delirious. The spear through his ribs, though it had not pierced his vitals, had done much damage, and blood-poisoning had set in from the wound on his hand which had struck the Azande's teeth.

Hill-Smith was alarmed. It looked as though he would have to amputate Hansen's right hand, a terrible thing at best, and even then the end might be fatal, with the broken ribs and fever. The airplanes from Kampala would bring another doctor, but it was doubtful if he would know better than Hill-Smith what to do.

Hill-Smith thought of the chicken, and a last desperate course suggested itself to him. If only he could stave off a decision till midday! Marchmont would then be in London, and he could take his advice. He urged his London office to press for a speeding up of the airship's schedule and to have the best doctors of Harley Street available at his office when Marchmont arrived

London hit on a better way. It appealed to the Irish Free State for help, to send one of its fastest planes out to meet the airship and bring Marchmont into London. Irish ears are never deaf to such an appeal, and the upshot was that Marchmont arrived in London at eight o'clock, two hours ahead of the airship. Mary was with him.



*Mary turned pale at the motionless form. "He is dead," she said quaveringly. "You have killed him!"*

MARCHMONT looked the doctors over with a quizzical air. They were clearly fearful at prospect of the experiment. Mary realized that something awesome was to be attempted. Marchmont would not explain, but insisted that she leave the room.

The haggard faces of the laboratory men told of the strain under which they had worked for the last forty-eight hours. All sorts of strange apparatus had grown up since Marchmont went away. He examined it quietly and critically, saying nothing. He examined the new high-tension power-lines and seemed satisfied; his quiet, composed demeanor was a tonic to his overwrought assistants. He stood with bent shoulders for a moment, buried in thought, then picked up a slide rule and did a little figuring He laid the rule down, called the power-station and asked for the spare generator to be thrown on the

line. Then he sat down at the desk and called Hill-Smith.

"Hullo! Let's look at that patient of yours."

Hill-Smith turned the television on the unconscious form of Hansen. Marchmont motioned to the doctors to watch with him.

"What about it?" he asked.

"He will die unless you succeed in getting him here."

"And if I get him here, he will live?"

"Probably—if his constitution is good."

"In that case, I will have him here in a few minutes."

MARCHMONT called Hill-Smith again. "I am going to send you a piece of apparatus *en bloc*. Make a space for it next to Hansen's bed, as long as the bed and nearly as wide, and five feet from the floor."

Then to one of his assistants: "Close that switch, Johnson."

Marchmont sat still at his desk, watching the far-off African scene. His fingers rested on a couple of buttons.

"Stand by!" He pressed the buttons. A whole block of apparatus suddenly vanished from the room. One of the doctors gasped. Marchmont chuckled. He pointed in the television, where the doctor's consternation was matched by that of Hill-Smith, who was gazing with blank astonishment at an array of machinery that had appeared beside Hansen's bed.

"Don't touch it, buddy," called Marchmont. "I am going to test it."

Hurriedly he connected a few instruments together, apparently with no organic connection with the rest of his apparatus. Delicate galvanometers that he studied with a microscope, tiny condensers and rheostats.

"Good, perfect! I knew I could transfer solid objects in great style. But here we have transferred a nearly perfect vacuum to Central Africa without admitting more than a few atoms of air."

HE made a few more calculations on his slide rule, and changed the setting of several instruments.

"Johnson, change those switches," he directed. "Hill-Smith, I am going to send you a very delicate piece of silver foil. Please close the door and windows, and make no hurried movement in the room. It will be wrapped in a roll with a thin sheet of tissue paper. As soon as it arrives, chloroform your patient to prevent his moving, and unroll the foil over the bed. There are no connections to be made, but see that the foil covers the bed completely and passes underneath it, so that Hansen is enclosed in a metal cylinder, as it were."

Marchmont glanced over his instruments and made a minor adjustment.

"Stand by!" . . . . . A long roll of paper disappeared before their eyes.

Hill-Smith, overwrought with the excitement of the night-time battle, trembled visibly as he administered the chloroform to Hansen.

"Cheer up, buddy!" called Marchmont. Hill-Smith smiled wanly. The doctors watched him anxiously. "Hill-Smith has not forgotten all his old skill," one of them remarked. "He was meant for a doctor, as we all knew at college." The sheet of foil, surrounded by its tissue paper, was laid neatly over the unconscious Hansen, and the ends brought together under the bed, and resting on the floor.

"Now!" Marchmont got up and looked over the main switches, tested all the lines, and sat down again. He looked at all the instruments on his desk and adjusted a couple of them. He looked, a little anxiously, and for the first time without a smile, at the doctors and the room where Mary was; he looked tensely in the television at the care-lined face of Hill-Smith and the shrouded form of young Hansen, and—pressed the plunger.

THE place seemed to go black before their eyes, as if momentary unconsciousness had seized them. Then instantly it was light again, the morning sunlight streaming through the windows. Mary burst through the door.

"What has happened?"

Marchmont sprang to his feet. *In the middle of the floor stood a bedstead of African mahogany threaded with rimpis of buffalo hide for a mattress. Tattered shreds of silver foil lay streaming from it, and on it lay the silent form of Hansen.*

Mary ran to his side, and turned pale at the motionless form. She clutched Marchmont's sleeve. "He is dead," she said quaveringly. "You have killed him!"

"No, madam," said one of the doctors. "He is far from being dead—and I believe he will soon be quite well again."

"You silly little goose," said Marchmont, as he took her back to the adjoining room.

THE END.

# REAL EXPERIENCES

*How a strange mystery was solved is here described by a reporter who participated.*

*By*

**Charles E. Hill, Jr.**


# A Lesson in Journalism

THE city room of the Morning *Times* hummed with press-hour activity. Clouds of blue tobacco-smoke drifted over the sleepy reporters and editors as they wrote up the stories that the night had told.

Suddenly a phone shrilled impatiently. The city editor, sipping from a cup of steaming black coffee, picked up the receiver, listened intently for a moment, and with a brief "Many thanks," hung up.

"Here, Charley," said the city editor to me, "dash over to the Ashton—Bill Wardman—murdered—phone your story in—thirty minutes to make the bulldog edition."

Going down in the lift I reflected with much pleasure that Belle Leitner, of our rival paper, the *Post*, would handle this case. The *Post* had the city divided up into districts similar to police patrols, and the Ashton was in her territory.

