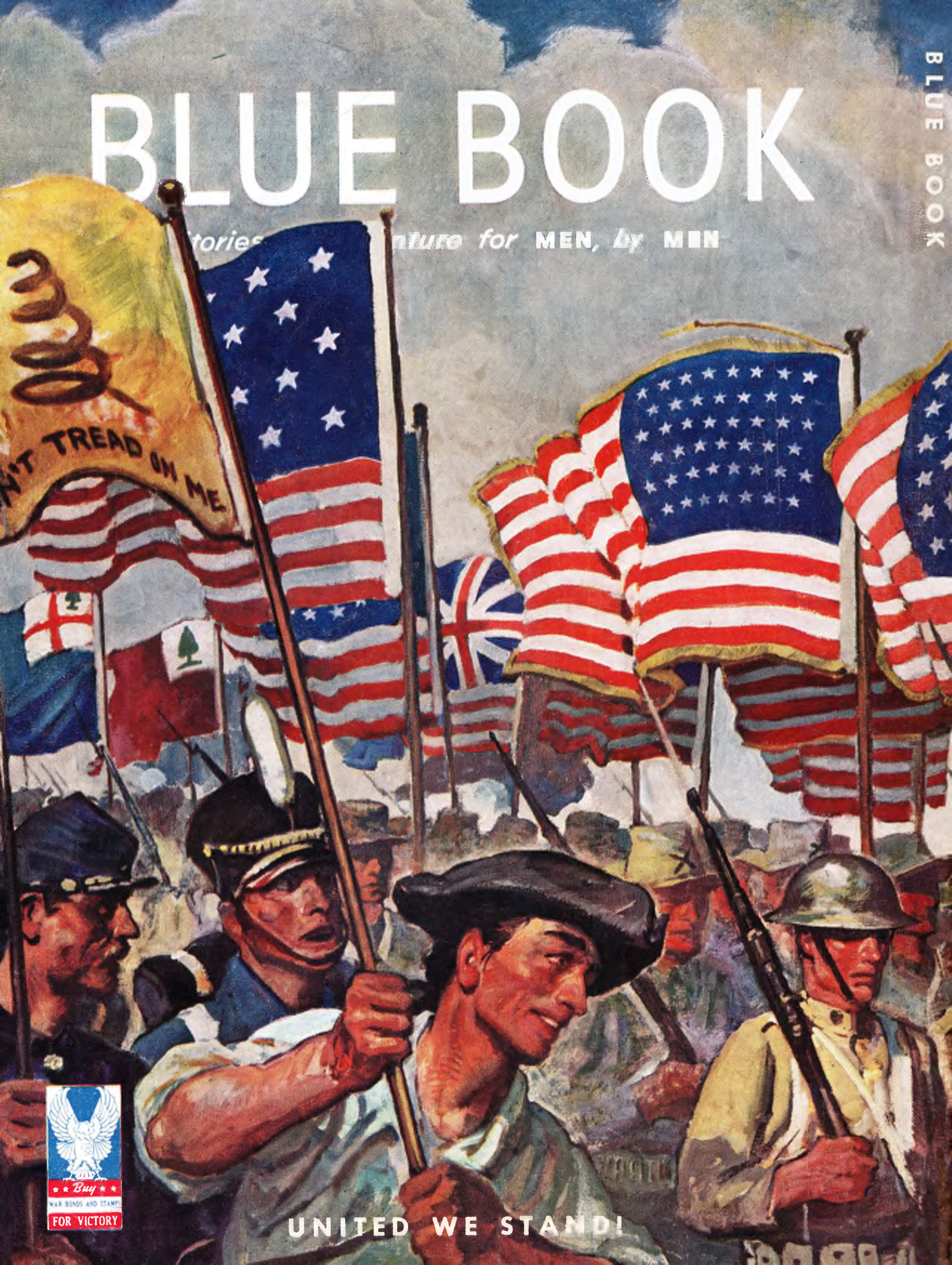
BLUE BOOK

tories nture for **MEN, by MEN**

BLUE BOOK



Who's Who in This Issue

TRACY RICHARDSON

I WAS born during a cyclone in Nebraska, and some think I have been slightly addled ever since. When I had reached the ripe age of three months my dad swung a tar bucket on the rear axle of a covered wagon, bundled the family inside and headed south for some place where there were water and trees. Eventually they reached Lamar, Missouri, and that's the place that, if I was actually pinned down to it, I would still call home. Actually I have seen very little of Missouri for many years.

In 1909 I took a trip to the tropics and landed in the middle of a revolution. I stayed in the center for thirteen months, and apparently some sort of a bug got into my bloodstream, for there followed in quick succession Brazil, Venezuela, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, Cuba and finally the World War, where I served in three branches, Canadian Infantry, British Naval Air Service and the American Air Corps. After the war I made my one and only trip to the Far North, where one of my old sergeants got his own back by bossing me for a full year.

Most of my business through life has been exploration work and mining, for I obtained a degree as a mining engineer in the Royal School of Science in London.

I have one particular thing in life which is envied in many people, which is that I have usually done the things that I wanted to do and gone to those parts of the world that interested me most. I have always carried a camera and kept a diary, and things that I did through these years are still interesting to me and I hope are of some interest to others. (Colonel Richardson is back in the army now.)

RAY NAFZIGER

BORN on a Kansas farm during one of the summers of the period of great hot winds. My father was a farmer and feeder in southern Nebraska and cattle rancher in Platte River sand-hill country. Went East to attend George Washington and Columbia universities; returned West to attend schools in New Mexico and Colorado. Army, 1917-1918. Employed by U. S. Department of Agriculture in Washington, D. C., and in New Mexico, the last as forest ranger. Partner in dude ranch in Jemez mountains near Santa Fé, three months. Own and operate—mostly by correspondence—a cotton and alfalfa farm on the Rio Grande in southern New Mexico, where my own bale-an-acre cotton average puts me to shame in a neighborhood of two-bale-an-acre cotton-growers. But I have a two-daughter family that makes up for cotton-production deficiencies.

About Our Cover

From left to right in foreground appear: The Civil War Flag, the Gadsden Flag of 1775, the fifteen-striped Flag (a stripe for each State was the original idea) of 1812, about which "The Star-Spangled Banner" was written; the Flag of 1898—forty-five stars; the National Emblem of today. In background, left to right: two of the Pine Tree Flags of 1775, the first Navy ensign (with crosses on field) and others —including, at right, the Philippine flag of Bataan.

So many requests have come in for copies of our covers that we have arranged for a special edition of this one, without the magazine lettering at the top, but instead a simple title, "*The Hope of All the World.*" We will be pleased to send you a copy of this, packed flat, on receipt of ten cents to cover mailing expense. Address Blue Book Magazine, Dept. W, McCall Street, Dayton, Ohio.

BLUE BOOK

August, 1942 MAGAZINE Vol. 75, No. 4

A Complete Book-Length Novel

A Novelette

Nine Short Stories

A Serial Novel

Special Features

Prize Stories of Real Experience

Except for stories of Real Experiences, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

McCALL CORPORATION, Publisher, The Blue Book Magazine

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READERS' FORUM

A SUGGESTION RE THE COVER

In this age of toothpaste-smiles and sophisticated ladies, it is indeed a pleasure to find in BLUE BOOK *at least one magazine that makes a practice of reproducing a cover of vital significance. I find that many such covers would be suitable for framing—perhaps many other readers of* BLUE BOOK *do—if it were not for the titles and comment which, in most instances, make it impossible. Why not give us, from time to time, a cover free of all printing, excepting of course, the magazine's title?*

I consider the new format a change for the better; in my opinion it makes an attractive magazine still more impressive.

The only suggestion I have to offer for a magazine that is so consistently well-rounded is this: please maintain the balance between those stories of purely dramatic "punch" and those of stimulation, definition, and analysis—by all means give us the fast-moving stories, but don't neglect tempering them with stories that compel us to do some thinking of our own; for instance, such stories as Nelson Bond's "The Bookshop" and "The Magic Staircase;" Jacland Marmur's "The Conqueror" and "At the Lion's Mouth;" Gordon Keyne's "The Princess and the Prophet" and last but not least, "Highlights of the New Books" and informative features such as Stefan Zweig's "The Mystery of America's Godfather."

B. Waterhouse
Swissvale, Pa.

ONE FOR THE BOOK

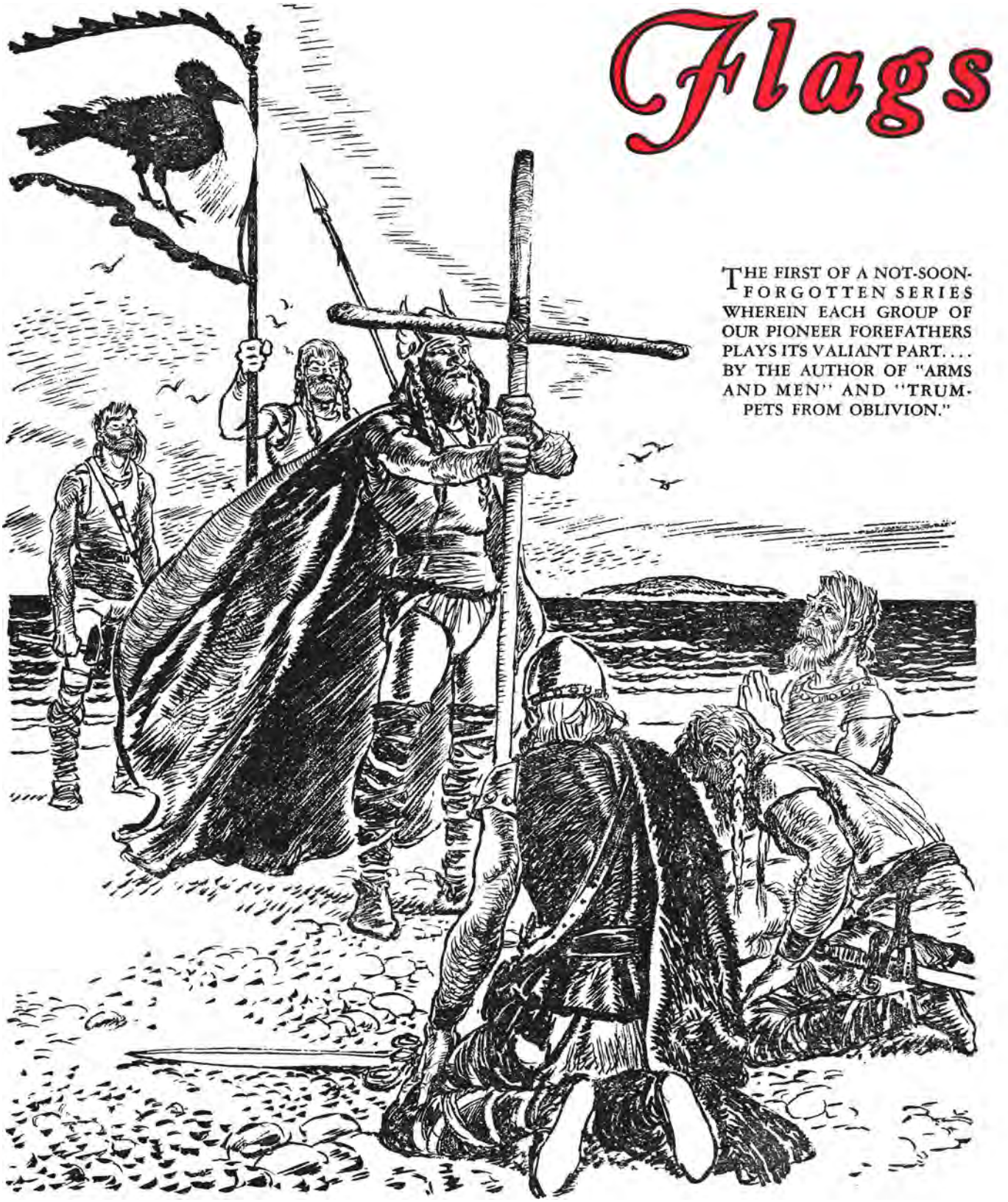
Of all the nastiest things I've heard about women, this is one for the book. So women have invaded every sanctum that was dear to a man's heart years ago! Yes, years ago, but this is not the Eighteenth or Nineteenth Century. Robert Roche (May 1942) must be living in one of these centuries, for he doesn't seem to realize women are not to be held back in anything, even to reading the BLUE BOOK *which is for men, by men.*

If women can take over a man's job and do just as well, if not better, I believe she too is entitled to some of this masculine pleasure. I boil when I hear men talking about women as if they didn't exist. So come on, girls! Let's put men in their places for a change, and see how they like it.

Mrs. Dorothy Sparrey,
Chicago, Illinois.

(Continued on inside back cover)

Flags



THE FIRST OF A NOT-SOON-FORGOTTEN SERIES WHEREIN EACH GROUP OF OUR PIONEER FOREFATHERS PLAYS ITS VALIANT PART.... BY THE AUTHOR OF "ARMS AND MEN" AND "TRUMPETS FROM OBLIVION."

Foreword

JIM BROWN was lost, as may easily happen during maneuvers; he was hot and exhausted and disheartened. He slumped down beside a pine tree and gazed out at the Pacific Ocean, whose sparkling flickers of white ran clear to Pearl Harbor and Australia and China. The breeze was cool; it made soft whistling sounds in the trees overhead, like distant voices singing among the pine-needles. Gradually the cadenced tones drew nearer —yes, they really were voices! Surprise thrilled him, when words began to come clear. . . .

"LISTEN to us, Jim Brown, private first class! Listen to us, the voices forever marching upon these timeless waves of air. Once, like you, we pulsed to the greatness that lies in life and high emprise, in swelling achievement and the storm of armies; but now we bring you a message that we have learned through the strait door of death. If hatred and writhing fury be the ringing clarions of your universe, they are but penny trumpets here in ours, where the still small

# of Our Fathers

by H. Bedford-Jones

voice of brotherhood rests and rolls in chasms evermore.

"Each of us in life had his own emblazoned flag, and honored it according to his own vision, small or great. Each of us had a different banner; yet difference lay only to the eye, and each stood for the same ideals in the end. This flag of yours but carries on our tradition.

"To each of us our banner was a bit of cloth, as yours to you; we were made of bone and flesh as you yourself. Yet within us were souls, as in you; and in our banner, too, was held a spirit that still lives on, doing homage to this your flag. What lies within this scrap of cloth, this cresset of the yeomanry of heaven?

"WE came with the old Raven of the pagan Vikings, emptying our blood upon your shores, claiming for our God's acre your forested hills and vinland slopes. Our ensign was the ravening bird of prey, men said; but to us it spoke of ghostly strength, of family and old friends left beyond the world's edge. Hail, Raven of Odin, bird of wisdom and of blood! Visible sign of invisible gods and forces, leading us on to stake liberty and life against the world's unknown!

"WE came with the Lilies of France, the golden fleurs-de-lis. No mere garden flowers, but granted us by heaven upon the oriflamme, the sacred banner of our ancient rulers; given as a token of beauty ineffable, of spiritual tenderness and of unearthly values, a memory to bear upon the crown of earthly monarchs. So blew our lilies by sea and shore and mountain, by arctic wastes and western isle, in smoke of council-fire and scalp-dance—golden lilies, uplifting hearts of men across the wrack of battle and foundered hopes.

"WE came, in the lightnings of the Castle and the Lion, proud quarterings of Leon and Castile, astride this noble hemisphere our galleons had discovered. Ours the might of regal hand beating across continents, subduing savage nations with pitiless majesty, sinking iron into the soil of valley and hill and islet—the red of iron and the red of blood together mingled to eternity. Up, Castile! Thunder, Leon! Conquer gloriously, daring all things; go down to death when ye must, but go victorious in pride and honor deathless, taking salute of the celestial legions as ye blow across the winds between the worlds, triumphant unto this last!

"WE came, with cross of red on field of white, St. George's cross; St. George who spoke of stars and kings, our leader. Aye, Cabot's hand lay on the oaken helm, but Tudor England trod the oaken deck, and the prayer of George of Cappadocia sped us to land with the gladsome whirr of grav goose quills at the end of English yards! The red cross, bandrol of the Christ, rood of Him who died upon the crooked tree, who fought the hard fight and died unvanquished—this gentle flag we bore to mind us ever how slight a thing is death, if the heart be unafraid and foursquare to all mankind, as the cross-flag blew foursquare to every wind of God! Amen.

"We came, oppressed, enslaved, seeking afar the tolerance we neither knew nor gave, searching the freedom men denied, as we in turn denied it. Yet our hearts warned us more truly, as did the flag we bore, with the red cross of St. George fielded by the white cross of St. Andrew. We streamed it at the *Mayflower's* peak, amid doubt and stress and suffering; we planted it full sturdily into the New World earth.

"WE came from neither king nor prince to this new western earth; our standard boasted neither crown nor cross. We hoisted the colors of freemen, beggars of heaven—we of the young republic, the United Netherlands. Our freedom was bought with tears and anguished sweat, as it must be purchased with heart's blood over and over upon this earth. . . .

"Thus we came, we who have spoken, and many another like us; we came, and our banners flaunted upon the forest shore and then were no more seen. We gave them, these flags of ours, to make our own. It is the heir of our inspired imaginings.

"Salute! Such were our banners of old; such is our flag and yours today. Salute, stripes and keen stars! We, the voices of the dead, salute you, brave bit of cloth that holds aloft the hope of all the world! This scrap of fabric blowing in the wind, this merest trifle of your equipage—why, what a blessed little thing it is, one of those little things that thunder ceaselessly upon the vault of heaven! So small as to be cradled in your hand, yet it flutters high above the venomed bitterment of earth, blowing ever higher and farther upon the glory of the coming day. . . . To You, Old Glory—Salute!"

I – WARLOCK *or* WOMAN

IT has not been told, for one reason or other, what took place during that second summer of our stay in Vinland. It is usually reckoned that the new country was filled with warlocks and trolls, whereby we came to harm. Leif Ericson, as you shall see, deemed this to be the best story to give out, so it was done; he was a hard man when angered.

I was Arne the Smith, and the witless thrall Romuna was my helper at the forge. Old Eric the Red, he who found and settled Greenland, had bought Romuna for two silver rings from traders who voyaged out to Greenland and wintered with us at Brattalid. Men thought it was a bad bargain, seeing that this Romuna was a little man, a Lapp, with a witless smile and no sense at all; but, said Eric, time would tell whether the bargain were good or ill.

Everyone knows how our voyage to Vinland came about. During the winter Eric died and Christianity was settled upon Greenland. Leif Ericson, who had discovered Vinland during the previous year, was too busy to seek that country again. His brother Thor-

vald said it was a shame to leave Vinland unknown and unexplored, so Leif offered him the ship and men to go, if he liked.

So Thorvald decided to go. He chose thirty men and made the ship ready; Leif gave him advice and help, and two men who had been on the first voyage to serve as pilots. We got away late in the year and had a hard voyage southward, but at last we came to Vinland. There we found the huts that Leif had built, and occupied them for the winter.

When spring came, Thorvald sent out men with the ship to explore, while he stayed at the huts with a number of men who were sick. It was a pleasant land but without inhabitants, and the months drifted past; in the summer the ship came back to us, having found no people but much fine timbered country, with many islands and bights. Winter came again, and Thorvald prepared to fare forth himself in the second spring; it is this faring whereof I have to tell.

During this while, nothing had happened worth the words. Our thirty men were all from Iceland except the thrall, Romuna. Small he was, and though very cunning at the forge he could tell nothing about himself; indeed, he scarcely spoke at all, only smiled and whimpered in his witless fashion. He had a black beard and empty eyes. There was a great scar across his head where some weapon had bitten deep, but he was not quarrelsome. "Arne's dog," they termed him, because he was ever at my heels.

"Sixteen men shall go with me in the ship," said Thorvald when spring was in. "Arne, you and the thrall shall journey with us. It is my thought that we may have need of your skill before we return. And let there be no more bickering about the flag, I warn you all!"

He said this because of the disputes that had arisen, as ever haps among idle folk.

Thorvald was red, like his father Eric; he had ruddy hair and beard and very bright blue eyes, and he was given to swifter action than thought. Yet he was a careful and shrewd leader and a good seaman; under his hand the old ship, which had belonged to Leif and to Eric before him, behaved well.

We overhauled her for the water and calked her afresh in the seams. Romuna was skillful at this work, so it was given him to do, while the rest of us got the gear and lading in readiness. About this time befell the sharpest of quarrels between Atli Farseer the steersman and Biorn Frodeson, in regard to the flag; from it stemmed much that came afterward.

BIORN was old. He had come to Greenland with Eric the Red, and after Eric died had taken the new faith of Christ. He was a skald and played the harp, and it was said luck went with him. For this reason Thorvald took him to Vinland. He had weak eyes and was no fighter, but was greatly skilled in curing wounds and was beloved of most men.

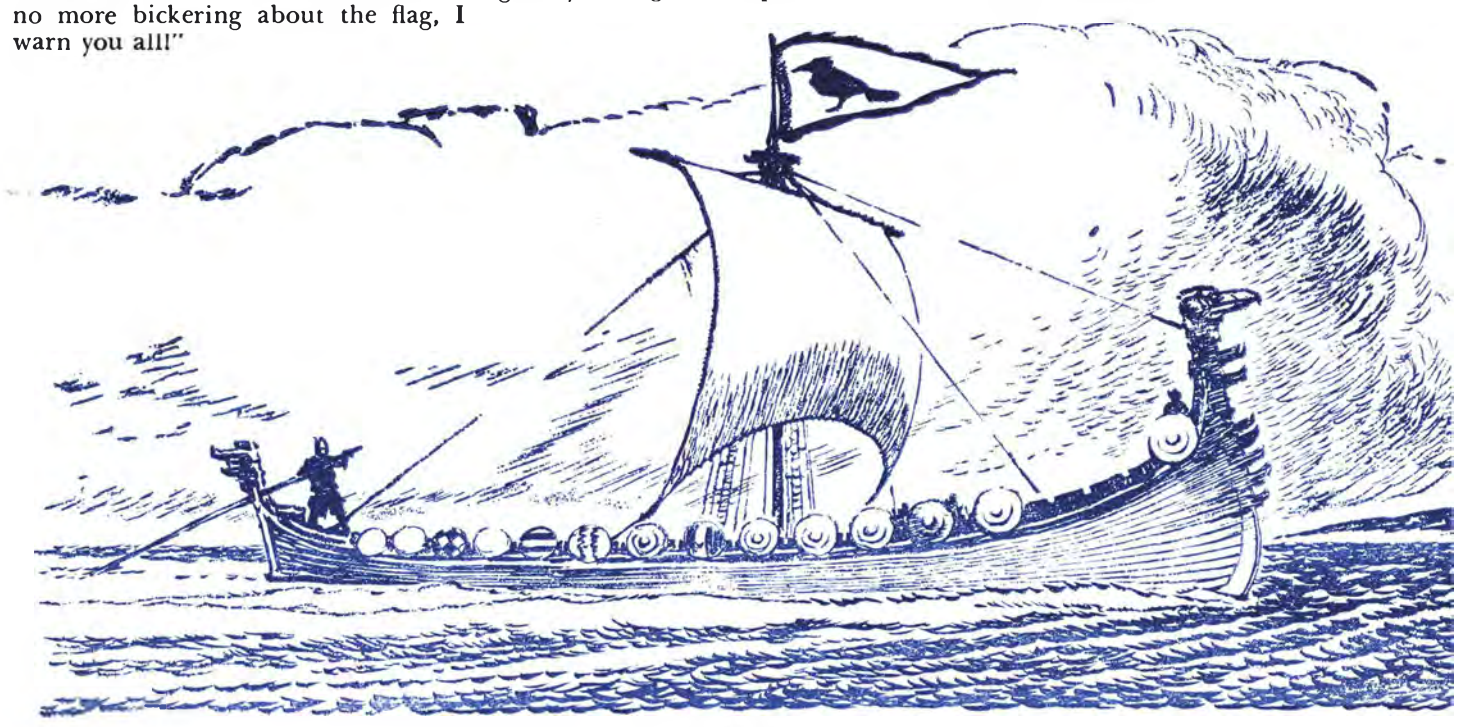
He and Atli fell out regarding the old argument. Atli held to the ancient gods; he was so mighty and well-thewed that he could hold the steering-oar alone in a half gale. It was Atli who had counseled Leif Ericson to give us the flag of Eric the Red, to go upon the ship. This was a large banner of white Flemish cloth on which was sewn a raven in black, and the edges were well bound with leather against fraying. Leif was much attached to this flag and prized it greatly, but gave it up at Thorvald's request, saying it had brought luck to him and to his father, and should serve his brother in like manner.

Around the winter fires, however, had been keen argument touching this standard. Some contended that it was no good thing for Christian men to fly this flag, because the raven was Odin's bird who preyed on dead men and a symbol of the heathen time. Others said that the raven was the bird of wisdom and therefore lucky, since it had led Eric to Greenland and Leif to Vinland, and had also brought us hither in safety. Although some held with Atli to the old gods, most of the men, and Thorvald among them, had taken the Cross and been baptized, and they did not know what to think. "However," said Thorvald, "it is not your affair but mine; and the flag goes with the ship when we take it forth."

"That may well be ill luck," said Biorn, "for the raven is the bird of death, and the raven flag leads rovers and vikings on their bloody forays."

Thorvald was not pleased by this speech, but ended the argument. Next day, Biorn was at the ship trying to make Romuna talk sensibly, when Atli Farseer came up to them and told Biorn he was an old fool to croak of ill luck before it came. One word led to another, until Atli seized a spear and thrust at Biorn with it. To save himself, Biorn caught up the calking-mallet, but lost his balance and fell, and the mallet struck the thrall Romuna on the head and he lay like a man dead.

With this the quarrel ceased. Biorn carried Romuna up to the house and tended him, and the little Lapp was well again when we set sail to explore the land to north and east. But after that day his wits came back to him.



They were nothing to boast about, at best; however, Romuna was shrewd enough to confide in no one but me.

"Good smith, good friend, Arne!" said he, puffing out his cheeks and winking at me. "If there be warlocks and deviltry at work, trust to Romuna; I've put more than one warlock in the chest o' time in my day. Aye, and death at the masthead, and men too long away from home and women! Now I'll talk no more till we're at sea and crouching under the leeboard, you and I."

Still, I questioned him until I discovered that he was a good Christian man, though he admitted to having been a wizard in his time. So there this matter rested. . . .

Sixteen of us set forth with the ship of a pleasant spring morning. Thorvald had chosen me and Romuna and old Biorn, who could strike up a tune with the best, but Atli Farseer had picked others—so most of our company were men who stuck to the old gods, even if they had let themselves be baptized into the new faith for luck.

Men too long away from home and women, said the little man, and said aright. Thorvald had a questing look in his bright blue eyes, and well I knew how most of the others felt; this was a good land, too good not to have some people in it.

We hoisted sail and rode the sea's horses eastward, then turned north and took to the oars. There were woods and islands and beaches of white sand, but Atli headed from the islands and kept to the mainland shore. We were in good spirits and blithe with the warm sun, and although the ale-casks were empty, we had made a drink from the grapes that grew everywhere, a good drink that warmed the heart in a man. Here and there we halted to seek game, which was plentiful, while fish were for the taking on all sides. A good land, this Vinland! Yet we found no living folk, though an occasional trace of human presence.

So cheery were we all that when old Biorn upraised once more the question of the flag we flew, there was only good-humored talk, and Thorvald himself set the subject for discussion. We landed and brought in some game, built a roaring fire on the shore, and made merry over the feast.

"Now speak your mind, Biorn," said Thorvald, when we had well drunk. "Tell us what flag you would have us fly, if not the Raven of Odin! But let there be no talk of ill luck."

Old Biorn combed his beard with his fingers and wagged his head.

"Why have a flag at all?" said he. "In all song and story, the raven signifies blood. It is said of King Harald that he was the feeder of ravens; it is said of a sword that it gives the ravens to drink. That is well; men have a flag as an emblem of what their hearts lust after—"

"Give us a flag with a woman on it, skald!" yelped somebody, amid a storm of laughter.

"There is truth in that, also," Biorn said stoutly. "But they say that King Olaf in Norway has a flag which is the flag of the king and the land, bearing only the Cross. That is what I bid you, Thorvald Ericson. It ill beseems Christian men to sail under the flag of the old pagan gods!"

"I will settle this once and for all," said Thorvald, before others could speak. "We sacrifice no longer to Thor and Odin; we do not let the blood of horses run into the sacred basins; we have gainsaid all the old gods and their customs. But the Raven is the flag of my father Eric, and it is my flag. It led Eric to Greenland; it led us to this fair Vinland. For us it is not the flag of the old gods—it is the symbol of a far horizon, of a new world found and settled! Let that stick in your head, Biorn Frodeson. Adventure far-flying, ships and men speeding with the horses of the sea—why, it is the flag of this Vinland of ours!"

"Vinland!" rang out the shouts, as drinking-horns were lifted. "Vinland! Skoal, Thorvald! Drink to the flag of Vinland!"

PARTLY in jest, the affair so ended; but old Biorn was well aware of a grim quality in Thorvald's jest, and heeded it. In those days a leader was not given command because he owned a ship or had a rich sire or a noble lineage; he had to be a better man than those under him. Thorvald Ericson did not have the superhuman strength of Atli the steersman, but no man of us was his equal with weapons. Also, he was of uncertain temper.

I sat on the dark shore later that night, and under the stars talked with the thrall Romuna. He had a strange way of speech, as he told me of himself—speech hard to understand. Yet, as I mind, his words were not many.

Some few years back, he had been stolen away from his place in Lapland and passed as a thrall from hand to hand, out of the east country into Norway, thence on into Iceland and afar.

"Gostling was my home," he went on. "I never saw the east again, but in my mind's eye I saw much in the east. I was Romuna the warlock, a seer in the darkness itself, a wolf's tooth in the jaw of a mouse!"

"You, a warlock!" I exclaimed. "But you've called yourself a good Christian man!"

He peered and cackled in the starlight.

"Though I was far away, folded in the rocky cliffs at Farstang, a true Christian I! Songs of beauty were heard in the world, and magic in the stones of old Gotland rang out; we were told the Man of Galilee had come to us, and we believed. I was not evil, ever. I rang the basin in the bloody places of sacrifice with stones instead of human bones."

Wizards, whether good or bad, were ill to my taste. I said as much.

"Harm I wrought none, good friend Arne!" said he mournfully. "Look you, much is given me to see, just as now I see no luck on this trip, but the bane of men and ships, and bright blood on sword and arrow. Yes! I have warred upon trolls and wizards of evil sort. Value me as you will."

"A cunning man, a good heart," said I. "No man so cunning as you at the forge can be evil, Romuna."

"So speaks the master smith," he said gladly. "In those days I had a friend, Catheslat. We dwelt together, till we heard that monks with shaven pates had brought the true God to the land. Catheslat prayed with me and then took ship to the Vat of Thave. He ever feared lest life give some other more than he, and would see the Godhead; but he came not back. But never was I evil, good Arne! If I wove spells, it was always against evil men; and if I weave spells now, it is only for good."

I could believe this, and my belief comforted him. A strange little man,

this Romuna; witless and of no understanding, but good and kindly of heart. And when the bellows lit the forge and the iron whitened in the ring, he became blithe and merry as do most men when in strong liquor. He was a good smith and clever with all tools.

Two days later a sudden gale caught us; this was under a cape, and willy-nilly we drifted in ashore. We came to land safely, but there the ship broke her keel on the rocks while we were dragging her up.

"Never mind; there's timber for the hewing and game for the killing," said Thorvald. "So make shelters and get out tools, and fall to work!"

It was plain that we would be here a long time, fitting a new keel.

When camp was made and all in order, and a tree from which to hew the keel felled and hauled down to the shore, some of us scattered forth in search of game and to view the land, and it so happened that Thorvald and I kept in company, with bow and spear. He and I held apart from the others, and I saw it was his wish to push far through the trees.

"Anyone might think you knew where you're going," I said.

"That would be correct," Thorvald replied. "Last night my father Eric the Red came to me in a dream and said we were close to the end of our faring. He said to round the cape when the work is done; but first to hold westward through these trees until I come to a hill crowned by a great stone. So I seek it, and you shall help me."

It irked me that so good a man should put faith in bootless dreams and in the words of pagan men like Eric the Red. Not that I deny the existence of trolls and nightgangers, for in Iceland I have known many a man dead of such evil spirits; and here in this new world of Vinland it would be hard to say what might be found. But dreams—well, that is another matter.

A hill crowned by a great stone—a queer thing to seek amid forest trees! And yet presently we came upon it, and I myself sighted it the first. Thorvald came running, pleased and excited as a boy. The hill was only a little hill, such as might have served to mark some warrior's grave, but the big stone above it was of huge size.

"Help me roll that stone," said Thorvald. "Something may lie beneath it."

"I say no to that," I told him bluntly. "If the stone was put there to hold down a troll, I'm not the man to let him loose! Let be, Thorvald."

"But the dream was true!" says he.

"That may be; it said nothing of moving the stone," I replied. He tried to move it, but could not, and was wroth at my refusal to help. Then he forgot his anger, upon seeing something come out of the forest and approach us.

I laid shaft to string, seeing that it was a woman; but she held up both hands, empty, in token of peace. She was somewhat dark of color, and was dressed in skins. She came toward us in obvious fear, staring at Thorvald, then dropped to earth and prostrated herself as though he were some god.

This was the first human being we had seen in Vinland.

Thorvald laughed aloud. "Now you see, grim Arne, what was the meaning of my dream, and what Eric the Red tried to tell me!"

"Then it must be that since his death he has changed," I said, "for he

was wont to say there was no luck in a dark woman."

Thorvald laid down spear and bow, and went laughing to the woman, and raised her up and looked into her eyes. She spoke at length, but what she said was lost upon us. Then she made gestures and pointed; it was clear that she bade us accompany her, no doubt to some garth of her people.

"Have a care, Thorvald!" I said in warning. "Where the she-bear is, there too is the male; and this may well be some trap. Besides," I added, with guile to snare him, "your father Eric showed this hill and this stone, as a token you were to go no farther."

"That is true," he said, frowning. Then he turned to the woman and made gestures to her, bidding her come with us. She drew back and shook her head, whereat he laughed and made more gestures. She smiled suddenly, touched his great flaring red beard with her finger-tips and went running at speed like a deer back in among the trees, and was gone.

Thorvald picked up his weapons. "Say nothing of this to anyone, Arne," he said, looking very bright and eager. "Is she not a graceful maid?"

"Graceful, aye; maid it may be," I said. "An ill-favored wench, and if she were at Brattalid your brother Leif would set her to work in the kitchen."

"By the hammer of Thor, have you no eye for beauty?" he said, laughing.

"I have a tongue for Christian oaths, not Thor-oaths," I told him.

"Then keep it out of my affairs," he said, a snarl in his throat, and we made our way back to the camp under the cape.

As he ordered, I said nothing of our meeting, but so changed was Thorvald that men eyed him curiously, and Atli Farseer pressed him with questions about what we had seen. Thorvald said we had found no game but had seen some fine trees, and he was minded to stay in this country of Vinland and settle here, as his father Eric had done in Greenland.

LATE that night the thrall Romuna crept close to me.

"Now are the magic runes cut, master," said he at my ear, "and evil is stirring, and trolls whistle in the air! It is too late to undo the knots of fate, but perhaps I can weave a spell that will keep death from others of our company. Tell me what happened today."

"Your business is to get the keelson cut, not to prate of ill luck," I growled.

"Have it your own way," he said. "But it needs no warlock to read the eye of Thorvald, who is like a stallion ready to leap the fence! The keelson is cut and shaped, and in three days we shall be at sea again; why will you not trust me?"

He was a shrewd fellow, and I told him all that had happened.

"There are no devils in this land," said he, "but devils enough in the hearts of men, and trolls and warlocks at work! Wait and see."

Next day we fitted the keel, and took the broken keel and Thorvald raised it on a mound of earth on the cape, and named the headland Cape Keel for a memory. About noon he took his weapons and went out to seek game; then I noted that Atli Farseer and another man were gone, and someone said they were hunting. Thorvald would take no one with him, but set forth alone, and I knew he went to meet that native woman at the hill and the stone.

Late in the afternoon he came back, sullen and angered, and said to make ready the ship as soon as might be. By nightfall, Atli and the other man had not returned, and by morning they were still away. They came while we were tarring and finishing the work, and carried a slain deer between them.

"Where were you, Atli?" demanded Thorvald.

"Lost," said Atli Farseer, looking cheerful and ruddily content. "We came upon thick trees and could not find our way until we gained the shore and then followed it. We wandered most of the night, and this morning saw the smoke of the camp."

Thorvald eyed him askance. "Hair and beard are well combed for sleepers in forest," said he. "Now get ready the ship today without fail, for I intend to sail around the cape and see what lies beyond. And I shall go alone to scout the northward forest today, while all others keep camp."

He went out alone, with his weapons. Atli and his companion laughed much and talked much about getting lost in the woods and were quite cheerful about it. I did not know what to make of all this matter, but that afternoon while I was shaping a new hold for one of the storm-boards, Romuna came to me and spoke softly.

"You cannot read the runes, Arne, but I can," said he. "Here is what happed. Atli suspected the truth, and went out and found men living afar in this place, and has kept the thing secret. Thorvald did not meet the woman again, but he will see her today; I whispered to him that I had seen chips floating on the brook, and if one followed the stream one might come to some abode of man."

"Did you see chips on the water?" I asked, and he chuckled.

"No, friend Arne; but it is better that Thorvald find these native people than that Atli Farseer and the others find them, for with Atli all is brute force and might, and he would bring arrows whistling about our ears."

"Perhaps he has found them already," I said.

We got the ship in the water and loaded that day. Now things came a little out into the open, for the man who had been away with Atli talked of having seen human beings; they were brown of skin, he said, and fleet of foot. Most thought he was lying and making up a big story as a boast; but I knew he spoke truth.

Why it should be kept a secret, I did not see. We had often discussed the chance of finding people living in this country; now Thorvald, and then Atli, make the discovery, and each of them keeps a close mouth. I said as much to Romuna.

"Good smith, Arne, but poor reader of hearts," said he. "Is your own lusty youth so far forgotten, brawny Arne? Still, it so haps with some men. Most like there are some people near here, but not many of them, and perhaps only one or two women. That would explain much."

Thorvald laughed aloud. "Now you see, grim Arne, what was the meaning of my dream, and what Eric the Red tried to tell me!"

Illustrated by Herbert Morton Stoops

THORVALD came back before set of sun, well content and cheerful and full of news. He had seen people afar, he said, brown half-naked men; it was told him what Atli's companion had said about sighting folk the previous day, and he asked Atli if this were true.

"True enough," assented Atli indifferently. "They seemed like *skraelingar,* weak and powerless folk. I would have spoken of it, but you were in ill humor last night."

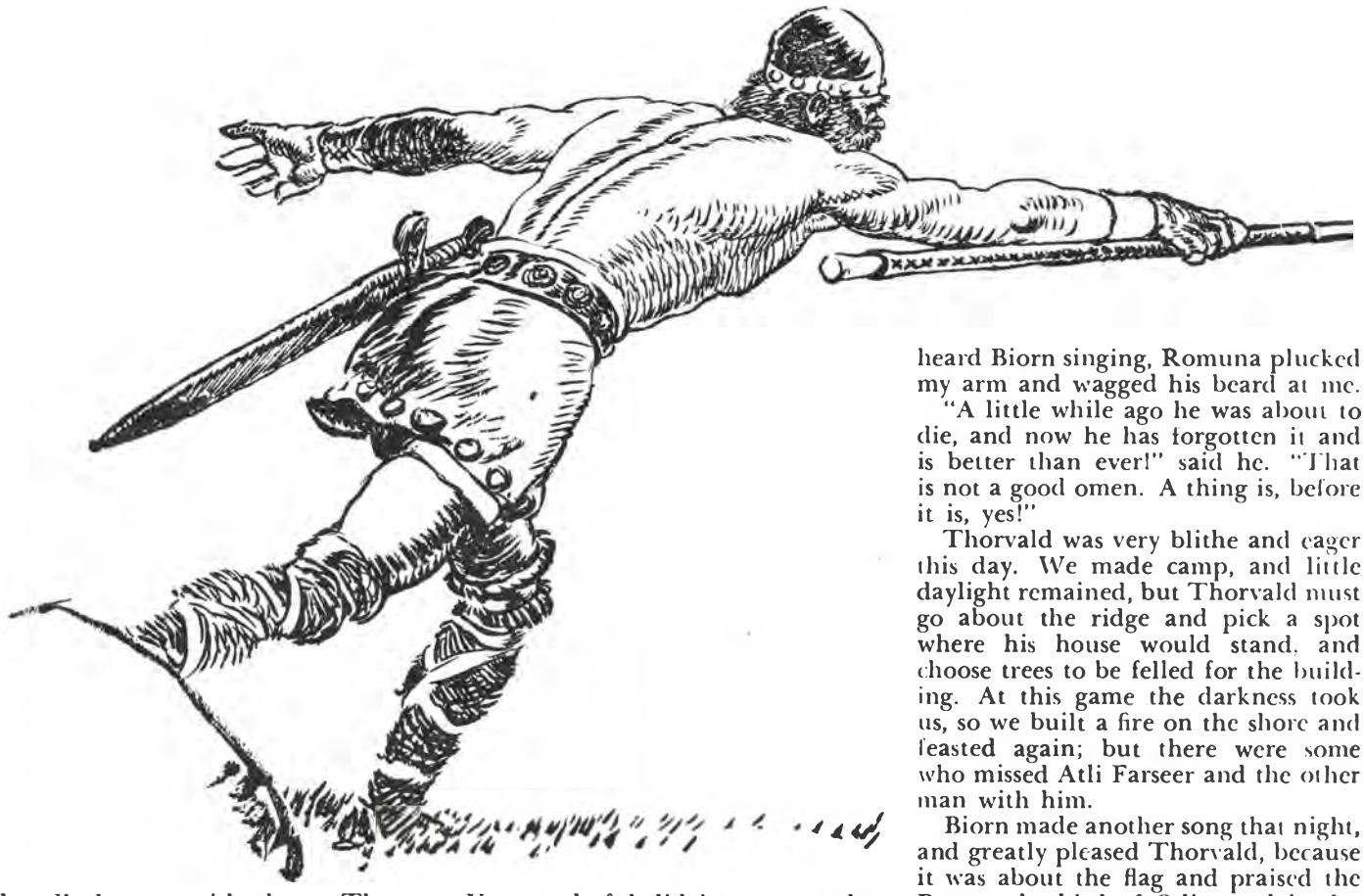
Thorvald and Atli bent ill looks one upon the other, but said no more about it. Thus we put a name to these Vinland natives; Skraelings, we called them. Some were for going forth to meet them and for making friends, but Thorvald naysaid this.

"We set sail in the morning and round the cape," he ordered.

Romuna spoke at my ear.

"Now it is plain to see what has taken place, Arne. The woman has bewitched Atli Farseer, who found her in the forest, and she has bewitched Thorvald as well. But Thorvald met her today and has a reason for rounding the cape; it is not because of his dream, either. Ill must come of this."

What came of it first was that by morning Atli and the other man had disappeared, and no tracks were to be seen; it was said by some that trolls



had walked away with them. Thorvald was furious and forbade any search being made. Out ship, said he, and be on the way; let them have what they sought, and no loss!

So we got the ship in the water, and she proved sound and well repaired. We set out in good time, but by reason of heavy rocks must go far to win around the cape. All that day we rowed, and the next, until a fair wind sprang up and we could hoist sail. With evening the mouth of a fiord opened before us, and Thorvald bade down sail and ride for the night, which we did. Next morning we held into the fiord, which was a great and fine bay.

I HAVE not spoken of old Biorn Frodeson this while. During many days he had been ill and keeping to himself like a sick dog. Now as the fiord opened ahead of us, he called out to Thorvald, who had the steering-oar, that he hungered to go ashore.

"I shall not get well of this sickness," he said. "I want to be laid under the earth and not in a sea-wave."

"As you like," said Thorvald. "I am looking for a place I saw in a dream. It is a high ridge of great trees, very glorious to see. Below it are wide sands and shallows at ebb tide, and the place is marked by three huge stones standing at tide-mark."

I knew he had not seen it in any dream, but that the Skraeling woman had told him of it by signs and gestures.

Yet wonderful did it seem on that afternoon when the very spot was sighted, the three standing-stones plain to behold, although it was flood tide and we could not see the sands. Not in all Vinland had we beheld such trees as grew thickly upon the high ridge, with the wide fiord outspread below and the far cape and islands beyond. It made us homesick for old Norway, because in Iceland and Greenland were no trees at all.

"Here shall I remain!" cried out Thorvald exultantly. "It is beautiful here, and I shall build my house amid these trees above the water. Here we plant the Raven flag, comrades!"

Biorn's eye kindled, and he said that the very sight of this place brought life back into his body, but it was ill talk to christen this land with the Raven.

"That may be true," said Thorvald, "but it is my land and I take it for my own, and let him take it from me who can, Raven or Cross!" With this he leaped ashore, but being a Christian man withal and well baptized, he made a cross of wood and set it in the sand. This action made all of us feel easier.

Landing-stages were put out and the ship was snugly berthed above the fall of the tide. So well felt Biorn Frodeson that he sat on a rock and sang aloud a song that he made about Vinland and the high trees. I was working with Romuna, making a ring of rocks to use as a forge, there being much broken gear to mend, but when he heard Biorn singing, Romuna plucked my arm and wagged his beard at me.

"A little while ago he was about to die, and now he has forgotten it and is better than ever!" said he. "That is not a good omen. A thing is, before it is, yes!"

Thorvald was very blithe and eager this day. We made camp, and little daylight remained, but Thorvald must go about the ridge and pick a spot where his house would stand, and choose trees to be felled for the building. At this game the darkness took us, so we built a fire on the shore and feasted again; but there were some who missed Atli Farseer and the other man with him.

Biorn made another song that night, and greatly pleased Thorvald, because it was about the flag and praised the Raven, the bird of Odin, and it also spoke of the Cross and how both emblems stood for the same thing. The flag was not for luck, as some thought, but because, sang Biorn, it represented what men held to be noblest and best. Some would die for the old gods, othersome would die for the white Christ. Whether it made them more comfortable to have the Raven or the Cross on the banner was all one, because the flag spoke to them about things such as home and friends and honor which everyone reverenced alike.

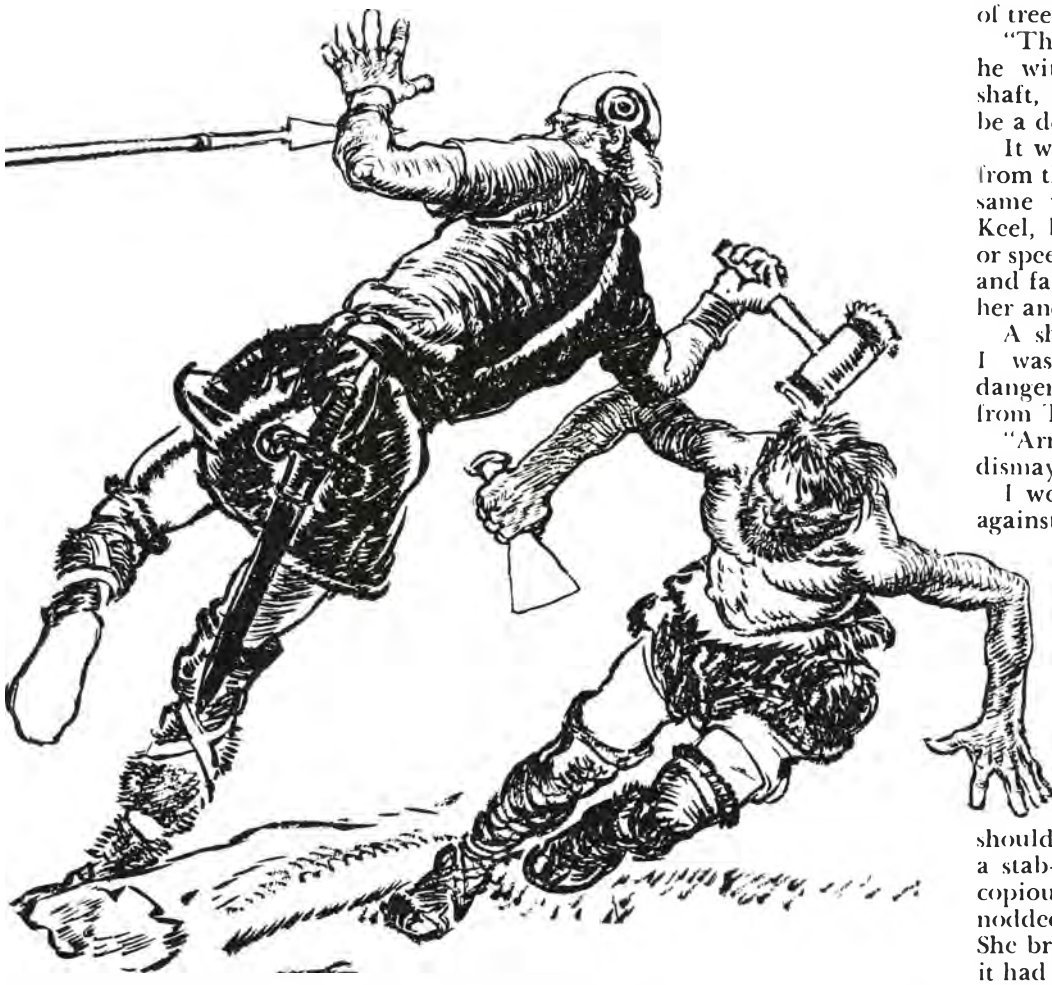
"A true skald made that song," I said, "because it is hard for ordinary folk to understand and cloaks its meaning behind fine words and phrases. But none the less it is a good song."

A pity that it was not kept in memory, for I have not heard a better song, even in Iceland or on the lips of Sigvat the Skald in Norway. But Romuna, shivering close to me that night, said it was a song made by a fey man, and there would be ill doings on the morrow.

"But I have made spells for your protection, good Arne," said he, "and no harm will come to you from the wizards and warlocks of this heathen land."

"I'm here to sleep, not gossip," I said angrily. "Be silent!"

Morning came, and there was no sign of Atli nor anyone else. The man who had been on watch at daybreak thought he had seen objects moving far down the beach, where the sand



showed wide and high at ebb tide. We looked, but all was empty there.

"I'm going up to the crest of the ridge to see if there be game among the trees," said Thorvald when we had broken our fast. "Arne, you and Biorn take your weapons and come with me. Who was it that was crying in the night, like a woman?"

"No one here," said the men who had stood watch.

"I wakened twice," said Thorvald, "and each time heard a woman sobbing."

Nothing had been heard of this by any other, and it was laid to some dream that had been in Thorvald's mind. But Romuna looked at me with a white face, when he brought my sword and spear.

"Do not go, do not go!" he said under his breath. "I tell you there will be bane of men and worse, before the sun is high!"

"Trolls and devils fly away with you and your croaking!" I said angrily. "When I get back, let me find that rock-forge finished or I'll take a whip to your shoulders!"

"It will not be finished, this or any other day," said Romuna, and turned away.

I walked with Thorvald and Biorn up the shoulder of the high ridge. There were no trees out at the end, but when they began they were thick and tall. Thorvald said we should walk down midway of the ridge before trying to get through the trees, and so we did; he was watching keenly in all directions, and I knew what it was he hoped to see. By land we were no great way from the cape where we had planted the broken keel and seen the Skraeling woman.

When we came to the place where Thorvald meant to pierce the forest, there were a number of scattered stones, and Biorn must stop to lace his legging. He sat on one of the stones.

"Let us rest for a little bit," he said. "Age tells. I'm glad that I brought no shield; more weight of armor in this hot sun would have melted what little fat remains on my bones! It was a hard climb up the ridge—as though someone were trying to hold me back."

Thorvald, whose thews were of iron, shook his head at Biorn. He had no sword; he had brought his shield, but carried only a spear with a black wood haft. Leif Ericson had given it to him long ago and he loved it above all other weapons, and its name was Raven-feeder.

"It is easy to see," said he, smiling, "that a skald has more strength in his head than in his legs! Rest you here. Arne and I will go on a little way, and you overtake us when you are ready."

We went on together, but not very far; Thorvald's eyes were on the edge of trees, and he came to a sudden halt.

"There is something coming," said he with a sharp breath. "Notch a shaft, Arne, and stand ready! It may be a deer or it may not—"

It was no deer. I saw her come out from the trees and start toward us; the same woman we had seen at Cape Keel, but now there was no strength or speed in her, for her steps were slow and faltering. Thorvald went to meet her and caught her by the arms.

A shaft notched on my bowstring, I was watching the trees against danger, when I heard a great cry burst from Thorvald.

"Arne! Look!" he called in mingled dismay and fury. "Look at this!"

I went to them. She was drooping against him: he had laid bare her shoulder and side, where there was a stab-cut beneath her arm, bleeding copiously. She smiled at us and nodded, and reached under her robe. She brought out a knife, showing that it had made the cut. Thorvald vented a roar at sight of it.

"Atli's knife!" he cried. "You know it, Arne? By the hammer of Thor! It's plain enough that Atli stabbed her! See, it was a fight—look at her arms!"

Indeed her neck and arms were bruised and discolored; even against her bronze skin the marks stood plain.

"Well, better quench the blood than roar about it," said I. Dropping the bow, I began to bind up the woman's wound. She had lost much blood, but it seemed to me that the hurt was not a bad one, and when I said this Thorvald rested easier.

"Call Biorn; we need his skill with hurts now," he said. I turned and called. Biorn still sat on the stone; he did not move or answer me. He must have fallen asleep, I thought.

Thorvald began to speak but his words died. Out of the trees came a roaring voice; we knew it at once for the voice of Atli Farseer. What it said we could not tell, but it was close by.

"Hold her up, Arne," said Thorvald, a grim fury upon him. "He has fought with her and slain her, and now we'll have these wild folk buzzing about us like bees. By Thor's hammer, he'll pay for his madness here and now!"

He thrust the woman at me. I seized and held her upright, being careful of her hurt. Then he let out a

roaring shout at Biorn and caught up his shield, which he had laid down. The old skald came to his feet, only to topple forward and lie motionless; blood streamed from him, and two shafts stuck out of his body.

"Ware arrows, Thorvald!" I cried. "They've shot Biorn from cover of the trees—"

A shaft whirred, then others, whistling all around us. Two at once broke upon the shield of Thorvald; he picked up the fragments, and showed them to me, laughing.

"Stone points, Arne! Nothing here to cause us worry."

"Stone points bit Biorn," said I. Then the woman gave a sharp cry, flew at him, and seized the arrow-points from his hand, making gestures not hard to understand.

I caught up my bow and began to loose shafts at figures slinking along at the edge of the trees. I dropped one and the others ducked out of sight.

"Ha, Arne! She means that these shafts are poisoned!" cried Thorvald.

"Like enough," I told him. "Will you stand here all day to be a target?"

Before he could reply, Atli's voice came out of the trees close at hand.

"Thorvald! Up and away!" lifted his shout. "To the ship, quickly—it's life or death, man! To the ship!"

Hearing his voice, the woman caught up Atli's knife and faced toward the trees like a vixen. Thorvald nodded at me and seized his spear.

"Take care of her, Arne. This is a matter for me and Raven-feeder."

Atli Farseer came out of the trees, staggering forward like a man who has run far. He had sword in hand, and it was red; at sight of us he stopped short.

"To the ship!" he gasped out.

"All in good time, Atli," said Thorvald, moving toward him. "Where is the man who went with you?"

"Dead," said Atli, pumping air into his lungs. He stood taller than Thorvald by a full head. "Away, did you not hear me? To the ship!"

"Time enough," said Thorvald. "So you stabbed the woman, Atli? That was ill done, and worse done to stab and not kill. Now choose, whether these Skraelings shall kill you, or whether Raven-feeder shall drink your life! All this is your doing, lusty dog, and what's done must be paid for. Choose!"

Atli snarled at him. I bawled at the two fools to get away while it was time, but neither heard me. I tried to force the woman farther from the trees, but she fought against me; she was all intent upon what was happening there.

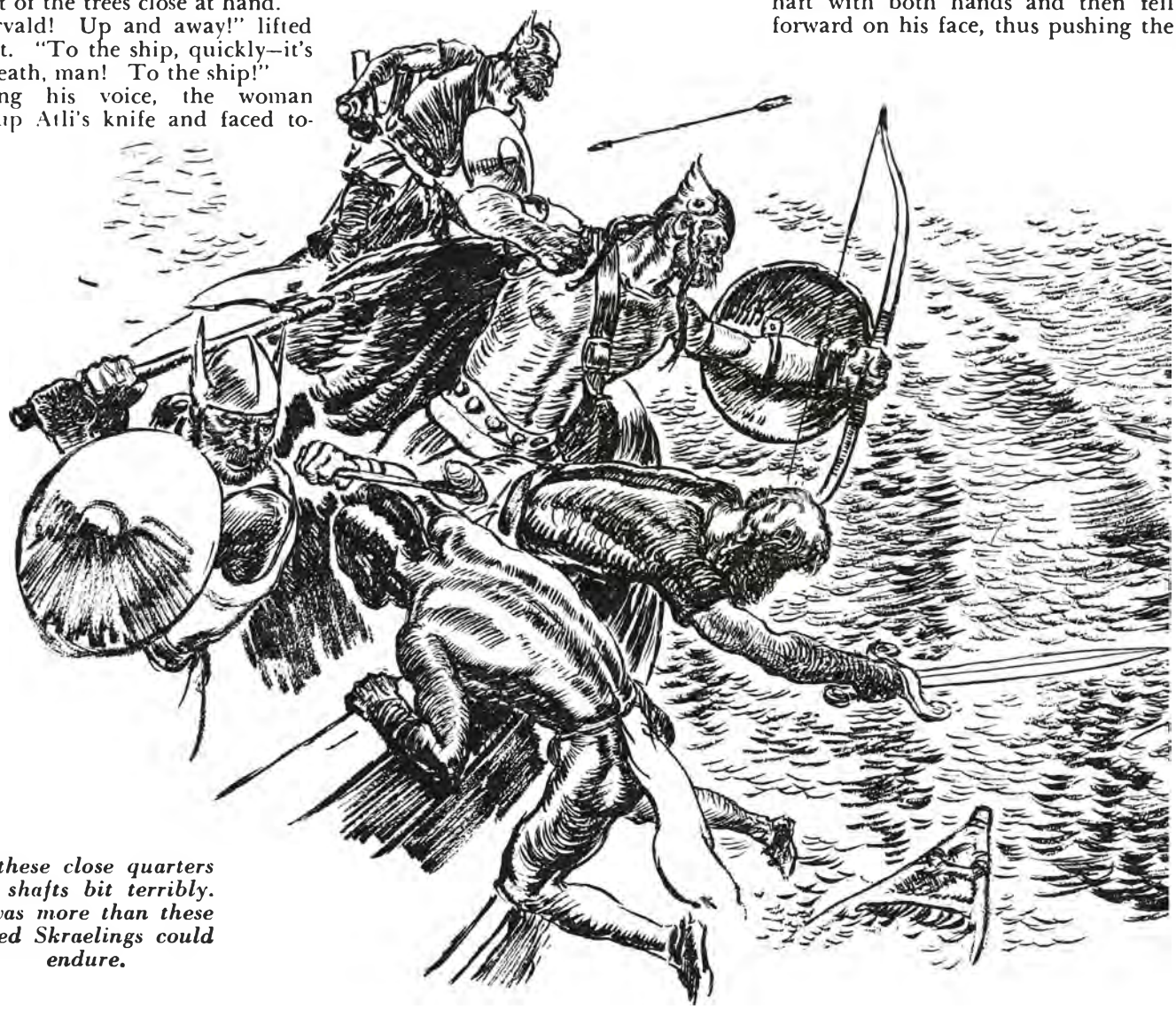
Atli Farseer had his breath back. There was blood on his arm, but he was not greatly hurt, and he snarled again at Thorvald.

"The woman—ha! So that's it!"

He swooped like a hawk, his sword flashing. Thorvald warded the blow, taking good care to keep beyond Atli's grip; with his agility, he could do this. Sword clanged on shield, spear pecked and pecked at man. Mad battle-rage came upon both of them, yet Thorvald kept away. The sword splintered suddenly, and broke off.

Atli flung the hilt as Thorvald stepped lightly back. It was a bronze hilt wound with metal wire, and heavy. With such terrific force was it flung that it struck upon Thorvald's helm, dented it, and for an instant dazed Thorvald himself. Atli seized this one instant and flung himself forward with a wild yell.

Whether he ran upon the spear or whether, as seems more like, Thorvald stabbed it through him, I could not tell. He stood gripping at the spear-haft with both hands and then fell forward on his face, thus pushing the



At these close quarters our shafts bit terribly. It was more than these naked Skraelings could endure.

halt almost through his body. Thorvald came up to him.

"Thanks for helping Raven-feeder on its way," said he, getting the spear loose. He stooped and spoke with Atli; what he said did not reach me, but I heard what Atli said as he died.

"You are close to the end of your faring, Thorvald, just as your father Eric foretold you," said he, then laid his face in the dust and was dead.

Thorvald cleaned the spear and came to where I stood with the woman. She was making gestures excitedly and did not want to come with us; she was, indeed, too weak. Thorvald gave me the spear and swung her up in his arms.

"Guard our backs, Arne!" said he, and we went. No arrows came after us. I passed close enough to old Biorn to make certain that he was dead; and I remembered what Romuna had said.

Still the woman was talking and gesturing. When we came to the brow of the ridge, Thorvald made out what she meant, and called me. I caught up and he pointed to the sand below. The tide was beginning to come in, and I saw three black dots.

"Boats," said Thorvald, "upside down on the sand with men beneath them. Most like they were covered over by sand and it has blown away. Go get the men; take them there and slay all beneath the boats, to keep Biorn company!"

The men were running to meet us. With most of them, I went at the sand where the boats lay; and boats they were, but made of skin or tree-bark. Under each one were three naked bronze men with weapons ready; their weapons were all armed with stone.

We killed them, except one who got away, being so fleet of foot that he escaped us. We were looking curiously at the skin boats when we heard Thorvald's war-horn blaring, so we hurried back to the ship. She was still well above the tide, and we had to haul her over the sand to water, for a great number of skin boats were heading up the bay for us.

Thorvald was still on the shore. He called me, and I went to him. The woman lay on the sand, and she was dead; she had died from blood-loss, no doubt, since she had no other hurt. Thorvald looked up at me and rose.

"Help me carry her above the tide mark," he said. "We will lay her in the earth when we return."

"From Greenland?" I said, helping him with the body.

"No, from the meeting with these Skraelings!" he snarled.

He was like a madman, running and hurling himself into the work. We pulled and tugged on the ship and the water crept up to meet us, and when we got her afloat the fleet of skin boats was not an arrow-shot away, the naked men screeching like furies.

"Up with the storm-boards!" Thorvald ordered. "Out bows, and kill!"

The skin boats came all around us, and arrows flew. We got up the high boards, crouched behind them, and our bowstrings twanged fast; at these close quarters our shafts bit terribly. It was more than these naked Skraelings could endure.

They turned and paddled away, those of them that could still paddle. Corpses littered the bay; our shafts pursued them until they were beyond range. Then the voice of Thorvald lifted from the stern.

"Are any of you hurt?" he demanded, and we told him no one. "Then I am," said he. "An arrow flew between the storm-board and the shield and hit me in the arm. Here is the arrow, and I think it will be my bane."

It was not a bad hurt, but I remembered what the woman had said about poison, and Thorvald remembered it also. We made back to the shore, and the sweat of death was upon Thorvald; none the less, he landed with us and went to the woman's body.

"Take her up," he said, "and bury her on the ridge above. Bury me there also, where I was minded to build a house. Maybe it will come true as I said, that I shall remain here. Bury me there and place a cross by my head and another by my feet, and call this ridge Cross Cape. And, Arne! Overhead you shall fly from a tree the Raven flag of Eric the Red, and put Biorn and Atli under the ground also."

He died a little after.

WE took counsel and left this place straightway, after obeying his orders, and went to find the rest of our men at Leif's houses. And then it was I missed the thrall Romuna, and would have gone by that way again to find him, but someone had seen him running off into the forest, so I knew he had taken to freedom.

When we were back at Brattalid next summer, I told Leif Ericson all that had been said and done regarding his brother's death. Color came into his face, and anger into his eyes.

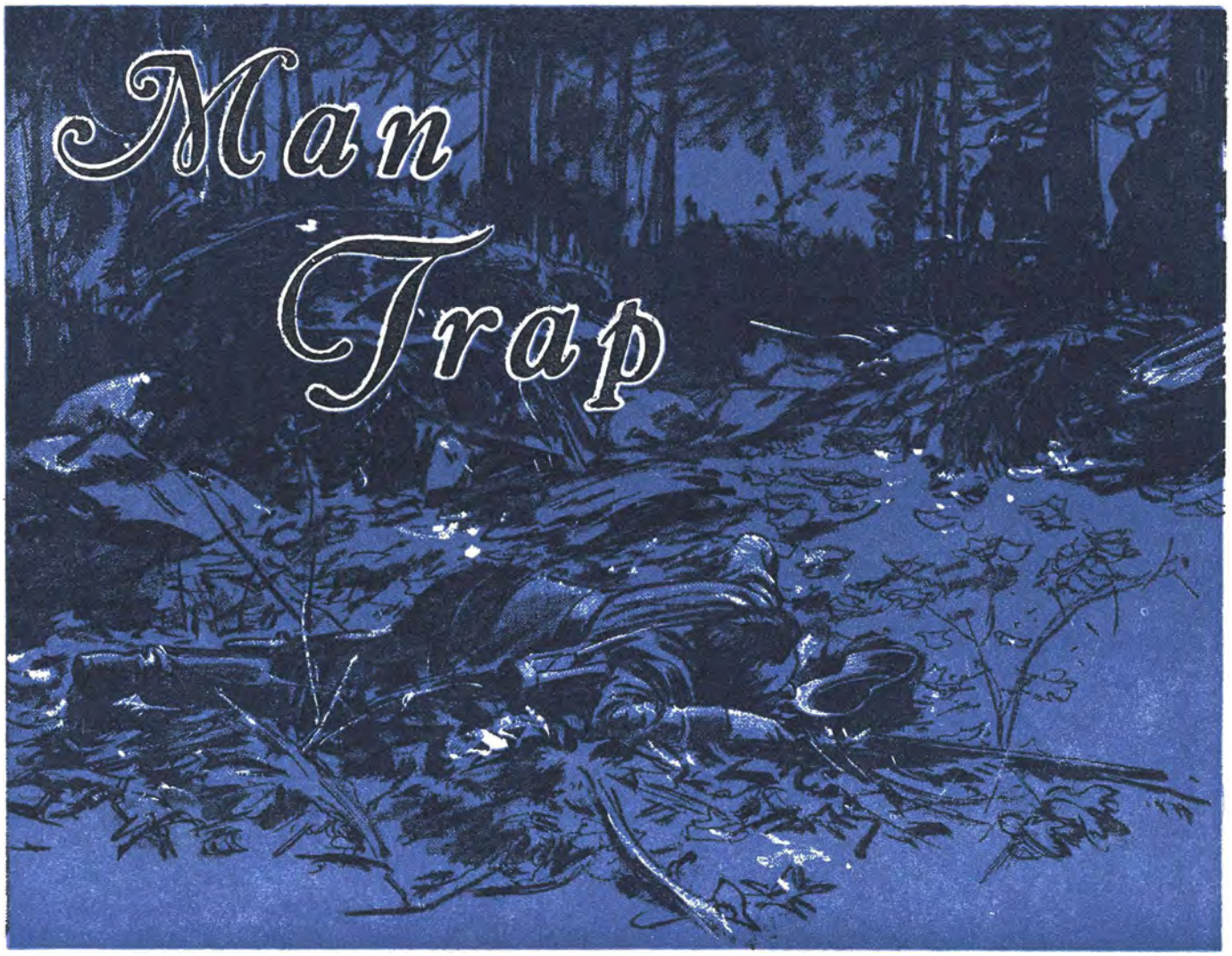
"It is more fitting that any great man should come to his end by the doing of trolls and warlocks," said he, "than because of a heathen woman. So let it be said of Thorvald, and see to it that you keep a close mouth."

My thought ran that he was angered because we had left the flag there. I asked if this were so.

"What better use could there be for a flag, than to mark a brave man's grave?" said he.

VICTORY IS *in the* HEART

The next story in this series appears in our forthcoming September issue.



FIRST and last, the Shuju Nuri business was pure melodrama. Tellegan came back to the Grant Hotel in Basel at four o'clock. "Two British agents are coming through the barbed wire and mines along the German frontier tonight," he told Wyatt. "They're bringing with them the notorious Shuju Nuri; and they'll need clothing, new passports, guns. The British here are short-handed, and I've agreed to help them. You and Sunburn drive out the Colheim road at ten tonight. At Wiese you'll pick up Hans Lichter, a Swiss in English employ. He'll guide you to the meeting-place. After you've fixed them to pass Swiss inspection, you'll drive them to the British legation."

Wyatt had been standing at the window staring down at the quaint Swiss street. At Tellegan's order, he turned incredulously.

"Did I hear straight?" he asked. "Did you say two British agents were bringing Shuju Nuri out of Germany? *The* Shuju Nuri?"

"Yes."

At this, even Sunburn Sanderson, the third of the diplomatic secret agents in Switzerland, looked up from rolling a cigarette.

"You mean," he said, "that this Nuri is coming out of his own free will?"

"No," said Tellegan, "they've kidnaped him; they're bringing him out."

A silence fell on the room, broken only by the street noises from below. Wyatt was thinking: "It's fantastic what the English will do when they're desperate."

He knew the story of Shuju Nuri. For two years this son of a Hindu father and a Pathan mother had been broadcasting from Berlin to restless northern India and the Afghan tribes along the Khyber Pass. His flaming rabble-rousing voice, his fervor, his passionate hatred that could charge a lie with the scalding conviction of truth, had kept northern India in a ferment. With his less famous but efficient brother Lallu Shu Nuri, Shuju was organizing rebellion; the Germans were shipping arms in by transport plane,—or submarine; no one knew which,—and the situation was critical. With the Japs in Burma, with Germany threatening the Near East, if there was a big revolt up north the chances of defending India were few. Shuju Nuri was keeping that revolt alive. And now, unable to quiet him any other way, two British agents were forcibly bringing him out of Germany! With him silenced, Lallu Shu Nuri could not carry on.

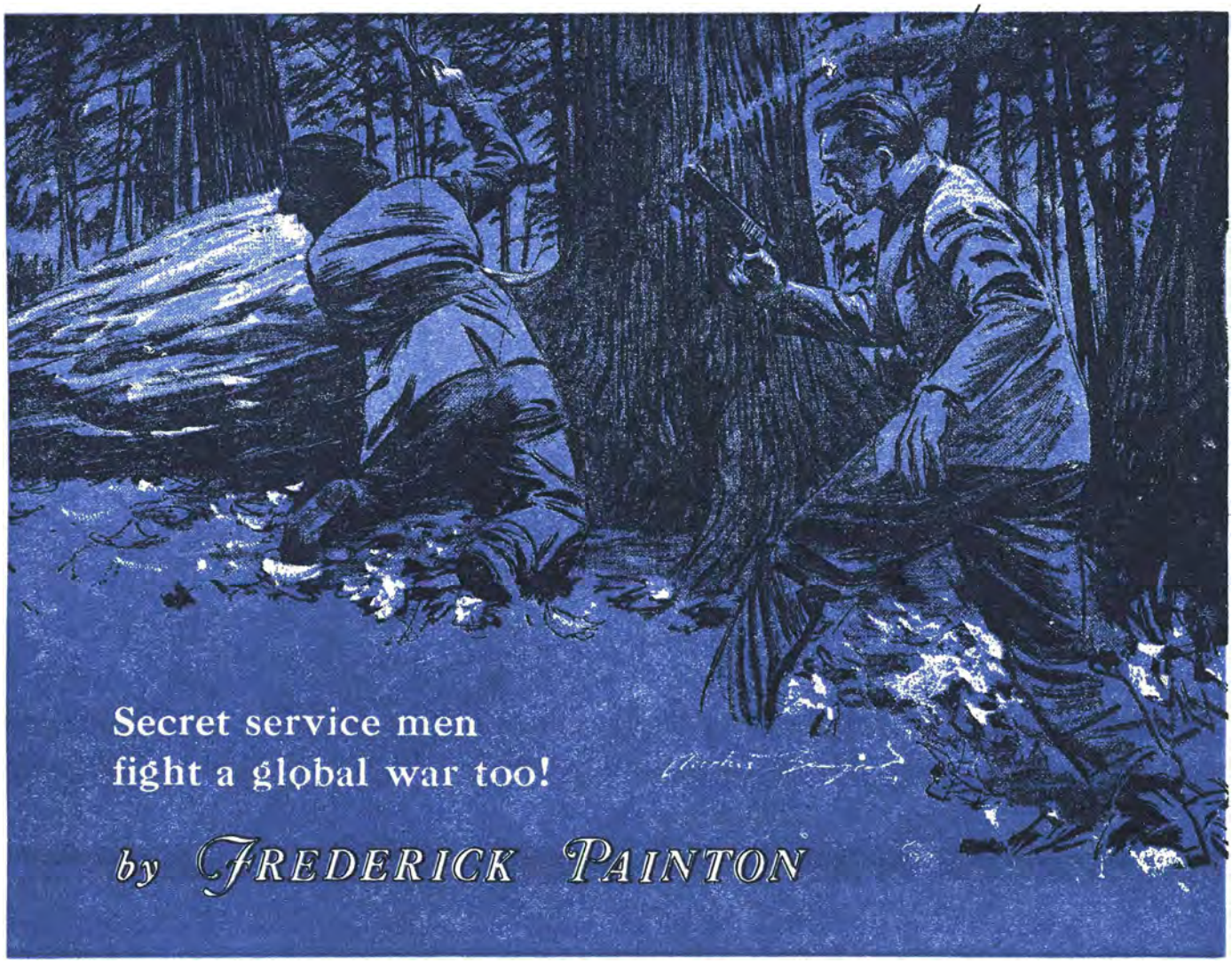
It was magnificently bold. Only England, which had agents with thirty years of residence in the Reich, could even have considered it. Only they would have attempted to bring the man out alive instead of shooting him on the spot. Thus, his confession would yield clues to his leaders and followers of importance in India, and smash the threat completely.

"Well," Wyatt broke the silence, "for once I'm pleased to do a job for the British."

"Yeah," nodded Sunburn, "even for that Sir John Stockton-Wells, and God knows I can't take *that* potato even with gravy."

Wyatt laughed; for Stockton-Wells, resident British head agent, was a rather arrogant dish for the Americans.

Wyatt and Sunburn gathered clothing, food, passports (forged), a bottle of wine—and at the agreed time set out in the Rénault sedan. They were glad of the adventure; it was a joyful change from the monotony of keeping books on money paid for information, hiring and firing spies to create an espionage organization inside Germany.



At Wiese a bearded man, dirty as a charcoal-burner, stepped briefly into their headlight glow. *"Guten Abend,"* he said when Sunburn had stopped. "It makes a nice spring."

At the code signal Wyatt opened the door. The man jumped in. He smelled of dirt, sweat and lack of soap. Wyatt took an instant dislike to him.

In a harsh voice the man Lichter said: "Three kilometers beyond St. Jacob, a woodcutter's road goes left. Take that. We will hide the car there and go the rest by foot. The Germans are watchful."

The car went on. Wyatt, who had made the trip to the German wire before, was aware of the danger the two daring Britishers and their prisoner underwent—the barbed wire, the sentries, the hidden land mines that a two-pound pressure would detonate. The German guards did not hesitate to shoot at any unusual movement on the Swiss side; two or three times they had actually chased escaping refugees onto Swiss territory.

The woodcutter's trail through the forest was barely discernible in the blued headlights, and Wyatt was relieved when Lichter said: "You must stop here; we must continue on foot."

The guide climbed down. The fattening moon was up by now, but here in the gloom of the forest it only made the shadows blacker. Every so often Lichter would curse, and tell them to be more quiet. Lichter moved deftly, never hesitating. They were approaching the Rhine this side of Hunigen. Presently the Swiss slowed down. "You can go no farther," he whispered. "Remain here, and I will bring these others to you. I know where the mines are."

Wyatt and Sunburn crouched down in the edge of the little glade. An instant later Lichter vanished in the blackness. There was nothing now to do but wait, and it was a boring task. Ten minutes passed. A dog on the German side howled mournfully. Once Wyatt thought he heard a man's soft whistle. Twenty minutes passed.

SUDDENLY Sunburn tensed. "Did you hear that?" he whispered.

"What?" Wyatt twisted, moonlight on his face. This time he heard the sound—behind him—a slight clink, as if something metallic had struck a tree.

Thoroughly alarmed now, Wyatt drew his gun. He heard a soft click as Sunburn released the safety of his .45.

"That monkey's trapped us," Sunburn mouthed. "Those are soldiers behind us."

Wyatt knew it was so, even if he could not understand the reason. He glided noiselessly to the left into the deep pines, got down on his knees, hung his gun by the trigger ring and began to crawl. His heart thudded suffocatingly.

A few seconds later he saw a dark shadow that was not a tree. A man with a coal-scuttle helmet, and high lights along a rifle, was on his left—another beyond him—directly on the path they had traversed, cutting off all escape. Then, from behind, came a slight clank, a shuffle that might have been a boot feeling for a foothold. Closing in!

Wyatt felt his stomach twist and go cold. But he kept crawling. His sensitive fingers felt for soft earth that would cover a buried mine. He knew that for some reason Lichter had tricked them, and might have led them through an open space into Germany. He kept veering wide to his left. He seemed to be clear of the trap when he suddenly saw a form loom up almost upon him. Over his shoulder a sheet of fire flashed. A bullet fired by Sun-

Illustrated by Austin Briggs

"I will make a signal from my compartment—with my handkerchief: like this."

burn fanned his ear. The shadow screamed and fell at his feet.

"Now," said Sunburn, "it's time to run like hell."

They ran, twisting, dodging, pausing for a few seconds to listen, rest their panting lungs. The pursuit cut in, but too late. They were clear, racing to get a charcoal-burner's hut behind them, when suddenly a man ran out of it. Here in the clearing the moonlight etched him with silver. He ran lumberingly, but he hadn't a chance. In four bounds Wyatt and Sunburn closed in. Sunburn threw a right hook that knocked the man into Wyatt's arms.

"Hang onto that guy," said Sunburn grimly. "He knows the answers to tonight's crossword puzzle."

WYATT held Lichter, the man who had led them into the trap, and with Sunburn's help dragged him to the car. Silently they drove back to the Grand Hotel. Tellegan was anxiously waiting up, and blinked in astonishment as Wyatt shoved the dirty Lichter into the room.

"That's not Shuju Nuri!" he cried. "What—"

"Wait," said Wyatt, and explained the narrow escape. "Those Germans had a trick to get me and Sunburn into Germany," he concluded. "All the rest Lichter can tell us."

What followed was not pleasant. Lichter was sullen; he refused to talk. Sunburn doubled the fist that once had knocked Jim Braddock down, and said: "I know a language he'll understand. You guys turn your backs."

Wyatt and Tellegan did. . . . Presently Lichter, sobbing and broken, said he'd talk.

"The two men who were to bring Nuri," he whimpered, "were caught. Before they died, one confessed the scheme. Here in Basel, Herr Kapitan Ernst von Maxsen has employed me to tell him what Sir John Stockton-Wells does at the frontier. Herr von Maxsen ordered me to lead you as planned by Sir John. He laid the trap. He particularly wanted to capture two *Amerikaner* spies, as he said they could tell him much he must know."

"How much did he pay you?" Wyatt asked.

"The regular price. Fifty francs."

Fifty francs! Nine dollars, roughly.

"We come cheap," said Wyatt.

He stood in gloomy disappointment while Tellegan telephoned Sir John Stockton-Wells. It was neither Wyatt's nor Sunburn's fault, this failure, but it was their first, and it hurt.

Nor was Sir John Stockton-Wells gentle on their feelings when he arrived. He was a chubby, red-faced man, with a broad accent and a complete faith in the superiority of the British ruling class. Immediately he said: "There must be some mistake. Your men have blundered, Major Tellegan."

The white-haired chief of the diplomatic secret service frowned and made Lichter repeat his story. It finally dawned on Sir John that he had been nicely had by the Germans.

"Two fine men gone to pay the piper for this!" he sighed. "Well, that's the end of it. We'll never get Shuju Nuri now."

Irritated, Wyatt snapped: "Why not?"

Unprovoked, Sir John replied: "Because we've tried everything else. Nuri hates women; a Viennese cinema actress is in Dachau now because we paid her to test her wiles. Nuri hates England too much for a bribe. He can't be persuaded to leave Berlin since he went there in 1939. He had two bodyguards. He doubtless has more now—and the Gestapo has been alarmed." He sat down heavily. "No, this was the last attempt to bring him within reach."

Wyatt, during this, had been remembering Shuju Nuri's voice on the radio, was trying now to read the man behind it—his character.

"I'm not so sure," he said abstractedly.

"Not sure? Don't be an ass, man. Do you think that if there were any possible way to get Nuri out of Germany, our Foreign Office would have overlooked it?"

Wyatt caught Tellegan's warning look, but it made no difference.

"Just possibly an idea could incubate elsewhere," he said dryly.

Sir John's eyebrows went high.

"Really, now, you're a bit sarcastic —damned bad taste, y'know. Also, let me say, if you can find a way to get Nuri out of Berlin and within reach, the F.O. will give heartfelt thanks—and I will stand a champagne dinner at the Metropole."

It was good-humored, of course, but it was a challenge. And Wyatt took

it. In any case his encounter next day with Herr Kapitan Ernst von Maxsen would have spurred him on to retrieve the defeat.

Von Maxsen, tall, square, proud of his Heidelberg scar and his blue blood, stopped Wyatt near the dining-room.

"So glad to confirm our belief you and your friends are American secret agents. Now we shall know what to expect."

"Will you? I wonder!" Wyatt's eyes were gray granite chips.

"*Jawohl!*" said Von Maxsen blandly. "I am certain we can arrange proof enough for the Swiss police. They'd enjoy escorting you over the border."

ALL that day and night and until dawn, Wyatt, Sunburn and Major Tellegan wrestled with the problem. And as the sun came over the mountain peaks, they had a scheme. The problem was, would it work?

"The approach," said Wyatt wearily, "has got to be his vanity. It's colossal. He thinks of himself as a heaven-sent messiah, and that he alone can lead."

Tellegan nodded, still scribbling messages to American agents in Italy.

"A lot of our people there," he said, "hold high places in the Fascist hierarchy. If anybody can get to Mussolini, they can."

"Yeah," said Sunburn, yawning, "but will old Musso do it? He's second fiddle to Hitler—"

"Mussolini hates German penetration in the Near East and India," said Tellegan. "He'll do anything to oppose Hitler there."

The messages went off that night. Then for days the three agents eagerly scanned the Basel *Zeitung* and hung on the portable American radio that brought them German D.N.B. official broadcasts. . . .

Ten days later Wyatt spotted the item in the *Zeitung* and yelled in triumph: "Look—it's done!"

He held out the D.N.B. item for both to see. It read:

> Shuju Nuri, famous Indian independence leader, has been honored by Premier Benito Mussolini with the order of the Imperial Italian Crown. This, the most coveted decoration in Italy, will be personally awarded in Rome by Il Duce at an early date. This order, usually conferred only on leaders of states, is rumored to mean the recognition by both Germany and Italy of Nuri's nationalist government of North India.

"A bauble does what a blonde or a bank-roll couldn't," grinned Sunburn. Then his face fell. "But say, you two, how do we know when he's to leave Berlin? Joe Goebbels isn't going to advertise it."

"Exactly," muttered Wyatt. "And suppose he flies in a German bomber."

"He's afraid to fly," said Tellegan. "And as for the date—I'll talk to Sir John."

Wyatt put in three insufferably dull days waiting. The lust of the manhunt, the fervor of creating a mantrap, was upon him; and the dull paper-work of directing and paying spies was intolerable. Sunburn was no better. Then on the third evening Tellegan came in with Sir John Stockton-Wells. A third man followed, a small slimly built Hindu. Sir John paid Wyatt the courtesy of a handshake and a feeble grin.

"I think I shall buy that champagne dinner, and gladly," chuckled Sir John. "Now, meet Lallu Chu. Real name is Nuri. Shuju's brother."

Wyatt stared in blank astonishment at this arrogant-eyed man, who was hardly less famous than Shuju himself. How did this happen? What could make Lallu betray his brother?

The Hindu bowed and said: "Most gratifying, Sahib."

"He came from Berlin. My message," said Sir John. "You know he works for Shuju—you didn't know he also works for us when it's safe and profitable. He can arrange to identify the train Shuju will travel on. For a price. It's your pidgin now, so I turn him over."

He went out. An awkward silence fell on the room—awkward, that is, for all but Lallu. He smiled, completely at ease.

"My price," said Lallu, "is ten thousand dollars American. You may pay it in Swiss francs if you like."

IN this business of being a spymaster, Wyatt had met scoundrels and bluffs, thieves and murderers, liars and crooks. But he looked in astonishment now at a man who would sell his brother to certain death for a cheap price. Lallu caught his glance, sensed the contempt in it.

"I hate Shuju," he said easily. "I would kill him myself, but I am afraid. Now, if you are clever, you will kill him for me."

His glance shifted to Tellegan as the leader. Tellegan was evidently fighting his inward disgust; and stung, Lallu cried: "You do not know the facts. All his life Shuju has stolen from me. He has taken my money, my first wife, my friends—the love of my people. He is a vampire. Yet what has he done that I or another could not do better? He shouts for revolt, and I can shout sweeter. He yells for arms and armies, yet what little of strategy he knows I taught him."

He broke off abruptly. "That he is my brother born within a year of me, is an accident of fate. I have hated him through a hundred thousand reincarnations."

Silence fell, which Tellegan finally broke.

"How can we know you will keep your word to reveal the train on which your brother goes to Italy?"

"Sir John Stockton-Wells holds my wife as hostage for my loyalty," said Lallu. "She is to bear me a child—a man-child, I am confident. Is not that enough?"

Tellegan made no sign other than to go to the strong-box where was kept the money with which the spy chain was paid. He counted out Swiss thousand-franc notes into the effeminate brown hand.

"Here are two thousand dollars American," said Tellegan. "The balance will be paid when you have done the thing you have pledged."

The Hindu pocketed the money.

"My brother hates to travel," he said, "but he will go soon. Much is at stake. Have, then, a man of yours at the Rieben station—day and night. I will be on the train of my brother. I will make a signal from my compartment—with my handkerchief: like this."

He had taken out a handkerchief, and with a swift roll of his hands it became a white O. Day or night, even in a blacked-out train, such a signal could be seen.

Tellegan nodded.

"Very well. We will maintain a watch. Our men will board the train, and if all be well, you will get your money then."

Lallu smiled, bowed, and with a careless shrug walked out the door. Sunburn followed, locked the door and held his nose suggestively.

"The biggest bad smell we've ever met."

Wyatt shrugged. "Just a hunch, but I don't trust him. This looks too simple."

Tellegan's tall spare figure paced the room. He was bent, worried, and in that instant he reminded Wyatt startlingly of Lincoln's last portrait.

"Sometimes," he said at length, "the most difficult affair becomes simple because of the right approach. A ball of twine, started wrong, defies unwinding, but if the right strand is plucked, it is easy."

He paused, but Wyatt did not speak, and he went on: "It is not ours to pick our tools. The man is a knave, but he can help save India, and we must use him."

Then abruptly: "You and Sunburn will go to Rieben tomorrow night."

BY the time Wyatt and Sunburn were to go, the rest of the scheme to seize Shuju had been planned. Sir John told them the details.

"We have—er—friends in unoccupied France. In the Drance River Valley. We'll have a plane there. The Rome-Berlin Express goes close to the French frontier at Naveraz. The train will be stopped there by us when you send a telegram to Vouvry. You

will have Shuju Nuri ready to deliver. We will have motorcars waiting. He'll be in Croydon within seven hours."

Wyatt stared at Sir John. The way the man talked, you'd think it was simple to kidnap a man off a train crowded with Swiss and Germans.

Sir John said doubtfully: "Do you think you need help? I shall be glad to send an experienced man to help you."

Wyatt forced his voice to be calm: "We can do our end."

Sir John said no more, and Wyatt and Sunburn packed. As they were going out the lobby, Captain von Maxsen was just entering.

"*Guten Abend!*" His cold eyes surveyed them. "You travel, Herren?"

"To America," said Wyatt, and added ingenuously: "As if you did not know!"

The German smiled.

"Too bad you *Amerikaners* did not stay there from the beginning!"

Wyatt and Sunburn then began a most intricate journey. They flew to Geneva, rode across the lake to Evian-les-Bains on the little steamer. Here they hired a smaller boat which took them to Lausanne, and when the Swiss Air Service's transport plane for Bern and Zurich took off, they were aboard it. By now they had shaken all Gestapo men trailing them. And then the midnight *rapide* from Zurich to Rieben, via Basel.

Then began a boresome job of watching all the trains from Germany. By day this could be done with binoculars from the window of the Brauchhaus. The Swiss customs men examined the train here, so there was a delay of nearly an hour. They could see the signal and still get aboard. But the hours passed uneventfully. Wyatt had plenty of time to think, and he became more and more uneasy.

"I am sure there is more to this than we've seen," he muttered on the fourth day. "Why are the Germans letting Nuri accept this medal? The man's precious where he is. Why let the publicity go out that he gets it?"

"Search me," said Sunburn. "Why?"

"The Germans are playing a game too, and we happen to fit in."

BUT try as he might, Wyatt could not solve the puzzle. Then on the next day they saw the signal. It was from a first-class compartment on the third coach of the Rome-Berlin Express.

Wyatt and Sunburn were very cautious about getting tickets and climbing aboard—and it was well they were. As Wyatt mounted the third coach, he saw Captain Ernst von Maxsen in the fourth. More, he saw twenty or more German officers in full uniform in the same coach. And there were other men who, he was sure, were Gestapo agents. During the customs wait, he overheard a few fragments of conversation that told him these Germans were going to Italy on a special mission. . . . What was it?

Even Sunburn saw the difficulties of their mission magnified by this development. And when, after the train departed on its run south, Gestapo men rode in the aisle of Coach Number Two, Wyatt almost despaired. The Germans suspected a trick, were prepared. But it was too late to change the main plan now.

He carefully reexamined his map of the railroad line, figuring the many tunnels and especially their length. Against their length he figured the train's running time, which enabled him to calculate the minutes the train would be in the Taravo Tunnel. This was the longest tunnel near Naveraz.

It figured to between five and six minutes. In that time he would succeed or fail.

"You've got that 1903 penny with the Indian head," he said to Sunburn.

"Yeah, and I got the fuse-box located. I can reach it in three jumps, and the penny will short every light on the train. It'll take them longer than five minutes to fix the short-circuit."

Wyatt nodded; now there remained only to verify that Shuju Nuri was aboard. He risked Von Maxsen's presence and walked along the coach-aisle as if to the diner.

In Coach Two, Lallu was leaning on the brass rail staring out of the wide window at the gorgeous Swiss landscape. The window was highly polished. He could see Wyatt, but he did not move. Instead he blew his nose, and holding his handkerchief, did so awkwardly with four fingers extended.

Compartment Four!

Wyatt moved on. A heavy-set German stood in front of the compartment, and barely moved enough for Wyatt to squeeze by.

A woman sat inside. She was heavily veiled. Wyatt stared. What was this? Beyond her was a man muffled in a greatcoat, his Homburg hat tipped over his face. His hands were a soft brown.

Shuju Nuri?

Wyatt could not be certain. The build, general appearance, indicated that it was. But in that brief glimpse Wyatt could see nothing of the face.

He went on, luckily found the diner crowded, and returned. He lingered near Lallu until the electric train dived into a tunnel, a short one, and the lights were not on. Instantly he slid through the darkness toward Lallu.

The Hindu's voice came sibilantly to his ear.

"The balance of the money, Sahib. You have seen him."

Wyatt smiled grimly. "I have seen a woman and a man who might be Shuju. I am not certain."

"But I have told you so. You see the guards, the many officers?"

Wyatt had separated the funds entrusted to him. "Here is half," he said. "I will give you the rest when I know it is Shuju."

"You fool!" came Lallu's voice. "Why do you think those officers and sailors are aboard, if Shuju be not here? They take him to India by submarine to begin the revolt."

FOR an instant Wyatt could not believe his ears. India? Submarine? Then in a flash he saw the brilliant genius of the German plan. No wonder the Nazis had permitted publicity to Mussolini's proposal to award a decoration to Shuju: no wonder they let a rabble-rouser whose voice was worth an army corps leave Berlin! This was all cover to get Shuju Nuri onto a submarine which could find a thousand secret places on India's undefended coast to put him ashore.

Wyatt, teeth clenched, could visualize that arrival. Shuju would be received like a god, be the spark in the powder-keg: the leader of thousands of maddened fanatics who would sweep all before them.

With Japan pounding from Burma, and Germany from Iraq—then India would be lost, and perhaps with it the war itself.

Wyatt took a big breath. No matter the cost, Shuju Nuri must not reach India. Even if he must be shot in cold blood!

In the reflection from the train window, Wyatt could see Lallu's sardonic smile. Another thought struck Wyatt; why had Lallu betrayed the one chance of success India might have to revolt? The man's effeminate face told him nothing.

"Now," said Lallu softly, "you are convinced? You will not try to abduct him, but shoot while he is helpless?"

"The balance of the money," said Wyatt curtly, "when we have him."

He moved on, fully aware now not only of the stark peril of their adventure, but of the intrigue surrounding every angle of it. He thought of Lallu and smiled grimly.

"There's one rat due for a surprise!" he muttered.

The train roared out into the bright sunshine. As Wyatt turned into his compartment Captain Ernst von Maxsen came through the coach door. Wyatt ducked his head, went hastily in. He kept his back turned, felt Von Maxsen's shadow pass. Had the Gestapo man seen him, recognized him? He did not think so.

Sunburn, muffled up, pretending to nap, said: "He didn't stare in. I think we're okay. How does it look?"

Wyatt said: "It will be touch and go—about two minutes from the time the train hits the Taravo Tunnel."

A boresome job. . . . watching all trains. Then they saw the signal.

He did not tell Sunburn of his discovery about the submarine. But he made a quiet decision.

"There's an empty compartment at the head of the coach," he said. "You stay there. And if any one but me comes in—act."

Sunburn gave him a queer look but nodded. And he obeyed when Wyatt told him to seize one of the dark moments in a tunnel to make the change. Never in his life was Wyatt to be more overjoyed at a decision of his. For at Gillon, less than a half-hour from the Taravo Tunnel, the door of his compartment suddenly opened. He got one quick look at Ernst von Maxsen, and then before he could make a move to defend himself, one of Von Maxsen's followers plunged bodily upon him.

Wyatt never had a chance to resist. The man had a blackjack; smothering Wyatt with his body, he swung it smartly. At the blow the scene went black. Half senseless, Wyatt was jerked upright.

"Bring him into Compartment Four," said Von Maxsen calmly; "then we'll get the other."

Wyatt had little memory of that trip in the German's arms. It was much later that his head cleared and he looked into Von Maxsen's hard face.

"You should have gone to America," said the Gestapo agent, "because now you will go to Rome. And there you will be a spy and treated as such."

In Rome! Good Lord! He had never thought about that. But of course, if he was forced to remain aboard the train, Von Maxsen was right. In Italy he could be tortured, hanged. That invisible frontier made his life forfeit.

"I'd like to know," said Von Maxsen, "just now, at least, how you knew Shuju Nuri was traveling by this train."

Wyatt remained silent. Von Maxsen laughed harshly.

"I shall get some amusement in making you tell, in Rome," he said.

"I imagine you will," said Wyatt. "Only, the Swiss will never let you take me over the Italian frontier. I—"

"The Swiss will say nothing," cut in the German roughly. "You are an escaped murderer, and we will have the evidence to prove it."

WYATT nodded. Trust the Gestapo to plan with extreme care to meet all such contingencies! Forged evidence, of course.

Von Maxsen grinned savagely.

"*Jawohl,* Herr Wyatt," he said, "we are not such fools as you take us for. We have our own plans—"

The door to the compartment flew open, and the man who had slugged Wyatt reëntered. In German he said: "Herr Kapitan, the other has escaped. I have searched the train, and he is not aboard."

Wyatt's heart leaped. Good old Sunburn! Maybe this mess could be solved yet.

"*Dummkopf!*" growled Von Maxsen. "The train has not stopped. He was aboard. He still is. Go find him, and do not return until you have. Use the other men if necessary."

The man bowed and went out. A moment later Lallu came in. His eyes strayed over Wyatt with no recognition. He sat down beside the muffled man. The latter moved, and Wyatt saw now that it was not Shuju Nuri. There was no resemblance of feature.

Von Maxsen locked the door, turned back to Wyatt.

"Now," he said coldly, "I could have killed you—and would have, had there been need. But I delay because you shall tell me how you knew Shuju Nuri was to be aboard this train."

On Von Maxsen's wrist was a small strap watch. Silky black hairs came long over the leather and the watch-face. It was Berlin war-time, an hour faster than Swiss time. But the whirling second-hand told Wyatt he had roughly three minutes before the train dived into the Taravo Tunnel. Already the conductor or someone had switched on the lights.

Wyatt sneered at the German.

"I'll tell you nothing!" he declared.

Von Maxsen scowled. With a sudden movement he crushed out the coal of his cigar against Wyatt's right ear. The pain was savage. Wyatt permitted himself to yell with pain, tried to strike back. Von Maxsen struck him across the face.

"I'll flay your hide until you answer," he growled.

Wyatt deliberately cringed, groaned. "No, *bitte!*" he cried. "I'll tell! It was Lallu—Shuju Nuri's brother."

His eyes as he spoke were on the two men and the woman across the compartment. The woman gave a tremendous start.

Lallu leaped up, yelled: "The man lies in his teeth. I told him nothing."

Von Maxsen said softly: "Herr Wyatt, if you are lying—"

"He has four thousand dollars' worth of Swiss francs on him," said Wyatt. "Look at their numbers. In my pocket are four thousand more. You will see the numbers on both packets run consecutively."

For an instant the compartment was in an uproar. The woman cried out; Lallu tried in vain to dodge the blow that Von Maxsen struck. He fell to the floor under its impact, and Von Maxsen was on top of him, tearing at his pockets. The woman drew a gun and threatened Wyatt. A moment later Von Maxsen rose, holding the money. Wyatt, while he was half-senseless, had been relieved of his gun; but now the Gestapo man searched him again and took his money. The comparison of numbers was made. His face grew gray.

"It was you, Lallu," he said grimly, "and you will wish you had died before doing this trickery."

Wyatt was watching the sag of Von Maxsen's pocket where his gun was. Suddenly the train roared into the tunnel. There was a hollow roaring in Wyatt's ears from the increased air-pressure, until he swallowed. A minute went by. Two! But the lights stayed on. Good God, had Sunburn been taken too—when everything depended on his shorting the lights? In desperation Wyatt began to edge unobtrusively to reach Von Maxsen's gun pocket. Lallu had got off the floor, sobbing.

At that instant the lights went out.

Instantly Wyatt's hand streaked for Von Maxsen's gun. It was not there. Neither was Von Maxsen. There was no time to grope. Von Maxsen would shoot now. Wyatt hurled himself to the floor and slid toward the woman.

His hand clapped over her mouth, and he flung her body in front of him. He had memorized that compartment, and he thrust her now toward the door. Lallu was cursing, at his right. Wyatt said softly: "Lallu, you know what Von Maxsen will do to you. Your only chance now is to help me."

He had betrayed Lallu to get that aid. It remained in the next few seconds to see if his scheme would work.

The woman spoke hoarsely: "Do not shoot, Herr Kapitan. He has me in front of him." She was shaking with terror.

Now Wyatt thrust the woman's body roughly toward the door, and Von Maxsen cursed. The woman howled, and Wyatt smashed her against the German. At the same time he groped with his left hand and encountered Von Maxsen's right, holding the gun.

HE let go the woman, clung to the arm with both hands and gave it a tremendous twist. Von Maxsen screamed in pain—the cracking of the bone was audible even above the uproar. And as the gun fell, Wyatt fell to the floor, groped for it and was up in an instant, the weapon in his hand.

A match flared yellowly—in the hands of the muffled man who had impersonated Shuju Nuri.

The light hung there only for an instant, for Lallu leaped upon the man and knocked him flat. But in that brief time Wyatt saw Sunburn at the compartment door. The big American hit that door with two hundred pounds of solid bone and muscle, and he came through in a rain of glass and sash-splinters.

Behind him a flashlight glowed. Nuri's two outside bodyguards were thrusting forward. One had a Luger pistol which he was hastily mounting on a hollow steel stock to make of it a small machine-gun. The other had a short-snouted automatic.

Wyatt shot this man in the body just as he was leveling to shoot Sunburn in the back of the head. The light went out. Outside in the darkness was an uproar of voices, somebody shouting, "*Wo ist?*" in a silly confused voice.

Wyatt grabbed the woman as she ran out the door. Beyond him at the end of the corridor were train officials and lights. In a few seconds now the entire trainload of German officers and Gestapo would become aware of what went on, and descend *en masse*.

He said quietly to Sunburn: "Grab Lallu when you find him. We'll be clear of the tunnel in a few seconds."

He thrust the woman into the corridor by the main window. Even as he did so the darkness faded. The next instant the train shot into the sunlight.

"Tell them not to shoot, Shuju," Wyatt said to the woman. "You'll get it first."

The woman threw up the veil, and showed Shuju Nuri's terrified face.

"They'll shoot," he cried, and muttered something in his own language.

THE corridor was crowded with uniformed men. A colonel was yelling for passageway and demanding *bei Gott und Teufel* to have it. But the very press of confused men prevented any concerted rush in an aisle that was barely wide enough for a man's shoulders. One of the Gestapo men fired, but loudly shouted protests stopped that.

Wyatt raised his gun and smashed out the plate glass of the window. Now Sunburn was alongside him, Lallu as a shield. Sunburn was grinning wolfishly, showing his gold back teeth.

For only a few seconds did this confusion, bewilderment and crowding bodies last. Von Maxsen, despite his cracked arm, staggered from the compartment.

"*Amerikaners!*" he yelled. "They kidnap Shuju Nuri of the Indian movement. Help! Help!"

In a desperate display of courage he turned and hurled himself at Wyatt and Shuju. Wyatt could have shot the man at point-blank, yet something stayed his trigger finger. Instead he bashed the weapon into Von Maxsen's face in a chopping motion, and the man fell back, his face streaming blood.

But the situation had instantly clarified for the mass of men who now pressed close. Wyatt and Sunburn fired, choosing arms and legs as targets. But the front mass was pushed on by the back mass.

In that instant the emergency brakes slammed on with such violence that the passageway became a mass of falling men. Wyatt went down, Shuju on top of him. The Hindu turned in a frenzy and tried to claw Wyatt's eyes out.

"Let me go," he screamed. "Kill him!"

Wyatt slugged him, and got to his feet. Sunburn was swinging his gun like an ax at any head that bobbed up close. The train was stopping so swiftly it was difficult to hold their feet. Soon it was barely moving. Wyatt grabbed Shuju Nuri, hurled him out the window. He jumped out himself, yelling, "Stay under the side of the train, Sunburn—they'll be shooting."

Then Sunburn, with Lallu, lit on the ground beside Wyatt. Still holding the Hindus as shields, they backed crablike toward the engine. Hands and faces and upper halves of bodies emerged from the windows with broken glass. More windows were being broken, and other heads came out. Wyatt fired twice. The heads snapped back like turtles' into their shells. There was a shout from behind Wyatt:

"This way! Down to the road! We're covering you."

He heard the purring rattle of a sub-machine gun, saw holes stitched in the side of the car. He thought, then, queerly enough: "The Swiss are going to raise hell about this."

But he went down the embankment. Hands snatched Shuju Nuri from him.

"Into the car!" It was Sir John Stockton-Wells' voice.

Wyatt obeyed. Sunburn leaped in beside him, still dragging Lallu. Wyatt now saw what had stopped the train so swiftly. An explosion on the side of the railroad cut, probably made with hand-grenades, had loosened the late spring snow and the rubble be-

The train was stopping so swiftly it was difficult to hold their feet.

neath to make a slide that thoroughly blocked the right of way.

That was the last Wyatt saw there. The car and the other behind it shot away at high speed, and headed directly for the French border.

"Plane there," said Stockton-Wells, from the front seat. "Where's Shuju Nuri—or did you fail to get him?"

Wyatt pointed to the woman. "Take off the seven veils," he said, "and you'll find Shuju."

The Hindu cursed venomously.

Wyatt chuckled. "I felt a lot of whisker-bristle when I clapped a hand over her mouth, so I knew she was a man." He told them about the daring scheme to take Shuju to India by U-boat. "We were nearly tricked," he concluded.

Sir John's round face was sober at the thought of what might have happened. Then suddenly he smiled and held out his hand.

"That was quick clever thinking, Wyatt, and damned daring action," he said. "I'll pay that wager gladly."

He paused, puzzled. "But why did you bring along Lallu? He'll be exposed as our man now."

"He *was* exposed," said Wyatt quietly. "Not as your agent, but as his own. He was, as usual, playing both sides against the middle. If we caught and killed Shuju, Lallu was going to go on to India and be the new messiah. Building on his brother's name, he was going to get the power he had been so jealous of in Shuju. He wanted Sunburn and me caught, so we'd kill Shuju rather than let him go on—which I would have done."

SIR JOHN whistled softly. Shuju Nuri began to weep hysterically, and Lallu Nuri cursed them in every language except English.

Sir John said no more until they reached the grain-fields where the plane waited. Then:

"Wyatt," he said very softly, "you've thought me a little stuffy—and doubtless I was. But we've both learned something from this, and I especially. Let's be friends."

The man was so British in his faults and virtues that Wyatt warmed to him. Presently the plane took off, and Wyatt and Sunburn went back to Basel. . . .

The final incident in the affair took place a week later, on the evening the three went down for dinner. In full dress, wearing all his miniature medals, his right arm still in a sling, Captain Ernst von Maxsen stood near the dining-room entrance.

Sunburn had been bemoaning a new meal of the same old mutton. He fell silent as Von Maxsen blocked Wyatt's way. The German's cold eyes included Tellegan as he spoke.

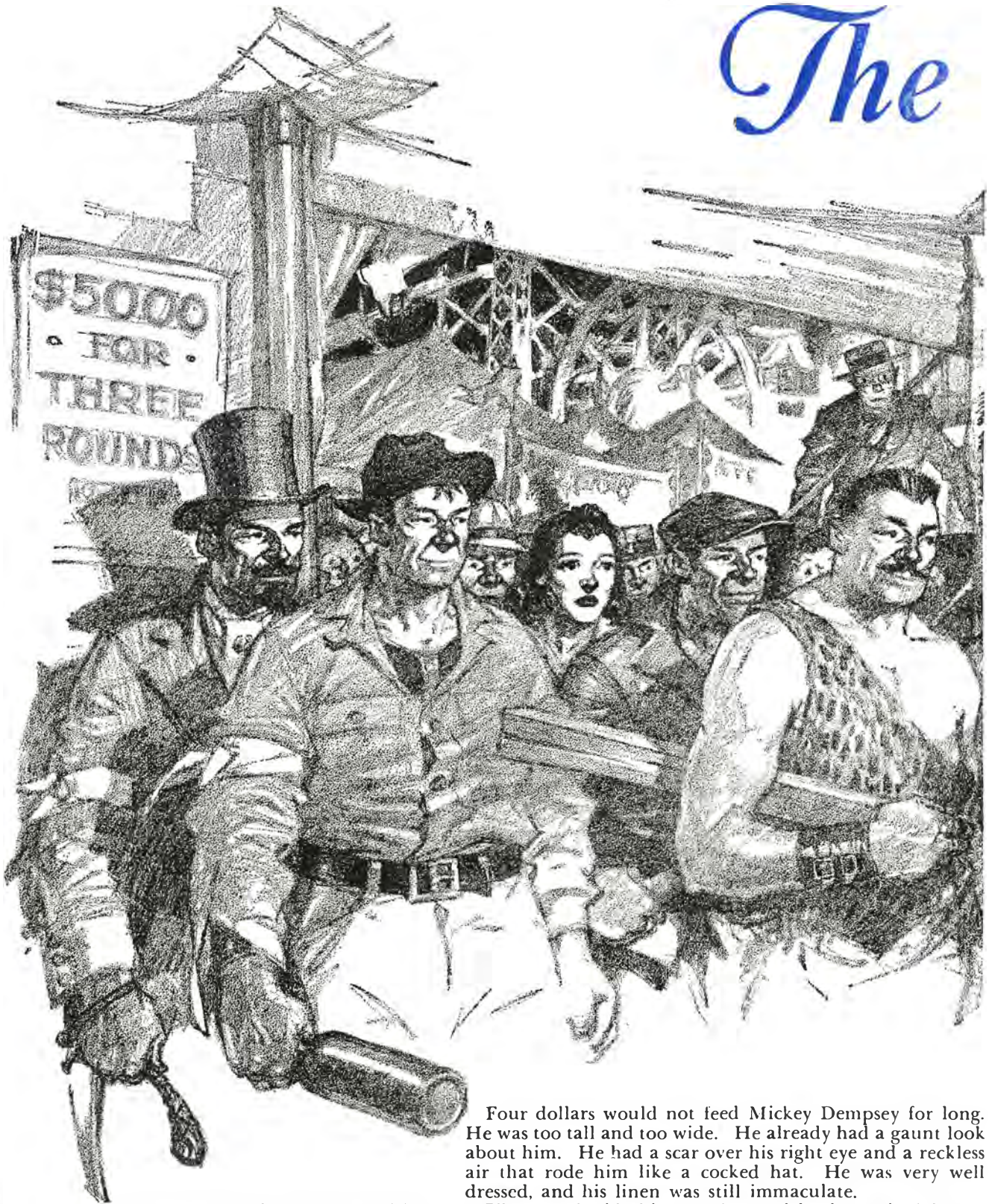
"*Guten Abend,*" he said. "I just wished to suggest that you three leave Switzerland at once. Otherwise I shall take great pains with you."

Wyatt said: "Perhaps pistols and knives at sunrise?"

"Nothing as obvious as that," said Von Maxsen, stepping back as the others went on into the dining-room.

The *Tageblatt* by Tellegan's plate announced the confession of Shuju Nuri in London the previous day, in which every ringleader in the conspiracy was named. Once again, Wyatt thought, India was saved—but for how long, he wondered.

The



TAMPA is a pleasant town and very nice to visitors from the North, and in January it is springtime almost, and at Benjamin Field there are boxing matches. They are not big, important matches. Dark Latin boys from Ybor City slug each other enthusiastically, and the box seats are only $1.10, and few of these boxers ever get any place; but there is blood and punching and some excitement.

Mickey Dempsey paid for his ticket and had four dollars left, but there was a kid in the semi-final with a good left hook, and Mickey had to see him. There was something about the way the kid threw that left which was important. So Mickey went in and took his seat, very close to ringside.

Four dollars would not feed Mickey Dempsey for long. He was too tall and too wide. He already had a gaunt look about him. He had a scar over his right eye and a reckless air that rode him like a cocked hat. He was very well dressed, and his linen was still immaculate.

The man beside him was big and burly. His right ear was tin and his nose was a travesty. He glanced at Mickey —looked again. He said in a foghorn voice:

"Hey, battler!"

Mickey grinned. "Nope. Football. I boxed in college."

The man said disappointedly: "College!"

"Pitiful, isn't it?" said Mickey. "I came to see this Gorganza. He has got a hook."

"Football! A mugg's game," said the man.

"Sure," said Mickey. "That's why I quit. I'm Mickey Dempsey."

"I'm Croaker Jones," confided the man. "Where did you do this college boxing?"

Carney Fighter

When the old war-cry "Hey Rube!" resounded he showed her that even a college guy knew the answer. . . . By the author of "Who Fights for Glory?"

by JOEL REEVE

Mickey told him about his university. It was easy to talk to this man. Mickey had not talked in too long. He told the man about the West Side of New York and his parents who had died and how he had worked to get to college. The man listened until the fights came on.

Mickey stopped talking. The semi-final was a diller. Mickey got excited and waved his long arms, shouting advice. The boy with the hook knocked out his opponent. Mickey sat back and breathed easily through the final match. When it was over, Croaker Jones said:

"You sure like fights. How about a short drink?"

"I don't drink," Mickey said. "And I got four bucks."

Croaker Jones stood up. He was not so fat, after all. He was solid and capable-looking. He said: "That's a lotta hay. C'mon and talk some more."

They went to a jook and sat in a booth, and Mickey talked against the Crosby records and the gut-bucket strains of the organ. He told about college and how he had come there all wide-eyed and green, and what the graceful living had done to him.

He could express it pretty good to this bat-eared stranger. He said: "I got a scholarship for football. I boxed because the coach asked me to. I was a campus big shot. I did everything I started out to do."

He stopped then. He could not tell anyone about Carol Calloway, not even this stranger. He said:

"My pop was a welterweight fighter. My ma was a kinker with Barnum and Bailey."

"A kinker?" said Croaker Jones. "You say your ma was a kinker?"

"With the Algao troupe," said Mickey.

"I knew her," said Croaker Jones. "I was a kid, run away from the Asylum. I knew the Algaos."

Mickey said: "Well—so college was fine. I got All American this season. But I quit. It—it wasn't enough. There wasn't anything left to fight for."

Croaker Jones said: "You only got four bucks? That's all you got?"

Mickey said: "I got two hands."

"You got a job," said Croaker Jones abruptly. "You got a job with me."

Mickey said: "Doing what?"

Croaker said: "His ma was an Algao! Imagine that!"

Mickey said: "What do I do?"

"You got four bucks, and you ask me stuff?" said Croaker.

WELL, it was, Mickey conceded, a job for a man who liked fighting. Croaker Jones ran the boxing tent in the carnival. The Amalgamated Shows was tremendous. It consisted of uncounted huge trailers, all painted blue and white. It was a traveling carnival, the biggest in America.

The boxing tent carried a couple of lightweight hamdonnies who did the "exhibitions of skill unparalleled" and a character named Geezer Gonigle who was slightly punchy but very useful. Mickey chopped tickets and handled the money.

Croaker was not good with money. Croaker was the drinking type. Yet he was the real goods, Mickey conceded. He was the main attraction.

Croaker took on all comers. His offer of fifty bucks to any man who could stay three rounds with him was legitimate. . . . Well, almost legit. Geezer held the watch and was sometimes a bit forgetful when a tough local lad showed signs of lasting.

Croaker had a face like a gargoyle and a heart like a watermelon. He said: "Take it easy, kid. Get used to the carney folk and you'll like 'em. A big guy like you can always get along with people."

Mickey got along. He got to know the strange creatures who made up the show even before they were out of the Florida loop. Freaks, cat men, trick motorcycle riders, gals from the hooch shows, grifters, spielers, the concession gyps with their gimmicks and their lumber and their queer talk, front office men with hard faces, ordinary razorbacks, all became acquaintances with extraordinary ease. Croaker introduced him as, "Mick Dempsey, a fighter I got to help out," and at the word "*fighter*," they always beamed and patted him. But Mickey did not do any fighting.

The man glanced at Mickey—looked again. He said in a foghorn voice:"Hey, battler!"

Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

He chopped tickets and made change. Sometimes he thought about the university and how lovely had been its Gothic simplicity, its green lushness, its smooth, country-club atmosphere. And he thought about Carol Calloway.

Carol had been all that the university was to him. Her father, retired and wealthy, lived there and Carol had been part of the university. She was blonde and willowy and she had said that she loved Mickey Dempsey, and Mr. Calloway had been surprisingly willing.

And then the restlessness had come on him. It had been too easy, pushing college kids around a striped field, knocking out green college boxers at will. The job which Mr. Calloway had provided had been too easy. He had been conscious of it a year before he left.

Carol said: "I don't understand; you won't graduate!"

"I can't explain," Mickey said helplessly. "I've got to do something. I've got to fight."

"Fight! You don't need to fight. You've fought your way here, and we're proud of you," she told him.

"I can't explain," he said, "but I know I got to go."

"You'll be back," she said confidently. "I know you'll be back. It is good here."

He walked across the carney lot, thinking about her. It was late, and the boxing tent was closed. Only the hamburger stand was open. Some of the boys would be grabbing a dog before starting out on the late night's round of gin mills.

There was a girl, small and slim. She came out of the Gay Paree tent and walked ahead of Mickey. A beefy man with a hat which shrieked on the side of his head caught up with her. The man took her arm and said:

"I been waiting for you, babe."

The girl said: "Beat it, Gabby. I told you once."

He held onto her arm, so that she stopped walking and faced him. The man said: "You can't do this to me."

She hauled off and slapped him, hard. The man shook her, saying: "I'll knock your teeth out if you don't—"

Mickey reached out quite casually, with his left hand. He caught the man under the ear. He walked in with the right. It dropped on the man's jaw. The man fell down.

The girl said: "Now what right have you got butting into my business?"

Then she looked again and said: "Oh, hello, Mickey."

Mickey said: "Hello, Dotty."

She was Dotty Price, and she did the Lady Godiva in the Gay Paree show. She rode a white horse in a long wig, and the boys all whistled. But she had tights on her, Mickey knew. She was surprisingly good-looking in a nice way.

The man was wallowing around on the ground. He got up unsteadily and stared at them. He was a big man, taller even than Mickey. He had a long nose and close-set eyes. His name was Gabby Digby, and he owned a piece of the Amalgamated Shows. He said:

"Okay, wise guy. I'll remember you."

Mickey said: "Scram before I really give it to you! And leave Dotty alone hereafter."

Digby scrammed. Dotty said: "You shouldn't have done that. Now everyone will say—"

Mickey said: "So what?"

"I'm nobody's girl," she told him flatly.

Mickey shrugged. "Will it hurt if they think so? It'll keep Gabby off you. I heard he was bothering you."

She walked with him to the hamburger stand. The boys raised their eyebrows, and someone said: "Love and love!"

She sat silently and ate a dog. After a while she talked. Her parents had been in the business too. Mickey told her about the Algaos, and she wrinkled her nose. She said:

"I guess we're kin, sort of, Mickey."

"Yeah?"

"We'll let it ride. Gabby is big stuff in the carney. He could be pretty mean. If you're willing—I shouldn't let you do it—"

Mickey said: "It'll be fun."

"I'm nobody's girl," she told him flatly. Mickey shrugged. "Will it hurt if they think so? It'll keep Gabby off you."

That was how Dotty Price and Mickey Dempsey came to run around together. The carney went up and down the Southern States, waiting for the late spring in the profitable towns of the North, and the two young people played. They had a lot of fun, and people came to take them for granted.

Gabby Digby did not bother them. He stood around and watched and said nothing. He was a silent man. Croaker Jones told Mickey:

"Digby is tough. He's a bad egg. You got to watch your step. Dotty is a nice head, but you got to watch out."

Mickey said: "I'm awake. You watch out for the bottle. You nearly got clipped by that blacksmith last night."

IN Virginia the crop of local yokels produced no opponent for Croaker. The big man came to the booth where Mickey sat and said: "Geezer will take over. Come back here with me."

Mickey went into the small dressing-tent. Croaker said: "We got to have a show. Go out there and challenge me."

Mickey said, "Nix, pal. I'm a college boxer. You told me yourself college boxers were n.g."

"We got to have a show," said Croaker. "In the third round I'll give it to you. I'll lead with the left, and then I telegraph the right. You see it coming, roll into it. You take it on the neck. Then you go down."

Mickey said: "Suppose I take it on the chin?"

"That will be very sad," said Croaker grimly.

Mickey grinned and went out. It was fun in the crowd of gawking country people, pretending to challenge Croaker. The crowd took him up at once, as one of their own, one against the carney. He got dressed in worn tights and went in there.

He felt pretty good in there, at that. Croaker stabbed at him, and Mickey ducked and countered, and got his left on Croaker's nose. The big man pretended to be enraged and rushed like an express train about the ring, missing wildly. The crowd loved it.

Croaker came once too fast. Mickey was caught on the ropes. He was in the spirit of it now, so he swung lustily with both hands. He sank the right in Croaker's midriff.

He crossed the left and swung the right again. To his horror, he heard Croaker's breath wheeze out. The entire weight of his boss fell into his arms.

He struggled, holding Croaker erect. He waltzed around, trying to make it look good as the crowd cheered wildly. Croaker essayed a whisper, but only choked on it. It was a minute before his rubbery legs regained their strength.

Croaker threw a weak right. Mickey thought quickly. The big man was in a bad way. Mickey took the right on the jaw. It did not hurt very much, but he dived for the canvas. Geezer counted ten very rapidly. The crowd went out disappointed, but Croaker heaved a sigh of relief.

In the dressing-tent Croaker finally managed to say: "Hey! What a wallop!"

"An accident, Croaker," Mickey apologized.

"Nobody tol' me you can hit," bellowed Croaker.

Mickey said: "I'm just a college boxer."

"You can hit!" accused Croaker. "The hell with the boxing. You can hit!"

Mickey said humbly: "Okay, Croaker."

"Every day," said Croaker, "you box with them palooka lightweights. You box with me. It'll do us all good!"

Mickey said: "You're the boss, Croaker."

SO they boxed every day. It made for busy days, but at night Mickey would meet Dotty at the hamburger stand and they would talk. She said:

"You left college to do something. Maybe this. Maybe this is what you are supposed to do."

Mickey said: "Me? Look, I have better things than fighting to do in this world."

"Better than the carney?" she asked quietly.

He was silent. He said, "The carney is all right. These strange people—they are good to me."

They had been good to him. They had accepted him at his face value. Croaker had said he was a fighter. The carney people had taken it up. After he belted Croaker, they were around every day. Even the midgets and the sideshow freaks would come in and watch him box. They did not say much, but they were in there. He could feel them behind him.

It was a queerish thing, the way they were with him. They all knew about Gabby Digby, who was a big man in the management. Digby could make trouble for them. But they liked Mickey and his mother had been with Barnum's show. They talked to him like he was one of them. It gave him the same feeling as the playing on the university team. They were all together in something, the end of which was not quite clear to any of them.

He said: "Dotty, how come you never went up? You've got class. Why not try Broadway?"

For a moment she did not reply. Her fingers played with a paper napkin, tearing it. She looked away from him, at the huge Ferris Wheels, when she spoke.

"I've been up there, Mickey."

Mickey said: "Oh." Then he said: "Skip it."

"I guess I am just carney people," she went on as if he had not spoken. "I don't understand some things. I got in wrong up there. I loved the guy."

Mickey said, "Skip it," wondering why his heart jumped a little.

She said: "Maybe that's why—anyway. When it developed he had a wife already, I couldn't take it. I belted him, and he blackballed me in show business."

Mickey said: "You want me to hunt him up and belt him—but good?"

"I used a bottle," she admitted, and then they laughed.

They had the quality of laughter in them. It ran through their entire relationship. They had fun. Mickey boxed daily and felt fine and they had lots of fun. Once in a while Gabby Digby would come around and stare at them, but the carney people were always there and Digby would go back to the traveling front office and everyone would grin behind his back.

Mickey had not counted on playing so close to his old college town. He was jittery for a day or two. Then he said to Dotty:

"Once upon a time—"

Dotty said: "Skip it!" and they laughed.

Then he told her about Carol. Dotty said: "Eight million bucks! That's a lot of money, Mickey."

Mickey said: "I don't know. About anything. I'm just playing along with Croaker, marking time. I guess I'm a no-good Irisher."

Dotty said: "You're—well, you're not so bad."

They let it go at that. On Thursday the ringer appeared. He was a dark, tough-looking guy with a parcel of drunken friends in tow. Croaker took one look and said,

"Toots Kline from Newark. A stumble-bum, but a tough heavy. I know him good."

Mickey said: "So what?"

He saw Digby, then, talking to Kline. The front-office man was getting into home territory, where he knew people. He was taking it out on the boxing show. He was getting ready to bust up Croaker's show.

Mickey said: "You'll eat this bum, Croaker."

Croaker made a face. "I dunno. I got a pain in my stomach."

Mickey said: "You been hitting that bottle again."

"I don't feel so good," said Croaker.

"Okay," said Mickey. "I'm quick. I get it."

Croaker said: "You'd do it, Mickey?"

"Why not?" shrugged Mickey. "You've been good to me."

Croaker hesitated a moment. His old eyes were shrewd upon Mickey. Then he said: "He is a tough bum, pal."

Mickey went back into the tent. When the ball went on, he came out and posed with the two lightweights while the spieler gave it to the crowd. Toots Kline came swaggering forward. He had bunches of cartilage over his eyes and practically no forehead. He said:

"For fifty bucks I will eat this carney."

Croaker said: "Here is a fighting man. Now who wants to see this contest of skill and brawn?" and the spieler took it up from there.

Sitting on the stool in the corner with Croaker, bending over him, Mickey felt good about it. He had not felt so good since his last football game. He was on edge. Kline had three men in his corner. They looked tough, and so did Kline, who stripped to hairy chest and thick shoulders.

Croaker said: "This guy is a pro. You never fought a pro. You have got to fight him like this."

Then Croaker told him, and Mickey listened carefully. It was while he was listening that he saw Carol and Mr. Calloway standing in the crowd, over near the entrance.

For a moment it did not seem strange that they were there. Then it was pretty awful. Then he knew down deep that he had been expecting it, that it was bound to get around and that they would certainly have to look into it. He listened to Croaker and resolutely did not look toward the tent entrance.

The bell clanged rustily. Kline came charging out with both hands flying, eager to earn the fifty dollars. Mickey covered and bulled his way in close. He used his right to the body, once, twice. Kline backtracked and boxed shrewdly as the heavy glove landed.

Kline's face was serious at once. He was a pro, and he knew a hitter by the first punch. He was a good boxer, at that. He hit Mickey with a left in the jaw and spun him.

Mickey came back, pivoting. Kline rushed. There was an opening. Mickey really turned loose the right. It rode down the alley, clipping Kline on the button.

Kline stopped dead, his mouth open, his eyes glazed. Mickey was light as a feather, stepping in. He threw the left, then another quick right, as Croaker had taught him.

Kline stumbled, his hands dropping. Mickey hit him in the middle. Kline caved in. He fell on his hands and knees. He did not try to get up.

Geezer lifted Mickey's hand. The three men from the corner came piling in, shricking, "Foul!"

Mickey backed away irresolutely. He looked over and more men were coming in the door. Carol and Mr. Calloway were trapped. He saw the middle-aged man put his blonde daughter behind him and square off.

Croaker said: "Get out of the ring. I'm gonna 'hey rube.'"

Croaker leveled off the first of the three men. Mickey hesitated. One man drew a knife. Mickey went flying past Croaker. He kicked once, and the punting toe caught the wrist and the knife went flying. Carol shrieked.

Croaker's bull voice bawled: *"Hey rube!"*

Mickey hit someone else who came near. Kline was rolling around underfoot. There were twenty hoodlums in the small tent. Croaker was having his hands full, but Geezer was plying a blackjack with great effect.

Blood was running. Mickey fought his way through the mob. Someone cut at him with a big stick. It landed across his shoulders, almost felling him. He lowered his head and slammed through a small hole like a fullback.

Mr. Calloway had a red face naturally; now it was scarlet. He was fending off a large Negro. Mickey hit the Negro, as Carol shrieked: "Get me out of here!"

Mickey stood in front of them, crouched, stripped to his trunks. There was no way out with the crowd milling. He was afraid they would cut down the tent and then there would be tragedy, with fighting men under canvas. Croaker rose and fell and rose again, all bloody, yelling, "Hey rube!"

Then Mickey saw the carneys coming in and that was a sight. They wore handkerchiefs about their arms and everyone who did not have a handkerchief got swatted. They carried stakes and brass knucks shone on their hands and they had limber blackjacks and some had just their bare fists. They came in groups of two and three, more and more units piling in as space cleared for them.

They were wonderful. They were efficient as trained troops. They leveled off a space around Mickey and the Calloways in a trice. A razorback said: "Get the lady out, Mick, and come back for the fun."

MICKEY led them out. Carol said: "Such brutality! Such horrible— Mickey! You look awful! Oh, Mickey, how did you ever get into any such thing?"

Mickey said: "'Scuse me. I got a date."

He plunged back through the entrance. The carneys were doing beautiful. Croaker was up in the ring, all alone now, directing them. They had the hoodlums stretched like herrings all over the place. The general public had gone through the back. It was wonderful.

Croaker said: "We got to square John Law quick. Was any of the Judys or their stooges hurt?"

There was a man with a black eye. Croaker gave him five dollars. The man was satisfied, he said. None of the other customers seemed to have complaints. Toots Kline was against the side of the tent, his left eye closed. He mumbled, "Your own guy done it. Gabby Digby hired me. He offered me another fifty for taking the show. He paid off the other muggs."

Croaker said: "You gonna stick to that story, or do I turn you over to a committee?"

"I'll swear it in court. He never told me about no carney mob," said Kline. "He crossed us."

Croaker said, "This Digby is not a carney. He is a front-office dough-bag. I think we better see this Digby."

The big razorback who had spoken to Mickey said solemnly: "Nobody, not even the front office, can make a pass at a carney show. We will see this guy."

There was a small commotion at the door. The carneys started out, but a whirlwind sifted through them. Dotty wore a dressing-gown over her scanty tights. She cried:

"Mickey! Mickey! Where are you?"

"I'm okay, baby," he said foolishly.

"Okay, wise guy," said the man. "I'll remember you." Mickey said: "Scram before I really give it to you! And leave Dotty alone hereafter."

Then the carneys were coming in, handkerchiefs about their arms—and everyone who did not have a handkerchief got swatted.

She was in his arms, shivering, crying a little. She said, "I was in the act and I couldn't answer the 'hey rube'. When I heard it was at the boxing tent I came running as hard as I could. Oh, Mickey, I was scared!"

He still had on the boxing gloves. He patted her clumsily, saying, "Now, baby. It's all right. The boys got here and fixed it."

She said: "If they had hurt you—"

Mickey held onto her. She felt good. Over her shoulder he could see Carol Calloway peering through the door of the tent. He held tighter. He said:

"Everything's all right, baby. Everything is swell."

THE news about Digby broke that night. The committee never found him. He had sold out his interest that morning and was departed for other fields. The carney went up into New York State. Things went along.

The Calloways were far in the past. The college town was a nebulous place where Mickey had once spent brief time. Mickey was boxing all comers at the carney tent.

Croaker Jones was slipping. He was over forty and the liquor was getting him. It was easy for Mickey to step into the spot and take over.

The carneys bragged him up all over the country. His name was becoming a byword. The Dempsey punch was fast getting as famed in the carney land as the punch of another, earlier Dempsey.

Mickey knocked them out. He knocked out tyros, amateur boxers, and now and then he knocked out a pro. Not many pros would get up there for a chance at fifty and another chance of being hammered by a carney fighter. Only a down-and-out palooka would try it. Mickey took care of them.

One day he dropped a fair-to-middling heavyweight in one punch. After the show that night, when he started for the hamburger stand, Croaker was beside him. The three of them sat down together and Dotty said:

"How about it, Croaker?"

"It is time," said the big man heavily.

"You got a bum?" she asked. Her color was high and her eyes were sparkling. Mickey looked at them puzzledly.

"Yeah, I got Sailor Martin," said Croaker. "Geezer can run the show. Geezer is a right guy."

Mickey said: "What is this?"

"You're getting nowhere fast, Mickey," Dotty told him. "You're a carney fighter and that's not good enough."

Mickey said: "Nuts! I love it."

She said softly: "I know. But it's not enough. You've got to go up. You've got to train seriously and fight some good men."

"It takes money," said Mickey. "I'm broke. I'm always broke."

Croaker said: "I got the dough. I'm staking us. If you'll let me manage you."

Mickey said: "Now wait—"

"You've waited long enough," said Dotty steadily. "We're about ready to close. We'll be in Florida in another month. You stay North and go to work."

Mickey said: "Got it all figured out, haven't you? The two of you, conniving."

But he was talking against the wind. He was licked and he knew it. He could not refuse to take a favor from Croaker. He knew well enough how Croaker loved the opportunity. He knew what it meant to Croaker if he made good.

He said: "Well, if I must, I must. But I like the carney. The carneys were good to me."

Dotty said: "You'll never forget us, will you?"

She held her head high, looking at him. He said: "Forget you? I—say! How am I going to get along without you? What about that?"

"I'll be in Florida," she said. "When next season starts, I'll be with the show. You'll always know where I am, Mickey."

"Yes," he said. "I'll always know. In my heart, baby."

They did not have many good-by's. The carney people gave him a rabbit's foot and a traveling-bag and a bathrobe which was green and had in gold letters, "Mickey Dempsey, Pride of the Carneys" across the back. They gave him other things and they sent him off with the band playing off-key but loud, and everyone shouting himself hoarse.

Mickey said: "It's like leaving home."

Croaker shook his head. "There's other things. You had it tough, then you were a gentleman for awhile. Now you are gonna see other things. We're going up, pal."

Croaker was off the liquor from that time. What struggle he went through, Mickey never knew, but the big man did not touch the stuff after they hit New York.

New York was different from the fight-game angle. There were the gyms, Stillman's and the others, and there was Jack Dempsey's and the side-street spots where the sports hung out. Croaker was surprisingly familiar with it all. He had been up once himself and twice with other fighters, Mickey learned. He had never succeeded in making the grade, but the Croaker was known and respected.

They started in a small club uptown and Mickey knocked out a stumblebum or two. Then they got a bout with Natie Braun. Mickey was surprised that night. He was lucky to get a nod. Braun was a seasoned pro.

He fought every week, over in Jersey, out in Pennsylvania, back in the clubs of Manhattan and the Bronx. He fought in Brooklyn and there he made his hit.

They liked him in Brooklyn where the Irish are still well thought of and the kayo punch is revered. He beat Maxie Corrarra in Brooklyn and that put him up there.

It was spring and the carney would be starting on the road. He had written to Dotty and had received short notes in answer, for Dotty was not a writing girl. She was well, she was resting on the beaches, she wished she could see him. No word of love or nonsense. He was to fight and make good. He said to Croaker:

"The carney will be moving. We should go South."

Croaker said: "After the Corrarra thing I got this."

It was a wire. It was an offer to go to the Coast and fight Bananas Bannigan. Mickey looked at it and scowled. He called Dotty on the phone that night.

She said: "You shouldn't. It costs too much. You go West and fight. You are doing fine, Mickey. Please go West."

He said: "But I want to see you. I—"

"Go West, young man," she said gayly. She hung up the phone. Mickey stood and looked at the instrument for a long moment. Something went bad inside him.

"She doesn't care. She just doesn't care."

Croaker was excited when they got on the train. He said: "Gabby Digby made a deal yesterday. He bought Joe Bradley's contract."

"Is he a fight manager, too?" Mickey asked.

"Nope. He's a wise guy," said Croaker. "Pete Gray handles Joe. Pete will front for Gabby; Gabby will get the dough."

Joe Bradley was next to the champion. To lick Joe Bradley was to get a chance at the title.

Mickey said: "I'm a year, maybe two years, away from Bradley. This is a slow business, this fight business."

"You are making dough," said Crocker. "We have got rocks salted away. What do you care how slow?"

Mickey said: "I have become a prizefighter who loves his trade. Killer Dempsey, that's me."

Croaker seized upon that. When Mickey almost beat out Bannigan's brains, Croaker gave it out to the papers. Mickey became "Killer Dempsey." And Croaker said:

"You're developing color, pal. The newspaper boys are going for you. The mob will be calling us into New York for a big shot pretty soon."

They stayed on the Coast all summer. Mickey fought often and got some movie work. He met a lot of girls but somehow they did not interest him, even the movie girls, so pretty and shapely as to turn any man's head.

He did not write to Dotty any more. He had one brief letter, saying the carney was playing in Jersey. He never answered it and silence ensued. Croaker got the call and they went back to New York and fought Cab Bellew in the Garden. . . .

That was fine. The Garden was great. Mickey got in there and the crowd gave him a big hand. He was popular before they saw him fight.

He hit the fading Bellew with a right hand in the second round and belted him out of the ring. The crowd went wild and Mickey Dempsey was made.

They got into the big money then. Mickey fought a couple of second-raters and filled the Garden each time. The Main Stem was Mickey's open road. Night-clubs welcomed him and a lot of musclers and chiselers flocked around.

Croaker said one night: "I dunno about you, Mickey. Now you're changing again. You're getting hard."

"Hard?" Mickey said. "I'm a fighter—what do you expect of me?"

He had a couple more scars and there was a reckless look in his eye. He went out a lot. He did not drink, but he craved company. He was always surrounded with people who had plenty of time and were willing to let him reach for the check.

Croaker said: "It's coming spring again. The carney will be on the road."

"We're through with the carney," said Mickey.

"You never get through with the carney," said Croaker solemnly. "I been up here before. The carney is always there, like it's been for hundreds of years."

Mickey said: "I'm through with it. It was just another phase. Like the slums—and the university."

HE met Carol at the Rainbow Room. Strangely, she was glad to see him. They danced and they had dates in New York. He took pride in spending his money on her. They never mentioned Dotty Price.

Mickey did not think often of Dotty. When he did think of her, he quickly put it out of his mind. It was not good to think about Dotty and the laughter they had together and the tenderness that had been between them.

The fight with Joe Bradley was not Croaker's idea. Gabby Digby came around one day. He said:

"You been flying high, Dempsey. I've never forgot what you did to me. I want to get you a beating."

He glowered, not making any bones about it. Mickey said, "Once a rat, always a rat."

"So I'm a rat," said Digby. "You want to fight my bum, Bradley?"

Mickey said: "I'll fight the champ if they'll let me."

Digby said: "Sign here."

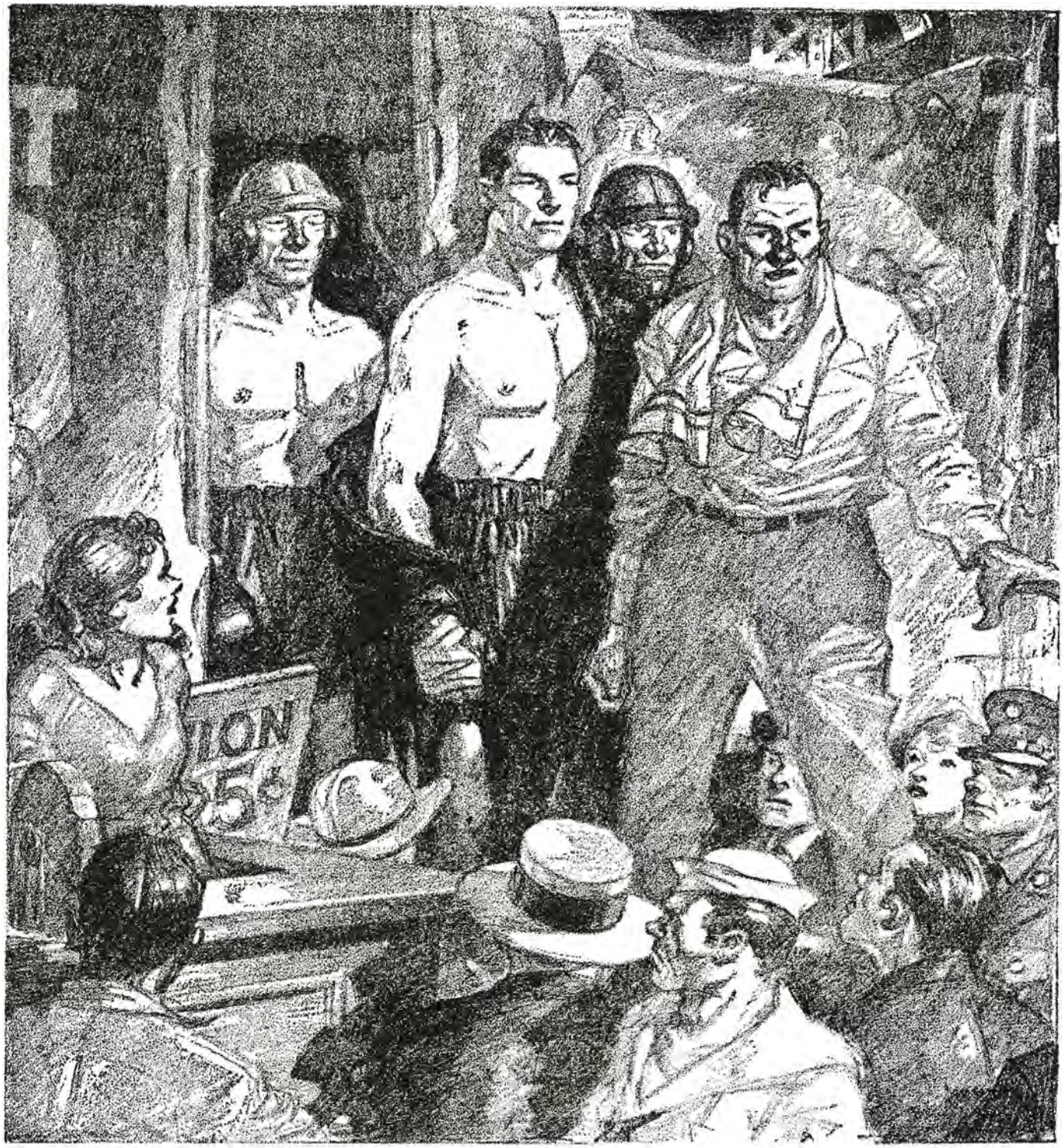
It was a legitimate contract. Mickey read it. He knew he should consult Croaker, but there was no legal reason why he must. So he signed. He said:

"I'll be glad to give you a chance to get even. For the money I'll make, win or lose, it is worth it."

Digby said: "I'll be at the ringside, Dempsey. I'll be loving it. I wish that broad from the carney could be there, that's all I wish."

Mickey took a step toward him and Digby was gone. Mickey sat down and thought about Dotty and about

Croaker said: "Get out o' the ring. I'm gonna 'hey rube.'"



"Step right up close, folks, and behold Killer Dempsey!"

Carol and her eight million dollars and the boy Carol was playing with now and the knowledge that he could move back and deal out the boy.

Croaker read the contract. He said slowly: "This is wrong. You're not ready for Bradley."

"I can take care of me," said Mickey carelessly. "Suppose he decisions me? We make a pot of money in the Stadium."

Croaker said: "You aint lost a fight. I was hoping we would go all the way without losing a fight. This Bradley is a good man, and Digby wants you to get licked now, so that Bradley won't ever have to fight you when you are ready."

Mickey said: "This is a business. We make money, so it's all right."

Croaker shook his head. "Back in the carney it was fun. You did all right while it was fun. But as a business—it's a dirty business, Mickey."

Mickey shrugged. He was tossing off everything that he used to hold dear, these days. Croaker did not say any more. Croaker was very silent all during the lackadaisical training through which Mickey sauntered before the Bradley fight.

They were in the dressing-room. The Stadium was filled with impatient fight bugs. Mickey slumped on a chair while Croaker solemnly wound the gauze about his hands. The smell of wintergreen was strong and the silence oppressive. Even the hired trainer was glum.

Croaker said: "Your timing is off. This Bradley is a hooker. If you do not beat him to the punch—"

Mickey said harshly: "Nuts. I'll take care of him."

He was on edge, but it was not a healthy edge. The training had gone badly all the way. He had come to the stage where knocking another man's ears off was not all of life, and he had nothing to put in the place of the other things.

Croaker said: "What you do, you box this boy and when you can get inside the hook, you use the right. But he has a cast-iron jaw, Mickey. You got to cut him down slow, in the body you got to cut him down."

Mickey said: "We've been through all that."

It was bad to snap at Croaker. The big man's face was glum and hurt. Then there was a knock at the door.

Croaker went to the door. "Geezer!" he said.

Geezer Gonigle came in. Mickey blinked and stared. Geezer said: "Hiya, champ?"

Mickey said slowly: "What—how did you get here?"

"The carney's in Jersey again," said Geezer happily. "Everybody's out there. We closed down for the night. The carney aint never closed down before for a night!"

Croaker said: "Everybody? The razorbacks, too?"

"Ringside and bleachers and wherever we could snag ducats," said Geezer proudly. "We hadda see the champ beat Digby's guy, didn't we? He'll be the champ some day, Mickey will. We hadda see our own guy, didn't we?"

He had not written to them in a year. He had not seen a carnival, nor thought of any of them save Dotty in months. He said:

"Er—Dotty—is she out there?"

"Right at the ring. She and me have got seats together," said Gonigle. "We sure are proud, Mickey. When you're the champ maybe you'll come back to the carney, huh?"

"Beating Bradley doesn't make me champion," said Mickey evasively.

"You beat Bradley and you'll beat the champ," said Geezer. "You'd be some attraction with the carney, Mickey. They'd pay you plenty. You'd be the big shot and the boxing tent would be the star attraction."

Geezer's eyes glowed at the idea. Mickey said: "It's something to think about, pal. Go on out there and take care of Dotty. We'll have a party afterward."

Geezer extended a hand. He said, "Luck from the gang, pal. You know we're with you."

Mickey shook hands, and Geezer went beaming on his way. Mickey walked up and down like a jungle animal in a cage. He said:

"Croaker, I can't beat this guy Bradley."

"I know it," said Croaker simply.

"All those carneys out there. Betting their last dime, too. I know them. They would give odds to get their last dime on me," Mickey muttered.

Croaker did not speak. Mickey walked some more. He said: "I never got a beating before. I figured to take a dive tonight if the going got tough. I figured that I would pick a soft spot and cheat Digby of my beating."

Croaker said: "That's bad figuring, Mickey."

"They all do it," said Mickey. "I've been hearing stories. . . . It's a business, isn't it?"

"I don't like that kind of business," Croaker said.

There was a tap on the door. A boy said: "Ready, Dempsey!"

Mickey said: "The robe! The carney robe! I haven't worn it in months!"

"I got it," said Croaker. It was in Croaker's own bag, neatly folded and laundered.

Mickey put it about him. It was a virulent green and the gold letters had faded a little. He went out through the door. Croaker and the second followed close. . . .

UP in the ring the lights were glaringly white. There was so much shouting and so many ceremonies that Mickey could pick out no one from the crowd. The carneys must be shouting with the others, but he could not distinguish them.

He kept peering at ringside. Carol Calloway and her boy were there. She waved gayly at him and the boy was sullen and unhappy at her excitement. Mickey nodded. He still had not located Dotty Price.

Then he saw Geezer. Dotty was beside him. She wore a perky little hat and a blue suit. She looked fine. As Mickey stared, Gabby Digby leaned over from the aisle and spoke to them. Geezer scowled.

Dotty reached for something. Mickey hoped it would be a hatpin. Geezer reached too. Digby waved his hand deprecatingly at them and produced a little black book. Mickey knew then.

Digby went up the aisle, looking right and left. He was searching for carneys. He was making bets on Joe Bradley. He was going to take the carnival people for every cent they owned. He had Dotty and Geezer and now he would get the others. He knew their fierce loyalty to one of their own.

ONE of their own, Mickey thought bitterly. He was not one of them. He had never belonged, really. In all his life he had never belonged anywhere.

He could not claim the slum of his youth. The university had not been for him; although he made good there he had never finished, could never be other than an alien in the midst of strange luxuries. In the carnival they had accepted him, taken him for granted. They had fought for him, had confidence and faith in him. But he had left the carnival.

And now it was the fighting. He had not to himself been true, even at this, his chosen vocation. He had made this match, knowing at the time that it was for money, that he was not ready for Bradley. He had been willing to accept defeat, even to dog it in the face of defeat.

He was no good at life, he thought, sitting there while former champions and coming challengers were introduced. He looked down at Carol and her youth and that was not what he wanted. He stared over at Dotty; she made a face at him and clasped both her hands above her head in the fashion of boxers the world over.

Mickey had to grin. She put her head on one side and smiled back at him. There was no rancor, no reproach for unwritten letters, unsent telegrams. It was just like always with Dotty—he could see that from up in the ring.

The ring was clearing. Mickey sat there and stared down at Dotty and although she smiled there was no answering smile on his brooding face. The referee called; Croaker had to lift him and take him out for instructions.

Joe Bradley was a great-shouldered man with a heavy jaw and narrow eyes. He was very like his real owner, Gabby Digby, except that he was young and strong and could box. Mickey looked at Bradley and was aware of the danger. The bulging left forearm was a threat which would menace every moment of his stay in that ring.

The referee said, "Shake hands now and come out fighting and may the best man win," and that was that.

Mickey tested the ropes absently, bending his knees. He looked down at Carol and she called, "Knock him out, Mickey!"

He glanced over at Dotty. Geezer was sitting on the edge of his seat, all dithery with excitement. But Dotty was sitting back and she did not know Mickey could see her and her face was white and scared.

Dotty Price was a knowing girl, Mickey thought. She had been watching the game, the boxing business. She knew what Bradley could do to a man game enough to stand up there and meet that left hook.

The bell rang. Mickey slid off the ropes and came out with his hands held high. Bradley's left was hung off to the side, poised in the air. Mickey fiddled, feeling his way. He thought Bradley was open and went in with the left, straight for the head.

Bradley's hook was a bludgeon, hammering the ribs over Mickey's heart, opening his mouth in a gasp of pain.

Mickey's legs were numb and could not carry him away He clinched desperately.

He saw Digby's face over the edge of the apron, screaming for instant victory, for complete annihilation. He pushed Bradley away and danced on his toes as strength came back to him. Bradley would get him, all right, but it would not be that easy.

The carney people—they would lose all their money! He would have to make it up to them. . . .

Of course they would not allow that. They had bet it freely, they would take their losses. They had bet it because they believed in Mickey Dempsey, the old carney fighter. They had bet it on his gameness and his good right hand.

Mickey went to the ropes, came off hastily as Bradley tried to corner him. He regained his speed, going to midring. Bradley busily tried to land the hook. Mickey ran and the crowd yelled. The round ended.

There were welts on Mickey's lean body. He lay back and listened to Croaker.

"Stay away from it. He don't make mistakes, this boy. He has got that hook in there and any minute he lands it."

Mickey said: "He's tough."

"He has got a habit of throwing that hook to the body and then bringing it up to the jaw," said Croaker. "Watch out for that! You do not want to be kayo'd, Mickey."

"No," said Mickey. "I do not want to be kayo'd."

HE took it in there. He took it pretty good. There was a lot of blood after the third round and he went down in the fourth, but got right up.

Everything seemed far away, everything but Joe Bradley and his impressive jaw and that threatening, bludgeoning left hook. The bell rang, he went out, he got hit. He tried to hit back, sometimes he did get his right to the body of the other man. The bell rang, he sat on a stool and Croaker patched him up so that he did not bleed to death. That was all he knew through the fifth, the sixth, the seventh rounds.

Before the eighth, Croaker said in his ear: "Mickey, you better take one. You can't beat him."

Mickey shook his head. He dared not speak, because inside his mouth there was blood and he had to swallow the blood because the referee was watching him. The referee would stop the fight if he knew about the cut inside his mouth from which the blood was pouring.

Croaker said: "He might kill you, boy. You can't take a beating like this and not pay for it. Take a dive, Mickey. Take an out and fight him again some day."

Mickey shook his head. Croaker sighed. He said: "Then I'll tell you. The only thing beats a hooker is another hook. You got no hook. When you open up to let it ride, he may knock your brains out. But you got to try it."

Mickey's mind went around on a Ferris Wheel. He was back at the hamburger stand with Dotty and the wheels were quieted for the night, but the lights were still on. He was thinking pretty clearly now, swallowing the salty blood.

A hook. The hooker hated a hook. Of course. If he opened up and tried to change his style, Bradley would knock him out. That would not be dishonest, as he was all ready for the kayo anyway. If Bradley really gave it to him, then it was all over, so what?

So the carneys lost their money. But that was nothing, as carnival people never keep money anyway. They are always losing it or spending it and there was always a little more where that came from, they said gayly.

So the carneys lost their hero. He did not feel like a hero. He felt like a louse and a badly bent louse at that. He did not dare to look down at Dotty now—to see the fear, the disappointment, the hurt in her face at his ignominy.

The bell rang. He got up and went deliberately out. He poised his left hand, holding it low and wide, ready for that hook. He was going to throw it. Bradley shuffled, looking faintly puzzled and hugely scornful.

Bradley came in, bobbing. Mickey feinted with the hook. Bradley came forward, weaving and throwing punches.

Mickey held the hook. He shifted. He got everything there was, all the last vestige of his speed and strength. He put it all together. He blasted the straight right down the middle. He landed it in Bradley's body.

He almost stumbled, caught himself. Bradley's mouthpiece was a ghastly grin as he fought for air. Mickey deliberately threw another right to the body. Bradley's left knee came up.

Mickey stepped back, stepped in. He pawed with his left, but threw the right like thunder. It crashed against Bradley's unprotected jaw.

Bradley was going down, slowly, like a sinking ship. Mickey looked at him curiously. Bradley was making a fight to stay. Mickey walked to a neutral corner, on rubber legs.

The wind blew through his head and spun the pinwheels. All his senses heightened and his vision became very clear. He could see Gabby Digby, his hat awry, screaming maledictions upon poor Bradley. He could see Carol Calloway, standing, cheering, her face flaming with pleasure at the carnage.

He turned his head painfully, swallowing blood. Dotty was sitting very still, looking at him.

He raised a sodden glove. Dotty just looked at him. He stood there, clutching the ropes with his left hand. He was alone up there and Bradley was getting up.

Bradley wanted to clinch. Mickey held him off with the long left. Bradley tried to throw the hook, but the zing was gone from it. Mickey took it once more on the jaw.

He countered with the right. He slung it against the heavy jaw before him, slinging it again—and again. Joe Bradley toppled. He stretched his length on the canvas and his face seemed buried, as if in sand.

Mickey felt his hand being hoisted. He was dazed now, after that moment of clarity, when he had seen clearly. He was drawn within himself and he had to get rid of the blood clotting his nose and his throat. He got out of the ring very quickly, seeing Gabby Digby's apoplectic face with only vague pleasure.

He was almost unconscious until the cold water hit him. Croaker kept saying: "He took an awful beating. I never saw a worse beating. He took it good, like a man."

The water ran over him. The pinwheels had stopped gyrating. He was all right, now. He was sure of himself. He let the water revive him and the blood washed down the drain, all pink as it mixed with the water.

THE spieler said: "The mightiest man of the modern ring, the greatest attraction on the lot, folks! Step right up close and behold the man who will fight Joe Louis next summer, Killer Dempsey!"

The smell of the popcorn was strong and the peanut whistle shrilled its message under the glaring lights. The carney was in full swing. The calliope still played the banal tunes of yesteryear and the Ferris Wheels spun with their chattering, happy loads.

Dotty looked over from the ticket-chopper's high berth. She winked one eye. Mickey shed his bathrobe and stepped into the spotlight. A razorback who was acting as stick for the pitch yelled, "Attaboy, Mickey! You're our boy!"

He was back where he belonged. His mother had been a kinker with Barnum and Bailey. His father had been a boxing man. He was back there, starring the show. He was "Killer Dempsey, King of the Carnivals!"

He hoped it would be a boy. . . . Dotty looked sweet and she would not quit the carney, even with all the fine money in the big bank in New York. Croaker patted his shoulder and told the crowd about the Bradley fight.

He was happy again. He was back where his blood called him. He was Mickey Dempsey of the Carnivals.

Science and the COP

A whole murder-mystery novel is compressed into this brief dramatic page.

by Frederick Bechdolt

"YOU'LL take care of me, Lieutenant?" The voice of the cigar-stand proprietor was thin and anxious.

"I'll see what I can do, Louis." Detective Lieutenant Greggains glanced at his wrist-watch. "Time's wastin'. And me with a murder case to crack before six o'clock, or else—" He nodded at the insignificant little man behind the show-case, framed by festoons of magazines. "I might drop in tonight on my way home."

He looked bigger than he was, walking down the mean, narrow street. Younger men in the Homicide Bureau, trained in modern scientific methods, sometimes complained about his habit of taking time out, as he had just now with the cigar-stand proprietor, while he was busy on an important case. Detective Sergeant Lane, who had been teaming with him for two years, maintained that this continual harkening to requests for favors was a hangover from the rough old flatfoot days.

It was nearly two o'clock when Greggains passed through the wide grim entrance of the Central Police Station. Half an hour later his partner entered the Homicide Bureau and found him sitting behind his desk, staring at a little key.

"Find anything new down on Howard Street?" Lane asked.

Greggains looked up and shook his head.

"No dice."

"If we don't crack this case before six o'clock," Lane growled, "they'll spring Houseman on a writ." He scowled. "What's the big idea?"

Greggains shoved back his chair and began talking slowly.

"On August second, William Langdon drops out of sight. Last man seen with Langdon was James Houseman. They were seen leaving Houseman's office in the 800 block of Howard Street. Houseman says they walked up Howard nine blocks and parted at the corner. Houseman owns a thirty-eight caliber police-model Colt's revolver. We found it in his apartment last night. It has been cleaned recently. The two men have been mixed up in the race handbooks, and Houseman is a big shot in that end of town. If anybody could put the finger on him, chances are they wouldn't talk."

He ticked the key with his forefinger.

"We have pegged everything else that we took off of him, but we don't know what lock this fits. There is a door somewhere; and when we find it, I think we'll find what's left of Langdon." He rose slowly from his chair. "We're going to take Mr. Houseman for a little walk."

Lane shook his head. "What'll that get us?"

"There is a gadget," Greggains said. "They call it the lie-detector. You clamp it on a man's arm and ask him questions. It has a graph connected with it to register his blood-pressure. When he tells the truth, the pressure remains normal. When he lies, it takes a jump."

"We haven't got one," Lane reminded him.

"If we had one," Greggains said, "it wouldn't do any good. But it's given me an idea."

Lane glanced at his watch. "Only three hours to go. That idea better be good."

It was after three o'clock when Lane slid behind the wheel and his partner settled down beside Houseman in the rear seat of a shabby prowl car.

"Park as near his office as you can," Greggains directed.

Houseman said nothing. He had spent most of the last twenty-one hours facing a bright light, listening to questions, answering some, ignoring others; he hadn't wasted any words. If worry troubled him, he failed to show it; lack of sleep had left him as unruffled as his pale gray suit with paler pin stripes. His hair was light, his eyebrows lighter. He looked as cold and colorless as an ice-cube.

The police car slipped through traffic, eased around several corners and drew up to the curb in the 800 block of Howard Street. The three men got out and walked slowly up the sidewalk. Houseman was looking straight before him until he felt the thick fingers of Detective Lieutenant Greggains upon his wrist. Then he turned his head and frowned.

"It's up to you," Greggains asserted. "I can cuff you to me if you would rather." His index finger slipped behind the base of Houseman's thumb, and they walked on in silence.

They had gone five blocks and were passing a four-story building whose brick façade was dingy with smoke and dust. The ground-floor entrance opened into a billiard parlor; the upper-floor windows were placarded with *"For Rent"* signs. The three men were in front of the narrow stairway entrance when Greggains slackened his pace and looked sharply at Houseman. Four blocks farther on they halted and started back to the car. Repassing the spot where he had slackened his pace before, Greggains glanced at the prisoner again and nodded at the stairway entrance.

"That's the door."

To Lane's surprise, it was. And as soon as he had opened it, he knew what they were going to find. They climbed the stairs and the evidence became unmistakable. A thin film of perspiration was on Houseman's forehead.

The third floor was occupied by a long loft. The body was lying in the middle of the room. The prisoner said nothing when they halted before it, but he was breathing thickly. Greggains held him by the wrist and listened to the things which Lane told him.

"Slug entered the back of his head," Lane announced. "Passed out through the forehead."

Less than half an hour after they had come here, he found it imbedded in the woodwork beside a window.

"Thirty-eight caliber!" Lane's voice was exultant.

"The ballistics man will tie it to that gun we found in his room," Greggains said. Houseman's knees buckled but he recovered himself at once.

FOUR hours later the two detectives were sitting in the Homicide Bureau.

"It's in the bag now," Greggains said. "We'll call it a day."

"The lie-detector!" Lane cried. "That was smart thinking."

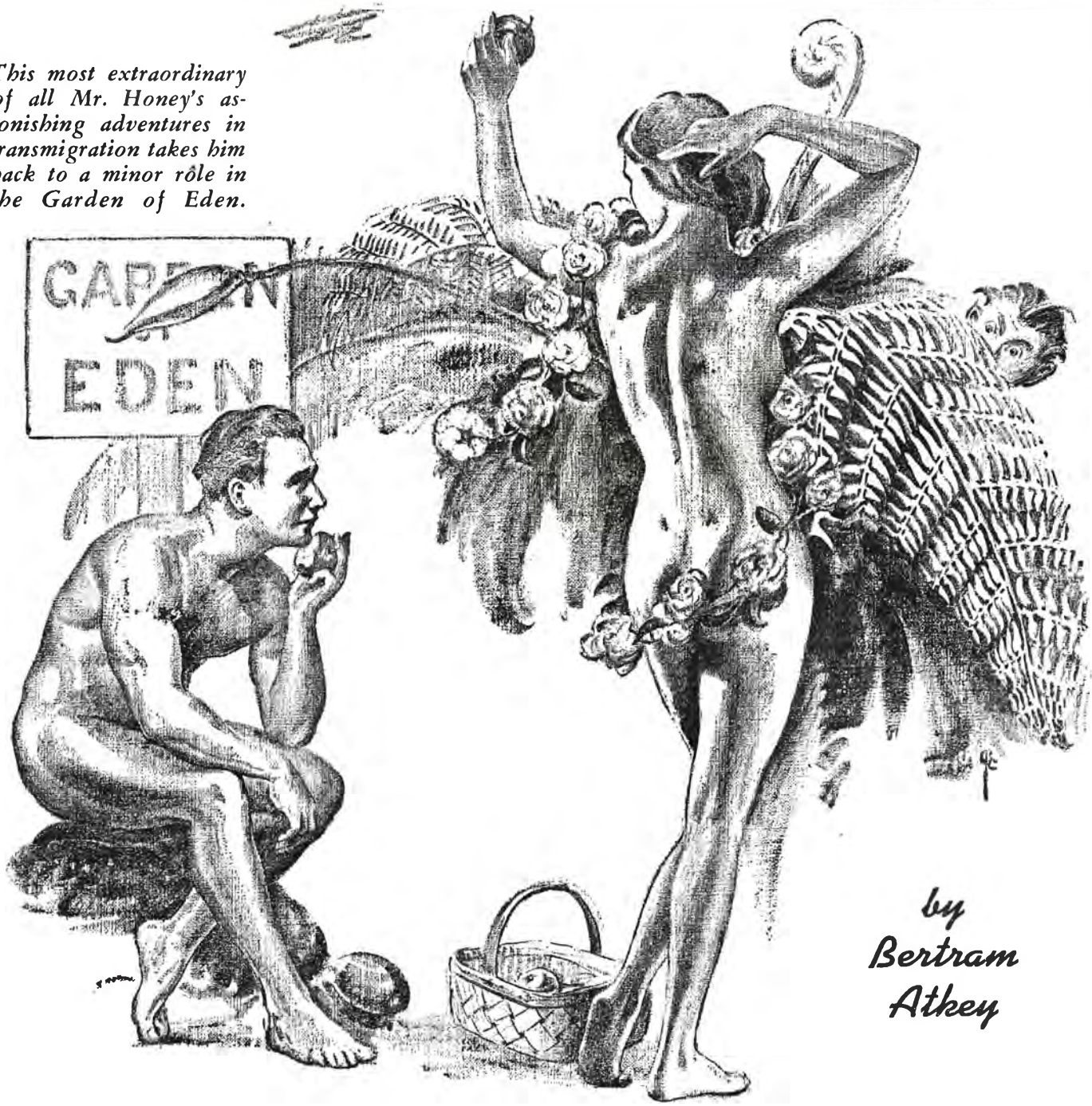
"His pulse jumped like a scared bullfrog when we passed that door." Greggains was smiling. "This science aint so bad."

On his way home to a late dinner he happened to remember the rabbit-faced little man, and he stopped for a few minutes at the cigar-stand. He looked about him to see that no one else was within earshot; and when he spoke, it was in an undertone.

"It's okay, Louis. The slug ties to his gun. He's cracking now, and he'll talk tomorrow. We won't need you to testify. I covered up for you by putting on an act. Scientific stuff! They all fell for it. Nobody knows that you saw Houseman and Langdon going up those stairs." He nodded benignly. "Much obliged."

A PARROT IN

This most extraordinary of all Mr. Honey's astonishing adventures in transmigration takes him back to a minor rôle in the Garden of Eden.



by Bertram Atkey

RAPIDLY increasing experience of the staggering possibilities of the Lama's pills had led Mr. Hobart Honey to the conclusion that the chances of any one pill landing him back into an incarnation in which he really had been a great man were not so good. About a hundred to one against, he figured.

He was not at all proud of this—but against that, he was getting out of the habit of being ashamed of it. As he put it to himself one evening:

"After all, I believe I've got a right to consider myself an averagely decent, civilized sort of citizen in this life, so why worry about what sort of person I was in a life I lived a few hundred or, for that matter, a few thousand years ago? Nothing can be done about it, anyway. It appears that I was the man who shot King Rufus in the year 1100. All right. What are they going to do about it? It seems that I was the eunuch who embezzled a few dozen of the wives of Prince Demetrius and sold 'em to Ptolemy, King of Egypt. Well, what if I did? They can't arrest me for it—303 B.C. was a considerable while ago. And the experience was interesting—well worth re-living. I think I'll take another trip into the Bygone this very evening!"

He settled himself comfortably in his easy-chair, and fortifying himself with a glass or two of wine, swallowed one of the pills with practiced ease. . . .

It took him back to an incarnation in which he was an elderly carrion-

PARADISE

Figleaf and parrot, along with other pictures, are to be blamed on Charles Chickering.

eating condor, who spent the whole time between rare feasts of carrion in circling round and around somewhere up in the stratosphere over the Andes, reflecting on modern carrion, its scarcity and poor quality compared with the carrion of his youth.

A dull life, and of no value to an author of the Twentieth Century like the man who wrote under the pen-name of Mr. Honey—unless a precise knowledge of what it feels like to be one of the world's leading epicures of carrion is valuable. An evening wasted, as far as Mr. Honey was concerned. There was no frenzied public demand for the biography of a naked-necked condor.

He shrugged it off, and next evening he took a little more wine and selected another pill.

He was conscious of a curious feeling, as the little pellet passed his glottis, that there was Something Coming this time—that he was bound for a life in which he was going to meet Folks that really were Folks. He had often enough had this feeling before, but never quite so pronouncedly. Even as he blacked out, he was muttering to himself about it.

HE woke slowly, and as was usual, a little confused—with the familiar confusion of feeling that he was really Hobart Honey of London, but knowing that he was by no means so; feeling that he had only left London a few seconds before, yet knowing that the first foundation-stone of London would not be laid for a good many years to come—that the site of London, in fact, still lay a few miles under the sea.

He felt himself cautiously, before he opened his eyes, and found himself to be highly hairy, all over. Then he scratched himself a little, and felt all the more comfortable for it.

For a few minutes he lay, pleasantly warm under the sun, breathing deeply the marvelous scents of what could only be a miraculous wealth of flowers. He listened dreamily to the soft sigh of perfumed zephyrs wandering around and about, and he knew that life was very good indeed. He scratched himself a little more, and was distantly conscious of a faint unease, which he characterized as the merest hint of hunger. Still, for a little he lay blandly relaxed, listening to a melody of birds singing softly in the perfumed and spicy little winds about him.

At last he realized where and what he was. He was Nm the Near-Man—that is to say, the nearest creature to Man that a creature could possibly be without actually being Man himself.

He was the personal servant of the First Man of His Period—or for that matter, of any other Period either.

Nm was very proud of this. He lay there, lost in his delicious languor like a man in a bath of warm, perfumed oil. He knew it was well past dawn, but he knew there was no need to hurry. His favorite parrot, roosting in the fig tree under which Nm had slept, would tell him when the Boss was on the point of waking up.

And even then, life would be as lovely. There would be no complications. Breakfast was ready. By the side of the Boss were heaps of everything good; he only had to reach out his hand—needn't even open his eyes—just only reach out and take what he touched—shaddocks, mangoes, durians, dates, persimmons, peaches, pomegranates, pears, grapes, plums, nectarines, oranges, figs—fruit, to be brief; fruit of every known variety, and dozens of varieties not now known nor ever likely to be. And nuts—more kinds of nuts than the modern mind ever conceived—nuts that tasted like everything from a coconut to a ham sandwich or a chocolate sundae.

For this was the Garden of Eden, and Nm's boss was Adam.

He lay there dreamily, thinking of this truly noble First Man whom he was privileged to serve and to adore; and of the old days, when he had left the wandering tribe of Near-men to which he belonged to journey on through the tree-tops in which they spent roughly ninety-five per cent of their valueless time—wisely, for the country was unlimited of lions, and teemed with tigers and similar meat-eating creatures.

"How fortunate I was," mused Nm, "to have been found by him when I was!"

That was entirely true, for Nm was in somewhat of a jam when he first set eyes on Adam.

He had come down out of the tree-tops at the edge of the forest where it joined the desert, to get a drink of water at a pool surrounded by tall rocks. He stepped round the tallest rock, and found that he was not the only denizen of the district who liked a little water now and then. Eleven maneless lions, six tigers, quite a number of leopards, several black panthers, four rhinoceroses, six bull elephants, nine cow ones, and about a couple of dozen big buffaloes were around the pool also.

NM took a look at them all, and turned a double backward somersault—into the rock, due to a sort of overanxiety, very natural in one so solitary and unarmed.

They, in their turn, took a look at the Near-Man. He was one of these scrawny, scraggy Near-Men, and quite a few of the menagerie were uninterested in him. But not all of them: six lions, three tigers, most of the leopards and all the black panthers started for him, and he had already said farewell to his native tree-tops when suddenly there strolled round another rock a being whose appearance on the scene short-circuited *all* local activities like a flash of lightning.

All the animals rose, politely, and those that were bounding toward the Near-Man suddenly ceased bounding. They slewed round, trying sheepishly to look as if they had only been hurrying to the Near-Man to gambol with him a little.

They wagged their tails apologetically, then placed them between their legs, as they stared past—not *into* the eyes—of the newcomer, who shook his head, then laughed quietly and spoke briefly. Evidently it was a word of friendly advice to go while going was possible, for they went like guilty things glad of a chance to go. The elephants, rhinoceroses and buffaloes did not go, but stood about in attitudes of respect and deference.

Yet the superb newcomer, noted the Near-Man, was not merely unarmed; he was undressed—well, nude. It was something in his eyes that quelled the animals; indeed, Nm took a look in the eyes and felt quelled himself—quelled but adoring. He was still quaking from the shock of the great beasts, and as he stared dumbly at the magnificent apparition who had saved him, he trembled from some other cause that was not fear. Gratitude—admiration—something of that sort, no doubt.

HE saw a tall creature—like a god, he would have thought, if he had ever heard of a god; very tall, almost gigantic by our modern standards, but symmetrical to the last decimal of an inch. Under his golden skin smooth muscles rippled and played at every movement; under a close helmet of crisply curled gold hair, and a broad smooth brow, shone with an electric intensity a pair of blue eyes that—by the Near-Man, at any rate—could not long be looked into. The head was noble—set high on a muscular neck that was as graceful, swift and flexible as that of a cobra. On the clean, clear, curved lips was the friendliest smile that the Near-Man had ever known or dreamed of; and over all, was a glowing strength and beauty; and in spite of the unbearable brilliance of those piercing eyes there was, the Near-Man sensed, a monumental and virginal innocence.

Nm suddenly bowed down, his face in the sand, trembling. . . . He did not know it yet, but he had been looking at Man—at Adam the First Man; and he was not accustomed to that sort of thing. The Founder of the race of Man was, rather obviously, something special—well, look at *us!*

A golden voice, strong as sunlight, gentle as dusk, came to the Near-Man as he abased himself.

"Be not afraid!"

Then, as he quaked, hiding his face in the hot sands, the trembling Near-Man felt an arm, strong as steel, yet gentle as compassion, pass around him.

"Why, thou poor thing, be not afraid, I say. Thou art with *me,* and henceforward thou shalt be under my protection—and I am *Man!*"

He lifted the scrawny wretch like a rag from the sand.

"Courage!" he said, and looked at Nm with smiling brilliant eyes.

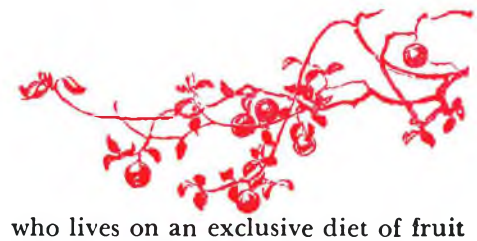
"Art thou hungry? Nay? Art thou thirsty? Yea, I see—thou camest here for that? Drink, then, and come with me."

"Yes sir!" said Nm the Near-Man humbly.

He had drunk his fill while Adam waited. Then they had turned their backs on the pool and strolled together across the desert to the Garden of Eden—having established, though in their innocence neither knew it, the first social distinction known on earth.

IT was upon this event that Nm pondered dreamily as he lay, still half-asleep, that morning. He smiled—a trick he had learned from Adam—as he remembered it all.

Then a small cloud passed over the sun of his personal content as he remembered something else. They had been happy enough, he and his master, for months after he had secured the situation. But it had been a sinecure, judged by modern standards. That is to say, one cannot be a valet to a gentleman who does not wear clothes; nor can one be a cook to an employer



who lives on an exclusive diet of fruit and nuts. One can, of course, crack his nuts for him, but why painfully crack nuts between two rocks for an easy Hercules who can crack his own between finger and thumb?

No—Nm was not overworked.

Perhaps that was why he became so observant of Adam.

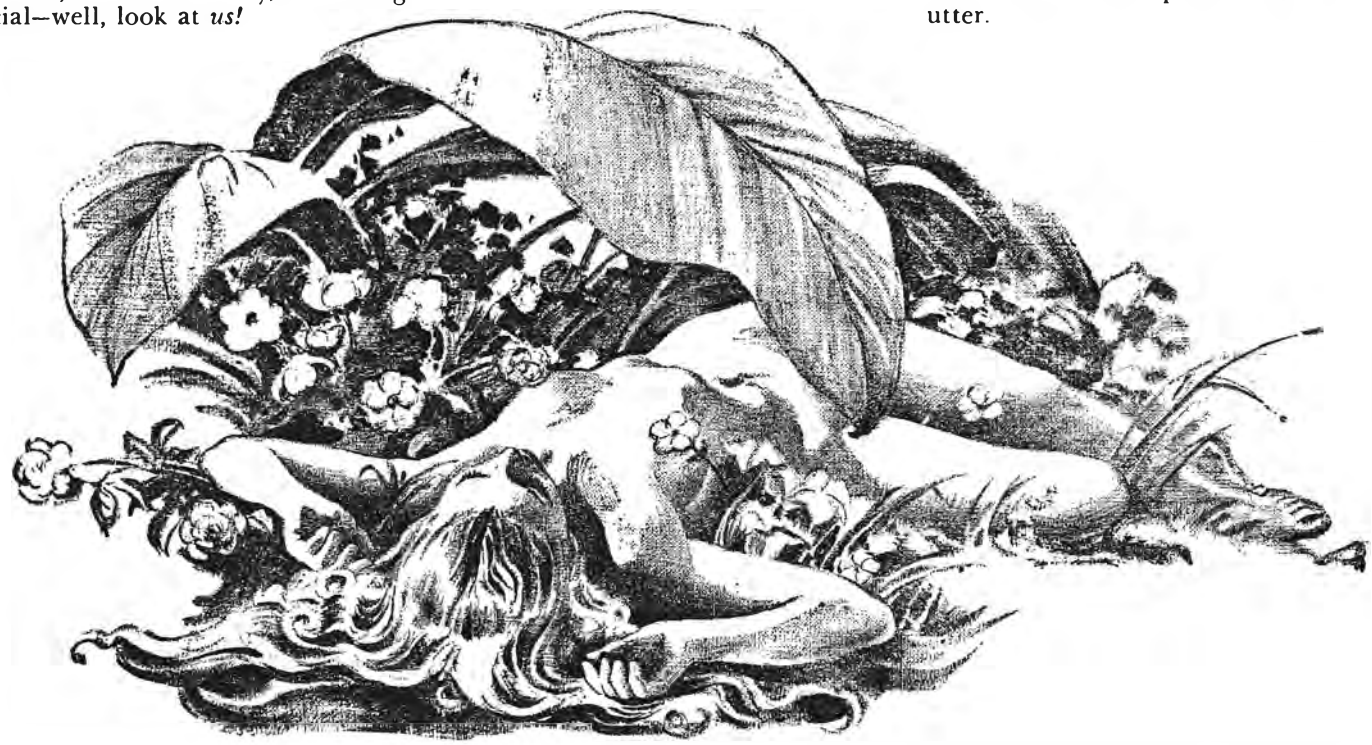
Latterly he had begun to suspect that Adam was bored and lonely. He, Nm, thought of the word as *"lonely,"* though he hardly knew what it meant. But he knew this, that the manner of his master was more and more frequently distrait; that he looked down the glades and vistas of Eden as if he were expectant; that he turned at eventide away from his lookings, his expectancies, as if he were sad and, in a vital way, distressed.

II

Eve

OVERHEAD in a fig-tree Nm's parrot Irony—so called because Nm thought it was a pretty sound—a beautiful sketch in scarlet, green, gold, blue and pale pink—had been muttering to itself for a long time, rather like a well-satisfied person talking in its sleep. Nm was quite used to this.

But he was *not* used to the sudden ear-piercing whistle which, after a short silence, the parrot saw fit to utter.



It was, as both Nm and Irony—the only living thing after Adam, Nm loved—understood, an alarm.

Nm woke suddenly as the bird, abandoning the alarm, began to talk:

"Somebody hath come here in the night! Nm—somebody hath come in the night!"

Nm sat up.

"It is well," he said. "I will see to it. Meantime, wake not the Chief with thy whistlings! Where is the person who hath come in the night? Quietly!"

Nm got up. "Show me," he commanded.

"This way," said the parrot.

Nm followed a flutter of scarlet wings. . . .

She was lying fast asleep under a fig tree not far from Adam.

Nm took a look, caught his breath, and decided without any difficulty at all that he had never seen anything remotely resembling it in his life. Beauty? Why, she dimmed the sunrise!

Nm stared—beauty-stricken. Irony fluttered down to perch on his shoulder, took a long, thoughtful look, and screwed its gaudy neck to look up at Nm.

"Hast thou ever observed the like in the whole period of thy natural life?" it asked.

"Nay, bird, not so; I have not seen," muttered Nm. "Verily, such a sight dimmeth mine eyes!"

He spoke the bare truth. The little deep-sunken eyes of the Near-Man were full of inexplicable tears.

"She is lovely past understanding," said the parrot.

"Why dost thou say *she?*" asked Nm, puzzled. "She? *She?* That is a word I have not heard!"

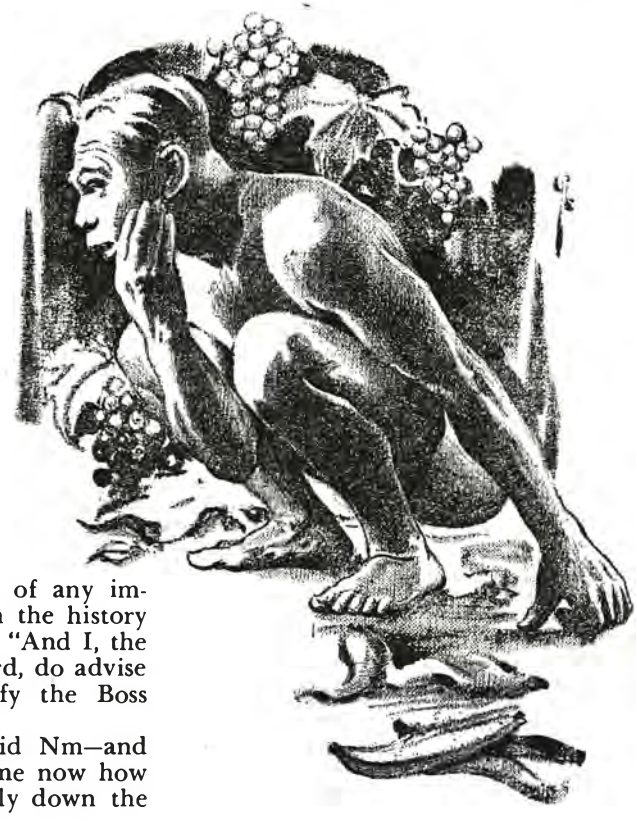
The parrot chuckled—much as present-day parrots chuckle.

"I invented it! I, the parrot! It is a good word, and it will frequently be heard when the world grows older."

"I think so too!" said Nm. Still staring through his unconscious tears, he continued: "Bird, thou art wise, well experienced and far-traveled! Think'st thou that She will permit such as I to serve her, to attend her, to follow humbly in her shadow, ever-obedient, ever-attentive to her least wish?"

"Yea—and even so," said Irony. "She will permit! Thou shalt never lack somewhat to perform in her service, Nm! As I believe it to be!"

He fluttered a scarlet wing and scratched a purple poll.



"Verily, such a sight dimmeth mine eyes!" muttered Nm.

"She is the first thing of any importance to take place in the history of the Garden," he said. "And I, the parrot Irony, the wise bird, do advise that thou shouldst notify the Boss without loss of time!"

"Yea, that will I!" said Nm—and lingered still. "I mind me now how he hath gazed so wistfully down the vistas! Thinkest thou, bird, that he hath gazed for such as She?"

"I am incurably convinced of it," said the parrot. "How could it be otherwise? Look at her!"

Nm looked some more. He had been looking all the time they had been talking, but his eyes were not weary.

Yet he dared not linger. "Watch well over She while She still sleeps," he said. "I will now notify the Boss!"

He crept away, looking over his shoulder—with the result that he flattened an ear against a coconut palm as he walked sidewise, and so, abruptly, turned to look where he was going.

ADAM was awake, eating fruit. He smiled on Nm as the Near-Man crept up.