Here at last was an opportunity to display my undisputed merit as a reporter, and to assist my wife-to-be in the work which she preferred, for the time at least, to the bestowal of my wedding-ring and charge accounts.

Under my skillful guidance Belle had become quite successful in the news-reporting game, but she obstinately refused to leave it for a more domesticated life as my spouse until she had put over one big scoop.

Now a scoop, or "beat," is to a reporter what a royal flush is to a poker-player, but they are seen with less frequency. Besides the *Times* there were the trained news-hounds of two other morning papers and three evening papers to be reckoned with, and though I had all the confidence that a lover can have for his sweetheart, I had to admit that she was going to have some stiff competition. Meanwhile I would continue to pay restaurant bills instead of gas bills.

OUTSIDE, the night was cold and drizzly—ideal murder weather. An enterprising taxi-driver, lying in ambush for our reporters, slithered his grumbling machine along the curb, and I was soon skidding through the wet city streets.

Bill Wardman, I reflected, was an eccentric old rake and very unpopular. In racing circles and among the gambling fraternities in which he was very prominent there were many, I suspected, who would have sponsored his sudden demise with enthusiasm.

Many choice scandals in the newspaper columns originated in his whims and caprices. His death would come as a great shock to some reporters and editors who were greatly indebted to him as a source of excellent news material when times were otherwise dull.

This story, I knew, would be played up to the limit; for some time we had needed a good lively murder-story!

AT the Ashton a bluecoat admitted me to the room in which the dead man, with a bullet between his eyes, slumped over his desk. It had been an excellent shot and the murderer must have been a man who knew his business.

There was no sign of a struggle, but a light bamboo cane which we all recognized as Wardman's was lying across the desk before him. The house detective hazarded the opinion that Wardman had been about to use this stick to defend himself when he was shot.

Standing rather close to the opposite side of the desk was an ornately carved chair which had evidently been made for exhibition rather than utility. It was constructed of teak, and two spindles, one on each side, at the top, projected somewhat like spurs.

The chair was unique but I considered it mainly because a chalk mark on the carpet beneath it indicated the spot where the police had picked up a shiny forty-five-caliber pistol with one chamber discharged, and incidentally without fingerprints.

Another chalk mark put on the side of the chair showed where the police had picked up a silk pocket handkerchief, which was, thus far, the only clue to the slayer's identity.

In fact, it was a clear case of murder if I ever saw one. Every one present agreed to that.

A shot had been heard about a quarter past eleven and an investigation had disclosed the dead man. The murderer, whoever he might have been, had made a successful escape.

I HAD written down all my notes and was about to leave when I suddenly realized that Belle had not been present. I also realized that no other reporters had been here.

The realization was fairly dizzying. It was a scoop for me, for at this hour it was impossible for any other paper to get the story in their first editions. My inner being surged with conflicting emotions. As the minutes wore on towards the hour when the last forms were locked and placed in the press I debated my love for Belle and my duty to my paper. I knew that her failure to get the story would result in much unpleasantness for her at the hands of the *Post,* and everybody down there would be throwing fits and profanity all over the place. City editors are the meanest men on earth, anyway.

In desperation I swore the telephone operator at the Ashton to eternal secrecy and gave her my notes. I told her to call the *Post,* say she was Belle, and read them off. I felt like a hero and a cheat at the same time.

When she finished I gave her a five-dollar bill; then I called my own paper and with sweat dripping from my brow, told the story.

I added, to the city editor, that I intended to hang around for a while and await developments.

Then I immediately began a frantic search for Belle.

After discouraging visits to her usual haunts I was about to give up, when a big shiny roadster glided up before one of the all-night cafés, and Belle got out, followed by an unpleasant bounder in a top hat. This was a Mr. Chess, an old school chum of hers, she had told me once. If this was true, the poor fellow must have started to kindergarten at the tender age of twenty or thereabouts.

I followed them into the café and greeted her calmly but firmly.

"Belle," I said as quietly as I could, "where have you been all night? Bill Wardman has been bumped off."

HER face blanched, I thought. She slipped back into her furs.

"Good night!" she said to Chess. "I'm off. See you later."

She dashed for the door.

"Comin'?" she asked.

I followed in my most dignified manner, and called a taxi. As we bumped through the wet streets I regarded her sternly. What explanation could she offer?

Things had been so dull on her beat that she had decided to run out for a dance with Mr. Chess, she said. She had never expected anything to happen. Now she was going to catch the devil and everything!

I let her worry for a few minutes and then sprung my surprise.

"Don't you worry, Belle," I said soothingly, and with as much nonchalance as I could muster, "for your paper has the story."

Then I told her what I had done and how I got the news to the *Post*.

I sat quiet for a while to allow her time to appreciate the significance of my magnaminity. She sat as if stunned and I strongly suspect that there were tears in her eyes, but in the darkness I could not be sure.

Stopping the cab, I called a newsboy, and bought two papers, the *Times* and the *Post*.

In the light of a street lamp we read them. Big banner headlines streamed across the front pages.

Belle breathed a sigh of relief when we reëntered the cab.

"Charles," she said, "I could love you for that—but how could you treat your paper so rottenly?"

"Paper be hanged!" was my hearty rejoinder. "It is indeed a pretty state of affairs when a man can't place the consideration of his loved one before that of an old newspaper!"

WE had reached the *Post*, and Belle got out, while I continued to the office of the *Times*.

The city-room was practically empty. I thought the city editor looked at me rather queerly when I entered. Was it my troubled conscience? The truth began to dawn on me with horrible reality. I had *sold* my paper. I had committed one of the greatest crimes of newspaperdom—treachery to my paper!

However, the C. E. did nothing more than comment on the case, and I breathed easier. From that moment on I decided that nothing short of murder would ever tempt me again to bite the hand that fed me.

Returning to Wardman's apartment, on my way home, I was surprised to find Belle there. She had been talking to one of the city's plain-clothes men when I entered.

"Anything new, honey?" I asked.

"Nothing at all," she said. "Let's go home; I'm tired."

As we parted for the night and I had received my good-by kiss, Belle said:

"Since tomorrow is Sunday, and we don't have to work, you can come over to my apartment and have a dinner cooked with my own dainty hands."

"I'll be there," I said, but I couldn't keep a quaver out of my voice. It was the voice of a man holding four aces and kicking a raise. I knew that she was so overcome with my generosity that she was arranging this dinner to give me another opportunity to propose.

IT was four o'clock Sunday morning when I turned in and I slept soundly until three in the afternoon.

The morning papers were inside my door as usual. I picked up the *Times*. My story was repeated and the usual biographical and obituary notices flanked it. The two other morning papers contained nothing of the case, but the *Post*, which I happened to pick up last, handed me a stunning jolt.

I lifted off the comic supplement and stared with amazement at a screaming headline:

WARDMAN A SUICIDE

I eagerly devoured this new story. I choked it down. I gorged it. Why, the thing was preposterous—it would have been impossible for Wardman to have killed himself! My head was in a whirl, but as I read on I instinctively felt that the *Post* was right.

One puzzling paragraph, however, worried me greatly.

> In the dining-room of the LeParadis Club last night Mr. Wardman was observed to be very despondent. He had a strong altercation with a Mr. Alfred Chess, a prominent turfman from the West. It is now the belief that the suicide was arranged so as to throw the suspicion of murder on Mr. Chess. Mr. Wardman has always been known to be slightly unbalanced and the police believe this to have influenced him in planning such a peculiar suicide. *Mr. Chess has established an alibi, having been at the time of Wardman's death in the company of a reporter of the Post.*

A torturing suspicion that I refused to recognize kept pounding at my brain. I dressed hurriedly; as I shaved I nicked my face several times.

I gulped down a cup of steaming coffee at the corner restaurant and broke all speed laws getting across town to Belle's apartment.

"What in the name of the devil is all this rot in the *Post?*" I demanded of her when she let me in.

## A Lesson in Journalism

She smiled wistfully as she spread the cloth on the small table.

"That's true. He killed himself," she replied.

"But why?"

"He told Mr. Chess that he had been cleaned out in the last race at Tia Juana and didn't have the nerve to go on. He blamed Chess for all his troubles. They almost had a fight."

I was utterly flabbergasted.

"But how could he kill himself? There were no fingerprints on the pistol. He couldn't shoot himself without leaving fingerprints. Besides, there were no powder-marks on his face, and if he did shoot himself he couldn't have placed the pistol in that inaccessible position."

BELLE entered the kitchenette and returned bearing a tray laden with steaming dishes.

"That's easy to explain. You see, one of the men from the homicide squad was there last night when I arrived, and we doped it all out ourselves. Of course you know that Wardman was crazy?"

I nodded.

"Well, he simply hung the pistol over one of the spindles that project from the top of that odd chair, reached across the table with his cane, steadied the pistol, looked squarely into the muzzle and pushed."

I groaned. How could this obviously simple explanation solve the case?

"But how did he put the pistol under the chair?"

"My dear boy," said Belle patronizingly, "the recoil threw it there."

"But there were no fingerprints on the gun."

"No," she said, pushing two chairs against the table. "That explains the silk handkerchief. He held it with that while placing it over the spindle. Are you ready to eat?"

My appetite had gone, but I mechanically moved to my accustomed place at the table.

"Belle," I said feebly, as I reached for the bread, "you knew that all the time, and you never told me—after—after what I did for you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I ask you: is that gratitude?"

She smiled.

"No—but that's the proper way to handle a story for your paper."

# Bayonets

*By*
**William Black**

IT happened early on the morning of September 18, 1918, during the Saint Mihiel drive.

I was in a Headquarters company of a combat division made up mostly of drafted men. After going to one of the cantonments here in the United States, I was assigned to the signal platoon of that company and in that branch of the service I was in the front line with the division on all its engagements.

We arrived in France, and after coming back from a signal school, where we were taught by British instructors all about signal work as it should be done up the front lines, we were held in support of the British forces at the Arras front. We did not have much to do there except to perfect our knowledge of signal work under the guidance of our own officers.

It was about the middle of August that we started to move toward our first big engagement—the Saint Mihiel drive.

After riding a "side-door Pullman" for several days, and hiking for many more, we arrived at last within hearing distance of our sector. On September 10th we moved up to the front, and by the morning of the 12th we were in on the big fireworks.

The fighting went on for three days, during which time we kept up communication between our battalion headquarters and the company's in the front line by means of runners.

On the third day things began to get quiet, and orders came along to dig in and hold the positions that had been taken. We had lost about half of our men in the signal platoon through being gassed, wounded and killed. That left the signal-men long hours and a lot of work for the territory we had to cover. My buddy and I were at battalion headquarters this day, when the sergeant in charge of the platoon came to us and said the major wanted better and quicker communications with the front lines.

*Patching broken telephone-lines under heavy fire is an experience to remember—especially when in addition you are taken for a spy.*

It was then decided to establish a lamp station on the hill overlooking the valley, and flash all messages from the line company back to the battalion headquarters.

AT that time my buddy and I, with two or three others, were assigned to G and H Companies to take care of all their communications. The lamp station went good for a few days until the enemy airplanes spotted us there in the bushes—then things began to get pretty hot for us. It got so uncomfortable that I decided to go down at night and report to the sergeant just how things were up on the hill.

After explaining to him how we were situated, it was decided that we should run a line from battalion headquarters, which was situated in an old quarry up to the line company's P. C., a distance of about half a mile, most of which was over open ground exposed to the enemy positions up the valley.

The line was laid the next morning, during which operation we lost three men.

From then on we had a lot of trouble keeping our line repaired. The enemy seemed to know just what we had there, and their shells were continually breaking our lines and cutting off our communication. The few of us left had our troubles keeping the line in repairs.

It happened one night that my buddy and I were off duty. We were sleeping in an old shack by the quarry, when the sergeant came and woke me up and told me that H Company's communications were cut off. He then told me to get my buddy up and go out and find the break and have it repaired.

After getting our equipment together, we left to do the job. We started outside of battalion headquarters. It was so dark, except for the occasional bursting of a shell, that we had to pick the line up and run it through our hands; in this way we could easily find where a shell had blown it apart.

We started up the road and across the railroad bridge into the open stretch of ground between the railroad and the woods that covered the face of the hill, where the front-line company's P. C. was located. We had not gone twenty-five yards into the open when we found a break; we thought then it was the only one, but later found out it was only one of many.

After repairing that break, we tapped in and got the O. K. from battalion headquarters, but no response from H Company who was in the line at that time.