"Sir," said Nm, a little hysterically, "*She* hath arrived in the night!"

Adam bounded to his feet, like a deer.

"*She?* . . . That is a word which I have not heard!" he said.

"Yet it will never again be unknown—said the parrot, sir!" said Nm, inventing boldly, though he was abasing himself to the ground.

"Thou art strangely humble, Nm!" observed Adam.

"Sir, I have seen that to render me humble!" said Nm—which was pretty fair, for a Near-Man.

"Take me there," said Adam, smiling, "and let us see if it can humble *me!*"

So Nm took him there—and left him there.

Even if he had looked over his shoulder—as he did—Nm would have

seen no more than a superb example of Love at First Sight.

To say that Eve was the loveliest woman Adam had ever seen would of course be equivalent to saying precisely nothing, for he had never seen a woman before. (There were, he understood, a number of near-women, relatives of Nm, haunting about in the tree-tops of the forests, but these he classed, rightly, with the orangs and chimps.) Eve was something new—too new to be true.

FOR a full hour Adam gazed upon her, thrilled and fascinated.

"She is utterly beautiful, yet She is different from me. She is round in places where I am flat. Yet I am beautiful too!" he said naïvely but quite truthfully. "So I suppose flat is beautiful and round is also beautiful. How nice! I wonder if she would mind if I touch her—it would be wonderful to touch her. And after all, she is mine—everything in the Garden is mine. It must be. Besides, it cannot be intended that I should stand here and stare at her forever. She cannot have come here just to be stared at in her sleep. She must have been sent into the world for some good purpose, though what on earth I am going to do with her, I do not know. Perhaps *she* would know—I will awaken her and see."

Some dim instinct checked his outstretched hand—a faint, far consciousness that perhaps it would be just as well to *provide* something for her before he woke her—a little breakfast, a selection of mixed fruit or something of that sort. He thought hard. Yes, it was definitely the tactful, propitiating thing to do, he decided.

It was an important decision—probably the most important decision ever made in the world; for it started a fashion which has persisted to this day—if that instinct to propitiate and please womenkind which is inextricably a part of mankind's make-up can properly be called a fashion.

He arranged the fruit as attractively as he could within easy reach, then very gently smoothed her cheek with the backs of his curved fingers.

"Oh, lovely one!" he whispered. "Wilt thou not wake up now, please?"

Her eyes opened so instantly that—as it occurred to Adam long afterward—she might almost have been already awake. For a long time the deep amethyst eyes countered the electric gaze of Adam—then, surprisingly, they fell. For a few seconds only.

Then she raised a slim hand to hold Adam's, still caressing her cheek

"Oh—oh—oh—but I have dreamed of thee this whole night long," she said in a voice so musical that Adam thrilled like a plucked harpstring.

"Sayest thou so, O Splendor of the Dawn!" answered Adam, trembling. "And I have sought throughout Eden and far across the deserts beyond it these many days, and desperately dreamed these many nights, for what it was I knew not, but which I know now is that which I have found. It was for thee I looked and longed!"

They stared at each other. Again her eyes fell.

"Mine eyes are dazzled," she cooed.

"But mine are enriched!" said Adam, and took her in his arms.

"But nay—nay! It is so public here!" she demurred.

"Not so," said Adam. "This is private property—private as far as the eye can reach, and beyond and beyond that again."

"But whose?" murmured Eve.

"Mine! Save only for one small, gnarled and writhen tree!"

Eve took him in her arms.

"Ours," she sighed.

"Nay, *thine!*" said Adam, generous as he was beautiful. "With this—all this—forever I endow thee—for thy sweet beauty's sake!"

That too, in its way, was another important decision.

She kissed him, murmuring fondly.

III

A. Snake, Esq.

THIS, being the record of Mr. Hobart Honey's experience in the incarnation of Nm the Near-Man, is not the proper place in which to follow in any sort of detail the lovely life of Adam and Eve during their first few months in the Garden of Eden.*

Probably the most beautiful, possibly the noblest, certainly the first love story in the world, it went, in its superior way, pretty well like all subsequent genuine love-affairs. It had its ups and downs, of course—and Nm was mainly concerned with its downs. Few lovers require the attendance of either a Near-Man or a parrot when their affairs are going well, so Nm and his parrot were thrown pretty much on their own resources for a long time after the arrival of Eve.

They managed.

Then one day Nm, strolling about the Garden with nothing to do, paused in surprise before the tree which Adam had always firmly instructed him was not, in any circumstances whatever, to be touched.

"Nor, mark ye well, Nm, is fruit to be plucked from it—never, in no circumstances whatever," Adam adjured him.

"No sir!" he had promised, never believing that such an ugly, gnarled, knotty, twisted, inexplicable-looking tree would ever bear any fruit.

Now, to his amazement, the tree was brilliant with the most exquisitely shaped and colored fruit the Near-Man had ever seen—and he had seen considerable fruit in his time.

He hung about for a while, admiring it. Naturally, it never occurred to him to touch it, after Adam's prohibition. But it was otherwise with Irony the parrot, which flew across before Nm could forbid it, and tried the fruit.

"It's good—of its kind," said the bird. "It kind of stimulates your mind—though for flavor, I prefer a good pomegranate!"

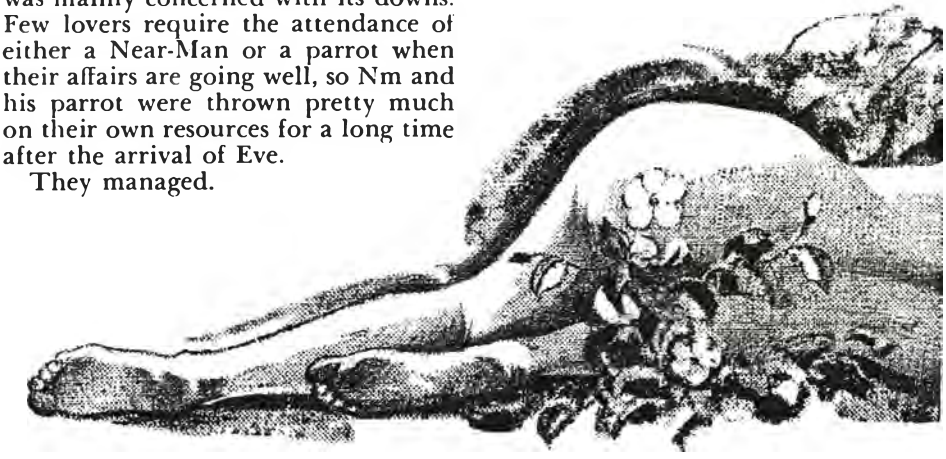
Nm, startled at the freedom of the rainbow-hued bird on his shoulder, was about to move on when a being moved out from behind the twisted trunk of the tree—a tall, dark, handsome brute in man's shape, who would have reminded Nm of Mephistopheles if he had ever heard of Mephistopheles.

This one had fixed the startled Near-Man with a pair of glittering eyes.

"Leave those apples alone!" he commanded.

"Yes sir," said Nm hurriedly, shuddering under the glare of those mesmeric eyes.

"Return whence thou camest, and tell the Lady of Eden—that lovely Human called by the First Man 'Eve'—that the fruit of the tree has ripened and is ready. Tell her no more—nor less—than I have said."



*Should any frenzied Public Demand for such a record of Life in the Garden of Eden arise, no doubt it can be furnished upon receipt of the usual fees, less Income Tax, by Bertram A.

"Yes sir," said Nm humbly. "What name shall I say, sir?"

"Name? Name?"

The Dark One smoothed his gleaming pointed beard, reflectively.

"Name? Say that the Snake—" His eye fell on a patch of tall, gently wind-waved grass beyond the Tree. "Say that the Snake-in-the-Grass sent her word."

He laughed. It was a silently suggestive sound, like the flicker of forked lightning seen afar off.

"No. Say A. Snake, Esq., sent word. She will know! Mention it not to Adam! Dost thou understand?"

The Near-Man hung fire.

"Sir," he quavered, "to my Lord Adam, who saved me from the great beasts, I mention all things."

"Fool," said the parrot, who had partaken of the fruit.

"Well said, bird or evil spirit, I know not—nor care," said A. Snake. "Mark it well, Near-Man, that if the Lady of Eden thinks it fitting that her Lord should know, then *she* will tell him—not such as *thou* art, Near-Man."

"Yes sir—no sir," said Nm.

"Get gone!" said A. Snake, dangerously.

And Nm went.

HER laugh, when Nm passed on his message, sounded as innocent and as charming as the laugh of a child about to engage upon a trifling mischief.

And indeed, it was no more to her than a trifling mischief. She had only once deceived Adam before—that time when he was calling her, and it had seemed to her to be just a playful little amusing thing to hide behind some bushes as if she were far away. She had come out at once when he sounded forlorn and frightened. They had cried a little about that—it was a new thing—but in the end they had laughed.

Nm did as he was told next morning when Adam had gone, for once alone, to bathe.

"Yes—I understand," said Eve distantly. Later, lurking in the brushwood, Nm saw her pick up a woven basket and go out in the direction of the forbidden tree.

"Oh, she is wrong!" lamented Nm, in a dumb, instinctive way.

"Fool, she is utterly right," said the parrot—not so polite as formerly. The fruit of the Tree of Knowledge was toughening its psychology—if any.

"I must follow her and report to the Lord Adam," said Nm.

"You must mind your own business!" said the parrot acidly. "That's common sense—if not more."

"You're telling me," agreed Nm, "what, I suppose, I ought to know for myself—only I don't! Yet I know, somehow I feel it in my spirit, she will return a different woman."

The parrot chuckled.

"This time *you're* telling *me*," said the bird cryptically. "Madam is not a one to stand still and congeal. Madam is a lady who progresses fast!"

"Why do you call her 'Madam?' That is a new word," said Nm.

"And a good one! It is a word which will endure in no uncertain fashion for All Time, brother!" prophesied the sagacious bird—correctly.

SHE came back, flushed, excited and too lovely to be true. In her hand she carried a little basket of fruit.

Even Adam, getting a little more used to her than he had once been, noticed the change.

"O Glory of the Garden, what hath come unto thee this day? Thine eyes are stars—thou art all my dreams come utterly true—"

He slipped his arm around her.

But Eve only laughed. "I have had an adventure. Come, eat the fruit which I have gathered for thee, and I will tell thee as thou eatest!"

Hungry from his swim and attracted by the fruit, Adam did as he was told. He was halfway through the basketful by the time A. Snake, Esq., was first mentioned.

Then Eve related to him all he wanted to hear—and more—about the dark handsome stranger with the queer name who had so unexpectedly come into her life.

She ended:

"He was a very interesting man—though of course compared with thee, he was but as a remote star is to the sun! Oh, yes, I met him quite by chance—though Nm first told me of him—and he gave me this new fruit. Dost thou like it, dear heart?"

Adam reflected.

"In a way it is good, but only—in a way. Darling, it is bitter-sweet on my tongue, and my senses swim as though of some strange poison I had eaten."

He shook his beautiful head, passing his hand rather bewilderedly across his eyes.

"I have not felt like this before," he said—naturally enough, for he had eaten heartily of the Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge—and that is a strange and sharp and heady fruit.

"Moreover, Light of mine Eyes, I like not the sound of thy new playmate Snake!" Here Eve saw the first frown ever frowned in the history of life on his brow. "And it is in my mind that I will make a great club of hard wood and go forth and beat the life out of him ere ever this day's sun shall set. I am full of foreboding."

Somebody chuckled behind them—but it was only the parrot.

EVE'S glorious eyes were round and startled.

"Adam! To beat the life out of him!" she repeated, shocked. "Darest thou talk so! Thou—*thou*—so gentle! Thou who hast ever loved and befriended all things—from the great beasts of the desert to the tiny hummingbirds that flit like jewels—"

She began to cry.

"Nay, nay, dear heart, do not weep. It was but a swift, passing anger—"

"Anger! What is anger? That is a word I have not known—"

"It will be heard again," said Adam dryly. "And other words that have but newly come crowding into my mind: *Anger! Hate! Suspicion! Envy! Greed! Famine! Pestilence! War!*"

"I do not know those words—nor what they mean!" Eve was crying bitterly now.

"*War! Separation! Heartbreak!* Darling, they swarm about me like evil, stinging things. Yet shall we be always together in our hearts—" He broke off, staring at the fruit, struck by a new thought.

"Whence came this fruit? Came it from a gnarled and malignly-shaped, twisted and ugly tree?"

Eve nodded.

"That was the Forbidden Tree—of Knowledge. That is why I have become aware of all those new and bitter words! And of these bitter forebodings. We shall be sent forth from the Garden!"

He seized and held her with both hands.

"Look into mine eyes, Eve!" he said urgently. "Thou! Hast thou too eaten of the fruit?"

She shook her head.

"I saved them all for thee, I love thee so!" she said.

But she was quick-witted. Before Adam could move, she snatched a handful of the fruit and crammed it into her mouth, and stood up at her full height with her arms flung wide.

Adam gaped as he stared, and another new word for his wife came into his mind.

"*Perfection!*"

"Now she too hath sinned and must suffer with me. Yet she remaineth most perfect in mine eyes!"

And indeed she was.

"Now I too have eaten of this bitter-sweet fruit, my Lord!" she cried. "And whatsoever it hath done unto thee, so let it do unto me! Together and alike we have dwelt in this Paradise—together and alike, for good or ill, we cleave and cling each to each, forever—and wheresoever!"

Nm, watching from a highly respectful distance, saw that the times were changing fast. He, of course, was only a Near-Man, and so he knew all about that dull gray feeling we call Misery. He was using a good deal of Misery just then.

He sat there anxiously watching the noble creatures he adored, and his spirits rose as he saw that Eve had stopped crying, and within Adam's arm, was smiling up at him as, unconsciously, they moved in the same direction as that in which went two huge, misty Forms which just then silently passed them all.

They carried between them, these gigantic Forms, a huge notice-board upon which appeared, in enormous, quite unmistakable letters, the following words:

TO THE EXIT

Slowly, reluctantly, Nm—who knew something about the Outside World—rose from his scrawny haunches to follow them. Near-Man though he was he—like his employers—could take a hint when he got one—in thirty-six-inch letters.

Then he heard the whistle and fluster of the parrot Irony coming up fast behind him.

"No hurry—no hurry! Why hustle things this way!" said the parrot. "We're leaving an awful lot of good fruit behind! After all, if it's knowledge we need, why not clear the tree while we are it? May as well hang for a bushel as a peck!"

But nobody paid any attention to him.

Adam and Eve hesitated for just a moment—looking back awhile wistfully at a very lovely scene. . . .

"Lord, aint they a beautiful couple?" said the parrot, impulsively. "They will always be looking back like this—these couples! Come on, Nm!"

Near the exit, Adam and Eve checked again, looking out at the arid and rocky desert.

"Oh, how harsh and terrible!" cried Eve.

Adam laughed low.

"It might be worse! Come, dear heart!"

Only Nm, scuffling along behind them, heard her answer:

"With thee—*anywhere!*"

The parrot hung over them all, working its gorgeous wings like a kind of mill.

Suddenly it squawked:

"There he is behind the banyan—seeing us off! Sir Adam, if thou dost really desire to club him, now is the time!

"Not that it would do any good!" muttered the uncanny fowl to itself. "This is the work of a gang, if I miss not my guess! A swell property-snatching racket!"

Adam and Eve looked back. The creature calling himself A. Snake, Esq., was, as the parrot said, watching them from behind a big banyan tree. But even as Adam flushed and started for him, Snake vanished before their eyes.

Eve caught Adam's hand, and they turned again to the exit toward which the Forms were impatiently and peremptorily beckoning them.

"Place is full of strangers and illusionists," muttered the parrot.

"Art thou coming, Nm?" called Adam.

"Yes sir!" said Nm, humbly, hurrying up.

Adam looked up, his blue eyes gleaming.

"And thou?" he asked the parrot.

"Sir," said the gaudy one, "thou canst never make the grade without me—for I am what the new words will in a day to come, call a *Sense of Humor!*"

Adam laughed.

"So be it," he said.

His arm tightened gently around Eve.

"Come, then," he said. "Let's face it!"

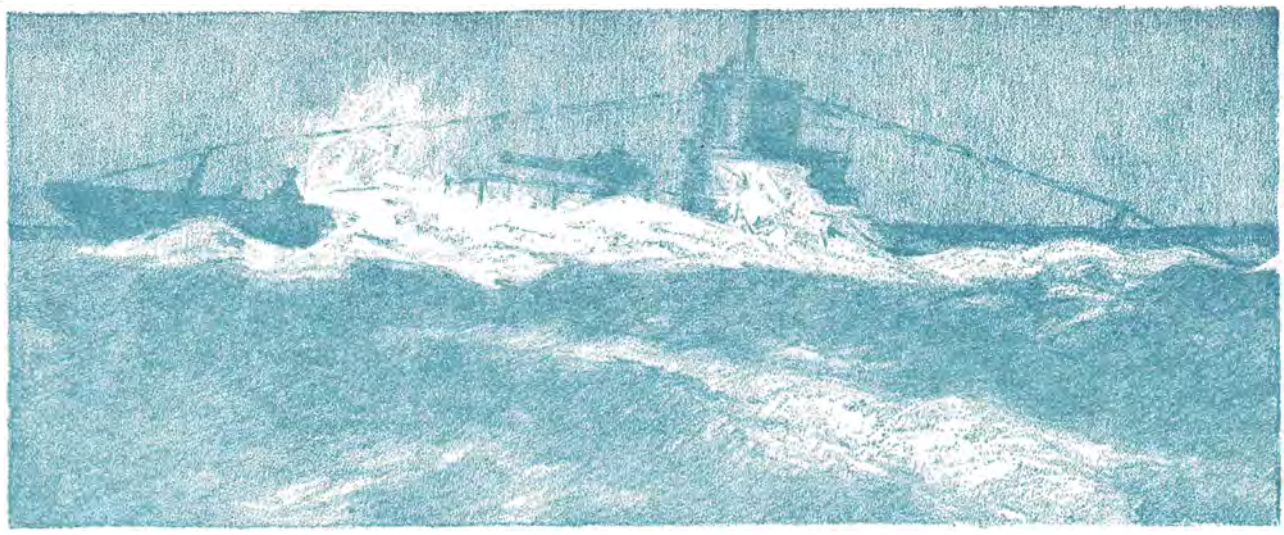
But of them all, it was only Nm who did not face it—for it was at the very moment when they all went forward into the desert that he awoke in his London flat, once more in the person of Mr. Hobart Honey.

HE sat for a long time quite still, thinking very deeply. He was not proud that this sample of the Lama's pills had shown him personally as only a Near-Man—but against the debit of that, he could set the credit of having been the personal servant of the unique specimen of mankind which, rather obviously, Adam was.

And yet, after a while, it was upon Eve that his mind closed most tenderly—Eve, Mother of All. . . .

He reached for a large glass of port, with a pang of regret that the power of the pill had waned so soon. He would have liked to be in the forefront of the Battle of Life just a bit longer.

That Adam and Eve had won was, of course, obvious—the fact that he, Hobart Honey, (not to mention a worldful of other descendants) existed, proved that!



The Bosun's Ladder

A moving drama of the doubly dangerous sea today, by the author of "The Promised Land" and "The Iron Whirlwind."

by JACLAND MARMUR

THE sea was dark under brilliant stars, and appeared at first to be empty. The long hills of ocean moved with unhurried speed, making a deep, rush-throated booming. Only when it scended to a running crest where the northeast gale whipped sprays across it did the open boat reveal its presence, swimming in half an acre of Atlantic foam. Then it fell away in a hollow trough where nothing could be seen of the faint rumor of impending dawn. But presently it reappeared again, a black chip stark against horizon gray, hove to a sea anchor with six men huddled on the thwarts. These six kept cursing, bitterly and to no purpose; for there was no officer in the lifeboat of the steamer *Betelgeuse,* now *spurlos versenkt* on a voyage toward Freetown out of the Port of New York.

"Here's what you get for your war risk bonus dough!" The man on the stroke thwart shivered, snarling: "You can warm your bones with that."

"Don't you worry, Joe." The cackle behind his back was singularly mirthless. "When the sun hits your skull you'll wish to hell you were cold again. You—"

"Stow it! Save your beefing for the Union Hall. It don't sound half so smart out here."

The bosun's gruff voice, fighting pain, throbbed against the pouring wind. It brought them to momentary silence, reminding them there were others in the tossing cockleshell; that dark shape stretched on the bottom boards far aft, the unconscious quartermaster on the starboard side—and the girl who meant to join the British African nursing corps. She was on her knees, her slim body swaying to the violent motions of the boat, her gray eyes calm as she did what she could in that friendless void. She said nothing, not lifting the lovely oval of her youthful face while the wind made a yellow pennant of her hair against dissolving night.

"Well, he can still bark!" she heard Joe growl. "Busted leg, smashed ribs an' all—we got the bosun with us anyhow."

The quartermaster thought he heard that too. The words dropped dimly to a place down deep in Johnny Barclay's brain, striking sparks of semi-consciousness. He began to remember one thing and another. . . . He had the wheel toward the end of the middle watch. The *Betelgeuse* was helming like a little boat, though the wind on her bow was fresh and the heavy swell ran strong and deep. A part of Johnny's brain could smile at that, loving the sense of seacraft skillful steering gave. Then his memory went bitter; he heard the second mate muttering to his relief after Johnny passed the course, hanging for a moment on the ladder from the bridge:

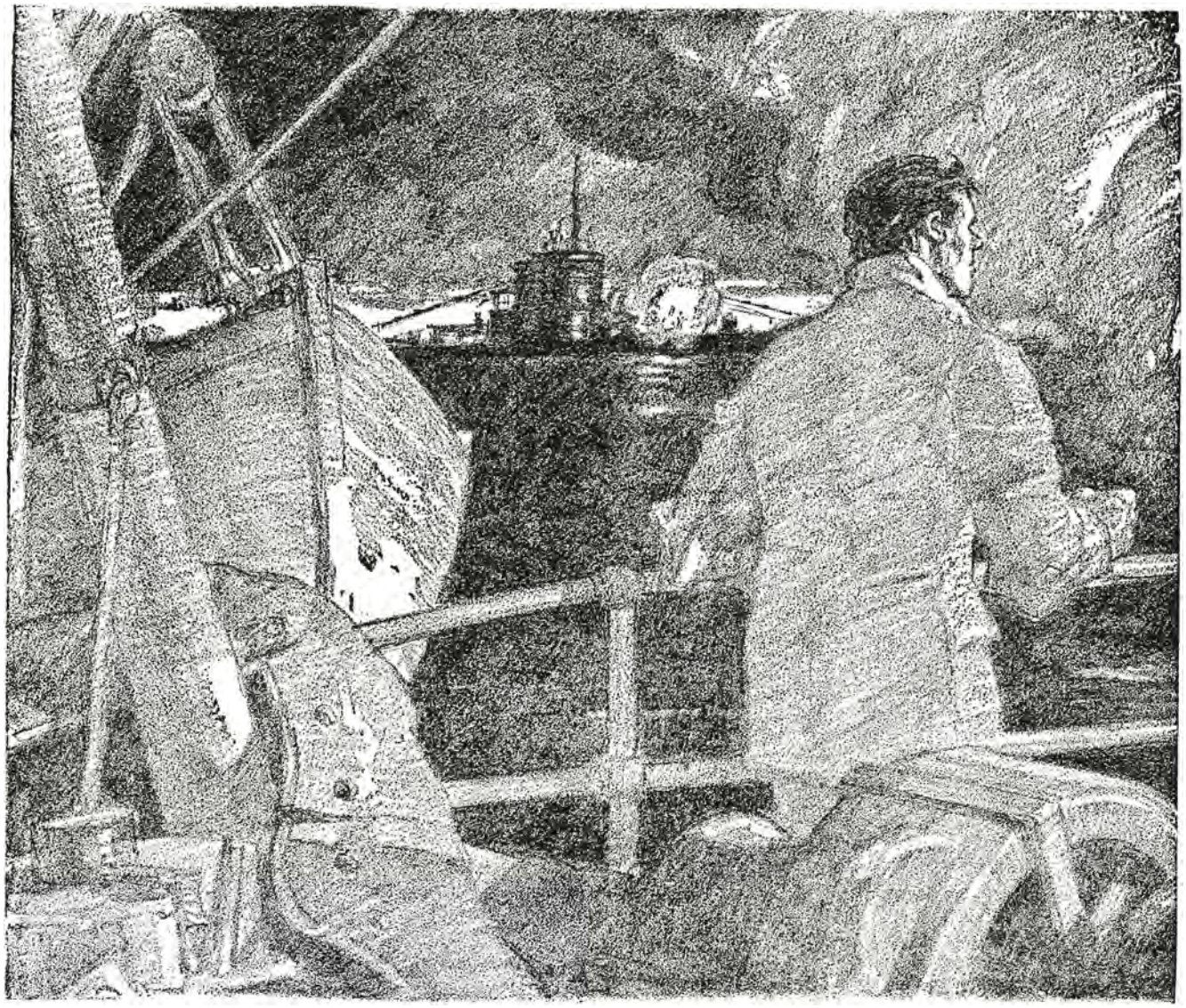
"That's Johnny Barclay, Mister." He remembered the acid irony of that voice as plain as day! "I thought you'd like to know."

"I do know." The third officer's thin laughter reached out sharp as threat. "Damn' lucky I'm in the ship at all, instead of on the beach. My name aint Barclay, an' I'm not the owner's son. Why aint his ticket in the rack instead of mine?"

"'Cause he hasn't got one yet, that's all." The Second chuckled gustily. "They held the berth for him right up till sailing-day—while Johnny, the owner's fair-haired boy with his time fresh in, went down to sit before the Board. Plenty of weight in the letters his father gave him too, I'll bet! Lucky for the merchant service notes like that don't take no holding-ground with tough old Captain Framm."

"Lucky for me, too! He gets his hand to a ticket an' they'll shove him up the ladder to command so fast your head will swim. Then he'll sit ashore in back of a big oak desk an' tell the hired help what's what whenever we hit the dock and hope the North Atlantic freeze will thaw from out our bones. I've seen it before! I know them lollipops."

"But you should have heard the row on board when Johnny told his father—just as quiet as you please!—the inspectors turned him down. Cold! He didn't have his ticket after all." The second mate's derision came pealing down the wind. "How could an owner's son be as dumb as that, the old man wants to know, bellowing at the kid. He thinks getting an officer's certificate is just like catching fish; all



The chief mate . . . hurling curses

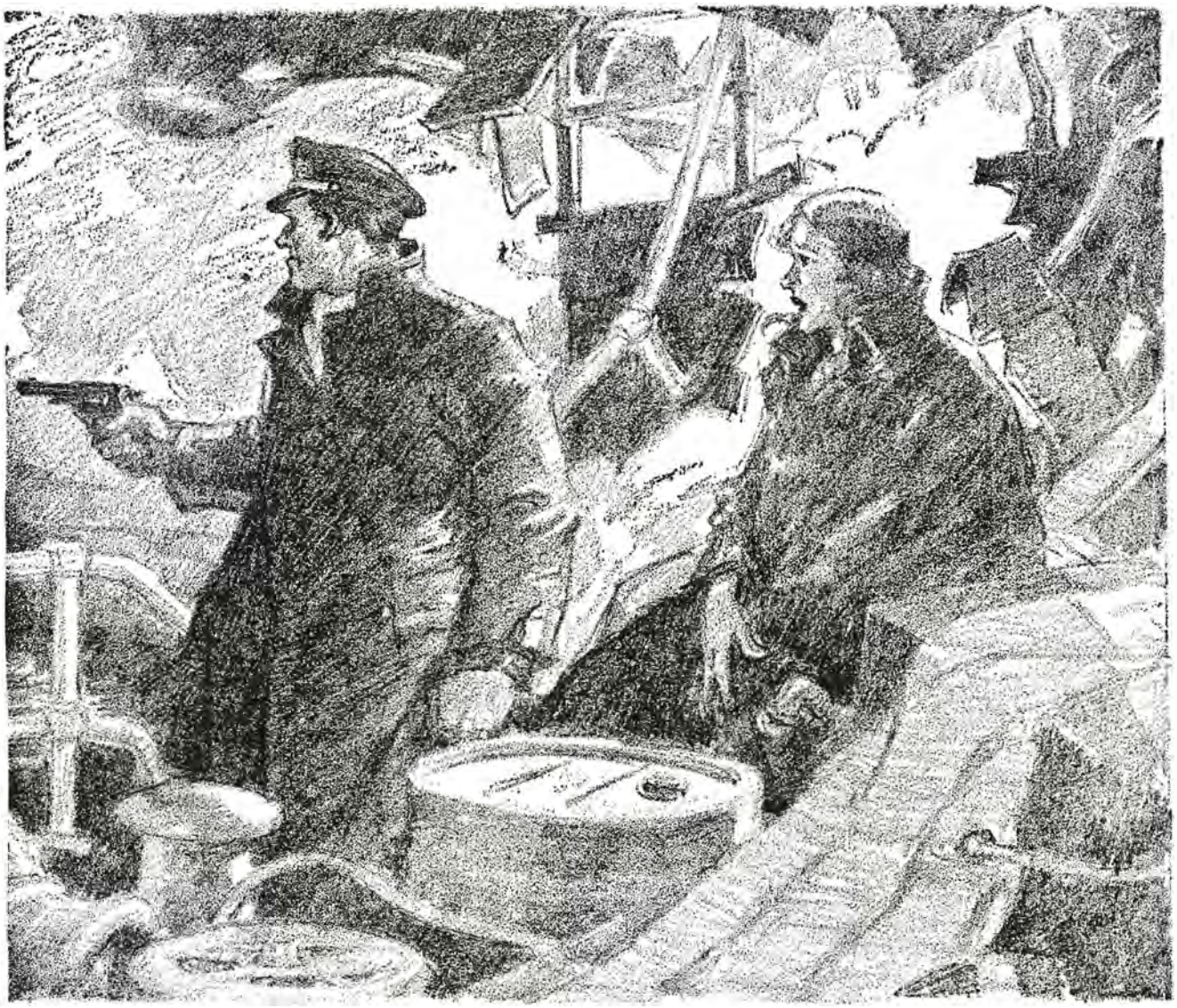
you need is good fresh bait. Hell, Sam! There aint been a seafaring Barclay in the Line he founded since old Jessiah Barclay died. And that makes twenty years. Now, *he* was—"

Johnny's memory squirmed at that, because it recognized the truth. He stirred on the bottom boards, moaning. But the vise still held his head, letting him see only broken fragments of lucidity. . . . His father thought a boy a fool who was an owner's son and went to sea the hawse-hole way. A fellow had some sense and the Barclay name besides; he learned about finance and how directors talked; he dealt in gilded paper—not in rusty ships. But Johnny had old Jessiah's Cape Cod sea-gale-and-canvas blood; that's where the trouble was. He thought a man who charged a watch with his ticket in the rack could do it only when he earned the right. And not before. Nonsense for an owner's son! That's what his father told him, blunt and cold and practical. Get the silly captain's handle to your name if you had to, but get it quick and come ashore where wealth was stirring, where the cold blue gales and the running seas could do a man no harm. A fellow with the Barclay name could afford to laugh at deep resentment in the fo'c'stle and the quarterdeck. Let them snarl! Clamber over them and walk the high place soon! And that's why Johnny, hearing that with his brand-new officer's ticket in his pocket and the third mate's berth all greased for him, quietly told his father he had muffed it and would have to sit again another trip.

All that rushed past Johnny Barclay's mind as it kept on fumbling back to consciousness. He meant to climb the ladder to the bridge when he knew it was his right. When the men below would know it too. When the right time came. When the Bosun with the beard a fathom long, who had full charge of things like that, gave him the solemn nod to indicate it was all right. He recalled grinning, thinking about that ancient sailor yarn as he turned in after the middle watch in the fo'c'stle of the steamer *Betelgeuse*. He remembered what a sweet, clear sound her bronze bell had, tonguing out the sea time just before he fell asleep. And now someone was talking about that fabulous old man, saying he was here! That wanted puzzling out. There was an empty place between, and Johnny had to fill it in.

So his mind, struggling for order, recalled the hideous blast as the torpedo struck without warning, flinging him violently from his bunk. When he raced aloft, the afterdeck of the *Betelgeuse* was a welter of unbelievable wreckage. On her starboard quarter an evil shape was surfacing through pools of foam, brine drooling from it fore and aft. He was in time to see a gun snout, low on the water over there and discontent with the work so far, belch a sheet of smoke with a flaming heart. In the middle of its roaring sound he saw the wireless shack explode—and the rest was all mixed up.

It was all mixed up with the murder of a helpless ship; with splintered lifeboats and the cries of dying men; with a sight of the chief mate . . . . hurling curses at that jackal shape while he emptied his feeble pistol at it before something knocked him down and abruptly silenced him. Then Johnny saw the girl, silhouetted against the



while emptying his feeble pistol.

flames, and he started to race her way. That was no place for a long-legged girl who could smile the way she could. But Johnny never reached her, because on the way something struck him. But that was the end of memory till now. Till he heard that voice, coming dimly from a distant place and saying—

"We got the bosun with us anyhow."

The Bosun? Why, that was a staggering thought. Because maybe he was dead! Maybe he was on his way to Fiddler's Green, that happy place where honest sailors go for the last long watch below. That's where the gnarled and grizzled Bosun with a beard a fathom long would be. And when first you clambered overside and your watch was mustered down in Fiddler's Green, he told you where your place was. No use to quarrel either, for that fellow always knew. Deck-boys, seamen, mates; merchantmen and admirals—in the end they all passed by the Bosun so he could check them off. Even the liner skippers came along, proud and striding with martinet authority, confidently holding out their masters' papers; extra-master; sail and steam. The Bosun never even looked. He took no stock in what inspectors said aloft. He kept his piercing sea-blue eyes upon your face, and what he found there was the final truth. Officer or fo'c'stle hand, he just nodded toward the ladder or he waved you forward with his horny palm. That's the way that ancient story went and Johnny Barclay knew it, struggling back to consciousness and wondering with faint alarm if his time was as soon as now. All he had to do was let his eyes come open and he'd know for sure. If he found that he was tossing in a shallop with a patched gray sail— But now the talk was clearer. So best listen for a moment, Johnny thought; best listen carefully.

"Sure!" That harsh voice belonged to Chips, the carpenter of the *Betelgeuse*. "We got the bosun with us an' we got the little lollipop. Now aint that fine? Hell of a help he'll be!"

Hearing that familiar scorn of him, so hard and biting, Johnny Barclay stiffened instinctively to oppose it; it made his mind take hold. He recognized the sharp quick movements of an open boat, the long booming of the wind, the noise of the sea very close. Shallop with a patched gray sail? The Bosun in a place called Fiddler's Green? Johnny knew better now. Silly sailor yarn! But he felt cool hands on his bandaged head, a touch as comforting as he had often dreamed about. So at last he let his eyes come open to find that girl looking down on him, faintly smiling.

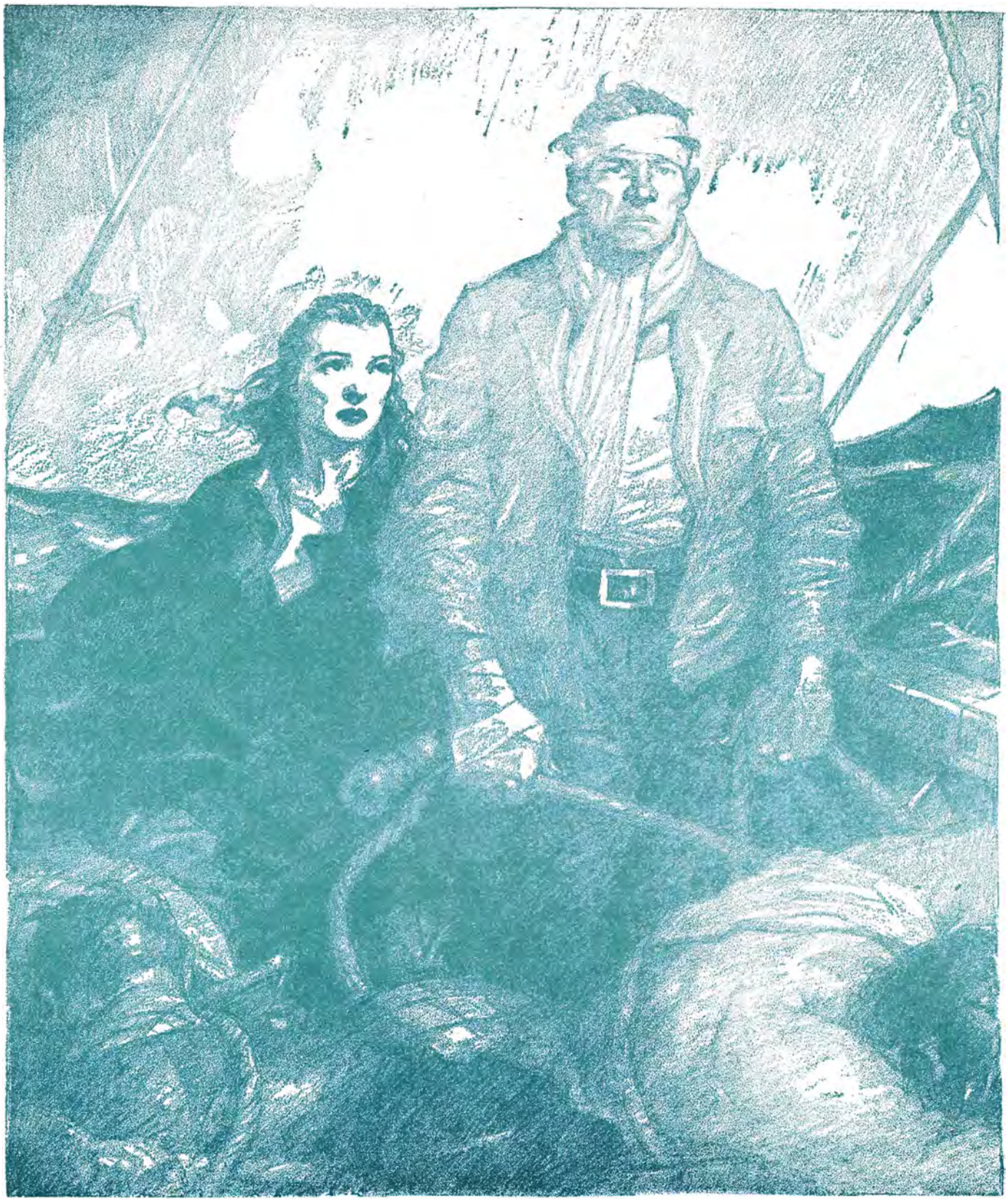
"Easy, Johnny. That splinter grazed you an awful thump."

"Careful! Do you no good, being nice to me." Johnny's voice was grim. "I'm a dangerous character," he told her bitterly. "I'm the owner's son."

"Glad to meet you." Disbelief and mockery flashed instantly in her eyes. "Myself," she said, her throaty voice a taunt, "I'm the owner's wife."

That made Johnny Barclay grin. "It's not a bad idea. I'm for it." And he sat up in the sternsheets of the open boat.

He found false dawn crawling along the eastern board. Great continents of cloud were piled there, their ragged upper crags igniting. In between the sea was empty, bleak and bottle-green, the steep hills marching with a leisure-



"I'm waiting, Toni," said Johnny, "to hear what the Bosun says."

ly majestic speed until their crests went toppling into creamy froth. When the lifeboat of the *Betelgeuse* lifted along an ocean-flank, swimming in that foam, it appeared as if the men were sitting in the midst of it, not on the thwarts at all, while the wind went pouring past. Six men . . . . Johnny counted them. And the bosun, with the girl saying sharply to him:

"You lie still!"

"My God!" said Johnny Barclay, searching the gray-green seas, shot through now, along their humpbacked shoulders, with points of blue and yellow fire. "Is this all? Where—"

"The rest are taking a spell below. We waited until daylight to make sure." Joe's voice was flat with hard, sarcastic irony. "Damn' shame there aint an officer to tell us where we are an' what we oughta do!"

Johnny's lips went taut, but he said nothing, making an instinctive appraisal of the open boat, her complement and her equipment. When his eyes found the water-breakers aft, they narrowed alarmedly. One of these was smashed to kindling in its chocks. The other, close against where Johnny sat, leaked two small

jetting streams from splinter-holes on its upper curve each time the lifeboat rolled. He knew it was half empty as he stooped over, found some canvas, and plugged the holes carefully. They watched him. Joe passed the tip of his tongue across his lips. The bosun watched him, too, sea-memory in his pain-drawn eyes, and channeled along his leather cheek.

"You fools!" he growled to all of them. "Not one of you thought of that! Get the mast unlashed and step it. Set the lugs'l. Pete, trip that sea anchor and haul it in." His white head turned about. "Ship the rudder, Johnny. It's time we moved. I think the compass is unharmed." But the men continued to huddle on the thwarts, overpowered by catastrophe. The bosun put his fist on the gunwale. "Move!" he bellowed. "Move, you blasted fools!"

THEY heard that commanding tone and recognized the familiar voice of authority. The open boat began to dance more lively, free of restraint as they sheeted the lugsail home and Johnny Barclay eased the helm, testing the weather's weight on his cheek, skillfully gauging the run of the heavy sea. She dipped her gunwale down; a dollop of spray swept clean across till he let the wind draw steadily aft, till behind his back the restless ocean hills pursued him, tall and green, heedlessly thrusting the boat aloft to pass under her and sweep ahead.

"Where the hell you think you're goin'?" Joe spat at him. "This aint a yachtboy's cruise up and down Long Island Sound! We talked it over; an' we're for the Cape Verde Islands to the east an' north."

"That's no good, Joe. We'd all be dead."

"Would we?" The shaggy head appealed to the rest. "He's got her pointed for the coast of South America. That's over fifteen hundred miles away! You think—"

"Yes." Young Johnny Barclay said it quietly, but deep inside of him a strange thing stirred and tensed, suddenly alert. He braced himself, though his voice was calm. "The Cape Verdes lie a dead beat to windward and a current setting strongly to the south and west. We'd rot on the thwarts somewhere between Sierra Leone and Cape St. Rocque. It's no good, Joe." The North Atlantic pilot chart was like a graven image at the back of Johnny Barclay's mind. "We can cross the sail and steamer lanes between Good Hope and the Port of New York this way. We can get picked up. We got a chance. The course," he said, "is south-southwest."

The eyes of the man on the stroke thwart flamed. "Who says it is?"

"Me," said Johnny Barclay, and his voice rang stronger now: "I do."

"An' who the hell are you?" Joe's laughter pumped out thickly, the men behind him echoing hoarse approval. "There aint no owner out here an' there aint no owner's son! So don't go getting smart ideas just because you're sittin' in the sternsheets with the tiller in your paw. That don't cut no ice with us, Mr. Johnny Lollipop! We say her head goes east an'—"

"No."

Joe leaned aft, half rising from the thwart. Johnny watched him, knowing they were asking for certain death, wondering for that trembling moment how he was going to manage this, and wondering why he should even try. Then he heard a deep bass voice, exploding in angry words.

"Sit down, you fool!" The bosun had dragged his shoulders up, hanging to the gunwale with one fist, half sitting and half lying down, a grizzled man with the sea mark tooled upon his face, his big head against the wind and fever in the hollow pockets of his eyes. "You'll steer the course you're told! And stay for'ard. All of you! Where you belong."

It broke the spell. Joe dropped back, grumbling, while the bosun, exhausted with that effort, fell back along the bottom boards, his taped chest laboring, his eyes on the youngster at the tiller-bar. "She's yours, bright boy," he gasped. "Let's see what you can do. Steer south-southwest."

"It looks," said Johnny, "like I'm gonna need some help."

"Help?" The bosun tried to laugh. But the best he could manage was a heavy sigh. "Someone's got to bring them home. Every damn' one of them. But me, I'm— It's up to you."

Johnny's head shot quickly round, meaning to blurt a protest out. But he didn't. He faced forward instead where the ocean peaks were tumbling in a frothy glitter now. Suddenly, the sun burst like a bombshell in the east, pouring a white hot light on the running open boat. The quartering wind made a strong, deep, humming sound, noisily urging her along. And he heard the voice of the girl against it, low and troubling.

"I'm Toni," she said simply. "Short for *Antonia Alderly*. And I'm sorry. I thought you were getting smart. What in the world are you doing out here, a tramp ship quartermaster, Johnny, if you're really the owner's son?"

"I'm waiting, Toni," said Johnny, grinning at the drumming lugsail leech, "to hear what the Bosun says."

She couldn't make anything of that, and she didn't try. Neither did Johnny Barclay; it just slipped out. But he grinned no longer after that. Because thirst and the sea took charge, and there wasn't any officer in the lifeboat of the steamer *Betelgeuse*, a shining speck adrift in a vast and empty void.

Two biscuit tins and a half-empty water-breaker. For six men, the injured bosun, and the girl with the yellow hair. Not counting himself, that was. He looked them over, wondering what they brought with them besides their union cards. The resentful eyes of Joe and Chips bored at him. They wanted water, and Johnny could only stubbornly shake his head.

"At sunset," he said, "when it'll do us some good. Half a pannikin and two biscuits each. We might as well get used to it."

He remembered that first sunset, gold and crimson banners hurling through horizon cloud, the ocean rollers rearing crests like regimental battle plumes racing to assault a feeble cockleshell. And he remembered rationing the water carefully before swift twilight fell, and how the last glow, softened in a gray-green trough, touched the face of Toni as she held the cup to the bosun's lips. Johnny hung to that vision, along with the tiller-bar. Because it seemed to him he kept the boat's head south and west for days, for weeks on end. But he learned he was right about Joe, though whether it was the first dawn, the second, or the third he didn't know. He woke abruptly from a fitful doze as a face came at him, a face with eyes fastened greedily on the water-breaker Johnny guarded with his legs.

"Stop that!" he cried out instantly. "Joe! Get back!"

The man's wild head snapped up. "To hell with you!" it croaked. "By God, I'm gonna wet my throat before I die!"

HE tensed in his crouch, suddenly lunging. Johnny saw the knife blade flash, the light streak blue along its length. He heard the girl's sharp cry and just as he leaped erect and aside, he saw Chips crawling aft. He barely sensed the steel slicing his dungaree jacket to bring warm blood along his shoulder. Then his fist struck out; he felt its impact and saw Joe fall. Then he swayed there, panting, waiting and ready for Chips, wondering why he didn't come. It startled him to see the carpenter sprawled inertly across a thwart, a slim girl with an ashen face standing over him, still holding in her small white fists the tiller-bar she had unshipped and used. An exultant feeling surged up in Johnny and he meant to cry it to her. But the thrashing lugsail sent her quickly aft to thrust the helm up, leaving Johnny where he was, swinging against the sky and growling thickly:

"This won't do. Won't do at all. They'll go mad and—"

Mechanically he went about lashing Joe and Chips each to a thwart with

a piece of line while the others watched him dumbly, making no complaint when he gauntly passed among them, flinging their knives into the sea. Then he came aft and took his place again. Behind Toni's eyes, whenever he looked her way, he thought he saw a hint of what could easily be called a smile in any other place than here: he wondered what there was to smile about. That much he remembered with an extraordinary clarity. But the rest got all mixed up—in a pageant of blazing sun, breaking seas, and the booming rush of the heavy northeast trade. By day the smallboat of the *Betelgeuse* floated under a burning, blue-white vault; by night she swam in darkness under myriads of starpoints glittering aloft, infinite and remote. Yet each dawn found her as if she had not moved at all, central in an ocean walled by cloud, her head still pointed toward the south and west. Johnny lost track of time. It was endless and his mind was spinning round. . . . Joe and Chips, lashed to the thwarts and snarling at him. Then Pete, the bosun's mate, leaping up flame-eyed and roaring. You had to beat him down and tie him up along with the other two. Well, that made three. But there were six. Six thirst-crazed men lashed down in an open boat without strength or will to loose themselves. It was hard to remember when each one went. But there they were now, the lot of them. Staring at him. And once each day he rationed the water and held it to their swollen lips while they cursed him, gulping greedily and leaving all the rest to him. Toni and him. Because you didn't have to lash Toni down. Or the bosun. He just lay there, uncomplaining, the fever of his wounds blazing in his eyes. And Johnny couldn't stand it any more. He was as human as the rest of them; he needed lashings just as much as they. So he cried rebellion —out from a throat thirst-swollen, dry as ash.

"Damn you, Boats, for shoving it on to me!" He tried to bellow that to all the spaces of the sea and sky. "This job aint mine! I never signed the articles for this. I signed as quartermaster in the *Betelgeuse*. No one even knows I passed for third mate at the Custom House. No one knows I got the ticket; I never hung it in a chartroom rack. This job aint mine!"

HE thought he thundered it aloud, though his voice was a cracked, hoarse croak. He stood in the sternsheets, drunkenly gyrating against a blinding horizon line, waiting for some hopeful answer from an empty place. But there wasn't any. There was just the girl, watching him in exhausted silence. And the bosun, his eyes still fixed intently on the youngster with the tiller-bar against his knee. So Johnny sank to the thwart again, drained. He let his head fall to his chest while the sea kept thrusting the open boat aloft and down, rhythmically aloft and down. And he was sure the end was here. They were through; they were all washed up. His course was wrong; his sea judgment poor. Even Joe knew better. Even Joe. There weren't any ships left anywhere on the lanes from the Good Hope Cape to pick them up.

That's what Johnny Barclay thought when the last darkness came and he was alone in it, still hanging grimly to the tiller-bar. But he could review things calmly now, in what he was certain was a brilliant clarity of mind. The faint moaning of the lashed men forward, the long whimper of the wind, the steady wash and rush of restless water—these noises were indifferent externals; they had no power to disturb the sea's essential silence. He was at the ocean's core where the stillness was, profound and everlasting, and he must learn its meaning now or not at all. He had done his level best, he told it bluntly. He had picked the burden up when there was no one else who would or could. He didn't care what his father thought; he had Jessiah's blood. Well, what about it? Was it good enough? What would old Jessiah think, and what would the Bosun say? He ought to find out now. He ought to find out very soon. So Johnny Barclay, hanging on before exhaustion drowned him out, grinned at the starry night, remembering that ancient sailor yarn about a place called Fiddler's Green where the gales blow sweet and smell like wine and have no weight at all, where a girl with yellow hair will smile at you and take your hand in hers when eight bells go on the big bronze bell for the last long watch below. . . .

That took the very last of Johnny's coherent thought. After that he found his legs were made of lead and wouldn't do what he asked them to. It angered him. So he staggered erect to face the final dawn. It made a silent celebration in the east, climbing the ramparts of the burning cloud-masses while south and west the night haze hung and in between the ocean valleys held still fast to remnants of dissolving dark. It startled him to find the girl beside him, crying things he couldn't understand, wildly waving. Till all of a sudden that veil of mist began to part and he saw a dark hull spoiling the horizon line.

It thrust toward him. It took on shape and substance, looming larger, dipping down blunt bows in white Atlantic foam and lifting up again with hawsepipes dripping brine. Johnny thought he smiled at Toni. He meant to tell her this was nothing at all to be alarmed about. It was just the way it ought to be. Presently they'd send the shallop over—the shallop with the patched gray sail. Then suddenly he frowned. By God, he thought, this was a most amazing thing! She ought to be a sailing-ship with spars that touched the sky. Well, there you were! That showed you how much credence you could put in the yarns you heard at sea. They never told the truth at all. They never got it straight.

"Ship *Betelgeuse!*" Johnny tried his desperate best to keep his voice quite clear and calm, the way a sailor's hail should always sound. "Torpedoed without warning on a voyage toward Freetown out of the Port of New York," he cried. "We've had an awful time and I'd like to get my men aboard for rest—if the Bosun will allow."

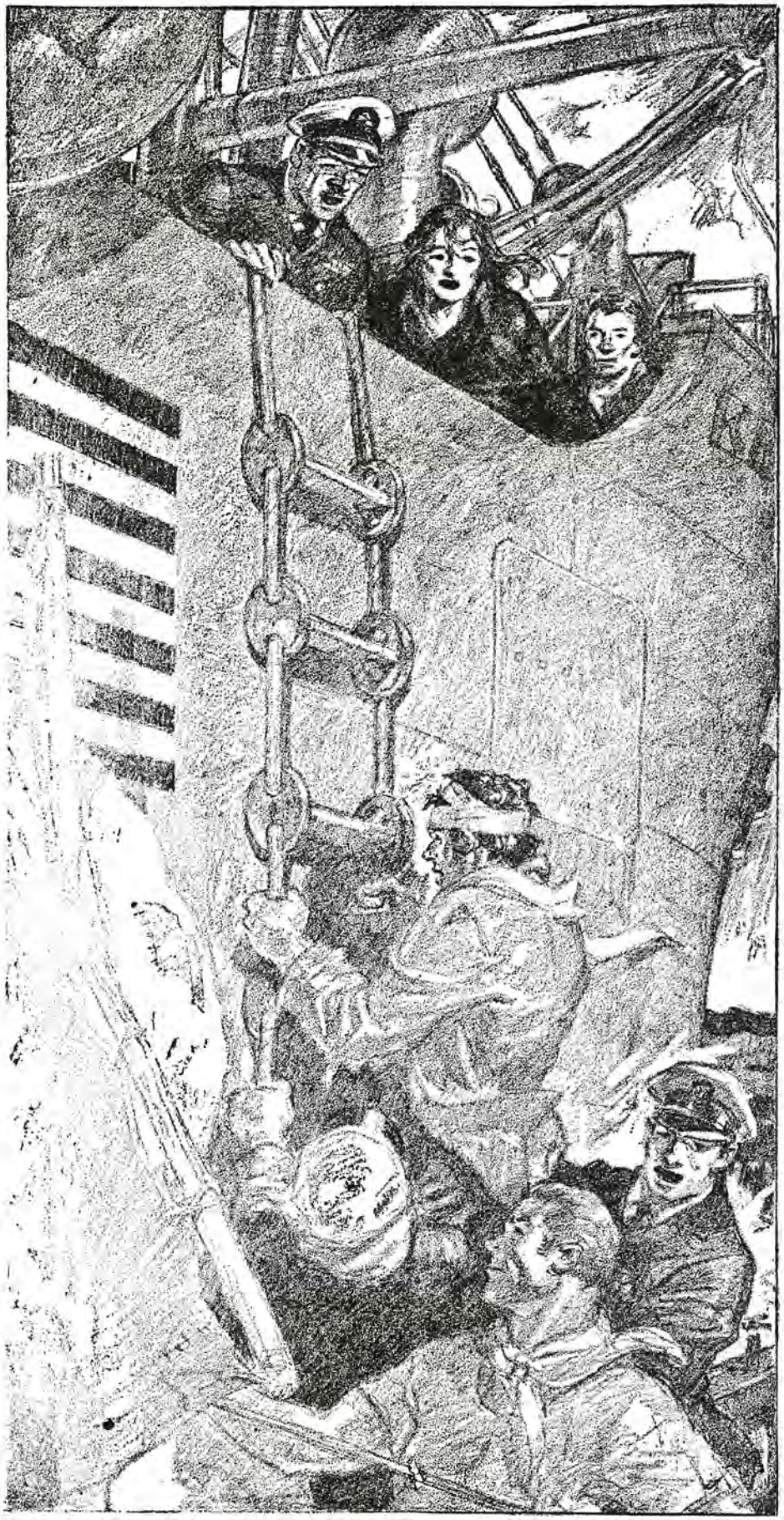
That's what they heard on that maindeck after they sighted a speck adrift in the dawning light and the master altered his course to investigate. They peered over the rail, aghast at what they saw.

JOHNNY heard their voices growling up there; he heard the winch steam hiss. He couldn't make much sense of that. He only hoped they'd hurry. He felt exhaustion crawling over him, and he knew that wouldn't do. He had to hang on long enough to see the men all safe. That's what the bosun told him ages and ages ago. Someone had to bring them home, and it was up to him. So he stood there, tottering, grimly keeping the tiller-bar between his knees. No good fighting with him for it; he wouldn't let it go. He watched strangers unlash the men, sending them aloft on a sea stretcher bent to a cargo fall. One by one. He counted them with the severest concentration, knowing there had to be six. Six and the wounded bosun. And then he could find out about himself. About himself and Toni. Because she wouldn't leave his side. They were struggling with her urgently and she wouldn't go. They didn't seem to understand that. But Johnny did.

"I told you long ago I was the owner's wife." He heard her throaty voice with an amazing clarity. "I thought I was pretty smart. But now I see I meant it, Johnny, and I think you ought to know."

"Of course, Toni." He wasn't a bit surprised. She knew! She knew as well as he. You couldn't go against the gods and there wasn't any use to try. They belonged together forever now. "Wait for me on deck," he said. "I'll find out right away."

Then he was all alone. It was a little frightening. But he understood no one could stand beside you at a time like that. And he knew his time was now. Because he saw the ladder that led aloft. It kept bumping against



Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

"Poor devil!" the mate was growling. "How he managed to bring them in—"

that vessel's side and it was steep and hard. So now was the time to find out if it was meant for him. Now was the time to know if the ticket in his jeans had sound validity. He felt arms upon him and he summoned strength to thrust them off.

"By God, sir, he means to climb it! He means to climb it by himself!"

Johnny heard that dimly and it made him frown. "Of course!" he thought. Who else would climb it for him if he couldn't manage it himself? A tightness seized his throat. In another instant he would know the truth. So he forced his head up and he looked aloft, searching out the face at the ladder's head with the beard that ought to be a fathom long. He couldn't see it clearly; things were making a dizzy blur. So he waited for the word he'd know was meant for him. He waited, taut and trembling. Then it came. . . . Now—here it was!

"Come along! You're all right now." The voice, gruff with indulgent understanding, boomed down from a distant, lofty place. "Come along aboard now, Mister Mate."

Johnny sighed. He could let his pent-up breath escape. Mister Mate! He even tried to smile, that was so fine a thing to hear. Now he could let go the tiller-bar—now he could stagger to the ladder—now he could seize the tough, coarse sailor rope and put his foot on the uneasy lowest rung. Up aloft they watched him from the rail, knowing it was no good denying him the right to come aboard on his own two feet. They saw a gaunt and haggard specter with a bandaged head and eyes like burning coals, painfully climbing a pilot ladder, swaying while the sun exploded on him and all around the white and tumbling ocean blazed suddenly with the first pure light of dawn.

"POOR devil!" the mate was growling hoarsely just before he reached down a helping hand. "How he managed to bring them in, the devil only knows. Imagine lashing them to the thwarts! . . . What do you suppose that wounded fellow meant when we hauled him in, saying they had a seafaring Barclay in the Line again?"

He got no answer, expecting none. But Johnny thought he heard it. It funneled slowly down into what was left of consciousness. It could let the slow grin slip along his burning lips. Because he was all right now. Because Toni was waiting for him up there, waiting to take his hand in hers. He was very sure of that. And he knew where his place was. He knew he could charge a watch of his own and hang his ticket in a chartroom rack. He could climb the bosun's ladder leading to the quarterdeck. He had the proper nod at last. He knew what the Bosun said.

We read much about our war among the islands north and east of Australia. Here are excerpts from an American's book about the background—about life among the wild men and wild animals of Papua.

The House

by CHARIS

WHEN I was very young, someone once told me that, if you wanted anything badly enough, the chances were that you would get it. At the time I contemptuously considered this one more misguided adult aphorism. How many things had I not urgently desired, from immediate metamorphosis into the opposite sex, to a grown-up's pillow at night; and what good had it done me? But, however skeptical one may be of its fulfillment, the wish itself remains. It was rather later in life that a new wish obsessed me. . . . Quite why the insatiable longing to go to New Guinea possessed me I often found difficult to explain. . . . In my anthropological studies, New Guinea offered a field of investigation comparatively unexplored and of great interest. But I think that strongest of all was the feeling that the sort of life that would lead to New Guinea, not to mention working there, would be a very fine sort of life indeed. . . .

When Freddy and I were married, he seemed to take very kindly to the idea of New Guinea too. Perhaps he felt the subconscious need of balancing his two years in the Antarctic under Admiral Byrd with an equal length of time in the tropics. Perhaps I made such a nuisance of myself that everyone, Fate included, decided the simplest solution would be to grant me my wish.

The progress toward our goal was as exciting as its attainment. Never, in our wildest moments of optimism, had we dreamed that the same benevolent Providence which accorded us New Guinea would throw in gratuitously Tahiti and the Solomons, the Tuamotus and Fiji, and the whole blue expanse of the Pacific, which, even when quite by itself, was a completely satisfactory experience. . . .

We were fortunate in being sponsored by the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. It was to the Academy that the birds collected were to be sent, the butterflies, freshwater fish, and the botanical specimens that mouldered away before we could ever get them out of New Guinea; the anthropometric measurements, on the other hand, were to go to the Peabody Museum of Harvard University. With great wisdom the Academy armed us with numerous imposing documents covered with red ribbon and gold seal, which seemed to have a hypnotic effect on harbourmasters and other officials along the way; with even greater wisdom they appointed a friend of ours, Dillon Ripley, as official ornithologist to the expedition.

Seven of us tucked snugly into the *Chiva,* the fifty-nine-foot schooner which was to carry us from Gloucester, Massachusetts, to New Guinea. Diddy Lowndes, another friend, went along for the trip; George Adams joined us as captain and navigator, and two adventurous young men from Gloucester, Charlie Smith and Doane Nickerson, signed on as cook and sailor, respectively.

Our first disaster occurred at Panama; the Diesel auxiliary had an inconvenient fit of temperament in the middle of the Canal. . . .

For a month we were tied up to the dock in Balboa waiting for a vital Diesel part to arrive by airmail from New York. The *Chiva* rose and fell on the eighteen-foot tide with monotonous regularity while we lived the lives of goldfish in a bowl of very warm water, stared down at by the sailors on the giant ships which towered around us and by the usual curious idlers on the wharf.

Dillon was the first to fall from grace. One day he came on board with a parrot, a middling-sized green one named Joey. As Dillon feels about birds, so I feel about four-footed animals. Shortly after this self-indulgence on his part, I had my first meeting with the kinkajou or Panamanian "honey bear," a brown furry animal with a black tongue and a long prehensile tail. When a kinkajou sleeps, it curls into a round ball tied up with its own tail, its little pink-padded paws crossed defenselessly, and is altogether irresistible—that is, to anyone with my failing. The day before we were scheduled to leave Balboa, Dillon and I made a secret expedition to the zoo and examined kinkajous of assorted sizes and ages. The big ones were lethargic and fierce, the littlest ones exhaustingly active and fierce, but we finally encountered a young adolescent that seemed amiably disposed toward us. She wrapped her tail in an affectionate stranglehold around my neck, wound her fingers in my hair, delicately removed one of my earrings with her teeth, and won my heart completely. We smuggled her surreptitiously on board the *Chiva,* where, since she was a nocturnal animal and the afternoon was hot and bright, she retired to sleep in the clothes hammock above my bunk. This aptitude for accommodating herself to her surroundings seemed to us to bode very well, and we decided to postpone any mention of her presence.

At that particular time we had for neighbors four submarines picketed in a row at our stern and a largish tug looming over our bow. The full name of the latter, as we could read when we walked along the dock to her bows, was *The Lieutenant-Colonel Herman C. Schumm.* However, on her stern which she presented to our view some of the letters had been washed away or otherwise removed, leaving only the unusual diminutive of HERMA HUMM. We had stared for so many impatient hours at this name, that it seemed only natural to present it to the kinkajou.

Herma Humm II introduced herself to the company on board the very first evening. Having completed her siesta, she emerged softly from the stateroom porthole, crept quietly along the deck to the Captain's glass of rum punch, lifted it in her very capable forepaws, and drained it to the dregs. Deplorable as such a gesture would have been in a human being, in a kinkajou it seemed rather endearing. Herma Humm was given a little more rum and made welcome aboard.

ON farewells to Panama we wasted no emotion whatever but settled down promptly and contentedly to the routine of life at sea. We "dogged" our watches every day to avoid a mutiny from the twelve-to-four, the graveyard watch. The four-to-eight was naturally the favourite, including both the cool beauty of the sunset and of the dawn.

These sensations of peace and solitude on the night watches were not, however, apparent until we had left Herma Humm behind in Tahiti. For Herma Humm drunk had been one thing; during the next six weeks Herma was sober and not beloved. Her activities became so destructive that during the day I kept her in the vegetable crate on deck. At night, for her exercise and recreation, she spent the watches with Freddy and me.

From the Galápagos to the Marquesas we were three weeks without sight of land, steadily pushed by the southeast trades filling our squaresail and raffee. Only the romping porpoises, the skimming, iridescent flying fish

in the Rain Forest

CROCKETT

and the dark shadows that were sharks lived with us in our world of sky and boat and ocean swell.

At last, landfall—the Marquesas—majestic mountains brooding over deep valleys, tangled green slopes, and a mournful, dying race. . . .

From the Marquesas we headed southward toward the hurricane-battered Tuamotus, a low-lying group of coral atolls, thin strips of land with waving coconut palms surrounding still lagoons. Freddy and I were on the four-to-eight morning watch as we supposedly approached the first of these, Takaroa. Not a shadow of land could we see. . . .

TO Herma Humm, Tahiti was perfection. Poor Herma had really had rather a thin time on the *Chiva*—no liberty, no flowers, no appreciation. But in Tahiti she was the toast of the dance-halls. She set out on our first evening's exploration perched on my shoulder with her tail wrapped firmly around my neck. When I got up to dance, I left her leashed to my chair. The music stopped and I returned to the table, to find Herma gone. It was some time before my agitated search led me in the right direction, for there was a tremendous crowd obscuring the bar. When I had pushed through it, I saw that on top of the bar sat Herma, three leis draped around her neck, drinking a rum punch. As soon as she emptied her glass, money clattered from all sides onto the bar to buy her another. From then on Herma became public property, a ward of the island. My feeble efforts at reform were unavailing, but . . . . because she was happy she became more tolerant of humankind, and seldom bit except in fun.

On nights that we didn't go out, she was more of a problem, getting her exercise by running around the walls of our hotel cottage, jumping on the furniture, and bouncing on the beds. When we felt inclined to sleep, we locked her in the bathroom, whence we could hear ominous clatterings the night through. In the morning I let her back into the bedroom to seek out some dark and secluded spot for her day's sleep.

The day finally dawned when I knew I must give Herma away to two of her most ardent admirers. Freddy got up first that morning and went into the bathroom to shower and shave. As this part of a gentleman's toilet seems to take an interminable time, I decided I had another nice long sleep ahead of me. Two seconds later the bathroom door slammed behind Freddy's exit; he stalked through the room and out.

"What's the matter? Where are you going?" I called after him, and to my surprise received no answer.

With a sense of foreboding I went into the bathroom. The shower curtain was down, the window-shade was down, and the roll of toilet paper had been entirely unwound. (We had gone to bed early that night, and Herma Humm had obviously been bored and resentful.) How she had managed to open the medicine chest above the washbowl was a mystery, but she had. In the washbowl a mass of shaving soap and brush, razor, toothbrushes, cold cream lay in a very gooey heap, and on top of this heap Herma Humm reposed, still hissing angrily from Freddy's intrusion. Sorrowfully I picked her up, rinsed off the shaving soap, tooth paste, and cold cream, cleaned up what was left of the bathroom, and carried her to her new home. . . .

After the sweeping dramatic peaks of the Marquesas and Society, the islands of the ferocious Melanesians appeared from a distance dull and lowly. But the smaller Solomon Islands, with their green jungle foliage through which squawking cockatoos and brilliant butterflies flapped and sailed, their white sandy beaches where the megapods buried their eggs, seemed cozy and friendly after the majestic melancholy and breath-taking beauty of the volcanic stalagmites of Polynesia. . . .

The Governor of the Solomons was very kind to us, and because we had been good and not trespassed on forbidden ground, he permitted us to visit Ontong Java, supposedly the largest coral atoll in the world. Certainly it took us one whole day to sail the length of the lagoon. . . .

From Ontong Java we headed for Rabaul, capital of Australian New Guinea in spite of the fact that it is on the island of New Britain. This choice of a situation had recently proved to be not entirely fortunate, for shortly before our arrival occurred the Great Eruption which blew the top off one mountain, buried the town under pumice, and left several ominously puffing craters around the town. The most astonishing manifestation took place in the harbor, where, in certain currents, all the pumice which had been spewed into the ocean was sucked back there again, floating six inches deep over all the water and making the boats look as though they were imbedded in dry land. It was in this condition the day we arrived, and as we stared from the chart to the harbour and back again, we could only believe that the entire floor of the ocean had risen. This was startling enough, but when we saw a boat chugging slowly and without any wake toward us, the only explanation seemed to be that we had sailed through the looking-glass.

We were quite a time in Rabaul while the *Chiva's* bottom was painted for the last time. We found a kind friend who let us take hot baths in his house, always the height of hospitality to boat-dwellers, and others who invited us to live aboard their freighter while the *Chiva* was in dry dock. But we were impatient to get on, with New Guinea so close to us. Finally, scrubbed and painted, weighted with supplies, we were off on our last lap.

Two

Island of Survival

IN New Guinea the curtain rolls back for thousands of years. It takes only a few days of living among the towering great trees of the Rain Forest hung with orchids and giant lianas, among the shy, dark-skinned cannibal peoples, to forget that such things ever existed as the thunder of traffic, the ticking of clocks, the comforts and hurry of civilized life. Magically one is transported back from the twentieth century to the time when man hunted his food with a bow and arrow, when he roamed the forest living on nuts and fruits, when he slept in flimsy shelters and ate his fellow man. Like the delicate tracery in a limestone cliff of some Silurian trilobite, the existence of the New Guinea Papuan is a survival into modern times of an early form of life, a dim daguerreotype of our remotest ancestors. New Guinea, like its neighbour Australia, was cut off from the continent of Asia at an early age, and together they form a cul-de-sac in which still exist primitive forms of life that elsewhere are extinct: the egg-laying duck-billed platypus of Australia, the little pouched marsupials of New Guinea, the no-

madic culture of the Australian bushman and the New Guinea Papuan. . . .

The inhabitants of New Guinea obligingly manage to look as though they belonged in some remote geologic era. By no stretch of the most kindly imagination could they be called a handsome race. Of course there is considerable variety among them, but as a group they create an impression of incompleteness, as though they had been turned out in a hurry without any of the proper finishing touches. Half of their features, for instance, are grossly exaggerated and the rest have been obviously skimped. Their temples are narrow and pinched, and in some cases their chins appear to have been forgotten entirely. Their noses, on the other hand, are enormous, flaring, and often hooked in a manner more reminiscent of an able financier than a naked jungle dweller, and their prognathous gums and buck teeth project snoutishly between the thick flesh of their redundant lips. Unlike the Negroes of Africa, Papuans often grow luxuriant but ill-trimmed beards which add to their general uncouthness. Their brown bodies are frail and not sculpturesque, bulging both forward and aft—the former from their ill-balanced diet and malarially bloated spleens, the latter from inherent mild steatopygia.

These queer little people have a reputation for the utmost ferocity. There is no doubt that in parts of New Guinea this is well deserved, but we found it difficult to suspect the tribes among whom we lived of anything more barbarous than a tendency to kill and eat people who didn't behave according to their standards. I suppose some people might interpret even this as ferocity.

NEW GUINEA is the second largest island in the world. It is not a compact mass as is its successful rival, Greenland, but perches on the Cape York Peninsula of Australia like an elongated bird. Its shape and size are not its only provocative features; it has also the distinction of being the point where Oceania meets the Orient. To the east stretch the islands of Melanesia, from Fiji to the Solomons, inhabited by black-skinned, frizzy-haired, canoe-building peoples. To the west lies the Malay Archipelago, whose broad-faced, straight-haired inhabitants gradually reach their peak in the civilizations of Java and Bali. Northwest the straggling Philippines reach out trailing fingers toward Borneo; almost due north are the Japanese-mandated islands of Palau, and Japanese boats sometimes put in and out of Manokwari, uneasiness following in their wake, for there are a few mysterious Japanese colonies on the New Guinea coast about which strange rumours are heard. New Guinea's preponderant population differs from most of these neighbours, is frowned upon by them as an inferior race, and is feared because it is still largely unsubjugated. . . .

When we first arrived in Sainke Doek we were, of course, completely ignorant about the inhabitants and their ways. The only source of information on the subject was the natives themselves, and at first they seemed indisposed to share it with us. At the outset Freddy and I secretly considered it rather courageous of us to contemplate living among people whose last meal of human flesh had been very recently consumed. We soon found, however, that the shoe was on the other foot: that our great problem was to allay the fear with which we inspired the Papuans. Wherever we went we seemed to precipitate the same sort of panic as that fabulous monster, the Spanish horse, created among the Aztecs. Children screamed when we approached them and hid behind their trembling mothers; strong men quaked and ran away to hide.

At first we were amused, then mildly indignant, and finally humiliated and displeased. We knew that we were definitely outsize and that our colour was unusual, but it is wounding to one's ego to be habitually shunned. At last we decided to employ the tactics of a wild-animal trainer—move cautiously and possess ourselves with patience. In the meantime we stared surreptitiously at our unwilling neighbours and modestly hoped that familiarity with the sight of us would breed at least unconcern.

The bravest person in the village turned out to be eight-year-old Kam, the son of Sake, the chief. He was a bright-faced little monkey with enormous eyes veiled behind ridiculously long lashes and a scar on one cheek where as a baby he had tumbled into the fire.

Followed by two nervous companions, he came one afternoon to call. We laid ourselves out to be as entertaining as though the last crowned head of Europe had deigned to enter our house. With vulgar hospitality we loaded him with beads, biscuits, and fishhooks. This system of crude bribery was effective. He came again the next day, bringing more and bolder little friends in his wake. By the end of that auspicious week, most of the children had practically taken up residence in our house. Once the parents saw that their children associated with us and came home afterwards not only intact, but with presents as well, they gradually screwed up their courage to the point of coming to see us too.

The best means of luring them in, we discovered, was to pretend absorption in a book or some concentrated activity until they were well up on the veranda. If we glanced up and saw them *en route,* they were apt to make an elaborate display of searching for something on the ground—and to bolt for home the moment we looked away. Once they had squatted down and accepted cigarettes their fears seemed to be allayed and their curiosity fully aroused. The next day the first scouts would appear with friends in tow, proud to show off simultaneously their amazing courage and their familiarity with us and our strange belongings.

Our possessions would scarcely have impressed anyone but a Papuan, consisting, as they did, in the barest necessities of life purchased from a Chinese trade store. In Sainke Doek, however, Freddy's shotgun and camera, my ancient typewriter, our tattered shorts, our cans of food and magazines created a veritable sensation among people who beat their clothes out of bark, who slept on pandanus-leaf mats, and who pounded their food from the trunk of the sago palm.

LIKE two *nouveaux riches* in a community of the impoverished genteel, we were gradually accepted by neighbours dazzled by the splendor and magnificence with which we surrounded ourselves. At the same time we became very favourably impressed by the members of the society which we had crashed. Their manners were so faultless that we often felt ashamed. This was not merely happenstance. We often heard one small child severely reprimanding another for some contemplated infringement of their code of gentle courtesy. Ill-temper was rare as rudeness. There were plenty of family scenes—what household could be without them?—but no sour, bitter grudges, no dark and ugly moods.

The tribe among whom we lived was the Madik. They were about five hundred strong, and formed a sort of buffer state between the large coastal Moi tribe to the north, which straggled all the way to Sorong, and the wilder inland tribes to the south. The Moi we cared for not at all—they were ugly, black, and obsequious from long subjection to the minions of the Tidorese Rajahs. For the inland tribes, especially the lusty Moraid, who were close to the Madik both geographically and genealogically we were full of respectful admiration. The Moraid were tall, lean, and proud to the point of arrogance. A band of them entering Sainke Doek in single file, shouting their marching songs, stepping rhythmically with their superb and disdainful carriage, was a sight to make us catch our breath. Like all buffers, the Madik were more timid and gentle than these boisterous neighbours. They were a little people with yellow-brown

skins and dusty hair which in some of the women had a distinct auburn tinge. . . .

Housekeeping at Sainke Doek was of a beautiful simplicity. To begin with, neatness was hardly any problem at all. Owing to the sieve-like construction of furniture and floors, any spilling at meals, usually indecorous, could be done so tidily as almost to become a social grace. An upset cup of coffee drained quickly and spotlessly through the table and the floor, splashing innocuously onto the ground beneath us. Bits of food, toppling from forks held in quinine-shaken hands, dropped like plums to be garnered by the young cassowary who made his headquarters below. Ashes, pencil shavings, dust and all other flotsam and jetsam followed this self-disposal system, nor need I elucidate the advantages involved in maintaining four pet lories, a parrot, a cockatoo, and an unhousebroken tree-kangaroo.

Nothing is ever quite perfect in life, so beside the things we did not want around, a number of the things we did also went through the floor. It was very difficult to keep everything always in a proper position, vertical to the open lines of our interior. Pencils, knives, toothbrushes, bandages, fishhooks, fountain pens, spools of thread, and rolls of film seemed always to be dropping away. Fortunately the Papuan children showed a lively archaeological interest in our open basement. Every morning two or three black, pot-bellied little urchins would appear at the top of our ladder, their hands full of assorted treasures. What still looked attractive to us we kept; the more damaged specimens served as rewards. . . .

I LOVED life in New Guinea. Sometimes, when I remember certain phases of it, I wonder why. The flaw was not in our cannibal friends, of whom I was extremely fond, nor the heat and humidity and mud, nor the fact that what are ordinarily considered the comforts of life were conspicuous by their absence. It was not that we had malaria continuously, and not that we had too little to eat; it was not the swarms of midges which made the days hideous, nor the leeches that dropped on us from the jungle leaves.

Even the rats were endurable, though they definitely rated as a nuisance. More rats come out of the New Guinea jungle than from all the wharves, the attics, and the sinking ships in the world. They were especially playful at night, running across our mosquito nets, knocking things off our table, eating holes in our best baskets and our soap. The noise they made during these maneuvers was not conducive to sleep. Not only did they scamper loudly around the room, but they persisted in knocking over cans of food in the storeroom next to us while they dived hopefully for the bananas hanging from the ceiling, or scrabbled at the bags of rice. . . .

Around our veranda hung a series of bamboo perches for our birds. Most of them were free to come and go, but we felt that each would like his own private apartment for the night, and it was far safer to have them sleep out of reach of snakes and rats. It grieves me to have to say that the idea of this ornithological collection was conceived in spite. Freddy felt that he had suffered unduly from my taste for bringing wild animals into the home. Herma Humm had been too quickly replaced by the two marsupials. Minggo, the wallaby, was a minor nuisance. During the day she kept to her own devices and her piles of leaves, and really bothered no one except for occasional onslaughts on passing bare legs. It was also amusing to hear the regular *thump-thump* of her hops behind us as we walked. But she developed an aversion for sleeping alone, and spent all her nights trying to get in bed with one of us for company. This habit annoyed even me. . . . Because she ate all day Minggo grew enormously fat and finally one day simply died; we suspected apoplexy.

Then there was Rebo. No animal in the world ever won my affection so completely as the little black tree-kangaroo, but she was rude and unfriendly to Freddy. So Freddy brooded over my inconsiderate acquisition of pets and planned a revenge. He decided that I didn't like birds, so he would buy every bird in the market and fill the house with them.

There was only one fallacy in his plan. The reason I didn't like birds was because I had never known one intimately. Of course I had met plenty of them casually on the *Chiva*, but had not then learned the right approach to them. Every time I made a friendly advance to a bundle of feathers, it bit me. Minggo and Rebo showed, I felt, far more discrimination because they bit everyone but me. In Sainke Doek, however, I became even more attached than Freddy to our bird collection, and derived as much childish pleasure from playing with its members as with Rebo. To Freddy's credit, be it said that he was not resentful.

There was Aveco, the large white cockatoo with the golden crest. Aveco's wings were clipped here and there so that his flying was rather limited; but his two legs, with their powerful talons, took him almost any place he cared to go. When he was thirsty he climbed up the leg of the table and tapped suggestively on the green teakettle of boiled water, and if he was lonely or in need of attention he would climb up Freddy's or my leg, claws deeply sunk in the flesh, to perch firmly and affectionately on knee or wrist. His ordinary speech was raucous and guttural, with a slight cleft-palate effect, but when he particularly wanted someone to scratch his head for him, he would croon beseechingly in the softest of childlike voices.

SANKY, our young green parrot, we had raised from a peevish ball of gray fluff. Her childhood was an amazing sample of interminable bad temper, which she expressed audibly by a running comment of disagreeable sounds, and actively by well-placed pecks. In youth she softened slightly and was only consistently petulant with Rebo. Between them there was constant and half-serious guerrilla warfare. Rebo would climb up to the rafter from which Sanky's perch was hung and haul it up hand over hand by the string. When it was nearly to the top she would let perch and Sanky drop shatteringly down again, coming up with a sharp jerk at the end of the line. Bored with her diet of green leaves, Rebo also was always trying to steal Sanky's food from her perch. Sitting on the veranda rail on her long hind legs, tail waving as counterbalance, she would reach out with her two little black hands, start the perch swaying, catch it on the back swing and immerse her face in the dish of rice or banana, in spite of Sanky's dreadful language and irate attacks.

Too . . . . we had Yacob, a brilliantly colored lory from the island of Biak. On the mainland of New Guinea there are lories almost identical with Yacob, but, like our cousin the gorilla, they have not the gift of speech, whereas Yacob spoke two languages with extreme fluency and almost without cessation. Besides this talent, he had the most beguiling ways. He used to play in my lap like a kitten, rolling onto his back with both feet sticking in the air, clutching at my finger when I tickled him. Then, taking up a position on my knee, he would make darting attacks at the palm of my hand as I tried to close it over his head. Each time he eluded me he would give a flute-like giggle or guffaw with a tremendous belly laugh. . . .

Rebo was, as even Freddy grudgingly admitted, the life of the party. She was very small and black and furry, looking much like a miniature bear except for the long tail, white-tipped, which trailed out behind her, and the blankly benign expression in her rather prominent eyes. Being a lady tree-kangaroo, she possessed a pocket, a very small edition of the one from which she had so recently emerged. Her benignity, Freddy would tell you, was entirely confined to her eyes.

For so small and helpless an animal she was ridiculously ferocious, and re-

garded me as her only friend in a world of two-legged and quadrupedal enemies. This was both flattering and inconvenient, for as she grew larger, her gait, an alternation of hop and gallop, never grew appreciably faster. She insisted on following me wherever I went, which meant that I had to adapt my pace to her. When we traveled down to Sorong and back to replenish our supplies, it was obviously impossible to regulate the speed of ourselves and our carriers to Rebo's whims, and so I had to carry her. At the end of a long day of staggering over hidden roots, divesting myself of festoons of lianas and coils of scratchy vines, wading through crocodile-infested rivers with slippery bottoms, ploughing up steep bare slopes open to the sun, Rebo became inordinately heavy and extremely restless. She would clamber up and down me, trying now to perch on top of my head, claws well dug in for security, now shinnying down my leg to the ground. No native would approach within her foraying range, and Freddy, whom I ordinarily consider a courageous individual, limited his cooperation to caustic comments on the inadvisability of making wild animals into pets.

AT home in Sainke Doek, Rebo's charms were more apparent. She made the most of the arboreal aspects of our house, hitching up the supporting posts, running across the rafters, nibbling off the orchids, rearranging the odd bits of gabbi-gabba laid here and there as suggestions of ceiling, and not infrequently precipitating one down on our heads. During the heat of the day she mercifully took a long siesta, generally in the upper-berth hammock formed by the top of my mosquito net. Unfortunately this meant that she often didn't care to sleep through the night. She would pick some dark hour at random and set about the business of knocking down our clothes hung from a few cherished coat-hangers against the wall. Then, having overturned the canteen of water on the table, she would begin investigating Freddy's shotgun shells under his pajamas on the shelf. Those that didn't please her were briskly shoved off and clattered on and through the floor. A period of gymnastics would follow on the rope from which our mosquito nets were hung. This, by some complicated system of weights and measures, stresses and strains, always caused our air mattresses, under which the nets were tucked, to bounce unrestfully. Finally Rebo would hop onto the sagging top of my net, swing like a sailor over the side, descend by means of poking her claws through its delicate tissues, and land with a thump on the edge of my pillow. Bored by this time with her own devices, and anxious for companionship through the cold gray dawn, she would set herself to pulling my hair until the last vestiges of sleep had been dispelled.

Feeding Rebo was a simple problem, for close to our house was a private little swamp where the long green kankung vines that she loved grew in profusion. I used to roll up my shorts and wade in through the mosquito wrigglers to pull them up, while Rebo leaped onto a floating log and gazed in distress at her wet tail drifting out behind her. Rarely was this slight effort necessary, however. To Rebo, as to a shrine, food offerings were brought by the natives almost every day. In the house the kankung was piled on the veranda floor and Rebo sat on her hind legs beside it, pulling out a vine at a time with one hand and munching it thoughtfully. As beverages she favoured tea and beer. Every afternoon she had a saucer of tea and milk with us, covering her black muzzle with white froth. . . .

Rebo's intelligence quotient was not, I'm afraid, very high. Marsupials are not, after all, among the more advanced types of mammals. For this reason I was all the more proud that she always came when I called her, emerging covered with cobwebs from the dark recesses of the roof or leaping through the window from the godown table, where she liked to play with bandages and bottles, scattering our supplies as she jumped. But most of the time she spent close beside me. If I lay back in a canvas chair, she sat on the edge of it, paws on my knee. If I sat in a straight chair, writing or typing, she balanced on the back of it, paws on my shoulder or around my neck. She also liked to do this at mealtimes, but took such an interest in what I ate, snatching rudely from her advantageous position, that we often tiptoed to lunch and spoke in whispers, hoping against hope that Rebo would sleep through the meal.

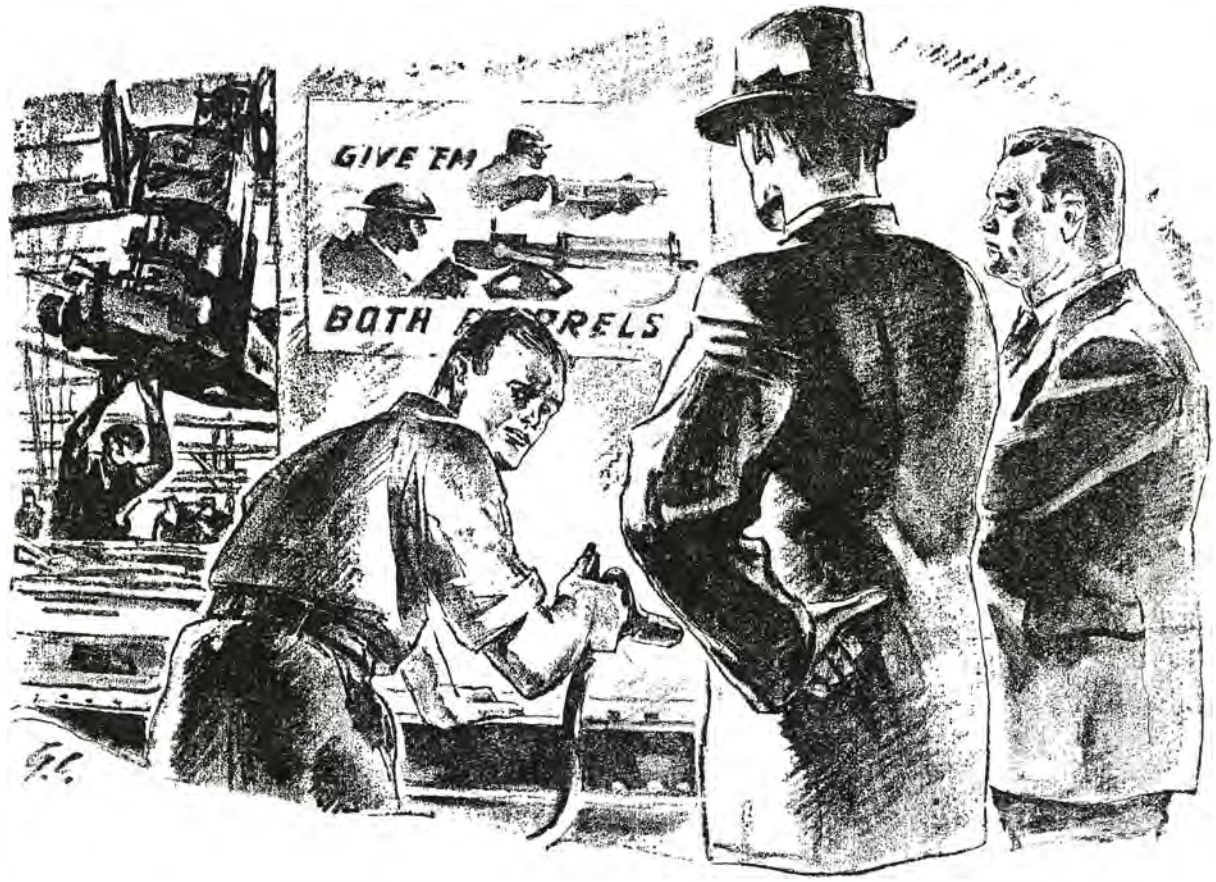
It was at our supper that she had the most fun. She always wakened from her siesta in the late afternoon and spent a busy hour with our hanging orchid plants, and plants we had thought were orchids but turned out not to be. Then followed the excitement of a trip to the bathhouse with me just as darkness began to fall. Rebo loved the night, and her black fur was a perfect camouflage for our ill-lit veranda. When we sat down to our soup, Rebo was never to be found. Not until Martin stepped softly around the table to pick up the dishes did she give evidence of her whereabouts. From her hiding place under the table or my chair she would suddenly spring at his bare foot, grasp it tightly for a second, and then dart away again into the shadows. Poor Martin, deeply conscious of the dignity of his position, suffered terribly from this ordeal. A lightning jump, a muffled screech, and he would continue on his way, trying to look as though nothing had happened. I would reprimand Rebo severely but, invariably misinterpreting my remarks as an invitation to join us, she would hitch up the back of my chair and reach over my shoulder for a piece of bread and jam.

If we were starting on a long trip, we slunk surreptitiously out of the house while Rebo napped. When she awoke and found us gone she became frantic, hopping wildly all over the house in search of me, chittering as she went to frighten off any ambush. Sometimes she even left the house and started down the path, anxiously peering around. Martin or Evart, far too terrified to touch her, would stand guard at a safe distance to keep off stray dogs until we returned. . . .

THERE was one cat in Sainke Doek. How it got there no one knew, and the natives treated it with the utmost respect. What it subsisted on was also a mystery, for it was irritatingly blasé about the rats. It came over once a day for a romp with Rebo. Their methods of play were so extremely unlike that they both became bewildered if they ever got beyond the stage of chasing each other around, for Rebo's next move was to grapple with her playmate as though she were the trunk of a slender tree. In spite of a few minor injuries inflicted on each side, they remained admiring friends. Sometimes when I strolled away from the house I would be warned by muffled giggles to look over my shoulder and would find myself the leader of a strange little expedition. Rebo would be following close behind, intent on the problem of progression. On Rebo's heels would be the cat, studying with interest her eccentric gait. Behind the cat stalked the young cassowary, who would follow any moving object.