Picking up the line again, we started towards the woods and H Company. It seemed the enemy knew we were there, for they sure were throwing some big stuff around us. Several times we both hit for a shell-hole, and didn't mind how much mud or water was in it.

After repairing six or seven breaks and doubling back on the line where a shell had broken it after we had passed over, we found ourselves in the woods at the foot of the hill. We then decided to follow the line up to the P. C. and find out if everything was all right there. By picking the line up, we had no difficulty in finding our way up there, even as dark as it was.

Arriving there, the lieutenant in charge told us everything was O. K.; so we left, with the intention of returning to battalion headquarters and finishing our sleep.

As we started, the lieutenant told us things were pretty lively and that the enemy had sent two or three raiding-parties over in our lines during the night, one of which had been captured. In that party they had taken sixteen prisoners. He told us to watch out, as we might get lost and run into some strangers. We told him we knew the lay of the land pretty well, and believed we could get back without any trouble.

After leaving the P. C., instead of following our line back down to battalion headquarters again, we struck off down a path which we thought would bring us out near the railroad bridge.

WE had not gone down the path more than three hundred yards, when we got the command:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

Since the words were spoken in good American, I figured it was some of H Company's men, and we would have no trouble in getting past, therefore when the challenge came again I replied: "Signal-men from Headquarters Company, assigned to G and H Companies."

After a few seconds, during which time I could hear some men talking among themselves, some one in broken English, whom I took to be an Italian, said:

"Don't leave them, Corporal—they're a couple of spies."

We could not see how many men there were, as they were concealed by the heavy brush along the path. I realized the predicament we were in, and started to explain as fast as I could just who we were. I told them we had been out for the last three hours repairing the line between battalion headquarters and H Company—but all the explaining I could do did not seem to convince them. They still seemed to think we were part of a raiding-party that had got through from the enemy lines. They did not seem to understand what signal-men were, and I racked my brain for some way to convince them.

From the sound of their voices I figured there were at least six men in back of the brush there. It seemed the more I talked the less I could make them understand.

Then one man whom I took to be the corporal stepped out from behind the brush. He told us there were too many of the enemy going around in American uniforms, and they were taking no chances.

As he was standing there pointing a rifle with a bayonet on the end of it at us, a voice from behind the brush urged:

"Stick a bayonet through them—it will be two less we have to kill later!"

Out came another man with his bayonet toward us. If we had ever made a move to get down that path, it would have been the last of my buddy and me, right there and then! I can almost feel a bayonet or a bullet tearing a hole through me now, at the memory of it. From their actions they meant business. The sweat was coming out on my forehead; I don't know how my buddy felt, but I know I felt none too good.

I got a hand on the corporal's rifle, and asked him to come back to the P. C. with us. I mentioned the lieutenant's name in charge there, and said he could explain everything. The corporal was willing to go back with us, but the rest of that gang seemed to want our blood, and kept saying:

"Go ahead and stick them, Corporal—don't let them kid you!"

YOU can imagine my feelings—trying to convince them, and all the time hoping that the sentiments of those in back would not overrule that of the corporal! Finally it was decided to take us back to the P. C., and, ushered along at the point of two bayonets, we were taken before the lieutenant.

He asked what the trouble was.

The corporal said he had caught us sneaking down the path in front of his machine-gun, and did not know who we were.

For the minute the lieutenant had forgotten just who we were, but after we enlightened him, he explained to the corporal and his men. Then everything was O. K.

The corporal informed us that we had come mighty close to getting a bayonet through us, and well we knew it. But there was no blame attached to the corporal or his men, as we would probably have done the same thing, had we been in his position.

The lieutenant then asked us what we intended to do. I said we would sleep there until morning; if communications went dead before then, we would follow our line back and repair it as we went along. This we did—we stayed there until daylight, with no mishaps to our line, and then proceeded toward headquarters. We certainly were glad to get out of that mess!

By
**James E. Morton**

*Trapped by a fall of rock deep in a zinc-mine, this man lived through terrible hours.*

# The Cave-in

A FEW years ago, while working in the zinc-mines of Kansas and Oklahoma, I had an experience which caused me to leave the mines forever.

I was employed as a machine-man at one of the many mines of the district. My helper and I were working in Number Two drift there. We had finished for the day, and were waiting at the "doghouse" for a jitney, when the distress-whistle sounded.

Going to the mouth of the shaft, we asked what had happened, and were told by the ground-boss that Number Two drift had fallen in. At once boarding the can, we descended to the lower level, and crossed to where Number Two drift had been, discovering that for about two hundred feet the entire drift had fallen down.

We knew that there had been six men working this drift on the night-shift, and as it had only been a few minutes since the night-shift had gone down, they were undoubtedly still in the drift—unless they had come out after something, which was most unlikely. True enough, after taking a check of the remaining men we found that these six were missing.

WITHIN a few minutes everything was in an uproar. Some of the men lost their heads and started tearing at the rocks with bare hands, without thought of danger, and several were injured by falling rocks and timbers before any kind of order could be established.

An hour after the first sound of alarm, we had a crew of the old-timers working at the wreckage in the drift; two men would work at the rock slide, while eight of us would set timbers. Although the men working at the rocks were changed every thirty minutes, there were only eight of us who understood timber-work, and we must therefore stay at the job hour after hour.

When the cave-in started, the roof of the drift had been twenty-five feet, but long before we reached any of the imprisoned men it had settled to about seven feet. Fast as we worked at the timbering, we were unable to stay the pressure of the rocks for long at a time. The leader of the rescue-workers was a brother of one of the imprisoned miners, but we did not need his urgings to spur us on.

On top they had placed guards around the entire lease, as the rock was settling so fast that the least added pressure was apt to start a new slide at any minute.

At ten minutes past midnight we got the first of the imprisoned miners out, and an hour later we freed a second one; both were uninjured except for a few bruises.

It was then that we began to wage a losing fight with the rock—as fast as we set

the timbers, the pressure would cause them to break and fall. Two other men and I were working at the head timber, when there came a sudden crash, and the roof fell in behind us, cutting us off from both sides.

Some people will tell you that when a man is close to death he thinks of all the wrong things he has ever done; but I can truthfully say that nothing of the kind entered my head. I don't think any of us three were really afraid during our entire imprisonment. We had, indeed, been expecting something of the sort from the first minute we had started on the rescue-work.