Our bathhouse was a short distance from the main house—a little palm-leaf construction filled with kerosene tins of water from the stream. It was usually impossible to take a bath alone. The door would only close halfway, offering an enticing invitation to Rebo, the cat and the cassowary. Besides them, three hens, each with a brood of six or seven chicks, found the wet floor of the bathroom an ideal place to roost, and clucked angrily at us if we splashed.

We never did anything to discourage chickens; for once a noisy old hen, accompanied by a suspiciously interested rooster, laid an egg two days in succession on one of the shelves in our bedroom. These were the only eggs we ever had in Sainke Doek that didn't come from a cassowary; but in spite of our efforts to attract our neighbor's poultry, it never happened again.



When Rivets Explode

A stirring drama of the 1942 warplane production line.

by TRACY RICHARDSON

MAJOR ROBERT WORDSEN tossed a paper on Colonel Aldren's desk and waited impatiently until the head of the Air Service Information Department finished what he was reading.

"Well, Wordsen," said the Colonel, "you look bothered. What's on your mind?" His voice was gruff, but his eyes twinkled.

"This!" Major Wordsen indicated the paper on the desk. "I've already got forty-seven jobs on hand, one or two of them important. And now this!" He read from the paper. "Investigate air-hammers manufactured by the Land Automatic Tool Company, and file complete report on form U.S.A.S.97-P8-121."

"Well, Major, why not investigate and report? Why come to me?"

"Investigate an air-hammer? Great Ancestors, Colonel, what is there to investigate about an air-hammer? I'm not a mechanic. Wouldn't know one end of an air-hammer from another. What's the dope? It sounds screwy; and anyway, it doesn't look like an Army matter."

Colonel Aldren's smile left his face. "Bob, this is serious. There's a lot more to it than just investigating an air-hammer. I'm sort of going on a hunch about this, so I want you to go to the factory where these air-hammers are manufactured. Go straight to the general manager, and he'll give you an earful. He's the one who made the squawk. From there on, it's up to you —to drop it, or follow your nose. Sorry I can't tell you more," he added hastily as Major Wordsen started to speak, "but I don't want to get you tangled up in theories."

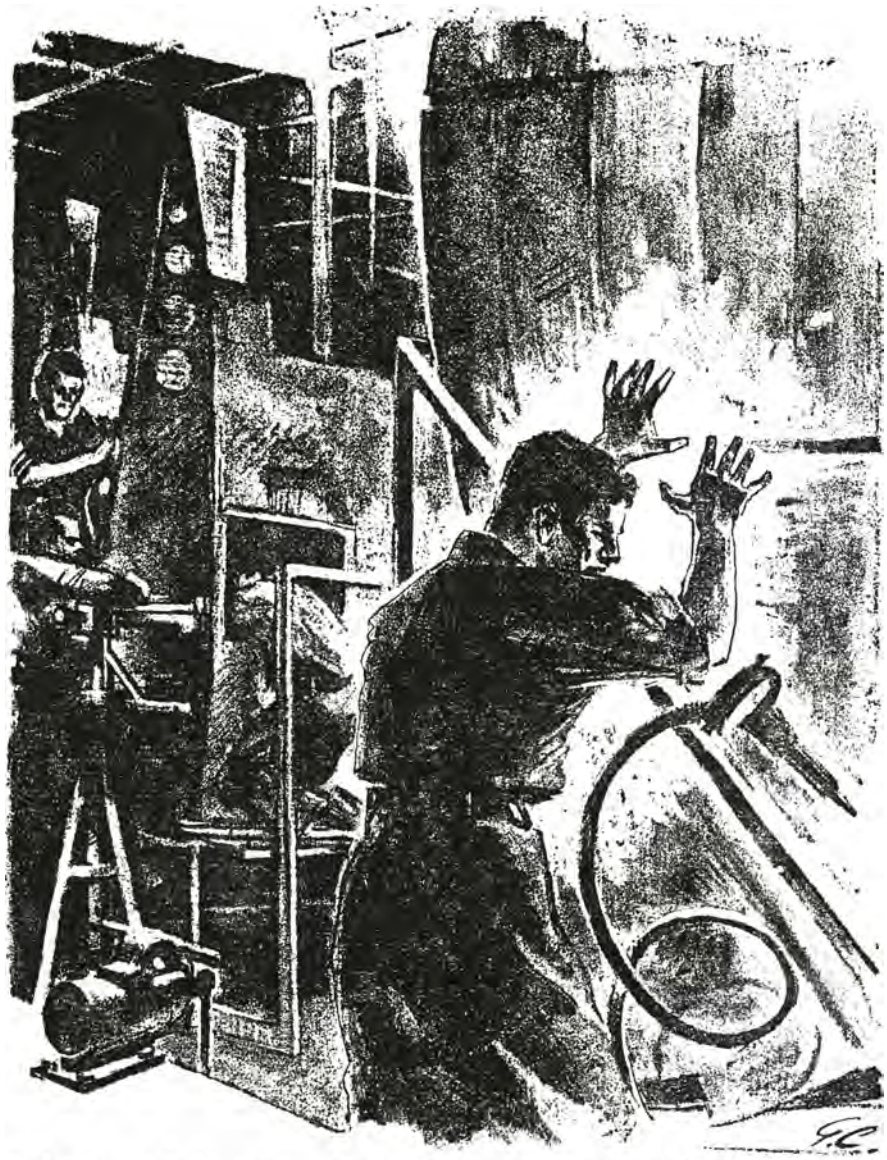
Major Wordsen snorted disgustedly. "Some Army, this is getting to be! Shall I go official or as a private investigator?"

"Official, in the open, but not in uniform. They've got a cockeyed law in this man's country that says no private investigator can go into any plant to make an investigation. They're afraid some lily-white agitator might have his sleep disturbed. That's right —no employer can hire a private detective to protect his plant against thieves or even *saboteurs*. Now get going: the plant's at Aldin, Indiana."

Major Wordsen arrived at Aldin late in the evening, too late to go to the plant of the automatic tool company. He read the local papers, talked to the hotel people and others and got a general impression of the town and of the company. Land *was* Aldin. They had the only real pay-roll in town. Everyone either worked for Land or lived off those who did work for them. From all he heard, everything at the plant was lovely—good wages, good hours and management, and the best of living conditions. He finally went to bed, still without an idea as to why he was on this job of investigating an air-hammer.

The Major was stopped at the gate of the plant when he called the next morning. He had to submit his credentials and wait until they were taken to the office, inspected and a pass issued. While he waited, he used his eyes. The plant was not large, but it was compact. Wide-mouthed smokestacks indicated blast furnaces or foundries. He could hear the concussion of giant drop-hammers and all the noise and orderly activity of a plant busy producing essential tools. Then a uniformed guard guided him to the office of the general manager, Henry Dorber. . . .

Major Wordsen got a surprise when he saw Dorber—a typical Prussian, with blue eyes, short blond hair combed straight back, and a carriage as stiffly erect as a member of the old Prussian Guard.



*"The damned thing just went to pieces—*smack!*—the chuck flew apart."*

Dorber's greeting was cordial. His English was perfect and easy, with a smoothness only gained by a lifetime in America. "Major Wordsen, I was notified you were coming. I'm sure glad to see you. Sit down—I'll not waste your time."

"Give it all to me, Mr. Dorber; explain, please."

"Major, we manufacture many types of small automatic tools used by the Government, especially in aviation construction and in a small way in shipyards. Just stating a well-known fact, there are no better tools of this type made than those made by Lands. But we're in trouble; it's small now, but if it is not located, we may lose our contracts and be out of business. And me—well, I like it here and don't want to lose everything I have."

"What's the trouble?"

"Our air-hammers are going to pieces while in use."

"Sounds like a job for a metallurgist. I'm an Army officer."

"That's just it. There's nothing wrong with our products. They're made right; the material is right—the best; and I'm positive the trouble does not lie here, but—we're getting the blame. Something happens; one of our air-guns blows up, destroys the hammer and does serious damage to whatever they are working on."

"How many times has this happened?"

"Eight times. There's no—"

"Humph! Where?"

"Where? Major, that's the trouble." Dorber walked over to a steel filing-case and brought out a folder. "Here they are—reports on the eight accidents; and every one of them blamed on a Land air-hammer. And they happened in seven different plants, all the way from the Atlantic to the Pacific."

Major Wordsen picked up the reports and read slowly, analyzing every word. Except for wording and implication, they were all the same. They all explained that while in use, the head of a Land automatic riveting hammer had blown off, ruining the hammer and in some cases seriously damaging parts of an airplane, so that replacement of parts was necessary. Some reports stated their mechanics were getting afraid of Land tools, and agitators were making talk about a boycott against Land tools.

Major Wordsen tossed the reports back on the desk. "Have copies made of these right away; then we'll take a quick run through your plant. I want to see how these hammers are made, and the men who make them. . . . By the way, Dorber, you're German?"

DORBER drew himself up indignantly. "Major Wordsen, my father and mother were Germans. I was born in Germany. They brought me to this country when I was two years old. I am an American. I—" He almost broke down, his face flushed with emotion; then he began again: "Don't you see what this does to me? This is my business, my life. I've worked up to this position from the bottom. Now this trouble comes, and the first thing they do is to look at me and mutter: 'German—Nazi!' I've done everything I could. I've investigated here, I've tested, and I'll swear it's not the fault of our hammers!"

"Got any idea what has happened?"

"There's only one answer I can figure out." Dorber walked to a display case and brought back a small automatic air-hammer, weighing five pounds at most. "This is the hammer that receives the blame. Now watch. With this set wrench I loosen this screw, and out comes the cup-shaped head that shapes the rivets. How easy it would be for someone to take out this head and drop in a small particle of some high explosive and re-insert the head again. Simple, but it's the only solution; only no one sees it that way. They blame the workmanship and material of our hammers."

"All right. Let's take a look over the plant."

Dorber proved that he was not only a capable and well-liked manager, but a master mechanic as well. He showed Major Wordsen everything from the furnaces where the steel for the hammers was treated, the heavy drop hammers where it was forged and shaped, the lathes and drill-presses and the tempering process, and finally the final grinding and polishing.

"These air-motivated tools must be as accurately made and finished as a fine watch," Dorber explained. "Now I'll show you the final testing-room. First every part is passed under a fluoroscope to determine if any interior flaws exist. The rejects from this test are about one in a thousand, and that's rather good. Then the hammers are assembled, and an expert riveter tests them with the various heads and types of rivets. These hammers are all made for the smaller alloy rivets such as are used in the aviation

industry, and to a smaller extent in shipbuilding."

Major Wordsen was watching the back of the head of a man busy driving rivets in an iron frame. When Dorber paused in his explanation the Major asked: "That man there with the hammer—who is he? Know anything about him?"

For a moment Dorber appeared startled; then he smiled. "Don't miss much, do you? That man goes under the name of Harry Collins, and he's an ex-convict. He's been here four years, and is one of the best and most trustworthy men we have in the testing department. There are five other ex-convicts working in this plant, and I'll vouch for every one of them."

The Major walked over to Collins, who looked up at him from the corners of his eyes, then paused in his work and growled: "Hello, copper! What you doing in a plant like this? Been busted off the force?"

"Nope, Collins—just back in the Army for the emergency. Glad to hear you're doing so well."

"Thanks. Bet them mugs back in the city are glad you're out of their way for a while." He squinted knowingly at Wordsen. "Say, you looking into this thing about these hammers blowing up? Well, Mister, if you are, you're in the wrong plant. When these tools leave here, they're perfect. Anyway, I hope you nail the trouble, or maybe we'll all be looking for another job, and it aint so easy for a lug like me."

"All right, Collins; glad you're loyal. Now let me see you jam some of these rivets."

Expertly Collins smoothed the heads of rivets into the steel testing-plate while a bucker-up held a dolly-bar against them from the other side. He was working on a string of a dozen rivets held in place by a strip of tape. That saved time. Toward the end of the string, the bucker-up called out, "'Splosive!" and stepped back. Collins swiftly changed the head of the hammer, and in quick succession drove home three rivets with short bursts. "There you are," he said as he laid the hammer on the bench. "Okay?"

"Wait a minute, Collins. Just what did that helper call to you a minute ago, when you changed heads on the hammer?"

Collins grinned. "*'Splosive*, Mister—short for *explosive*. You see, there are a few places in an airplane where it is impossible to get in with a tool to back a rivet, so they use what they call an explosive rivet. Original idea was to have a bit of explosive in the rivet to expand the end. We use a soft core with a hard driver to expand the end. Works just as well, and is safer. Get it?"

"I believe I do," said the Major absently, "I believe I do." For a minute he stood there thinking; then he snapped: "Dorber, get one of these so-called explosive rivets sliced in half for me. I'll stay here—I want Collins to give me some lessons in handling a gun. May want a job sometime."

Collins grinned again, crookedly. "Not you! Once a copper, always a copper. I'll show you about the air-gun and rivets, but it takes a long time to get really good. Handling the gun is easy: you hold it square and hold it firm. Takes a bit of practice, but it's learning your metals that counts. It's one thing to slug a rivet into a piece of steel like this, but something else again when you get onto a delicate piece of duro, like some parts of an airplane. If you don't hold straight, you'll cock the rivet. If you don't hit it enough, it will be loose and cause vibration. If you pound it too much, there's a chance of crystallizing the rivet or the material being riveted, and that makes them brittle. But, Mister,"—Collins' eyes squinted up at the Major—"*you can't hammer a rivet hard enough or long enough to make it explode.*"

Major Wordsen got the hang of the hammer and Collins admitted he did a fair rivet head. Dorber returned with the halved rivet. Major Wordsen looked at it quickly and nodded. "I get it. These rivets are larger than some, aren't they?"

"There are scores of sizes," Dorber said, "but the soft center ones have to be a bit larger so the core will expand and hold solid. As you see, a special hammer-head is used—for these rivets are exploded from the round head end instead of the butt, as in all other rivets. See?"

The Major nodded. "Yes, I see. Thought I had an idea, but guess I'm just a dumb cluck of a cop after all. Well, I'll be going. You'll hear from me."

"Hope you can clear this thing up, Major, before it goes any farther."

"Don't know. After all, I'm not a machinist. By the way, where do you get your rivets?"

"They're a special alloy rivet made by a company in Detroit." And Dorber gave the manufacturer's name.

Wordsen made a note in his book, bade Dorber good-by and returned to the hotel. There he called the head of the information department in Washington.

"Got anything?" asked the Colonel.

"No sir—nothing, that is, except to learn how to drive a rivet, that the manager of the plant was born in Germany, and there are five ex-convicts working in the plant."

"Good God! You call that nothing? I'll see that the Department of Justice gets on that right away. What else?"

"I wouldn't bother the D. of J., Colonel—not until I make my final report, anyway. That's all I have found out, but I've got ideas that will take time to work out. I want a plane and a good pilot. Got a lot of moving around to do. Can I expect him here in the morning?"

"I'll see what I can do and call you back; you can plan on its being there."

THE pilot, who reported to Major Wordsen next morning was an old-timer. He might have been thirty years of age but it was hard to judge from his wrinkled face, wrinkled from squinting into far horizons at the sun and trying to peer through fog and darkness. At the airport the Major was surprised to find he had been sent a twin-motored bomber for a ferry plane, with a crew of four besides the Captain. "My orders don't say what to do," said the Captain, "other than report to you. They sent a full crew along, said you might need help."

"Fine, Captain. Our next stop is California. Have these men get me two five-gallon demijohns of distilled water—I'm going to develop a few pictures while we're on the way. Get the water, and we're all set."

With a change-bag for a darkroom, Major Wordsen processed his miniature films. Long before they landed at the California airport, the films were dried, inspected and packed away for future reference.

It was in one of the California aircraft factories that two of the air-hammers had blown up. They landed their bomber at the factory field, and Major Wordsen took Captain Wells and one of the sergeants with him on what he termed a tour of inspection. He didn't try to reach the head of the factory, but got the chief Army inspector assigned to the plant.

"Major," said the Inspector, "it's just one of those things that happen—nothing to get worried about. I wrote out a routine report and sent it in. I'm not supposed to give an opinion on such things, just facts. I did that.

but my opinion is that some part of the hammer became crystallized and flew to pieces. Lots of power behind those heads, you know."

"Glad to have your opinion, Inspector. You're probably right—just routine; but I want to see the mechanics who were using the hammers when it happened, their helpers too."

He questioned the mechanics casually, slowly. "Just tell me what happened," he said, "tell me in your own way, no embellishments."

"Well, sir," answered the first mechanic, "we were going along as usual, and the damned thing just went to pieces. It was behind a brace in the wing, and you can't get to them with a bucker, so we use the soft-core—explosive rivets, some call them. And then—*smack!* Now, Mister, that's all I know about it. The chuck that holds the head in the hammer flew apart; a hole was knocked in the duro of the wing, and they had to take the whole thing off!"

"H'm—interesting. And what time did this happen? I mean, the exact hour of the day?"

"Quarter of eleven in the morning shift."

"And you'd been using the same hammer all morning?"

"That's right. I've been using that gun for over two months, and it's never given any trouble. Guess it just got tired."

"Tired?"

"Yes. That's an expression we use when a machine just wears out and goes to pieces, or perhaps the metal crystallizes and breaks."

"I see. Thanks. Now, you,"—this to the second mechanic,—"what time did your gun do its stuff?"

"Mine was the first to get wrecked. That was a week ago, about three of the afternoon shift. Mine happened exactly the same way, except for place and time. I've used that gun for the past three months, and it never gave trouble before. I don't think the hammer was to blame."

"No? Why?"

"No reason, except that I've been using this make of tools for a long time, and they're tops. I'll take 'em every time."

"Good. Write it out, and I'll sell it to the maker for an advertisement. Now for the buckers. What have you boys got to add?"

"Mister," said one of them, a towheaded boy of perhaps twenty, "all I know is, I was sticking in a row of rivets and getting ready to tape them, when this thing goes off. I was inside there, and it's pretty close quarters, and it nearly ruined my eardrums. So help me, that's all I know."

"And you, son?"—to the other boy.

"Just about the same, sir, except that a piece of metal from the wing cut through my cheek."

"In other words, all any of you actually know is that something happened. Thanks—that will be all for the time being."

"What do you think?" asked the Government Inspector who had been a silent witness to the interview. "You didn't get a thing we didn't know already. Nothing that wasn't in the reports sent in."

"No? All right, that's probably why you are an inspector and I'm an investigator. Now I want to see the party in charge of all supplies—whoever's got charge of the records of material—used, on hand and ordered."

"That will be the chief materials clerk. This way."

The materials clerk was a busy man, with a staff of clerks and helpers under him. He didn't welcome intrusion and he answered questions curtly.

"We get our soft-core rivets from a nut and bolt company in Michigan. We use about two thousand a day—here's the exact figures, if you want to look 'em over. We have on hand exactly two hundred thousand soft-core rivets and another half million on order. Even at the rate we're expanding, that'll keep us going for a while. Anything else?"

"Yes. Give me a package of soft-core rivets."

"If you want to take them with you, you'll have to sign for them."

"Now for the personnel officer of the plant," the Major said as they left the materials clerk's office.

Captain Wells, the pilot, touched Major Wordsen on the arm. "Say, Major, it may not mean a thing, but I believe I'm getting the drift, and here's one for your book. That clerk was kicked out of Randolph Field."

"Kicked out!" the Major exclaimed. "Come, give."

"Well, perhaps not exactly kicked out—that's an Air Service school expression for a man who fails to make the grade. He was down there as a cadet, and just wasn't flyer material. I remember his face."

MAJOR WORDSEN didn't waste much time with the personnel officer. He checked the records of everyone connected with the accidents and those working in the storerooms. Then he asked abruptly: "Got a hospital here?"

"No. Just an emergency unit and an ambulance. If there's anything serious happens, we take them to the city hospital."

"Then you wouldn't have an x-ray here?"

"No hospital machine, but in the material-testing lab they've got an x-ray machine for testing. That do you any good?"

"Perfect! Let's go."

In the laboratory the Major explained what he had in mind. "That's easy," said the chief test engineer, "—or at least it should be. Here, it won't take a second to find out, that is unless you want negatives made. The fluoroscope will do the work."

Major Wordsen explained: "First let's use the fluoroscope. Then I will want negatives made of the package and of rivets individually."

"Suppose we make the negatives first; then while they are being developed we'll use the fluoroscope screen. O. K.?"

One glance on the screen convinced the Major it was a job for an expert. However on the developed negatives he could see clearly the soft cores of the explosive rivets, each a perfect example of that type of rivet.

"Tell me," said the test engineer, "exactly what you are looking for and perhaps I'll be able to offer some suggestion."

The Major scratched his head for a moment. "Maybe I'm being sort of silly. I'm looking for some of these rivets that have had the soft core removed and something substituted, possibly an explosive substance. How long will it take you to go over the two hundred thousand rivets in the stockroom?"

The test engineer whistled. "So that's the idea—and I call myself a test engineer! If we can do it by the package it won't take long. If we have to pass the rivets along separately I'll have to rig up the machine over a traveling belt. Not long."

"O. K., get busy, it's got to be done. I'm sure I'm right."

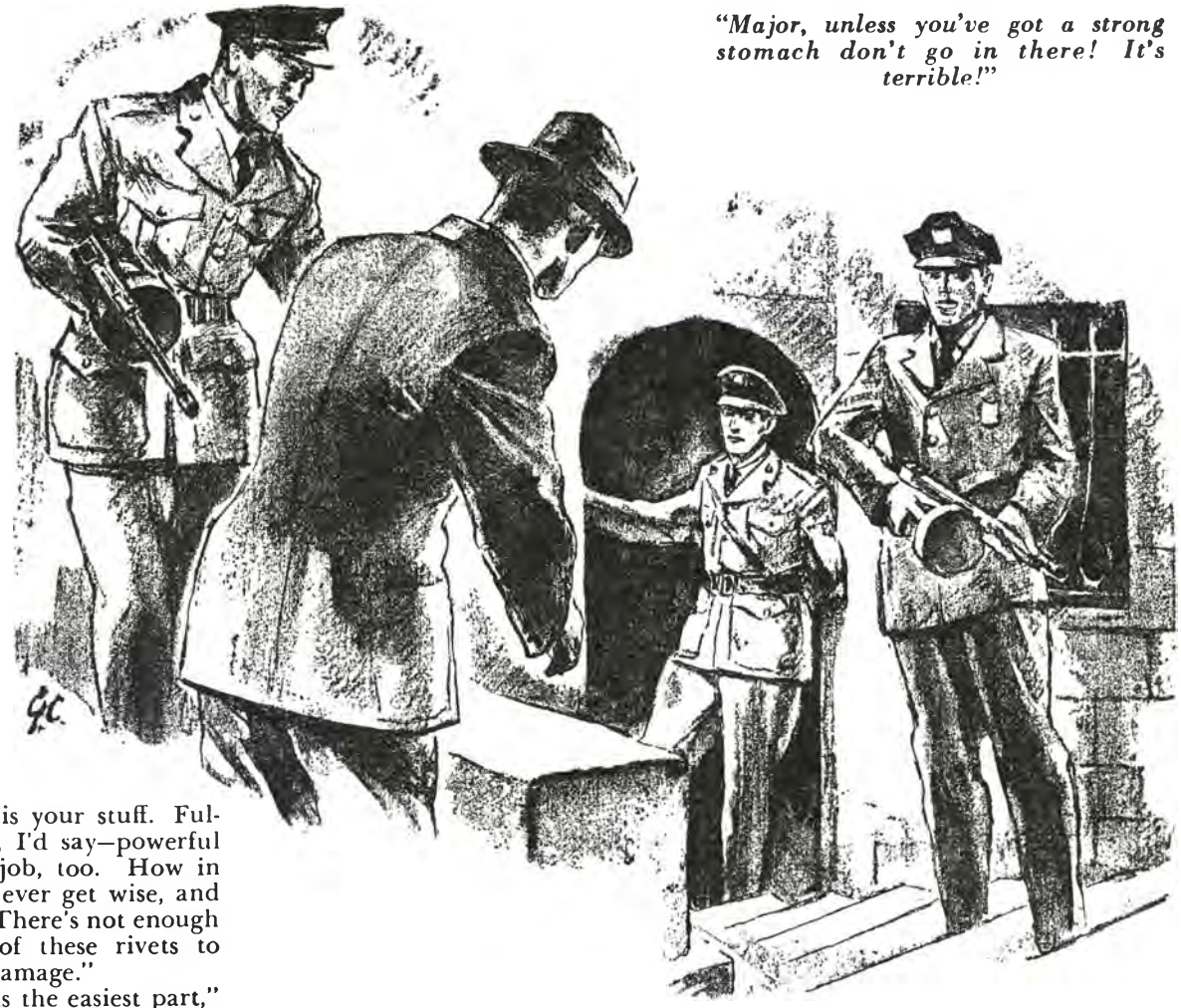
It wasn't as difficult as the Major had anticipated. Once they had caught the exact outlines of the regular rivets the packages passed along rapidly. The chief engineer did the examining himself. More than two hundred packages had passed over the table when he reached out and passed a package to his assistant. "Negative, package and individual," he said simply, and went on with his inspection.

In two hours the entire lot had passed inspection and three of the lot had been picked for x-ray negatives. In each of two packages they found one rivet that did not show the solid core of soft metal. In the other package they found two—four rivets out of a total of two hundred thousand, and still to be proven that anything was wrong with them.

"Can you open these rivets without danger?" Major Wordsen asked. "Remember, I'm going on the theory they contain some kind of an explosive."

"I think so. This explosive, if it is such, can't be so terribly sensitive. Remember these rivets have had a considerable knocking around. I'll rim one of them gently with a cutting tool and break it off. Won't take a second."

He proved he knew his business. The severed rivet disgorged a whitish crystalline powder. "There," he said



"Major, unless you've got a strong stomach don't go in there! It's terrible!"

with satisfaction, "is your stuff. Fulminate of mercury, I'd say—powerful enough to do the job, too. How in the world did you ever get wise, and what's the object? There's not enough explosive in one of these rivets to do any particular damage."

"Getting wise was the easiest part," said the Major. "I heard one of the buckers-up call them explosives, and an ex-convict convinced me it could not be the hammers. As for damage, they were never intended to do much damage to property. They were to wreck morale. A couple of dozen accidents like those that happened here, and they'd chuck all the hammers. Mechanics would be afraid to use them and agitators working from the inside would be waiting to stir up trouble. A small thing, but part of a well-laid scheme to sabotage American industry. Now you can see the necessity for caution, why departments like yours are important. Other *saboteurs* may not adopt such simple or harmless devices. I'll take these rivets and be on my way. I have things to do. This was the most simple part of it."

As they droned through the air on their way East Major Wordsen used the plane's radio to talk to his chief, He explained what he had accomplished and the Colonel's curses crinkled the airways. Wordsen explained just what he planned to do and asked for coöperation.

The bomber landed at a military field close to Detroit, and they were met by fast military trucks loaded with officers and men armed with submachine-guns. Wordsen gave them their orders and then in a powerful car was driven to the factory of the nut and bolt company. There were no Government inspectors in this plant, as the work was routine, most of it done by automatic machines that turned out their endless streams of rivets almost without attention. The Major went directly to the manager's office, and showed his credentials.

"I'm taking charge of this plant. No one will be permitted to leave. I want your personnel man, with his records of all employees."

"Why—why," spluttered the astonished manager, "you—you can't do this! It's illegal. I'll—"

"You'll be a good boy, or I'll call in some of those tough soldiers and let 'em work you over. Get busy—I'm not fooling."

IT was a pale shaking manager who led the way to the office of the clerk who acted as personnel man, a wizened chap who seemed to take pleasure at seeing his boss sweat.

"Are your employees photographed and fingerprinted?" demanded Major Wordsen.

"Why, no," answered the surprised personnel man. "This plant is not engaged in important war work, and it has not been thought necessary."

"All right, that can be attended to later. How many men do you work?"

"Three hundred. Three shifts."

"Damnation!" exploded the Major. "How many work on the machines that make these so-called explosive rivets?"

"That's a small job. Six men to each shift."

"Give me their names and addresses. All the data you have on them."

The clerk sorted out the cards and handed them over, noting the ones on the present shift. The Major called in the soldiers and gave rapid instructions. One officer with a dozen men went into the factory to bring in the men then working on the explosive-rivet machines. To the others he ordered: "Take these cards, one to each officer and truck. Go to police headquarters and pick up two or more police. Go to the address on your card and get your man. If he's not there, place a guard over the place and go out and get him. Search every inch of their quarters, occupied or available for use by these men, in their presence. Search for rivets, and any form of explosive small stuff. Now get going."

The first officer and his men brought in the six surprised and protesting prisoners. Major Wordsen held his counsel. He assigned men to each mechanic and gave them their orders, and then settled down to await reports. A soldier had taken the place of the telephone operator.

An hour passed before the first report came in. Then call after call came, all reporting no results. Suddenly the operator shouted: "Major! They've got something! Here's Lieutenant Mason. Take the wire."

"Major!" The officer's voice was eager. "We've got everything. Good old name—George Smith. Basement apartment. Big police dog. Mechanic's tools, drill-press, lathes. About a thousand explosive rivets. We're still searching. Better come right away."

"Right. I'm on my way."

One of the military trucks followed the Major as he raced to the address. Outside, he was met by the Lieutenant and a police officer. The young Lieutenant's face was white, ghastly. "Major, unless you've got a strong stomach don't go in there. God! It's terrible."

"Pull yourself together, man! . . . . What's up?"

The policeman, more used to sudden death, explained; "It's the prisoner, sir. He managed to chew a handful of fulminate caps. His head don't look much like a head any more."

MAJOR WORDSEN laid his reports on Colonel Aldren's desk. The Colonel looked up sharply. "You look all petered out, Bob. You did a good job. Have a hard time?"

"Hard time!" the Major groaned. "Say, the man who devised this report form, U.S.A.S.97-P8-121, must have had nothing but malice in his heart."

The Colonel picked up the hated report. One line was filled in. *"Investigation proves Land Automatic Air Hammers to be all O.K."* At the bottom of the report Major Wordsen had scrawled his name.

"What's so hard about that?" demanded the Colonel.

"Trying not to tell anything, Colonel. If I'd explain the whole thing, I'd be writing more reports for the rest of my year's service, so let us call the case closed. George Smith, who when he jumped ship in New York City carried the name of Werner Schmitt, is dead. He had a simple scheme, but a deadly one. There's nothing to show who he worked for or with. His scheme was so simple it was really good. There may be a thousand more just like him scattered through the factories of this country. It just goes to show they don't always hit at the big ones, either. No effort seems too small for them. So, Colonel, there is your report. Anything more?"

"Yes, but I don't suppose it would do me a bit of good to ask questions. Anyway, you've done another good job. Wish I could give you a medal, but you didn't risk your life, didn't have to shoot anybody and no one shot at you. You can't make a hero out of a man for just running down the pedigree of a rivet, now can you?"

A colorful story of the freighters in the mountain country.

By Ray Nafziger

WORKING in the big barns of the Thornton Brothers in Grandy, you learned to listen for the leader bells of the jerk-line teams freighting ore from the mine camps. In time you could tell which team was rolling in, just by the jingle of the different bells. Idaho Justin's set sounded the finest—as if the shells had been hammered out of bright new silver, and the clackers made of soft wire gold and tuned to a little mountain stream.

When I heard Idaho's leader bells that November evening, I throwed down the fork I was shoveling oat hay with, and hustled to the office to tell Dad Burns, the barn boss.

Old Dad was napping on a cot. He woke up as waspish as a setting hen, stomping his boot-heels hard and chewing on his gray spindly mustache-tips.

"Am I to be woke up by a fool stableboy account a skinner is headin' in with a string of hungry hayburners?" he asked.

But this, I told him, was Idaho.

"Idaho," grunted Dad. "And who's he but just another knotheaded horse herder working for a outfit that's going bust? I knew what would happen here as soon as Dan and Will Thornton died. They were freighters, them two! You wouldn't catch *them* signing no crazy contract to freight the Marley mill in before winter."

Idaho's leader bells were sounding stronger and I streaked it out of the barn to see him make the Railroad Street turn. The evening passenger was in, and turning the corner, I had to sidejump quick to dodge a stranger that I guessed had come on the train. A tall girl, red-headed, and built blocky, although she stood so straight she looked sort of slim instead. She smiled at me and spoke real friendly. "Why the hurry, Bub?"

"Idaho Justin's rollin' in," I told her, and hurried to meet the freight outfit now stringing up the street: six matched pairs of horses pulling two heavy loads of ore—a lead wagon and a smaller trail one hooked behind.

Any of the long line outfits freighting out of the mountains made a fine sight, but best of them all was Idaho Justin's prize team, stepping along fast and proud, their heads bobbing and silver harness buckles and brass hame knobs shining bright in the sun. With Idaho sitting jaunty and easy as a cowboy in the saddle on his iron-gray near wheeler, Teton, and waving at me now and calling, "Howdy, Jimmy," just as if I was somebody, too.

The big shod hoofs clumping down hard, the bells, the rumble of wagons and rattle of butt-chains, fetched a crowd of men out from saloons and stores—bartenders and clerks in aprons, barbers and half-shaved customers—all to watch the strung-out line of horses and wagons make the narrow corner turn into Railroad Street.

The way Idaho made it was pretty to see. He let his sorrel leaders cross the intersection, meanwhile pulling easy on the light rope jerkline that ran to the checkrein of the near leader, Tom, as signal for Tom and his mate, Jerry, to hold over to the right. When the two were even with the plank sidewalk on the far corner, Idaho called in his deep, cheerful voice, "Yay, Tom! Jerry!" and a long steady pull brought them around left at a brisk trot, crowding the loading-platform in front of the hardware store.

Then one after the other as the swing pairs reached the corner, each span jumped the lead-chain when Idaho sung out their names—"Buck! Jim! Ute! Siwash! Cap! Kit! Skookum! Cayuse!" It was like clockwork, the way those matched pairs of blacks and browns and bays went over, stepping fast and pulling to the right all around the turn, while the iron-gray wheelers, Teton and Rock, piv-

BELLS UP THE ABO

oted slow on big hoofs, with the high wheels of the wagons cutting a half circle behind 'em.

Then one by one as Idaho called their names, the swing pairs worked back over the lead-chain, until all twelve horses were straightened out and heading for the Thornton yard. That was the fancy way Idaho Justin always made the turn into Railroad Street, and with my eyes still full of it, I trailed after the big wagons, swaying and bobbing along over chuckholes, and never looking somehow to move as fast as the horses.

"Careful, Bub, or you'll look a hole in that outfit," said the sorrel-haired girl, who had fallen in beside me. "A smart team, but that big lumberjack didn't need to jump all four swing pairs over the lead-chain for that turn. Just an overgrown boy showing off."

I stepped short and she stopped. "Idaho aint no lumberjack or overgrown boy either!" I told her. "And what does a girl like you know about freighting, anyway?"

"Not as much as I should, maybe," she said, laughing at having stirred me up. Then she went on ahead of me, walking with a fast swinging stride and her head held high and proud like a spirited horse.

I guessed sudden who she was when she followed Idaho's outfit into the wagon yard. Old Dan and Will Thornton had died bachelors, leaving their stables and teams and red freight-wagons to a niece. The niece had lived in Grandy as a small girl, Dad Burns said, a infernal nuisance always around the barns and horses. She'd been expected to arrive, and here she was, with no more sense than to call the best jerkline skinner in the country a lumberjack.

Dad Burns was near the gate, and he started to bawl something hostile like he does at any woman putting foot inside the yard or barns. But when the girl said "Hello, Dad," old Dad's face lit up and actually cracked into a smile.

"If it aint little Lin!" he hollered as they shook hands. "Growed from a gangling-legged colt into a dignified lady."

"Maybe a lady but not dignified, Dad," she told him. "Dignity is something a freighter keeps shut in the jockey-box."

"You're right there," said Dad, turning sour again. "It's high time you come. First big snow you won't have no outfit left. Not after the crazy contract that California big wind of a D. V. Sawyer made to haul the Marley mill machinery up Abo Mountain. But you'll learn 'bout that soon enough."

He turned to Idaho Justin who was swinging out of his saddle. "Idaho, this is the boss, Miss Thornton. Lin, this is Idaho Justin. About the only Thornton skinner that can drive through Grandy without knocking down half a dozen buildings."

Idaho looked at the girl and she looked at him, a straight, sharp sort of look that made Idaho color up all over his square face. Then she just nodded and walked along Idaho's team, patting each horse and looking him over close.

"We'll never go broke if our other teams are half this good," she said.

"Yeah, but they aint," snapped Dad. "And this here twelve-up team aint ours: they're Idaho's, working for us on contract. Idaho brung 'em down from the Northwest."

"Not our team?" said the girl and she seemed plumb disappointed. She gave Idaho another sharp glance, and then, telling Dad she'd be back, she headed for the big house where her uncles had lived.

Idaho as he looked after her acted dazed as if he'd been kicked by a horse. "Is that girl the boss?" he asked Dad. "She can't be. Not that girl."

Dad glanced quick at Idaho and snorted. "Why, o' course she can't be," he says. "Not that girl. She's the Queen of Sheby."

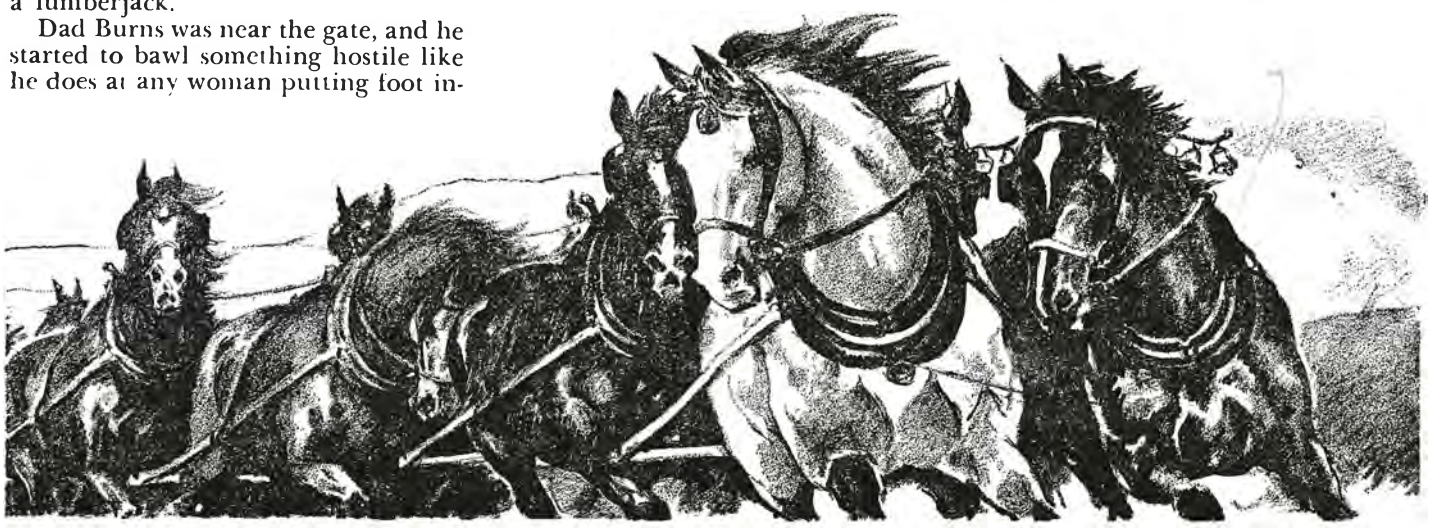
"Can't a man ask a civil question around these barns and get a civil answer?" Idaho says huffy-like, and him and me unhitched and unharnessed. Usually Idaho is full of cheerful talk, hoorawing Dad and me, but tonight he says hardly a word, and he even forgot to take his bells off Tom's and Jerry's hames and hang 'em up.

Dad Burns chewed his mustache-ends after Idaho had left. "Did you see that?" he says, disgusted. "Idaho never even looks at a girl, but here one walks up and bats a pair of blue eyes is way and he's a plumb goner."

"Not Idaho," I says to that. "Idaho's too smart to be took in by any girl."

"Mark my words," says Dad. "Idaho's brakes is busted and he's rollin' back toward the pit o' matrimony. I seen a lot o' freighters, and any girl that makes a jerkline skinner forgit to hang up his fancy leader bells has him eatin' oats out of her hand."

After supper instead of heading for a saloon, Idaho always came back to sit in a chair tilted against the office wall talking to Dad and me. I knew why he'd rather be in the barns. He liked to listen to horses crunching their corn, with his Jerry leader every now and then kicking nervous against the plank side of his stall. And after



the horses settled to eating hay, it was as quiet and peaceful as a church, except maybe for a horse blowing out through his nostrils.

BUT the night after Lin Thornton showed up the barn wasn't near so peaceful. That girl was in the office going over the books with that loud-mouthed, know-it-all dude of a D. V. Sawyer which the Thornton lawyer had hired as wagon boss and manager. Sawyer claimed that the "D. V." was short for Death Valley, California, where he was raised. It was Sawyer that had put Thornton Brothers in a bad hole by signing the contract to freight in the Marley mill.

For fifteen years Thornton Brothers had done the freighting between Abo mine camp and Grandy. Lately the Abo mines were playing out fast and the freight getting less. The only hope for the Thorntons was the new mines opening fourteen miles up Abo Mountain in Marley Canon. With the contract for hauling in the new mill, the Marley people had promised a five-year freighting job, providing the machinery was got in before winter broke.

Which was fine and dandy, if Sawyer could get the job finished before the first heavy snow.

When trains begun to drop off cars with the Marley girders and stamps and the steel for the cyanide tanks, Death Valley Sawyer, thinking of getting 'em up Abo Mountain, had a bad chill. But when the boilers looking as big as all outdoors was set off, Sawyer near fainted. And 'stead of taking the boilers up first before a snow come, he was killing teams to rush up the smaller stuff.

That contract was what Miss Lin Thornton and D. V. Sawyer talked about most in the office that night. Dad was smoking his pipe in the empty box stall where the stable-man and me had our bed-rolls. Idaho came in a little later to hunker down alongside Dad.

Illustrated by Maurice Bower

"They're your horses, Idaho," she says, "but I'd never have forgiven you if they'd gone over."

Sitting there under a smoky lantern, a lot of talk came in from the office. First thing that red-headed girl wanted to know was why the Marley boilers hadn't gone up. Sawyer 'lowed as how it was a mighty big job, maybe the biggest freighting job ever done in the West, considering Abo Mountain grades. But she needn't worry, Sawyer told her. He had it all figured out.

"It's not right," said Idaho. "—A young girl having the worries of a freighting business."

But Dad grunted. "Save your pity. Lin loves the worries of freighting. Freighting's in her blood. Her granddaddy whacked bulls along the Santa Fe Trail. He had six sons, the youngest one Lin's pa, and wherever freight moved in the West, one of the Thornton brothers was there rollin' it."

"If she was a boy that freighting blood would be all right," said Idaho. "But women and freighting don't mix."

"Don't try to tell her that," advised Dad. "She'd never of gone back East to school if her uncles hadn't promised her if she'd stick there six years she could come back to stay. That girl as a baby was rocked to sleep to a lullaby o' hoofs and wagon wheels. Raised in a freight-wagon, she was. And Lin aint the first woman to think she's a freighter. You ever hear about Calamity Jane, who freighted into Deadwood?"

"I heard of her," said Idaho as he got up. "And it's none of my concern if Miss Thornton wants to be a Calamity Jane, who was more man than woman. Only I didn't think she was that kind. Me, I'm off to my bunk. Heading back for Marley in the morning with a load of stamps. And I need a swamper; mine quit in Abo."

"Where you'll git another swamper aint my worry," said Dad.

"No; yours is where you'll get another stableboy," Idaho told him. "I'm taking Jimmy here as swamper."

"What? This dumb kid?" yelled Dad Burns. "He don't know a jockey-stick from a chock-block."

"How will he ever learn, around a sour old stable boss?" asked Idaho, jogging me in the ribs. "Roll your bed in the morning, kid; you're getting a hayfork stoop and a graveled disposition like Dad's. A barn's no place to learn to skin a jerkline outfit up a snaky mountain grade."

Dad and Idaho wrangled hot and heavy, but early morning saw my bed-roll up on the load of heavy steel stamps and me climbing up on the lead-wagon. It's a swamper's job to set trail-wagon brakes on grades, besides helping feed and harness, but Idaho had his outfit rigged so's he could work brakes on both wagons from his saddle, and I aimed to be

up where I could watch him handle his team. Climbing out of the Grandy Wash, we crossed the high rolling greasewood plain to the river, where we unhitched at noon to water and feed. Me, I'll never ask to be happier than on that morning, with the willow and wild plum leaves scarlet and the mesas brown with grama grass, and beyond them the far mountains gold-splotched with frosted aspens and floating in a blue haze.

"Freighting is a man's job," Idaho said. "Running a home is a woman's."

Fording the river, forty-eight big hoofs splashing and water swishing against the wheels and lapping at the wagon-box bottoms, scared me, but Idaho only laughed. "You'll learn to follow the riffles, kid," he told me. "That's where you find solid footing."

At dark we pulled into the wagon yard at Twenty-five Mile Camp, where three other outfits were unhooking to feed and get ready for the real freighting, done around a campfire of nights.

THE third day we were snaking up the dark, cold trough of Abo Cañon, with the clatter of hoofs and the hammer of big wheels over rocks making a steady thunder. That Abo Cañon was so twisty the leaders was often out of sight, and the road was on a sloped shelf so narrow there wasn't enough room for a fat lizard to crawl between the wheels and the creek boiling below.

That night Idaho and me and a Thornton skinner, Hod Ellison, were unhooking in the yard at Abo mining-camp when D. V. Sawyer and Lin Thornton drove up in a buckboard.

Sawyer, dressed in a blue suit with a watch-chain of gold nuggets across his middle and a derby canted across his head, started to help Miss Lin out of the rig. Instead she hopped over a wheel and walked across to Hod Ellison's team.

"Your string seems mighty leg-weary," she remarked to Hod.

"Yes, and I'm liable to have trouble on Abo Mountain tomorrow," said Hod. "Too heavy-loaded for a team that's been overworked."

"Back in California," bawled Sawyer, "a skinner's got too much pride to admit his team can't pull any load that can be piled on his wagons."

"Maybe," returned Hod, "that's why you aint hauled them Marley boilers yet. Waitin' for a California skinner to tackle 'em."

Sawyer whacked himself on his chest. "You're right! I'm trustin' those boilers only to a California freighter. Taking 'em up myself day after tomorrow and showing Miss Thornton a real jerkline skinner."

"If it doesn't snow," put in Miss Lin, her voice sort of frosty, as she stopped where me and Idaho was unhitching. "Mr. Justin, your horses are pretty enough to be in Barnum & Bailey's Circus. A little too fancy for a freight team, don't you think? And it's a pity that the grays are smooth-mouthed."

Idaho he unhooked a tug and laughed. He wasn't blushing none, I noticed; he had that out of his system. "Been looking at their teeth, have you, Miss Thornton?" he said, free and easy like he was talking to another man. "A lot of people have tried to trade me out of my horses, but they're not for sale. And if they were, I'd not unload them on someone who wouldn't know a team from a string of burros—if they wore a pretty set of harness."

"You don't think I know much about horses or freighting, do you, Mr. Justin?" she said, pretty riled.

"Well, no," Idaho said in his easy way, "I don't think you do. How could you be expected to?"

"Being a woman, is that it?" Miss Lin asks, her voice cold as the wind off Abo Mountain, and then she headed for the Abo hotel, while Idaho went on about his work, whistling. I wished Dad Burns was there: it was easy to see Idaho would never forget

to hang up his leader bells again, account of that girl!

Pulling out of camp next morning with Hod Ellison's team bells jingling just ahead of us, I had my first sight of the Abo Mountain road. The hair rose a little on my head. It looked like a long rope throwed down from the top of the ridge. I'd have bet a empty wagon couldn't be pulled up those grades.

For half a mile the trail clumb a steep chute blasted out of a cliff. Idaho's team had to dig in to drag that double load of stamps up it, with Idaho giving 'em plenty breathing-spells.

Out of the chute we swung sharp around a point where the road begun to climb a string of rocky stairs, each slanted like a gable roof, with an outer falling a hundred feet or more.

Behind us came the rattle of a buckboard and I looked back to see D. V. Sawyer and Lin Thornton, just as Hod Ellison started a loud yelling and whip-popping. I looked ahead to see Hod's team stuck. Before the brakes could be set, both wagons had backed over the chock-sticks put on the back axles to hold a wagon from rolling down a grade. Then the lead wagon cramped, shoving a front wheel off the road and within a inch of hanging over a hundred foot of empty air.

By then Idaho had his brakes tight and I was putting the chock-blocks behind the back wheels. And before Hod let out his first yell for help, Idaho had the lead-chain unhooked from in front of the wheelers, leaving only Teton and Rock hitched to the outfit.

"Stay with the wagon, kid," Idaho called to me and trotted the other five pairs up the road, standing on the back doubletree to help hold the lead-chain tight and keep the horses from stepping into the stretchers of the pair ahead. Hod's wagons blocked the road, but Idaho grabbed Skookum's tail to steady himself and put his string up the steep bank to pass around Ellison's outfit.

Lin Thornton and Sawyer ran past me just as our near wheeler, Teton, begun fretting, wanting to follow the rest of the team. Sawyer noticed it and yelled to me over a shoulder: "Tie up that horse's check so he won't be arting the wagon!"

I jumped to do as I was told, with my eyes up-trail where Idaho was hooking his string on ahead of Hod's leaders. Then him and Hod gave the word and those twenty-two horses yanked Hod's wagons back in the road and pulled them to the top.

Idaho was bringing his team back when behind me I heard a loud bang and the clatter of steel shoes. Even before I swung around I realized what I'd done in my excitement—tied Teton's check to the light brake-release ropes instead of to the heavy brake-pull ropes, so that when Teton jerked his head, he'd turned loose the brakes. As the brake-levers slammed back, Teton had been yanked against the lead wagon, and on the steep grade the wheels had jumped over both chock-sticks and chock-blocks.

I let out one scared yell and jumped for the ropes on Teton's saddle-horn to jerk the brakes tight. But it was too late: the brake only slowed the wagons. Inch by inch they dragged big Teton and Rock back, although the iron-grays were pulling with every ounce of power in their blocky bodies to hold the load, fighting with knees buckled and bellies low. They knew if they were drug off the road they were goners.

Idaho had left his team to race down and flip loose the link that connected the lead-chain with the crotch-chain of the trail wagon. Turned loose, the trail wagon dropped back over the cliff, landing with a crash like a cannon shot. But even that wasn't saving Teton and Rock. Already one back wheel was on the cliff edge and slowly settling.

"Chock 'er!" Idaho yelled to me from behind the other back wheel which he'd grabbed by the spokes and was straining to hold.

The chock-block chain was caught under the wheel, but there was a rock across the road. It was too big for me to lift, but I turned it end over end, to jam it under the wheel. That didn't stop the slow settling of the other back wheel, but it held the wagon from rolling backward.

D. V. Sawyer charged in, swearing loud, but Idaho swept him aside and ran to meet Hod Ellison who was hur-

rying down with Idaho's string. In a jiffy Idaho had swung the horses up the bank and jack-knifed them back along the road. Hod quick-hooked them on in front of Teton and Rock who by now were choked down, sides heaving like bellows, nostrils flared wide and showing red. It was all over after that; Idaho released the brake, called, "Yea, boys—giddap!" and the wagon eased back into the road.

Death Valley Sawyer, still cussing loud, looked over the cliff and turned on Idaho. "And you call yourself a skinner!" he bawled. "That trail wagon is smashed to kindling, and it'll take a day to lift the stamps back on the road. You're fired!"

Idaho didn't say a word; he hadn't the breath. He'd lifted out his heart the same as Rock and Teton had. I started to say it was all my fault, but Idaho shook his head at me.

Lin Thornton was standing by Teton, patting his big neck. When she spoke, her voice was shaky.

"They're your horses, Idaho," she said, "but I'd never have forgiven you if they'd gone over. Except that you were behind that wheel, and—and you'd have gone over with them. Mr. Sawyer, you can't fire a man who'd risk his life for a pair of horses."

"Why, sure," said Sawyer, plumb agreeable, "you're right, Miss Thornton. Idaho's a good man, except he gets excited in a jam. We'll keep him."

"Hold on," drawled Idaho. "Miss Thornton, when your manager fires a man, you don't want to interfere. A girl can't run a freight line: you've got to let your boss handle it."

Lin Thornton's blue eyes begun throwing off sparks. "Are you actually trying to tell me," she asked, "that I can't run my own business?"

Idaho smiled down at her in a way to make her still madder. "Freighting is a man's job," he said, like he was talking to a child. "Running a home is a woman's."

"Thank you," she slams back sarcastic. "That being your opinion, it must hurt you to even work for a firm owned by a woman. Mr. Sawyer, if you wish to dispense with Mr. Justin's services, you have my heartiest approval."

Sawyer he took off his derby and scratched his head. Then, "Why, certainly, Miss Thornton—" he begins, but Idaho breaks in.

"I can't be fired," he said, grinning wide. "My contract runs until the Marley machinery is delivered."

Sawyer he mutters to himself and look down at the busted wagon again. "S'posin'," he said to Idaho, "you get a crew to hoist back those stamps and get 'em over to Marley. And since the road's blocked here, Miss Thornton, we might as well get back to Grandy so I can start those boilers."

IT took the rest of the day to hoist those heavy stamps back on the road. Next morning Idaho and me went on to Marley and he wouldn't let me tell anybody it was my fault we'd lost the trail wagon.

"We all make mistakes, kid," he told me. "That's the way we learn not to make 'em."

We unloaded at Marley, and dropping back to Abo, loaded with ore for Grandy. Between Grandy and the river we met D. V. Sawyer and Hod Ellison hauling the two big Marley boilers, blocked up on two eight-wheeled logging wagons borrowed from a lumber outfit. It looked like a parade: Sawyer had a dozen men and a string of extra horses, besides a twenty-horse team on each wagon. Following them in rigs was Lin Thornton and Dad Burns and the two Marley mine-owners who was worried their boilers would never get in before winter broke. They had reason to be nervous: the weather was building up for a storm.

Sawyer told Idaho to take off his team and come along to help move the boilers. At the river they hooked Idaho's team on ahead of Sawyer's to drag one wagon across the ford. After the second was brought over safe, Sawyer starts to throw brags, but Lin Thornton with the sky turning to lead suggested that he hustle those boilers up to Twenty-five Mile Camp. And Sawyer with one outfit, Idaho with the other, twenty horses to the team, we headed out, Dad and Miss Lin and the Marley mine-owners following.

Next morning snow was falling so thick it hid the tops of the ridges. It came down all that morning, muffling the rumble of the wheels and the hoofs and leader bells as the boilers rolled on. Snow balled up bad in the horses' shoes and on a grade Sawyer's wagon slid off the road. It took us three hours to get it back in the road. With the snow still piling up, we done well to reach the camp at the mouth of Abo Cañon by dark. There old Dad Burns he stomped around in the cold, swearing and predicting trouble.

"Anybody except a man raised in Death Valley would know wagon wheels won't stay on them slanted snow-covered grades up cañon," Dad told me and Idaho around the fire we'd built near our bed-rolls. "While as for Abo Mountain, a herd of elephants couldn't pull a wagon up it. What do you think, Idaho?"

"Me?" said Idaho. "I don't think. I only work here."

"Just one way to move them boilers," went on Dad. "Sleds."

"Sure, sleds would be fine," agreed Idaho. "Logging-sleds would be strong enough to hold up those boilers—if we had 'em."

"Ten years ago the White Bone Lumber Company stored two big logging-bobs in our barns at Abo," Dad told him. "They're stronger than these eight-wheel wagons and they won't skid off the trail. They're still in the barns, covered with a pile of boards. But of course Sawyer wouldn't use 'em because no freightin' was ever done on sleds in Death Valley. This is as near Marley as he'll ever git those boilers. Which means the Thornton outfit goes bust."

"Too bad," said Idaho with a yawn. "Maybe there'll be enough left for the lady boss to start her a millinery store."

Me, I was dog-tired and I crawled into my bed, to be shook awake 'fore daylight by Dad. The camp was busy, feeding and harnessing. At breakfast it was discovered Idaho had left some time in the night with Teton and Rock and Tom and Jerry—without a word to nobody. D. V. Sawyer swore at Idaho for skipping out, and then with a neckerchief tied over his ears, he got horses hooked to the wagons and clumb up in the wheeler saddle of the lead boiler team.

He traveled on into the deep snow of the cañon a few hundred yards until he hit a bend where the trail sloped toward the creek. There the back wheels skidded and the wagon skated off the bank and landed on its side. The boiler smashed the wagon and broke loose to roll fifty feet and wedge in the creek bottom.

D. V. SAWYER, sitting up on his wheeler, looked at the wagon and boiler and then he busted out in language to melt a snowbank. Never had he got into a jackpot like this in California, he bellowed.

"We never claimed we could grow oranges in this country, either, Mr. Sawyer," Miss Lin blazed out. "Stop swearing, and show us some of that real-jerkline-skinner-in-action stuff you promised."

Death Valley dropped the syrupy talk he'd been using toward Miss Lin. "What can I do?" he bawled out. "There's no way in the world of moving these boilers before spring."

Then the two Marley mining-men busted out mad, threatening if the boilers weren't delivered right now, they'd sue the Thorntons for breaking the contract Sawyer had signed and take the whole outfit for damages. At that Sawyer, who was looking down at the boiler with a foot and a half of water freezing around it, hollered "I quit!" Borrowing a saddle-horse from one of the men, he headed back for Grandy.

"And now what, Miss Thornton?" asked Jack Marley, the head mining-man. "We've got to have those boilers at the mine. What are you doing about it?"

Miss Lin she glanced up-cañon and then she smiles. In the distance sounded the jingle of leader bells, Idaho's. "Doing?" she said to Jack Marley. "Why, delivering your boilers, of course. With the Thorntons a contract is a contract."

The bells got louder and Idaho's sorrel leaders and the big iron-gray wheelers come out from the snow-covered trees. When they got a little closer, we could see Idaho was standing on the heavy front bunk of a big logging bobsled, with a twin sled to the first one hitched on behind.

Miss Lin she frowned as Idaho pulled up. "Is there a bobsled party somewhere tonight?" she inquires.

"If you were a man," Idaho told her, "you'd realize these sleds are just what we need to haul the Marley

boilers. After Dad Burns told me about these bobs last night, I decided to go up after them. From the looks of that wagon, Sawyer can use 'em. Where'd he go?"

"Back to California to get his feet warm!" said Lin Thornton. Then she laughed. "If anything could cheer me up, it's those ridiculous sleds."

"If you'll kindly go back to camp, Miss Thornton," Idaho states dignified, holding in his temper, "where you won't get in the way and be in danger of getting hurt, we'll do a little freighting for you."

Miss Lin she shrugged and headed for camp. "Sleds!" she said disgusted, as she went. "Sleds!"

Idaho looked after her and when a gob of snow slid off a pine branch and plopped on his hat, he scowled after Miss Lin as if she'd throwed it at him. Then he peeled off his mackinaw and from then on that cañon was the busiest place you ever saw, with Idaho and the crew of men down in the creek chopping the boiler out of ice and rigging up a rolling hitch on it. With Teton and Rock hooked to a block and tackle, they hoisted the boiler up the bank and chocked it on the bunks of the first sled, booming it secure with heavy chains. In half a hour more the second boiler was on the other bob.

After that, with Idaho taking just his own twelve horses and Hod Ellison another string, we headed up Abo Cañon, bucking through deep snow, easing around hairpin curves, with the crew of men shoveling the worst drifts. Those sleds were made for rough country, with chock-sticks, and rigged on the rear bob runners were steel grab hooks that acted as brakes when they were lowered to gouge into the ground under the snow.

Around noon Dad Burns and Miss Lin arrived in a wagon with feed for the horses and hot grub for the men.

Idaho don't say nothing to her and she says the same back at him.

All afternoon Idaho works like mad, keeping the men shoveling drifts and moving the boilers on steady. We made it into the Thornton barns at Abo Camp at ten that night, men and horses fagged out, and the sky spitting more snow.

"Here's where those boilers set for the winter," said the Thornton barn boss. "Been storming steady on the mountain. Snow drifted twelve feet deep on top and just above camp water from the old Red Jacket mine shaft run over the road to freeze a mile of grade. She's a glare of ice you couldn't crawl over on hands and knees."

Idaho only laughed and slapped the barn boss' back. "What's a little ice?" he asked. "We'll just sharpshoe our teams tonight and waltz up that mountain."

Miss Lin went to the hotel while we wolfed our suppers. The snow-shovelers rolled out their beds, but there wasn't no sleep for Idaho, Dad Burns and me. Idaho sent one crew of men with picks to rough up the ice on that froze stretch and another crew to shovel out deep drifts. Dad and me took turns running the blower for the blacksmith sharpening shoes at his forge, while Idaho and Hod nailed them on.

Half the camp followed us out the next morning to see Idaho try that icy grade. Lin Thornton was following in a buckboard with Dad, and I'd have liked to hear what she said at seeing that team she called circus horses yank the boiler over that ice.

WE went on from there, horses scrambling up the icy grade between walls of snow as high as their heads. We made the top of the mountain by dark and after coming back to Abo Camp for the night, went on next day—Dad Burns and Miss Lin still trailing us—to slide those boilers into Marley Cañon about noon. Us swampers hustled horses into log sheds to feed, while the Marley miners they lifted a yell and Jack Marley grabbed Idaho's hand and shook it hard.

"That's freighting," he said and he turned to Miss Lin. "You know what this means? If you can bring in heavy boilers through this snow, you can freight concentrates and supplies so we can operate all winter. We'll sign that five-year contract right now."

"It's a deal, but the winter rates will be double the summer ones," Miss Lin told him.

Jack Marley only laughed. "Double they are," he agreed.

Miss Lin got out of the buckboard and walked over to Idaho. "You got them here," she said as if hating to admit it. "I didn't think you could do it, Idaho."

"It's just that you're a girl and can't savvy these things," he told her. "For winter freighting you'll have to get a bunch of bobs built, and buy more horses. But don't make me an offer for mine: they're not for sale."

"I don't suppose," said Miss Lin, "you would consider taking Mr. Sawyer's position?"

"Me?" said Idaho. "I made up my mind long ago never to work for a woman. They're always wanting to try out foolish notions. But Dad Burns here is the one who got your boilers through. Put Dad in Sawyer's place and I'll contract to freight with my team, same as now."

Miss Lin she turned to Dad Burns and I'll swear she winked at him and he winked back at her. "You're in charge, Dad," she said. "We wouldn't want to miss seeing that team of Idaho's play hippety-hop over the lead-chain on that Railroad Street turn."

"They're my own team, remember, Miss Thornton," says Idaho, huffy. "And I'll have 'em turn somersaults if I want."

"Hrumph!" grunted Dad. "C'mon, kid," he says to me, "le's git in to a hot stove."

Inside the mine office I scraped frost off a window to look out. Idaho and Miss Lin were still standing by the boilers, arguing hot and heavy. It was beginning to snow again.

"Did you hear Idaho tell her off?" I says to Dad. "And I suppose you'll still say he's a goner? Look at 'em—standing out there in the snow fighting."

"Them two are enjoyin' that fight so much they don't even know it's snowin'," said Dad. "And 'fore long you'll hear wedding bells 'stead of freighter bells ring out over the Abo! And there your Idaho will be, wearin' one of those Spanish jaw-breaker bits a woman sticks in a man's mouth when she marries him."

I had to laugh loud at that. "She'll never get Idaho," I told him back. "Idaho's too smart. Look how he got those boilers up here."

"Smart, eh?" sneered Dad Burns. "Whose idea was them sleds?"

"Yours, of course," I reminded him.

"Hrumph!" said Dad, disgusted. "I work in Grandy; how would I know what was stored in the Abo Camp barns ten years ago?" He looked around him. "Don't tell nobody, 'specially not Idaho, but it was Lin remembered them loggin'-sleds, back from the time she was a kid playing around the barns. She told me to mention 'em to Idaho as if it was my idea. Born and raised in a freight-wagon, that girl! Nothing gets by her."

"One thing got by her," I told him. "That it was my fault 'stead of Idaho's when the trailer wagon went over the cliff."

Dad just looked at me, tired. "Lin told it to me that way, kid. She thought Idaho was mighty noble to risk his life to save Teton and Rock and then to keep still about the mistake being yours. I guess that's when she made up her mind to get Idaho, along with his team; the first time she saw that string I knowed she'd decided she had to have them horses. And since his idea of a girl is the old-fashioned, helpless sort, why that's the kind she'll be. You're too young now, kid, to realize the slick wiles of women and how they git their way while letting a man think he is the big boss. You'll learn all that when you're older."

He opened the stove door and throwed in a chunk of wood. "A lot older!" he said—and he slammed the door shut hard

"Steve, I want you to meet some people."

Typhoon

The former officer of the Philippine scouts who wrote "Far Call the Bugles" gives us this novel of 1941 Mindanao.

The story thus far:

SUNSET was near when we came to my first sight of the Hacienda Mirage, in Mindanao; and in a few minutes I would see, talk to, Gabrielle Clough. It wouldn't be pleasant: nothing in my life had been pleasant. My main mission here, in the land where I was born, was unpleasant. The Marshal himself had directed it; and for proper reasons I had been selected as the emissary.

But there was a private mission: and that was for my father. I had all the evidence I wanted in Manila to start legal action against Garson Clough. I need never have seen him. But because of that picture I had seen in a photographer's window, I wanted to see Gabrielle Clough.

Now I halted my party—Mitras, as he called himself now, who had been a clerk for my father and Clough; and faithful Sergeant Doan, who had got left behind from the American expedition in Siberia, and had been with my father ever since; and the *capataz* and the *cargadores*. I had left my father in a far-distant hospital slowly recovering from an all-but-fatal wound inflicted by a Japanese bomb.

I rode on alone to the great hacienda—and was received by Consuela Pilar, a smoky-eyed mestiza beauty who told me that she was soon to marry Garson Clough. Moreover, I saw Gabrielle; she was even more lovely than her picture. And at length I talked with Garson Clough.

"The facts of the Pang Pang affair were these," he insisted. "A certain contingent fund was in your father's keeping. He could not show that fund when the company auditor suddenly dropped in at the plantation."

"But you had the combination of that safe as well as my father. You were the only two who did have it. Why—"

He waved an impatient hand. "I explained that. And also there was no proof, for that matter, that your father had actually taken the money. It simply wasn't there when called for, and your father had no adequate explanation."

Later my father, as he reminded me, had started a cinchona plantation, but had borrowed money to develop it—and Garson Clough had bought the mortgage from the bank. . . . So my father, who had stayed in the Philippines after the Spanish-American War, intending to make the islands his home, had been dispossessed and had turned soldier-of-fortune; and I had come back to Mindanao to visit my mother's grave—and to see Gabrielle—and to settle with the now wealthy and powerful Garson Clough. For through a confession my father had wrung from Mitras, we understood Clough's perfidy.

I got no farther that night, however. Clough urbanely kept the conversation friendly, insisted that I prolong my visit. Somehow I had grown unaccountably sleepy; I had more than a suspicion that there had been chloral in the drink Clough had urged on me. . . . When I awoke, it was moonlight, and there was a sound of music and dancing in the great patio. *(The story continues in detail:)*

Dawn

by CHARLES L. CLIFFORD

WHEN I reached the top of those stone steps, however, there was no sign of Gabrielle. The music was still playing, and I saw now that it came from some mechanical device set in the patio wall. Nobody seemed to notice me as I stood alone, staring. But somebody had: I felt a touch on my arm, and with it a scent that wasn't of the night. Or was it?

I turned at the touch, at the sound of the softly husky voice: "We were wondering about you. Hoping—"

Consuela Pilar was looking up at me as though her happiness depended upon my smile. There was no smile.

"Where is Miss Clough?"

She gave the place a quick glance, a token glance and then looked back at me a little impatiently.

"Dancing."

I don't think she had seen her dancing, but now I did. She was at the far end of the terrace and she was dancing with Gregorio Mitras. It made me suddenly very ugly. Mitras—Mitras in a starched and natty mess jacket, sharply creased black trousers of the latest cut, flagrantly wide, with a flagrantly red cummerbund binding his narrow waist, and his black eyes flashing, his white teeth gleaming as he danced with Gabrielle Clough.

I stared at him, enraged—at this Eurasian racketeer, trickster, and worse!

"What is *he* doing here?"

She looked at me with suddenly widening eyes: a calculated childishness in them. In spite of myself I was stirred. They were beautiful eyes and they had lots in them; deep in them. But they weren't putting out.

"I mean Mitras. The man with Miss Clough."

"Oh," she said. "Why, he is of your party. Your friend. Our guest, *por supuesto.*"

"I can't remember that I have identified my friends —yet."

She looked at me as though I had said something meant to hurt her. Her eyes seemed to grow bigger with the expression of this hurt.

"Where is Mr. Clough?"

"The Raja?" Once again she gave that perfunctory look, unseeing, uncaring at the moving people. Then she looked back at me.

"Please, let's dance," she said.

"The Raja!"

"Are you being sarcastic? Facetious?"

"Are you being entirely normal?"

"Let's dance." She took my arm and drew me toward the smooth inner rectangle of the terrace. I moved with her but I wasn't looking at her. I saw a sight that stopped me in my tracks. I saw Sergeant Doan. For years I had seen Sergeant Doan in strange places and in strange rigs. I had seen him in coolie rags and in the winter dress of

Dancing with Mitras! It made me suddenly ugly.

Mongolia. I had seen him in the uniform of a Japanese colonel stripped at night from a too-long-dead body. But I had never seen him in formal evening dress. And I never had dreamed that such a thing would come to pass. But it had. And more. Where or how he had learned the intricate steps he was executing, I had no way of knowing. Certainly they had never cropped up in any of the few respites from war we had shared together. He may have in the Shanghai bars done some dancing. Or in worse places, if there are any. But never in my presence, and I wondered that shame didn't overwhelm him as suddenly he looked my way and caught my eye. Instead he waved brazenly, and his rare laugh boomed across the terrace.

Well, they were certainly making themselves at home. It occurred to me bitterly that were I to see the Moro *capitaz* dancing the *jota* out there with some fat dowager, I wouldn't raise an eyebrow.

AS I danced with Consuela Pilar, I thought of Mitras. I'll admit it was a feat, with that woman in my arms: she was relaxed so completely that she moved almost as a part of me. But a part unknown until now: clinging without weight, moving without effort, her smooth oval face against my shoulder, the glossy touch of her midnight hair just enough.

Mitras had left the Philippines a long time ago. As a boy—but with none of the innocence, the bewilderment or aimlessness of a boy. He was wanted by the Manila police. And for years after he had been wanted by other police. Shanghai was the place for a fancy young man like Mitras. His looks alone could pass him anywhere in the East. He had the handsome grace of what is called the mestizo in the Islands, Eurasian on the China Coast. The white blood and the brown or yellow: so mixed that outwardly the white won, but inwardly the cross-current so often made for evil—and consummate genius for evil.

Mitras had stepped right into the exact place where he should have had his beginning. Shanghai is one of the real evil cities of the world. And in Shanghai was, and still is, I suppose, the secret group of men known throughout China as the Pan-Yang. There is power in that small guild of lawless men. Some good, too. National good has sprung from its illicit gains in some cases. And national evil. Opium-control in a racketeering sense is the big source of income. Defrauding of the Chiang government in taxes and shake-downs all along the line. Everybody loses except the boys in the Pan-Yang. For little as it is known, opium is still one of the big sources of Chinese income. Legal, highly taxed. It is even reported to be the backbone of the present war-chest.

Mitras had been brought in, the night my father was wounded. They had him dead to rights. He'd crash-landed in a Japanese reconnaissance plane in a wheat-field. The Jap pilot had been badly injured, and he talked. Normally it would have been just a pistol-shot in the back of the head for Mitras. The Jap said he was Chinese, and he was in civilian clothes. He also said he had been directed to fly him close to Chungking to make a fast twilight landing, and leave him to his espionage. But Mitras put up a big front, used big names, and even demanded in his arrogance that he be permitted to see the Generalissimo himself. His story was that it was all a double-cross for the Japanese.

My father had him brought in. Even at first he said there was something familiar to him in those bold eyes and that false white smile. But he didn't recognize him. He listened to Mitras' lies, watching him, trying to remember where he had seen a face like that—certain that he had. And he radioed Mitras' lies back to Chungking, got back what he expected, and was authorized to give him his deserts on the spot.

It was only then that Mitras, knowing what was coming to him, came out with the last—and he must have thought it hopeless—shot he had. He claimed to be a Philippine citizen, protected by the United States. He tried to prove it by a minute personal history. The first part, of course, rang true. He named the firm he had worked for, that my father had worked for. . . . And then—my father remembered.

It was almost unbelievable, he said: sitting there in a mud-covered hut, the sound of firing still hanging in the night air, and this sly, crooked *mestizo* standing there, dapper, clean, but fighting like hell for his life. Mixing lies and truths and boasts and whining pleas. My father hardly listened. All the time he was remembering, thinking back to that quiet, lovely town in Mindanao where all that he had and loved were suddenly lost to him because of a crookedness he had had no part in. Where this very man, now hard, matured in his way of life, had been a mere Filipino clerk, not out of his 'teens, obsequious, writing his trivial clerical stints in the flowery hand of the Filipino schoolboy.

His life was my father's. That is the Chinese way. And my father's mind-processes had become curiously Chinese. Mine never had, though I had grown up in the country. I had given what I had because of my father: but I had never liked China. I never will.

My father made a deal with Mitras that night. He had tried to get me in, but I was on patrol. He had placed Mitras under close guard, had been wounded shortly afterward. Later, when he told me the story in the Chungking hospital, we had worked it out.

The big thing with the Chinese is "face." And the powers in Chungking understood perfectly when my father asked for my relief, and for Mitras. It was as though he had asked for a bundle of straw when he asked for Mitras.

I looked across at Mitras—across that wide terrace. Nothing strawlike about him now. He was a handsome man, and I realized that before he had left Manila, he had outfitted himself carefully for any eventuality—had in his intuitive sly way foreseen this place and what might happen here. He had his sources of income: even in Manila a man with his contacts could raise what money he needed, I knew. He'd certainly dressed himself.

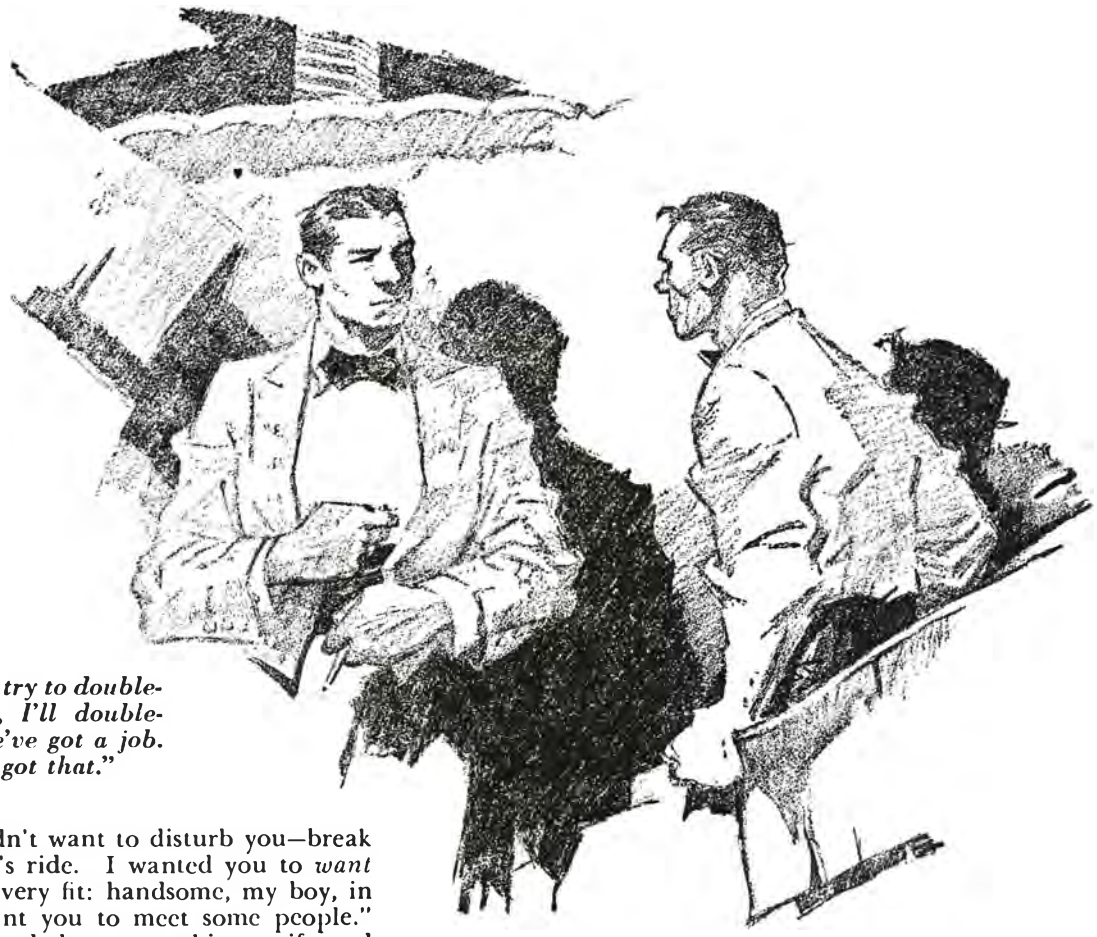
"You are very quiet. Would you like some champagne?" asked Consuela Pilar.

"Yes. I'd like to see Mr. Clough."

She smiled and gave me a little shake.

"Stop being serious. Stop not liking me very much." But she dropped her arms, and led me to a corner table; and there was Garson Clough. Mitras had intrigued me this night, and Doan had startled me. But standing there with the gay music in my ears and the white Philippine moon streaming down on me, I was stopped by the sight of Garson Clough. At first I thought he was making whimsy of the setting, dressing a part for the amusement of his guests. For he wore the clothes and accouterments of a noble Moro: a high *dato*—more grandeur than most Moros of rank could afford to affect. But the clothes were real: no "costume" tawdriness about them. He had on the tight, gold-buttoned jacket, the skin-taut trousers and the sashlike sarong of the *dato:* the coat a royal purple and the lower dress of vivid green. And on his head was wound the *tubo* of Mecca. Bright green! I had never seen a jewel in a Moro's turban such as are affected by Indian princes. But I saw one in the *tubo* of Garson Clough. I saw a huge black pearl, and the pearl was crested with a *barong* of flashing diamonds. On one of his great hands was a ring set with an enormous pink pearl: on the other flashed the dull green light from a rectangle of emerald.

I stared at him, searching his hard face for sign of make-up. There must, I thought, be stage paint, mascara, to put sanity into this sight for me. But there was none: the rich natural color alone was there. And a natural smile as he looked up and greeted me.



Doan said: "If you try to double-cross your father, I'll double-cross you! . . . We've got a job. Maybe you forgot that."

"Good boy, Steve! I didn't want to disturb you—break your nap after a hard day's ride. I wanted you to *want* to come down. You look very fit: handsome, my boy, in those clothes. Here, I want you to meet some people."

Before I could say a word, he was making swift and hearty introductions. People at hand were being thrust at me, he was calling to nearby tables, drawing the crowd around him. The music stopped, by some touch of his hand, I suppose, and the dancers came up. Women smiled as naturally as at any normal party; men shook hands, grinned, said normal words of welcome.

He was explaining me; explaining me in robust, pleasant words: Son of his old friend, best friend. Those were the days. Days of the Empire. And now, come back to where I belonged, it was like a breath of the old days to him. Great boy. Image of his old man; and his old man was the salt of the earth. And this big handsome soldier of fortune a chip off the old block. Yes, soldier of fortune, but aren't we all?

He laughed heartily then and reached out, taking Consuela Pilar's rounded arm in his great fingers. He held her arm, drawing her with a certain pride toward him. She looked up at him and a strange, deep gleam came into her dark eyes.

I SAW Gabrielle Clough then. She was farther back than the others around us, and there was a still, sort of far-away look in her lovely eyes.

She didn't look at me, and I looked at nothing else. People were talking, all mixed up, and I heard Garson Clough roar out a command for champagne. It must have been placed about him in ready quantity, for almost at once corks were banging out and glasses foaming. He himself thrust a filled glass into my hand and his eyes demanded my instant attention.

"Steve, Steve! That big smile now. No modest skulking. And all you good people. All you fortunate commercial soldiers of fortune, hark ye!"

A young woman, almost naked in a coral-colored gown, gave a high-pitched laugh. I saw Mitras bare his white teeth: this was something he liked. These women and their men and their background! Just before, one of the men had told me that they had come from all over Mindanao for the party—that some were here on a chartered boat, and that each year the celebration had become a junket of increasing moment. It was also Garson Clough's birthday. Raja Clough, the white Raja of Mindanao. I'd heard, of course, of the white Raja of Sarawak: the Englishman who actually was a Raja, recognized by the Borneo natives as such.

But Garson Clough! This crook with his hearty laugh and open gestures and his green *tubo* of Mecca! Did the Moros know of this burlesque of their sacred hierarchy?

I couldn't learn now, certainly. How far this thing had gone, how much farce it might be. I couldn't do anything; for now, Garson Clough was raising his glass on high and gesturing for silence. In his blue eyes there had come a serious look; there was nothing masked about his look: open, cleanly serious it was, and that is something I never have been able to understand.

He said gravely, but smiling too:

"My prospective son-in-law: Steve Curtis. Please all drink and shake his hand. Gabrielle, my dear!"

The words didn't even register with me at first. Just the sound of her name as he turned slightly, seeking her, smiling at her still face. I watched that face, struck suddenly by the tragic, awful thing her father had done. It was very white. I could not tell, watching her, whether this was what it was to me: a thing so preposterous that the words expressing it had to have no meaning. Had to be, by the very law of living words, something that had never been said. Imagined only.

I was unable to see more of her then. They were all around me, shaking my hand; and one woman lifted a puckish face and kissed me.

"Last chance!" she said, and she swallowed the champagne in her glass and smashed the glass down on the stone at her feet.

Garson Clough had me by the hand, his eyes looking naïvely into mine. I couldn't beat it with any look I knew. I should have felt, I thought, like taking a punch

at him. I should have felt as a fool is supposed to feel when made a fool of by malice. But the man was too much for me. His look, the feel of his great hand was too real. Too *honest*. I could only think of Lewis Carroll and his incredible "Alice in Wonderland." That was as near as I got to concrete thought, to comparison.

I got away from his hand, from the crowd about me. Gabrielle was blocked off from me, by women mostly. Women gushing over her, some eyeing me over their shoulders as they waited to get up to her.

I pushed toward her. I got around the crowd, flanking them, and I got her by the arm. People began to laugh. I wondered what most of them thought. They were familiars here. They must know I had never been here before, had no chance to know this girl. What had been told to them—left untold for them to guess?

She came away from the crowd with me, walking quietly enough, saying nothing. I didn't like simply to drag her off into the dark, but I had to get her away from this madhouse.

I led her over to the steps where I had seen her standing alone earlier tonight. The music had started up, and they were all dancing again. Or those who weren't were downing the champagne and rallying loudly about Garson Clough. He didn't even look our way, and the others, I suppose, thought we were entitled to a word alone at the moment.

All except Gregorio Mitras. He came so silently that I didn't hear his new, sharply pointed black dancing-shoes on the stone. He was smiling widely, and his dark hand was thrust out in a way I didn't like. He was, in effect, my prisoner. We weren't in China, but China was in my blood more than I knew. To me the change in locale was not a change for Mitras nor in what was due him if he failed in his pledge. The brutality that had become a part of me, that my father had sorrowed over, was ready at any time for Mitras. And Mitras knew it as well as I. It had only been mentioned once. "I'll do it at any time," I told him. "What should have been done to you at Fushan. It won't be murder to me; and for you, it will be only what's coming to you sooner or later."

He hadn't grinned then. He was certain of it—he too had been in China long enough to know what a human life is not worth.

I ignored his hand. The girl didn't even look at him. Once again she was staring off toward those luminous-edged mountains, waiting as though without feeling for whatever might come.

"Tell Doan I want to see him. Here, in a few minutes."

It was a full-fledged leer he gave me now. He jerked his sleek black head backward. "He's gone native," he said. "But I'll make a search."

"See that *you* don't—go native."

I turned from him then, took Gabrielle Clough's arm and walked her down the steps.

WE moved in silence, and once I looked at her hair and the side of her face. The moon touched it, edged it as it did the distant mountains and gave it the same blurred purity of color, softness of line. Deep down something seemed to shake me so that I felt the way I remembered feeling as a kid when I was frightened and sick with the fear of being alone.

We walked over the lawn and down toward the river. I could hear the rush of it, steady, deep and eternal in undertone as it went over the high ground and the bold rocks to the lower level of the plateau. The moon touched it in twinkles of light and the darker places, in the night shadows, seemed black with mystery.

She slowed and then stopped by a block of high trees.

"This is where we swim," she said.

I didn't even look.

"Why did your father pull such a thing?"

"I don't know."

"Did you know before? Before he acted the clown back there?"

"No."

I looked at her closely, but could tell nothing. Her face was unmoved by any expression. No sign for me or anyone else to judge her thoughts, her emotions.

"Look at me."

I took her arms, my hands on each arm just above the elbow. She looked as smooth, as serene as though just up from her dressing-table. She lifted her eyes slowly, looked at me steadily. But there was nothing there to go by. . . . Just as before.

It angered me. "Haven't you anything to say?"

I KNEW then by the way my heart beat in me, that there was something I wanted her to say. Hopeless as it might be, impossible as it was under the circumstances, if only for the bitter elation it would give me, I wanted her to break and ask for comfort, understanding. . . . But there was nothing like that.

"Do you know I love you?" I asked; saying it sounded like all the rest of it here. Insane, without real or future meaning. But my voice shook as I said it, and inside of me I knew it was true. "*Do* you?" I repeated.

"No," said Gabrielle.

"No, what? No, you don't know? Or no, you don't want to hear it?"

She said nothing. But she didn't move or try to move, and her eyes watched me with that steady, unreadable look. I drew her toward me, dropped my hands and put an arm about her. I looked down at her, smoothed her rich hair away from her eye, put a hand under her chin. I lifted her face a little and kissed her. She made no movement of any kind; even her hands—either of them—didn't move. And I saw that her eyes remained the same: open, steady on mine.

I felt suddenly cold, bitterly lonely. I moved back from her and I looked over at the river. I felt as though I had touched, suddenly tried then to grasp and hold an invisible thing.

"Just like quicksilver. Nothing—"

"Quicksilver? You mean me?"

"You, yes. Cold, untouchable—beautiful too, in a way."

She moved away from me and sat on a bench of natural wood meant, I suppose, for the swimmers. I could see where they had dammed the river in this by-way in its course, and the pool under the great banyan trees was smooth and level in the shadow.

"Would you like a cigarette?"

She had opened the small evening bag she carried, and was looking at me now, calmly, holding the case out to me. I took one, and the gold lighter she passed over. We smoked in silence for a while and I decided that I'd wait till doomsday, if necessary, to make her talk without words from me. At last she said:

"What did my father say to you upstairs?"

"Spun me a pack of lies. Then slipped me a knock-out drop."

"A what?"

"Some chloral hydrate in my whisky and tan-san, that we were drinking in memory of my beloved father. His beloved pal, Steve!"

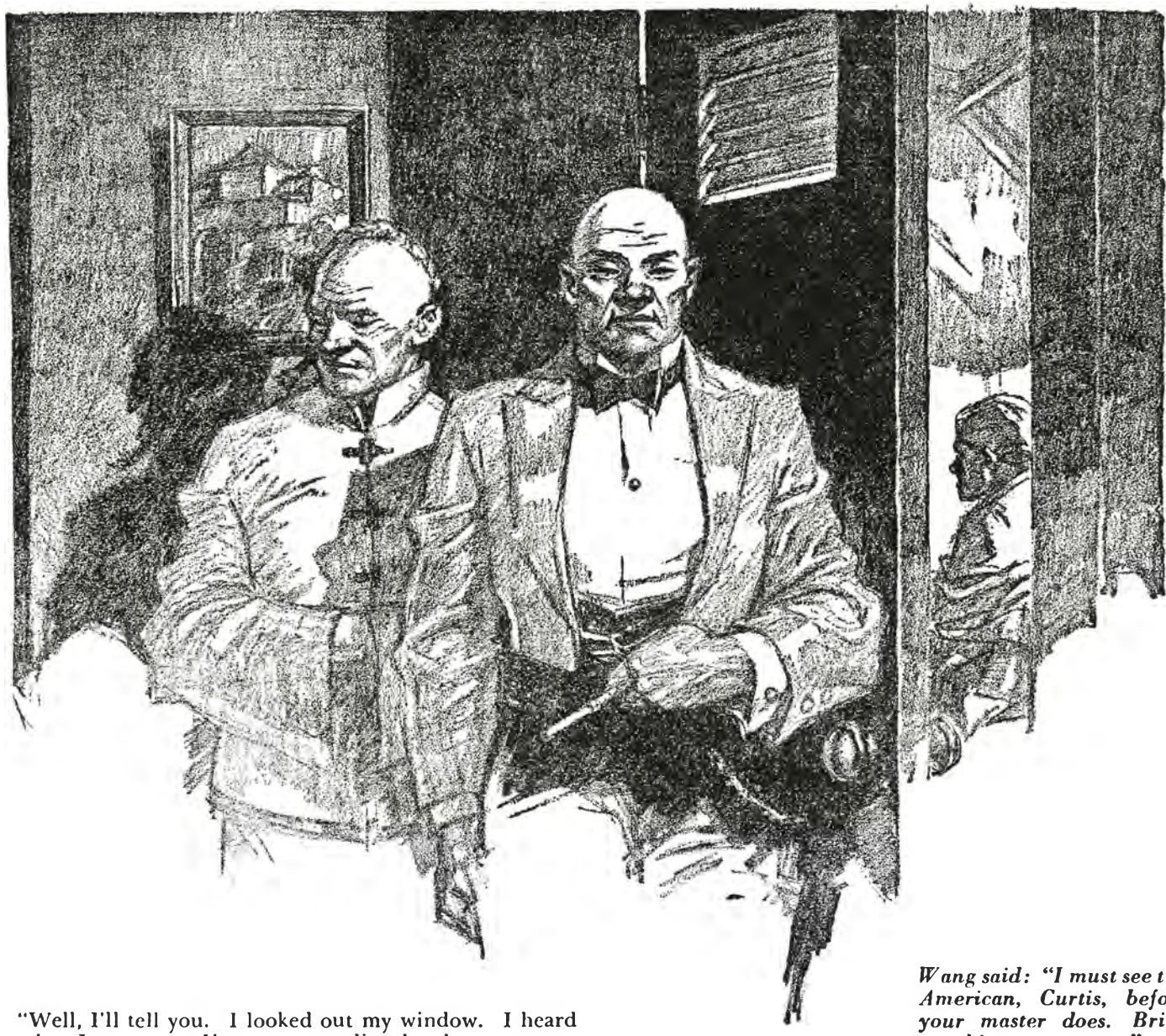
"I don't know what chloral hydrate is."

"It's a deadly drug. It can kill you. But he just wanted to put me out."

"Why?"

"So that he could go over Mitras thoroughly, and Doan. Don't play innocent; you saw the effect it had on me. You got me to bed. The only thing is, it usually lays you out for hours, leaves you with a terrible head. I came up wide awake. I dressed for the party—looked forward to it. Do you know why?"

"No. I don't know why."



Wang said: "I must see the American, Curtis, before your master does. Bring him to my room."

"Well, I'll tell you. I looked out my window. I heard music. I saw you. You were standing by the steps near the house. You were looking off toward the mountains. I could see your face clearly in the moonlight. It looked like the face of an angel. An angel who has taken an awful beating. I fell in love with you. You're the most beautiful girl I ever saw. And what else goes with it—I don't know: maybe that damned fake *spirituelle* look you have did the rest. But there it is."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I'd like to do what your father, so squirelike, suggested. So Raja-like." I laughed then, and she gave me a slow, unfriendly look.

"It's not amusing. Not to me."

"Or won't be for him, if what I hear of the Moros is true. They don't take kindly to a facetious view of their religion. And a Raja is, like most of their offices, a religious one."

"My father is a Mohammedan. He is not being facetious. He is a Raja."

She said it as coolly, as carelessly, almost, as though she had said he was taking a nap.

I was amazed, but I had no intention of showing it.

"I'm not interested in your father. Only in *my* father. Has he told you? Or can I expect more blank looks?"

"I don't question my father," she said simply. "Or what he does or directs."

"Are you a Mohammedan too?" I began to laugh, and she understood it for what it was, that laugh. Not all of what it meant, maybe: the loss in it, the bitterness of this that had happened to me. But she got the sneer in it.

"Let's not discuss my father," she said.

"Do you want to discuss his last direction? You asked me a minute ago what I meant to do about it."

She looked at me in silence, then she said quietly:

"Yes, I do want to discuss it. I came out here with you for that purpose."

I was taken aback by the calmness, her level tone.

"You mean that too wasn't facetiousness? A verbal knockout drop?"

"Yes," she said.

"That you and I are engaged to be married. Now that your Raja father has so announced publicly?"

She made a slight movement of her head. The moon hit it through the trees, and it shone like real quicksilver. She meant: "Yes."

"Good God!" I said.

I gave her a chance to go on, but she made no sound. She was staring at the level, slate-colored pool in the shadow, and once again I had that strange yearning, that misery for her imagined misery, burning deep in me.

"Then," I said, and my mouth felt dry, and I felt unreal, as though going under ether, "then it just remains for me to say yes. I've already said I love you. It's all very regular. Except one thing."

"Don't be a fool," I said, "or play me for one. Of course I'm not going to marry a girl I don't even know."

I waited for her to question that, but she said nothing. She didn't stir, but the wind had come up a little, and her hair stirred. The wide wing of it fluttered against her cheekbone, and at last she put a hand up to steady it.

"Just one thing," I said again. "You know what that is, of course?"

But she made no reply. Made no move.

"You must have read books. Romances? All real romance—"

She got up. Her chin was set, hard, rounded. Her eyes were getting at me now. Hard at me.

"I thought you said you loved me," she said, and there was a sort of quick, sharp gasp in the words. As though she had taken all that she could take, and was fighting back before the fight in her turned to tears. She took a quick breath and went on: "Was *that* facetious?"

"No. Not facetious."

"I'm going back. To my father. I'll tell him at once."

I had a sudden fear, somehow. Part of it was physical and my hand instinctively went to my hip. But the old leather belt was not there.

"Tell your father what?"

"That he was mistaken. That you do not want me."

"Want you? Why would your father even have imagined such a thing? You, yes. One look at me, and you could see what had happened to me. Even when I first saw you, maybe. But not your father. Unless you—"

Something in her eyes stopped me. She said coldly:

"My father told me about that part of your talk in his rooms. I thought it was entirely understood. It's embarrassing for me that you have changed your mind. But for you—"

(That feeling came again. I thought: "Go right now. Get Doan. Get Mitras. Roust out the *capitaz* and the *cargadores*. Pack and get out of this madhouse. Take your feeling for this quicksilver girl away with you, as you might the memory of a lovely scent, the color of a flower, the sight of a sunset so sweet that you remember it above all the sunsets you have seen. But *go!*")

"But for me? I'll tell you about me, Gabrielle. In just a moment. But before that, tell me about you. What did you say when your father told you that I wanted to marry you? An utter stranger come from nowhere? A penniless soldier of fortune who had never laid eyes on you before?"

She met my look steadily enough. "Stranger? We started to grow up together. We lived side by side. Our mothers were buried side by side in the cemetery at Pang Pang. Our fathers were close friends. Penniless? I hardly know what you mean."

"Ah. And what did you say? To your father?"

She looked at me as though amazed. "Say? My father is a Mohammedan. Do you know what that means?"

The thing was incredible. Even by the standards I had grown to know in China, where the greatest man China has known for centuries arose to more power than any Chinese ever had from the humble birthright of next-to-nothing. Where to lose "face" is to lose all that life means. Where men fight each other one month, and are as brothers the next. Where a man can have a dozen names, and be known far and wide by one or all of them. Where the written word is understood by all, and the spoken word alien a few hundred miles away.

"As a dutiful daughter of Allah, you said yes. I see. And you lose caste, face, if I fail you. After asking formally for your hand."

"My father loses caste. That is what you must understand."

"But you lose it with him. Internecine face. I see. Well, it's a great break for me. I get your father's idea very clearly. Whether you do or not, I have no way of knowing. You are too fluid, too like that quicksilver, to get even a faint grip on. But I do know this: you're not going to lose face because of me. Improve it, if anything. When you go to your father, will you tell him this: If he has a preacher handy, I'll call *his* hand—tonight. Are you prepared to do that?"

She looked at me for a long time. Something about that clear—yes, honest—look, stirred me. It actually affected me

so strongly that I had a sense of guilt, remembering my sarcastic words. Worse—come-on words. Because I hadn't meant them. Baiting, taunting words, they were really designed to shake this impervious girl with her cool voice, her steady, unflinching eyes; shake her out of this maddening self-assurance which already had made monkey enough of me.

While I looked at her, waiting for my dénouement, I thought of big-shot Raja Clough. He'd give me a knockout drop, would he? Get to Mitras, and even Doan he'd probably sounded out. I'd know in a few minutes. Suppose they had double-crossed me? Mitras swearing he had never seen Clough before in his life? Never seen that deed my father had sent to the Company? Completely repudiated the confession he had made to my father? Because in that confession—and it had been written and signed, a copy in my wallet right now—Mitras had testified that Garson Clough had opened that safe. Rifled it to the last penny, and used the money for Baguio mining-stocks.

Doan *couldn't* tell much. Liquor-and-women bribes wouldn't hold their lure long for him. He was loyal—if not to me, blazingly so to my father. Now this—this hurling of his daughter at my head, by Garson Clough! Was that to be my bribe? My price to keep the scandal of his misdeeds from the Manila courts, the newspapers? It could be. He was ego itself—Raja Clough! He had gone decent in a big way. The people out there dancing—the music came to me now as I thought it—seemed people of standing. With the little I knew of Manila—and most of it picked up in my short visit there before this southern trip—I had sized up those people. Big names, I supposed. Wealth and power and standing in the Islands. All friends of Garson Clough's. So much so that they had made this junket to celebrate his birthday and the Puasa.

This girl knew more than she was telling me. Not question her father? Between them, I had no doubt, much had been said since I blew in here. They were both in on it—agreed. But what I couldn't understand was her steady, impersonal attitude. Her implied insistence that an incredible thing like marrying a stranger without his being consulted was a mere act of filial routine duty.

What was the trick? I knew little about law, nothing about Philippine law. A lot of it was old Spanish and tricky, incredible to an American. But how could a man marry another man's daughter and not have some rights ultimately to her heritage? Was this egomaniac saving face by admitting me at once to a potential ownership of the Hacienda Mirage? At the same time automatically pulling my sting? Insuring a *nolle prosequi* forever?

What about Consuela Pilar? Clough said he was going to marry her. She therefore had dower rights at least in this gold mine of cinchona. Maybe more than dower rights: what could prevent him from leaving nothing to Gabrielle, all to this smooth-looking mestiza? Salving his conscience with the fact that his daughter had a husband to look out for her?

I was still watching Gabrielle Clough, and at last she spoke. Her words stopped all further thought, sent that quicksilver through me again. She said in a low voice:

"Yes, I am quite prepared."

She must have noted the blank unbelief in my face, but it caused no apparent reaction in her. She went on quietly, almost eagerly it seemed to me: "I think it would please everyone."

"Would it please your father?"

She said, almost breathlessly: "Oh, yes. It's the way he likes things. Done swiftly: settled as soon as decided on. In any case, he'd mentioned tomorrow."

"In that case," I said, and my heart felt light, lost somewhere deep in me, "let's go."

I put an arm about her, and once again I felt that soft tickle of her wing of bright hair against my face. We walked that way, saying nothing, toward the stone steps of the terrace. And as we started up, the music still playing, the dancers gliding about, I saw Doan. He was close to the patio wall, in the deep shadow of a group of spreading air-plants. I couldn't hear his voice, but he was bent toward a dim white figure, and he was talking low and earnestly.

I looked hard at that white figure. The face wasn't clear, but the silhouette, rounded and short, seemed familiar. Was it Cheng, the old Chinaman, with Sergeant Doan? I wondered. There was a dramatic, tableau air about those two in that obscurity. I felt a tingling of foreboding as I looked. Then I felt Gabrielle Clough's bare arm touch me, her hand close on my arm.

"What is it?"

There was a hint of tremor in her low voice, and her fingers tightened on my arm.

"Nothing," I said, and I laughed. "How do we break the news to your father?"

She looked at me a moment thoughtfully. "I'll do that," she said.

"And I'll wait here—modestly. . . . Gabrielle?"

"Yes?" She was looking at me with that strange, candid look that at times came to her and that made me feel utterly in the wrong.

I reached out and put my arm about her. She just stood there, and her eyes didn't change. That was the thing that I simply couldn't understand. She must have some feeling; but so far, none of it had shown through that impersonal calmness that was so maddening to me.

"I want to kiss you. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

"Yes," she said. "Perfectly fair."

I almost didn't do it. Out of pique. But then I thought: "I'll be damned if I'll let that stop me. I'll break this girl down." There was fight in me about that. I had ego too. And I was an adventurer. It had been my life. And that is the only way I can explain what I was doing, what I was willing to do in this mad place.

I took her in my arms and looked down at her—waiting, hoping for a change in her: a softening, a trembling, even a faint hint of giving, of warmth. But there was none, and I kissed her almost savagely, several times, and then I pushed her from me, and she turned and went swiftly toward the lights.

Chapter Seven

I FELT in my pocket for a cigarette, fumbled for matches. As I lighted the match, Doan came from the shadows. He saw that I had seen him and he stopped and motioned to me. I went with him toward the patio, through the wall door of it and we stood in silence a moment under the tree shadows, the moon white and still on the fountain, the flowers.

"Captain?"

"All right. Mitras said you had gone native. Have you been boozing?"

He had, on occasion, and we both knew what that meant. Hell on wheels for a period of liberty and then for months after not a drop. Cold forgetfulness of it all.

"Do I look it?"

He thrust his stonelike face at me, and I could see bright anger in his small sharp eyes.

"No. You're sober. Why all the hooting? The Mardi Gras out there earlier?"

He glared at me. "Steve—have you gone nuts?"

He was raging, and I had to smile. "You mean the announcement of my engagement?"

He cursed terribly in Chinese. There's no cursing like it. Then he said, with a deadly light in those little eyes of his: "If you try to double-cross your father, I'll double-cross you. I've been with him through thick and thin most of my life. And I'm not going to let champagne and a mango-faced dame kill all he's got to look forward to, now he's finished his fighting days."

"All right. I had one drink of champagne."

"And we've got another job. Maybe you forgot that out there in the moonlight?"

"For a moment, I'm afraid I did. We did pretty well on the first job in Manila, didn't we?"

"Sure. Legally. But that Mitras can cross us up yet. And it looks like you've gone soft. Clough's got you just where he wants you."

"Yes?"

"And if you were on the job, you'd have noticed something—besides them baby-blue eyes."

"I've noticed a lot."

"A big Chino, maybe?"

"No."

"A jade-and-ruby bracelet, maybe?"

"I noticed that."

He swallowed, trying to clear the anger in his red throat. "Well, the Chino sat back on the sidelines. But that black-haired mango was waving that Ming bracelet right in my face. Even you couldn't miss that. How did it get here? It's only been out of China a few months."

"She goes to Manila, I suppose. And Wang had it for sale."

"He also had two big pink pearls. You've got the list in your pocket. And the pictures."

"I have."

"And you never saw the pearls?"

"Not yet."

"Well," he said, sighing harshly, "so you see? Close as you were to them! In that blonde's ears."

I was silent on that one. But I wouldn't have noticed a house afire with those eyes of Gabrielle Clough to look at.

"You know that big Chink's name?"

"No."

"Wang. The guy you just saw me talking with."

I was shocked out of my pique now.

"You certain?"

"Mitras knows him by sight. He's seen him in Manila, and he made plenty of trips to Shanghai, even since the Japs took over. He's the richest Chino in the Philippines. And you know what we were told before we left Chungking: He plays it safe. Says he's a citizen of the Philippines and has no political interest in China. That's what makes him valuable to us. If anything, he lets them think he leans toward the puppet government."

"You talked to him? What happened?"

"He wants to talk to you. He's waiting now."

"Why? What reason did he give?"

"None. He said ask Cheng. Go in through the kitchen."

I THOUGHT swiftly. A Chinese can go crooked in a big way, quickly. He can betray blandly, and justify the betrayal with pleasant sophistries. This man Wang had done a lot for free China. He had marketed priceless Chinese art treasures; jewels smuggled out of the invaded country. He had been the mainspring of the Chinese money-assistance from the Islands. Every Chino in the Philippines had contributed, had been until the past few months contributing to the cause of the home country. But mysteriously those contributions had failed to arrive now for some months. Sinister doubts had arisen in Chungking. Also medical supplies, badly needed, had stopped. Suspicion had arisen that Wang had been reached—that the Japanese, who had a more ready access to him, had either bought him off or intimidated him. There was a huge colony of them in Davao on the east coast of Mindanao. Lately they had infiltrated into most of the other Philippine provinces. They were becoming bolder and bolder as German successes grew; more and more braggart about their future share in the Axis winnings.

The Marshal himself had explained my rôle before we left China. He had stood there, thin, his face tired and worn, but his eyes were as hard as steel.

"These Imperial jewels were China's last and most precious hoard. In a later day they will come back to China. So the man we have trusted with more than mere precious stones, Wang, must be a man of honor. A custodian of China's honor. He must place them well. In the past he has been a man of trust and a credit to his country. It may be that some harm has come to him; some danger threatens. For that reason I want a man like you, who has given of his blood, of his father's blood, to take my message. A man who can speak at first hand of China's grievous plight. From the standpoint of one who need not have given but who has given bountifully. It was that way with Wang before. I pray that it still is."

I knew, as he said these last words, that his hope was that shame might come to Wang if I painted my picture with the proper emotion—and at the time, standing there before this mystic man, it had seemed a simple mission: Seek Wang out in Manila, make him come clean. I had a complete inventory of the jewels in case he held out on me. I also had a copy of the receipt he had sent back to China.

But I hadn't bargained on meeting Wang in far-off Mindanao—in the house of Garson Clough, an honored guest among a dozen others, all of whom would stand against me in any argument with him!

Nor had I bargained on finding two of the most precious of China's treasures already adorning women of this strange gathering.

"You go back to the party. Keep an eye on Mitras."

He grunted, nodded, but his jaw was still set hard. "Watch yourself, Steve. Here—" He dug under his waistcoat and laid a small flat automatic pistol in my hand. "I saw that in a hock-shop in Manila. I liked the looks of it," he said. Then he turned and walked toward the lights.

I stood and listened for a moment. The music was playing, its sound muted by the wall between, the intervening trees, the distance. I wondered if Gabrielle Clough was telling her father how fast things were moving: if he were gloating—or craftily wondering.

A dim light burned near by, coming from under a low-hung parada as through a thick screen of vines. I moved toward it, peered inside. It was the kitchen, but there was no sign of Cheng. Why Cheng? I decided, and I walked quietly in through the side door and moved through the house as I had earlier that day. I found the great stairway and walked softly on my thin-soled evening shoes up the wide steps. I knew where Clough's rooms were, and the one I had been assigned. I had studied the house-plan from the outside while on the terrace and later while walking with Gabrielle Clough. I had done that instinctively as I would have studied the terrain about me while in command of troops. It was a huge place, thick-walled and with several wide flung wings. Why not find Wang without witnesses? They were all out there, dancing, drinking. I should have leisure enough to look through this place.

I reached the head of the stairs, turned to the left toward my own room. I heard voices. Voices muffled by the heavy door closed on Garson Clough's apartment. Had his daughter sought him out there? Was she even now giving him the story of our walk in the moonlight?

I moved toward that closed door. There was a door near me, closed, and my hand felt back for the knob. It turned and the door moved back, opening into a shadowy room. There was no moon on this side of the house. It was lucky for me that door moved in so soundlessly, that I was ready. For, as I felt the door give, the door to Garson Clough's room moved too: a crack of light showed. Whoever had opened it was still standing, waiting for a last word or saying it.

I slid into the room behind me, almost closed the door and watched. There was light enough from the hall windows for me to see clearly; the moon was on that side.

THE door opened, light streamed forth. I saw Cheng: gaunt, eyes down, half bent at the waist in his normal, calm obeisance to authority. He was bowing himself out. Clough called after him: always the last word, the important word for big-shot Garson Clough. And then I heard another voice: low, unhurried, but the very syllables of the words as clean-cut as razor strokes. The voice drew closer, calling to Cheng. The old Chinaman stopped, stood waiting. He stood close to the head of the stairs and from where I peered out he was only a few feet from me.

I watched. I knew at once it must be Wang, the man who came from Clough's room. He was a big man: a man from North China, without doubt. He had gone to heaviness. Fat, maybe, but you couldn't tell with that type of Chinese. His big shoulders were rounded, and looked smooth. But I've seen Chinese wrestlers who looked like that who could take three ordinary men and throw them about like ping-pong balls.

Clough was still talking through the door, complaining about something. I watched Wang come toward Cheng, closer to me. He wore the usual tropical dinner clothes—white jacket and black trousers; but he didn't look right in them. Too big, too grotesque in build. Such clothes are for the slim man.

I could see his head, the moon was almost straight into the window here and I could see his face. It was round—a big face. But it wasn't a soft face; the cheekbones were very high, and his small eyes gleamed in the strange light. His head was either entirely bald or the hair had been shaved close.

I saw the sheen of two great pearls in his waistcoat, and the flash of light from a ring on his hand as he raised it, signing to Cheng. He said only a few words to Cheng. He said them calmly in Cantonese, and as though asking for a type of beer or any other small service.

He said to Cheng:

"I must see the American, Curtis, first. Before your master does."

Cheng said in a low, anxious voice: "You heard the orders. It will be very difficult."

Wang never raised his voice. But it cut out like the tip of a lash:

"The world is composed of difficulties. This is the one for you not to fail to overcome. Bring him to my room. You will know how to inform me. I will excuse myself. It will take but a few moments for me to act."

There were no more words. Cheng made a small bow, turned and shuffled down the stairs. I stared at Wang. For a moment he stood there, the touch of moonlight on him, splashing light from the ring on his heavy hand.

Instinctively, not thinking, but certain of the need for action, I called softly to him. He didn't start. His head turned slowly, carefully, like the head of a great, wise turtle. He knew at once where I was. And I think he knew who I was.

I opened the door wider, stood out where he could see me. I could hear Garson Clough talking through the door. Impatiently.

Wang went back toward him, called softly into the room: "If you'll excuse me, please. I have a pipe in my room. I prefer it to cigars."

Clough grumbled acquiescence, and Wang closed the door as he left. He moved swiftly then. He came in by me, taking the door-handle from me and shutting it softly. In the gloom he drew me back toward the window.

"There is little time," he said. "I want to be sure of one thing: do you mean to marry the daughter of Clough?"

"You and I have a more important matter between us," I said.

"Please answer my question."

It came to me with a shock that we had been talking in Chinese—that this burly stranger was taking it as a matter of course. And I, who for years had thought of speaking no other language to a Chinese, had taken it as a matter of course. I cursed myself for my dumbness. I spoke up now in English:

"Don't be a fool—or play me for one. Of course I'm not going to marry a girl I don't even know. Whose father is a crook! Why do you ask such a question?"

"Because the girl has just told her father otherwise. That it was to occur tonight. She lied, then?"

"*I* lied. It won't hurt her when she learns the truth. I'm nothing to her except an unmarried male, forced on her by her father, to further his crookedness—to insure keeping this place that really belongs to my father! I want to hit him where it hurts—in his pride. I want this place without a long legal fight. I'm going to let it go as far as possible, and then give him his choice: hand it over, or have me laugh in his face in front of his guests. I don't want to go through a lot of legal red-tape."

"Do you know that I love you?" I asked. "No," said Gabrielle.

"You care nothing, then, about hurting this young girl?" he said, looking searchingly into my face.

"I would care if I thought that would happen. I doubt it. She's a Mohammedan, she says. Mohammedan women are mere slaves, as far as marriage goes. So let's forget the Western ethics of the matter. You, as a Chinese, should understand."

"Yes," he said softly. "As a Chinese. . . . But you won't get this place with such tactics. And if you laugh in Garson Clough's face, you won't laugh again."

"What do you mean?"

"You won't leave here alive."

"No?" My hand went inside my coat, and I felt the flat little automatic.

"No," he said, almost wearily.

It enraged me, the finality of that one word. "This isn't the lawless country it once was. There are Constabulary troops at Pang Pang. There are a dozen solid citizens and their women here," I said.

"Solid?" His sharp eyes burned into me. "Solid in a sense, yes. A solidarity of purpose."

"What do you mean?" I admit I was a little frightened at the way he had said that.

WE both stood motionless as Garson Clough's loud voice called out the name of Wang. Then he said: "I must go. I know why you are here—both reasons. You can accomplish them if you will trust me."

"Yes," I said, and drew my wallet from my pocket. I tore it open. "I'll show you one reason why I'm here. And I might as well get an answer now. I owe China that much. The China that trusted you."

He watched me as I tore through the money and papers in the alligator-skin folder. He was smiling as I stared up at him.

"Yes, I have already seen what is not there now. That should teach you to be careful whom you drink with. It should warn you. Have you a religion? A formal one?"

I was so amazed at his question that I could say nothing. I shook my head automatically.

"That makes it simpler," he said. "And the Mohammedan ceremony is also simple. It is performed by the father of the bride. Holding your right hand, he recites a few words from the Koran and asks you if you accept the woman as your wife. There are a few preliminaries and subsequent trifles which I imagine will be dispensed with under the circumstances. I doubt if you would wish the lovely Gabrielle to shave her eyebrows and mask her face with yellow paint."

"You must be crazy," I said.

"No: very, very wise. You spoke of China—of what you owed. Then do this for China."

"I don't owe China that much."

He stared at me and drew a little away from me. "Then," he said softly, "do it for America. You owe America all that you have."

I was stunned. "America!"

"It is your country, isn't it? Trust me, you will be giving it much. And of yourself little. Because by Moslem law, divorce is simple. You need merely tell your wife that you no longer care for her. No reason is required; no appeal permitted for the wife. If you must have revenge on Garson Clough, it is that simply in your hands. That way you may choose your own time. The most advantageous moment. You have everything to gain: nothing to lose."

"What have you to gain?"

"A possibility of winning your confidence. Possibly your assistance."

"Of double-crossing China? They think back there, some of them, that you have gone over to the Wang Ching-wei people, have become a Shih-shih man for the Japs. A yes-man."

He drew back from me. "That saddens me," he said and as he stared out the window, I thought: "What have I to lose? Buck this and I get nowhere. He knows why I'm here. He's seen those papers someone took off me. They're in this together—and I'm being given a look-in if I play the game. They can't buy me—with money or women—not even with their Gabrielle. But they don't know that. They've bought Wang. And compared to him I'm small fry. An adventurer. A mercenary soldier. Why shouldn't they feel that I can be made one of them? Whatever 'one of them' means. Why not find out? What *have* I to lose?"

Again Garson Clough's bull voice roared out and I heard the feet of Cheng on the wide stairs. I also felt the touch of Wang's hand on my arm, the powerful fingers digging in.

"Answer me!" he said.

"I'll do it," I said. "I'll see it through."

He was gone like a wraith through the dimness and I heard his voice in the hall, speaking pleasantly to Garson Clough. Then I heard Clough speak sharply to Cheng.

"Go back and look again. I must see Mr. Curtis at once."

I waited until Cheng had again gone down the stairs. Then I walked quietly toward Clough's closed door and knocked briskly. I opened it at his first word. I was startled at what I saw. Not just Clough and Wang—there were several other men in that big room. Men I remembered seeing dancing and drinking outside not long before. I had met most of them.

They all watched me as I came into the room.

"I was in my room," I said. "I heard you call my name."

He was bright as a dollar. He smiled expansively and waved grandly.

"Ah, Steve! I just heard the good news. You're a fast worker—a thing I like."

"I'm glad to hear that," I said. "I was a little nervous."

He laughed heartily at that. "The heavy father, eh?" He got up, waved his hand at the seated men. "Steve, I don't think you've met these chaps individually. Reason we're here. First, of course, to congratulate you. Then have a private little drink together. Men I want you especially to know. And to like. All have a lot in common: now you're to be one of us."

I looked at the several faces: all different faces, of course, but I marveled at how alike—how strangely similar were the expressions, their manner of watching me. There were no smiles, in spite of the demands of the occasion. Yet there was no open hostility. Rather a wariness, I thought, watching them; not sold on me by the jovial Clough. But willing to be. I'm something they want; that they can use. Not too importantly, maybe.

THEY came up from their chairs slowly: only one seemed agile. He was closest to me and held out his hand briskly. He looked like a Japanese. But I couldn't be sure. I've seen Ilocanos from upper Luzon who looked more like one. His name, he said, was Sixto Claro, which was Filipino enough. He showed his teeth and bowed.

"A very great pleasure," he said, and he backed away from me and stood over his chair.

A big man stepped toward us. His shirt-front bulged untidily and the lapel of his dinner-coat was dusted with cigar ashes. He held the butt of a thick cigar in his heavy fingers, and frowned through heavy, sweet-smelling smoke at me. He had bags under his small pale eyes; and greater ones under his jaw. His face was a yellowish brown.

"Honored—honored," he said in a deep gurgle of a voice, thrust his paw at me, and let it lie heavily, without life, against mine.

I looked him in the eye and waited for his name. His face darkened as he understood. He said, heavily: "Miller."

"Mr. Miller is from the northern part of Mindanao," Clough said. "And Mr. Claro from Davao. In these days of planes, it's a mere matter of you might say minutes to get together. I can remember—we can all remember, eh, boys?—when it was a matter of weeks. On a lousy Spanish freighter, with the single bathroom jammed full of groceries and cockroaches!" He laughed loudly at that, but I was watching the third man. He was skeleton-thin: naked, it must be possible to see through him, I thought, given a fairly strong light. His face was dead white and his hands shook as I watched.

It was like taking bones, taking that hand, and I almost shuddered away from it. But I looked at his sick eyes and I had a sudden surge of pity for him. The tropics had fixed him, all right, and he must know it. The sadness in his eyes showed it and it seemed to me that in those eyes as he met my look there was a hint of friendliness. Then he smiled, baring yellowish teeth, several gone. His mouth looked dry and unhuman. But the grip of his hand was firm, lifelike and he said in a surprisingly deep voice:

"Glad to have you with us, Curtis. And that things have happened as they have. I'm Cleary, from over in the Valley."

I SAID something, and was about to say more to this wreck of a man when Clough broke in as though to drive Cleary, of little importance, away from me to make way for real importance. This man had come forward from back near the wall. I had not seen his face clearly before. But now, looking at it, I was startled almost to the point of crying out. It was a true mask, not a normal face set rigidly. Not masklike: It *was* a mask! It was almost a salmon pink, dotted with freckle-like patches as a trout is speckled. The mouth looked like a thing of clay: the lips stiff, twisted, like a child's awkward sculpture. One ear was gone; sheared from the head so close that no mark of its being was left. The eyes were glossy black: polished marbles, fixed on me as though embedded in the hardened clay of that face.

"The great man of the *bondocks*—of the mountains and all the rest," Clough boomed, beaming. "The great *Tuan Cayman*—the Sir Crocodile, as the natives have it. Knows more about Mindanao than any other man—white or Malay. Blown up once in the very middle of a charge of dynamite: twenty-odd men with him never lived to tell the tale. All it did with Tuan Cayman is strip the clothes from him and take a little skin off his face."

The man never smiled. And I wondered if it were possible for him to smile. Burned, his face had been, horribly. Deeper than skinned it had been, too. I wondered if the muscles had been affected to the point of immobility, for there was certainly no movement of that face as he held a hairy hand out to me and nodded as though driven to a distasteful task. But those metallic eyes never left me. They seemed to go over me without the ordinary muscle movement required by normal eyes, in normal men.

I almost shrank away from him: I had a feeling of utter revulsion. Then Clough presented Wang, who bowed with great formality and sat down again in the chair he had taken in the background.

There was brandy and tan-san on the table, and we all sat down. At Clough's nod I made myself a drink. The thin man, Cleary, joined me. Feverishly, it seemed to me; and I saw that he was already a little drunk. The others had glasses in the armholes of their cane chairs and we all drank together at Clough's suggestion. It reminded me, that suggestion, of the patter of a cheap master of ceremonies forcing an undesired applause from apathetic guests.

"Before you joined us, Steve, we were discussing our holdings—we, here and the others downstairs. Rather startling. It runs to hemp, timber, copra and mining interests. We were considering a merger of a sort: not so much financial, but as a common protective measure."

"I'm afraid I've been away too long and was too young when I left to understand things like that."

He waved that aside. "Of course. Things have changed. For the better, in one respect, but in another—"

I happened to look at Tuan Cayman. His eyes were like cold, warning discs. But Clough ignored them. He said glibly: "A change in the Moro leadership, for one thing. Under Dinn we all prospered. He understood us and realized we were out for the good of the country. He saw to it that we had low-caste native labor—something unheard of before we reached our understanding with him."

"I wondered," I said. "Because even I can remember when Moro labor was unobtainable. Even to attempt to secure it would bring trouble."

"That's right," he agreed quickly, and he smiled approval at me. He was about to go on, drink in hand, coat thrown back expansively on his great chest—but Tuan Cayman spoke up. The first words out of that seared throat, were like the piping of a squeaky flute. But they steadied and there was an ominous incongruity to them—a direness far more affecting than any bellow.

He said, his glossy eyes set into me:

"Just a moment. A word with you first, Mr. Curtis."

"Gladly," I said, and my voice sounded to myself like that of a frightened boy.

"This I want to know: You are native-born to this country, I have been told."

"Born in Pang Pang."

"You have never been to America?"

"Never."

"To an American school?"

"No."

"Have never served with American troops? It is obvious that you are a soldier."

"I never have."

"Where have you served?"

"All over. Lately with the British in the Near East."

I took a side look at Clough at that, but he was staring as though impatiently annoyed at the man Tuan Cayman. He said sharply: "I think I've explained Steve to you all, Grimble. I knew his father. We were very close."

"Where is your father?" Grimble asked steadily.

"Dead."

There was a silence; but not the polite one normal to the reply. Then Grimble said evenly: "Is this a country you would fight for? The country where you admit to have been born?"

One look at those eyes and I knew there could be no hesitation about my reply.

"Yes," I said.

HE watched me a moment, as though staring deep into me to see if I could hold what might be a bold pose. Then he said quietly: "Was it for love of the English or of their particular cause that you fought with them?"

"No," I said. "As some men are lawyers, as you men are planters, I am a soldier."

"The side doesn't matter?"

"They were more convenient. I could speak their language."

I had said the right thing, I knew then. There was just a faint flash of his beady eyes. But it was a flash of satisfaction: and I knew that though Clough and Wang might know I had been fighting in China, they had not seen fit to share their information with these others.

In the silence now, I wondered about Gabrielle Clough. She had made speed, all right, in bringing her news to her father. Could she have come here and gone in the short time since I had left her?

I saw the phone then: close by Clough's chair on a small narra table. An inter-house phone, probably, and she

could have called from her own room or from any station outside. She had probably been ordered to. She had done her part well. . . .

Clough was getting up. He reached a big hand up to his handsome green silk *tubo,* touched lovingly the great jewel in it. I wondered if that, too, had been spoil from a Chinese tomb.

"Gentlemen, let us go down."

He bowed them all out ahead of him; but he took my arm. For a moment I had the strange feeling of a high compliment. His influence of grandeur covered me as with a warm, shining veil.

"Steve," he said, lowering his voice, "you won't be sorry for this. Not a day of your life. I only wish your father were alive to see our two families joined. You know I am really the *Raja Muda* of Mindanao—that is, the appointed legal heir to old Dinn. It has all been thrashed out by the *datos* of the country. Of course, a non-Moro could hardly be the religious leader. We compromised on that and the present *Cadi* carries on and he and the *datos* will appoint his successor. You understand?"

"Not clearly."

"Well, never mind that for now. I'll instruct you later. And Gabrielle can explain a great deal. You understand there is no compulsion: you need not become a Mohammedan. I hope you do: it's a great code of living, my boy, besides its religious aspect. There's one thing, though—"

He paused, still holding my arm, by the door. The others had gone by us and were moving down the great stairs. I looked up at him—crooked as he was, he fascinated me. I simply had to play up to him: to draw from him more and more of his astounding sentences.

"Yes?"

"Gabrielle. . . . She's young. She's never had the earlier background the rest of us have. The American background, you might call it. The *Christian* background, thank God. Where we were taught one thing—strings of beautiful platitudes and broke every damned one of them at the first attempt. No, she's been brought up in a decent religion. One that is a practical code of living: one that works. You mustn't mistake it for the fanaticism of the Christian who has 'got religion.' She doesn't think of it in any phony sacred way. It's just—remember this and you'll get along fine—it's a way of life. Almost a poetry of life. Certain things aren't done: others must be done. And done as the Koran says. You'll be surprised how decently it all works out. You'd better read the book."

I listened to him with amazement. Sincerity was written all over his big hard face. Standing there, talking in his low, resonant voice, it was as though a grand old priest was guiding with wise and sacred words an erring boy.

I wanted to get away from him. I was beginning to believe him.

"When is this—this marriage happening?"

He smiled. Still benign, the seriousness left his face. He tapped my shoulder in a fatherly way.

"Gabrielle is getting ready now. Maybe you—"

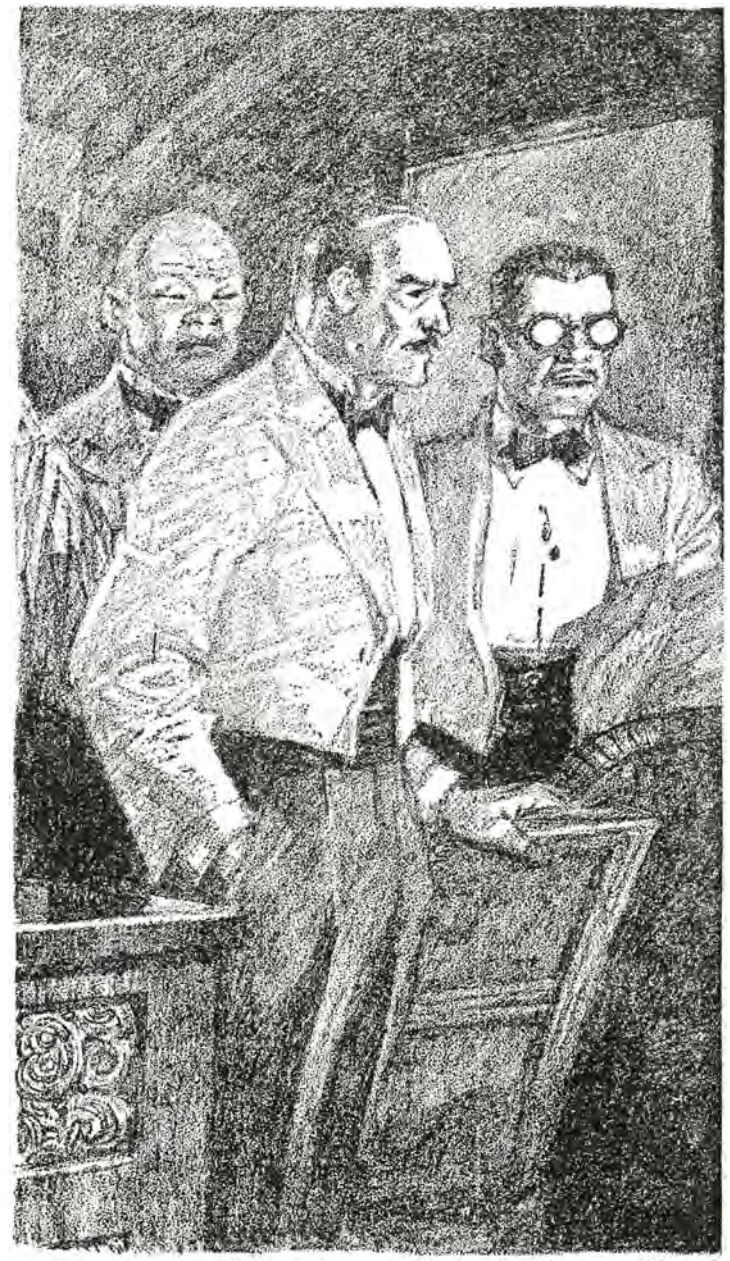
"Yes. I'd like to go to my room. I might as well have a clean face and hands. And brush my hair."

He laughed naturally, walking with me along the wide hall and into my room. The moon was low, the light of it heavy now, yellowing, poured in the window. The music had stopped; but in its place were the tinkling of Moro *gabangs,* the sharp tap of drums. We stood listening, looking out toward the hills. Lights flickered and they reminded me of my boyhood when I watched the *vintas* on the bay of Pang Pang, the flares above them lighting the water a blood-red, the spears of the fishermen flashing in the wavering fire.

"The news is out," Clough said. "My people are up and happy with it."

"The Moros?"

"I have hundreds here. They are very loyal. They all love Gabrielle. This will be a great ending to the Puasa."



"The great man of the bondocks," *Clough*

I looked at him, at the intent, almost mystic stare in his eyes as he stood there in the heavy light by the window.

"I should have thought," I said, without thinking, on an impulse, "that you and Miss Pilar. . . . All your friends here, and Gabrielle—"

He stared at me a moment and I thought I had gone too far. But he said slowly: "A natural thought. And now that you are to be in the family, Steve, it's proper enough for me to tell you. In strict confidence, of course."

"Naturally," I said, thinking: what could be more unnatural than this lousy situation?

"You see," he said quietly, "Consuela is a Catholic. And she's not a Malay. Pure Spanish."

"I see. Couldn't she—wouldn't she—"

"Oh, yes! But that wouldn't matter any more than you, a non-Mohammedan, marrying Gabrielle. It's far deeper than that. With the Moros. You see, I am to become their Sultan when Dinn dies. And there may be an heir. I sincerely hope so. That they won't stand for—as yet."

"What do you mean?"

"It's too long and involved to explain now. Dinn is favorable. The *Cadi* Usman is studying it. He's still open-minded. If Consuela becomes a Mohammedan—and in her case it would mean a serious novitiate—he has given me reason to believe that his decision would be favorable."

boomed; "the Tuan Cayman—Sir Crocodile, as the natives have it." I had a feeling of utter revulsion.

"Who is objecting?"

He frowned deeply. I saw his great hands close, the knuckles cracked.

"There's a young claimant. A nephew of Dinn's. Dinn has no sons. This young *dato,* Suliman, has something of a following. A radical element—you might call them communists. They don't want us in the country—we who have done such wonders with it. Given it prosperity. . . . Why I've paid the cedula tax for every one of my people for years now. Made their barrios sanitary: given them modern medical care. You won't see Moros about here with sores all over them the way they were when you were a boy. Or full of malaria—"

He was off on a big harangue and I had no desire to listen to it. I started to clean up as a hint, but he raved on.

"Why, damn it, they even wanted me to marry a twelve-year-old Moro girl, Dinn's next of kin on the female side. Bad enough. But when they suggested that I give Gabrielle to Suliman, I blew up."

I was removing my collar. I stared at him with my hand in the air. "What's that?"

"Yes," he said, calmly enough. "Wanted to put a big show on right here tonight. The nerve of the little monkey. Stood there as arrogant as hell and practically demanded her. A big bag of pesos in his hand. That's the custom, you know; you give the father a hundred pesos and the girl a present and there you are. I damned near booted him off the place."

I was struggling to keep my voice natural. I wanted this to go on as naturally as it had started.

"Suppose you'd said yes?"

He swung about, hunched his big shoulders.

"Don't be an ass."

"You handed her to me almost sight unseen. Wasn't that being an ass?"

"Now, Steve!"

"Suppose you had said yes? What would Gabrielle have done?"

He looked at me as though he hadn't quite understood. "Done? Why, what I told her to do, of course."

"Married him, you mean?"

"Certainly."

"I—see. I'm the lesser of the two evils."

He frowned, then said with almost childish excitement: "Suppose it resulted in a boy child? Where the hell would I be, after all the build-up I've accomplished? Playing second fiddle to my own daughter! And her sultan husband. Do I look like that kind of a sap?"

He looked like something pretty bad to me. And I was about to say so when he went on: "You see how it is. Once

she's married, he's out. Even his own people wouldn't back him. By the law the father has the sole say. And I've said my say. I owe you a lot, Steve," he said almost humbly.

"And I," I said, "seem to owe you a hundred pesos."

He laughed loudly at that and, like a child, was already back to his normal humor.

Once again he hit me on the arm in that cheap, theatrical gesture he had, and he started for the door. "I'll leave you now. She must be nearly ready. As soon as you are, come down. It'll be on the terrace."

"I'll be there," I said.

I've tottered on some edges of hell in my life. Ticked off minutes, seconds, before I had to jump into what I knew would be hell itself. Most of those times though, an unnatural, cold sort of calm had come to me. A sense of fatal accomplishment; tragic finality. But, as I heard the growing sound outside my window, my nerves responded as though literally tuned to those weird instruments. As though the years since my childhood were swept away on that wave of sound, and I was stirred, frightened as a child is frightened. For, not since childhood had I heard the Moro music. But so sensitive I must have been to it that, years later, I stood here shivering to it; remembering every component in that flood of sound. In that eerie galaxy of sound I separated the notes of the gabang, kulingtangang, the gong and agong. And backing the metal notes came the steady beat of the longer, finger-tapped drums.

Lights moved along the lower hills, pale, fluted in the night wind and under the yellow moon.

He had gone whole hog, friend Clough, and I marveled —even in my nervousness—at his social flexibility. Even I had not known I was to be married tonight until less than an hour before. . . .

I had searched at first for a means of lighting the bathroom: it took me some time to realize that the place was wired for electricity. For years I had known nothing but a bean or fish oil lamp. . . .

I looked at myself in the mirror over the huge porcelain bowl. My tan seemed to have yellowed: my eyes were unnaturally bright; my hands shook a little as I tied my tie.

I turned out the lights and walked out into the dim, empty hall. I hadn't dared look out the window onto that terrace. I'd take it as it was—take Gabrielle Clough for my wife as I would a casual, a trivial gift.

Chapter Eight

I WENT out the front door, came onto the broad lawn and walked up the stone steps where I had seen Gabrielle Clough looking toward the far hills. Maybe I wanted to kid myself just once more; kid myself that at that moment she had seemed serious and lovely: not just some fancy-looking stooge. . . .

I went up onto the terrace and they were all there. The Moros had lined the walls, except for a cleared space where Garson Clough and his henchmen sat grouped about their tables.

The Moros were singing, their bodies moving, their feet moving, tapping in place. There were perhaps a hundred of them, women and men, and they were dressed gayly, in their best. The men wore the traditional skin-tight trousers and collarless, brightly colored jackets with shining metal buttons. About their waists were twisted *sarongs* and I was surprised to see the shine of ornate kris handles snugly tucked against their bodies.

It all came back to me in a flash: the sight, the sounds, the characteristic odor of them.

I walked toward Garson Clough. The men who had been upstairs with him were close about him; all the women of the party, and, farther out on the periphery of this gay, incredible gathering were the lesser guests.

Garson Clough waved to me and shouted something in Bugindanaw. The Moros looked at me. Their eyes seemed wild, I thought. As though inflamed with drink: but that couldn't be so. No good Mohammedan is supposed to drink. Though this rule, I learned later, was rarely followed by any Mohammedan of sufficient rank and purse permitting the breaking of the rule.

I wanted a drink. I saw my skeleton man close by, alone, a half glass of straight Scotch held in his long, bony hand.

He looked at me and the skin across his horse-like teeth stretched like thin, water-cracked leather. Without a word from me, he poured some for me in an empty glass and handed it up, the yellow of his eyes startling.

"Thanks."

They were crowded there; children with colored papers in their hands and dressed of a kind. Their high, thin voices were raised in a chant, and none looked at us.

I swallowed the whisky and straightened up. I went through the kids, through the ring of chairs. And then I looked up, stiff with shock.

Behind Garson Clough, on the high part of the outer wall, the cleared space, I saw Gabrielle Clough. She must have just been tossed up there, lifted by willing hands.

I stared in wonder.

She sat gracefully, her feet close together, her eyes looking down at me. She wore a long silk robe of pale blue, beautifully worked with symbolic designs. Above the skirt was a rose-colored bodice, and the two were separated by a wide silk sash, loose and full. On her feet were tiny rose slippers, glistening with pearls.

I noticed that in a first blurred glance. What startled me was the rest of her. They hadn't painted her face: thank God for that! For I remembered now what some of them I had seen as a boy had looked like. But in spite of the wonder of her eyes, I had to stare at the headdress she wore. It was nearly a foot high and wider than that. It fitted caplike to her head, with a white, nunlike band across her forehead. It winged out in thin gold scrolls arched in fretted gold. The whole was studded with flashing jewels; and in the center, surrounded by square-cut emeralds, was an enormous pink pearl.

Two jeweled ornaments hung from her ears, and her lovely hair had been swept back, bound tightly behind and hung in a heavy sheen down to her shoulders.

I just stood there and stared.

Clough grabbed me, pointed to the wall. All sound ceased. I felt myself shaking. His voice was close to my ear. I could smell the heavy odor of his cigar.

"Jump up there. On her left!"

Somehow I found myself beside Gabrielle on that wall, and saw the mass of earnest faces raised to us. My hand was on the wall between us, and I moved it toward her. I wanted to feel that hand in mine, whatever else happened.

But I never found it. I found instead the hairy, moist hand of Garson Clough, and he lifted my hand and held it away from me, out as though on exhibition before that strange crowd. He started to speak; his deep voice rose and fell in strange words. And then I knew he was reciting from the Koran, and I stared straight ahead, not daring to look at him, to accuse him with deadly hate of this sacrilege he was so glibly perpetrating. I heard no sound from Gabrielle Clough, dared not look at her. But I knew she was there. It was as though she were almost a part of me, and I wondered.

The awful voice stopped, and I was about to move. I felt like leaping from this ridiculous wall and running—running amok as I had seen outraged Moros do as a boy.

She felt me move, and now her hand touched me.

"Wait," she said, just barely so that I could hear it.

I looked at her then, and there were tears in her eyes.

"Listen," she said. "I want you to hear this." And she meant the chorus of child voices raised once again, and brighter this time. Their young eyes were raised to us now. And there was something in the trembling of those voices that stirred me deep down.

"What is it?" I said.

She turned her eyes fully on me now, and I had her hand squarely in mine.

"They call it: *'Tap-Tap Namayan.'*" And she sang low, and with a trembling sweetness:

"Our love is eternal
Our witness the Divine
You . . . . are sublime
One without equal—"

"It's that way in English. The first song I learned as a child."

"It's a beautiful song," I said. "And you have a beautiful voice."

"Thank you," she said, and she looked away from me. The children were singing a last and different song.

"That's *'Libut Kappal,'*" she said almost indifferently, and she moved a little away from me. "It means 'Around the Boat.'"

"What do we do now?" I asked, looking at her. But she didn't look toward me. That earlier distant manner had come back, and I knew it, and it angered me. "When they get around the boat?"

SHE made no answer. I saw that she was looking toward Consuela Pilar, pushing through the tables toward us. She was smiling sweetly, and she shook off Mitras' arm before she moved. Others were crowding forward, and Garson Clough shook my hand. Then he put one great arm about his daughter and lifted her from the wall. He spoke to her in a low voice, and she moved back behind him.

The men were shaking my hand, and some of the high-caste Moros came up and were presented. They laid a hand across mine, their faces never changing, then drew the hand across their chests. They all had words with Garson Clough, and I noticed with amazement the elaborate ceremony of greeting. The *datos* or those of high caste placed their two hands over his right hand, and then drew their own right hand across their chest. But many of them, those of the lower class, simply bent and kissed his hand.

"The faker!" I thought.

I looked around. I saw the Skeleton weaving toward me, and Consuela Pilar had me by the arm. She drew my arm close against her, and looked up at me with those deep, meaningful brown eyes.

"Where's Gabrielle?" I said to Consuela.

She was nowhere in sight.

"You have a lot to learn," she said in that silky voice of hers. "You're not married yet, you know."

"No?"

"No," Cleary said, coming up. "Not by Moro custom. You've still got some private courting to do."

"Go back to your drink," Consuela Pilar said.

He weaved off, oddly agile as he slid by the tables. Like a snake, he glided by without as much as touching one.

"What did he mean by all that?"

I saw Mitras and Doan watching us, both back at the edge of the crowd, Mitras with a bottle of champagne in his hand. He looked drunk, too.

"There was an uprising in the valley," she said, "a long time ago. Some outlaws hid in the houses, and they wouldn't come out when the soldiers called. So they fired into the houses. They should have. They gave plenty of warning, and called to the women and innocent people to come out first. His wife—just a child, she was, Daughter of a big *dato,* and she was there, hiding as the custom is after the ceremony. In her father's house! And her father was as bad as any of them: actually behind the whole uprising. One of the bullets hit her. And when he gets drunk—" She shrugged and took my arm. "Let's get away from this. This mob."

"*When* he gets drunk? He looks like the type who's always drunk."

She shook her head almost savagely. "No. Better if he were. He stays sober always, unless there is something special. Like this. All Mohammedan feast-days. He hates them—hates the Koran—Allah, Mohammed. You heard him mocking? If it hadn't been for their marriage customs, he says, his wife would not have been killed. He was wild about her. They say she was very lovely. Part Chinese—and very rich. Not that he cared about that, but he took a strange pride in it: it made her desirability complete. More than anyone knowing him, seeing him, would have rated him. In pride!"

I wasn't interested in Cleary's past. I was interested in my own present—and future.

"Where are you taking me?"

She gave me a quick, intimate look. From the corner of my eye I saw Clough, still surrounded by his friends, jovial, bandying words and laughs. He was certainly trusting, I thought. In his place I'd have kept a sharp eye on Consuela Pilar.

She led me off toward the steps, not looking at them. We walked down toward the river in silence.

"What's the idea? Clough's not the fool he acts, you know."

She gave me a provocative look. Then she laughed softly. "But you are."

"I'm married to his daughter. Just married. I'm surrounded by his gang. I'm not fool enough not to know my every move is watched."

She was smiling mockingly. "A soldier of fortune."

"A meaningless phrase."

"I'm not so sure. Do you love her?"

"Why would I have married her?"

She kept that searching, mocking look on her face. "You know, I think you do. That you are covering up with facetious words—laughing off the real thing. Hoist with your own petard."

There was demand now in her eyes, and I thought: "She's hitting too close to the truth."

"Why would I have set a petard?"

She was studying me openly, wanting to drive home the fact to me. At last she said in a low voice:

"Yes, why? That is what I want to know. One reason I brought you out here."

"You know what a petard is?"

She nodded, and reached up a white hand to hold a thread of her tight black hair against the night wind. "An explosive placed to breach a wall."

"And mine has blown *me* up, not the wall?"

NOW she was worried because of my briskness, the unimportance I made of the matter. She drew in a deep breath and gave me a steady look.

"It needn't. Needn't hurt anyone. Just the wall. But you've got to know the chances. Make some compromises. If you're a real soldier of fortune, here is your chance to make it."

"I'm to trust you, out of the lot, eh? Not my father-in-law, not my wife. Listen to you secretly, out by a lonely river?"

She was suddenly angered and came closer to me, closing her fingers tightly on my arm.

"That's insulting from a man who has made his living as you have. A confessed adventurer! In the books and stories they are chivalrous *caballeros,* pure of motive and full of ideals. But in real life they are lawless, without morals, exhibitionistic and petty to the heart."

"How about the women?"

"The same. Worse."

"We're in the same boat, then."

"No. Because there's a type that goes out for big game, and qualifies for it by possessing superior characteristics. Not petty! I thought you were one of those."

"And you think *you* are one?"

She nodded, her lips tight, and she drew away from me.

Somehow I felt sorry for her. She looked younger, almost childish as she stood there in the faint light, the wind touching her close-packed hair, and her woman's instinct, in spite of the situation, forcing her to slick at the hair to maintain its perfection of regularity.

"Well, you've got more than one superior characteristic," I said. "Physically."

I looked her over openly, grinning, and I expected her to bridle. But she lifted those deep dark eyes and gave me a look. It excited me. She said, softly: "You have that. Let us get back into that one boat. Please!"

She had come close to me now—without, it seemed, any movement that was visible. She put both her rounded arms about my neck, bent her head back so that I could see the white column of her lovely throat. She looked deeply into my eyes, and my heart beat hard and fast. I just stood there. I don't know what I thought. But I felt plenty. And it was all centered here, in the arms of this tempting woman.

SUDDENLY she had moved away from me, and her voice came swiftly, low and exciting. "Are we in the same boat?"

"Yes," I said.

"I can tell you, then. It is going to sound very cold-blooded—or I hope desperately it is, to you."

"All right."

She repeated swiftly to me what Clough had told me earlier that evening about their intended marriage.

"I knew all that," I said. "Clough told me."

"What else did he tell you? In his room with the others?"

"Those pirates? They looked like pirates to me."

"They are pirates. Big-money pirates. Their stakes are an empire."

"Empire?"

She nodded. "And that," she said in a quick, sharp voice, "is *my* stake."

"Why do you need me?"

"You're going through with this?"

I said nothing, just watched her. She said swiftly:

"If you don't, you're a fool. I know all the answers to you. If you could chance what you did for China, a foreign country where you owed nothing, you'd be more than a fool not to throw in your lot here—where the stakes will be big, and where you could give the fervor of patriotism. You were born here. It's your own country."

"Where did you learn all this?"

She gave me that intriguing, mocking look. "I thought we were in the same boat? No more veils."

"Mitras."

She nodded. "There's not a fact or guess left in him."

"Did you have him out here? Or under those dark palms on the terrace?"

She gave me a hateful look. She said spitefully:

"He's warmer-blooded than you. You can inflame the Oriental, or the Latin, with a look, the inflection of a voice. He tried to double-cross you, by the way."

"I planned on that."

"You—you cold-blooded Yankee!" she said in a hard, level voice.

"Yankee?"

She twisted her shoulders with disgust.

"What did Clough say to him? I'd have thought it would appeal to him. Or did he value his daughter less than Mitras' price?"

"Less."

"What was his price?"

"Far higher than yours. Not just a bracelet."

I looked down at her arm. The bracelet was gone. I nodded at it.

"Did you buy him off with that?"

She shrugged impatiently. "Why did you lie about your father—when he's still alive?"

"An ace in the hole. To confront Clough with after his lying was over, in case he put up a big legal fight."

She had been watching me carefully, almost approvingly. "I see," she said slowly. "Yes—you worked this out boldly and intelligently. You're the man, all right."

"The 'man'?"

"The man on the horse."

"Not the boat?"

"Not the petty boat. I was a little afraid, back there. Watching you on that terrace wall with Gabrielle. For an instant it looked— But you are true to type. A woman is a momentary thing: the touch of one brings out in you a convincing verisimilitude. What in other men would be the real thing, but in you is spurious. Yes, you're my man, all right."

"Your man? You just saw me married to another woman."

"Yes. To a Mohammedan woman. And to all intents and purposes you are a Mohammedan now. As I soon will be. And that marriage was made because you had to pay that price for what you want. As Napoleon did, as other conquering adventurers have done before now."

"Thanks for the comparison."

"Don't be so facetious. Before many weeks have passed—" She stopped there and reached out and took my hand. "This is what I want. Your promise. I know now that you can make it. . . . And it's important."

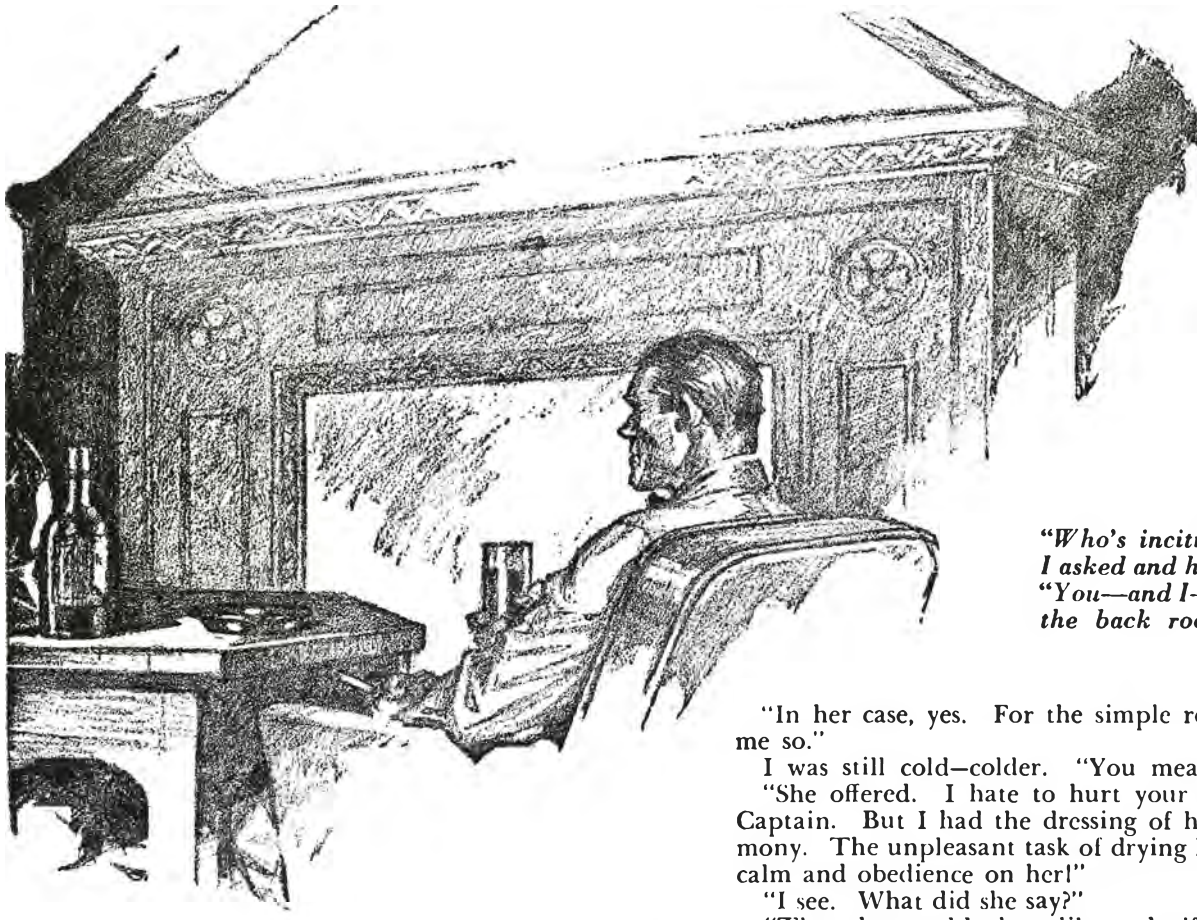
"What is it?"

She stared at me a long time, saying nothing. Her eyes seemed to grow against the dim white of her face.

"It is this," she said softly: "If anything happens to Garson Clough—either before or after my intended marriage-date—that you will take me as wife."

There was no sound except a faint touch of vagrant music, a distant laugh from the late revelers on the terrace. I felt her small hand in mine, and the edge of the river breeze touching my hot face.

"Are you kidding me?" I asked, and my voice sounded high and scratchy.



"Who's inciting to treason?" I asked and he nodded sagely. "You—and I—and the boys in the back room. All of us."

"You are allowed four wives by the Koran," she said simply. "You have only one. Will you promise?"

"I'm not a Mohammedan."

"You had no other religion. You have admitted it. You will be made a *dato* in a few days. That is arranged. And by the law here, you are a Mohammedan. Whether you like it or not!"

"What about Gabrielle?"

She shrugged. "She knows the law of the Koran. If yours was a love-match, she might have a complaint. But it could only be that you had broken a personal promise to her. Some Moros have only one wife—those who can't afford more, and a few who really love the one they married. In your case there is no love." She came close to me and took my hand again. "No love. You have told me that, or shown me that, haven't you?"

"How?"

"By your actions. No man of your type would have done what you did if he really loved a woman."

"No?"

"No. It is clear to me why."

"Why?"

The mocking look was in her face again.

"Why? Because you guessed Mitras would betray you—not give evidence. So you tied Clough's hands. He'd have to at least share the Mirage estates with his own daughter and son-in-law. Half a cake—"

"And Gabrielle?"

"You could walk off when you got tired. Tired of a little lovemaking, all legal. Just a nice little favor thrown in. Any man would do it if he had no—"

"Morals?"

"Well, the normal scruples ordinary men have. Not that I want you to have them. I'm playing on the supposition you haven't them. Glad you haven't."

"Suppose Gabrielle loved me?"

She gave a sharp, hard laugh that made me cold. "Don't be a *bobo!*"

"You think it impossible?"

"In her case, yes. For the simple reason that she told me so."

I was still cold—colder. "You mean you asked her?"

"She offered. I hate to hurt your vanity, my gallant Captain. But I had the dressing of her, before the ceremony. The unpleasant task of drying her tears, of forcing calm and obedience on her!"

"I see. What did she say?"

"That she would obey—like a dutiful daughter."

"That it was a lesser evil than marrying a lousy native?"

"As a matter of fact—" She shrugged.

"Yes?"

"I hate to hurt your pride more—but I fear she would rather have married the 'lousy native.'"

"What?"

She nodded gravely. "You see, she has been brought up among them. And he is a child of royalty. Really quite attractive, if you understand that, to her— Oh, what's the use? What difference does it make? You're in this thing for money and power. And so am I."

I steadied myself. Cold-bloodedly I made a swift estimate of the situation. I didn't spare myself. I saw now that, deep in me, unadmitted until now, there had been a hope: a hope that this lovely girl, this Gabrielle with the long gray eyes and the heavy gold-brown hair, had been waiting all her life for such as I. That at last she had been rescued from a hated environment, from a criminal, almost mad parent. That her years of repression had made her self-contained, unable or unwilling to give hint of this to me. But that the warmth of understanding, tenderness and careful nurturing would in the end bring a bursting dam of love.

I WAS cold as the mountain stream beside me now. "I'm in it for money and power," I said. "And I want you to help me."

"Ah," she said, and she came to me and put her arms about me. She lifted her face, and her wide, voluptuous lips were on mine. A part of me! She drew away at last, shook herself like a fastidious cat, and said softly:

"You see what I mean?"

"Yes," I said. "Now talk."

"Yes, talk," she said, as though a child repeating. "You ask me."

"Where do I fit—now that Mitras has spilled the beans?"

"Clough is delighted. He thinks ten times as much of you. You kept your secret. You were trained in the Chinese army. Doan hasn't done you any harm. Mitras

learned from him that you were considered one of the most daring and resourceful officers. Brutal."

"Brutal?"

"Doan may have lied to boost your stock—or to frighten Mitras. But it went sky high with Clough."

"Do the others know? Were they laughing at me when I told of my doings in Egypt?"

"You don't know Garson Clough. You still think of him as a petty embezzler. Of course they don't know. That would have been fatal."

"Fatal?"

"If you have a sense of loyalty to China. Of course you haven't. Clough and I have sense enough to know that. Or at least, I had. I told you, I know your type."

"And he took your estimate?"

"Of course. He always has—ever since he's known me. I told him you were a man who was out for what he could get. I suggested the offer of the fair Gabrielle after he had said how you admired her. That was the test. If you would rise to that bait, you were right in character. Don't you see?"

"I see."

She was looking at me with brisk interest now, and she said suddenly: "Now, what about Wang?"

I was startled, and stared at her, not saying anything.

"Please. I have played fair with you. I know you were together in his room. And you wanted that bracelet badly. You talk now."

"I never saw him before."

"I saw you go into his room. I saw him go in there shortly afterwards. My own room. . . . I was just about to leave and there was enough light in the hall."

"What importance could you attach to that?"

"This: You just came from China. You noticed that bracelet at once. Knew its great value. Were even willing to leave here for it. And get your estate back from a distance. Knowing at the time I didn't realize that you would have your cake and eat it, too. You thought Wang was still in Manila then. You'd try to shake him down for the rest. But when you discovered he was here, you stayed. Went whole hog. Girl, estate, a chance to get all that Wang had."

"Go on."

"I will. You are too late. Those jewels are Wang's stake in this game of empire I told you about. His blue chips. Too late for you. But in the end—"

She suddenly stared beyond me. "What was that?" she said in a dry whisper.

I had heard nothing. I looked about. The moon was down, over the mountains and the relic of light thrown up against the pale sky gave a faint greenish tint to all about us. Consuela Pilar moved away from me, started to run toward the house. Then I saw Cleary. He came from the shadows. There was a grin growing on his horse-like face.

"SCARE her?" He nodded toward the house. "I was just in there getting the cool of the river. All right now. Let's go up to my place and have a drink. I'm in one of the guest-houses."

We walked slowly, Cleary staggering a little against me.

We passed into the patio and now in the strange half-light I could see the guest-houses. They were disposed attractively among high trees, built as solidly as the main house: washed smooth stone with tile roofs. They were as solid as blockhouses.

"That's mine with the homecoming light," Cleary said, pointing. "Always leave a light on. Never know: she may come back. Just drop in some night, seeing my light. Moros say it happens."

"Who may drop in?"

He gave me a piercing look, jutting his jaw and looking upward as though over glasses.

"Who the hell do you think? She was a Moro, wasn't she? A very religious one. Why shouldn't Allah give her a break? He's done it before, according to the stories you hear."

"Your wife? You're hoping it will happen, eh?"

He scowled. "Why in hell do you think I stick around in this country?"

He glared at me and I said easily:

"It's not doing you any good, by the looks."

At first I thought he was going to flare up, but then he shrugged and gave me a hopeless glance. "Yeah. You got me there. But it still doesn't stop me from not wanting to see you hit the same skids. Guy like you: big, young, lots of stuff. Get the hell away from this layout. It's poison. Forget this dame—what's-her-name—Gabrielle. Forget her before she blows a tin horn on you. This is dynamite, kid. And the fuse is glowing merrily."

"Suppose I happen to love her—as you did your wife?"

WE had been standing a few yards from the house and he gave a searching look. He moved for a better view, then sighed.

"Thought I saw a shadow. This would be the night—Puasa—if it ever was going to happen. That's when they got *her*. Those soldiers with their dirty thirty-thirty slugs."

"Suppose I happened to love Gabrielle?"

He looked hard at me. "I grant you I haven't a monopoly on the emotion," he said. "*Do* you?"

I didn't say anything and he kept that searching gaze fixed on me. "None of my damned business, eh? Right. But if you do, get her to hell out of here."

"How?"

He frowned like a child. "How in the hell would I know? But don't stick around and become an *n*th degree sunshiner, like me. And these other freaks. Because, if you do, you may not live as long as they have. This thing go haywire and it will be a firing squad." He cocked an eye at me. . . . "Or maybe a platoon. You and she both."

"Firing squad?"

"They still have them, don't they? And not so long ago they appointed an American Commander-in-Chief in Manila. They're calling out reserves. That guy in Manila's no fool."

"What guy?"

"That General What's-his-name?"

We had moved closer to the house as we talked and now, after one quick look in the window—and he shuddered as he looked—he waved me toward the door.

"Drop into my parlor," he said ironically.

It was an attractive room, that living-room. Paneled in *narra* with a wide fireplace, heavy deep comfortable chairs. It ran the length of the house and he told me that there was a bath and two connecting bedrooms completing the place. The Scotch and tan-san was on a camagon table between two chairs and he pointed at one of the chairs.

"Hers—if the miracle happened. . . . Well, what the hell, you sit in it." He dropped into the other chair, shivered and poured a huge drink into a tall glass. I poured one. It was cold in here. High up, and the cold part of the night. He drank half his drink, bent over and lit the pine wood. It flared up, the pitch in it melting into the flame.

I drank a little and looked at him. "Why a firing squad?"

He pursed his thin lips. They were absolutely colorless.

"They still do it," he said. "For what they call treason. And they still call revolution, inciting to revolution, arming against the established government of a country: treason. Or have they changed that?"

"Who's arming? Inciting to treason?"

He finished the Scotch, nodded sagely several times. "You—and I—and the boys in the back room. Or is Clough's room in the front? Anyway, all of us. All boys together."

I took a chance. I had to.

"Cleary—I *am* in love with this girl. You were in love with your wife. Both Mohammedans. You got a lousy break. And so did I."

He gave me a sharp, unfriendly look. "How come *you?* Nobody's shot yours with a dirty thirty-thirty slug. And, as a matter of mere pathological, psychological and physiological interest, why in hell aren't you up there with her now? Why sitting here sharing my morbidity?"

"Because she doesn't love me."

He was full of sudden inquisitive interest. He leaned forward, his eyes alight with curiosity. "No? How come?"

"You seem pleased."

He gave that horrible, lip-stretching grin. "Misery loving company, eh? Well, you've got me wrong, kid. It just needed that confession from you to make me play along with you. Is she worth a slug in the guts to you? Thirty-two slugs, in case it's a platoon?"

"She is."

He looked at me for a long time, stared for awhile into the fire. Then, so unexpectedly that it startled me, he leaned toward me and took my hand in his unhuman, bony claws. "Good. Maybe they'll stand us up together. Allow us to smoke a last 'dobe cigarette together. And we can compare notes on the jams women can get fairly sensible men into."

"Why should it end that way?"

He shrugged. "It needn't. It may come off. They've got the brains, the set-up, the—that vicious persistency that seems to go with wrong-doing . . . you know? Way you look at it, of course, as to its being wrong. To hear them talk, it's right. Maybe it is. Only thing, I was brought up in a God-fearing, law-abiding New England town and to me it seems slightly off color." He laughed at that and poured himself out another drink, bobbed his head at me as he held out the bottle.

"Tell me the set-up. Clough will, tomorrow, but I'd like to hear your version."

It didn't fool him. He grinned horribly but nodded, too. "Oh, sure," he said. "Big-hearted Clough. You damned ass."

"All right," I said and shrugging, started to get up. But he was desperate with the need for company. In this empty, waiting house with its dimly lit, shaded lamp.

I sat back in my chair and picked up my almost untasted drink.

"How much do you love the Japs?" he said harshly. "Like everybody else, I suppose?"

"About."

"How much would you trust one?"

"The same."

He lit a cigarette and lay back in his big chair and stuck his incredibly long and sticklike legs out toward the fire. On his skeleton face was a parody of smug satisfaction. His eyes were on me with a lively, humorous look. "In other words," he said, "if they told you that when they took Manila and the northern islands that they'd allow you and your friends to rule Mindanao and Sulu, just out of big-heartedness, you'd be slightly skeptical? Is that right?"

HE was well rewarded by the look that must have been on my face, as I exclaimed:

"What!"

"You're one of the boys now. The hierarchy of Mindanao and Sulu. The heir apparent. You can't miss if that incredible bit of double-crossing I heard out under the weeping willows is like it sounded."

"When the Japs take Manila? What do you mean?"

He shrugged.

"You've been reading the papers this year, haven't you? And listening to the radio? You know where they are now? On the doorstep of the Dutch East Indies."

"Well?"

"And of course you've heard how busy their bearlike neighbors are at the moment?"

"That's right." But still I seemed not to grasp it.

"And what a long trip it is for a fleet with all its supply train from—let's say Pearl Harbor—out here to the romantic Orient?"

"Some weeks—yes."

"*If,*" he cocked an eye, "they weren't *delayed,* let us say, at Pearl Harbor? And how many naval bases are there here, once they arrive?"

"Cavite. Olongapo."

He was nodding profoundly: now he gave me that birdlike look. Full of sly triumph. "*If* they could get to them *in time.*"

I started to speak but he cut me short with a swift wave of his long, thin arm. His eyes were hard now and his teeth bared. He shook his head quickly and his dank hair, flat against his high polished forehead, flung away.

"No Cavite. No Olongapo. *Kaput—sigue Digupan, no espera Caloocan.* In other words, brother, they'll have just come for the sail. Plus, of course, the damnedest bombing a fleet ever had. From planes based from Formosa and our own flying-fields. How do you like that?"

I LAUGHED and it angered him incredibly. Color actually came into his pale seamed face and he struck his hand impotently against the heavy arm of his chair.

"You damned fool!" he raged. "And *you* were in *Crete!*" He stared at me then. A sly, watchful look came slowly into his eyes. He said softly: "You lie like hell. You never saw Crete. Ah—"

I got up. "The hell with you," I said. "You're drunk."

He smiled suddenly. "I wish to hell I was. But my stomach always beats my brain to it. Sit down."

I had moved toward the window. I wondered what time it might be. I wondered clearly, realizing that all along she had been in the back of my mind; I wondered where Gabrielle Clough was—what she was thinking—and what she expected of me on this, her wedding night.

I saw that it was quite dark now; the moon gone. And as I stood, staring into the night, a sound came, growing.

I heard Cleary's chair creak, his bones creak as he came and stood beside me.

"Sounds like a plane," I said.

His awful fingers closed like tongs on my arm. I could hear his breath suck in as though he were a metal man and the machinery of him was long unused.

"It's more than a plane, brother: it's Kismet."

So fast the plane came that it now roared over the little house. A strange sense of dread, of foreboding took hold of me and I shivered in the night air.

"She's coming in to land. What could—"

As I turned to meet his hard, listening look, a sharp burst of sound shattered through the shaking thunder of the plane. Cleary swung about and I realized that the phone was ringing. The sound had none of the normal comfort of a familiar thing. I had jumped at the sharpness of it and had the foolish, guilty feeling of having ducked a snapping bullet. Cleary was gazing expressionlessly at me and he held the receiver out.

"For you."

"Me?"

"For the gentleman from Crete. A lady calling."

He nodded steadily, grinning sadistically. "Without the slightest doubt, your heathen bride."

He got up, and as I took the receiver from him, he bowed, grimaced and made for the door.

"I'll take a walk around the block while you coo. *Adios po!*"

I heard his metallic whistle outside as I lifted the receiver to my ear, spoke into the mouthpiece and listened to Gabrielle Clough's voice in answer. My hand shook and I could feel sudden sweat against the cold rubber. I could feel the thudding of my heart when I hung up, turned and went out into the chill and darkness of the night.

This story concludes in the next—the September—issue.

Ghosts Come

UPON this evening of strange destiny, a handful of travelers with a single baggage mule came into the sprawling courtyard of the inn at La Cuesta, a village six miles out of Seville. There were four servants, a boy, an old man who was quite ill, and a grizzled soldier who gave orders arrogantly, despite evidences of poverty.

"Names? A pox take you! My name is Bernal Diaz; that of my master is too good for your ears! Your best room, and at once. Also, supper."

The innkeeper knew high blood and poverty when he saw them; in those days they often kept company in Spain. So he ordered a fire in the best room and extra quilts for the big bed there; storm was brewing, and December snow threatened. The village barber and the priest were summoned, but both were away with a sick farmer. There would be delay.

Delay irked Bernal Diaz, and there were tears in his eyes as he aided his failing master. New Spain and the empty glory won there lay far behind them all, years behind them and oceans away. Diaz, the doughty veteran, had hewed his way with the best of them, but nearly all the Conquistadores were dead now.

So they waited: Diaz, stooped but of stalwart frame; the servants, one brown and three white; the slim boy with proud, high-held head; and last, the hollow-cheeked man so gray and gaunt, who lay in the great bed and peered out upon the room, a bitter fierceness in his bony features. He was like some old wolf peering from a hilltop upon approaching death, a snarl of ferocity still lifting his palsied lip.

The boy ate and was taken to another room. The servants were below. Bernal Diaz, silent, fed the old man with a spoon until he fell asleep, long bony fingers gripping at the coverlet as though it were an empire. Leaving the candle lighted, Diaz tiptoed away and downstairs to the main inn-room below, where the four servants sat clustered over food. One of the four, a man of copper skin and liquid eyes, looked up and spoke in Aztec, which the others could not understand.

"And Malinche, master? How is he?"

"He sleeps." Diaz glanced around. "The boy Martin's not here."

"He has eaten. He went to the room he shares with you. He took the pretty toys the good bishop gave him yesterday, in Seville."

"Toys!" spat grim old Diaz. "A boy of fifteen, with toys!"

"He is the son of Malinche," said the Aztec. "And they are the toys of war."

Diaz nodded grudgingly and hugged his threadbare coat about himself. Malinche! Thus it would always be, the name of power, the name of iron will, the name that had conquered lands afar—Malinche. This name remained, and nothing more. Of all the kingdoms, conquests, titles, spoils, this name alone remained. Malinche: so the Aztecs called Hernando Cortez, but with a darker reason.

Diaz pointed a finger at one of the servants.

"Go sit at the door of his room. If he wakens before I've eaten, call me."

He went on to the common board before the enormous fireplace of the inn. Several traveling merchants, caught belated *en route* to Seville, gabbled away as they sopped into the garlic stew. They eyed the stooped, stalwart man with the sword at his thigh, and made room for him. The fire was welcome on this December night of 1547.

One man spoke, with a guffaw and a knowing wink.

"Did you hear about the great conqueror, the Cortez who won New Spain nigh thirty years ago? Done for, they tell me. I saw him in Madrid two years back, when the king refused him audience; he was a proud devil, that fellow!"

A burst of laughter sounded. "The pride's out of him now!" jeered another. "They tell me he forced his way to the royal carriage. The king coldly asked who the fellow was, and he made reply: 'One who has given Your Majesty more kingdoms than you had cities!' If you ask me, it's a wonder he didn't get a whip over his back."

"Bah! It's all nonsense about his being done for," said another. "My uncle was in with him; I know all about the rascal. He's got millions hidden away—millions! Gold by the cask. That's inside information, too. My uncle saw where it's hidden. That's why the king turned sour on him. And when the queen wanted those five enormous emeralds he always wears, he refused to hand 'em over. That's where he made his mistake, you bet!"

"Did him no good," chimed in the first. "He lost 'em when he went with the fleet to Algiers and the admiral's ship was wrecked. I know. My cousin was on the same ship. He saw the Conqueror, as they called him, crawl ashore naked."

"Then, by God, he saw some scars!" spoke up Bernal Diaz.

The words lashed with their laconic fury. The others gave Diaz haughty stares and ignored him again. The man with inside information leaned over the board.

"Listen! I know why he lost those emeralds, and why he's done for, even if he has a fortune hidden! I know! There was a curse put on him, and on all the gold in New Spain. My uncle—he's dead now, got a tertian fever that killed him—knew all about it. When Cortez killed that Indian emperor, what's-his-name—"

"Montezuma?" put in someone, and the speaker nodded.

"Damned unchristian name; that's it. Well, that heathen emperor put a curse on the gold. That's why it's never done anyone the least good.

at Night

by MICHAEL GALLISTER

Illustrated by Bob Kearfott

A Conqueror's Path of Glory Comes to its Inevitable End

Those fellows who were with Cortez, they're all dead now. They died poor."

"So did Christ," said Bernal Diaz. They eyed him again and drew away.

"Something—that curse!" spoke up the first man. "Even the treasure that came over here brought death to everyone. Take Cortez himself. He had a son by some heathen woman who helped him to conquer that country—"

"She wasn't heathen. She was baptized," broke in someone.

The speaker shrugged. "No matter. The wine that goes into the barrel comes out vinegar at the spigot. Accursed, that's no lie! Cortez himself is accursed, same as the gold."

With a snort of ill-concealed rage, Bernal Diaz gulped his wine, rose from the board and stalked away. The others looked after him with a grin and a jest about the pride of a cabal

lero and a ragged cloak, and then forgot him.

Diaz, reaching the stairs, was met by the man who had been on watch.

"Master, he's awake. He asked for you."

"Good." Diaz crooked his finger at the Aztec. "Come, you, wait outside his door; we may need you. Don Martin is still in his room?"

"He has not left it. He must be sleeping by now," said the Indian, following up the stairs.

Diaz went into the room alone and closed the door.

The fire was blazing with a cheery, ruddy light that flickered over the ceiling and the tattered tester of the big bed. He came close to it and perched

on the edge. His hand clasped the bony fingers of the old man who looked up at him—a man broken by age to less than nothing.

"Have a priest ready, Bernal," said the dying man in a thin voice.

Diaz nodded.

"I've sent for him, and for the barber; both are away together, but will come upon their return. Someone is dying tonight, it seems. It's not so bad as that with you."

The brown cheeks of Diaz had a glitter on them.

"Nonsense; it could not be better, old friend," said Cortez. "But cheer up, I'm not done for yet. I must have a word with Olid and with Alvarado, before Sandoval arrives."

THE nerves of Diaz jerked to those names. The blazing old eyes were shrewd and wholly sane; but what did Cortez mean by this talk of men long dead, his three great captains who had conquered the Indian kingdoms after he showed them the way?

"Olid died in Honduras," said Diaz gently, soothingly. "And Alvarado—"

"Naturally." The shaking voice of Cortez firmed a little. "They, my oldest comrades and friends, lusted after gold and power; they turned against me, betrayed me. Olid, seeking to become a king, was destroyed. Alvarado was crushed by a horse—ah, the glorious god! Do you remember how handsome he was, back in '19, when the Aztecs worshiped him? But Olid is coming now. I hear his trumpets."

Diaz, who heard nothing at all except the rising howl of the wind, swallowed hard. He had never known the mind of Cortez to wander, before now.

"Do you recall, Bernal, how he always loved that peculiar flourish of the trumpets, and taught it to his squadron trumpeter?" went on Cortez, smiling faintly. "And the army used it, too, but chiefly Olid. It had a flourish and a quaver; one the Moors had used in Granada. Olid had it from an old Moor, who had been trumpeter to the last of their kings. Olid took it to himself, in his pride—do you remember?"

"He was a proud man. I remember well," said Bernal Diaz sadly; if memories were sad things, sadder still it was to see the great captain's mind weakening.

Suddenly he felt the bony fingers tighten upon his hand. The old tired voice rang out more loudly.

"There! Listen! I told you he was coming! Do you see that dark, strong figure with the glinting armor? He always used to keep his armor spotless. Before he went to Honduras, he killed two Indian slaves because they let his morion become specked with rust— Ah, he's coming—he's here!"

Until now, Bernal Diaz had shrunk from the sad reality; but where lay reality? He started slightly. His eyes rolled about the room, and he felt an indefinable chill touch of horror striking at him. For it was no delusion.

He himself heard that peculiar quavering trumpet-call Olid had so loved; it was like nothing else, it was used nowhere else. Very thin and far away it was, and ghostly, like a sound from the dead past. This increased his agitation. Olid was long since dead in Honduras, dead with his treachery and rebellion.

The trumpet-call lifted again. Olid's trumpeter had always blown it to announce the captain's coming, as though he had been a king. Back in New Spain, all the army knew that Moorish music—and it was here, here!

Cortez lifted his hand as though in greeting.

"Welcome, old friend," he said. "Welcome, Olid. It's high time we had a word together, you and I."

Bernal Diaz gulped, and followed the keen old eyes. He looked at the fireplace, where ruddy reflections danced on shabby walls and rafters. A palsy seized upon his hands; he fancied that he saw a stern dark shape there by the fireplace, armor glinting.

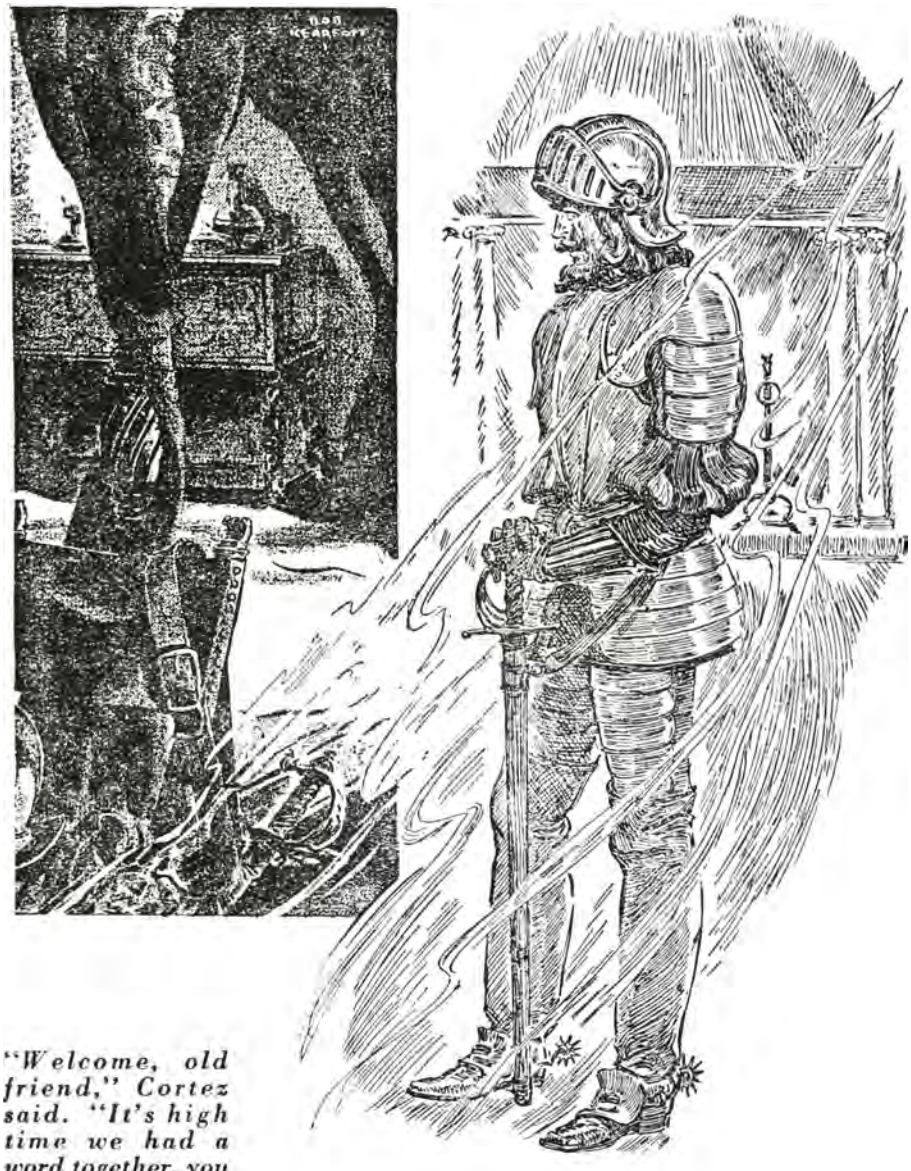
"Olid, my captain, the past is gone. Let it go." Cortez was speaking gravely. "Out of all the past, there is only one thing to recollect—that night beneath the tree: La Noche Triste, when the little handful of us looked back at the temples of Tenochtitlan where our comrades were being sacrificed. Except for you, I had not survived that night, Olid, with the curses of my soldiers heaped upon me!

"We had failed utterly. We were ruined. Everything was lost. Even our God—Christ pardon me!—had failed, it seemed; the heathen gods were triumphant. And you staggered up to where I sat, with stout Bernal Diaz beside me. You and he, the others all drowned in the sleep of utter exhaustion and despair—"

A shiver took hold of Bernal Diaz. He tore his rapt, staring gaze from the fluttering firelight and shadows, from the glint of armor and the hollow eyes of a dead face. He buried his sweating cheeks in his hands, with fear and horror upon him. A ghost, Olid's ghost!

Except for the evidence of his own senses, he would have laughed at such a delusion. Yet he heard the trumpet-call again, as he sat shivering. It was real. It rang more loudly in his ears. He could not deny this evidence. He pressed his hands close over his eyes, but his ears caught the clink-clank of armor, as though a man were moving.

CORTEZ'S words brought back into his mind that scene under the great tree, in all its agony. He was living again the terrible Noche Triste of defeat. He could hear the groans of the men—everyone who had survived



"Welcome, old friend," Cortez said. "It's high time we had a word together, you and I."

was wounded, and he could hear the low, bitter voice of Cortez speaking, as Olid came stumbling up to where the two were sitting.

"The curse of Montezuma; ah, how that man cursed me! Yet I slew him not. His own people killed him. And now what's left, my friends? A few of us have escaped. We can expect no help from Spain or Cuba. For we're practically outlaws, and the royal authorities, who would have pardoned success, will punish failure. Face it—failure! We've lost everything."

"You still have Malinche," Bernal Diaz said softly. "Or Marina, as we've named her. She's unhurt, Captain."

"The only woman I ever loved or shall love," replied Cortez under his breath. "But the greater things—success, conquest, empire! We held everything in our hands, and have lost it all." He pointed toward the distant lake, the reddened sky. "Those temple fires—our comrades, dying there, beneath the sacrificial knife!"

"Oh!" said Olid, adjusting a bandage. "It's very simple, after all."

This Olid was a hard-headed, practical fellow. A great soul, and in the Spanish fashion he had a proverb for everything, and another to cap it.

"We need advice, and none of your wise quips," said Cortez.

"Precisely what I'm about to offer. Something Fray Olmedo once said when I was in a quandary. It has stuck in my mind, Captain. It's the most practical advice I ever got from a priest, and just now it's the only thing to get us out of this mess."

"Indeed!" The commander's voice was wearily sardonic. "In that case, my brother, let's have it by all means."

"Since these things are necessities, let us meet them like necessities!" said Olid promptly. "That's all."

All! The stout-hearted truth of those words fairly blazed. Olid, the open-handed, the generous, turned to give water from his flask to a groaning man. Cortez sat in silence, and then Diaz heard his voice, low and bitter.

"The cannon lost. All the gold and baggage lost. My papers gone. Most of the horses gone. Five hundred men lost, and countless of our Indian allies. Every single musket, and most of the crossbows, lost. Well, my brave Olid! You've made a man of me again. Since these things are necessities, let us meet them like necessities!"

His head jerked up, his shoulders squared. Cortez was himself once more, despite his wounded hand and wounded soul.

The distant fires in the night above Tenochtitlan merged into the flickering glow of the flames against the wall, the dancing shadows on the rafters above, as Bernal Diaz came back to the present.

Outside, a gusty whirl of December wind smote the old tavern until it creaked and shook. The trumpet sounded again; the Moorish quaver, the peculiar royal call beloved of Christoval de Olid, in those old days before his base murder by the men of Cortez.