First we tried to win back to the outer drift, but soon gave this up, as we saw we were doing more harm than good—we only succeeded in starting the rocks to moving faster. We knew it was no use to try for the heading; there would not be time; the drift was apt to fall in at any time now.

There was only one thing to do—construct some kind of prop against the falling rock, and wait for outside assistance.

Taking some of the fallen rock, we constructed three crude pillars, crossing them with pieces of broken timber. Luckily for us, we were all experienced miners, and knew what to do without any wasted effort. We knew we would have to work fast, as the lamps would soon exhaust our supply of oxygen, if allowed to burn very long.

In about half an hour we had completed the three pillars. But we were reluctant to extinguish the lights, and sit in the dark.

TWO hundred feet below the surface, surrounded by sinking earth—and no lights! It was only the mercy of the Almighty that we were able to keep our courage up at all. As it was, within a few minutes our nerves were all on edge; every sound was like the blast of a cannon; any minute we expected rocks to fall upon us.

One of the fellows—Frank—who had just been married a short time, said:

"Thank God, I took out an insurance-policy before I started working!"

Strangely enough, he was not afraid for himself, only worried by the fear that his wife would be left homeless. I do not clearly recall any of my own thoughts.

Before long the air began to feel heavy and close, and we knew it would be gone in a few hours at most. Just then one of our makeshift pillars crashed down, filling the air with a cloud of dust, and fouling the air still more.

Frank spoke again:

"Fellows, we haven't got long at the best—only a few hours. If you boys have anything you want done for you, now is a good time to tell it. Perhaps one of us will make the grade, even if the others don't."

Acting on his suggestion, we lighted one of the lamps, and each of us wrote a farewell note to his loved ones—for, as Frank said, even if we were all lost, the rescue-workers would send the notes on for us, sometime.

After we had finished writing the letters, we decided that we might as well take a smoke, as our time was getting short now. Of course the already foul air was not helped any by the odor of burning tobacco, but I do think that smoke helped a lot in keeping up our nerve.

Looking at my watch, I saw that it was five o'clock in the morning. We had been covered since about one-fifteen—not long when one is in the outer air, but a long time to be buried alive!

Soon after this the air got so heavy that we could hardly breathe. Frank started to sing, "Nearer, My God to Thee," and somehow we all seemed to feel better afterward; then, crawling over until we sat shoulder to shoulder, we took a last smoke, shook hands and sat calmly down to wait.

At nine o'clock we heard very faintly the sounds of a rescue-party. An hour or so later we could see the lights of their lamps. Soon they began to shout words of encouragement to us, but received no answer, for we were past talking. Though we were unable to shout to them, however, we still had strength enough to light a lamp.

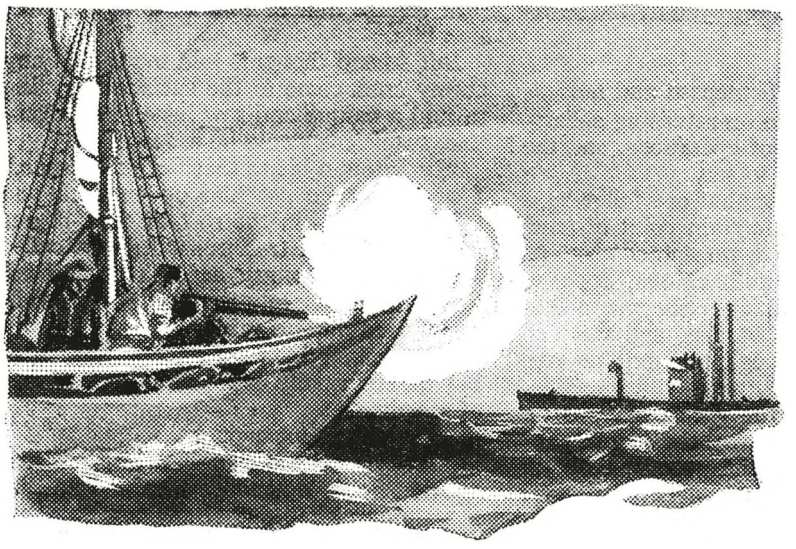
Then was when the strain began to tell! Would they reach us in time? Would the pillars hold long enough—or fail just when there seemed a chance of rescue?

BUT an hour later the rescuers had us out of the drift and on the way to the top!

The only one of us who could stand on his feet was Frank. I will always believe that the prayers of his wife were what helped him to carry on after we two others had passed into unconsciousness.

The four fellows still trapped in the heading were not saved; their bodies were recovered a few days later.

A short time after this I quit the mines and came to Colorado. I still get an occasional letter from my two former comrades in danger; I am happy to say that neither of them is now working in the mines.



*By*
**Frank Shaw**

*A war-time Q-ship commander describes the destruction of a submarine.*

# Greek meets Greek

COMMANDING a "Q" boat, as I did during the latter years of the Great War, had long periods of monotony, varied occasionally with swift intervals of hectic excitement and almost ridiculous adventure.

The mystery ship given me was an ancient Italian brigantine, equipped with a powerful hidden armament; and when we encountered an enemy submarine, we were able to give a good account of ourselves. But the U-boats grew chary of showing themselves on the surface, and satisfied themselves with sinking honest merchant freighters while deeply submerged.

Being conversant with various European tongues, I formed the habit of heaving the brigantine to at night off various inconspicuous Greek and Italian ports, and going secretly ashore, in disguise. Actually we were constantly disguised as Italian shipmen when working at sea; so few changes were necessary in my clothing. It was an easy matter to land without being detected and walk into some one or other of the many cafés; and there, taken for an ordinary Greek or Italian seaman, listen to the talk that went on at the tables over the wine.

We had a very strong suspicion that the enemy underwater boats were being clandestinely supplied with fuel and provisions by traitorous members of various Mediterranean nations. What I wanted to find out was how and where these supplies were shipped; and one night in April, 1918, I got a very promising clue.

In following this up, I had to buy a lot of liquor for a Greek fisherman and lie myself black in the face, knowing that if a mistake caused me to disclose my real identity I should be immediately knifed or sandbagged; but I did get information from my table-companion that sent me back to the brigantine in some elation. Fuel and supplies were actually being handed over to enemy ships, enabling them to extend their cruises.

IN case what followed should be considered brutal, it should be remembered that at this period of the war enemy submarines were sinking without warning all merchant freighters that came within their range, and bidding fair to reduce the Allied Powers by systematic starvation. I had with my own eyes seen many good ships wantonly sunk; and I had heard saddening stories from survivors concerning the wholesale slaughter that was going on. To us of the Suicide Club, as the "Q" boat service was called, an enemy submarine was no better than a

rat or a wolf—to be destroyed by the swiftest means possible.

TAKING my first lieutenant and navigator into conference on returning aboard, I decided on a plan of operations, and the brigantine stood out to sea.

On the next morning but one following I headed her up for a certain point of land, and as we approached, we sighted there an innocent-seeming Greek caïque, such as are employed for fishing. She was a boat of maybe fifty tons burden, and was certainly slatternly enough to merit no particular attention.

Apart from her, the visible sea was deserted. This point was considerably off the beaten track of the patrols, both destroyers and armed trawlers. It was a lonely place; the land showing was rocky and inhospitable; and the sea was full of treacherous currents; and frequent sudden gales affected the neighborhood—alarming gales.

The brigantine stood down to the caïque, the crew of which were engaged in fishing. I worked to leeward, and fancied I smelled unmistakable gasoline fumes. Consequently, tacking, I bore down, and ran alongside.

The Greek crew, amongst whom I now recognized my table-companion, appeared astonished. They were still more astonished when a machine-gun swung its muzzle toward them; and I ordered them sharply to throw up their hands and attempt no resistance.

They protested vociferously that they were innocent as new-born babes; but my navigator jumped down into the caïque and dragged aside a big tarpaulin, which covered, as we had suspected, enough gasoline and stores to fit out a submarine for a month's cruising.

AS the Greeks could not explain this store, they were taken prisoners. My men were anxious to deal out summary justice, and eyed the yardarms longingly, as if wishing to see them hung with wriggling fruit.

Although these men deserved hanging, however, it was not my place to mete out justice, so I sent them aboard the brigantine in irons.

My first thought was to sink the caïque and her cargo out of hand, and wait on the spot which was obviously a rendezvous, until some U-boat or other appeared, and then engage him in conflict and, I hoped, sink him.

But second thoughts told me that if any enemy craft came to the surface expecting to find a caïque and saw instead a brigantine, suspicions would be aroused.

"Let's talk a bit to that Greek *padrone*," I said; and we got him up on deck and talked to him—in the sort of third-degree fashion that his traitorous dealings called for. We were pretty hard-bitten and not inclined to be unduly gentle. After a while he saw reason and said:

"The submarine may come at any time; but we are usually at the rendezvous ahead of schedule."

That was about enough.

"It's your idea, Number One," I said to the first lieutenant, who looked like something picked out of an East Side gutter, and not in any way like the ultra-smart naval officer he really was. "What about it? Can we work it?"

"We certainly can," declared Number One; and the navigator nodded his approval. "The shipwright and the engineer can work that between them," the navigator opined.

SO we set to work, without any loss of time. Whilst some of my biggish crew were dumping the gasoline overboard,—we kept the edible supplies, as our diet-scale was limited and monotonous,—the rest were busy with the midship twelve-pound quickfirer.

The caïque seemed to be a fairly stanch craft, and quite capable of standing what we intended her to stand. When she was cleaned out, we got a tackle to the fore yardarm and hoisted out our disappearing midship gun, carriage and platform and all, having unbolted it from its place, and swung it outboard into the caïque's bottom, where it fitted quite snugly. We lashed it into position with thin rope and wire, and covered it with the original tarpaulin used to hide the stores. The covered hump in the boat's bottom looked very little different.

But the gun would not protrude over the bulwarks; so the shipwright cut down the planking on either side, and adapted it so that we could knock the loose sections away in an instant. We passed down into the caïque thirty rounds of twelve-pounder ammunition; the spare Lewis gun, a couple of rifles and a box of pineapple grenades. Each of the chosen crew had a six-shooter.

We also transshipped enough ready-for-use stores and water and rum to keep us going for a matter of forty-eight hours. This being arranged, volunteers were called for, after the men had been informed plainly what was afoot.

They volunteered, to a man. Only a gun-crew was required, however; so a selection was made. I took command of the caïque, appointing Number One to the brigantine pro-tem; and giving him orders to sail away into shelter behind the land; and after that to act as circumstances dictated; but in any event to return without fail to the spot, after forty-eight hours.

OUR brigantine went away, and the caïque seemed very small and lonely. We were, however, determined to sink whatever submarine came along, because the opportunity seemed too good to be missed. As every surface ship appeared as an enemy to the U-boats, we considered any means fair whereby to decoy them to destruction. But for my chance hearing of this scheme of clandestine supply, this opportunity for reprisal would never have occurred.

We waited twenty-two hours without anything happening, save that we did see the smoke of a considerable convoy on the horizon, and once we fancied we heard that dull distant thud which means an exploded torpedo.

Just an hour or so before sunset on that April afternoon, a U-boat appeared on the surface within two miles of our position. He came cautiously, maintaining his diving-trim, obviously ready to disappear at a moment's notice. He hoisted some bunting after satisfying himself that the coast was clear; and I dipped and hoisted the Greek flag, as the caïque's *padrone* had mentioned.

"Three thousand yards," I gave orders to the gun-crew, estimating the range as well as I could. Most of them were already hidden under the tarpaulin. The sightsetter repeated the range and adjusted his sight. But I had no intention of opening fire at that range. At the very best we could only expect to get off one round in a hurry; and as the submarine could dive in about twenty seconds, that round had to find the target. The submarine came cautiously; and men clustered round her forward gun—a four-point-one rifle. They were always suspicious—as they had to be! I had had a desperate idea of allowing the submarine to come right alongside and then attempting to carry her by the board; but my job was to sink U-boats, not play heroics. The enemy ship carried a crew of sixty or seventy men at least; we numbered seven all told. So it would have to be gun-work and a hope of sinking him.

He came on slowly. "Two-five hundred; two thousand!" I called the altering ranges. I told the gun-layer to take a look through a hole in the bulwark, at the enemy, to familiarize his eyes with his target. The U-boat came on to within fifteen hundred yards; then to within a thousand.

"Let her go—rapid independent!" I ordered. Things happened. I kicked out the loose section, and the gun's muzzle swung.