"Farewell, old friend! Our blessing and forgiveness go hand in hand," said Cortez, and lay smiling faintly, his eyes upon the dancing shadows.

Bernal Diaz furtively crossed himself. He was no grand caballero but a common man, a peasant, shrewd and practical, who had enchained kings. Ghosts or not, he knew the hair was prickling and lifting on his neck, for in this room was death itself. Yet with his own ears he had heard the ghostly trumpet-call of Olid!

"Strange, is it not," murmured Cortez, "that of all the world I have only one thing left; the name of Malinche. And the boy she left to me."

Bernal Diaz nodded silently. This was true. The Aztec name of Marina, the Indian girl whom Cortez loved, had been transferred to the captain himself. To all Mexico, he was Malinche. He was Malinche now, to the Aztec slave crouching outside the door. And this, except the boy asleep, was all he had, all he was.

SUDDENLY the old captain stirred. "Bernal! Do you remember, when Alvarado married that princess of Tlascala, how a chorus of native flutes played the bridal march? Listen! By my hilt, that's the very air! I've heard it often in New Spain. Every native boy knows that tune; they call it the Doves of Tlascala! That's Alvarado coming now."

With difficulty, Bernal Diaz choked down an oath of surprise and dismay —for he heard it, he heard the flute! Above the crackling of the fire and the creak of the old rafters, and the lifting whistle of the wind outside, he heard the soft, low piping of a flute, as he had so often heard it in the Indian towns. More, he knew and recognized the tune.

This thin and silvery ghost-flute terrified him exceedingly, because it was not imagination. No Spaniard would know this air. Death was here in the room; and in that dark Presence anything might happen, anything! In his actual terror, Bernal Diaz groaned faintly and perked up the coverlet to hide his face, as he sat on the bedside. He pressed it close with convulsive, trembling fingers, hiding sight of everything from his eyes.

"Well met, Pedro, well met!" The voice of Cortez was strong and ringing. "Greeting, comrade; the same Tonatiuh as ever, eh? Dear friend, we must have a word together; it is the moment of mutual pardon, of understanding."

Bernal Diaz wanted terribly to look at the flickering fire-glow, and dared not. He waited to hear the voice of Alvarado; he heard nothing. But he did hear the Aztec flute again, and it was playing the same air.

"Tell me, Pedro," went on Cortez. "Do you remember that night when we took the *teocalli,* the pyramid of the war-god? Ah, that was a night for soldiers!"

BERNAL, who had been there, shook with the memory as he sat in fear. Cortez had led the way that night, with Tonatiuh, the Sun-god. Thus the natives had named Alvarado, for his sunny golden hair and beaming smile. Alvarado, the cavalier of old Gothic blood, the headstrong and arrogant, the doer of great things, good and bad!

They had fought their way up the long circling ramp to the summit, a mile in length. Cortez, one arm crippled, himself led the assault against heavy stones, arrows, flaming beams—then, at the summit, came a three-hour battle, hand to hand, without quarter.

Bernal Diaz and Cortez were down together. "Coming, comrades!" The ringing voice, the deft sword, the radiant presence above him and Cortez—what a memory it was! Alvarado, cutting, thrusting, slashing like a madman, helping Diaz and the captain to rise amid a hurtle of shafts and spears and native clubs, the whistling Aztec war-cry in their ears!

And, on the crest, the fight to the death, in fury undying, every man sore hurt and a goodly share dead or over the edge and gone. Turn around, now, with Alvarado down and two wild priests of the war-god hacking at him. Cortez, shield fastened to useless arm, sword at work, and the great laugh of Alvarado as he gained his feet.

And later, when the image of the war-god had been toppled over the edge, and the wooden shrine was being fired, Alvarado came to drop, panting, beside Diaz and the captain.

"Hurt, Bernal? A tough fight, Captain! I owe you a thing or two."

"What's from the heart makes no debt," quoth Cortez grimly. "We're all one, Pedro. After this day, what can ever come between us? I used harsh words with you, when I found you had started this war. Let me retract them in this moment. As God lives, you are dearer to me than my own brother!"

Alvarado rose impulsively, his arm about those armored shoulders in a quick embrace.

"And as God lives," said he, "if ever I turn my back upon you, let the weight of the world crush me! Captain, we'll make you emperor of this new world. In all you do, in all the future holds for us, be sure of one thing—the faith and sword of Pedro de Alvarado!"

This was the one thing, in after years, that failed stout Cortez at his direst need.

Bernal Diaz, crouching beside the deathbed, felt pity and awe stirring in him at the memory of Alvarado. The rebel and ingrate had been crushed to death by his own falling horse—the death he had invoked for broken faith.

"Farewell, Pedro, farewell, in love and forgiveness of all that was and all that had to be!"

The voice of Cortez rose and died again. With a jerk, Bernal Diaz sat up and looked. Once again he heard the dancing notes of the flute, the ghostly echo of the Doves of Tlascala; then the haunting sweet pipings were checked and gone. He saw nothing but the flicker of the flames on walls and ceiling, while the loose casements rattled in the night-wind.

"So, then, that's done! And, by Santiago, I'm glad of it," said Cortez, in so matter-of-fact a way that Diaz gaped at him. "I just recalled a curious thing, Bernal. Do you remember when we landed at Palos, long ago, and met Pizarro?"

"Captain, I was not with you that voyage," replied Bernal Diaz. "You left me in New Spain. Sandoval was with you, and Juan de Rada. A brave cavalier."

"Yes. Later, after the conquest, he went to Peru," said Cortez, his old eyes thoughtful, and his voice strange. "It was he who killed Pizarro, down there."

Silence fell again, save for the rattling casement. Bernal Diaz caught the implication of those words. In this moment of failing life, with everything lost, the old soldier of soldiers envied Pizarro that death by the sword.

Cortez, who had tasted all the greatness and glory of earth, who had seen every jot of it his and then stripped from him, had only one adventure left. He was now upon its very threshold, and regretted that it came thus, in a little village inn.

Bernal Diaz remembered, now. Sandoval had died, there at Palos, after that landing and the meeting with Pizarro. Sandoval, the shining heroic figure, the one chivalric man in all that crew of ragamuffin, blackguardly Conquistadores. . . . The man Cortez loved.

"My son Sandoval! He's coming now," the old Captain said suddenly, as though he saw a door opening.

Bernal Diaz moved to protest the words, but his voice died in a gulp. A spasm of real terror shook him. It was not the rattling casement that he heard. It was a sound above this rattle; such a sound as might have heralded the noblest and finest of all men, second only to Cortez as a soldier, dead at thirty-one, loved by all who knew him. A drum-roll, now loud, now dying out, now falling into a steady and sustained beat, as though to quicken the feet of marching men. Yet it was only a little sound, a faint one, as from some ghostly drum far off.

Bernal Diaz doubted his own senses; then Cortez spoke, proving that he also heard the same thing.

"I think St. Michael must have commanded the drums of heaven to sound for Sandoval!" said he, smiling. "Sandoval, the gentle knight— Ah, here he is."

The firelight spurted. A log broke and the flames fled high. A glow of light leaped across the wall and ceiling. Bernal Diaz stared in stiff and frozen horror. So sharp was the reality of this scene that fear overwhelmed him like a wave of the sea.

"Sandoval, my son!" The harsh tones of Cortez were softened with affection. "One man without stain of cruelty or greed or selfishness. Kiss me, dear son, gentle captain!"

Now a truly frightful terror deepened in Bernal Diaz. He saw nothing, yet he felt a chill breath, and heard a sound as of a crunching tread to the continued beat of that far-off drum. A cold presence was beside him, and it was not imagination.

Later, he found a loose casement had blown open, in the night wind.

"YOU and I, Sandoval, have naught to forgive or forget," went on Cortez in steady, intimate tones. "Once in a lifetime comes a man loved by all; you were that man. How my heart was torn, that day in Palos when the Honduras fever claimed you! In all our years together, my son, there was nothing to regret. We were soldiers—ah, the beating drum! The drums of Otompan! You remember? Our greatest day, our most glorious victory?"

Now, Bernal Diaz sat there absolutely frozen with ghastly fear of the dead. He saw nothing, but thought he saw strange things; he heard a low sound like whispering, and emotion shook through him like a living wind.

He too had heard those drums of Otompan. Now he heard them again,

as the voice of Cortez recalled that desperate day to his mind. That day, the second after the escape from Tenochtitlan, when the valley of Otompan opened to their sight. A valley white as driven snow with the quilted cotton armor of Aztec warriors. White as snow, far as eye could see, dotted with the gay plumes of chieftains and kings. There was no escape, no evasion. The Aztec hosts had gathered to destroy the shattered remnants of the white invaders.

They, the Conquistadores, had lost every advantage save that of steel armor. Powder, cannon, muskets—all were gone. They themselves were stiff with wounds, all of them. Only twenty horses remained. And here was an ocean of death, implacable, fiercely determined.

"Sword and lance, *pardieu!*" said Gonzalo de Sandoval, and looked down at Bernal Diaz who stood beside his stirrup. "You'll fight for your supper today, Bernal, and lick your wounds in place of wine!"

He spurred his horse on to where Cortez sat, looking out at the ocean of death with desperate eyes. The captain turned. The eyes of the two met, for a moment, and Cortez nodded as though to some unspoken question.

"Take the right wing with ten cavaliers, my son. Shatter them with the lance, pick the leaders, and converge. Converge! We'll meet halfway through their host, ahead of their infantry. I'll lead the other ten cavaliers. Victory!"

"If God wills," cried Sandoval joyously, and went to his command.

Sick and well, hurt and maimed, all must now fare alike and fight alike. Conch shells and whistling war-cries greeted them, and above all the drums —a thunderous, rolling, blood-maddening beat of drums. Ten horse on either flank, they drove down into the massed array, charging, trampling, shattering a path. Sword and lance only; no guns now, to awe the naked Indians with smoke and bullet. No naked Indians, indeed—but uncounted thousands, the pick of Aztec warriors, determined to destroy these invaders and their Indian allies.

So the battle was broken. Sandoval and Cortez fought like men inspired. They hewed a way, converged, and met—only to be forced back. As the Aztec regiments shattered, new ranks filled the gap. . . .

Time passed. The sun gathered heat, terrific heat for men in armor; wearied men, spent with killing. An hour passed, two hours, three—interminable hours, minutes past conception to men not fighting each moment for life. And gradually, inexorably, death closed in upon them.

The Spaniards were halted. The waves of Aztec warriors burst upon them, as spray upon an ocean rock, wearing them slowly down. All of them were wounded. Cortez had two slashes over the head and his horse was dead. He obtained another, a former baggage animal, but his horsemen were forced back. They pressed upon the infantry and disordered their ranks. The recurrent waves of Aztecs pressed forward ever harder.

"Look!" Cortez beckoned Sandoval, then rose in his stirrups and pointed.

Amid the thronged ranks far ahead showed a litter bearing some gorgeous personage. About him were crowded Aztec nobles, as their brilliant attire testified. The banner above him was a golden net, symbol of Aztec high command.

"Our only chance, Sandoval!" Cortez gripped his lance. "At him! Follow, support me!"

His spurs drove in. His rangy horse leaped in pain, leaped full at the brown ranks. Behind came Sandoval and the others. Such was their desperate ferocity that they clove a road through the masses of men, reached the guard of nobles, broke it, and the lance of Cortez felled the Aztec general.

At this, those serried ranks burst in wild dismay, and the lances and swords slew until arms dropped in utter exhaustion. Of them all, the palm went that day to young Sandoval, and to the Captain himself.

THE distant drum beat on, though faintly. Sparks flew up as another log fell and burst. The room was growing chill, and the voice of Cortez rose as though in effort.

"Farewell, son Sandoval! We part again to meet again, God willing. We fought hard against death at Otompan—what fools we were! There's but one honest man and true friend left me in this world. Where are you, Bernal Diaz? Where are you?"

The grizzled veteran stirred, and came to his feet.

"Here, Captain. I'll shut the window. The room's cold."

"It will be still colder, yet warm enough for me," said Cortez grimly.

Diaz closed the blown casement, flung more wood on the fire, and came back to the bed. The one candle still burned dimly. It was a tallow dip, not one of fine wax, and barely limned the shrunken, haggard head on the pillow.

"It is high time you remembered the words of Olid, old friend Bernal," said the questing voice. "Are these things necessities? Then let us meet them like necessities! Go and bring Martin here, and hurry the priest."

A sob lifted in the throat of Diaz. He stumbled to the door, went out, and heard voices below; the barber and priest had come. He sent the Aztec to hasten them, and himself went to the next room. Flinging the door open, he strode in.

"What, not in bed yet, lad?"

The boy, Martin Cortez, slim and straight and proud of head, turned from an open package that lay on the bed.

"Thought of my father would not let me sleep, Bernal," he said. "I was trying out these things the good bishop gave me yesterday, in Seville. He had them made for me, he said—a gift."

Bernal Diaz looked, and speech failed him for the thumping of his heart.

Three small things of silver, but not too small for use. A sackbut or trumpet, an Aztec flute, a tiny model of a war-drum, all exquisitely made. As he looked at them, a thousand thoughts and emotions rushed across his mind. That ghostly music he had heard, that real music—had it come from this room? Were all the happenings in that other room merely the hallucinations of a dying man?

He shook himself abruptly. "Come, lad. The Captain wants a good-night kiss."

Footsteps pounded the stairs as the others ascended. Back in the big room, Bernal Diaz stood grimly watching. The boy's arm encircled that gray head on the pillows, and he heard their brief words.

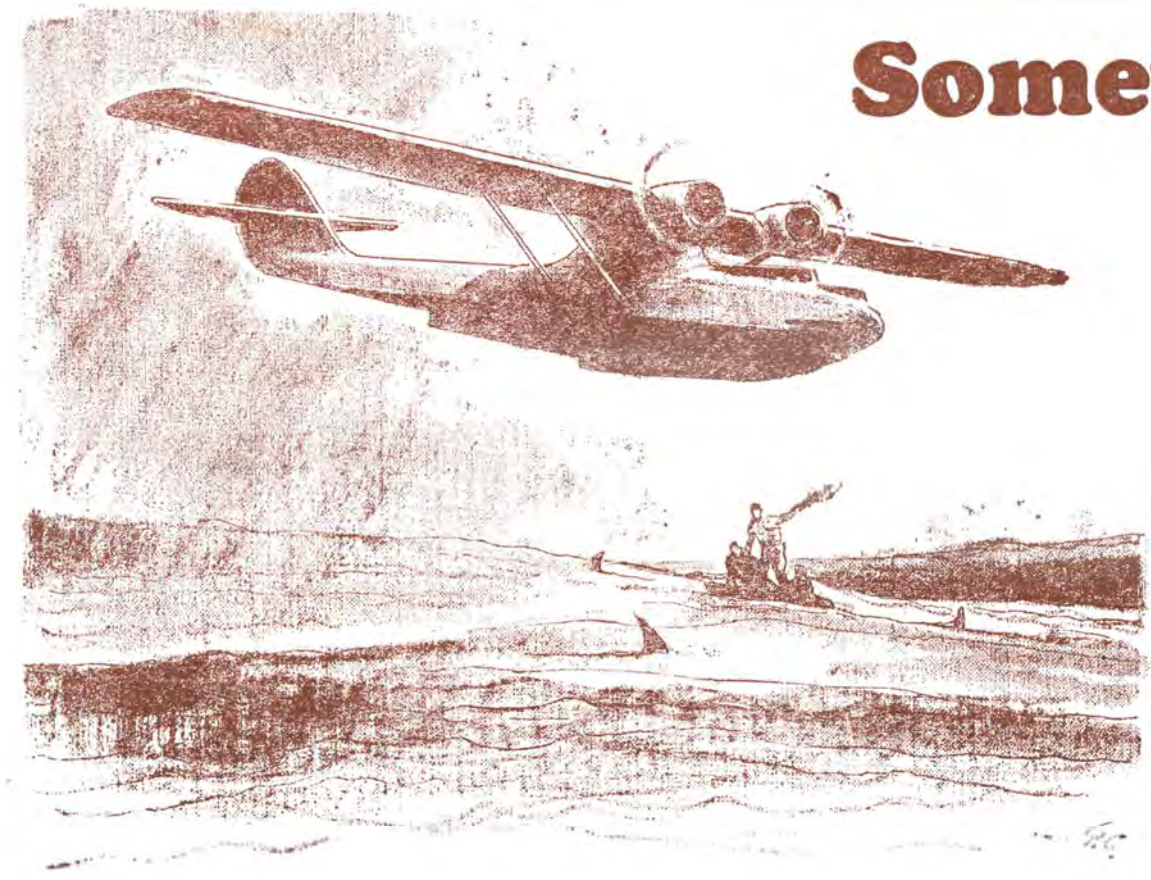
"Good night, Malinche," said the boy.

Malinche! Name of father and mother both; the only thing left to that dying man, this name by which an emperor had often addressed him.

"Good night, my son. Sleep well," replied the grim harsh voice.

The boy went out, the priest came in. Bernal Diaz crossed himself. For the last time he met the gaze of his Captain—the unfaltering, steady gaze of this old man who had won and lost everything in the wide world except a name that was not his own, and who was now making his last discovery. And thus stout Cortez died.

Something



Illustrated by
Grattan Condon

FOR a while there, we had only the life-jackets from the Jap torpedo plane, and it's always been a wonder to me that the sharks didn't take us, except they'd had a big free lunch served them when the Jap cruiser went down. A shark aint particular what he eats.

The destroyer broke away from its troop convoy in a sharp turn, and before it had straightened out, started firing at what was left of the torpedo plane—which, naturally, was the same as firing at us. I said:

"Boys, I'm ascairt we're goners."

Carl Shultz was so white that it looked as if his whiskers were painted on him. "I hope it aint nothin' smaller than a five-inch shell," he said. "Them rifles aint human, Sarg."

I knew just how he felt. I had one of them .25's through the fleshy part of my leg, on the inside above the knee, and one of them grooved across my neck.

"Did you bring your pistol, Sergeant?" Rayburn Howarth asked. "We might as well die like men."

"Shut up," I told him. "Can't you remember about the tree?" I'd had Howarth in my platoon ever since he got out of boots camp, and for quite a time I'd been tryin' to teach him what it takes to make a hero. . . .

The Jap destroyer had us bracketed with a turret gun—one over, one short; and the next one sure for a bull's-eye. Then something very nice happened: It must of been a thousand-pound demolition bomb that grazed its starboard strakes. As far away as we were, I could feel the shock of that explosion, transmitted through the water.

The destroyer went into a turn that got sharper and sharper as it kept heeling over more to the right, taking water like a sieve through the buckled plates. It capsized, and immediately the bottom went out of her in another jarring explosion. Probably her own boilers blowing up.

It was quiet enough after that, so we could hear the engines in the sky above us. At first I thought the noise was from a formation of airplanes. I turned over onto my back and held my left hand over my eyes, peeking through the cracks of my fingers to keep the sun-glare out. "A Flying Fortress," I told Shultz and Howarth.

"Hurrah!" Howarth shouted. You got the idea that if he had a flag, he would have waved it.

"Hurrah, hell!" I said. "It's not going to see us, from twenty-five or thirty thousand. Wouldn't do any good if it did, bein' a land plane."

The Fortress could see those troop transports, though. And with the Jap cruiser sunk, there weren't any high-angle heavy-caliber guns to bother its aim. It was picking off those transports one by one, the way a kid spits through the knotholes in a board sidewalk.

After maybe fifteen minutes Rayburn Howarth spots an empty life-raft as it came up on the top of a wave about fifty yards away. "Look, men!" he hollers, pointing toward it, and just then a wave smacked him in the face—and he took on a gallon or two of the Sulu Sea.

I stroked over to him and held his head up and pounded him on the back while he choked and gagged and finally got some air into his lungs. Honest, I thought he was a dead would-be hero right then and there.

It's funny how Rayburn Howarth always wanted to be a hero. That is, he took it for granted that he *had* to be a hero, just as though he was back on the Hollywood movie lot, heroing in "B" thrillers. But shucks, the Jirenes aint no place for heroes. That's what I tried to tell him after his fight with Carl Shultz, a few days before we packed our sea-bags onto the transport.

There wasn't any reason for the fight. All Carl did was say that he could go for Dinah Holt in a big way. It was outside the recreation hall where we'd just seen "Death Divers," starring Rayburn Howarth and that little blonde darling Dinah Holt. There was maybe five hundred leathernecks and gobs in that theater, and any one of them would have admitted offhand he could go for Dinah Holt in a big way. That would make quite a few guys to argue with.

But Rayburn Howarth said, in a high-and-mighty way: "I beg your pardon?"

for the Sergeant's Seabag

by Louis Goldsmith

Carl Shultz asked: "What you beg gin' my pardon for, recruit? I just said I could go for that little blonde twist you snuggled up to in the last scene. You was in the gravy an' didn't know it."

Rayburn Howarth said, "You'll eat those words!" And he swung a haymaker at Carl.

Now, the way he said it and everything, reminded me of a scene in "Winged Vengeance." Maybe you remember the one where the hero slugged his pal, just before he took off on a dawn patrol. Only in that case the girl was there to see it, and throw her arms around the hero while his pal lay unconscious from the blow, and then the hero found out that the girl really had double-crossed him, just like his pal had said. That was the way the story went; but come to think of it, it wasn't "Winged Vengeance." It was "Death Rides the Skies."

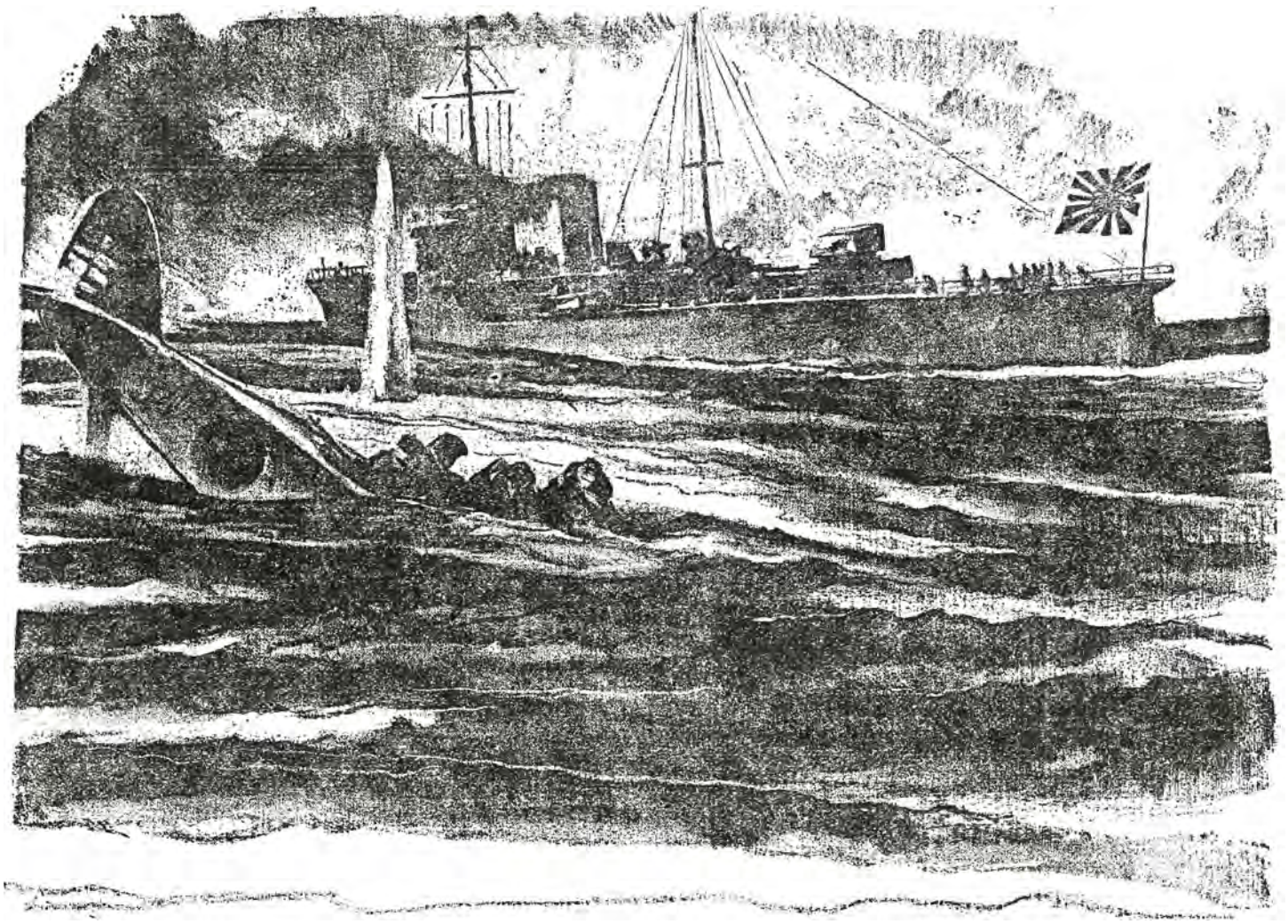
But in this case, here in front of the recreation hall, there wasn't any beautiful girl to throw her arms around Rayburn Howarth, and Carl Shultz tucked his chin under his hunched shoulder, stepped inside the haymaker and chopped a left to the boot's chin. Rayburn Howarth's knees doubled up under him, and he kinda wilted down onto the porch of the recreation hall. A gob stumbled over him and looked down and giggled. "Who says they don't sell hooch in the Halls of Montezuma?" the gob asked, shakin' his finger playful under Rayburn Howarth's nose.

Well, that's a slap at the Marine hymn, and we don't like that. I plants one in the gob's mush which wipes that grin off his face, and a big gunner's mate named Charley picks me up and tosses me headfirst into some shrubbery. By the time I get back, Carl has shoved his fist into the mate's breadbasket, and the M.P. whistles are sounding off. I snake Rayburn Howarth out from under the pile, and with Carl we weigh anchor.

RAYBURN HOWARTH is shouting: "Let me down, you cowards! I'll go back and fight them like a man!"

Neither me nor Carl can understand what's eatin' him; and the next day, as the saying goes, the plot thickens. Dinah Holt comes out to see Rayburn Howarth, and he refuses to go

She said: "Lin, I want you to take a picture—for the Sergeant's seabag."



When the right wingtip dug into the water we did a cartwheel.

up to the reception-room to meet her. "Please tell Miss Holt that she was probably right," he says bitterly. "She'll understand."

Now, we get some funny specimens in the Jirenes. We get everything from Presidents' sons on up and down the scale, and mostly we don't think of them as bein' Marines. Anyways, not professionally. Mind you, I'm not runnin' them down, only—there it is. They come an' they go, but the Jirenes go on forever.

This being Saturday, the barracks-room is deserted so I sit down on the cot, facing Rayburn Howarth. I said: "Let me tell you something, m'boy. We'll be pullin' freight for the Islands most any day now."

RAYBURN'S jaw squares up, and don't let anybody ever tell you he aint got a real he-man face. "The sooner we get into action, the better I'll like it," he says.

That's the way his kind usually is. They got it figured out that as soon as they get the hemisphere-and-fouled-anchor emblem on their cap, they're set for a landin'-party; bugles tootin' and guns a-poppin'!

I says: "The only action you're goin' to see in the Philippines is wearing an M.P. brassard and walkin' up one dirty street an' down another, the gobs hatin' you and the soldiers hatin' you. And when you aint doin' that, you'll be lappin' up poor quality beer or peck gin. And when you ain't doin' that you'll be standin' guard mount or sittin' in quarters thinkin' about girls."

"Thinking about girls!" he says.

"Thinkin' about girls," I tell him. "You'll sit there and think about every decent girl you ever went out with; how she looked an' what she said, an' the kind of perfume she wore and whether the sun was shinin', or the moon was shinin' or if it was just plain rainin'. And whatever it was doin', it'll seem like pure heaven."

"What in the world are you talking about?" he asks, like maybe I was a little touched in the head.

"I'm tellin' you what it's like to soldier," I said. "I'm trying to tell you what it's like to have girls look slantwise at you as you pass them on the street, an' give you just a little more room than they would a guy in civvies. Right now there's talk of war, so it's a little different. But wait till you get over to Manila. You'll be wantin' somebody to give you a good hard kick for every time you could 'a' gone out with a decent girl, and didn't."

His smile reminded me of the one he'd had in that close-up—I can't remember the name of the picture—when the good-lookin' Eyetalian girl got the bombsight plans from him. "I'm not interested in girls," he said. "While you're at it, you might tell Miss Holt I said that."

"Okay, pal," I agreed. "I'm not used to dog-robbin' for a buck private, but I don't mind doin' it this time. Not a bit." I went into non-com's quarters an' slicked down my hair an' put on my best blouse, with the four hash marks. I also pinned on my "basic," with that handsome chain of expert pistol, rifle, bayonet and C.W.F. bars. Something to dazzle the eyes, I am.

DINAH HOLT was just getting into a maroon-colored limousine when I arrived an' gave her my bow that I'd learned from watchin' a shavetail who'd been along on a goodwill tour to South America. I told her what Rayburn Howarth had told me to tell her. I tried to be dignified, but just lookin' at her made me so I had

to stop every three or four words and swallow.

Dinah Holt has the prettiest eyes I've ever seen. They're a kind of golden gray. I mean—well, a little bit like the sky is sometimes in the Caribbean, before the sun comes up. Gray, with tiny flecks of gold. And her mouth—but then, I guess everybody's seen her in the movies. Only she's a lot better looking. And that's because she's really not as beautiful as she looks on the screen. She's more human.

When I had finished telling her what Rayburn Howarth had told me to tell her she looked at me sort of wistful and repeated the words, as though she was memorizing them for a picture scene: "Please tell Miss Holt that she was probably right. She'll understand."

"Yes ma'am. Those were his words," I told her.

She smiled suddenly, looking me up and down. "You're a sergeant, aren't you?" she asked. "Are you Ray's sergeant?"

"He's in my platoon," I admitted.

"You're all dressed up, Sergeant," she said. "You must be going some place. Won't you let me take you there?"

Would I! That car, with Dinah Holt sittin' in it, looked like heaven to me.

We drove out of the gate, and Bill Sutton, on guard-duty there, stared at me with his mouth wide open like he was seein' a battle-wagon flyin' around on pink wings. Miss Holt was looking at me out of the corners of her eyes, smiling just a little. "Sergeant," she asked, "are you able to bend your back? Don't you get tired holding it so straight?"

I tried to answer both questions at once, and got mixed up.

"You've been in service a long time, haven't you?"

"I've served close to eighteen years in the Marines," I told her.

"Eighteen years!" she repeated. Then she bent over toward me and she wasn't smiling any more. "Have you done many heroic things in that time, Sergeant?"

"Heroic things?" I says, starin' at her, trying to see if she was kiddin' me. "Look here, Miss Holt, leathernecks—I mean *real* marines—aint heroes. We're just—well, half sailors and half soldiers, an' pretty damn' good at both trades, if you'll excuse a little braggin'."

"I will," she said, her voice kind of low and husky. "Sergeant, have you any special place you want to go, or—well, if you haven't, would you come out to my house for tea—I mean, highballs?"

There was only one possible answer to that question and I managed to choke it out, without exploding. I didn't hardly believe it was happening to me until she came down from changing into slacks that were exactly the same color as her eyes. She said: "Let's go out onto the terrace, where we can watch the ocean."

Well, she could watch the ocean if she wanted to. I'd already seen it quite a few, but this was the first time I'd ever sat in a canvas chair like an officer's deck chair with a girl like her to look at and a tall, cool drink on the table beside me, where I could reach it without hardly moving.

WE both of us sat that way quite a while without saying anything. Pretty soon she asked: "What are you thinking about, Sergeant?"

It was all so nice and natural-like and I'd got to liking her so well that I took a chance and told her the truth. I said, "Have you ever seen the inside of a Marine's seabag? I mean a *real* Jirene?"

She smiled, waitin' for me to go on.

I said: "If you know how to fold things up just right, you can get an awful lot in a seabag. An' when you get to your next station they'll all be clean and nice, an' not much wrinkled. That's what I'm doing now, Miss Holt."

She looked at me, frowning a little.

"Don't get me wrong, Miss Holt," I said, "but I'm packing as much of you as I can up here in my seabag," I said, tapping my forehead. "You, an' all the rest of this here. An' how nice you are, an' everything."

Her teeth made a white, perfect row, closing on her lower lip and she turned away from me. I thought I'd spoiled everything then. I finished up my drink, gettin' ready to go. I didn't want to be sittin' on my cot sometime in some sweltering hole of a place and recollect not having finished that good cool Scotch-and-soda.

But when the Chinese boy appeared like a miracle with a fresh drink, Miss Holt said: "Lin, you bring my camera, please." And when he came back with one of those little toy cameras that cost three or four hundred dollars she said, "Lin, I want you to take a picture of us as we are sitting here. Take several of them, Lin. I want at least one good one—for the Sergeant's seabag."

THAT'S the kind of a girl Miss Holt is. That's why I took my shirt off and beat on the water whenever one of them dorsal fins came slitherin' up too close to the raft. As far as I was concerned personally, I wanted to slip off into that blue water and dive and keep on swimming downward until I reached a cool, dark place where the water would be good to drink. And whether it was good or not, I would drink it and keep on drinking it. I would never come up again to this blinding hell.

Carl Shultz was mumbling to himself. He kept thinkin' he was crawlin' through thorn brush like was off the beach at Nicaragua. It was them damned small-caliber rifle-bullets. He had about a dozen of them in him an' the salt water stung in the wounds, an' the sun festered 'em up. They say the folks back in the States think the Japs are dumb, usin' such small-caliber rifles.

Dumb! Those little monkeys have been in the business of murderin' and torturing people for the last dozen years. A Springfield or Garand or service Colt kills a man clean. A badly wounded man is an asset to the enemy.

"Line o' ,skirmishers!" Carl would squawk, his throat dry as sandpaper. "Range, six hundred yards, no windage. Damn these thorns!" And then he'd beat at his poor arms and legs. His lips were all black except for the red, bloody lines where they had cracked open. His tongue was beginning to swell till you could hardly understand him.

Rayburn Howarth tried to hold Carl's hands to keep him from hurting himself. That must have made Carl think that one of the natives had him, and in the struggle they almost overturned our raft. That raft wasn't much bigger than a postage-stamp.

And all this time the sharks were circling around us, sometimes rolling until their bellies looked pale blue under the water and we could see the cruel slits of their mouths.

I got the two men separated. I don't know just how I managed it. And then I turned Carl's head to get at the angle of his jaw, and I socked him with all the beef I had. He went slack all over, quivering a little, and I pulled him crossways of the raft.

Rayburn Howarth looked at me, shaking his head like a mad bull. "You'll pay for that!" he threatened. He started to get up and then his eyes went vacant of expression. "Sons and brothers at strife!" he exclaimed. "What is your quarrel? How began it first?"

"We aint quarreling," I told him, scared by that funny look. "I just put him to sleep, so he wouldn't hurt himself."

He didn't seem to hear me. "'Thou slave, thou wretch, thou coward!'" he said. "'Thou little valiant, great in villainy! Thou ever strong upon the stronger side, thou fortune's champion, that dost never fight . . .'" He shook his head, as though sorry for me. "'To die! To sleep—to sleep! Perchance, to dream; aye, there's the rub, for in that sleep of death what dreams may come, when we have shuffled off this mortal coil—'"

I understood by that time, ignorant as I am about Shakespeare and such things, that poor old Rayburn was

slug-nutty from the sun an' talkin' like in a show.

MISS HOLT had told me: "Both his mother and father were on legitimate—stage actors, you know. He has real dramatic talent and training." She'd shrugged. "I think I'll have a highball with you, Sergeant."

"For myself," she said, after Lin had brought her a drink, "I'm just a pretty face—that is, if you admit I'm pretty."

"I will," I told her. "And how!"

She smiled her thanks. "But I can't act for beans. All I can do is look worshipfully at the hero, and mug well in the close shots. Photogenic, that's me. And that's all. But he could really act, if he'd outgrow this hero complex." She spread her hands. "But here he is, doing one horse opera after the other . . . maybe I should call them horsepower operas, since they switched him from Westerns to flying. So I'm carrying the torch for him."

"Lucky him," I said.

"Oh, I don't know about that, Sergeant. When a woman loves a man, she doesn't want him to be a second-rater. Not when he could be tops."

"So you quarreled?"

She nodded, then shook her head. "Not exactly quarreled. Ray is too—" She clenched her fists. "The darned fool's too noble to quarrel! Heroes don't quarrel, Sergeant. They just get hurt. I called him a cheap, make-believe hero. I wanted to do something to jar him out of his complacency, before it was too late."

"So he joined the Marine Corps to prove he was a hero."

"So he joined the Marine Corps," she agreed, and finished her drink off at one tilt. "Sergeant," she commanded, "tell me what a hero is!"

I'd studied that question over a lot. There was a woman in my home town that we all called Aunt Martha. Her husband died, and shortly afterward she had a stroke that left her paralyzed from the waist down. She had three small boys and she put every blasted one of them through college—by sewing and fancy embroidery work. And the only thing ever worried Aunt Martha was that some one would feel sorry for her. But that wasn't the kind of hero Dinah Holt meant. I knew that; I knew what she was gettin' at.

I said: "A hero is a guy who gets into a dangerous spot and does the right thing at the right time. And there's another thing—it's like a tree."

"Like a tree?" the girl said, as though afraid I was joking her.

"Like a tree," I nodded. "I remember when I was a kid, somebody told me that if a tree fell down, miles away from any living thing, human or animal, it wouldn't make a sound."

"Wouldn't make a—but that's absurd!"

"Nope. Not when you think about it. If there was somebody there to hear it, it would be a sound. Nobody to hear it—no sound."

"I see what you mean."

"Well, it's the same way with heroes. The kind Rayburn Howarth thinks he is, or wants to be. If there was nobody to witness them bein' a hero, they wouldn't be one."

She shook her head, sort of doubting that.

"Look here," I said, "do you think every guy who gets a war medal is really a hero? Not on your life! An' don't think there aint plenty of guys who really deserve them and don't get them. It all depends on somebody bein' there, seein' it and bein' in the right frame of mind to consider it heroic."

"I suppose there's something in that," she admitted. "But it doesn't solve my problem; or Ray's. Mind you, I'm not saying he's too good for the Marines, but— Do you think he could ever be a hero, granting all these other things?"

I SHOOK my head. "Nope," I said, "not the kind you mean. He aint got the timing, Miss Holt. It's like—well, something like boxing. Anybody can learn to dance around and shove their fists in. But it takes a natural, like Joe Louis, to time 'em. Rayburn just aint got what it takes."

"Well," she said, after a little, "that doesn't seem to solve anything—not that I don't love him just the same and know deep down in me that he is heroic in other ways."

I felt awful sorry for her. And for Rayburn too, as far's that's concerned. He was a good guy. Believe me, a duty sergeant gets so he can spot 'em, good or bad, clear across the parade-grounds. He was just a square peg in a round hole, as you might say, only he was the one who put himself there.

She gripped my arm, her face all alight with a new idea. "Listen, Sergeant, if he could just be a hero one time. Just once! You said there were lots of men who get medals when they don't deserve them."

"Well, not lots of them," I corrected. "I mean, it's a matter of the right guy bein' there, bein' in the right mood—"

"That's it, Sergeant! You'd be there. You'd—couldn't you be in the right mood?" She gripped my arm tighter. "Don't you see how important it is? Just one tiny little, insignificant medal—or just mentioned in orders—anything so Ray could come back to me with his self-respect. So he could come and strut a little."

"Now look here, Miss Holt," I said. "you don't know what you're asking. Maybe my talk's been misleadin' you."

"Oh, I don't mean for you to lie—to cheat. But Ray isn't a coward. You know that, don't you?"

"He's got nerve, all right," I admitted, remembering how he wanted to go back and fight that gang of tough sailors the night before. "Only he fumbles . . . he aint got the slightest idea what a tough world this is. He's like a babe in the woods; like a kid with a cap pistol who's been readin' too much *Dick Tracy* stuff."

"But if he had a chance—if something was just arranged a little for him. He'd do it. I know he'd do anything he thought was heroic, because . . . well, because he really loves me and wants to come back as much as I want him. Only he's too proud."

"Well," I said, "puttin' it that way he—"

"Oh, if it only could be, Sergeant! I'd never, *never* say another thing about these silly pictures he makes. He could sit back in those mock planes, with the wind-machines blowing his scarf back—"

"That's what always gripes me," I said, "the way those movie pilots wrap ten yards of muffler around their necks an' let the ends fly around in the propeller-wash."

"What's so wrong about that?" she asked curiously.

"Wrong with it!" I said. "Do you think a real pilot would wear something that'd choke him to death, or beat his face raw?"

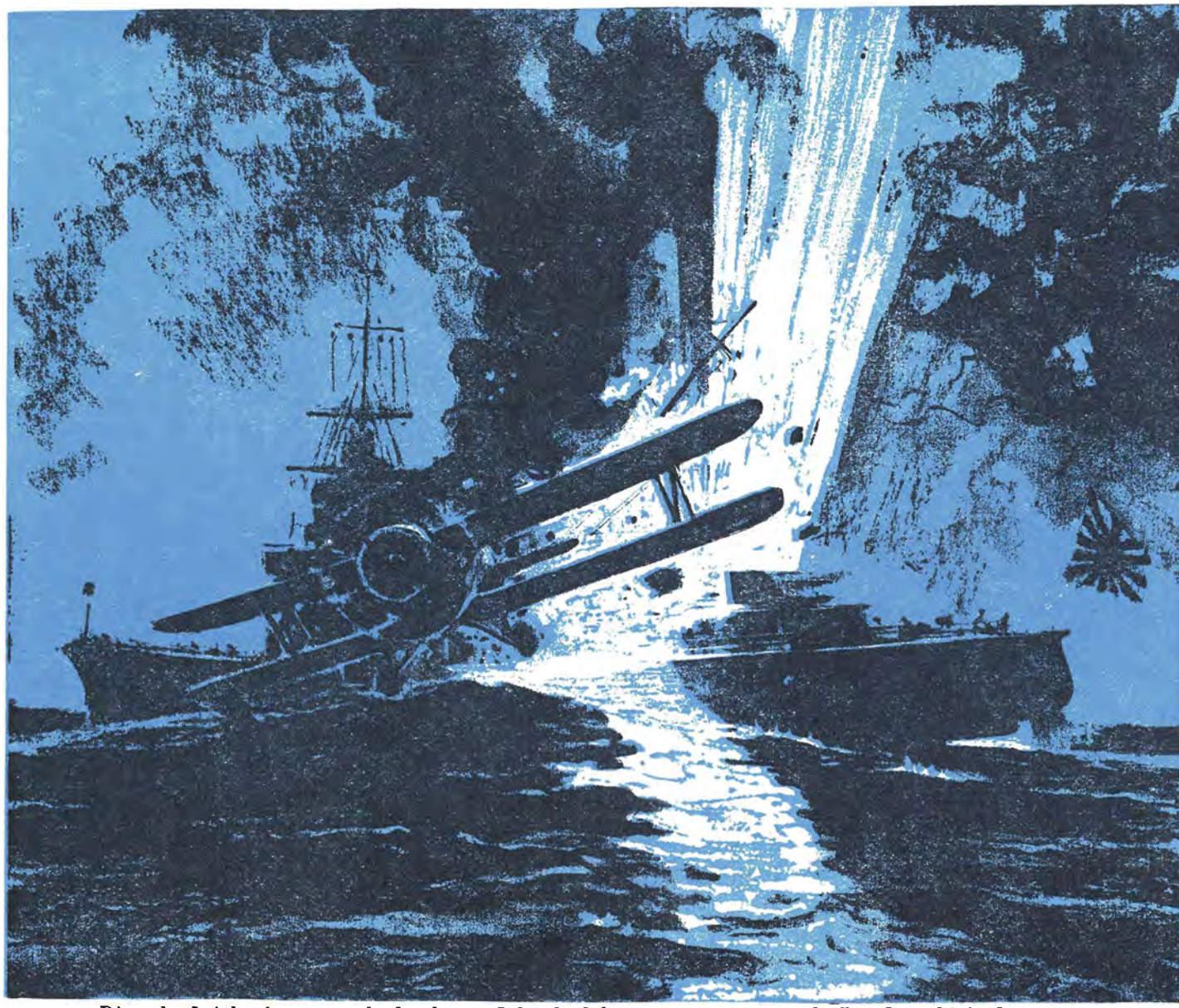
She leaned toward me. "Have you flown?" she asked. "I mean, piloted an airplane?"

I didn't answer. That's a sore point with me—a very tender spot, indeed.

WELL, I guess everybody thought I'd gone batty, or was losin' my grip of things. I followed that good-looking lug of a Rayburn Howarth around the post like a hungry hound-dog. An' I gave him long talks about the right way to go about bein' a hero and I told him that important point, illustrated by the tree. Somebody had to be there to see him be a hero.

So's not to pass up any bets I let Carl Shultz in on the secret. It didn't make sense to him, but Carl's a good Joe, willin' to play along an' not ask too many questions if he's sure you're not dealin' off the bottom of the deck.

Carl's handy with his dukes, so he give Rayburn some lessons in fightin'. Not boxing. Rayburn had already taken a lot of boxing lessons and in fact had been the hero in a couple of Golden Gloves thrillers. He could dance around real nice, an' knew how to snort an' make faces. But when we rigged it up so he had a fight with a supply sergeant, the drygoods admiral knocked him for a row, an' since there wasn't nobody else in the company who couldn't knock hell outa the supply sergeant, we was kinda stumped.



Directly I felt that torpedo let loose, I banked her up into a vertical. But I couldn't flatten out.

Twice I managed to slip and fall off of the shore boat an' do a drowning act. The first time Lieutenant Henry, very much disgusted, fished me out with a boathook while Rayburn was unbuttoning his blouse, gettin' ready to save me. The second time Rayburn jumped in with all his gear an' it took both Carl and me to fish him out.

And then we were in the Islands and things began to happen and there was no more time to worry about heroes and such. We had work to do.

It happened while we were temporarily attached to a regiment of Filipino Scouts. The Lieutenant told me to call for two volunteers and do a reconnaissance patrol along the beach. It was supposed to be just a routine patrol or I never would have taken Rayburn Howarth when he stepped forward with the rest of my platoon, to volunteer.

Well, we blacked up just like it was goin' to be tough work an' just before we took off I happened to think: "Maybe something'll happen so Rayburn can become a hero." I'd been thinkin' along those lines so much that it was gettin' to be second nature.

And something did happen. And how! About five hundred monkeys, dressed in uniform, armed with those wicked little rifles and Tommy guns, slipped in between us and the main body of the command.

We had a run-in with them twice. Once when we contacted their flank guard, both the Japs and us very much surprised, but Carl and me showing 'em that the Marine Corps don't hand out expert pistol medals for nothin'. The second time was when Rayburn Howarth got buck fever.

You can't blame him. It was the first time the kid had ever been under fire and he'd seen where I got grooved across the neck an' he was in a sweat to do a little groovin' himself. Only it was just like I said to Miss Holt: Heroes are guys who do the right thing at the right time, an' when you're outnumbered fifty to one the right thing is to lay low.

That's when I got the one in the leg and poor old Carl got himself sieved up pretty bad. The next two days and most of the second night were plain hell. There was a full moon, and moonlight in the Islands is just about the same as daylight.

Our emergency rations were gone and we were nursing the last few drops of water in our canteens. There was plenty of swamp water but we didn't dare build a fire to boil it, and we had better sense than drink it raw.

And then we came to the edge of the beach that second night and peeking through heavy cogon grass we saw something—four Japs, squatting near a fire in a small clearing, heating water for their tea an' having a very jolly time of it, to judge from their cackling laughs. And you'll wonder why I thought that was a dream.

It wasn't the Japs. It was what stood out there on the flat volcanic sands of the beach. An airplane!

We sat there for a long time, and me, I got hot an' cold and I shook like I was comin' down with a bad case of malaria. When we drew back into the brush, out of earshot, I couldn't talk for awhile.

I was thinkin' about what Les Towers, test pilot for Boeing, told me a long time ago when I was a sergeant attached to flight duty at Pensacola; when I had the crazy idea that I'd get into flying-school. "We never sell the Japanese any service-type planes until they're two years old," he told me. "And then they've got to buy the engineering along with the plane, because they'll just copy it, anyway."

And there that plane was, maybe an old U. S. type; anyway, an airplane that had been designed by white men. I didn't care if every control, lever and valve was labeled in Jap characters. I could figure them out.

Carl Shultz, who was never a fast thinker except with his fists or a gun, said to Rayburn Howarth: "Say, recruit, whyn't you fly us up to Manila in that airplane?"

"Me!" Rayburn said, in a shocked whisper. "Why, I can't fly an airplane, Carl."

"What'd you mean, you can't fly, recruit?" Carl said, beginnin' to get mad. "Aint I seen you fly in 'Death Divers?' Aint I see you—"

"Pipe down, squarehead!" I told Carl. "Throw some timber on the hatch while I think a coupla times."

"Say," Carl said, gettin' his mental machinery into high gear, "what's a matter with you flyin' that crate, Sarge? Down there at Pensacola you used to —say, there aint no Flight Surgeon around here to tell you your depth-perception's haywire! Gimme the okay an' I'll take care of them little squat pots back at the fire, an' no sound from 'em, either."

So that's how it happens we're flyin' at three thousand feet, trying to claw some more altitude with that torpedo hooked onto our belly, when the dawn breaks out like thunder, just as Kipling said in his poem. And there below us, seemin' like they was standing still, was the cruiser and destroyer, convoying those Jap troop-ships.

It was just like I see a guy's face in front of me . . . a dirty, mean guy who needs his mug smashed in; who needs his teeth knocked down his gullet.

Me, I don't think at all. I shoves the wheel clear forward for a dive an' I points to the torpedo-release lever, down there between the controls to the cowl shutters an' the carburetor hot-spot, and I shout to Carl: "When you see me pull back on this control wheel, you pull on that lever an' I'll bet you six months' pay you can't pull it out by the roots."

Well, that's about all there is to the story except that I lost the six months' pay. If Carl had been feelin' in the pink I expect he would have pulled the belly right out of that tin can of an airplane—pulled the wheels up into our laps!

Directly I felt that torpedo let loose, I banked her up into a vertical. I don't think they even got a shot into us from the cruiser, because they certainly weren't expecting a thing like that from one of their own planes. But I couldn't flatten out of the vertical. When the Japs copied this particular airplane they missed out some place on lateral control.

Parts of the cruiser were still raining down when we sideslipped into the water. I'd got the nose up and had the wheel clear over to the left. We had lost most of our speed, but when the right wingtip dug into the water we did a cartwheel, tearing the whole side of the fuselage open and throwing the radial engine clear.

I was knocked out for a couple of minutes. It couldn't have been longer, but in that short a time I was back with Dinah Holt, tasting that grand cool drink, hearing her say, "—a picture for the Sergeant's seabag."

THE Flying Fortress hadn't seen us, but they saw the torpedo launched and the cruiser blow up. They knew some friends must be down there, needing help, if they were still alive. That evening, around two bells, a Navy Consolidated came nosing over the horizon from the north, flying at about eight hundred feet. I was still slappin' the water with my wet shirt, making faces at the sharks and callin' them Japs, which was no wonder the sharks was riled up.

My arms and shoulders were burnt from the sun, like I'd been dipped in boiling oil; we were all of us pretty close to dead. But as soon as I could think and talk good, I fixed up a report of everything that had happened from the time our patrol left the main command to when we got picked up by the Navy flying-boat.

The three of us were on a transport, by that time, headed back to the good old U.S.A. and all the women refugees on the ship acting as nurses to us guys who had got punctured. Pretty soft, I'll tell a man. One of the girls helped me with the report, using big words an' we sure made it hot.

I didn't have to lie very much and I'd fixed it up with Carl Shultz so he knew what he should say if anybody asked him. Every once in a while this girl would exclaim: "Just like he used to be in the movies! I think he's wonderful, don't you? I'll bet you're proud to have served with him!" And I'd say, "I sure am."

The ship's captain must have told the story to the reporters when we stopped off at Honolulu, and they sent it on ahead by radio to the States. And then hell got loose! Sparks wrote it up in the ship's news bulletin.

Rayburn Howarth came directly to where I was on the boat deck, sittin' nice and comfortable in the shadow of one of the life boats. He had the news bulletin an' started reading it: ". . . . Fortunately Rayburn Howarth, private first class, had had sufficient flying experience in connection with his work as a moving-picture actor—" That was as far as he got. He was too mad to read any farther.

"Be your age," I says to him. "What difference does it make who flew the airplane? We were all there, weren't we? We all took the same chances! Now run along; quite botherin' me."

"I—I'll deny the whole thing!" he sputters. "Why, they're talking about a medal for me . . . it's simply impossible!"

I pulled a long face. "All right," I says, "spill it to the captain. Get me in bad. Get me busted down to a buck private for falsifying a military report, after me workin' like a dog for these stripes!"

"But, Sergeant, they're going to transfer me to Public Relations—" He stopped, looking at me as though he thought I wasn't exactly right in the head. "Don't you want a medal?"

"Me!" I says. "Hell, guy, I'm a United States Marine." I pointed to the hemisphere-and-fouled-anchor on my cap. "I already got a medal! All I'm asking is that you don't make trouble for me."

He went away. An hour, maybe two hours, later, he came back. He said, "Well, Sergeant, you win. I won't make trouble over that report, though I certainly won't accept any medal. I'm no hero and never will be one . . . S-a-y, why in thunder did you do this? That's what I can't understand."

I said: "Trot along, boots. I'm sleepy."

How could I explain it to a guy like that, one who's never soldiered? Something nice for my seabag? Naw; he'd think I was crazy.

A twice-told tale—from the December, 1923, Blue Book

Mrs. Opalsen's Pearls

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

"POIROT," I said, "a change of air would do you good."

"You think so, *mon ami?*"

"I am sure of it."

"Eh—eh?" said my friend, smiling. "It is all arranged, then."

"You will come?"

"Where do you propose to take me?"

"Brighton. As a matter of fact, a friend of mine in the city put me on to a very good thing; and—well, I have money to burn, as the saying goes. Come!"

"Thank you, I accept most gratefully. You have the good heart to think of an old man. And the good heart, it is in the end worth all the little gray cells. Yes—yes, I who speak to you am in danger of forgetting that sometimes!"

I did not quite relish the implication. I fancy that Poirot is sometimes a little inclined to underestimate my mental capacities. But his pleasure was so evident that I put my slight annoyance aside.

"Then that's all right," I rejoined hastily. . . .

Saturday evening saw us dining at the Grand Metropolitan in the midst of a gay throng. All the world and his wife seemed to be at Brighton. The dresses were marvelous, and the jewels magnificent.

"It is a sight, this!" murmured Poirot. "This is the home of the profiteer; is it not so, Hastings?"

"Supposed to be," I replied. "But we'll hope they aren't all tarred with the profiteering brush."

Poirot gazed round him placidly.

"The sight of so many jewels makes me wish I had turned my brains to crime, instead of to its detection! What a magnificent opportunity for some thief of distinction! Regard, Hastings, that stout woman by the pillar! She is, as you would say, plastered with gems!"

I followed his eyes.

"Why," I exclaimed, "it's Mrs. Opalsen!"

"You know her?"

"Slightly. Her husband is a rich stockbroker who made a fortune in the recent oil-boom."

AFTER dinner we ran across the Opalsens in the lounge, and I introduced Poirot to them. We chatted for a few minutes, and ended by having our coffee together.

Poirot said a few words in praise of some of the costlier gems displayed on the lady's ample bosom, and she brightened up at once.

"It's a perfect hobby of mine, Mr. Poirot. I just *love* jewelry. Ed knows my weakness, and every time things go well, he brings me something new. You are interested in precious stones?"

"I have had a good deal to do with them one time and another, madame. My profession has brought me into ıtact with some of the most famous jewels in the world."

He went on to narrate, with discreet pseudonyms, the story of the historic jewels of a reigning house, and Mrs. Opalsen listened with bated breath.

"There now!" she exclaimed as he ended. "If it isn't just like a play! You know, I've got some pearls of my own that have a history attached to them. I believe mine's supposed to be one of the finest necklaces in the world—the pearls are so beautifully matched, and so perfect in color. I declare I really must run up and get it!"

"Oh, madame," protested Poirot. "You are too amiable. Pray do not derange yourself!"

"Oh, but I'd like to show it to you!"

The buxom dame waddled across to the lift briskly enough. Her husband, who had been talking to me, looked at Poirot inquiringly.

"Madame your wife is so amiable as to insist on showing me her pearl necklace," explained the latter.

"Oh—the pearls!" Opalsen smiled in a satisfied fashion. "Well, they *are* worth seeing. Cost a pretty penny, too! Still, the money's there all right—I could get what I paid for them any day, perhaps more. May have to, too, if things go on as they are now. Money's confoundedly tight in the city. All this infernal—" He rambled on, launching into technicalities which I could not follow.

He was interrupted by a small page-boy who approached and murmured something in his ear.

"What? I'll come at once. Not taken ill, is she? Excuse me, gentlemen."

He left us abruptly. Poirot leaned back and lighted one of his tiny Russian cigarettes. Then carefully and meticulously he arranged the empty coffee-cups in a neat row, and beamed happily on the result.

The minutes passed. The Opalsens did not return.

"Curious," I remarked at length. "I wonder when they will come back?"

Poirot said thoughtfully: "They will not come back."

"Why?"

"Because, my friend, something has happened."

"What sort of thing? How do you know?" I asked curiously.

Poirot smiled. "A few moments ago the manager came hurriedly out of his office and ran upstairs. He was much agitated. The lift-boy is deep in talk with one of the pages. The lift-bell has rung three times, but he heeds it not. Thirdly, even the waiters are distrait, and to make a waiter distrait"—Poirot shook his head with an air of finality—"the affair must indeed be of the first magnitude. . . . Ah, it is as I thought! Here come the police."

Two men had just entered the hotel, one in uniform, the other in plain clothes. They spoke to a page, and were immediately ushered upstairs. A few minutes later the same boy descended and came up to where we were sitting.

"Mr. Opalsen's compliments, and would you step upstairs?"

Poirot sprang nimbly to his feet. One would have said that he awaited the summons. I followed with no less alacrity.

THE Opalsens' apartments were situated on the first floor. Knocking on the door, the page retired, and we answered the summons to come in. A strange scene met our eyes. The room was Mrs. Opalsen's bedroom, and in the center of it, lying back in an armchair, was the lady herself, weeping violently. She presented an extraordinary spectacle, with the tears making great furrows in the powder with which her complexion was liberally coated. Mr. Opalsen was striding up and down angrily. The two police officials stood in the middle of the room, one with a notebook in hand. A hotel chambermaid, looking frightened to death, stood by the fireplace, and on the other side of the room a Frenchwoman, obviously Mrs. Opalsen's maid, was weeping and wringing her hands with an intensity of grief that rivaled that of her mistress.

Into this pandemonium stepped Poirot, neat and smiling. Immediately, with an energy surprising in one of her bulk, Mrs. Opalsen sprang from her chair toward him.

"There, now! Ed may say what he likes, but I believe in luck—I do. It was fated I should meet you the way I did this evening, and I've a feeling that if you can't get my pearls back for me, nobody can."

"Calm yourself, I pray of you, madame." Poirot patted her hand soothingly. "Reassure yourself. All will be well. Hercule Poirot will aid you!"

Mr. Opalsen turned to the police inspectors.

"There will be no objection to my—er—calling in this gentleman, I suppose?"

"None at ail, sir," replied the man civilly, but with complete indifference. "Perhaps now your lady's feeling better, she'll just let us have the facts?"

Mrs. Opalsen looked helplessly at Poirot. He led her back to her chair.

"Seat yourself, madame, and recount to us the whole history without agitating yourself."

MRS. OPALSEN dried her eyes gingerly, and began:

"I came upstairs after dinner to fetch my pearls for Mr. Poirot here to see. The chambermaid and Celestine were both in the room as usual—"

"Excuse me, madame, but what do you mean by—'as usual'?"

Mr. Opalsen explained:

"I make it a rule that no one is to come into this room unless Celestine, the maid, is there also. The chambermaid does the room in the morning while Celestine is present, and comes in after dinner to turn down the beds under the same conditions; otherwise she never enters the room."

"Well, as I was saying," continued Mrs. Opalsen, "I came up. I went to the drawer here,"—she indicated the bottom right-hand drawer of the kneehole dressing-table,—"took my jewel-case and unlocked it. It seemed quite as usual—but the pearls were not there!"

The inspector had been busy with his notebook.

"When had you last seen them?" he asked.

"They were there when I went down to dinner."

"You are sure?"

"Quite sure. I was uncertain whether to wear them or not, but in the end I decided on the emeralds, and put them back in the jewel-case."

"Who locked up the jewel-case?"

"I did. I wear the key on a chain round my neck." She held it up as she spoke.

The inspector examined it, and shrugged his shoulders.

"The thief must have had a duplicate key. No difficult matter. The lock is quite a simple one. What did you do after you'd locked the jewel-case?"

"I put it back in the bottom drawer, where I always keep it."

"You didn't lock the drawer?"

"No—I never do. My maid remains in the room till I come up, so there's no need."

The inspector's face grew graver.

"Am I to understand that the jewels were there when you went down to dinner, and that since then the maid has not left the room?"

Suddenly, as the horror of her own situation for the first time burst upon her, Celestine uttered a piercing shriek, and flinging herself upon Poirot, poured out a torrent of incoherent French:

The suggestion was infamous! That she, Celestine, should be suspected of robbing Madame! The police were well known to be of a stupidity incredible! But Monsieur, who was a Frenchman himself, would not—

"A Belgian," interjected Poirot; but Celestine paid no attention to the correction.

Monsieur would not stand by and see her falsely accused, while that infamous chambermaid was allowed to go scot-free! She, Celestine, had never liked her—a bold, red-faced thing, a born thief! She, Celestine, had said from the first that she was not honest! And had kept a sharp watch over her, too, when she was doing Madame's room! Let those idiots of policemen search her, and if they did not find Madame's pearls on her, it would be very surprising!

Although this harangue was uttered in rapid and virulent French, Celestine had interlarded it with a wealth of gesture, and the chambermaid realized at least a part of her meaning. She reddened angrily.

"If that foreign woman's saying I took the pearls, it's a lie," she declared heatedly. "I never so much as saw them."

"Search her!" screamed the other. "You will find it is as I say."

"You're a liar, do you hear?" said the chambermaid, advancing upon her. "Stole 'em yourself, and want to put it on me. Why, I was only in the room about three minutes before the lady come up, and then you were sitting here the whole time as you always do—like a cat watching a mouse."

The inspector looked across inquiringly at Celestine. "Is that true? Didn't you leave the room at all?"

"I did not actually leave her alone," admitted Celestine reluctantly. "But I went into my own room through the door here twice—once to fetch a reel of cotton, and once for my scissors. She must have done it then."

"You wasn't gone a minute," retorted the chambermaid angrily; "you just popped out and in again! I'd be glad if the police *would* search me! I've nothing to be afraid of."

AT this moment there was a tap at the door. The inspector went to it. His face brightened when he saw who it was.

"Ah," he said, "that's rather fortunate! I sent for one of our female searchers, and she's just arrived. Perhaps if you wouldn't mind going into the room next door—" He looked at the chambermaid, who stepped across the threshold with a toss of her head, the searcher following close after her.

The French girl had sunk sobbing into a chair. Poirot was looking round the room. "Where does that door lead?" he inquired, nodding his head toward a door by the window.

"Into the next apartment, I believe," said the inspector. "It's bolted, anyway, on this side."

Poirot walked across to it, tried it, then drew back the bolt and tried it again.

"And on the other side as well," he remarked. "Well, that seems to rule out that."

He walked over to the windows, examining each of them in turn.

"And again—nothing. Not even a balcony outside!"

"Even if there were," said the inspector impatiently, "I don't see how that would help us, if the maid never left the room."

"*Evidemment,*" said Poirot, not disconcerted. "As Mademoiselle is positive she did not leave the room—"

He was interrupted by the reappearance of the chambermaid and the police searcher.

"Nothing," said the latter laconically.

"I should hope not indeed!" said the chambermaid virtuously. "And that French hussy ought to be ashamed of herself—taking away an honest girl's character!"

"There, there, my girl, that's all right!" said the inspector, opening the door. "Nobody suspects you. You go along and get on with your work."

The chambermaid went, but unwillingly.

"Going to search her?" she demanded, pointing at Celestine.

"Yes, yes." He shut the door on her and turned the key.

CELESTINE accompanied the searcher into the small room in her turn. A few minutes later she also returned. Nothing had been found on her.

The inspector's face grew graver.

"I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to come along with me all the same, miss." He turned to Mrs. Opalsen. "I'm sorry, madame, but all the evidence points that way. If she's not got them on her, they're hidden somewhere about the room."

Celestine uttered a piercing shriek, and clung to Poirot's arm. The latter bent and whispered something in the girl's ear. She looked up at him doubtfully.

"*Oui, oui, ma belle*—I assure you it is better not to resist." Then he turned to the inspector.

"You permit, monsieur? A little experiment—purely for my own satisfaction."

"Depends on what it is," replied the police officer noncommittally.

Poirot addressed Celestine again.

"You have told us that you went into your room to fetch a reel of cotton. Whereabouts was it?"

"On the top of the chest of drawers, monsieur."

"And the scissors, where were they?"

"There also."

"Would it be troubling you too much, mademoiselle, to ask you to repeat those two actions? You were sitting here with your work, you say?"

Celestine sat down, and then at a sign from Poirot, rose, passed into the adjoining room, took up an object from the chest of drawers, and returned.

Poirot divided his attention between her movements, and a large turnip of a watch which he held in the palm of his hand.

"Again, if you please, mademoiselle."

At the conclusion of the second performance, he made a note in his book, and returned the watch to his pocket.

"Thank you, mademoiselle. And you, monsieur."

The inspector seemed somewhat entertained by this excessive politeness. Celestine departed in a flood of tears, accompanied by the woman from the police department, and the plain-clothes official.

Then, with a brief apology to Mrs. Opalsen, the inspector set to work to ransack the room. He pulled out drawers, opened cupboards, completely unmade the bed, and tapped the floor. Mr. Opalsen looked on skeptically.

"You really think you will find them?"

"Yes sir. It stands to reason. She hadn't time to take them out of the room. The lady's discovering the robbery so soon upset her plans. No—they're here, right enough. One of the two must have hidden them—and it's very unlikely that the chambermaid did so."

"More than unlikely—impossible!" said Poirot quietly.

"Eh?" The inspector stared.

Poirot smiled modestly.

"I will demonstrate. Hastings, my good friend, take my watch in your hand—with care. It is a family heirloom! Just now I timed Mademoiselle's movements; her first absence from the room was of twelve seconds, her second of fifteen. Now observe my actions. Madame will have the kindness to give me the key of the jewel-case. I thank you. My friend Hastings will have the kindness to say 'Go'."

"Go," I said.

With almost incredible swiftness Poirot wrenched open the drawer of the dressing-table, extracted the jewel-case, fitted the key in the lock, opened the case, selected a piece of jewelry, shut and locked the case, and returned it to the drawer which he pushed down again. His movements were like lightning.

"Well, *mon ami?*" he demanded of me breathlessly.

"Forty-six seconds," I replied.

"You see? There would not have been time for the chambermaid even to take the necklace out—far less, hide it."

"Then that settles it on the maid," said the inspector with satisfaction, and returned to his search. He passed into the maid's bedroom next door.

Poirot was frowning thoughtfully. Suddenly he shot a question at Mr. Opalsen.

"This necklace—it was without doubt insured?"

Mr. Opalsen looked a trifle surprised at the question.

"Yes," he said hesitatingly. "That is so."

"But what does that matter?" broke in Mrs. Opalsen tearfully. "It's my necklace I want. It was unique. No money could be the same."

"I comprehend, madame," said Poirot soothingly. "I comprehend perfectly. To *la femme,* sentiment is everything, is it not so? But Monsieur, who has not the so-fine susceptibility, will doubtless find some slight consolation in the fact. Is that not so?"

"Of course, of course," said Mr. Opalsen, rather uncertainly. "Still—"

HE was interrupted by a shout of triumph from the inspector. He came in, dangling something from his fingers. It was the pearl necklace.

With a cry, Mrs. Opalsen heaved herself up from her chair. She was a changed woman.

"Oh! Oh! My necklace!"

She clasped it to her breast with both hands. We crowded around.

"Where was it?" demanded Opalsen.

"Maid's bed. In among the springs of the wire mattress. She must have stolen it and hidden it there before the chambermaid ever arrived on the scene."

"You permit, madame?" said Poirot gently. He took the necklace from her and examined it closely, then handed it back with a bow.

"I'm afraid, madame, you'll have to hand it over to us for the time being," said the inspector. "We shall want it for the charge. But it shall be returned to you as soon as possible."

Mr. Opalsen frowned.

"Is that necessary?"

"I'm afraid so, sir. Just a formality."

"Oh, let him take it, Ed," cried his wife. "I'd feel safer if he did. I shouldn't sleep a wink thinking someone else might try and get hold of it. That wretched girl! And I would never have believed it of her."

"There, there, my dear, don't take on so."

I felt a gentle pressure on my arm. It was Poirot.

"Shall we slip away, my friend? I think our services are no longer needed."

Once outside, however, he hesitated, and then, to my surprise, remarked:

"I should rather like to see the room next door."

The door was not locked, and we entered. The room, which was a large double one, was unoccupied. Dust lay about rather noticeably, and my sensitive friend gave a characteristic grimace as he ran his finger round a rectangular mark on a table near the window.

"The service leaves much to be desired," he observed dryly.

He was staring thoughtfully out of the window, and seemed to have fallen into a brown study.

"Well?" I demanded impatiently. "What did we come in here for?"

He started.

"*Je vous demande pardon, mon ami.* I wished to see if the door were really bolted on this side also."

"Well," I said glancing at the door which communicated with the room we had just left, "it is bolted."

Poirot nodded. He still seemed to be thinking.

"And anyway," I continued, "what does it matter? The case is over. I wish you'd had more chance of distinguishing yourself. But it was the kind of a case that even a stiff-backed idiot like that inspector couldn't go wrong over."

Poirot shook his head.

"The case is not over, my friend. It will not be over until we find out who stole the pearls."

"But the maid did!"

"Why do you say that?"

"Why," I stammered. "They were found actually in her mattress."

"Ha!" retorted Poirot impatiently. "Those were not the pearls."

"What?"

"Imitation, *mon ami.*"

THE statement took my breath away, but Poirot smiled placidly.

"The good inspector obviously knows nothing of jewels. But presently there will be a fine hullabaloo!"

"Come," I said, dragging at his arm.

"Where?"

"We must tell the Opalsens at once."

"I think not."

"But that poor woman—"

"*Eh bien,* that poor woman, as you call her, will have a much better night believing the jewels to be safe."

"But the thief may escape with them!"

"As usual, my friend, you speak without reflection. How do you know that the pearls Mrs. Opalsen locked up so carefully tonight were not the false ones, and that the real robbery did not take place at a much earlier date?"

"Oh!" I said, bewildered.

"Exactly," said Poirot, beaming. "We start again."

He led the way out of the room, paused a moment as though considering, and then walked down to the end of the corridor, stopping outside the

small den where the chambermaids and valets of the respective floors congregated. Our particular chambermaid appeared to be holding a small court there, and to be relating her late experiences to an appreciative audience. She stopped in the middle of a sentence. Poirot bowed with his usual politeness.

"Excuse that I derange you, but I shall be obliged if you will unlock for me the door of Mr. Opalsen's room."

The woman rose willingly, and we accompanied her down the passage again. Mr. Opalsen's room was on the other side of the corridor, its door facing that of his wife's room. The chambermaid unlocked it with her passkey, and we entered.

As she was about to depart, Poirot detained her.

"One moment—have you ever seen among the effects of Mr. Opalsen a card like this?"

He held out a plain white card, rather highly glazed and uncommon in appearance. The maid took it and scrutinized it carefully.

"No sir, I can't say I have. But anyway, the valet has most to do with the gentlemen's rooms."

"I see. Thank you."

Poirot took back the card. The woman departed. Poirot appeared to reflect a little. Then he gave a short, sharp nod.

"Ring the bell, I pray of you, Hastings—three times, for the valet."

Devoured with curiosity, I obeyed. Meanwhile Poirot had emptied the contents of the wastepaper basket on the floor, and was swiftly going through them.

In a few moments the valet answered the bell. To him Poirot put the same question, and handed him the card to examine. But the response was the same. The valet had never seen a card of that particular quality among Mr. Opalsen's belongings. Poirot thanked him, and he withdrew, somewhat unwillingly, with an inquisitive glance at the overturned wastebasket and the litter on the floor. He could hardly have helped overhearing Poirot's thoughtful remark as he bundled the torn papers back again: "And the necklace was heavily insured—"

"Poirot," I cried. "I see!"

"You see nothing, my friend," he replied quickly. "As usual, nothing at all! It is incredible—but there it is. Let us return to our own apartment."

We did so in silence. Once there, to my intense surprise, Poirot effected a rapid change of clothing.

"I go to London tonight," he explained. "It is imperative."

"What?"

"Absolutely! The real work, that of the brain—ah, those brave little gray cells!—it is done. I go to seek the confirmation. I shall find it! Impossible to deceive Hercule Poirot!"

"You'll come a cropper one of these days," I observed, rather disgusted by his vanity.

"Do not be enraged, I beg of you, *mon ami*. I count on you to do me a service—of your friendship."

"Of course," I said eagerly, rather ashamed of my moroseness. "What is it?"

"The sleeve of my coat that I have taken off—will you brush it? See you—a little white powder has clung to it. You without doubt observed me run my finger around the drawer of the dressing-table?"

"No, I didn't."

"You should observe my actions, my friend. Thus I obtained the powder on my finger, and being a little overexcited, I rubbed it on my sleeve—an action without method which I deplore—false to all my principles!"

"But what was the powder?" I asked, not particularly interested in Poirot's principles.

"Not the poison of the Borgias," replied Poirot with a twinkle. "I see your imagination mounting. I should say it was French chalk."

"French chalk?"

"Yes; cabinetmakers use it to make drawers run smoothly."

I laughed.

"You old sinner, I thought you were working up to something exciting."

"*Au revoir*, my friend. I save myself! I fly!"

The door shut behind him. With a smile half of derision, half of affection, I picked up the coat, and stretched out my hand for the clothes-brush.*

The next morning, hearing nothing from Poirot, I went out for a stroll, met some old friends, and lunched with them at their hotel. In the afternoon we went for a spin. A punctured tire delayed us, and it was past eight when I got back to the Grand Metropolitan.

The first sight that met my eyes was Poirot looking even more diminutive than usual, sandwiched between the Opalsens, who were beaming in a state of placid satisfaction.

"*Mon ami* Hastings!" he cried, and sprang to meet me. "Embrace me, my very good friend—all has marched to a marvel!"

Luckily the embrace was merely figurative—not a thing one is always sure of with Poirot.

"Just wonderful, I call it," said Mrs. Opalsen, smiling all over her fat face. "Didn't I tell you, Ed, that if he couldn't get back my pearls, nobody would?"

"You did, my dear, you did And you were right."

I looked helplessly at Poirot, and he answered the glance.

"My friend Hastings is, as you say in England, all at the seaside. Seat yourself, and I will recount to you all the affair that has so happily ended."

"Ended?"

"But yes. They have been arrested—"

"Who are arrested?"

"The chambermaid and the valet, *parbleu!* You did not suspect? Not with my parting hint about the French chalk?"

"You said cabinetmakers used it!"

"Certainly they do—to make drawers slide easily. Somebody wanted that drawer to slide in and out without any noise. Who could that be? Obviously only the chambermaid. The plan was so ingenious that it did not at once leap to the eye—not even to the eye of Hercule Poirot! Listen, this was how it was done!

"The valet was in the empty room next door, waiting. The French maid leaves the room. Quick as a flash, the chambermaid whips open the drawer, takes out the jewel-case, and slipping back the bolt, passes it through the door. The valet opens it at his leisure with the duplicate key with which he had provided himself, extracts the necklace, and awaits his time. Celestine leaves the room again, and *pst!* in a flash the case is passed back again and replaced in the drawer. Madame arrives; the theft is discovered. The chambermaid demands to be searched, with a good deal of righteous indignation, and leaves the room without a stain on her character. The imitation necklace with which they have provided themselves has been concealed in the French girl's bed that morning by the chambermaid—a master-stroke, eh?"

"BUT what did you go to London for?"

"You remember the card?"

"Certainly. It puzzled me—and it puzzles me still. I thought—" I hesitated, glancing at Mr. Opalsen.

"*Une blague!* For the benefit of the valet! The card was one with a specially prepared surface—for fingerprints. I went straight to Scotland Yard, asked for our old friend Inspector Japp, and laid the facts before him. As I had suspected, the fingerprints proved to be those of two well-known jewel-thieves who have been wanted for some time. Japp came down with me; the thieves were arrested; and the necklace was discovered in the valet's possession. A clever pair, but they failed in method! Have I not told you, Hastings, at least thirty times, that without method—"

"At least thirty thousand times," I interrupted. "But where did their method break down?"

*It is suggested that the reader pause in his perusal of the story at this point, make his own solution of the mystery—and then see how close he comes to that of the author.—*The Editors.*

"*Mon ami*, it is a good plan to take a place as chambermaid or valet—but you must not shirk your work. They left an empty room undusted, and therefore when the man put down the jewel-case on the little table near the communicating door, it left a square mark—"

"I remember," I cried.

Hercule Poirot nodded.

"Before, I was undecided. Then—I knew!"

There was a moment's silence.

"And I've got my pearls," said Mrs. Opalsen as a sort of Greek chorus.

"Well," I said, "I'd better have some dinner."

Poirot accompanied me home.

"This ought to mean kudos for you," I observed.

"*Pas du tout*," replied Poirot tranquilly. "Japp and the local inspector will divide the credit between them. But"—he tapped his pocket—"I have a check here, from Mr. Opalsen; shall we return here next week-end, my friend—at my expense this time?"

A NEW TYPE OF CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Edited by
ALBERT H. MOREHEAD

When this development of the crossword puzzle was introduced in England a few years ago, it won immediate popularity and has now displaced the older variety. We are confident that after the puzzle fans among our readers get the hang of it, they too will be enthusiastic.

In this type of puzzle the difficulty is not in the words but in the definitions. There are four main types used:

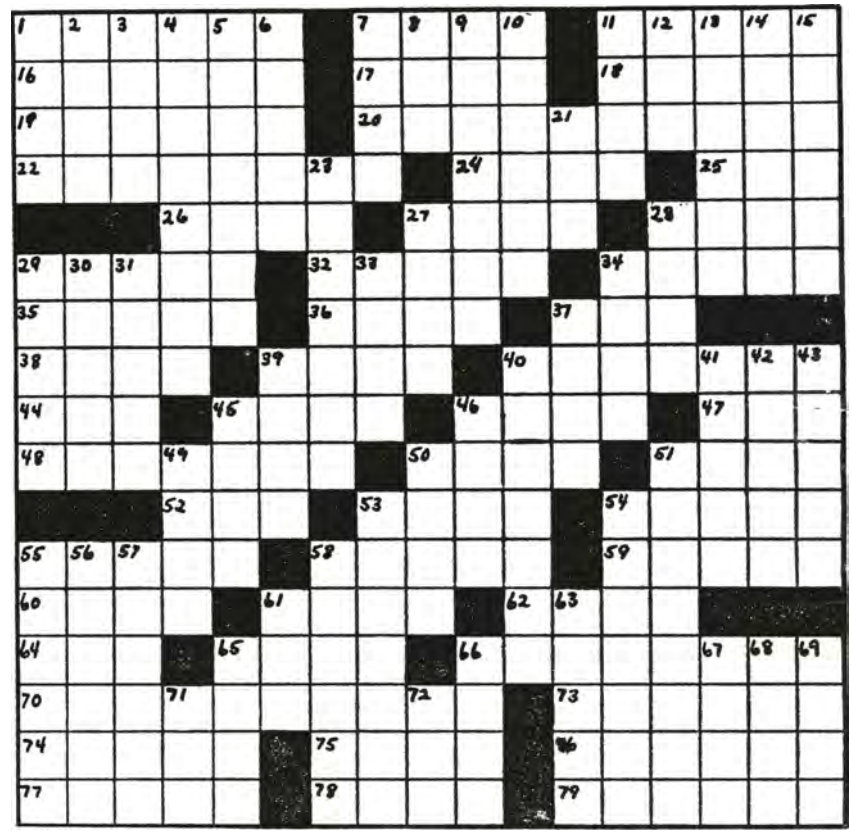
1. THE ANAGRAM. For example: "Forgive from merit." The word is *remit*, which means *forgive* and is an anagram of "merit."

2. THE ENIGMA, employing puns on the syllables in the word. For example: "The head, I see, is the subject." The word is *topic*, which means *subject* and is made up of *top* (head), *i* and *c* (see).

3. THE HIDDEN WORD. "The duke must go away *or* keep hidden." The word is *york*. "Duke" is a clue; and "hidden" is a clue to the type of definition.

4. And, for variety—and to keep you guessing—some straightforward dictionary definitions are used.

It will be observed that two, three or even four clues are present in each definition; *usually including a synonym of the word*. The solver's problem is to discover which part of the definition relates to the actual word, and which part is added as a play on the word.

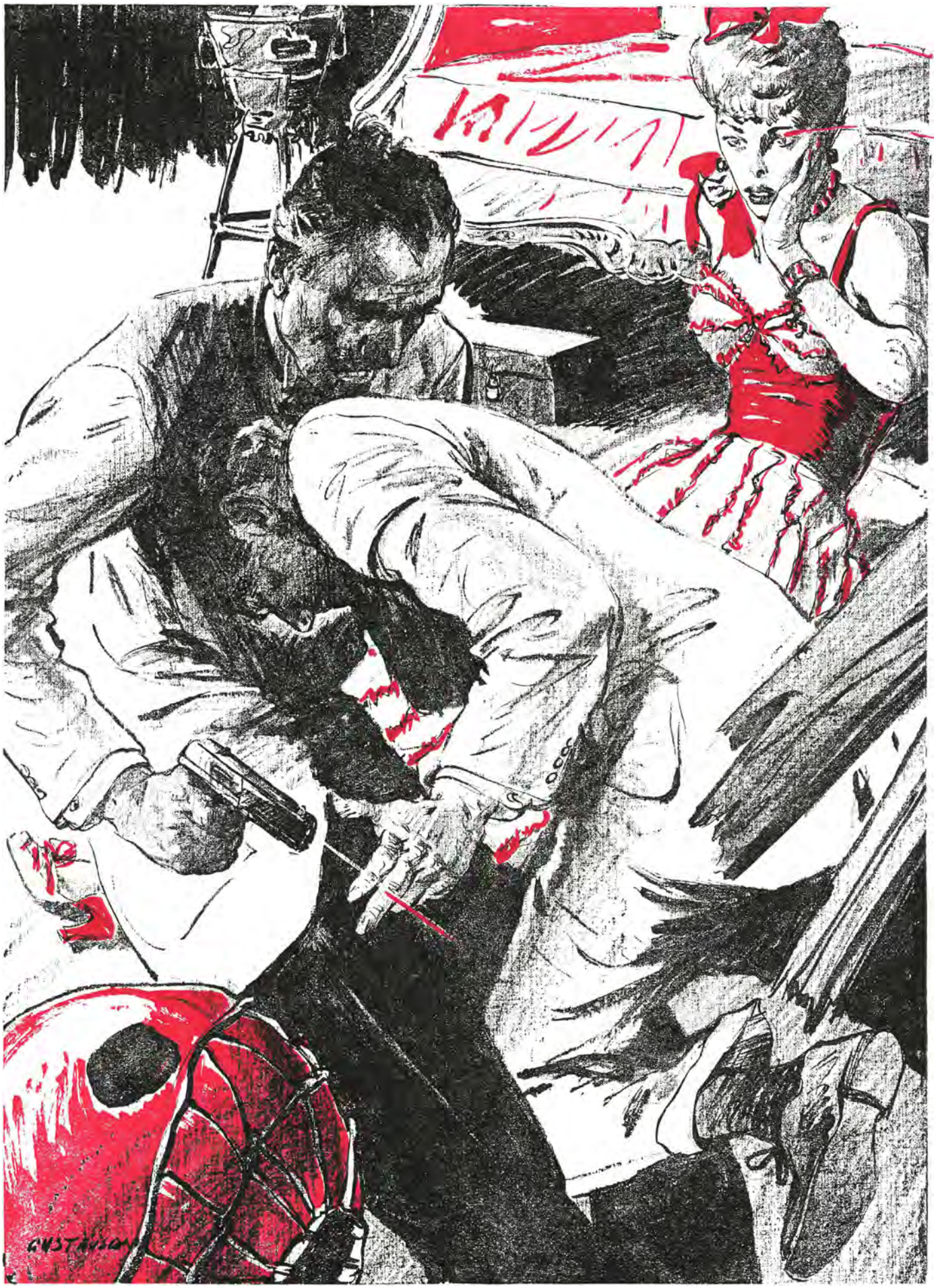


ACROSS

1 Wash. St. shows traces of scythes
7 Baobab enshrouds the young
11 Mixtures for livestock
16 Some horrors, all war, cause torment
17 Ain't closed? Nope
18 The Lee is around where you wait for it
19 Fly in a plane
20 Rats eat, run from dining-room
22 Think of time, date
24 Mosaic material
25 Mark in spots
26 President, Prado; O.K., by you
27 Began to be awful, came down to earth
28 A lot to be empty with ease
29 Reduce an em to en, justify a donkey, and collect
32 Sharp point ends in anger
34 Confused prose is always a problem
35 Composer of Carmen
36 French without, article within
37 Hoot
38 The burden is upon ourselves
39 Move quickly from the lift
40 Not flowin'—raisin'
44 Backward perch, forward beetle
45 Disguises led us to the runners
46 501 are finished
47 Take an oath
48 Built from the T. decree
50 Tie together
51 This with gold (but French) in the center
52 War, though backward, is still unfinished
53 Try is in the middle of the pith
54 Aspect sounds like fellows
55 Let us pray for light rain
58 Pair could be made bitter
59 Raider can become correct
60 Neat, being in a girdle backwards
61 Love, if reversed, is angry
62 Fare for 20 Across
64 A tear on a gravestone
65 Petition in apeal
66 Jealousy, run for a wrapper
70 Naps, dreams & &
73 Renoir impression in the laundry
74 Gunfire emanating from ovals
75 66 Down, now visible
76 This rascal becomes an Indian sailor
77 Death's brother (*Daniel, Shelley, Tennyson*, etc)
78 Made only by God
79 Showers ice, almost in sheets

DOWN

1 Transposed hams are a fake
2 Greeting by hand, with hail included
3 Lifeless when hidden in a riddle
4 Walks to get pastries
5 Urgent trial is most fiery
6 Promise that wears well
7 Trying guest in disarranged robe
8 Follow a monkey
9 Rouses to action
10 I enter, unbroken
11 Chimney compartment
12 Take V for victory — and for always
13 Eva desires, so conceals, the escapes
14 Mark next after the C tone
15 A pointer from a tester
21 Nothing less than a female voice produces high pitch
23 They struggled, 61 Down with dust
27 Power, hid in this
28 Wide, wet or Moslem
29 Dwelling of mixed brick
30 The puttan spent, it's still unimportant
31 Sky-blue
33 With help at the end he got rewarded
34 Be absorbed in rope
37 Disbanded band
39 Soared, but not with ease
40 Scorn
41 A blank to shun
42 Nordic, yet a senor is mixed up in it
43 We ten to divide poetically
45 Stop, check and remain
46 Round and flat and is in the District of Columbia
49 Strange cargo, lacking naught but sharp rock
50 A parting twice oblique
51 Come, you lose — in heaps
53 Nor rage, or anger, but audibly sad
54 Seek near leg for star bearer
55 Silk refuse
56 Neat, Al; and original, too
57 Stir, though there is peril in it
58 Struggle manfully
61 Rapid transit lines start otherwise
63 Found in all lives, despite veils
65 Wholly in support
66 Seen in bondage
67 Formerly found in a cone
68 Moss over 28 Down
69 Mistakes a Gaelic sound
71 Palindrome of eventide
72 Where Mary called the cattle home



Bagot was staggering forward, off balance with the give of the broken door. The bullet brushed him and missed as he collided headfirst with Fréjus.

MADAGASCAR HAZARD

Japanese, Free French, Vichy French, natives—and an American ship-captain who took a hand in the game before the British came. . . . A complete novel—

by Gordon Keyne

Who wrote "The Princess and the Prophet."

CLOSE to the red mooring-buoy of the Messageries Maritimes, so little used these sad days, lay a small vessel flying the American flag. Casual speech referred to her as a schooner or lugger; she was in point of fact a brigantine, that hybrid rig which because of its speed and ease of handling, is one of the last remnants of the days of sail.

She was not pretty; harbor craft were clustered around her, and she was taking on supplies and water. She was unkempt, rather dirty, and what was visible of her canvas showed brown and patched. A seamanly eye, however, might have noted the careful precision of her lines and rigging, as though she were a trim lass playing a slovenly role.

From her position off the Port Nievre jetty and five miles within the entrance of this enormous bay, which was one of the finest harbors in the whole world, little of the vast geographical unit grouped under the general title of Diégo-Suarez was visible. Here was Port Nievre, officially retaining its native name of Antsirana; the city running over the shore hills and marshes, the government buildings on higher ground, and the astonishing naval base, dry dock and military establishments pushing to the westward.

Overhead, Mount Amber towered into the sky, a mighty bulwark at this northeast tip of Madagascar, fronting the whole Indian Ocean in massive challenge; mountains formed the western and southern horizon—ominous reddish mountains, reddish uplands, reddish stone and earth that reflected the heat a thousandfold.

A boat left the brigantine and headed for the jetty, a single man in whites sitting in the stern. Two planes from the air base were circling high overhead; he eyed them with sardonic contempt. Like the harbor defenses, they were old and outmoded. March had gone, April was going, but the southwest monsoon was holding off; it was slow to break this year, and the heat was terrible.

Compared with other parts of Madagascar, however, the heat in Diégo-Suarez was fine and healthy. It was not heat that caused the curious feeling of paralysis conveyed by the city and the dockyards and naval base. It was not even the war, this havoc war which had left every outpost of the French empire in stricken futility, except where the Cross of Lorraine blew for Free France. It was something darker, more sinister; something in the faces and souls of men. The hopeless eyes of the damned, one might have said. Here in Madagascar was Vichy France; it was the Tricolor which flew above the Residency on the hill.

The man stepped ashore at the jetty. He was slim, with very brown features, neatly carved but undistinguished. A glimpse of his eyes brought a sense of shock; these were a clear, luminous gray. The contrast with dark hair and sun-darkened face was extreme. He had the careful gait of a seaman, but it held the resilient spring of youth. A man of thirty or less, to judge at a venture.

He had to pass through the customs shed, where the guards gave him a pleasant word and passed on. He nodded to a *douanier* and asked a question in poorly accented French.

"I want to find a café named Soa Vorona; can you help me?"