The first round was fired so smartly as to astonish me, although I knew the gun-layer was a dab hand at his job. The shell hit in the conning-tower—that settled the question of the U-boat's remaining on the surface. He answered our fire at once, and the shell screamed over us, going through the caïque's sail.

He maneuvered to bring his after-gun to bear, and laid a short bracket over us. Further, he brought a machine-gun into action from his conning-tower, and bullets thudded into the hull. One man was hit, but not gravely. We got up our own Lewis, and I ran a ladder up toward the enemy, and contrived by good luck to sweep his fore whaleback clean, putting the four-point-one out of action.

MEANTIME, Lockyer, my gun-layer, was firing with astonishing rapidity, considering that the gun was tearing loose from its lashings, and had to be held down at every discharge by hand. Our target practice was good; shell after shell hit the U-boat.

He made a desperate run-in in an attempt to cut us down; but before he had closed to within five hundred yards, Lockyer dropped a shell into his engines, and he stopped.

The deadly spray of bullets from my Lewis prevented anyone showing face above his conning-tower. The only trouble was that the ammunition for this machine-gun was rapidly becoming exhausted. I told Lockyer to increase his fire if possible, and he complied by at once hitting the enemy's after-gun.

## Greek Meets Greek

A HATCH in his deck opened just now, and men began to appear. But as they had weapons in their hands, our fire was maintained. Lockyer punched hole after hole into the enemy's hide at or below the water-line. But the twelve-pounder was beginning to fail us—tearing loose from its lashings. The U-boat's people dropped flat and kept firing at us with rifles; the Lewis gun replied.

It was hot work. Bullets seemed to be flying everywhere; and I cannot yet understand why more of my men were not hit. I think the shock of surprise had shaken the enemy's nerve, however.

The submarine was sinking, a wreck. The caïque was perforated like a colander with bullets. It was hammer-and-tongs fighting now, almost yardarm to yardarm, indeed. Lockyer shouted, as he fired again, that he was expending his last round. The caïque's mast had been hit badly, so that it was impossible to set sail and close with the enemy, ending the affair by pineapple grenades. But I turned the men to with rifles to deal with the enemy snipers, who presently scuttled down the hatchway, though a couple of them leaped overboard and began to swim toward us.

The U-boat was sinking faster, heeling away from us. It seemed a pity, but it was wartime, when pity is sometimes out of place.

We remembered our comrades who had been sunk without warning, and hardened our hearts.

Steadily we went on firing; and when we were almost at our last round, the brigantine appeared in sight—using her engines, contrary to orders. She was ready to open fire with both her guns, but it was unnecessary.

In a few minutes the U-boat sank, taking all her crew with her except the two swimmers, who were taken aboard as prisoners, and as proof that we had disposed of one enemy underwater boat at least. The brigantine picked us off the caïque just before she foundered. We got a bit of credit for this action, and ridded the seas of one terror.

But though we cruised for some time in that neighborhood, no other submarine showed itself above the surface. My total loss was three men wounded, one seriously, and the twelve-pounder gun, which we were unable to salvage in time. The enemy's loss was one modern submarine, complete with crew.

# This Bull Throws Too

A COWBOY in the rough mountain country of Arizona, where the cattle are often as wild as deer, has a good many narrow escapes from death or serious injury, if he is reckless enough to "make a hand" working wild cattle in the mountains—and stays with it any time.

Especially when a man is camped alone and riding alone, does he risk his life. A horse may fall, breaking a man's leg, and the man may not be missed for a week.

I have punched cows for fifteen years in the wildest, roughest mountain country of Arizona. I have had some close calls, and had some bones broken; but the time I felt nearer death than I ever did, I escaped without any injury at all.

I was staying alone one summer on a small ranch, which ranged about eight hundred head of cattle. This ranch was part of a big outfit, but separate from the home ranch, and distant from it about thirty miles; sometimes for weeks I never saw anyone, for this range comprised about forty square miles, and was very rough.

At round-up time, twice a year, the crew from the home ranch would come down and brand the calves, and gather the steers, and in winter I had a man with me to help brand the calves that had been missed on the round-up. For calves missed on the round-up are "range branded" during the winter—caught and branded wherever they are found. A good many get to be yearlings, and some reach the age of two, three, or four years before they feel the red-hot iron; these, as most people know, are mavericks or "long-ears." In midsummer we never branded anything—on account of flies—unless we ran across a big maverick.

ONE warm day in June I was packing salt out on the range with two pack-mules, for there were no roads, and even at

## By **D. L. Read**

*This Arizona cowboy broke his rope on a full-grown maverick, and the subsequent proceedings were lively indeed.*

round-up time we had to pack all our camp outfit. Going out loaded, I led the mules, and unloaded the salt at a salt-lick about eight miles from my camp. Then I turned the mules loose on the homeward trail, for I knew they would go straight home.

I was riding along behind my mules down a rather open cañon about seventy-five yards wide, in which was a spring farther down, where a good many cattle watered; as I neared this spring, I saw a small bunch of cattle coming from water.

Naturally, I looked them over, and what should I see but a four-year-old maverick bull. A four-year-old maverick bull is not to be passed up at any time, so I took down my rope, built a loop and got ready to charge him.

Now, a grown bull is the hardest of all livestock to make lie on the ground, after you have caught and thrown him; and the best way, of course, to catch one is by the front feet. This is not so hard to do, if you have smooth, level ground, but it is almost impossible where there is brush or boulders. The next best way to catch one is by the head, and leave your loop slack, until he steps in it with one front foot. But that is not always easy to do; with the bull and your horse both running, the bull is more than apt to take up the slack himself, before he steps in the loop.

I charged the bull, made a long throw and caught him by the horns, and throwing my rope over his hips, went on past him. I "busted" him, all right, but when my horse hit the end of the rope, which was tied to the saddle-horn, the rope broke. I quickly made another honda—a small loop—and again caught the bull by the head, repeated the performance and broke my rope again. Both times it had broken close to the bull's head, but now it was getting rather short.

But I made me another honda, determined to try again. But my rope was so short I missed his head, and he stepped in my loop with one hind foot, and jerked it tight. I didn't want him that way, for it is very hard for one man alone to throw any kind of an animal with a rope on one hind foot. I followed him around for ten or fifteen minutes, leaving my rope slack, thinking maybe the loop would drop off his foot, but it would not. So I must get him down some way, or let my rope go with him. It wasn't worth much, but it was the only one I had, and a cow-puncher can't catch his saddle-horse in the morning without a rope.