"But yes, M. Bagot! The Quiet Bird—it is well known. It is in the upper town, just past the bank. Anyone there can point it out."

Bagot thanked him and went on. Boats were coming in from a corvette and also from the *courrier,* the little coastal mail-steamer. An old submarine lying in the military harbor was sending a boat ashore. The jetty was taking on life. As he passed a group of officers, Bagot caught a snatch of talk; they were speaking about him.

"An American, yes. His vessel is just from the Indies, from Java; he brought a cargo of rubber and other things here. Ha! He could talk of the war, this American, if he would!"

BAGOT walked on. An American! True, he thought bitterly. An American who should be at work back there in Australia, so vibrantly working and fighting these days, instead of reaping his fat profits here in Madagascar. He was not too proud of himself. And yet, how wonderful it had seemed, to seize his chance at fortune!

Junior officer of a ship torpedoed by the Germans, stranded in Java by the war, the great chance had come overnight. He had seized it, buying this brigantine and a rich cargo for a song; he already had his master's ticket, Grenille made a splendid mate, the lascar crew were a fine lot. All had come out well; and yet, despite the money in his pocket, John Bagot somehow felt no great joy of it. He had pulled off a great coup, and he found the taste strangely flat.

Quick interest filled him as he paced the streets. This lower town was partially native, with bamboo huts and thatched roofs; it merged into a widespread modern city, but one held in the clutch of a paralyzing hand. Soldiers brown and white, gay officers, Hindus and Chinese and French abounded: natives were rare, here at Diégo-Suarez, although under the administrative changes of 1930 it had become to all intents the northern capital.

Bagot halted at a street-corner, seeing Grenille approaching. Grenille was his mate, but no one would suspect Grenille of being French, or rather Creole, since he had been born here in Madagascar. While in Australian waters he spelled and called his name Grennil, and his tongue wagged fluent English. He was a dark, smiling,

mustached man and a rascal; but he was a charming rascal. Efficient men are usually charming, when they care to be.

"Ha, Cap'n!" said Grenille cheerfully. "Did the water barge get aboard?"

Bagot nodded. "All shipshape. What's the meaning of this blasted note you sent me, to meet someone at this restaurant?"

Grenille's gaze slid up and down the street. He laughed. "I made a contact from the old days, Cap'n. A Major Dessarts, now in Government service. He'll speak with you in the café. Somehow he got the idea that since you're an American, you'd be willing to help some chaps out of a bad hole. I told him you were no philanthropist, but all he could see was the American flag. He's Free French, by the way."

Bagot eyed his mate coldly.

"If you get me into trouble with the authorities, by God I'll keelhaul you! And I mean that!"

Grenille shrugged. "No need to take such trouble. Merely hand me over to the police; they have an old murder charge against me. Now I'm forgotten, but if you remind them—"

"Stow your fool jaw!" broke in Bagot. "Now be sensible. What's it all about?"

"Money—hard cash. Dessarts will explain. I've fallen into an amazing situation, and it interests me. By the way, if you prefer oil for the Diesel to French francs, you can have it. But watch out for a man in a striped linen suit; there—he's looking into the window of that *papetérie* yonder. Dangerous. See you later!"

With a jaunty nod Grenille stepped away; he seemed in a great hurry.

Intimately as he knew Grenille, John Bagot was dumfounded. Oil for the engine! That meant a lot. It was impossible to buy any here; fuel oil was held strictly for naval use. Bagot did want desperately to fill his tanks. That auxiliary engine had got them out of the bloody ruck back in the Eastern seas and had brought them here through calms where the sails were useless; but now the tanks were nearly empty.

Bagot went his way, alert, senses prickling; he noted that the Frenchman in the linen suit kept pace with him. A spy, no doubt. Well, he knew that things were on a hot griddle here in Madagascar. The natives and civilians were for Free France; the administration, headed by a French politician, was savagely for Vichy and Laval, and enforced its preference with iron hand. And it was no secret about the Japanese mission now here, or what the Japs wanted.

NO philanthropist, eh? Grenille gave him a shrewd thrust there, Bagot reflected. He had brought his ship through and sold his cargo, at fat profit. It had been touch and go—running the gantlet of the Jap fleet south of Java, only to find himself cut off from Australia; then to bear up for Bombay, to find himself cut off; then for Ceylon, and more Japs ahead of him. Then, in desperation, he had taken the whole Indian Ocean in his stride and had pulled through, while fleets and armies perished behind him.

A job well done, but he was a bit raw-edged about it. He was hard, efficient, pricking a resolute course amid a shipwrecked world; and he was not too proud of it. He should have made for Australia, he thought; he might have got through. Then he could have enlisted with MacArthur's men. He was half in the notion of selling the *Zaidee* here; only half, however. He could not get back to Australia now.

"Missed the bus, damn it!" he growled. "Hello, here's the place—"

He turned into the restaurant of the Quiet Bird, to translate its Malagasy name. As he passed the tables of the *apéritif*-drinkers, he was aware of three men at the corner table beside a glass wind-screen. One was a French naval officer; the others were chubby, brown-faced men, dimpled and laughing. They were Japanese in mufti. Bagot saw them without looking at them directly, as he saw everything, and stepped inside the café. His gray eyes had chilled and hardened like agate. He knew one of those men, not personally but by sight; it was Shigemitsu, the ace of Japanese political agents.

THE place was half-filled with clients. Pushing his cap back from his sweat-moist hair, Bagot settled down on the leather-upholstered seat that ran along the wall. The waiter hovered at his table; Bagot, who was hungry, ordered luncheon and a bottle of wine. He saw no sign of anyone who might be Dessarts; no one showed the least interest in him.

Others drifted into the café, and the tables began to fill. And here, to Bagot's surprise, came the Frenchman in the striped linen suit. He removed his sun-helmet and glanced around: a tall man with spare, hard-chiseled face, vibrant dark eyes. He stepped over to Bagot's table, bowed, and indicated the chair opposite Bagot.

"With your permission, monsieur?"

"Certainly."

The other smiled, sat down, and replaced his topee.

"Monsieur is an American? He was pointed out; Americans are rare in our country. I am Emile Fréjus, a civil servant of the administration."

Bagot, amused by this approach direct, gave his name; they shook hands. Fréjus ordered an *apéritif* and talked. Bagot talked too, without reserve. The war? Oh, the war was far away; he had left it behind in Australia. Yes, a trader of sorts. He was going on with his brigantine to Mozambique and Capetown. His meal arrived, and he went on talking while he ate.

To meet such a man as M. Fréjus was indeed a pleasure. They clinked glasses, drank a toast, and spoke with mutual respect of Laval and the noble men of Vichy. It was obvious that Captain Bagot had no use for any Free French; he said so flatly. Fréjus finished his drink, glanced at his watch, paid his score, shook hands again with many polite expressions, and departed as though satisfied.

Immediately on the right of Bagot was a man who had exchanged casual greetings with Fréjus; a man in tailored whites, with large black mustaches and deeply melancholy eyes. Now, while gazing placidly across the room, this man spoke from the corner of his mouth.

"Monsieur, my name is Dessarts. I spoke with your M. Grenille. Would it interest you to make money, much money, by means of your ship?"

"No," said Bagot, also gazing vacantly at nothing, and filling his pipe.

"Is there anything that would interest you?" came the question.

"Yes," said Bagot. "My tanks full of Diesel oil."

"You shall have it this evening, after dark," was the amazing reply.

"Go ahead and talk. What do you want?"

Dessarts lit a vile French cigarette before replying. Amid the clatter and noisy tongues of the place, their sidelong words went unnoted.

"A Japanese mission is here; they are hoping to take over the entire island. They have finished their work here and are leaving for the capital and the west coast. This land will become another Indo-China, you comprehend?"

"I've heard rumors of it," Bagot muttered around his pipestem.

"It is tragic! The natives are in panic. The Free French party is furious but helpless as yet to act; Free French officers are being moved out of all places of trust. Hatred is at work. The red hills are going to be still more red. Vichy will abandon us!"

"Vichy has denied such intentions."

"The men of Vichy—pah!" Dessarts lacked any place to spit, but his expression showed his feelings. "There are

plenty of honest men left. Well, to business! Can you leave here in the morning?"

"Yes; if my oil comes aboard."

"Count upon it. Our organization can do this, at least."

"Very well. Be explicit. What do you want me to do?"

"First, go down the west coast; get clearance for Nosi Bé and Majunga—now called Mojanga."

"Simple enough; then what?"

"At Nosi Bé, let Grenille run your vessel across the channel to Mozambique; you will go on to Mojanga. Grenille will come back and meet you there. One of our men must be taken to safety from Nosi Bé, you comprehend. The main task lies on beyond, at Mojanga."

"Wait," said Bagot. "Let your friend go by some other means. By a native dhow."

"Impossible! They are watched. Every dhow is watched and known, every boat of any size; this has become a land of spies and treachery! The iron hand of the administration is everywhere. Your vessel, with its American flag, can do what none other can do. And ships of any kind, remember, are rare nowadays."

"All right. Finish what you want me to do."

"Arrange with us at Mojanga, where I am stationed; make one trip, one only, across to the mainland. That is all. I have not mentioned many little details which will be looked after by us. Payment will be made at Mojanga—one hundred thousand francs, and expenses, including the fuel oil here."

"Francs? Neither French francs nor Madagascar francs interest me."

"This payment will be made in gold."

Bagot puffed at his pipe, startled. Something more, then, than a mere affair of helping some fugitives reach safety! Payment in gold, eh? And this matter of getting the fuel oil put aboard bespoke influence, also. It was excellent pay, high pay; the risks, then, would also be high. Well, he had implicit confidence in Grenille.

"Such a deal can't be settled here, in this fashion—"

"It must," said Dessarts. "Danger is all around us; it's now or never! Trust us. We trust you. Grenille will come aboard tonight; he can tell you everything. I leave this evening for Nosi Bé and will meet you there."

"How do you go?"

"There is only one way from here—by boat. The corvette is leaving. The steamer from Indo-China is leaving."

"Oh!" said Bagot thoughtfully. "Are the Japs also leaving?"

"Yes. Some go to the capital, others to Mojanga. Well, your answer?"

"I agree," said Bagot. "Tell Grenille. The answer is yes."

The Frenchman nodded, rose, put money on the table and walked out of the place without another look or word.

BAGOT remained, unhurried; his air of composure was unaffected; it was part of him. Inwardly he had begun to thrill to what was going on here, beneath the surface. This great naval base of Diégo-Suarez was no more Madagascar than New York is America: but once established here, the Axis forces could strike a vital blow at the British empire. And in control of the whole vast island, they would intensify that blow beyond computation.

He could understand the frightful horror of the native population at thought of being handed over to the Jap barbarians, the frantic writhings of the whites, with Free French and Vichy French at each other's throats in merciless struggle. The pro-Vichy administration was in complete power, and was fighting for life against the unorganized officers and men of the opposite party.

So the Japanese mission was dividing, was going to the capital and down the west coast to Mojanga! This harbor on the west coast was the commercial center of the island, the vital ganglion of its trade with India and Africa and Europe; with Diégo-Suarez and Mojanga turned over to the Japanese at the first raid, the bulk of the colony would be a helpless victim. And the Japs were coming; their advance mission was already here.

Bagot shrugged, rose, paid his score and strolled out to the inferno of the streets. It was not his affair; he was quite helpless. He could only take a few risks and profit by what was going on. The die was cast—no use worrying. Grenille was amazingly competent, and evidently knew his way around.

A CALM, unruffled attitude was typical of Bagot. It was not assumed. Now, as ever, it lent him an air of serene strength which was of the greatest value. His interview with the harbor authorities went off without a hitch. He was given pratique and cleared for the west ports and Mozambique without question.

The harbor-master dropped information, too. The French steamer moored in the military harbor was leaving this evening; she was not a warship. She had come from Indo-China, and the Japanese mission had come aboard her. A corvette had convoyed her, but the corvette was now going elsewhere. There was as yet no news of the cruisers and transports *en route* from Dakar, alas! But they would come soon.

Bagot's air was aloof, detached, faintly interested but uncurious. Yet, as he made his way down to the jetty, which was alive with bustling business, he felt unwonted stirrings in him. The sight of that man Shigemitsu had somehow lifted his hackles. He knew what Shigemitsu had accomplished in Singapore and Java.

A tall, erect figure in striped linen came up to him.

"Ha, good captain!" Fréjus exclaimed cordially. "When do you sail?"

"Tomorrow, if nothing detains me," said Bagot. "I may pause to look at your west coast ports before going on. Perhaps Mojanga."

"Excellent; then we may meet again!" said the other, dark eyes studying Bagot's face. "I'm off for Mojanga on the corvette; special duty. Thank God, it'll be cooler at sea; the monsoon will break any moment now."

They separated with a handshake.

A little later Bagot was standing on the landing below, waiting for his boat. Three people went past, on the jetty floor above; a woman under a lacy parasol, an officer, a tall shape in striped linen. The officer was Dessarts; and by his protective attitude, the woman was his wife, talking and laughing with Fréjus.

For one moment Bagot, looking up, met the eyes of the woman looking down. Only for a moment; yet something passed between them. He felt electrified. He could not have described the woman or anything about her; he simply had the impression of something so vital, so indescribably vital, that it left him shocked and startled.

Then it was past, the moment gone.

With evening, Grenille came aboard, and Bagot was instantly conscious of a tremendous change in him. The man was steadier; he had a new light in his eye; he was more silent than usual. The brown lascars and even their serang regarded Grenille with curiosity; for when he did speak, the mate was joyous, eager, uplifted—not sardonic as he usually was.

Another man would have plunged into eager discussion, but Bagot did not. He could wait. He had absolute confidence in Grenille. Besides, there was a lightness in the air this evening, a change in its direction; the monsoon had broken at last, and now the steady southeast winds out of the Antarctic would cool the heated islands. Nothing more important could happen, just now; the long strain of the rainy season was ended.

"There's one outstanding thing in your mind," said Bagot. He and Grenille stood watching the steamer and the corvette pulling out of harbor, with a display of searchlight fingers. "Just what is it?" Bagot pursued. "Is it the monsoon?"

Grenille laughed softly. "No. But you're right enough. At sunset tomorrow we must be off a spot on the chart named Flat Rock. A native fishing-boat will be there, to put a man aboard us, perhaps more than one man. But if the one man comes, it will be a matter to write home about, I can tell you!"

"So you've let us in for something, eh? Now I'll have to study the charts."

"Yes. I used to know the west coast waters, but that was long ago. I'll not rest easy until that man's aboard; thanks to us, he'll reach Africa."

Bagot grunted. A fugitive, he thought; perhaps one of the Free French chaps escaping to Africa.

"You're not sure he'll meet us?"

"No. He must go overland from here, across the isthmus; and first he must get out of jail. But if he meets us —ah!" Grenille caught his breath sharply.

"What's so impressive about it?"

"If fugitives can find a road one way, perhaps an army column can find the same road the other way," said Grenille cryptically. "Perhaps, perhaps! Nothing's certain."

A bit too worked up, reflected Bagot, puffing at his pipe. Emotionally excited; a true Frenchman despite his veneer. Well, there was time enough ahead to discuss plans. The main thing now was to get away, in case that fuel oil did come aboard.

"Your friend Dessarts," Bagot observed, "seems quite the right sort."

Grenille laughed thinly. "He is nothing. A spark in the wind; a good man marked for death. A dreamer, a poet—bah! His wife is the driving force; a dynamo, that Sylvie Dessarts, a whirlwind, a human miracle! Wait till you meet her."

Bagot smiled in the darkness. So! He had already met her.

"Ah, I have learned so much, I have absorbed so many things this day!" said Grenille softly. "It stifles me. I have made up for the lost years— Well, hard to explain. I'll have to sort things out in my own heart before I can talk about it."

"You've changed," said Bagot.

"Right. I've changed—it's the change of an entire life," assented the other. "I've given myself to something, my friend."

"To what, then?"

"What I did not know existed: A cause!"

Grenille turned and disappeared below. After a little Bagot followed, thoughtfully. He had no end of labor ahead this night, with charts and pilot guide; he had to be prepared for anything, if he were to keep the *Zaidee* from those coral fangs and from the maw of those savage red mountains.

But the word Grenille had used stuck curiously in the back of his mind. A cause!

That night, as promised, the oil came aboard. Stealthily, silently, a thing done in defiance of all authority; so impossible, indeed, that it could only have been done by the connivance of many. But it came, and the tanks were filled; and with the morning tide, the brigantine slipped out of the great fourfold harbor known as Diégo-Suarez.

Chapter Two

FOR most of the long course around Cape Amber, Bagot remained in somber meditation. The incredible triple peak of Mount Amber hung in the sky, enwrapped by drifting clouds. The naked hills, grass-covered yet reddish in hue, were of volcanic origin, the seacoast was all coral.

Bagot alternated at the helm with Grenille. One must hug the shoreline closely, to avoid being caught in the terrific offshore currents; but once around the cape, the wind died out, except for squalls that whirled down without warning. It was nasty going. . . .

This change in Grenille; what did it mean? The Frenchman was hard, realistic, not given to romantic fancies. What was this change in his whole life? If true, it must be something remarkable; Bagot was slow to accept it at face value.

Under the Diesel alone, which gave her surprising speed, the brigantine held on for Voailava Point, the western tip of this northern peninsula of Madagascar, and made it in good time. At the extremity of the low sandy point, and a mile beyond it, lay the rocky islet marked on the chart as Flat Rock. Upon rounding this, Bagot cut off the power, loosed a bit of canvas, and began to thread his way amid the dull yellow coral reefs which filled this great recession of the shore and extended ten miles out to sea. He had to kill time until sunset.

The enormous naked strength of the world here was impressive: Ashore towered the dim masses of Mount Amber, their savage redness intensified by the sinking sun, red hills and cliffs continuing the shoreline to the southward. All this vast projection of the island was uninhabited, here on the west coast.

To the southward lay Nosi Bé, that collection of volcanic crater-peaks close to the mainland peaks, the oldest French settlement in this part of the sea. The Japanese spearheads would come in there, and at Diégo-Suarez, and at Mojanga—Bagot could see the seizure taking place here, as in the Dutch islands, as in Sumatra. With those three spots gripped by the tentacles, Madagascar would lie helpless to the barbaric absorption.

There was no hope of defense, even were defense considered: the old 75- and 90-mm. guns at Diégo-Suarez dated from the first World War. The natives were not warlike. For generations these Malagasy had been a peaceful folk. In ancient times a migration of Polynesians had come by canoe from the Pacific islands, occupying all this territory; these were a merry, pastoral people, raising great herds of cattle; and surprisingly, they were a Christian people. Long before France seized the island, English missionaries had been at work here, with remarkable success; now the towns and villages were grouped around churches whose steeples starred the southern landscapes.

Few harbors, vicious reefs and currents, unhealthy mangrove swamps, bordered the shores. The vast inland regions were high, healthy and delightful. French expansion had brought modern cities into being from north to south, developing mines and minerals, building up an astonishing commerce in little things, instituting great packing-houses and refrigeration-plants which were creating a mighty industry.

Even along the west coast, where the African influence and that of the old Arab settlements had left its mark, and where traders from Muscat and India had been established for centuries, there was a bustling modernity expressed in great harbor works and mills and factories. Yes, here was a rich prize for Nippon, even apart from the smashing strategic position of the island!

The afternoon wore on, and nothing happened. Bagot kept the serang or one of his men aloft all the time, watching for coral; this flittering among sharp-fanged reefs was nothing new to the *Zaidee*. These brown Malays, whose ancestors had been seamen for generations uncounted, were expert at coral work, which is akin to nothing else in the seafaring line.

Here and there among the reefs were visible native fishing-boats. As sunset approached and Bagot headed up for Flat Rock, one of these craft was also making for the end of the promontory. The breeze had fallen; here to the westward of Amber, as so often happens, was a dead calm, although off to seaward the southeast monsoon was kicking up the usual white horses.

The beat of the Diesel quickened. Bagot ran down to meet the native craft, which was laboring along under

sweeps. Fenders were put out; the two craft came alongside, and Bagot gazed curiously at the brown men aboard the fishing craft—Sakalavas, fierce negroid folk of this west coast. A man in soiled, tattered wreckage of whites came over the rail, gripping the hand of Grenille; he was a small man, clean-shaven. He exchanged a few words with Grenille who brought him to Bagot.

Already the two craft had sheered off, and the brigantine was standing southward.

"Cap'n, this is Colonel Payole," said Grenille. His bright eyes went to Payole. "All is well?"

"No," said Payole in a dead voice. A terrible fatigue lay in his face. "My son and Captain Raousset were caught; they were shot. Ah, that Fréjus! He is a devil. I am sick with the waves; let them catch me; it does not matter."

"Come below with me," said Grenille, and led him away.

BAGOT headed west, out into the Mozambique Channel, clear of the coral reefs. After a little, Grenille came back on deck. The sun was at the horizon, and clouds were massing. He glanced at the binnacle, nodded, and turned to Bagot.

"Half speed, eh? It is a short run to Nosi Bé from here."

"All harbors are closed at night in war-time," said Bagot. "No use getting there till morning. . . . Well, your man is aboard. Now we can talk. Supper is ready."

"Right, Cap'n. Payole is seasick; I put him in the cabin next mine."

Bagot nodded and called one of the men. He gave him the course and stationed him at the wheel; the brigantine would head west until midnight, then turn south and east again to reach Nosi Bé in the course of the morning. A few orders to the serang, who commanded the ten Malay seamen, and Bagot went down to the mess-cabin with Grenille. The cook was a Chinese named Toy. He served their meal silently, deftly.

"Now," said Bagot quietly. "Let's have the program."

"First, about Colonel Payole," said Grenille, his lean face ablaze with energy. "He is an important man. The troops are devoted to him. You heard him say his son and another officer were killed. Well, he must be landed safely at Mozambique; he must reach English territory. He is the head of the entire organization for Free France."

"Then there is an organization."

"Of which I'm now an active member." Grenille paused, then broke out vociferously: "I used to know many of these men, you see; I was an officer then, was accused of murder, and fled. Now I have returned. Loyalty cannot be brushed aside, my friend; these are my people. Sooner or later a man must come to the point of following his inmost convictions. I am helping the men here who are Free French. You know the news we learned at Diégo-Suarez—that the traitor Laval heads the government and the ruins of France are lined up with the Nazis, that Vichy cruisers and transports are on the way here, that Madagascar is given to the Japs!"

For Grenille, it was a long speech.

"I understand," said Bagot. "How much of an organization is there?"

"It is not powerful but goes far, Cap'n. All over the island, a purge is going on; our men are being weeded out, imprisoned, even killed. I must take Payole to safety, while you go from Nosi Bé to Majunga, or Mojanga as it is now called. I'll return there with the ship. The plans are being laid there; at Mojanga is the nucleus of the work."

Bagot nodded shortly.

"I talked with your Fréjus back at Diégo."

"Ah! That swine!" burst out Grenille. "He's the head of the secret police, a Vichy agent; he has killed, imprisoned, tortured. The administration represses all Free French sympathizers. Any officer who talks too much, suffers. This Fréjus is the devil in person!"

"An able man. He was in company with Dessarts and a woman: the wife of Dessarts?"

"Yes. I understand that she has brains, which is the curse of woman," Grenille said gloomily. "Dessarts is in the topographic service; his brigade is stationed at Mojanga."

Grenille's knowledge of conditions in the seething island was, naturally, superficial. A Vichy force was reported to be coming from Dakar, and if the Japs were given the island, there could be little resistance; the colony would be absorbed like Indo-China. Even with the will to fight, there was little means. A few antiquated guns, a few old planes, a handful of troops, a few small ships like the corvettes, which were little more than coastguard vessels.

"There's little hope of stopping the Japs," concluded Grenille. "The cursed traitors of Vichy have paralyzed all men in high places. The little men fight on. Some of the gold stored in the Bank of Madagascar has been removed by our side. It must be got across. Some of our officers still at liberty must be got to the mainland, too. Under the English flag is safety. You'll trust me with the ship, to take Payole across?"

"Of course. So that explains the promised payment in gold!" said Bagot.

"I made the bargain," said the other apologetically. "I told Dessarts you were a hard man but one of your word, that you played for your own hand and always won. I told him how we had got away from that hell around Australia—"

"In short," cut in Bagot, "you painted me as a ruthless devil whose one thought was money! Perhaps you're right. You had every reason to think so. If you drop me at Nosi Bé, how can you get away to take Payole across the channel? Won't they know it?"

"Yes. A charter will be given us by a Hindu merchant. You can thus go on openly to Mojanga to await my return. Do you object?"

"I object to nothing if the pay is good," said Bagot, a sardonic note in his voice. "Now you'd better get some sleep. I'll take the deck till midnight."

UP above, he found the engine quiet, the brigantine plunging along under short canvas. The night was lit by lambent flares of lightning, with heavy rain-squalls that came and went. To an unaccustomed eye the gusty wind, the heavy cloudbanks and the wild choppy sea would have tokened peril; but this was merely a threatening gesture of one of the most evil sectors of water on earth, and danger was slight.

Bagot slapped his hand on the wet rail, angrily.

"A mercenary, a blasted prostitute!" he growled. "Anything for money! And no blame to anyone for thinking so. I rescued this outfit at high profit, instead of doing my bit and going down in the hell back yonder, as others did! I'd have been a dead lion. A strapped seaman without tuppence to jingle on a tombstone! As it is, we're safe, and well off. Now I'm a mercenary selling myself and my boat for gold. What of it? All's blacked out behind me."

Here was a truth to console many a worse man than John Bagot, who had no family to mourn him.

As with the world, so with him; the past was gone. The backgrounds that had once been so important, were blacked out. Here in these seas, swept by war and havoc, everything had broken down; what a man had been or done no longer mattered, any more than if he had been a horse or a dog. The rest of the world was fast coming to the same point, too. In this quivering quarter of earth, only one thing was now important—what a man was.

"And I'm an American," muttered Bagot. "I'm here, when I ought to be back there! I've made a fat wad of money, should be proud of myself; but I'm not, blast it! Well, there's nothing I can do now except work back home with this craft. Everything behind me's cut off, and the future's dark."

Again this left no very good taste in the mouth, but could not be helped.

At breakfast, with the weird volcanic mountain-tips of Nosi Bé just over the horizon, and the lascar serang in charge above, Grenille said to his captain:

"Our friend Dessarts—I hope you'll have a chance to talk with him at Hellville. A remarkable fellow in his way. Believes in queer things like dreams."

"So do I at times," grunted Bagot. "I'm a practical man, of course; but no one who lives by the sea and stars can avoid the stuff of dreams."

"That's different," said the other. "I understand that Fréjus is in love with Madame Dessarts; that's why her husband remains alive. It may or may not be true."

"And she with him?"

"Don't be absurd, Cap'n. He's the chief enemy of our cause. I expect she's playing him along—you'll see; he'll turn up dead one of these days! He's too well hated. . . . What's the matter?"

Bagot leaped up. "Off the course, blast it! Something wrong on deck—"

He darted for the ladder. As he went up, he swept aside two of the lascars, who were jabbering excitedly. With Grenille close behind, he reached the deck, and paused.

EASTWARD, the mountains of Madagascar were massed darkly against the horizon; the brigantine was running in toward the land. The sea was sunlit, the day fine. But not more than a mile away and heading for the *Zaidee*, was a smoke-spouting vessel. The serang cried that she had changed course suddenly, and now was flying a signal.

Bagot, through his binoculars, eyed the flags and nodded.

"A corvette," he said to Grenille. He motioned the serang. "In with everything! She will send a boat. Your men speak only Malay; be stupid."

"Yes, tuan!" was the response. The brigantine fluttered up into the wind.

Bagot gave the staring Grenille a sardonic smile.

"Well, what are you waiting for? Get after that man of yours, quickly! You know where to put him."

"But how do you know?" cried Grenille. "They couldn't dream he was aboard!"

"Be prepared for anything." Bagot calmly got out his pipe, while Grenille darted below.

The corvette, it appeared, had fired a gun when setting out her signals. Now she came down fast for the brigantine, whose flag rippled up. She came close, came briskly around, and a steam launch ready in the davits was dropped. Men in blue, with red-tipped seaman's hats, filled her, and she started across the intervening distance.

At Bagot's orders the serang sent a ladder over the side. Grenille appeared, and with a slight nod joined Bagot. From the launch, as it swung alongside, an officer brave with gold lace came over the rail, and saluted Bagot, who came to him and shook hands.

"Well, you halt a ship under the American flag; and why?"

"Ah, you speak French! Excellent!" The officer beamed. "A thousand regrets; but we have received a report that a man, a criminal, was placed aboard your vessel yesterday, as you came in close to the land. And as you are now in territorial waters—"

"Bound for Nosi Bé, or Hellville, to be exact," said Bagot. "You're quite wrong about this criminal. No one has been put aboard us."

"Then every man aboard is accounted for on your manifest?"

"Naturally. Do I understand that you are seizing this ship?"

The officer spread his hands imploringly.

"I beg of you, m'sieur! Nothing of the sort. If you consent to permit a search, well and good—"

"By all means! This is no time to stand upon punctilio!" exclaimed Bagot. "We have nothing to conceal. If we had anyone aboard, I'd certainly not let you take him without an argument; but there's no one. Come down and glance over my papers. . . . Mr. Grenille!" he said in English. "Let these gentlemen search the ship; see that everything's opened to them."

The officer accompanied him below, glanced at the ship's papers, found that the number of persons aboard was thirteen—ten Malays, the cook, Bagot and Grenille—and with a rather bad joke about thirteen and bad luck, went back on deck. He mustered all hands; he sent his men into the holds; with the smiling compliance of Grenille, he went over every inch of the brigantine from forepeak to sternsheets.

Choosing his moment when the officer, who no doubt understood English, was fuming in baffled anger close by, Grenille touched his cap respectfully to Bagot.

"Beg pardon, sir; it must ha' been that there Mauritius cattle-boat they're after! Remember her? Yesterday, in that flat calm, she was laying close in to Flat Rock when we went past with the engine."

"No matter," said Bagot indifferently—knowing that the words had reached their mark.

The searching-party made an admirable job of it. They tapped the crates and boxes in the forehold, tested the ballast, tapped the hogsheads, and in short neglected no crevice where a man might be hidden, going over cabins and galley as with a fine-tooth comb.

When the officer had made absolutely certain there was no unauthorized person aboard, he apologized most courteously to Bagot, who showed not the least resentment over this action.

The launch sped away. The brigantine's canvas went up, and she headed away on her course for Nosi Bé once more.

Grenille remained with Bagot near the helm, until the corvette took her launch aboard and straightened out on her course.

"She's going north, eh? That means she believed our story about the cattle-boat," he said. "A near squeak, Cap'n!"

"Not at all," Bagot rejoined composedly. "If they'd found him—then, I grant, it would have been a near squeak. But they found nothing. Not even the guns or rifles."

"Well, he's safe now. He can resume his cabin, but he'll have to stay there while we're in Hellville bay. Shall I let him out?"

"I'll do it," said Bagot.

HE went down into the after-hold, where a bulkhead had been run across to make a separate room for the engine. Here, lashed in place, stood several fifty-gallon drums of lubricating oil. Each drum was fitted with a spigot.

As the only openings in these steel drums were for the spigot and for filling, it was obviously impossible that they could hide anything, much less a man.

Bagot went to one of them, turned the spigot at the bottom, and a trickle of oil ran out. He closed it at once and reached to a clasp on the body of the drum; it was on the rear side, against the wall. Loosing it, he freed the top third of the drum, which lifted entirely away from the remainder, to disclose the startled, blinking features of Colonel Payole.

"Out with you, Colonel!" said Bagot cheerfully. "Here's some waste, to wipe the oil from your feet. All's clear now. Back to your cabin and stay there, out of sight. If you feel like eating, I'll send you a tray."

Colonel Payole did not feel like eating. Seasick at the start, to stand closely cramped in an oil-drum, his feet in oil, for an hour or more—well, he just did not feel like eating, that was all. He made it most emphatic.

When Bagot got back on deck, the Great Road was opening up, and Hellville was in sight.

Chapter Three

THE lengthy native name of this town had been discarded for that of an admiral, Heilville; an appropriate enough name, in the hot season. It was known in general as Nosi Bé, from the island and district of which it was the capital. The town itself was rather a cluster of towns; and this group of islands, only six miles off the Madagascar coast, occupied a vital strategic position. It was actually composed of extinct craters, whose mountainous peaks towered sharply into the sky.

"So the *Zaidee* is in your hands," Bagot said, watching the launch of the harbor officials coming out, "until I get word from you at Mojanga."

"Right," assented Grenille. "Dessarts promised to meet you here and arrange everything; trust him. It's so desperately important that Payole be taken to safety! You'll learn why, quick enough."

The officials came aboard; they were courteous, brisk, efficient, having been informed by radio from Diégo-Suarez that the brigantine was stopping here. Everything was clear, and Bagot had no difficulty in obtaining a landing permit.

He took a single bag ashore. Almost before he knew it, he found himself at the Douane just inside the splendid new mole that crossed the harbor shoals for a thousand feet. The customs men gave no trouble; a chalk-mark, and he was clear.

His plans? He had none. Somewhere in town there was a single small hotel, but he eyed the steep streets uncertainly. He was thinking of taking a *pousee-pousee*, as the rubber-tired rickshaws were locally termed, when an ancient Citroën appeared, rolled to a halt, and out of it jumped Dessarts. He seized eagerly upon Bagot, embraced him, pointed out his bag to a Hindu lad who drove the car, and bundled him in. The car started away.

"All goes to perfection!" Dessarts exclaimed. "We've been worried about you. Did the corvette meet you?"

Bagot indicated the Hindu driver. Dessarts replied with one word: "Safe."

"Then yes, if you must discuss it now. The corvette stopped us, found nothing, and went on her way. Everything is quite all right."

Dessarts registered huge relief. He had obviously been drinking, and was a trifle mellow and garrulous.

"When your ship was sighted, I ordered luncheon," he said. "We stop with friends in the suburb of Ambanoro; the house is at my disposal; all is safe. Fréjus has gone on to Mojanga. I follow tonight. Everything is arranged for your ship; a Hindu merchant is employing her to carry some of his people to Mozambique—that is all a blind, of course. She will leave harbor this evening, if she likes. *Pouf!* This organizing—I do not like it! My wife, who has gone ahead of us to Mojanga—she is the real brains of everything."

She had gone on, then. Fréjus had gone on. Bagot choked down his sardonic, impulsive thoughts, and spoke gravely.

"I'd really appreciate it if you did no more talking until we're alone."

"Oh, all right, all right!" said Dessarts, and stroked his big black mustaches. He was quite unable to stop talking, but he devoted himself to explaining the scenery.

Even Bagot, to whom the scenery ashore meant nothing, was astonished by the native town that greeted them. Rather, it was Hindu, with narrow streets and Arab mosques; for centuries this west coast had maintained a huge trade with India and Muscat. This suburb of Ambanoro possessed magnificent stone houses and extensive gardens, belonging to the wealthy Hindu merchants. It faced an anchorage all its own, part of the Great Road, where lay Arab dhows and sailing-vessels of all kinds from the Malabar coast.

The auto swung into a garden, on to a house set like a jewel amid flowers, and the two men alighted. Salaaming servants led them to a cool shadowed balcony where a table was set with gleaming linen and silver. It was set for two.

"This is like a dream from the Arabian Nights!" exclaimed Bagot.

"Ah, nothing is impossible!" Dessarts said. "You will have a room here for tonight. Tomorrow, Captain Luchard will take you on to Mojanga. Our hosts are friends invisible; you have only to ask the servants for anything you desire. So come, sit down, drink to our good luck! Payole is safe; that is splendid!"

Dessarts settled at the table, poured wine, and drank. He was effusive, but the wine effected a change in him. Bagot regarded him curiously.

"You Americans," Dessarts was saying, "are strong and steady; you have poise. One observes it in you, Captain Bagot. This air of serene calm—my wife caught a glimpse of you at Diégo and was impressed by this air. It is what we need. Today I was talking with an old officer, one of us, who wants to get away from Madagascar purely for his own sake. A rare thing, pure selfishness! A rare thing in uniform, which teaches men to serve."

"You mean, to command," said Bagot.

The other dissented.

"No, no! You miss the point. Today the world is in process of destruction. Part of it, like the men of Vichy, seek a selfish ambition; the rest of it, like ourselves, is given up to the service of a cause, an ideal. In this generation of the world's agony, it is given every man to reach higher things. Our own desires are abandoned; we seek a common end."

The real spirit of the man was appearing; the wine had unloosed soaring thoughts from behind the undistinguished, rather helpless exterior. Bagot, listening, found himself astonished by the brilliance, the depth, the quality of vision, in this new Dessarts.

"Failure has become a glorious thing," he went on. "Failure, in the right cause, has reverted to the original meaning of the word; an overshooting of the mark. Yes, failure can be a badge of pride, these days! Like the failure of those who have fought Nazis or Japs and have gone down in defeat, but not in shame—the failure of the Dutch, of your Filipinos and the Americans with them, of the Chinese! They have not failed; they have not died."

"But fine arguments can't prevent Nippon grabbing Madagascar."

"True," said Dessarts. "We hope to get ourselves established on the mainland, and then return. Here we are only victims; there we shall be free men once more, able to act. We take to flight, only in order to serve elsewhere. Why, you yourself have come from afar, a stranger, to serve our cause! You see, there is no more nationality in the world. There is only brotherhood in God's service."

BAGOT felt himself profoundly startled. It was singular how something spoke through this man. He had a great gift, not of blatant French oratory, but of reaching the very soul of an auditor. Bagot recalled what Grenille had said, that he was marked for death because of talking too much.

"You have a talent for convincing people, Dessarts."

"Yes; that is what I am good for." Dessarts sipped more wine. "Once away from here, it becomes my work—to preach Free France to Frenchmen! I know where to reach plenty of men. Nothing in life now matters except this service, my friend. Wife, family, fortune, let them take their chances of survival. If I am right, if there is indeed a cause, they will not suffer; no matter what happens to them, there is no death, there is no failure!"

"That's rather nonsense, isn't it?" asked Bagot cynically. "There's death and failure in Java and in Bataan, for examples."

"Certainly; if you regard defeat as failure, and death as the end! But you cannot be so blind, you who have come to serve us, you American!"

"I didn't come to serve you," said Bagot quietly. "I'm a sailor; I follow the sea. I've no home, no family. I was put ashore in Java from a torpedoed ship. I took this business venture, bought this brigantine and her cargo, and tried to get away with her to Australia. We were cut off, and ran for India; cut off again, we came here. I came to make money, not to serve anyone except myself."

Dessarts smiled. "Ah, you calm and quiet one! You know better. We both serve a cause: to save our world from destruction by evil. Nationality, race, creed—these things no longer matter. Brotherhood has come to the front and will rise higher tomorrow! To this is our whole duty!"

As Bagot had said to his mate, men who live by stars and sea cannot avoid the stuff of dreams. He found strange emotions awakened and surging in him; he found himself impelled to make an entirely new bargain with Dessarts, and to set a totally new price on his services. But instead, he evaded.

"If your wife, for example, were in danger," he argued, "your first duty would be to her, would it not?"

"Not if it interfered with the higher duty. She has been often in danger—she is in danger now; but it cannot swerve me." Dessarts wiped sweat from his brow. "For the first time in my life, I can understand the fervent martyrs of religion! I am no religious man, me, but now I can understand. In this new and stricken world, the highest causes of devotion have uprisen before us. No one lives for himself any longer, or for those he loves. Only for service, only for what help he can give to others, and to the ideals of life. Things are not as they used to be. . . . But here comes Luchard. You must meet him —Captain Luchard of the engineers."

The things said at this meal lingered deeply in Bagot. They gave him a new light on the men with whom he was dealing, and on himself.

Luchard had come for Dessarts on some mutual errand. He was a trim, precise man. Like many Frenchmen abroad, he had the air of being weighed down by the tragic situation at home. To Bagot, he seemed dangerously taciturn.

"So we travel in company tomorrow, eh?" he said, shaking hands with Bagot. "And I'm to dine with you this evening; good! Dessarts, why not wait until morning, then travel with us?"

Dessarts shook his head. "No. Arrangements have been made for me to go. And in the morning, I must be in Mojanga to interview that damned hell-hound Fréjus. He pretends to be friendly with me, but all the while I feel he is mocking me."

"Ah!" said Luchard. "It is the same with me; but I feel that he intends to kill me. Ever since he made Mojanga his headquarters, I have felt like a doomed man."

"Look to the future," said Bagot briskly. "Clap a stopper on your imaginations, both of you! Tomorrow's a new day."

Presently they departed, and Bagot was taken to his room by a white-clad Hindu servant. He wanted only a bath and sleep—and later, a cheroot in the garden.

HE was enjoying the cheroot, late in the afternoon, among rich masses of flowers, when a servant brought him a folded scrap of paper—unsigned, but from Grenille:

"We sail in an hour with the tide. Should be back in three or four days. Everything okay."

Bagot tore it up angrily.

Inaction irked him. He hated to be here ashore; he felt lost and uncertain in this seething maelstrom of peril, of plot and counterplot. He did not see why he must go to Mojanga at all. . . .

This thought brought him up with a round turn. Why had things shaped up like this, if not to bring him to face the issue? For he must face it; he knew in his heart that he must face it. He could avoid it no longer. He had been pitched headlong into action here, and he must break with all his past. The ringing phrases of Dessarts had opened a new vista to him. Service! Service to a cause, to the cause of the world!

He was in this mood when Luchard arrived to dine with him, on the balcony where he had lunched with Dessarts.

"We'll get off in the morning," said the precise captain of engineers. "I'm to bring you to Mojanga and install you at a hotel. Now, however, I'm to give you fuller details than Grenille knew."

"Good," said Bagot. "First, give me a word or two. Why do I go to Mojanga thus?"

Luchard's brows lifted. "To consult there with us, of course! The definite plans will have been arranged by the time we get there. Madame Dessarts must talk with you."

"What have I to do with her?"

"Do you not know? She is the life and soul of the entire movement! It is she who plans everything, who makes things possible. She is magnificent!" Luchard warmed a trifle. "It was she who arranged to save Colonel Payole."

"I didn't know that," said Bagot. "Were any of that Japanese crowd here?"

"Two, with their secretaries; they went on to Mojanga by boat today; they have business everywhere. One was Baron Inoyo, the other a M. Shigemitsu."

"I've heard of them." Bagot lit a cheroot, his eyes stony. "Well, what about giving me some concrete details of my own job?"

Luchard nodded. "In the purge that has been going on, in the suppression of all sentiment not in accord with Vichy, many officers have been arrested or transferred to the southern part of the island. In a way, this helps us. Twenty or so of our officers will meet at a given point on the south coast. It is imperative that these men get away to Mozambique, and reach British soil.

"Here we are cut off," he went on. "We've no means of getting in touch with De Gaulle or with the British. They will make an appeal for help to the South Africans, to the British, to everyone! To get away by native boat is impossible; you saw how quickly that corvette was after you for Payole! But your vessel may manage it."

"Understood," Bagot said curtly. "There will be risks?"

"Yes. We'll have a gun for you, a twenty-millimeter quick-firer. But, of course, there is Fréjus."

"The master spy, I understand."

"And the Government agent watching over the safety of the Nipponese mission. He is our most deadly enemy. When the purge of civilians begins—ah, you'll see them rounded up by hundreds! Fréjus has spies everywhere. He must be removed."

"That's nothing to me," Bagot said coldly.

"So?" Luchard gave him an odd look. "When the ship stopped here, I had tea with them—Fréjus, the Dessarts and others. Fréjus spoke of you; an interesting man, he said. He may suspect that you are helping us. There may be complications of all kinds."

Bagot was annoyed at hearing this, and vaguely disturbed. He liked a straight course where he could see the dangers ahead. These complications due to human nature might bring sudden peril at unexpected moments.

"Grenille," he said, "mentioned that Fréjus is interested in the lady—Madame Dessarts."

Luchard shrugged. "You may trust Madame implicitly. She will arrange everything with you at Mojanga. It is she with whom you deal, from now on."

This cleared things in Bagot's mind. "One thing," he said: "If my vessel is brought back to Mojanga, will she have any difficulties with your naval people?"

"She'll not come to Mojanga. Grenille will fetch her to a point on the coast outside the city, already arranged

with Madame. We have the natives on our side, remember; they are against the administration."

Bagot nodded. Things were more to his liking now.

"But you also have Fifth Columnists among them, I think?" he asked.

"Yes," said Luchard. "New native regiments have recently been raised, under Vichy officers; and certain civilians are ready to purge their fellows. There are always traitors. Payole, remember, was betrayed at the last moment. We all run this risk."

"What do you know about these Japs—the two you've mentioned?"

"Very little," Luchard said. "We fear much. They're hand in glove with the Vichy partisans. They hand out promises and money. What they want, of course, is to seize the naval base at Diégo-Suarez, the Great Road at Nosi Bé, and probably Mojanga."

"So I figure. I've picked up a lot of information about those two Japs; I've seen the result of their operations in the Far East. Would you care to have it?"

"Oh, definitely!" Luchard exclaimed with interest.

"This Shigemitsu is one of the most important men, today, in Japan. He is the brains of the war clique; it is he who planned the moves that have been made. He himself was active in Malaya, Indo-China, Java, the Philippines—but behind the scenes. He's a fine political agent, because he's adroit enough to hide behind other men. If he gets Madagascar, he strikes a vital blow at the commerce of the British, cuts off supplies coming from the United States, and makes the Indian Ocean a Japanese lake."

Luchard was watching him, wide-eyed. "Ah! You know much about him!"

"Plenty. This Baron Inoyo, you mention, is Shigemitsu's right-hand man. He is a financial genius. The threads of commerce and industry are in his fingers. When the war is won for Japan, the new order is his affair!"

"Name of a name!" muttered Luchard. "This is indeed news!"

"Then so inform Madame Dessarts, if you see her before I do." With a gesture, Bagot dismissed the whole matter. But he could not dismiss the memory of that woman's face he had seen on the jetty at Diégo-Suarez—that face like the vital stab of a sunbeam.

"Tell me!" he said, over the coffee. "It seems like an odd situation: Dessarts must know that Fréjus has a certain interest in his wife?"

Luchard frowned.

"Certainly, but it is hard to explain," he answered slowly. "Dessarts is helpless; he can be denounced at any time by Fréjus, who plays with him. A cruel man, this Fréjus. But the domestic relation is not usual. Sylvie Dessarts had, until the war came, heavy interests in the perfume industry of the island, which is a huge one; she inherited this. It was not a marriage of love at all; shall we say, of mutual respect? She married Dessarts a couple of years ago. . . . But I should not talk about it. I really know little."

Little, but enough to give an inkling of singular things to Bagot, who did not refer to it again.

Chapter Four

THE launch trip over to the mainland with Luchard, the meeting with a car from the Renouf garage, and the run down the coast and around the mountains and back to the coast at Mojanga, took time; it was a long trip, but an enjoyable one. It was late afternoon when Bagot found himself installed at the Hotel Anglais, an elaborate new hostelry recently completed. The dining-room and café opened on the sidewalk. After a wash-up, Bagot went down to one of the little tables and made himself comfortable over a whisky and soda.

He was sitting there watching the crowds drifting past—vociferous Hovas from the upper country, Hindus and Chinese and French, sturdy Sakalavas, sailors, farmers, soldiers—when three incidents happened; each of the greatest importance.

The first was a large envelope brought to him from the hotel desk, where it had just arrived. Bagot opened it, caught a glimpse of charts, and laid it aside with satisfaction. He could guess what it was. He was still cogitating this when the second thing took place:

An auto halted before the hotel entrance, and from it emerged Shigemitsu, Baron Inoyo and two other Japs. They walked into the hotel; then Shigemitsu and the Baron came to the café, glanced around and took a table, ordering *apéritifs;* they were, obviously, stopping at this hotel.

BAGOT was glad of this close view. He knew how to differentiate the usual Japanese animal-face from the face of other Oriental races; but neither of these men was usual. Baron Inoyo was of aristocratic lineage, as his thin high nose signified, and his air of quiet poise and assurance. The deeply graven lines in his features marked him as by no means a young man.

Shigemitsu, on the other hand, was not old; he was in his way as remarkable as Fréjus, who stood out so markedly from other Frenchmen. Ere this, Shigemitsu had passed for European. He was of light coloring, with regular features and a finely shaped head. His face was long and narrow; a mobile face, eloquent of character and ability, not at all a bad face—in fact, eloquent of a certain nobility when in repose, but it was seldom in repose. Usually it was touched with flashing light significant of the restless, driving spirit within.

Taking his package, Bagot rose and left the place. He sauntered out into the streets of the lower town under the hill, not approaching the heights, whose fine air had made them the favored residential section of the city. These older buildings with their narrow streets and native bazaars and fine Hindu houses with sculptured portals in Indo-Arab style were fascinating. The Chinese section was fairly extensive, but the fortunes built up in the India trade had gone into more showy structures. Returning, he was on the hotel steps when a laughing voice checked him:

"Ha, monsieur! Welcome to Mojanga!" It was Fréjus.

He turned and shook hands cordially. Again he sensed the strength of this lean dark man, as he had felt it at their first meeting: a malignant strength, like some force of evil—or was this merely imagination, after hearing so much about him? Certainly Fréjus was affable enough now, though he refused to stop for a drink.

"No, no; I only pause in passing! One question, monsieur." Fréjus tapped him gravely on the shoulder. "You are an American. There are several Nipponese stopping at this hotel. I trust you will remember that this is neutral ground?"

"Naturally," said Bagot. "If it *is* neutral ground, indeed."

"So? Then accept the hint, I beg you. Now, will you let me take you to see some friends tomorrow? An informal afternoon. The Dessarts are charming people; you'd like them. Suppose I call for you at five? You'd get a chance to look in upon our life here, and I know they'd like the honor of your acquaintance. Yes?"

Bagot could not refuse, for refusal would be hard to explain.

"It would be delightful," he said. "I've already met Major Dessarts, I think."

"So he mentioned," said Fréjus, and Bagot congratulated himself on his own acuity. "Very well, then! Tomorrow at five. *Au revoir!*"

Bagot went to his room, sat down, and wiped his brow; beneath the cordiality he felt a subtly piercing sense of danger, as though it emanated from Fréjus like a ray invisible. "Perhaps he suspects you," Luchard had said.

Upon opening his large envelope, he found the latest charts and regulations covering the coast to the southward. There was nothing to explain their provenance; none was needed. Grenille must have arranged to have them sent him.

On one of the charts a lightly penciled mark gave him full information. Below Mojanga, as the former name of Majunga was now spelled, the coast bulged away westward to Cape St. Andrew, and south of this was the mid-point of the west coast at Maintirano, an active port in the old days of slavery. A few miles off the coast here were the reefs and shoals marked as the Steriles, or Barren Islands; and opposite these, south of Maintirano, was the penciled mark.

At this point on the low, wooded, barren coast would be concentrated the Free French exiles. Near by was a bend in the motor-road that skirted the mountains; most of them, then, would probably come by car. And since there was grave risk, pursuit would no doubt be prompt.

HALF the night, deeply into the next day, Bagot was absorbed in work. When he struck that spot on the coast, he would be risking life and ship; in an emergency, he could afford no guesswork. He had to know every inch of that maze of reefs. He had to know offshore depths, coastal appearance, which way to run, and how. He must know winds, currents, tides, at this particular season. He must know to the minute how long it would take the *Zaidee* to reach there from here, and a dozen other calculations must be gained by heart.

It was this excessive caution which, in Pacific waters, had made John Bagot what he was—a man impervious to failure. When he went down to luncheon, he had nearly finished the essentials of the task; he learned then that storm was sweeping the Mozambique Channel, and storm warnings were out. Grenille would be delayed in his return, possibly; too bad!

Bagot was again at work when Fréjus arrived for him, toward five o'clock.

Driving a powerful Fiat roadster, Fréjus was in such tearing high spirits that at first Bagot thought him drunk; but he was not. He drove wildly, with horn blaring, and in no time they were mounting to the Rova, the wooded heights above the old town, and were circling the ruins of the ancient native fort there. At a bend in the road, Fréjus drew up.

"I'm showing you Mojanga as you'll never see it afoot!" he exclaimed. "Look there! Never mind our hospitals and docks and buildings—there's our country itself!"

He had chosen a superb position. Below them, far outspread, lay the red-roofed city, the harbor and wide delta of the Betsiboka River. Forest and ricefields stretched away to the red hills; westward was the far vista of the Mozambique Channel, swept by gusty rain and squalls. Fréjus waved his hand toward the hill drive.

"We're proud of our Corniche road," said he. "Now we'll have a look at the new residential part of the city, and come to rest at the hospitable Dessarts villa."

"You seem very gay this afternoon," observed Bagot.

"On the contrary, I'm depressed. I've had the disagreeable task of disciplining a rascal, an officer."

"By court-martial, you mean?"

"No. There are some crimes too serious for such action. The man was a subversive, a dangerous radical. He had become dangerous to authority. . . . Well, let us not speak of the affair. It is regrettable."

He displayed to Bagot the expanse of neat villas and handsome residences, with their incredible masses of flowers and gardens, that reached across the higher ground. Many of these belonged to wealthy natives or to Arab and Hindu traders, to whom the enormous commercial rise of the city was largely due.

Fréjus pointed. "There's our destination ahead. Madame Dessarts inherited the property. A most charming woman, and capable, too. A magnificent place, eh?"

It was indeed a large villa set amid spacious grounds and gardens. A number of cars stood in the drive: both officers and civilians were present. Dessarts greeted Bagot with evident pleasure; and his wife—

Bagot found himself shaking hands with her, ignoring the French custom of brushing fingers with lips.

"It is rarely that we have an American visitor," she said lightly. "Come, you must meet our friends."

He was introduced to others, and was drawn into a group of officers who discussed the war in the Far East. Upon learning he had recently been there, they overwhelmed him with questions. Fréjus, apparently uninterested, went his way. But as Bagot talked, his mind was active. . .

Yes, she was the woman he had glimpsed at Diégo-Suarez: slim, golden-haired, bronzed and alive with health and high spirits, radiating a peculiar vital energy. Her amber eyes were aglow beneath dark brows—startling, heavy-lidded eyes which could say much or little.

Bagot had slight chance to study her, however. A late arrival turned the trend of his thoughts; the chief surgeon from the larger of the two hospitals here, a man evidently well known and liked. Bagot caught a hasty word of his:

"You have not heard? *Diable!* A most unfortunate thing! An accident, while he was cleaning a pistol. You knew him, Dessarts?"

"Who?" demanded Dessarts.

"Luchard, of the engineers. He was killed instantly. It might have been suicide, of course, but was apparently an accident."

Luchard! The face of Dessarts changed slightly; his dark, tortured eyes shot across the room. Bagot's gaze followed them and came to rest on Fréjus, laughing and chatting amid a group.

Luchard! It struck Bagot suddenly; for a moment he was flung off balance. So this was what Fréjus had meant by his talk about disciplining an officer! Luchard! How would it affect Grenille, all the plans? That trim, precise, saturnine man—dead!

No game for children, this!

Bagot retired within himself, warily. He was conscious of a chill upon the room, of furtive glances, of hushed voices, of forced merriment and talk. He sipped tea, munched cakes, talked of Java and Australia, and waited for something to happen. Nothing happened. Presently Dessarts joined him and fell into talk. Behind the black mustaches, the man's haunted eyes flickered everywhere. When they were alone, he spoke in his quiet way:

"This is terrible, about Luchard. There have been predictions of a purge—"

"What are you talking about?" demanded Bagot.

"Eh? It is quite safe to speak here."

"Look at Fréjus," said Bagot composedly. "Watch how he glances around, how he observes others—never in the eyes, always below the eyes. He smiles and jests, and looks at others. He has been looking at us. Did you never hear of lip-reading?"

Dessarts went white to the lips. He muttered something incoherent and went away.

THE chill horror that had stolen into the room made itself felt. The guests began to depart; everyone suddenly wanted to get away. Fréjus joined Bagot, and together they made their adieux. Sylvie Dessarts touched Bagot's hand, murmured something conventional, and turned her warm, lambent eyes on Fréjus.

"Will you bring your friend tomorrow evening?" she said. "Do come, M. Bagot!"

"Eh? Tomorrow evening?" Bagot glanced from one to the other. "This is the first I have heard of it."

"Ah, I forgot!" she exclaimed, with a frown of irritation. "You are an American; it might be awkward. I am so stupid! You see, there are some Japanese gentlemen in town, whom I have invited to hear the native musicians It might be awkward for you, yes—"

"You are most kind, madame," said Bagot, almost with rudeness, "but I fear that I cannot break a prior engagement, much as it would delight me."

She dismissed him with a shrug. But as he followed Fréjus out, he caught one swift look from her—a look of delight, of warm approval, as though he had said exactly what she wanted him to say. She was playing some game, then; what was it? What was this tension in the air?

"I think you did well to avoid the invitation," Fréjus said, when they started away. "This native music is rather stupid. Besides, there may be unpleasantness with these Nipponese; one never knows. Local feeling is running high, I understand, and I have been ordered to see that no incident arises during their stay."

"Have you many Japs in Madagascar?" Bagot asked.

The other shrugged. "At present, yes. And pardon my saying it, but there is mounting tension between your government and ours. Rumors are flying thickly. Let us hope all blows over!"

"Let us hope so, indeed," Bagot assented.

FRÉJUS dropped him at the hotel. During dinner Bagot tried to puzzle out the singular attitude of Madame Dessarts, but was baffled. He found himself recalling her vivid personality; she had dominated everything and everyone in the house. What a flame of a woman she was! She kindled something long dormant in him; he found himself wishing for, yet shrinking from, closer acquaintance with her. But somewhere, somehow, it must come; he was to confer with her here, so she would have to contrive an interview. And when would Grenille be back with the brigantine? Would this storm on the channel delay him? Thought of Fréjus chilled him again.

"Does that devil suspect something?" he reflected, going to his room. "Apparently not; yet he must know a good deal, since he removed Luchard. Hm! I don't like plots, never did. Something's due to break, if I'm any judge. And now I'll have to make up my mind about myself. No shirking it any longer. Damn! What I could do if—"

He lighted his pipe and glanced again at the envelope of charts. What a man could do on this devilish strip of coral-fanged coast—with luck and with a cause! And with such a vessel as he had! He looked at himself in his dresser mirror, and found no change, and wondered. He knew in his heart that something had happened to the old John Bagot, the hard, practical materialist who had thought first of life and ship and cargo.

He needed to clear his head. A walk would do it; a turn through the streets would be the very thing. He caught up his cap—and there came a light tap at the door.

"Enter," he said, and it swung open.

There were no room-phones in the Hotel Anglais, of course; that would be too much to expect in any colonial hostelry, when there were only some few hundred telephones in all Madagascar. So Bagot was not surprised to see a stranger step in, a smiling young brown man who wore the white cap and dust-coat affected by chauffeurs.

"M. Bagot?" The visitor spoke in atrocious French; he was, it seemed, an Arab. "I am Ahmed ben Ali, and have been sent to drive you to a certain spot outside the city. The car is in the street."

"The devil you say!" exclaimed Bagot. "Who sent you?"

"A friend, monsieur," was the reply. "There was no time for him to give me a writing; he said you would know the name." Ahmed closed the door carefully. "Pardon me—"

"Come to the point," barked Bagot. "Who sent you?"

"Monsieur Grenille, effendi."

"Oh! Good! Where is he?" exclaimed Bagot in untold relief.

"A few miles outside town. But there is a police spy who follows you, a man with bald head and hot eyes; he is downstairs now. I used to work in this hotel; I can take you out by the domestics' entrance so he will not see."

Bagot was delighted beyond measure. Now, with Grenille on hand and the brigantine back, the pattern of things would quickly fall into shape. So Fréjus had put a shadow on him, eh? Trust Grenille not to overlook so obvious a danger!

He followed the white dust-coat through back corridors and down the servants' stairs and out into a side street. A closed car was waiting there. Ahmed held open the door; Bagot paused as he was in the act of getting in. There was a murmur in the air, indefinable, like a distant swarm of bees.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"I do not know, effendi." The Arab made answer in a hoarse whisper. "It is something horrible; it is the natives, the Malagasy, the Hovas. They say that drums speak from Tananarive, the capital, and word goes out over the whole land. It means that something dreadful is about to happen."

Bagot got in, and the car started away at once, its lights going on. Leaning forward, he jerked open the sliding glass behind the chauffeur. He caught a pronounced odor of perfume in the car. This was not unusual, in this land of flowers and distilled essences that supplied the perfumeries of half the world.

"How far outside town are we going?" Bagot demanded.

"Nine miles, effendi. The villa is just past the village of Andraovany, by the new barracks."

"Oh! There are troops quartered here?"

"Yes. The new regiments of native troops, like those the administration is raising all over the island. They say that the Governor-General, M. Annet, has sent them a special flag and the very latest machine-guns. They are proud of his trust—*arrgh,* the infidels!"

The scorn of Arab for native left Bagot untouched; indeed, he did not hear it. Something else had flashed upon his brain like a knell of doom. Native troops! Fifth-Column activity, of course. The administration was frantically raising native regiments, officering them with Vichy partisans, making all things ready against trouble. If any French regiments rebelled at taking Nazi orders—so much the worse for them. If any natives aided the Free French—let them learn what the iron hand of Vichy was like!

The miles flashed past. It was a clear night but windy, with squalls lashing across the wide estuary and harbor. An almost continuous blaze of lightning filled the sky to westward, where the usual violent electric storm was sweeping the Mozambique Channel. So Grenille had won back, despite everything! Good man, Grenille.

They passed through the village Ahmed had named, and rolling on, turned in at a hillside villa above the river. By a flare of lightning, Bagot saw that it was a charming place flanked by rustling casuarina trees and solidly massed with bougainvilleas. The car halted. Ahmed leaped out and held open the door.

"I will announce you, effendi," he said, and went ahead to the house door. There he pounded at a knocker, and pushed open the door. Bagot, over his shoulder, glimpsed a large, dimly lighted room inside. "M. le Capitaine Bagot!" went on Ahmed, then bowed and closed the door as Bagot passed him and stepped inside.

There was instant impression of luxury—thick-piled native rugs, heavy furniture, glints of silver and cut brass and rich hangings, candles ablaze in massy candelabra, a tantalus and smoking-stand, even a piano in one corner.

BAGOT heard the car engine outside start up and then die away. Cap in hand, Bagot glanced about the room—then turned, startled.

A curtain was brushed aside, and into the room walked—not Grenille, but Madame Dessarts, smiling, hand outstretched.

"Welcome, Captain Bagot!" she exclaimed briskly, cordially. "Pardon my little ruse; I thought the name of Grenille would draw you. It was safer than to use my

own. Sit down and be at ease; we are quite safe here, we may talk freely."

For once, John Bagot was taken utterly aback.

Chapter Five

IN the silence, Bagot found the woman's gaze upon him, scrutinizing him. She displayed no triumph over the success of her ruse. Instead, she had become grave and somber; yet her glowing eyes warmed as she watched him.

"Around our island, which is larger than France," she said quietly, "there is a wall of darkness through which you have pierced. A wall of ignorance, of silence. We cannot communicate with anyone outside that wall. Our wireless sets have been seized. We know only what our pro-Nazi governor, the plump Parisian M. Annet, sees fit to tell us. The Nipponese have promised to occupy only Diégo-Suarez and our other islands; a lie, of course. Now we play for life or death, monsieur."

He listened, impassive outwardly, but inwardly deeply moved. This vital force of hers was not mere magnetism, but something beyond and greater, like vibrant sunlight.

"You must understand the rapidity with which we're forced to plan, move, change plans and make new ones," she went on. "It's been very difficult, because of spies and traitors, and—happenings like the death of Captain Luchard today. We've been forced to obey that old motto *'Do what the day brings,'* and do it quickly!"

"Never heard of it before," said Bagot. "'Do what the day brings!' You know, it's good. There's something to it."

"There is," she agreed, faintly smiling. "You have pierced the wall of darkness around us; when you took or sent Colonel Payole out, you did a great thing. He took with him, in his head, all the vital information that the British and our other friends on the outside need so vitally. They promised long ago to help us. There was a British secret agent here, but—he died. There was a De Gaullist officer here; he died too. The wall of darkness was well kept up. Now, within a day or two, terrible things are going to happen. We are helpless to prevent—sometimes helpless even to keep our promises."

Bagot's gray eyes chilled slightly.

"Why are you telling me all this, madame?"

"Because tonight must go out definite, final instructions; any mistake would mean the lives of many men, good men, fine men," she replied quite calmly. "If you wish to withdraw from your engagement, which becomes more risky every moment, you may do so. Very bad news has just arrived, though it's not yet generally known."

"What is it?" he demanded.

"The squadron from Dakar is off the south end of the island—the cruisers *Montcalm* and *Gloire,* with transports full of Vichy troops. They'll go direct to Diégo-Suarez to make that place safe. This is bad, because the British promised long ago not to permit Vichy troops to come past the Cape; they've been powerless to prevent it, and evidently can't give us any help."

Bagot fumbled out his pipe and pouch.

"Maybe: but those Limeys are cagey at times," he said. "They might want to bottle up the Vichy outfit here. And speaking of Montcalm—do you know they've got his head in a glass box up at a convent in Quebec? His skull, rather. That's a fact. I saw it when I was a kid."

She frowned slightly. "Just why do you speak in such a way, monsieur?"

"To get away from your hypnotic act," he said bluntly. "You're tense, concentrated, centered on me like a doctor on a patient. What do you want?"

A smile filled her eyes. "I want to know whether you wish to withdraw from your engagement with us."

"Me? Back out?" He frowned, astonished. "Why? Because it looks more risky?"

She shook her head. Reaching out, she picked up a cigarette, lighted it, and held the match to him for his pipe.

"No. Because the gold with which we were to pay you has been lost. The Government has it back. The party who were bringing it to the coast are dead."

Those golden eyes glowed at him, luminous and intent. He puffed his pipe alight. So here it was, face to face, and not as he had expected. A smile came to his lips; his eyes cleared, and leaning back in his chair he laughed softly.

It was her turn to be surprised, wondering, uncertain. Peering sharply at him, she wrinkled up her eyes to keep out the smoke, and spoke curtly.

"Well? What's your answer?"

Bagot chuckled over his pipestem. "That husband of yours gave me a thing or two to remember. Now you've given me something else. *Do what the day brings!* Well, this night has brought me something, all right."

He leaned forward, speaking earnestly. "I've found something, madame; a place to fill. Up to now, I've been pretty well concerned with myself and my own troubles. Now it's changed. First—you really need me and this vessel of mine, don't you?"

She thrust her cigarette into the ash-tray, tamping it out.

"It is a fact," she said calmly, without emotion, "that when we learned about you and your ship in Diégo, I thought God had sent you. We have such bitter need! Not just for this one occasion, but in a dozen ways. You and your one little ship, my friend, would be like an angelic host to us. Yes, I mean it."

"I guess you do," said Bagot. He saw everything in a new light; perhaps the vision had been growing in him since that talk with Dessarts. These men and women were not working for themselves; he was. They were working, not to win their lives, but to serve. *Do what the day brings!*

"All right," he went on briskly. "Let's have it understood, all cards on the table. I'm with you. I want no gold. I'm not in this game for money. This is my place; this is where I can do my bit and make up for what I haven't done before. Is that clear?"

SHE was staring at him, unshed tears stealing into her eyes as she comprehended.

"You—you can't mean it!" she began, stammering. Her bosom was rising and falling swiftly; emotion filled her voice. Bagot thought never had he seen so lovely a creature as this woman, so capable, so worthwhile.

"Yes; I've got my self-respect back at last; and never fear, I'll be paid otherwise. I'm asking a price—"

She caught her breath. Abruptly, her hands went out to him.

"Oh, my friend—that you should do this—and for me—"

"For you? Not a bit of it," broke in Bagot almost angrily. "I'd do a lot for you, certainly; you're a woman to go places with! But in this I'm on the square. You might just as well be a camel wearing blue jeans, as talk emotion and soft soap. I'm a practical man. I'm going to have my price out of you and your friends, and we'd better get down to business."

She flushed, laughed, sobered again.

"You'll really help us?"

"I'm one of you, as long as needed," said Bagot. "And since you seem to be running the show here ashore, I'll run it on the water. Mind this: aboard ship I'm in charge! Is that understood?"

"Yes, yes—*mon Dieu,* yes!" she exclaimed. She seemed laughing and crying at once. "But this—this is superb, monsieur! You do not know that I saw you at Diégo-Suarez?"

"Certainly I do, and I saw you," Bagot rejoined quietly. "I didn't believe you could be real; but you are. Well, shall we get down to business?"

"Of course. Ah, you have made me so happy!" she said softly. "Business? Of what sort? There is something I want you to do, something in which I need your help.

This is my own work, nothing in which my friends are concerned, but I must have assistance."

"Time enough. I have a demand to make also," said Bagot. "First, let's have everything squared away and understood: When does Grenille get back with my ship?"

A queer little flicker of terror leaped in her eyes.

"By tomorrow night," she breathed. "He must, he must! He promised he would! We must act then or never. We dare not wait another day! But if he does not come, we're lost."

Bagot calculated swiftly. Two hundred miles across the channel to Africa. With the engine, the brigantine could do ten knots if pressed—more with the canvas, under proper conditions. Yes, Grenille should be back in another twenty-four hours. A good gamble.

"HE ought to be back before then," said Bagot. "Right. Trust him: a good man. What's the program, if he shows up? Not details; just the bones of it."

"We go in two cars up the north road," she said, "to the spot where the ship waits, and go aboard. Did you get the packet of charts Grenille wanted sent you? I marked one."

"Yes."

She was calculating mentally, her lips moving without sound: then she nodded.

"Tomorrow night, Sunday night, we leave. You go out to sea and down to that spot on the coast to the south, near Maintirano. There, on Monday night, our friends will gather. Do you understand?"

"Certainly. I've already figured that much out. We can get there easily."

"We must—we *must!*" she repeated with energy. "It's just a tiny cove, a split in the shore. If we don't get there until Tuesday night, it may be too late; they may be lost, for many of them will be pursued. They'll come in cars."

"All right," said Bagot casually. "Slip in and get them, and slip out and across the channel—just like that. With sweat and agony and danger of a dozen kinds to make every blessed minute lag like a century. Eh?"

She nodded. Bagot knocked the dottle from his pipe, met her gaze, and stiffened.

"See here! Has this got anything to do with the affair at your house tomorrow night, the one you invited me to?"

She nodded again. "Yes and no. Our party here will be gathered at my house, to go from there. But there is something else—the something in which I need your help. Will you promise blindly to help me? I can't tell you now what it is."

"No," said Bagot. "I don't promise things in a hurry."

She gave him an odd look. "It—it concerns M. Fréjus."

"Oh!" said Bagot. "Your friend Fréjus, eh?"

Their eyes met. She colored slowly, delicately; even by the candlelight, Bagot could see the slow tide of color mounting in her cheeks. But her eyes remained steady and firm.

"Sunday night, tomorrow night," she said, "everything must come together—all the threads. It is hard to tell you this; you, a stranger! Others understand—"

She paused. Bagot understood that she was trying to tell him about her relations with Fréjus; there was something horrible in the very thought. He sheered away.

"Luchard told me that Fréjus was to be removed."

She nodded quickly. "Yes; they want that, all the others. I do not. That's where you must help me. I'm going aboard your ship; you must help me take M. Fréjus along, a prisoner."

"Why?" demanded Bagot laconically, thrusting the word at her. She started slightly at the word and its implications, then gestured lightly.

"There must be no assassination to stain our cause, M. Bagot. That is one reason. For another, with M. Fréjus in our hands, we have a hostage of the best. And we can make use of him."

"All right," said Bagot with decision. "If you'll play ball with me, I'll play with you. I'll help you. . . . By the way, just what's the program? What am I to do?"

"I'll send for you tomorrow evening," she replied. "Not to my house; Ahmed will take you somewhere else. You'll understand then. It's a promise?"

"Not at all; a bargain." Bagot smiled thinly. "You help me, and I'll help you. Those Japs are to be at your house tomorrow night. Very well. Chuck them into the cars and take 'em along with us—for me, not for you. I want the two gentlemen, alive and well. Why? Never mind. That's my price, all the price I'll ask. Can do?"

She reflected, lighting another cigarette thoughtfully; in the silence Bagot caught the drifted fragrance of flowers from outside, and heard, somewhere close by, the harsh barking of flying foxes. He saw her features light up.

"Yes, it would fit in—of course, of course!" She turned to him eagerly. "Agreed! It can be done; I'll see to it, and in return you'll help me with the matter of Fréjus! A bargain!"

She put out her hand; Bagot met her firm, quick grip and nodded.

"Good! Then it's settled. Now there's something else in the way of information: When your Free Frenchmen land across the channel, what happens? Mozambique is Portuguese territory, not British."

"Yes, but British agents are there, or were, to take care of everything. And before reaching there, it is possible to meet British ships; there are many in the channel, close to the African shore."

"That's all I want to know," said Bagot, satisfied. He came to his feet. "Well, I guess we understand each other; it's been a good night's work, better than you know! I'll say good night. . . . I suppose the car will take me back?"

"Yes. I must remain here to send out the instructions. . . . Wait, now." She had taken his hand; she held it, looking him in the eyes, as she went on: "My friend, remember how much can happen in twenty-four hours; remember Captain Luchard. Every detail, every plan, may change at the last minute. I'll send word by Ahmed if necessary. Remember you're watched all the time, and that everyone may be a spy. Ahmed won't come for you very early tomorrow night: I think, around ten o'clock. Good night."

She withdrew her hand from his, stepped outside with him, and watched the car drive away; he fancied a wave of her white fingers.

By gad! His heart hammered as he held match to pipe, trying to quiet his nerves with tobacco. She had been impersonal, and yet she had not. She was all dignity and command and efficiency, a human dynamo of kinetic energy; yet he felt that she liked him. She was not one of these energetic, busy females who are self-centered and see only themselves in any mirror; no, she was not playing a rôle. She saw each tiny detail—

"In other words," reflected Bagot, "she's a damned fine girl, and I'm for her! But none o' that, now, Johnny Bagot! You leave that game to Fréjus. She isn't any woman to do any cheating, either; she's straight and fine. I expect she's been playing Fréjus along for the sake of the cause, and now he probably won't be put off any longer, and something's got to give! Well, it won't be this girl; you can bank on that!"

A BLOCK from the hotel Bagot left the car and said good night to Ahmed. As he came into the lobby and passed through, he saw a man staring at him in slack-jawed amazement—a baldish, rat-faced man in soiled whites, who sat holding a newspaper. Ah, the shadow of whom Ahmed had told him! Just as well to know the man who was trailing him.

In his own room, he flung himself into a chair and stared at the envelope of charts with a fierce delight. Done! Done at last!

All the vague uneasiness of his heart was gone now. He had committed himself, not through duress but by choice. He had found his place indeed; he was vitally needed here, or at least his vessel was. More than this, the little minor loose ends would all be whipped up in a jiffy, once he got across the channel. The two Japs would take care of that.

He licked his lips at the thought. What would the British not give, to get those two Jap agents in their hands! Captain John Bagot could have whatever he wanted in exchange. And what he wanted was some sort of official standing for himself and his vessel. As it stood, he was no better than a pirate. But the British or Free French would take care of that; and so, if anything went wrong, the Vichy partisans could not very well hang him.

He was risking the ship, of course; he could afford to do this. The proceeds of the cargo he had brought over were safe stowed away. *Do what the day brings!* The words lingered in his brain as he turned in. . . .

He wakened early, a different man: unworried, composed, sure of himself and all around. He was not serving these men, this woman, but something beyond. He began to comprehend the words of Dessarts about service to ideals, about brotherhood. MacArthur was fighting for him in Australia; if he did his bit here, if he helped in keeping Madagascar out of Nipponese hands, he was fighting under MacArthur for his own people.

Meager breakfast over, Bagot lit his pipe and went out for a morning stroll about the streets before the heat set in. Sunday morning. Well, by this time tomorrow he would either be well out to sea, or dead. What if the brigantine were not back by this night? He shrugged at the mental query. Do what the day brings! Yes, by gad, he owed her something for those words!

Presently he wakened to the fact that this day, at least, had brought a stir of alarm and uneasiness to Madagascar, with a tension that threatened to reach crucial heights ere the day ended. But first came his brush with Fréjus.

Chapter Six

BAGOT was strolling up the Rue du General Joffre, and coming to the big church that stood under the Rova hill, he dropped in from curiosity. To his astonishment, he saw the spare, powerful figure of Fréjus directly in front of him.

Fréjus seemed absorbed in the service; but presently, as though drawn by Bagot's gaze, he glanced around, nodded and smiled. When the service ended, Bagot found the other at his side before they were clear of the doors, and speaking cordially.

"Shall we have a drink together, to celebrate the monsoon?"

A café table invited. True, the change of monsoon was something to celebrate. Now there would be the steady land-breeze all night, and the sea-breeze most of the day. The two men settled down at the table and ordered an *apéritif*. Fréjus, looking at the swarms of people about the church in their Sunday garb, sneered faintly.

"I wonder how many of those black-clad civilians will be under arrest before night?"

"You should know," said Bagot.

The other nodded. "We're at a crisis; new regulations have been issued in regard to shipping, travel, weapons, everything. Coastal traffic may be halted entirely. Much is brewing. Even today we may have outbreaks of violence, factional strife. The city's actually bubbling."

"And you have no remedy except repression?"

"None." Fréjus was inscrutable, grave, unsmiling; one could sense his implacable nature. "The old order of things must endure by sheer force; all subversive elements must be stamped down without pity. The administration must be upheld at all costs; without it, there would be anarchy in this island! Vichy or no Vichy—that is not the question at all. It is a matter of sustaining the *status quo* against absolute anarchy!"

"Well, at least that's one point of view," said Bagot, sipping his drink. "I'm surprised that you should have such ideas. Surely you're too intelligent not to realize that this attitude makes for your own destruction, eventually."

"That may be," said Fréjus stiffly. "I can see no alternative. The Vichy Government saved from utter ruin part of France and her possessions. We've supported that government; we must continue to do so, right or wrong, if we're to preserve this island for France."

"You mean Laval, and therefore Hitler."

Fréjus shrugged; his eyes darkened. "We can't judge, at this distance from home. We must do our best; any obstacles must perish."

"You might be surprised to find that death is not so important an assistant as you have supposed," Bagot said calmly.

Fréjus bent a penetrating look upon him. "You speak almost as an enemy!"

"Not at all; as an honest man, Fréjus."

"Then you might well read a warning into my words."

Bagot met the darkling gaze with a slight smile.

"Perhaps; yet I might be the one who is giving warning."

The lean face hardened. "Careful, Captain Bagot! I have heard some ugly whispers regarding you."

"Not from Luchard, certainly."

Bagot regretted those impulsive words, but too late. Fréjus whitened. A glint of anger came into his eyes; his lips thinned. But instead of continuing the discussion, he came abruptly to his feet.

"I'm glad to know where you stand, then. Good day," he said, and walked off.

Bagot cursed himself for a fool; why give way to impulse, with nothing to gain and all to lose? Because, perhaps, this man wakened a dark and stubborn animosity in him. But there was no sense in saying such things. What had he done, then, except told the truth?

He was sick of the old falsity and pretense; things were wakening in him, fighting in him for expression. He finished his drink, paid, and strolled away; and then he became conscious of the change in the town, in the people around him. Things were happening, or on the verge of happening.

Radios of Government issue were blaring away to gathered crowds speeches and talks from Tananarive, the capital on the other side of the island, and Vichy broadcasts. The crowds were of civilians, natives, Comorians from the channel islands, Hindus, Orientals. A few Senegalese and native troops were vainly trying to break up the groups.

A spirit of hot fear, close to panic, had swept abroad among the highly mixed population. Rumors of all sorts were flying fast and far. It was no longer a secret that Nippon wanted this fourth largest island on earth, and that Laval and Vichy were preparing to repeat the appalling perfidy that had tamely handed over Indo-China to the barbarian.

Disputes, discussions, near-riots, abounded. Tension was gathering, and tension meant trouble. The transports and cruisers from Dakar—where were they? No one know for certain. The iron hand of the administration, long at work in secret, was now openly gripping the entire island; to the army purge was now to be added a purge of officials and civilians. Some said it had already begun. Bus-loads of troops were on the way now to put it into effect in Mojanga and elsewhere. Ferment was bubbling; the faces in the streets were eloquent of bitter smoldering fires, for the vast majority of the populace were not only anti-Vichy but were fast getting into a frenzy of terror at prospect of being made Japanese slaves. Wild reports told of fighting here and there, of savage repressive measures. Wharves and public buildings were heavy with soldiers and guards.

Today, Bagot noted, the Japanese were staying closely within the hotel; under-cover men were loafing about the place in numbers, and many messengers came and went. Also, Bagot saw the bald-headed spy more than once, evidently keeping him under surveillance.

Late in the afternoon, going down to the hotel café, Bagot sat at one of the little tables over a drink and watched the streets. Excitement was everywhere; this Avenue Gallieni was in a boil. A long file of marines and soldiers, marching up from the harbor to the barracks on the hill above, was assailed on all sides by heated civilians, whose verbal assaults ran the gamut of insult and profanity. Bagot saw cars stop before houses or shops, squads of police enter, bring forth an occupant, and drive away.

THEN, to his amazement, he saw something else: Grenille, in spotless whites and Panama, came along swinging a stick, and with a casual shake of the hand took a seat at his table, and spoke.

"Don't look astonished, Cap'n. You're watched; maybe I am also," he said, and lit a cigarette. "It's good to see you again."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Bagot. "Then the brigantine's here! When did you arrive?"

"Laid her up safely an hour before dawn. I didn't have to go to Mozambique; we ran into an English patrol ship that took Payole off, and I came back here. I've just seen Madame Dessarts. I had to see you, briefly, before getting along."

"Oh! Seen her, have you?"

"Yes. With the—what do you call it?—yes, the pay-off coming tonight, I could take chances; besides, I'll be far away from here in an hour. But first, Cap'n!" Grenille leaned forward and extended his hand. His face was radiant, his dark alive eyes were glowing. "Will you shake hands all over again? You know why. Your action makes my heart sing!"

Bagot knew why, yes. He shook hands solemnly.

"I'm glad to be one of you," he said, and let it go at that. "D'you mean you're not in on the party tonight?"

Grenille shook his head. "Luchard's death hit us hard. I have a car; I'm heading south to help out one or two of our friends, and shall meet you tomorrow night with the others, down there. My job is to help manage that end of it. Yours, to get the *Zaidee* there. Let me describe the exact point on the coast—"

He did so, minutely, with the approaches to it. Bagot must put in after dark, a task that would have appalled most seamen. The Free Frenchmen would be gathered there from various points, with Grenille himself.

"We can't be sure of anything," Grenille went on gravely. "Some of our friends were to leave Tananarive, the capital, today by air. They were caught at the airport, that magnificent new airport at Ivato, twelve kilometers outside the city; they were shot on the spot. The civilian purge has already begun. It is beginning here now; tonight and tomorrow it will become a reign of terror."

Bagot scarcely heard. The fact that Grenille was here, that the brigantine was here and ready, made him want to yelp with delight. The greatest load was off his mind at once; he was alert and keen for action.

"The ship's fifteen miles north of here," Grenille pursued. "You can get almost to the spot by car; a little walking won't hurt. The men will be expecting you. Also, there's another man aboard there. That's why I had to see you."

"Another man?" Bagot's eyes chilled. "Who is he?"

"I don't know," said Grenille. "He came aboard from the English ship. He wanted to be landed here on the island; but after talking with me on the way back, he said it would be better to wait there for you and the others. He wants to talk with you and Madame Dessarts."

"Oh!" Bagot drew at his pipe. "A British agent?"

"Undoubtedly, Cap'n. Perhaps he will take my place."

"Eh?" Bagot was startled. "But we'll meet you down south?"

"Yes, because I shall want to see you again; then we part. My work lies here, *mon vieux*. You do not understand. This thing of Free France—why, it has become like life-blood, like the pumping heart! Everything else is of no account. Even if we must lose, we still have the duty, the service to give, and my work lies here. I've found my place, like you."

"Perhaps so," assented Bagot, with a nod of comprehension. "Mine's afloat, yours ashore."

"Precisely."

"Well, do you know what Madame Dessarts expects—about my helping her?"

Grenille shook his head. "She would not say; I gather that it is something vitally important. She is making all the plans. I obey her."

"Hm! It's not like you to accept dictation from a woman."

"It's not like you to promise blindly that you'll help her."

Bagot laughed. "Right; you've got me there. By the way, I think Fréjus is suspicious of me. I lost my head and talked straight to him, this morning."

"Can't be helped." Grenille glanced at his watch, swore, and rose. "Now, for tonight! Trust the lady. She's sending her car for you; it has something to do with Fréjus; that's all I know. Dessarts and the others, there at the villa, will take care of the situation otherwise. I must go, I must go! *Au revoir*, and all luck attend you!"

He shook hands and set off hastily. Before he had gone thirty feet, a car with a Hindu driver slowed down at his side. He clambered in, and the car departed at speed. So far as Bagot could see, it was not followed.

He was just paying for his drink, when the waiter summoned him to the telephone. In surprise, he followed, picked up the receiver, and heard Grenille's voice again.

"Something I forgot to tell you, Cap'n! Bad news. Corregidor, they say, has fallen."

With this, Grenille rang off, and Bagot went up to his room.

That was a facer and no mistake; Corregidor fallen! Bagot had done a lot of big talking about Corregidor, to his men, to the French, to anyone who would listen. He had really believed it a sort of super-Gibraltar, impregnable to all the world. That the little brown barbarians would ever take that rock was impossible, absurd!

But now Corregidor was down. It left him stunned. Why, the whole world was going down before this Jap horde! All the mighty places were fallen—just as, hundreds of years ago, the mighty places of earth had fallen before other barbarian hordes of destruction, Huns, Mongols, Vandals. After all, this was just the rhythmic recurrence of what had happened before, and would again. The great wave of barbaric power would sweep forth, destroy, consume, kill; and then, up to the eyes in blood and loot—it would fall apart and vanish in slaughter and fury.

Well, Corregidor was not the last stand of civilization, by a good deal! There was China still in the game; and India, and Australia, still existed. Bagot shook himself, and lifted his head.

"What the day brings!" he murmured. "What the day brings right now, is to buck up and take heart, and play the hand till hell freezes over!"

HE went down to dinner—found the place humming with news, and the front windows of the hotel being closed with iron shutters. Parties of Fifth Columnists had swung into action, it seemed; shops belonging to Free French partisans were being attacked and looted, and there was more rioting going on in the Hindu quarter—the Hindus being, of course, British subjects. Word had gone out that some Free Frenchmen had profaned a mosque, and the Arabs and other Mohammedans were out for

blood in consequence. Rumors of the wildest type were being bandied about.

"We are at the mouth of hell, m'sieur, of hell itself!" chattered the waiter, an old veteran with white mustaches. "They say arrests are being made wholesale, that nobody's life is safe! And two corvettes have come into the harbor. A great plot has been discovered, I hear, a plot to seize the public buildings—would to the good God it had succeeded! Anything were better than this terror!"

Bagot glanced around. "I don't see your Nipponese guests."

"Oh, two of them were here, m'sieur; the secretaries. The other two, the great men, were invited out to dinner and the evening, somewhere."

Bagot knew, then, that the assemblage at the Dessarts villa was taking place as scheduled. The irony of it struck him full force; Shigemitsu and Baron Inoyo, dined and fêted, listening with polite smiles to an evening of Malagasy music—while the terror they had instituted was sweeping around on all sides.

He smiled grimly to himself. "Well, it's the last pleasant evening those two birds will have for a while, if I know anything!" he reflected more cheerfully. He glanced up, as a figure approached his table. A quiver of apprehension shot through him; was he to be arrested? It was the bald-headed spy Fréjus had set upon him, the rat-faced man with spiky mustaches.

"M'sieur Bagot?" The spy paused, and bowed slightly. "Will you permit that I discuss a cup of coffee with you?"

"With the greatest of pleasure!" Relief surged in Bagot. "Sit down, man, sit down!"

The other complied, and mopped his bald head with a silk handkerchief; he was perspiring profusely. He looked at Bagot and smiled, showing very bad teeth.

"I am Raoul Cornaro, m'sieur, of the prefecture."

"Yes, I know about you," said Bagot pleasantly. "M. Fréjus put you on my trail; I was talking with him this morning."

He beckoned the waiter and ordered coffee for both. Cornaro did not appear in the least disconcerted by these words. Bagot, studying the man without appearing to do so, decided that he was a highly dangerous fellow: soft in the speech, damned hard in the eye, thin-lipped and capable.

"I am not subtle at all, m'sieur," Cornaro said, when the coffee had come and the waiter had gone. "I am not like M. Fréjus, who loves to amuse himself and then to pounce suddenly. No, I am afraid, because I think there is not much time ahead."

"Afraid? Why?" asked Bagot, wondering what was coming. "Time for what?"

"For living, m'sieur. What is going to happen, is no secret to me. In all this pleasant land are barely five thousand troops, though more are coming from Dakar. The administration will hand us over like sheep to the brown monkeys from Japan."

"Oh! You know that's coming, do you?"

"Unfortunately, yes. And I want to go away before it happens; but to go, one must have money, which is sometimes a hard thing to get, sometimes not."

Bagot laughed, amused and curious.

"You're a servant of the administration, but with an independent mind, eh?"

"Oh, no, m'sieur—merely a man, a little human being, who perceives a typhoon coming to swallow him up," Cornaro rejoined, and smacked his lips over his coffee. "I must avoid the typhoon. Duty does not worry me, for soon duty will be a thing of the past. A rich gentleman from America, to whom a mere ten thousand francs would mean nothing at all, could help me to get away. Such an amount would mean a great deal to me."

"Hello!" Bagot saw the truth suddenly. "You've got information to sell, eh?"

"That is it. Information about you, m'sieur."

Bagot puffed at his pipe for a moment.

This was little short of providential. In view of the warning of Fréjus that morning, something might break at any time; he might be arrested, detained for questioning, anything. And this bald-headed shadow might somehow manage to gum up the all-important plans for the evening—not so far off now, the French dinner being a late one.

"Well," said Bagot, with a glance at his watch, "this is no place to carry on the discussion, M. Cornaro."

"Quite true. You suggest—"

"That you come to my room. I don't carry any such sum on my person."

"Nor," said Cornaro suavely, "could I find any such sum in your room. I was looking in there this morning. Those charts of yours, however, are very interesting!"

Bagot laughed; the frank audacity of the fellow was engaging.

"Suppose you come to my room at nine-thirty," he said. "I promise nothing; but we should be able to talk there safely, at least."

M. Cornaro swallowed his coffee, rose, bowed, shook hands like an old friend, and went his way. Bagot looked after him, with a shake of the head.

"Looks as if the waiting is over, and the action begins," he reflected cheerfully, "at nine-thirty! You're an optimist, my little spy; I'm afraid you'll be disillusioned."

He chuckled. *Do what the day brings!* He was getting to like that sensible motto more and more—and also the source whence it had come.

Chapter Seven

CORNARO was scarcely the type of person to arouse any feelings of sympathy or pity. Nor was Bagot in any position to dispense such emotions. . . . The inevitable happened, with a trim efficiency which Bagot felt was largely wasted on such poor quarry. The unfortunate police spy was dumped unconscious on the bed, to which he was securely fastened with his own handcuffs; Bagot did not bother to gag his victim, since in any case he was burning his bridges behind him. Then he settled down to inspect his loot.