I WAS riding a big, strong horse, so I finally dragged the bull down, but before I could get to him to tie him, he was on his feet, though my horse kept the rope taut. The only way my horse could have kept him down would have been to keep dragging him, and he was not trained to do that. So I got back on my horse, and dragged him down again—but again he was on his feet before I could get hold of him. And now he was angry and threatening to

charge, and he was between me and my horse. I circled around, trying to make a sneak to get on the other side of my horse, but he circled with me, watching me closely.

The bull kept getting a little nearer to my horse, and now had quite a little slack in the rope. About this time I happened to think: "If he charges me now, he will probably break the rope when he hits the end of it!" Sure enough, just as I thought of it, here he came. And a split second after he started, I was on my way. When he hit the end of the rope, it broke as I had foreseen, and he kept right on coming.

I don't believe I ever ran any faster in my life, though high-heeled boots and spurs are not made for foot-racing. I was headed for a small live-oak tree on the side of the cañon, but looking back over my shoulder, I saw I could not make it. Not wanting to be struck in the back, knocked down, gored and trampled on, I stopped and faced him.

Now, an angry thousand-pound bull with wicked horns, charging straight at you as fast as he can come, is not a pleasant sight; and right then I had about the most anxious moment of my life.

If I had thought of doing as the Spanish *matadores* do, in their bull-fights, of jumping quickly to one side, and letting the bull go on past, I might have escaped being struck, but I was too scared to think of that, though I had seen it done many times.

How I longed at that moment for my old faithful six-gun! I would have used *that,* if I had had it, but it was at camp in the pocket of my chaps, where nearly all cowpunchers carry a six-gun nowadays. But it was a warm day, and not expecting to ride off the trail, I had left them at home.

IT has always been said that a bull shuts his eyes when he charges, but I know better, for I was looking him in the eye all the time, after I turned.

I turned a little as the bull reached me, and he lowered his head and struck me squarely on the hip with his forehead; and as he struck, he tossed his head. His horns on each side of my body came up and caught me under the armpits, and he tossed me over his shoulder as if I had been a pup.

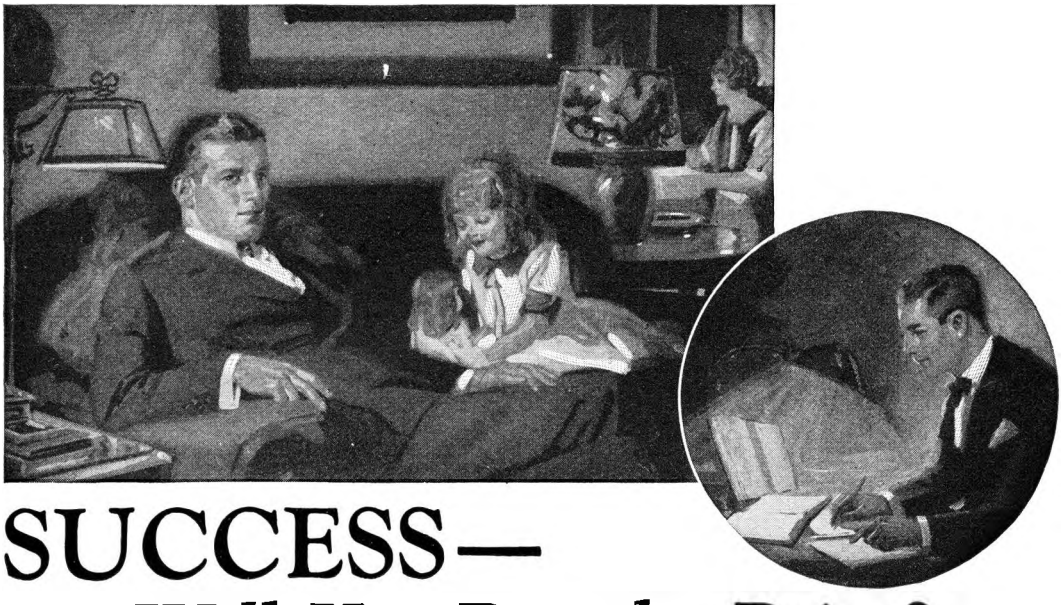
I landed on all fours, and I lit a-runnin'. It took the bull a second or two to stop and turn around, and by that time I had a pretty fair start of him, and I beat him to a small tree. I was not any too soon, for he was right behind me, and he snorted and shook his head as I pulled myself up out of his reach. The tree was not over ten feet high, but it was high enough.

And now I was treed. The bull, now thoroughly angry, was standing just under me, pawing and snorting.

I tried to scare him away, hitting him in the face with my hat, but that seemed to make him angrier, and he wouldn't scare worth a cent. So I tried another scheme. I got as far away from him as I could, and for ten or fifteen minutes I kept perfectly still. He soon grew tired of this, when he found there was nothing for him to fight, and presently he turned and walked off toward the brush; and believe me, I was glad to see him go.

I waited until he was out of sight and hearing, then came down and caught my horse. He was still standing where I had left him, reins down, "tied to the ground." Again my luck was with me, for if he had moved around much, he might have attracted the bull's attention to himself. And the bull would surely have charged him, and might have scared him so badly that he would have stampeded, leaving me afoot.

My rope was now too short to catch the bull, but I promised myself that I would meet him again some day; and I did, but I had another cowboy with me to help stretch him out, and I took great pleasure in burning the Double Prod on his hide.



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Evening after evening, they have tackled concrete problems, lifted bodily from business life, and under the direction of some of the ablest men in their respective fields *have worked those problems out for themselves.*

That they have been *well rewarded* for their foresight and their earnestness is shown by the fact that during only six months' time as many as 1,248 LaSalle members reported salary increases totaling $1,399,507—*an average increase per man of 89%.*

* * *

Many men, *knowing* what home-study training under the LaSalle Problem Method can do for them, nevertheless prefer to think that there's "nothing in it." That's the excuse they make for their futures.

If you—knowing these facts—are content to drift, you will not profit by reading further.

If on the other hand you have imagination enough to *visualize* your goal—to actually see yourself in a home of your own, enjoying the comforts and luxuries of life—if, in short, you are a man of *purpose*, the coupon below may shorten your journey to success by many years.

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