A small but serviceable automatic pistol he pocketed, with a grunt of satisfaction, and then inspected the papers he had brought to light. Cornaro's identification-card as an agent of police was returned to the man. The remainder proved to be orders of arrest signed by Fréjus—emergency orders. Bagot was scarcely surprised upon turning up one for his own arrest on the charge of conspiracy; the other names were unknown to him, half a dozen in all, but were identified as civilians of the city. Retaining his own as a souvenir, he touched a match to the balance.

He was watching them flame up, when there came a scratching at the door, and he admitted Ahmed in white coat and cap. The Arab looked at the figure on the bed, and turned to Bagot with a flash of gleaming teeth.

"You have been pleasantly occupied, m'sieur. But it is a pity to waste those handcuffs; you may have need of them," he said cheerfully. "They would be better used upon the master than on the man."

"Eh? You mean on M. Fréjus?"

"Allah alone knows the truth!" said Ahmed. "It is but a suggestion."

Bagot had the key of the handcuffs. He unlocked them, pocketed them, and tied up Cornaro with split towels.

"All ready," he said, taking his packet of charts.

"But let us have your bag also, m'sieur. No need to leave anything," said Ahmed.

In another two minutes they were passing out of the hotel by the back way, as before. Bagot had left sufficient money on the dresser to pay his hotel bill, as a gracious gesture.

The car was waiting in the side-street. Ahmed threw in the bag, slid under the wheel, and they were off. He leaned back to speak.

"I must warn m'sieur that there are patrols on all the roads out of town except the north road, which leads nowhere and ends in a road used only by woodcutters."

"Right," said Bagot. "Where are we going?"

"To the villa occupied by M. Fréjus."

The devil! What was Sylvie Dessarts planning? Bagot scowled at the darkness, unable to tell where they were. All street lights had been extinguished, although there was no blackout. He could only guess that they were proceeding to the higher level, where the residential portion extended.

No patrols on the north road—that was the one to be taken out of town. But if it led nowhere, how to reach the waiting brigantine? Still, Sylvie would know; it had been arranged, evidently, with escape well assured. This business of the Fréjus villa, however—Bagot did not like this by half. He was dealing with a woman; however charming or admirable, she was still a woman, activated by desperate emotions. No telling what he had let himself in for!

The car came to a halt. Ahmed clicked off the light and held open the door.

"We leave the car here, m'sieur; it is safer so."

Bagot got out. Under the blazing stars, the street was obscure, bordered by great mango trees.

"I don't like this by half," he grumbled.

Ahmed started off. "We are to wait, m'sieur."

"Where?"

"At the villa. No one is there. Soon Madame Dessarts will come with M. Fréjus. She wishes us to be ready to assist her. She says we must get into the back room and wait; when we leave, we must take M. Fréjus with us."

Beyond a low growl, Bagot made no response, but anger was working in him.

They walked half around the block and then came to a small villa set back from the street, a garage beside it—no different from a hundred others.

"How d'you know it's empty?" demanded Bagot.

"He lives alone, m'sieur. The servants go home at night, like all natives here."

The American stopped short.

"Sneak into the place? Be damned to it!" He revolted at the idea. "Sneak in yourself if you like; I'm no eavesdropper at keyholes! I'll wait outside. If they come, I'll be on hand; but I'll go into no man's house like a thief."

This feeling was unreasonable; more likely, it was the pattern of destiny at work. Certainly, Bagot felt strongly in the matter. In some ways he was without compunction; in others he was sensitive as a girl. What did not occur to him was that Sylvie Dessarts must have planned this job very carefully and perhaps intended him to be an eavesdropper.

Ahmed was dismayed and tried to argue, but Bagot sent him about his business in no uncertain tones, and he disappeared.

Bagot walked up and down; having asserted himself, he felt better. The street was deserted; the houses roundabout were dark. To himself, Bagot grudgingly admitted that it might have been safer to follow Sylvie's plan, but he was too stubborn to do so now.

When the lights of a car appeared down the street, he quickly slid up the steps of the villa and around to the side, where giant rhododendrons gave cover if needed. Crouching here, he heard a woman's laugh, the tones of Fréjus, and feet stamping to the front door; the car had been left out in front.

Lights sprang on in the house. In evening attire Fréjus was a handsome man; the ruthless lines of his features were softened and toned down, and he gave evidences of being more than a mere police spy. He bustled about, switching on soft lights, making Sylvie at her ease, getting out a wine-bucket and glasses from the kitchen refrigerator. The villa was not pretentious, but its three rooms were comfortable, and here on the higher ground it got the cool air that made life endurable in Mojanga.

The big living-room showed little of the man; this was a rented place and not distinctive. Sylvie, who had been wrapped in a military cloak, threw it off to disclose a filmy silk creation from Paris. She settled herself in a corner of the divan, lit a cigarette, and eyed Fréjus as he placed the wine on the table.

"The singing and dancing will go on for another hour; we'll not be missed," she said. "You have a snug place here, my good police agent; will you have it when the Japanese take over our island?"

Fréjus laughed. "We didn't come here to talk of that, Sylvie. You look divine this evening! I never saw you more—"

"Business first, wine and flowers later. Don't be trite," she cut in. "You promised me certain papers if we came here tonight. Well, I'm here! Suppose you set my mind at rest regarding the future of the Dessarts régime."

Fréjus nodded. "Very well; you're right."

He turned to the wall and opened a desk set into it. A large drawer came to sight. Key-ring in hand, Fréjus unlocked this drawer, opened it, and from it took a steel box of some size, which he placed on the desk shelf. To this he fitted another key, and opened it. Sylvie watched him with narrowed, intent gaze, a faint color rising in her cheeks.

John Bagot, standing outside at the open but screened window, began to understand many things regarding Sylvie Dessarts. He was to understand many more within the next few moments.

From the steel box, Fréjus took a tight roll of papers.

"There's enough here to hang Jean and a dozen more with him," he said lightly. "This is it; the *dossier Dessarts*. He's an honest simpleton, and I've been glad to protect him for your sake, but it grows wearisome. Why don't you leave him and have done? You never loved him. You've never been a real wife to him. It was a marriage of convenience in the first place—"

"Business first, personalities afterward, if you please," she intervened.

FRÉJUS laughed again and tossed the roll of papers to the divan beside her. He locked the box and left it, then lit a cigarette and regarded her smilingly.

"Well? You're satisfied?"

"No." She looked up, meeting his gaze, and gestured with her cigarette. "I'm still intent on business; you promised to keep nothing back. This terrible state of affairs here, this purge—it is your doing?"

He shrugged. "No; I've assisted, of course. But I've been busy with other matters. Perhaps you'd like to hear about them, Sylvie; they concern your friends, perhaps you." His gaze narrowed; the predatory, inflexible aspect of his face was intensified. He watched her with a cruel enjoyment.

"Indeed?" she rejoined. "How can such things concern me?"

"That's for you to say. I had a word with our friend Bagot this morning, the American captain. Do you know, that rascal is here for a purpose? I've unearthed the whole scheme. His vessel slipped into a little bight up the coast, late last night; there's to be a mass flight of these Free French gentry, and he's in league with them. Not here, but down south near Maintirano. So I've stopped it—and him as well."

She looked up at him lazily.

"You mean—arrest?"

Fréjus nodded. "He'll be pinched when he tries to leave the hotel; tomorrow morning he'll be in jail. A corvette goes north tonight; she'll blow his vessel out of the water at dawn. The orders are given. Those gentry down south will assemble to meet him—and be scooped up

in our net. It's well for you that Jean isn't concerned in it!"

"Oh!" she said. "You'd make me a widow immediately, eh? But you must be mistaken about this American—"

"Not a bit of it," snapped Fréjus. "He's a political agent. We've learned that an American force is now disembarking in South Africa; it's suspected that they and the British are planning some attempt against Madagascar. That's why our reinforcements are here, and a Japanese expeditionary force is on the way to help strengthen us. So now you know a little of the inside of things, my dear. Shall we pass on to the wine, and more pleasant topics?"

She pressed out her cigarette.

"I didn't suspect that you had discovered so much," she said slowly. "Or I might not have saved your life tonight."

"Eh? And how did you do this marvelous thing, Sylvie?"

"By coming here with you. It was not for kisses and furtive love, as you hoped." She smiled at him: those amber eyes of hers were wide and childlike. "You see, I wanted to give you your chance."

"For what?" he asked crisply. He had taken warning.

"To join us. It's not too late even now. You've done many damnable things, but you have qualities we need. In that steel box of yours are many secrets—accusations, charges, reports. Think how useful they'd be to us, how useful you yourself would be!"

"You must be mad!" he exclaimed, and stopped short, staring down at her. Speculation glinted in his eyes, swift surmise, startled appraisal.

Indeed, her calmness in uttering such words did seem unnatural. It was as though she did not realize their terrific import, or how tension had leaped alive in the room, how Fréjus had stiffened into acute suspicion and alarm.

"Has it ever occurred to you," she went on lightly, "that all your work is wasted in the cause of tyranny and injustice? Wasted it is. Yet you could do so much in a better cause! Like, for instance, this M. Bagot."

"That American!" broke out Fréjus contemptuously.

"Yes. He risks everything he has and is, to help us. Yet not to help us, either; rather, to serve the ideals that we serve, those for which poor Luchard died. You try to crush out these things, but you cannot. Men die for them, and in their death are far more powerful than you. I'm giving you a chance to turn around and join us."

FREJUS crushed the unlit cigarette in his hand. His lean face darkened, hardened. "Absurd!" he ejaculated.

"It would be more absurd if you refuse. Your death was set for tonight, remember, and I've saved you. That was something your spies didn't learn, eh?"

He started. "*Diantre!* Then you—your husband—the group here are in it!"

"Certainly," she assented, smiling. "Yes, there was more to it than you learned. Well, you have gifts, you have ability; you can still redeem yourself. For the last time, won't you try to see what I'm offering you?"

"Infamy!" he said with a curt laugh.

"No." She looked him in the face, soberly. "Suppose I said to you: 'Very well, take me; I am yours! But not in guilt and by stealth. Instead, embrace the cause I bring you! Realize that what I offer you is honor and valiant loyalty to things unseen, things for which so many have died! You are right about my marriage of convenience. I will leave the husband, whom I respect but do not love—for you! Well, M. Fréjus, what would you answer to all this?"

He hesitated. So tense and gripping was her earnestness, that it shook him visibly. She was offering him herself, and she meant it, if thus she could buy him over to the cause she served.

"This is nonsense! Be yourself, Sylvie!" he said softly.

She laughed a little. "Your last chance—and you call it nonsense! Don't you see that the whole world's in bloody sweat and anguish, that every one of us must sacrifice, must forget our silly ambitions, our future, if only we can do a tiny bit to help the great cause of all? Just as I would serve, if you'd let me, to win you over to the work! Why, you could be a second De Gaulle, the greatest man in this part of the world—"

He broke into a laugh, leaned forward, caught her up.

"Ah, Sylvie!" he cried. "I'll show you a better sort of dream! Here, my sweet one, forget your childish play-acting and remember that you're a woman—"

He drew her to him, pressing his lips to hers, covering her face with kisses. She made no protest; she remained passive, limp—until with one sudden movement she was out of his arms.

"That is enough; you are repaid for all you've done," she said, and turned swiftly to the desk. She caught hold of the steel box. "Well, at least I shall have these. . . . *To me, Ahmed! Bagot!*"

From the front door came an answering crash and an oath; Fréjus must have slipped the catch of the lock on entering. Bagot, furious, flung himself against it. At the same instant the door of the kitchen opened and Ahmed appeared there, a glint of steel in his hand.

Fréjus uttered one sharp, furious cry. Sylvie was striking at him with the steel box; he swept it aside, struck her and sent her reeling away, and whipped a pistol from under his coat. He shot Ahmed between the eyes as the Arab sprang at him. The deafening explosion filled the house with sound and almost drowned the noise of the front door, bursting in under Bagot's weight—almost, but not quite.

Whipping around, Fréjus fired again. Bagot was staggering forward, off balance with the give of the broken door. The bullet brushed him and missed as he collided headfirst with Fréjus, who was swept backward and borne down by the shock. The two men crashed to the floor together, Fréjus firing once more—the powder-burn seared Bagot's hand; the bullet missed.

Fréjus lay motionless. Falling, his head had come against the baseboard of the wall, with stunning force.

Bagot came to his feet. He kicked away the fallen pistol; there had not been time to draw or use his own weapon, taken from Cornaro. For a moment he saw nothing, except that Fréjus was knocked out. Remembering the handcuffs in his pocket, he got at them, his hand smarting from the powder-burns, and fell to his knees. Next moment he had clapped the bracelets on Fréjus; rising, he glanced around.

Sylvie was stooping over the figure of Ahmed; she came erect, with a helpless gesture. The young Arab was dead.

"No use," she said, then caught her breath and swooped down at Fréjus. She drew the key-ring from his pocket, thrust it into her bosom, and seized again upon the steel box. A bruise showed on her cheek, where Fréjus had struck her. She looked at Bagot.

"You—the bullets did not harm you?"

"No more than a powder-burn," he said, staring at her.

"You heard what was said?"

"Yes. By the Lord, what a woman you are!"

"Then you know that he had discovered our plans, somehow."

"That's right!" Bagot came alive suddenly. "Look here, can we get a warning to Grenille? He's gone south, you know."

She shook her head. "My resources are at an end. We'll have to trust him now. And you must get to sea before dawn, before that corvette can seize us all with your vessel!"

"Get us to the brigantine, and I'll answer for the rest."

She nodded, and donned her cloak.

"I've kept my share of the bargain, M. Bagot; all will go as you desire. Thanks for keeping yours." She pointed

down at Fréjus. "Can you get him into the car? We must take him with us."

Bagot grunted, and stooped. Once he got the limp body of Fréjus about his neck in the fireman's grip, and was erect again, he staggered outside, while she switched off the lights and held open the door for him. The night was peaceful and unalarmed; those shots had probably passed unobserved, muffled by the house walls.

Bagot recollected his bag, left in Ahmed's car around the corner. No time now for such trifles. He shifted his burden into the back seat. Sylvie joined him.

"Leave the other car; it's mine," she said, sliding under the wheel. "Poor Ahmed! He was a faithful fellow. We'll take this car; Fréjus should travel in his own vehicle! By this time, we should find everything taken care of at the house."

"Your husband is there?"

"No. He drove south with Grenille this evening. Two other officers are there; they'll handle everything, and have a car of their own."

The engine was going; she sent the car darting away, its lights flooding the dark street. Then she said no more, but drove hard and fast, making for her own villa.

Chapter Eight

BAGOT did not recognize the house or grounds when they arrived; the lights were all extinguished. As the car halted, Sylvie whistled softly. A white-clad figure appeared. A second joined it; there was a muffled colloquy. These, evidently, were the two officers she had mentioned.

"All's well, madame," a voice rose, "but there was much disturbance. The police may show up at any time—"

"That's no news," she broke in. "The two Nipponese?"

"Your servants have them, here; as you ordered."

"Put them in this car, then follow us in your own."

She spoke to dim shapes in the obscurity, evidently her native servants, in their own tongue. There was a chorus of responses. Two trussed figures were crammed into the car beside that of Fréjus; the prisoners were unhurt, but were bound fast and also gagged. The two officers were men Bagot had met on his first visit to the villa. They spoke to him, shook hands, and turned to gain their own car. One of the servants brought two small bags and put them in.

"My personal effects," said Sylvie, with irony. "More suitable clothes for the sea than these. *Adieu,* all!"

Native voices made response anew; then she put the car into gear and they were on their way. The lights of the second car sprang into view, only to be lost as Sylvie put on speed and made through the tree-shadowed streets for the northern highway. This, she explained, was a paved road that went only a short distance out of the city, then degenerated into old wagon roads used by woodcutters who fetched bundles of firewood in from the swamps.

"But," she added, "the road goes as far as we go—almost! We'll have to use the car lights; too bad, but can't be helped. They may be seen from seaward."

Starlight, and the cool rush of wind off the sea; it did not last long, for the pavement ended all too soon. North of the city and along the coast these mangrove swamps were impassable; the road curved inland, around them, and it was only a wagon road and poor at that. Most of the woodcutters, indeed, went back and forth by boat.

It was a long fifteen miles; soon the car was bouncing and jolting until it could advance only at a snail's pace. Now and again came an agonized groan from the rear seat. Bagot only smiled grimly. Keen anticipation rode him; a little more, and he would be back in his own element. Then the game would be in his own hands to win or lose, and he would have finished with this intrigue and plot ashore. Let Sylvie have that if she liked it; his work lay with wind and tide!

More than all this, was what he had jolting around in the back seat. In the light of Grenille's message, this was now all-important. Fréjus? Devil take Fréjus! Those other two trussed figures, once safely landed where they belonged, were big game!

He jogged the arm of the woman beside him.

"Look here! Remember, you offered Fréjus a last chance to throw in with you? Then why bother to keep him alive now?"

"If anything goes wrong, down there in Maintirano, we'll need a hostage; who could be better?" she replied, between bounces. "And he said things had gone wrong. On the other hand, if we get away clear, we'll try him and punish him for murder."

Bagot grunted. The vision of the implacable Fréjus being tried for his life by the Free French whose friends and brethren he had oppressed and imprisoned and killed—well, it would be something worth seeing, that was all! And as for being a hostage, she was dead right about it.

"You're all right!" he said. "If you could sail a ship, you'd be perfect!"

She laughed a little. "Perhaps I can do that, too! Oh—look, look!" Her voice lifted with sudden excitement. She pointed. Her hand darted to the instrument panel. "A wireless! Fréjus would have one, of course. . . . Do you know, we lost all those luxuries long ago? That was part of the wall of darkness and silence. And it works! It works!"

She showed the delight of a child. They were jouncing over an unspeakable track by this time; it ran along the shore heights at times, then dipped to cross tangled mangrove swamps, whose evil miasmic odors could not be dispelled even by the sea breeze.

From the radio speaker leaped a voice, fuzzy and distorted but still a voice. It was a broadcast from Mojanga, whose tall transmitter and radio tower adjoined the lighthouse on Caiman Point, west of the city. Bagot listened. The speaker was giving a brief news report, or what passed for such in Vichy territory.

The impertinences of the United States Government were being vividly resented by Vichy; the Japanese were reporting great naval victories in the Eastern seas, thus far not confirmed. The great Nazi spring offensive against the unfortunate people of Russia was about to open; Moscow would be wiped from the earth within two weeks. Here at home, a pact of commercial alliance and friendship was being drawn up between the governor at Tananarive and the Nipponese mission whose distinguished members were now guests of Madagascar. And still closer at home, all was now quiet in Mojanga; repressive measures had been used, and there would be no further rioting or confusion.

"It is regrettable," went on the voice, "that these brigands and wretches who call themselves Free French should have caused such disorders, even bloodshed. We have just learned of the death this evening of an esteemed fellow-citizen known to many of us, who was shot down by a group of these cowardly rascals south of the city. The name of M. Jean Dessarts, major in the topography brigade, will be inscribed upon the bright scroll of honor—"

Sylvie's hand reached across the band of radiance; darkness and silence filled the front of the car. A snakelike nest of mangrove roots appeared ahead. She skirted them, jolted into the track again, dodged a jagged lump of coral, and the car lights struck upon a fairly smooth section of road. She relaxed. Her voice came almost calmly.

"So it's happened. Probably while I was talking to that devil. . . . Do you see? He had planned it. He had learned that Jean was going south. He had posted some of his men."

"Oh! You mean Fréjus!" Bagot came out of his stunned silence. "Look here, he wouldn't do that—"

"While he was making love to me? You don't know him. That's his idea of a joke. Well, I only hope he's come to himself now and can hear us."

Bagot struck a match and looked in the back seat. Fréjus was still unconscious. So was Baron Inoyo, a trickle of blood on his cheek. The light struck upon the reptilian eyes of Shigemitsu, awake and staring. Bagot laughed, and tossed the match out the window. Then something jerked at his brain.

"Grenille! Didn't you say your husband was going with him?"

"Yes. They were going south together; they had to pick up two officers at outposts, men who had no way of reaching the rendezvous—"

She fell silent again; talk was quite futile. Bagot cursed to himself. There was no way of knowing, of course. Either Grenille was done for, or he was heading on into the south. If Dessarts died, others had to be saved; Bagot could fancy the voice of Grenille saying the words. He touched Sylvie on the arm, gently.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I can appreciate what a shock—"

"No," she rejoined quietly. "He had expected it to happen. I should have liked to save him for better things. That was why I listened to Fréjus. No, it is not a great shock, as you imagine; but it is a sad disappointment."

Bagot remembered that she had told Fréjus frankly she held her husband in respect, not in love; not unusual, for Frenchwomen.

To him, however, the death of Dessarts was a distinct shock; even keener was his swift anxiety about Grenille. However, he would not know about this until he put in at the rendezvous, down south.

Silence enfolded them now. The lights of the following car were visible from time to time. Presently they came out upon the shore, upon a stretch of coral sand and—nothing. The road ended here, amid far-reaching piles of firewood cut and stacked. Out of nowhere leaped a voice, urgent and imperative:

"Lights out! Off with those lights, quickly!"

Sylvie obeyed. Into the starlight on the white sand came a figure, then others behind him; the name of Allah rose upon the night, and Bagot spoke eagerly to the serang and others of his lascars. Then the leading figure reached him, as he left the car.

"You're Bagot? My name's Lynch."

"Oh! Grenille told me about you."

"How's everything?"

"Bad," said Bagot. "We've been betrayed, somehow. A corvette from Mojanga will be here at dawn to nab us. We must move fast and get to sea. Here, where's the brigantine?"

"Lying outside the inner reef," said Lynch. "Half a mile out. I have a boat here; I thought best—"

"Oh, you thought best!" barked the American. "That's a new one. Serang!"

"Yes, tuan?" rejoined the serang.

"Your men are ashore? Good. Neither you nor they are to take any order from Tuan Lynch or anyone else—except at my command. In this automobile are three bound men; take them as they are to the boat. When we get aboard, I'll give you orders about them. Remember—no order is to be obeyed unless it comes from my lips! Get about it, now."

THE Malay voices yelped assent. The other car had come up; its two occupants were out. Bagot introduced Lynch to Sylvie Dessarts and the others. After a moment Lynch turned to Bagot with an outbreak of eager words.

"You mean to say those three tied-up chaps are Fréjus and two of the Japs? Why, man, that's miraculous! You don't know—"

"I know damned well, Mr. Lynch, and I'll thank you to take note that those two Japs belong to me," said Bagot. "Just as well to have everything understood and shipshape. Now suppose we stop talking, and tumble aboard. It's going to be touch and go."

Lynch said nothing. The boat was pushed off the sand, the three captives lying in the bottom, and everyone piled in. Well filled, she headed out amid the phosphorescent swirls of the reefs. What with surf boiling in, dipping oars, and racing currents, the water was a luminous milky hue under the stars, as though touched with clear moonlight. The serang was at the tiller, knowing the brigantine's location. Already Bagot's mind was busy with offshore perils; he had the chart in his head, and was figuring shoals and reefs. He knew it was past midnight, and was feverish to haul out to sea before that corvette showed up.

IT seemed an interminable traverse before the dark bulk of the *Zaidee* blotched the starlit water. A man left aboard hailed them. They came alongside, and Bagot was the first up and over the rail. The feel of his own deck made his heart leap. Swift orders flowed from him, which the serang passed on. The three captives came aboard. With a word to Sylvie, Bagot led her down below and pointed her out a tiny stateroom, by the light of a flashlamp. He opened another that had no outside porthole and was used for storage.

"In here," he directed the men. The three prisoners were taken in and left as they were. Bagot locked the door and hurried on deck again.

The anchor came in; the brigantine headed seaward with engine athrob, Bagot at the helm and only the faint binnacle light below aglow. The feel of the ship under his hand delighted him. Nothing was wrong; the dark coast, its usual lights doused under war regulations, fell away. Here the shore ran from northeast to southwest; he headed straight west, to get clear of the Outer Reef and the bulge in the coastline that ran out to Cape St. Andrew, and the corvette that would be steaming up from Mojanga in caution of the reefs.

Then, assured of all pointing well, Bagot turned over the helm to the serang and joined the others in the messcabin below, where all were smoking and talking by the light of a dimmed hurricane-lantern. He made sure that all had their quarters and the lay of the craft. There was time, now, to shake hands; he met with a hearty grip from Lynch, a rangy man with a long nose and a keen eye.

"So you're a Limey, are you?" he said.

Lynch laughed. "You ought to know an Irish name, Cap'n Bagot! There's a lot I want to discuss with you."

"Save it, man; say an hour from now, when we're well outside danger," said Bagot, with a glance at the two French officers and Sylvie. "Then I'll not be jumpy."

"You? You're the last person to have nerves!" Sylvie exclaimed. He gave her a nod and a smile, and went on deck again. He was nervous, thinking of Grenille.

But the hurried heart quieted; the rush and lap of starlit waters calmed the heated spirit. The tumbling phosphorescence of the wake stretching dimly behind them put distance and solitude into the brain. The sea-breeze was freshening, as it does toward morning. Bagot got canvas up, shut off the engine to save fuel, and the brigantine heeled over and slid along with a bone in her teeth.

Bagot was thinking of Sylvie, when she appeared and stood beside the helm, watching the wind-taut canvas and the stars beyond. He remembered suddenly that she had stepped out of her home with nothing—she had lost everything in a moment.

"It's pretty tough," he said quietly. "Remember, I'm one of you now. Let me know how I can help and where—you, I mean. Have you made any plans?"

"Do what the day brings, my friend," she said composedly. "Thank you; I know what you mean. But my plans stand. Regardless of what's happened, there are those men down there with life or death hanging upon our coming. Nothing else matters just now."

"Right," he assented. "I'm afraid we may find some hot work when we get there. You will want to keep your prison with my precious pair, I suppose, till the suspense is over?"

"Till our friends get aboard safe, yes," she replied.

She drifted away again before he knew it. Bagot eyed the sea, the compass, the high stars, contentedly. It was a calm night; even the usual lightning out over the channel was gone. Might be a flat calm tomorrow, he thought; too bad. His head was filled with calculations of current and speed and distance; the chart was in his mind. He knew exactly what he was doing tonight, what he meant to do with daylight, and the time he had to do it in—the least details of what must be done before he could head in to meet Grenille's party.

Then he found Lynch at his side, quietly casual, understanding, amazingly sympathetic and friendly.

"Y' know, I've heard a good deal down there, Bagot; opened my eyes a bit. Don't blame you for being out of sorts. I was the same way—and I'm pretty well balanced too—after getting clear of Tripoli. Had to spend six weeks among the Eyeties and Nazis there, on a job; whipped me a bit, I can tell you. Feel like talking?"

Bagot laughed. "I'm a different man with the mangrove swamps out of my system, Lynch! What have you heard down below?"

"Plenty. The lady told us about her husband; rotten luck, eh? But I'm keen on this affair of the gentlemen from Japan. That's the most amazing thing, Bagot! It's rather knocked out our French friends, I fear; they can't conceive what you intend doing with the pair of blighters, unless you mean to cut their throats at the rail, come daylight."

"I've got 'em," said Bagot calmly. "I know their value. I'll keep 'em—until I make a deal. Are you interested?"

"Might be."

"There are no Americans in these parts to dicker with. Would you like these gents delivered alive and free on board one of your ships? Then get me some sort of official status for myself and this craft—whether Free French or British, I don't care a hang. I've joined up with the crowd here, you see."

"Heard about it," said Lynch. "Hm! What you ask, you know, is unusual—"

"Wait," interrupted Bagot. "You'd better forget red tape, if you want these two Jap devils alive. You get action and get it fast; I'm not running a concentration-camp or a guest-house. I'm warning you! If you've got to consult London and Glasgow and God knows what else, then it's a washout."

"CAN'T blame you a bit, old chap," said Lynch pleasantly. "Have you any wireless hidden aboard? I couldn't find one."

"No. I haven't."

"Too bad. I thought you Americans were up to date and all that sort of thing. Well, tell you what: Give me half an hour by wireless or word of mouth with my people—thirty minutes. You hold your blessed samurai until I can get that length of time to work in. How's that for fair?"

"Shake," said Bagot, and they shook hands solemnly. He had asked Lynch no questions about who he was or what, and no information was volunteered; the understanding was mutual. "Tell me one thing," Bagot said: "I expect you're Royal Navy. Anyhow, will you take a job as my mate until I get Grenille back—if I do?"

"With pleasure," said Lynch. "I think you're going to need me."

"I damned well know I am," said Bagot, and called the serang. "Obey Tuan Lynch as you would me, serang, and tell the men the same. That is," he added, "unless I change my mind again."

Lynch laughed heartily. "I admire your caution!"

"Yeah, I'm a Maine man, or was once," said Bagot. "Now, I've got some charts. I'll go over them with you, if you'll come below. If things are as bad as I think they are, we're going to need all the brains we have, before we get out of this mess; I expect we'll find a corvette and maybe a patrol boat or two hanging around those reefs down south."

They went below together. Dawn was hanging under the horizon, and the channel was clear. For the moment, all was safe; they were out of the trap.

But when the dawn came and Bagot was gulping a cup of hot coffee that the mess-boy brought to the helm, a new problem arose to plague him between stars and sea.

SYLVIE came to join him. Gone now were her filmy silks; she wore khaki slacks and blouse, a cap pinned over her hair. He greeted her cheerfully and asked a question that was not as casual as it seemed.

"Well, have you decided what to do with your handcuffed prize package?"

"After what's happened, there's no decision necessary," she rejoined. "When our friends come aboard, they'll sentence him, and carry out the sentence."

"Hello!" exclaimed Bagot. "Not aboard my ship, they won't!"

"You don't mean you'd save the life of this devil, when he's earned his reward?"

Bagot was silent for a moment. The stars were paling; the *Zaidee* was hurtling along under the booming monsoon wind, heeling well over to the thrust; she was close-hauled and making speed.

"I don't care about his life," he replied at last. "Only his death. You see, I've got my own notions about taking human life deliberately. I hold it's dead wrong. Sometimes it must be done, sometimes there's no other way out; then one just can't get away from payment of one kind or another."

"That's a strange belief, for you of all people!" she said bitterly.

"I've seen it work out every time. Your friends won't hang anybody aboard here; trial or not, it's murder."

"You'd not punish Fréjus for—for Luchard? For my husband?"

"He'll pay for his own evil deeds; it's not our job to do it. Suppose I had to kill a man in cold blood, even if he deserved it? That'd mean payment. Some folks would say he'd rise out of his grave to make me pay. I know better. It isn't that: It's me having to pay up for doing what's not my job to do, if you get the idea."

"Vaguely, I get it," she said. "What the Hindus call karma—cause and effect."

"I guess so. I don't mean I'd have to pay by dying myself; but somehow—I'd pay. That's what I mean about Fréjus. I brought him aboard, and I'll not be a party to his murder, and that's flat. And it won't make you feel any better to hang him or shoot him, Sylvie. Won't bring back your husband. There's a pattern to everything, if you can find it; can't be forced. Do what the day brings! You told me that in the first place."

After a little silence she said: "You're a queer man. I don't agree with you, but I respect you. Are we going to get down to Maintirano before night comes?"

"Sure. This wind is wonderful luck; it was pretty calm last night and looked as if the day would be flat. We're reaching out toward Cape St. Andrew and getting the channel wind. Where are your two officers?"

"Asleep, or seasick," she replied. "And the Englishman—Lynch?"

"He's questioning Fréjus and the Japs; found some interesting documents on them. I'm trading those two Orientals to the British, in return for recognition—for me and the ship. Perhaps from your Free French people."

A lascar appeared and spoke. Bagot nodded. The four double-strokes of the ship's bell drifted aft. "Hello!

Eight bells, four o'clock, the dawn coming up! And here's Lynch to take over."

The Irishman appeared, nonchalant, quietly cheerful.

"Any luck with the prisoners?" asked Bagot.

"Not much, sir. I've freed them, put Fréjus in a separate cabin, and left a man on guard in the passage."

"Yes, I expect that'll be safe enough," Bagot agreed; "we can handcuff all three of them later on, when we raise the reefs." He spoke with Lynch about the course; once the cape was doubled, they would be heading south, almost before the wind. "Sylvie! It's possible for us to run straight down and make the rendezvous before dark."

"Wouldn't that be horribly dangerous?"

"Yes, in the light of what we learned from Fréjus. But if that would be the best chance of getting those men away, we can try it."

"No," she replied. "They figured on assembling by midnight, not before. They'll answer your signal, the flashes for V. You know about it?"

"Of course. Frenchmen would have to be sentimental, wouldn't they?" he growled, and turned away. "I'm off to get some sleep. It's been a large evening."

He went below, cursing himself for a fool. It was a temptation to reach for her friendship; instead he had to be rude and gruff, like an awkward cub of a boy!

"Just as well, though," he told himself, as he tumbled into his bunk. "No time for sentiment; I'm no Frenchman. No time for personalities, either. Ten hours from now we'll be catching hell, if I'm any judge!"

Chapter Nine

N the old days Maintirano had been the great rendezvous for slavers from the African coast. The harbor was masked behind a screen of lagoons and islands and treacherous coral reefs that ran thirty miles from the shore in a maze of tangled menace. Here the slavers could run in and land their black ivory, regardless of pursuit. Now the town was abandoned; the site had been moved to higher ground, but the wicked reefs and lagoons remained.

With darkness, the *Zaidee* was running in toward the land. The *varatraza*, or afternoon sea-breeze, had fallen with sunset into a dead, glassy calm. For once the land breeze had failed to arise: instead, occasional windy gusts swept down from the high red mountains, and across the water, black under massed clouds, played bursts of electric fire. The evil caprice of this channel, through which swept the currents and winds between the Atlantic and the Indian oceans, was showing itself full force. One of the electrical storms, of almost inconceivable violence, for which it was so famed, was obvious in the offing; the glass had gone way down, and the oppressive stillness boded ill.

"It won't worry us," said Bagot confidently, as he stood beside Sylvie. "We'll work our way in among the reefs and islands before it breaks. I've ironed our three prisoners, and we're all set."

A leadsman was at work in the bows; between depths and compass calculations, the blind landing would be accurate. Far safer to stay away, of course; but Bagot was not seeking safety. Once in among these Barren Islands, he counted on leaving the brigantine and going ashore in the steam cutter and the boat.

The two French officers were somewhat recovered from their seasickness. The two Japanese had accepted their fate blandly, stoically; but Fréjus was in a fury at being handcuffed anew. Bagot wasted little thought on them; he was intent, now, on pilotage, as the vessel chugged away steadily; through night-glasses he was watching the phosphorescent play of the currents among the reefs and islands ahead. He had every depth, every coral head, every reef and channel, down in his brain.

"We could dodge corvettes and patrols endlessly, among these reefs!" he said, gaining confidence. "Everything's as it should be. We're making in through the Demoka pass, that cuts the outer reef. On the coast to the north is Demoka village. An Arab settlement is to the south of it—yes, all's right! That's the spot! You know, Sylvie, we could play the devil with your Vichy French people—not just now, but right along! I'd defy anything to catch us along shores like this. Grenille promised he'd get me a quick-firer; with a gun, we'd need fear nothing. We could dodge and fight from here to Diégo-Suarez! Yes, there's a real future for me in this sort of work!"

She laughed, and the vibrance of her laugh thrilled him.

"Then you can have plenty of it," she said. "A future! Who could ask better future or work? It won't always be helping men to escape, either. Once we get a bit of help from outside—why, we could seize half the island! That's what we hope to do; first get enough men together to land at Tulear, on the south coast, and take the huge new aviation base there. It can be done—we can do it! It's not a question of guns and fighting, but of taking the administration by surprise."

"We?" he repeated questioningly. "But you're going across to Africa—"

"What? Do you think I'll run away and hide to save my neck?" she asked scornfully. "I'm going to accomplish things there and return, let me tell you! My work lies here. We all feel the same way. It's the way you feel too: you told me so."

Lynch came up and joined them.

"We're passing the end of Maroantali Island, as I make it, Cap'n," he said. "If you want to anchor under her lee in the six-fathom depth—"

"Right!" exclaimed Bagot, and whistled for the serang.

On this impenetrable darkness, where only the faintly luminous lines of phosphorescent surf showed the coral, suddenly burst a wide flare of electric fury, crackling across half the sky and hanging there, rolling in sheets upon the water. This unearthly radiance lighted the low island shores, the farther reefs, even the coast six miles away and the savage coral fangs between. But only for an istant.

All was gone in pitch blackness, against which the eye and brain held the vision as though etched in fire. Bagot leaped to the wheel himself, rapid orders flowing from him. The engine fell silent. The brigantine, turning, glided on with her own momentum, and like a swooping bird came to rest in the sheltered anchorage of the island.

"Might not have done it without that lightning-flash," said Bagot, as the anchor plunged overside. "Mr. Lynch! See that the bower's laid out astern, will you? Can't take chances on these tide-rips and currents here. Sylvie, do you stop aboard or go ashore?"

"Go, of course," she exclaimed. "I have a flashlight."

"All right. I'll get you a waterproof; the sky's going to open before we get back."

With a crowd to bring out, he was taking no more ashore than necessary. The steam cutter and the large ship's boat were got into the water, the boat towing. With a leadsman in the bow, Bagot could mind the engine himself. Lynch was for going, but Bagot dissented.

"May need you here. No telling where the wind may come from; we may have to shift anchorage in a hurry. It's a mud bottom and good holding ground here, but if a bad squall sweeps down from the mountains, you may have to run back outside for shelter off Simpson Reef. You've got the charts; get the positions in your head. You're responsible; it must be so."

Grudgingly, Lynch assented.

They shoved off, Bagot at the tiller, Sylvie beside him, the lascar with the lead ready to heave it when needed. A chorus of farewells drove after them; then the brigantine was swallowed up in the darkness. The lighted binnacle of the cutter glowed faintly; for the moment, Bagot knew exactly where they were, thanks to the lightning.

It was going well; his confidence ran high. Everything ashore was dark. He had been afraid of a trap, with corvette or patrol-boats lurking, but all seemed clear. He thought of Sylvie's words, and his pulses throbbed. She was close, crouched against him; he caught a trace of perfume from her hair, and had a faint vision of her face in the reflection of the hooded light. Glory, what a woman! Yes, they could do things together here, no end of things!

He thought of Dessarts, dead. "A spark in the wind, a good man marked for death," Grenille had said. Well, perhaps Grenille lay dead now, too. They would soon know. And she had shown no great grief. It must be true, then; the marriage had been no love affair—

Sylvie glanced up at him suddenly, and he jerked his thoughts away.

"We're almost due west of Tananarive here," she said. "Did Lynch ask you about the cruisers and transports?"

"Eh? No, no," said Bagot. "Why?"

"He seemed excited when I told him they'd all gone on to Diégo-Suarez, around the island. Perhaps the English had tried to stop them from coming."

"Don't chatter," Bagot said impatiently. "I've got to keep my mind set on the reefs and water."

She laughed softly, and patted his hand as though in assent; the touch of her fingers held fire. Another woman would have been hanging over the body of her dead husband and getting her widow's weeds ready; few of them would keep on unfaltering at such a time.

Again he jerked his thoughts away from her, and held them savagely to his work. They were going slowly; to reach the shore, would take an hour or more. Another coruscating blaze of light leaped across the water; balls of bluish fire came drifting past them on the faint air; the red hills inland stood up naked and ominous.

It was well past eleven. In the blackness again a sudden puff of icy wind came off the land and struck them with the impact of a blow: Bagot cursed under his breath. He had oilskins ready; he wished fervently that it might rain and get this squall-weather done with. A luminous glow suddenly appeared on the water all around them; water and air seemed full of electric fluid, turning their faces a ghastly hue. And yet there was no light to speak of. Sylvie laughed again, no doubt at Bagot's expression in this ghost-glow.

"You'll get used to our channel effects, in course of time! You'd never believe some of the things that happen in electrical storms about here. What is it you call those drifting balls of fire?"

"*Corposants*," said Bagot. "That's the Yankee name, anyhow. . . . Ugh! Again!"

Another deadly cold puff. It presaged something, he was not sure what; he began to be afraid, and quickened the engine. They were closing in to shore, now, to the north side of a wide bay or river-mouth. He had come to the exact spot designated by Grenille.

"Show your light," he ordered.

She stood up, held her flashlight, and signaled with three short, one long.

"Just once!" he warned sharply, and she sat down again. "If they're there, okay; if not, no use drawing other attention. Now we'll know, win or lose!"

RELIEF shook him; it was over, ended, all this long-drawn affair planned so far back. Here was the shore-line—a clump of coral rock off to the right, and ahead a curving beach of sand. The phosphorescence showed him the outline. Then, suddenly, Sylvie's hand clamped down on his wrist, and an exclamation broke from her. Ashore a tiny yellow tongue of fire showed, and was gone instantly.

"That's it!" she exclaimed. "They're here!"

The two craft headed in. The white coral sand began to show itself in the darkness; a black mass of men, voices ringing guardedly.

"Grenille! That you?" cried Bagot in sharp joy.

Figures splashed out, pulling up the two boats; French vehemence burst forth, only to be abruptly stilled, as Sylvie spoke and her voice was recognized. They came crowding about her with sympathetic words; it was true, then, about Dessarts. Bagot wondered vaguely whether she had been hoping against hope, until now. . . .

Grenille was wringing his hand. "How many are here? Twenty-seven in all."

Bagot grunted. "More than I figured. Say, do you know they're after you? Fréjus dropped onto the plans, somehow. . . . Here, make 'em hold off with the cutter—watch out for her propeller! Get in, load up, get away! You can tow the boat after you—"

They rushed for the water eagerly, Grenille's voice ringing out. There was excited laughter. A sudden howl of wind burst upon them, then another, but Bagot paid no heed. He stood staring, incredulous, a ghastly chill finger reaching across his heart, his gaze upon the reefs and islands, and the thing there.

A PENCIL of light, sweeping, steadying, coming to rest upon its object. Then beside its point of source, a red flash and another. Even before the report of the gun came to ear, they knew what it meant.

"Trapped!" cried Grenille frantically. "Aboard, everyone! Aboard!"

Somewhere close by in the darkness a French voice rasped out a peremptory command to surrender. It was drowned in another howling gust of wind, and a terrific sweeping downpour of rain that hit like a cloudburst. Bagot realized, only dimly, that the worst must have happened: The fugitives were followed and trapped by shore, while the brigantine was trapped out yonder. And he was caught here helpless!

Helpless indeed! He shouted to Sylvie, heard her reply, and then was down in a smother of foam and water, and fighting unseen shapes. A rifle roared; pistols barked response. Something rammed into Bagot and knocked him sprawling into the surf. The drowning, hammering downpour of rain, sweeping on a gusty wind of hurricane force, would at any other time have ended this human struggle. Not now; here lay life or death in blind furious grapple.

Bagot all but drowned there, for men tumbled on top of him in the water. He got clear and gained his feet. Everything was pitch black; he had lost all sense of direction; the downpour of rain had smothered the phosphorescence of the sea-water. And yet this terrific blast of wind and rain had ruined the trap so neatly sprung, as Bagot perceived the next moment.

A blast of lightning ripped across the sky. For an instant everything was ablaze with the charged fluid, and earth and air and water leaped into a bluish glare. With horrible clarity, Bagot saw the cutter, out and darting away; behind towed the smaller boat, a mass of dark struggling shapes surrounding it, men in water up to their waists, men in uniform. Other men in uniform were huddled at the shore or rolling in the water.

Then—blackout again, and pelting downpour. The fugitives had piled aboard the two boats; most of them had no doubt made it, fighting off the soldiers, and the two craft were heading out for the brigantine. No use trying to swim after. In this furious mêlée, to distinguish friend from foe was impossible.

That lightning-flash had told the soldiers the truth also. A volley of rifle-shots split the darkness. Bagot, suddenly realizing that he, at any rate, was a lost man, swung around and blindly dashed up the sandy incline. He caromed headfirst into another figure; they went rolling in the sand, grappling furiously. Bagot got the other by the throat—and then his hands went limp.

A woman! He knew instantly who it must be, and spoke. A moan, a gasping word, made answer; it was

Sylvie, yes. He came erect in the rain, lifting her, getting her on her feet.

"Quick! The boats are gone. This way, into the brush!"

Holding her hand, he set forth, dragging her along. Voices were bursting through the rainy blackness around; Bagot hoped against hope no lightning-flash would come now. None came. He was aware of brush around them, of thorns dragging at his legs and thighs. Thorns or not, the pandanus scrub would give shelter. Panting, coughing water from his lungs, he forced her down beside him; they lay shivering, gasping, desperately waiting for some sight or sound.

Everything had happened with such rapidity, with such bursting momentum, that he did not as yet comprehend all it meant; but realization grew upon him as he lay there. Then a bolt flashed across the sky. Around them was brush; Bagot had a brief glimpse of the shore below, but the thick rain drowned all details.

"Sylvie!" He caught at her, pulled her erect, held her against him for a moment and patted her shoulder reassuringly. "We've made it; come on, keep going, get a bit farther from the shore, and we can hide out and rest. Come along."

She gasped something, and obeyed. He had his sense of direction now, and plunged on through the brush. The sand clung at their ankles, but was enough wetted by the rain to let them get ahead. Then, almost as suddenly at it had come, the rain was gone, and they were in stillness.

"Down! Far enough," he panted, and they dropped to the sand. An agony of fear was clutching at him now; again he caught the shuddering report of a gun. What of the brigantine?

A blanket of silence and blackness had closed down; it seemed interminable. Through it pierced savage, furious voices coming from the beach, and lights flashed on and off. The men there were aiding one another. The two boats had got away. But Bagot sat staring seaward, gripped by suspense, eyes wide in the darkness.

Then he saw it—a sudden burst of light far away. At the sight, a groan shook him. All too well, he knew what it meant. The little flare vanished in a rolling flood of electric brilliance. He strained vainly to see the boats.

"Did you see them? The boats?" he asked hoarsely.

"No." Sylvie was gripping him tensely. "But look—what is it?"

The flare was back again, higher now. The shells had done their work. The brigantine was afire, was done for. Out there six miles away among the reefs and islets, the light grew into a blazing pyramid of flame—and then was gone suddenly. A rain-squall had struck the vessel, perhaps the same squall that had struck here and swept seaward. Bagot's heart hammered; with an effort, he slowed his breath, struggled for composure.

"She's gone," he said. "Done for! The rain has extinguished most of the fire; she's six miles off, remember. Yes! They've got her."

A searchlight was visible out there, fingering around, settling on one spot and then remaining invisible. He groaned; he could not help it. The blow was crushing to the spirit. Everything was gone at one crack—his ship, his money, the two Japanese, everything. It was a clean sweep.

Then he wakened to words: Sylvie was speaking, curiously calm and practical words. He was amazed by her controlled voice.

"Come, my friend! Now it's my turn to act," she was saying, shaking his arm as she spoke. "Don't stop here; they'll search; they'll find our tracks, and we'll be lost with the daylight! Keep going, somewhere, anywhere; our only hope is to strike away from the shore. We're still alive; that's everything!"

A bitter, hollow laugh shook him, but he dragged himself erect and they set off again, hand in hand. They drove on; another rain-squall crashed down, occasional lightning guided them. Then, amazingly, stars appeared over the eastern peaks, the rain and wind were gone, and they struck into dry, soft sand; and here were clusters of trees.

"Far enough; here's warmth and safety," Bagot said, burrowing into the sand for hip and shoulder, embracing its grateful warmth on wet garments. He looked seaward; the searchlight was flicking about, nothing else was visible. The full scope of the disaster was reaching into him now with stunning effect. Words were horribly inadequate and futile; he dropped his head on his arms and tried to relax; it was quite impossible.

For the sand carried to him a regular, thudding sound; men marching, of course! He started up; they were in plain sight, a whole column of them, not a hundred feet away. The stars were out; everything was plain. They were marching by a track that led inland. He could hear their voices plainly as they talked and laughed.

"Cursed little gained, thanks to the rain!" said one officer. "To think they all got away! Well, they didn't get far; if those boats are hiding among the reefs, they'll be searched out like bugs, with daylight! And the shore patrols will get any who escape. A good night's work. I've no love for M. Fréjus, but he planned it well—"

The voices died; the column of men passed and dwindled into the obscurity.

Fréjus, and the two handcuffed Japs—what of them? Burned with the burning vessel? Perhaps not, thought Bagot; the devil looked after his own. Undoubtedly the two boats were hiding somewhere among the reefs, in which case they were indeed done for, with daylight. . . .

Sylvie was asleep—breathing deeply, and evenly; he was suddenly aware of her, and everything else left his mind as he looked at her, almost beside him. With the appearance of the stars the whole world had changed; the dense blackness had gone as the clouds rolled toward Africa. She had removed some at least of her clinging wet garments, which were spread out near by; and she had heaped warm sand over herself.

He stared at her, in wonder that she could sleep, thus peacefully. The reaction after crisis and exhaustive strain, no doubt; he himself felt he could never sleep again. He moved away from her, stripped and fell to work upon his hurts; thorns and brush had left him in shocking state, but there was nothing he could do except rid his skin of the prickers. She must be in similar condition, he reflected—and she could sleep!

Well, she had not lost everything at one crack. . . . Here he checked himself abruptly. Of course she had! Everything from husband to hopes and friends; a hundredfold more than he! The thought sobered him. He crawled into the sand again and looked up at the stars, and thought of his ship gone, his men gone, his money gone, his opportunity to do his bit gone, his life and freedom damned near gone, and all his fine plans vanished for good.

"So what?" he murmured. "Throw up the sponge like a whining boy? Or face it like a man and take your licking? I guess she's right about it all down the line—underdog or upper-dog, good or bad, in bitterness or in joy, do what the day brings! It's cursed cold comfort, but it's something to chew on, anyhow." And he fell asleep.

Chapter Ten

BAGOT sat up, rubbed his eyes in the sunlight, and remembered.

She was sitting there looking at him, gravely, silently. Her khaki was ripped and tattered and crumpled, but by some magic she had coiled her hair on her head, and this lent a semblance of neatness that was astonishing.

"Oh, hello!" said Bagot. "Still alive, are you?"

"Little more," she replied. "We both seem to be badly mangled. I let you sleep; you needed it."

He stood up and looked seaward. Everything sparkled in the sunlight; nothing moved except the rolling surf. The tide was out, and he grimaced at the odors of the exposed reefs.

"A patrol went along the shore, half an hour ago." She pointed toward the bay and river-mouth, adjoining. "Probably based at the native village there. And a corvette towed out what must have been your ship, still smoking."

"Out?" repeated Bagot.

She shook her head. "No; I should say *in*—close in to the shore here. Probably going inside the reefs to Manitirano. There were two smaller patrol craft dashing about among the islands, but they went away."

"Either the two boats got clear, or else got taken. The brigantine's done for; a hulk, I suppose."

She nodded. He turned and scrutinized the landscape. It was sandy, low, fairly level and extended to the red hills in the distance—a thorny desert, apparently, with patches of trees but no sign of human life. To the south, where the river-mouth sparkled, appeared a number of native craft, large and small, drawn up on the white sand close to the trees.

"So that'll be the village." He grunted and dropped again to the sand. "Well? I'm a stranger here, myself; if your brain's working, what are our chances?"

She smiled faintly at his words.

"We're free, at least. Have you any money?"

"Not a scrap of anything, except pipe and pouch," he replied, feeling his pockets.

"I have the flashlight; it was in my pocket. Ugh! What a nightmare of horror that was! We must not think or talk about it." She nodded as she spoke, and her eyes lifted to the trees. "We'd better move; the path that patrol used came too close for comfort. Luckily the bushes hid us."

"Move? Move where?"

"Anywhere except to the village or the shore. And we'd better keep out of sight, too. There are sure to be natives here and there. This part of the country is almost unknown, but cattle abound, and if we can find any natives we'll get food and shelter. Natives here would be Sakalavas; they'll be friendly if I can talk with them, for they're intelligent and always against the Government. Give me your hand, will you?"

He complied; she rose stiffly, awkwardly. To his quick exclamation, she grimaced.

"I seem to be all black and blue. Ah! Did you see those boats, at the village? Could we get one of them, tonight?"

"Perhaps; what good? We've no food or water; we couldn't get to the African shore."

"But we could get out to the islands and hide there."

"Perhaps," he assented doubtfully. "We'll bear it in mind. First thing, get safe shelter, if we can trust the natives. Able to walk? Let's go."

Walking, obviously, was difficult for her, but she made no complaint. They struck off together, keeping a sharp eye out for patrols or any moving objects. The hot sun warmed them, and Bagot soon lost his stiffness, but he noticed that Sylvie kept going with increasing difficulty. He slowed his pace accordingly.

The apparently wild and empty country opened up, on closer view, into unsuspected green nooks and dry watercourses. They were nearly at a cluster of trees when it widened into a charming shaded ravine dotted with a number of the small humped cattle of the island. At the same instant a sharp word from Sylvia drew Bagot's gaze toward the village down the bay; a dozen figures were leaving it and following the curving line of shore, the sun flashing on rifles.

"Patrol!" he exclaimed. "Into the brush and lie quiet!"

She dropped beside him, but could not suppress a faint groan. Eying her closely, he detected fresh blood trickling over one soggy shoe, from beneath her tattered slacks.

"Hm! This won't do," he said. Leaning above her, he drew the torn khaki to her knee and disclosed an ugly gash that had ripped across the calf of the leg. "Lord! Why didn't you tell me about this?"

"No use," she said calmly. "I got the thorn out, but there's nothing—"

He was already out of his shrunken jacket and stripping off his shirt. It was one he had got in Diégo-Suarez, and after the French fashion, it had a voluminous length that came nearly to his knee. He ripped off this extra length.

"Enough here for half a dozen bandages, Sylvie," he said. "No wonder you were limping! Easy, now—"

The torn stocking pulled down, he bandaged the hurt with deft fingers, leaving her to keep an eye on the patrol. It was far along the shore; they were in no danger. A brief rest, and they resumed their way, but for Sylvie it was still hard going.

To Bagot's surprise and untold relief, the little ravine opened up into higher trees, a trickle of water, then two thatched huts and a pair of dusky children playing in the dirt. They stood looking at the scene; something moved suddenly beside them, and there was a man with frizzy hair in a cotton knee-robe, leaning on a spear and grinning at them—a man whose negroid features and skin revealed him as a Sakalava. His friendliness was evident; when the startled Sylvie addressed him, he gave quick response and gestured toward the huts. She spoke with him rapidly, and he made cheerful answer.

"I told him the soldiers were looking for us; he knew it already," she said to Bagot. "A reward has been offered for any whites discovered. He's from the village people and lives out here to watch the herds. He says we're safe with him. I'm glad, glad—"

She wavered, stumbled, and seemed about to give way. Bagot stayed her; after a moment she was herself again, and moved on. All in all, he reflected, it was high time a bit of luck was switching around!

SWITCHED it had, for the moment. . . . Half an hour later they were installed in the smaller of the two huts—cleared, for their use, of everything except mats and calabash vessels. Bagot was banished while two chattering native women stripped Sylvie and applied herb compresses to her injuries; they would have done the same with him, but he insisted on being his own doctor, while the Sakalava man roared with laughter. An unexpectedly merry folk, these dark natives; and as it proved, Christian converts to the Norse Lutheran missioners who had spread their own belief over this portion of the island.

Together again, they ate fruit and fish, and strips of meat broiled over the fire. Then, stretching out, Bagot filled his pipe with his sun-dried tobacco, and puffed.

"Well, here we are," he observed. "Can we trust them?"

"I think so," said Sylvie. "They say the herbs will take the soreness out of my leg. But we're here—and we've no place to go. We can't stay here forever. There's no safety anywhere around."

He nodded. "Suppose we stop right here till you're in shape to travel. Then we can see about making for the hills or the islands."

Her eyes went to him. "It's a question, then, of saving life alone?"

"What's left, except life?"

She had no answer for a moment; then:

"I don't know; you may be right. But I can't believe so poorly of God, by whatever name you call Him! We must be here for a purpose."

"We are; and I've just told you what it is," said Bagot, and their talk ended. He was in no mood to concur in her notions about the dispensations of providence; his sense of crushing ruin was too acute and overwhelming.

Perhaps she comprehended his state of mind, for she did not recur to the subject. Nor did they have any great conversation for a while. That evening Bagot had the

Sakalava herdsman take him to a spot on higher ground that commanded a view of the shore and the sea to the islands and beyond. Wrapped in a blanket, he waited there hour after hour under the stars, hoping against hope for some sign from the vanished Grenille. That Grenille would return if at all possible, he well knew; but it could be only by night.

At low tide next day, with the friendly herdsman watching for the patrol, Bagot visited that ill-omened stretch of shore. Fortune favored him: after an hour's search, he found under the sand the night-glasses he had lost, and with these returned yet more hopefully next night to his post. But he saw nothing, except searchlights up the coast at Maintirano.

The native had promised truly; the herbs did magic work, and by the second night Sylvie was moving about freely, without pain. She was asleep when he crept into the hut at dawn, the fruitless night ended; he did not waken until noon.

THE afternoon passed drearily. Bagot was worrying himself vainly over plans; he could make none, could think of nothing, except to get one of those native boats and dare the channel itself. That would be madness in a small craft, and he could not hope to handle the larger ones, which needed a crew of half a dozen. Also, the Sakalava said that small, fast patrol-boats were always along the Outer Reef, ten to twenty miles from shore.

On the other hand, there were no more patrols along the beach, and their host said the soldiers had left the village entirely. The fishing-boats went out before dawn and came back at noon; fish were plentiful. The offered reward for fugitives, curiously enough, did not tempt the natives, because it was made in money, of which they had little and knew less; had it been offered in trade goods, said Sylvie, the situation might be different.

"Are you going to watch again tonight?" she asked, as the afternoon drew to an end. Bagot nodded morosely; his inability to shave irritated him.

"Yes; nothing else to do. It's our only hope."

"Then I'll come with you and take turn and turn about."

He gave her a look, but made no protest. At his expression, agitation came into her face; she leaned forward, touched his hand, and spoke with impulsive solicitude.

"Tell me; of all that's happened, of everything you've lost, what do you most regret? The ship?"

He looked at her; what he read in her face startled him, hurt him, sent all his cautious restraints flying.

"No," he replied abruptly. "You."

"I?" The amber eyes widened in surprise. "But I'm not lost! You saved my life—"

"You don't understand," he interrupted. . . . Well, why not tell her the whole truth and be honest about it? Nothing to be ashamed of. They were both done for, anyhow; he must give himself up to the French and try to gain clemency for her. He had decided upon this in his heart.

"I always hoped, somehow, that you and I might—well, might go places together. That's how I thought of it," he blurted forth. "I don't mean anything rough, like Fréjus. But from the first time I saw you, on the jetty at Diégo-Suarez, something about you hit me, and it's never stopped hitting me.

"Oh, I know you're married and all that—or were," he hurried on, everything coming out in a burst of speech. "I'd say the same thing if Dessarts were sitting here. When I thought we could get into regular operations together, after this first voyage, it was wonderful; merely to be working with you, I mean. I know you're all knocked out on account of your husband's death; I didn't mean to— Oh, I'm saying this all wrong!" he flared out desperately, and then blundered on:

"Don't you see, that's the loss I regret the most? The loss of your friendship; you're the finest woman I ever met. Why, I could worship you! Does no harm to say so. It's all washed up now. If I get out of this alive, I'm a beggar, starting life over. The chances are dead, the opportunities gone. . . . Well, you asked for it; I didn't mean to be insulting," he concluded, almost sullenly. "I got it off my chest, that's all."

They were sitting in front of the hut, watching the golden sunset rays search beneath the trees with level radiant fingers. Casuarina trees they were, feathery, murmurous in the breeze, grouped around one huge baobab that almost hid the huts from sight.

Sylvie looked down, toying with her ripped, tattered slacks. He could not see her eyes, but could tell how the color mounted in her cheeks, and cursed himself for having voiced those things he should have kept to himself.

"You know," she said quietly, not looking up, "there's a matter I've wanted to explain to you. Somehow, it's been impossible. I had no chance, no excuse, until you gave it to me just now."

"I didn't mean to pry into your secrets," he rejoined.

"It's not a secret at all; it's about my husband, Jean. You see, we married for business reasons and politics, not for love. That was when the Free French movement first started. It was a question of combining and saving our family wealth; by marrying, we got most of it out of the country, and could help support the cause with it."

Bagot's heart leaped. So it was true, true! She had not loved Dessarts, after all! As though his eager gaze compelled her, she lifted her eyes to his, and colored anew.

"You say—you had wanted to tell me this—" he began, and checked himself.

She nodded. "Jean and I had arranged to separate, you see, once we got away. It was only a civil marriage, but enough to let us get our belongings and property sold—"

She broke off abruptly. Bagot swung around. Their Sakalava host had come breaking in upon them; the cotton robe, token of his conversion, was gone, and his dark skin was oiled and supple with muscle from throat to loincloth. He stood now leaning on his spear and grinning.

"Hello! Ask him what's happened!" exclaimed Bagot. Sylvie complied. The native spoke at some length, and then took a scrap of paper from the recesses of his hair, and held it to Bagot. The latter took and opened it up, and saw the penciled name of *Lynch* written on the paper.

Sylvie broke out eagerly: "He says a white man's in the village, not a Frenchman, who says he has come to help anyone the soldiers are after. Our host talked with him, admitted nothing, but got this paper."

"Think it's a trap?" queried Bagot.

She shrugged. "If it is, are we in position to evade it? He can get Lynch here in half an hour."

"Okay. I'll risk it if you say the word."

She translated. The Sakalava laughed, leaped into flowing motion and was gone like a shadow across the sunlight. Bagot scrambled to his feet.

"I'll go stand on watch. I can see a long way off if it's really Lynch. But how can it be Lynch? Impossible!"

"You'll see! I told you, I told you!" Sylvie broke into eager laughter. "I told you there was a purpose, that we'd been saved for a reason. . . . I'm coming with you!"

Impulse leaped again in Bagot. No time for words—this possibility was too amazing not to dwarf all else. He touched his lips to hers, felt her response—then they were hurrying forth to see if the impossible had come true.

HALF an hour later Lynch sat with them before their hut; he was his usual unexcited self, a twinkle in his eye as he looked down his long nose at his cigarette and listened to their flood of questions. Bagot was in a whirl and looked it. His recent talk with Sylvie had left him bewildered, incredulous, hopeful of fantastic things, but Lynch speedily quenched his hopes.

"A corvette and two fast patrol launches were berthed among the islands. They picked us up with a searchlight and opened fire; their shells played the devil with us. We were smashed up and afire before we knew it, and the two French officers were killed. We got all hands ashore, but the low brush on that island afforded no shelter."

"You got my crew ashore?" blurted out Bagot.

"Yes; most of them are in prison now at Maintirano, up the coast. We had Fréjus and the two Japs with us; couldn't leave them to burn, you know. . . . Well, the next burst of rain killed out most of the fire aboard the brigantine, but her sails and spars had already gone up, and she was only a hulk. They towed her up to Maintirano in the morning."

"We saw them," put in Sylvie. "The two boats?"

"The cutter got away with most of the crowd. The smaller boat, with five men aboard, was picked up by one of the patrol launches; from those five, we learned that you two had not got away, and must have been killed or left here. Meantime, I had made a dicker with Fréjus—set him and the two Japs free, surrender to the Vichy crowd, and I'd be left at liberty. We did it. No sense in resisting, you know."

The sunset fires tinted his long face with cynical touches.

"You turned 'em loose!" exclaimed Bagot.

Lynch nodded. "Yes. I was glad I had done it, when I learned later that you had not been aboard the boats; I was free to come and look you up, you see. It was your only chance. Besides, I wanted those two Japs left at liberty."

"You did! You!" spat out Bagot, astonished.

Lynch assented. "Yes. They can't get away from Madagascar, you know; they're somewhere on the island and safe enough. Big things are in prospect; I can't tell you what's up. Take it on trust, will you?"

Bagot merely grunted. Sylvie leaned forward eagerly.

"But Fréjus? And Grenille?"

"Grenille got away with the cutter, no doubt. But Fréjus—well, that's different." Lynch shook his head and looked at her. "He was upset over your disappearance, madame. He found me a horse and guide, so that I could get down here by trail; I left the horse in the village—quite a rarity in this part of the island, they tell me."

"Was anything saved aboard the brigantine?" asked Bagot in a low voice.

"Nothing," said Lynch. "The cabins and everything aft were gutted. They beached her at Maintirano."

Sophie was looking at nothing, eyes wide and fixed in a set, tensed face. Bagot gave Lynch another glance.

"I don't understand this. Fréjus must have known what you are?"

Lynch shook his head. "He knows me for what I am, yes; but he's under the impression that I have a mission of some sort to the governor at Tananarive. Frankly, I had a rather tough time with Fréjus. I was after one thing, vitally important to me above everything else; and by heaven, I got it!"

"What?" asked Bagot directly.

Lynch tossed away his cigarette. His eyes filled with an exultant light; the lines of his face changed and softened; for an instant the man seemed in the grip of a radiant triumph too great to be contained. Then he clenched his lips; the light died out of his eyes, and he was himself again, a trifle embarrassed and hesitant.

"I wanted a telegram sent to Capetown that I was safe," he said simply. So grotesque were the words, in comparison with his manner and impressive build-up, that Sylvie took all this to be a joke, and smiled. Bagot knew better.

"What is so extraordinary about it?" he demanded.

"That message had to reach Capetown; it was a code," Lynch said quietly, calmly, once more, with no trace of emotion. "I can tell you this much and no more, my friends. There's a telegraph station at Maintirano. I persuaded Fréjus to send the message to Tananarive; from the capital, it went to Mozambique and Port Natal, thence to Durban and the Cape. And to get it sent, I risked everything. I lied. But I got it sent, glory be!"

Bagot studied the British agent thoughtfully. He sensed that something tremendous lay in the fact of this wire being sent; he could well conceive that in wrestling with Fréjus this man had passed through a supreme ordeal.

"I don't quite savvy all this, but let it pass," he said. "Lynch, if you're so confounded busy with political affairs, why bother with us at all? Why come to find us?"

A thin smile twisted the agent's lips.

"My dear chap, being an Irishman I always do things the wrong way about," he said lightly. "I've put myself in hot water. I've put you in hot water also, and I had to come to make good the damage, and rescue you if possible."

"Explain," said Bagot impatiently.

"I persuaded Fréjus that I was what I'm not. He was already halfway certain that you are an American secret agent or spy; I convinced him this was true also. In fact, I lied like a Trojan—but I got that telegram sent! Really, that's all that matters."

"Maybe you think so." Bagot looked up, as one of the Sakalava women appeared with a huge calabash of food for them. "When did you get to this village over there?"

"Last evening," said Lynch. "My guide was a good interpreter; I got on well."

"Hm! Have we any chance to get away?"

"None," rejoined Lynch. "The highways are patrolled night and day; arrests are taking place everywhere. By sea, patrol launches cover the Outer Reefs each night, and at Manghili Island, one of the group out yonder, if you recall the charts which we studied, there's a supply base with a couple of men in charge and a fast launch that patrols the inner channels by day. The other patrols touch there for oil and petrol—"

"Why do you say no chance?" broke out the American almost angrily.

"Because there's none, for one thing. However, I have a further reason. I know that you and Madame Dessarts here will be perfectly safe and have nothing to fear, if you simply surrender at Maintirano. Sorry I can't explain; a secret of state. But at worst, you'll get only a few days in prison—"

"Did you come here to persuade us of that?" exclaimed Sylvie. Her voice was edged with sharp suspicion. She was alert, alive, her eyes glowing.

Lynch smiled. "In a way, yes. I happen to know it's the most sensible thing to do—"

"And did it occur to you," she broke in, "that Fréjus, in turning you loose this way, was playing the old police game? That he was setting you free in order that you might find the quarry and lead him to it?"

"Yes," said Lynch. "I rather thought as much, to be honest about it."

He was quite nonchalant; he seemed unaware that the other two were staring at him in incredulous alarm.

Chapter Eleven

LYNCH, at a gesture from Sylvie, attacked the food; he was evidently hungry.

"You folks had best pitch in; it's good," he said in his negligent way. "I'm pretty sure you'll come around to my way of thinking. Sorry I can't go into explanations now, but it'll come clear soon enough, I promise you."

To Bagot, everything was horribly clear right now: Lynch had sold them out.

He could not blame the man too much: Lynch had acted swiftly and with excellent judgment in coming to an agreement with Fréjus. Lynch, after all, owed Bagot nothing.

It was impossible, of course, to understand his assurances that the safest plan was to surrender. He refused to give any explanation of this attitude, which seemed sincere. No doubt Fréjus had convinced him of this, or he had secured from Fréjus a promise of clemency; this did not seem very logical, but it was a good enough reasoning for Bagot. . . .

Yes, Lynch had sold them out. He had not minded a bit playing the rôle of decoy; this might be part of his bargain with Fréjus. He had just admitted having convinced Fréjus that Bagot was an American secret agent, a theory which Fréjus had previously held; in fact, there was no telling to what extremes he had not gone, to get that telegram of his sent by the French themselves.

NO chance, eh? No chance? Bagot saw a chance now; like a vivid quiver of lightning, it darted athwart his brain as Lynch was speaking. Sylvie, glancing up; met Bagot's eyes, and her face went white; she read the expression in those eyes, the blazing flash of anger and comprehension and sudden hope. It held her silent.

Then the look was gone, as Bagot leaned forward, knocked his pipe clean with an expression of intense absorption, and blew through the stem.

"Yes," he observed, "a political agent is generally supposed to be a first-chop good liar. But why did we figure so largely in your plans, may I ask?"

Lynch looked up, and chuckled.

"Because, old man, it was vitally important in my scheme of things that Fréjus be kept in this part of the island as long as possible. Naturally, his first impulse was to get a car and shoot off to Mojanga or to the capital. I didn't want that. He's the most able and efficient man in the administration's set-up. When he came to realize, as he thought, how extremely important you and Madame were to him, he listened to reason at once."

"Oh, you made us both vastly important to him, eh? You didn't know, of course, that there was a personal interest involved."

This was news to Lynch, who glanced up in surprise. Bagot came to his feet. He knew now exactly what he wanted to do—what, indeed, he must do. He was sorry for it. He had taken a liking to Lynch; but after all, the man was naturally playing his own game at the expense of everyone and anyone. That was to be expected.

"So we're safe, we have nothing whatever to fear, if we meekly hand ourselves over to Fréjus and his friends, eh?" said Bagot. At his tone, Lynch eyed him in startled alarm. "Well, I'd like to know the basis for your assurance. He has every cause to fear and hate both of us vindictively—"

"My reasoned opinion is that it's your best chance of safety," broke in the other.

"Why? Secrets of state, says you. You talk too much like a Munich-umbrella statesman telling Europe what a nice little boy Hitler is! If you think we're going to gamble life and liberty on any such say-so, think again!"

Lynch came to his feet; this was what Bagot had wanted.

"But," he protested, "you can't go off on any such tack, Bagot! My lips are sealed for the moment; but we're friends, all of us; we're serving the same interests, the same cause; and—"

"Like hell we are!" said Bagot, and lashed out, knocking Lynch back against the hut. "I'm your best friend—that's why I'm protecting you—"

His taunt was ended by a smash that drew blood from his lips; then they were going at it, hammer and tongs.

The Sakalava family come to watch, with wild appreciation and laughter; this was like their native boxing-game, but a trifle more blood and earnest lay in it than the natives put into their own pastime. For a moment Bagot did not do so well; it was evident that Lynch was an accomplished boxer.

But the American had been raised in the hard sea school. He took his punishment without a murmur; then threw the rules overboard and went for his man, and got him. All this while Sylvie remained unmoving, unspeaking, listening and watching with a certain bewildered horror in her eyes. When Lynch collapsed and lay inert and senseless in the dust, amid the wild plaudits of the whole Sakalava family, she shivered and rose.

"Did you have to do that?" she asked the panting Bagot. "I couldn't interfere. I'm afraid there's no hope for us now. But this sort of thing is so useless—"

Bagot wiped the blood from his lips, and laughed. Daylight had gone; darkness was coming down.

"Useless? Not a bit, Sylvie! No hope for us? You bet there is. Much to my surprise, I find that I'm not licked yet and don't intend to lick anybody's boot for a while, either. Now stand by. We need some quick action; I'll explain to you later. I want to tie Lynch up hard and fast, and gag him. Tell Mike to lend a hand."

Mike, as Bagot had christened the Sakalava herdsman, was only too glad to display his skill. In no great while the unfortunate political agent was firmly tied and quite efficiently gagged. From his pockets Bagot took a small compass, which he joyfully appropriated, with money, handkerchief, pencil and other small objects; these he turned over to their host, as payment for hospitality received.

"Ask him," he said to Sylvie, "if he can get us one of those boats from the village. Not a big one—a small one, that you and I can paddle. We should have it here on the beach in an hour; I don't want to get it at the village. They have dogs there."

Mike assented with energy, got his ever-present but never-used spear, and slipped off into the darkness. The women built up a tiny fire to serve as light, with a resinous wood that sparkled and bubbled flame, and renewed the dish of stew.

"Sit down and eat," commanded Bagot. "We've got to fill up now and trust to luck later. I'll talk. If you think I'm right and it's a pretty good gamble, just say so; if you prefer to trust to Lynch, yonder, okay."

"Trust to him?" she exclaimed indignantly. "Why, he knew Fréjus would follow him here, and he didn't care! And Fréjus may be here even now!"

"Or his men. That's what I'm afraid of," Bagot rejoined. They were pitching into the calabash of stew heartily, native bread accompanying it. "That's why it's now or never if we're to chance it. . . . Hello, he's awake!"

LYNCH, sitting lashed to the center-pole of the hut, had opened his eyes—but, gagged as he was, could not speak. Bagot waved to him.

"Sorry, old chap; now you've got a new experience for the book," he observed sardonically. "All you care about is winning your game; I happen to have the same idea, but my game isn't the same as yours any more, pal. You had your chance to talk, and wouldn't; and if you figured we would be so tamely handed over as the price of your own success, you were wrong. That's all. Wrong, Mr. Lynch, or Lieutenant Lynch, or whatever the hell you are when you're home in bed. I'm sorry I had to lay you out, and there's no hard feelin's about it; all in the game!"

"Well, just what do you propose to do?" demanded Sylvie.

"What the day brings, of course!" Bagot grinned painfully. "Night, rather. Lean over, and I'll murmur at your ear. Don't suppose I'm going to blat it out so Mr. Lynch can spill the works, do you? Not much."

His puffed lips at her ear, he spoke swiftly, softly.

"You heard what he said: a station on Manghili Island, one of the group out there. Oil and gas supplies for the patrol craft. A launch. Only two men stationed there. That means they have grub and water. Well, give us a boat, fuel, food and water—and it's off for Africa! What more can we ask? A gamble, sure—a big gamble. But if you're game to paddle eight or ten miles—tonight, now—"

She caught his hand eagerly. Her face lit up; she turned swiftly and held her cheek against his for one ecstatic moment.

"Good, good! Yes, by all means! I'll go and get a big calabash of water ready to take with us, and some food as well—"

She rose and was off, calling to the women of the family. Bagot looked across at Lynch and tendered him an ironical salute.

"According to Fréjus, there's a small U.S. army landing over at Port Natal, to lend you folks a hand," he observed. "You'd better get acquainted with Yankee methods, Mr. Lynch, before you team up with 'em. We don't quit easy, savvy? Mind, I don't blame you. I'd do the same thing in your place—but right now I'm in *my* place. Rest easy. Sorry you didn't have a razor along—left your stuff in the village, eh?"

AS Lynch's eyes widened at him, and Lynch made sounds behind his gag, Bagot grinned and lighted one of the confiscated cigarettes.

"So you wanted Shigemitsu and Baron Inoyo set free—you! And you wanted this, you wanted that, right from the start. I tried to play ball with you; but I don't savvy cricket. Anyhow, if we meet again, we'll shake hands and begin over. It's probably your Irish blood that got you down; Irishmen have no business working for England and America both! Give our love to Fréjus when he saunters along. I'll tell the genial Mike to turn you loose about midnight. Until then, sweat plenty and think of me. 'Night, sweetheart!"

He left the hut, feeling rather pleased with himself, and no mistake. The amazing actions and desires of Lynch, which he resented vividly; the chance which had shown itself to struggle on still and accomplish freedom for himself and Sylvie; above all, the astonishingly intimate disclosure of Sylvie Dessarts—these things had wakened anew in him the will to fight. He had not much left to fight for, true. What could come of this understanding with Sylvie, if anything, he did not know. But at least life and liberty were beckoning. And there remained Fréjus in the sinister background, Fréjus to be beaten at all cost!

Strange, that when life alone remained to win, it should seem such a great thing, so worth the winning. . . .

He found Sylvie with the women, preparing the gourds—those calabashes which abounded and could be turned to all manner of uses. He gave her one of Lynch's cigarettes.

"Last chance to smoke. Got your flashlight? We'll need it. Nothing else to carry but my night-glasses and the calabashes."

One of the Sakalava women exclaimed and pointed. A thud-thud of naked feet, and the herdsman appeared with his customary wide grin. He exchanged quick words with Sylvie.

"He's brought a canoe around!" she exclaimed. "Says it belongs to him, anyway. He'll guide us and help carry the gourds."

"Then let's go," said Bagot.

A farewell to the two women, and they set out down the ravine with their loads. . . .

The stars were bright; there was no wind except a gentle land-breeze that would help them along. They plowed through the loose sand after the Sakalava. The shore, that had seemed so far when they were struggling up from it, now was drawn close in the starlight, and the long phosphorescent lines of breaking surf welcomed them. The sea horizon was empty.

Only too well did Bagot perceive how desperate, almost fantastic, was this effort; yet nothing is too desperate to venture when all is lost. Here was the canoe beached; one of the slim native pirogues without keel or outrigger. Mike pointed to two paddles, helped put the dugout into the water and get their loads aboard, and shook hands delightedly.

Sylvie got in, balanced, and Bagot followed while their host held the craft; the paddles stirred a swirl of pale fiery water, and they were off. A last farewell, and the shore receded into starlit silence.

For a little neither spoke; they were engaged in finding balance, in getting the swing of the paddles and the feel of the cranky craft; yet it was of dry, light wood, and swam better than Bagot had hoped.

"Have you thought," came her voice, "that possibly M. Lynch had excellent reasons for his actions—that we might have been too harsh in judging him?"

"Then he should have stated them," said Bagot with finality. "Right or wrong, he sold us out; that's all I can see."

"Why could he have been so anxious to keep Fréjus here, away from anywhere?'

"Ask him when you see him again." Bagot laughed. "You know, Sylvie, I believe we'll make it! I had my doubts, at first."

"I still have," she rejoined. "But my friend—what was it you said? You're a good person to go places with. Yes."

"Bless you! There's a current sweeping us out, too; tide's on the ebb. You know, there's one thing nobody counted on—or rather, that everybody discounted?"

"And what's that? Providence?"

"No!" he snapped. "It's that I pored over those charts, until I've got every pin-point of coral, every reef and passage and bearing, down pat in my head! I can take us slap out to Manghili. I've got Lynch's compass, and his matches too. But if I hadn't sweated over those charts, I wouldn't have any advantage now."

"Well," came her voice after a moment, "perhaps that was what I said. Providence." A sudden, quick, excited little laugh. "That's not all! Remember those papers I got from Fréjus, when we took him?"

"Yes; gone with the ship," said Bagot.

"Gone, of course; but I too did some poring and studying! I can list the true and false officers—I know the spies who were pretending to help us, the traitors to our cause, all of them! That was the great thing, the most vital thing, to know! And if we do get away with this knowledge, I shan't have entirely failed!"

"Good work," said Bagot. "Good for you, comrade!"

"Didn't I tell you that perhaps there was a purpose in our lives being saved?" she exclaimed triumphantly.

"I won't argue with a woman—especially you," he replied. "Maybe you're right, at that; we're not safe yet by a long shot."

This was dreadfully true; they were getting well out, and waves began to slop in over the bow. Bagot had little fear, however. The long array of reefs and islands outside made these coastal waters almost like lagoons; for a great share of the coast, indeed, they were actually lagoons, splendid for fisher-folk, but to be shunned by larger vessels.

They paddled steadily. Bagot knew the precise bearings of the group of reefs which included Manghili, and could hold his course by the stars, and by occasional carefully cupped matches to light the compass. Currents were another matter, and this peril had to be faced when they reached the reefs.

EIGHT miles, or a trifle over; eight miles is a long way on a starry sea with only two paddles. After an hour, they rested, ate and drank, and went on refreshed. Another hour, and Bagot was straining to make out the first sign of coral phosphorescence, when abruptly he saw something else.

An angry *purr-r-r* leaped across the waters, a streak of pale fire, a dark mass that shot athwart their course a quarter-mile distant.

"Patrol," said Bagot, getting out his glasses. "If they sight us, good-by!"

He could make out little of the other craft; she was long, low, speedy—one of the armed patrols that held the shore

lanes for Vichy these days. She was holding her course; he thrilled to the certainty. She went sweeping northward toward the long string of the Barren Islands, and was lost to sight.

"She came from the very spot we're making for, Sylvie!" Bagot exclaimed. "Nosi Manghili—Manghili Island, where the supply-base is located! She made a stop there for petrol, perhaps. . . . Hello!" He broke off abruptly. His voice changed. "Damn it, I've just thought of something!"

"What? Something wrong?"

"Yes. Good old Mike, or else the women, will undoubtedly tell that we've gone by sea! That is, if anyone comes after us. Lynch, maybe. Did you warn them against telling?"

"I never thought of it. But I don't think you need regard M. Lynch as an enemy, at least to that extent."

Bagot merely grunted, and paddled on.

Another pause, to check on bearings; the swirling phosphorescence along the edges of the first reef was now plainly visible. He rested, watching the current; yes, all was bearing well; he knew exactly how and where to reach their goal. When they reached it—what then? He shut the question away hurriedly.

Here between stars and sea, as he idled to give Sylvie a good rest before tackling the reef-channels, queer thoughts came out of the darkness. For weeks upon long weeks he had been driving hard and fast, driving himself, his ship, his crew, accomplishing the impossible, getting clear of the Jap nets, reaching here, plunging into new risks. What had he achieved, what had he gained, by all this?

Nothing; he was back where he started, only worse broke. Yet a laugh rose in him at the bitter thought; untrue, untrue! Here was Sylvie, for one thing. And even though the worst were true, he had still achieved a greatly satisfying ethical victory.

"Y' know," he spoke out suddenly, "I've just waked up to something, Sylvie! I've lost ship, men, money—sure. Everything's gone. But after all, that's the very thing I risked when I got into this game of yours! I went into it with my eyes open; plenty damned cocksure, yes. Well, I found myself, anyhow; I achieved my self-respect, for one thing, and there's not so much to regret. Anyhow, I'd like to make myself think so."

He broke off with a rueful laugh. Her voice floated back to him.

"Oh, you think so, all right! And you've more reason to think so than you're aware, perhaps. If you only knew the difference it made when word went out that you, an American, had come in on our side! Risking yourself and your ship, too! It heartened everyone, cheered the hopeless. Ah, it was a great thing! Fréjus must have heard rumors; that's why he took you for an American agent. It must have hit him hard. Vichy and Washington are close to trouble, they say, over Guadeloupe and Martinique. So be glad of yourself."

"I'm glad of you, anyhow," he rejoined. "Thanks for trying to cheer me up, angel. Now pitch in; there's some real work ahead. This current is taking us between the reefs."

Work there was, and for a moment it was hot work, as the boiling current swept the pirogue on the coral. Bagot's heart was in his throat, for they actually touched those fangs whose razor edges would go through a boat's strakes as through paper. With his paddle, he miraculously kept them from overturning, and they slid away clear, unharmed—it was for such moments, such perils, that this craft had been made. Where another boat would have been slashed open, she was merely scraped a little.

Among the islets now, each with its far-flung reef. Bagot knew what he was looking for, and presently found it—the twin little round islands connected by a sandbank. Both bore a few trees and were encircled by the same coral reef, which completely enclosed them. The twin black bulk stood up clearly against the twinkling heavens.

A break in the reef. . . . Yes, he had found it; the water shone sufficiently to betray it, even under the stars alone. The nearer islet was Manghili. He cautioned Sylvie to bring in her paddle; he stroked them on silently, not too rapidly, his gaze straining at the shores. Where to seek that supply-base? On the western side, of course; he headed for it, and by the stars got a bearing on that reef opening. He might have to come away in a hurry, and dared not miss it with the tide ebbing.

The western side of the islet showed itself. A tiny glow of light appeared; with untold joy he bore down upon it. The soft starlight penetrated everywhere; drawing closer, he could make out a small bight, with what seemed a long iron wharf and, moored out a little way from it because of the tides, the shape of a heavy launch or cruiser. The glow of light came from above this landing. A hut was there, evidently; a rumbling of voices sounded.

Bagot sent the pirogue in at the sand. To set foot on the wharf would mean ruin; any step there would cause a vibration to be heard or felt at once by those in the hut. Sylvie was holding her paddle high, to prevent clashing. The canoe came in, and touched. She rose and stepped overside, and drew it up silently.

They had arrived.

If the two men stationed here were supposed to keep watch, they had evidently long ago given up the job as useless.

Bagot went to Sylvie. His arm slid around her; she clung to him, touching his bearded face with her fingers. He touched his puffed lips to them.

"With any luck, I'll get a shave soon," he murmured. "Stop here; don't make a sound. And don't move till you hear me call you."

"Good luck," she breathed.

Chapter Twelve

ROM the head of the wharf, Bagot found a little path that led to the hut. This soon came clear; trees were grouped about it, and these masked the glow that came from its one window. An odor of tobacco-smoke drifted to Bagot. He stooped, feeling about until he came upon a stone of the size and shape he wanted—not too small, not too large either. No need of killing, unless it were necessary.

As he stole up to the hut, the voices reached him clearly. One a gruff, rumbling bass, the other clearer, with a slight Bréton accent.

"Well, it's past midnight, Yves," said the bass. *"Et puis, alors?* Sleep, *mon brave!* Sleep! I'm turning in to luxuriate. The brass-hats won't be back tonight, so it's safe."

"It's your turn to keep watch, not mine," replied Yves, the Bréton. "You're the one who'll get shot, not me, if they do come back! So turn into your bunk, if you prefer not to spend four hours under the stars watching sky and sea!"

"Yes, you'd like to see me get caught, you damned De Gaullist!" rumbled the bass. "You'd like to see all of us good loyal heroes of Vichy face a firing-squad!"

This, apparently, was by way of a joke, for both men laughed together.

"Good thing we're not officers," the Bréton observed, "or we'd be purged too. I hear they got five of our officers in that affair the other night; five of the pilots from Tulear. And that damned Fréjus is here in person. Ha! I wish someone would put a bullet into him!"

"No luck; he was born to be hanged," came the sardonic response.

Bagot carefully put his bit of stone on the ground again; there was no need of it. These two men were Free French partisans, like so many of their fellows. Those who were in the ranks could do nothing about it. They could not be

sure of one another. These two, on their lonely detail, were evidently old pals.

"Seriously," said Yves, "you'd better keep on watch, *mon vieux*. While we were filling the tanks of that patrol-boat, I heard a bit of talking among her officers. The other two boats, they said, were somewhere in this direction. Apparently things are brewing; we'll have some more poor devils killed or imprisoned or chased away, for the sake of Free France!"

"They told me the corvette had gone north," replied the bass voice. "Well, well, if you think best, I'll stand watch. But I'll take blankets with me and do it comfortably! And if we take out the launch on patrol tomorrow, how about visiting that Arab village up the coast, eh? You know, I'd like to see that girl with the scarred cheek again—"

Bagot quietly went to the doorway, closed by a curtain and mosquito-net, drew aside the hangings and stepped into the lighted room; his right hand was in his jacket pocket, index finger extended. He smiled at the two startled men who sprang to their feet.

"Good evening, messieurs! Hands up, if you please, for caution's sake—*up!* Thank you. It would be a pity to have to fire on two honest Free Frenchmen."

One was a huge, bearded veteran, the other a dark and sallow youth; by uniform, of the marines. Neither was armed. They stared as at an apparition.

"First," said Bagot cheerfully, "a razor! Which of you has a razor?"

"Neither, monsieur," responded the veteran. "I have no use of one, by choice. My comrade has not the necessity."

"The devil! Still no shave!" Bagot turned to the doorway. "Sylvie! Come along! We're among friends!"

He nodded to the two staring men. *"Vive la France Libre!* Now you shall have your choice, gentlemen. Either we leave you here as helpless prisoners, while we take your boat and head for Africa; or else you go along as friends and comrades, and help load and work the boat. Here is Madame Dessarts—"

She broke in upon them, running. At sight of the two men, an exclamation burst from her; they saluted, with sheepish grins. A volley of excited French, too rapid for Bagot to comprehend, was exchanged; then Sylvie turned to him, radiant.

"Friends, yes! They were detailed to the topographic service a few months ago—they were under my husband! Why, this is splendid!"

So the two beaming marines declared also, enlarging upon the word in the French manner with a dozen different synonyms. The atmosphere of the hut became friendly, patriotic, even enthusiastic. Big Jules and sallow Yves, comprehending the situation, swore with fervent and elaborate oaths that to make Africa with the fugitives, and join whatever Free French force might be afoot, would be magnificent. Yes, the big boat could do it easily; she was not fast, but she was steady in a seaway.

"Then suppose we get about it," said Bagot, glancing around the place. "Sylvie, here's a primus stove, with coffee and food—never mind food, but you might make some coffee while we're getting the boat filled and ready. Lights, my friends?"

The two had flashlights, big ones, and they swung out with him into the night, laughing and talking at once, in a fervor of enthusiasm.

ON the wharf were situated storage tanks. Disregarding the skiff at one side, Bagot shoved out the canoe and took a line over to the moored launch. She was hauled in alongside the wharf, and the two marines fell to work.

Filling the tanks with oil and petrol was not the work of a moment; water-tanks, too, had to be charged, and food put aboard. The fruit in the canoe was hailed with delight. In the midst of this, Sylvie appeared with hot coffee, and all four pitched in to celebrate the occasion. Yves produced some cognac with which to lace the mugs of coffee for a warming toast to the Cross of Lorraine.

The two men could give scant news. Fréjus was at Maintirano, which consisted of little more than a native village, a French governor and harbor officials and a few dozen native troops in barracks. A handful of Hindu and Chinese merchants conducted the scanty trade of the place; coastal traders put in every few weeks, but the war had knocked out any regular steamer service. A detachment of marines was now based there, to operate the patrol launches on this section of the coast. The corvette which had been here, had gone north to Mojanga.

BAGOT, who had no watch, asked the time—and whistled sharply. "Didn't dream it was so late! We'd best get off at once; we must be out of danger by daybreak. Lucky there's no weather kicking up. Get your duffel together and let's be off! Blankets for the lady? By all means. Any arms?"

There was not so much as a rifle on the place; this was unimportant, however.

The bright flashlights, contrasting vividly with Sylvie's little worn-out light, made short work of the loading. The launch was impressive alongside their canoe, but was itself of no great size; upon learning that Bagot and Sylvie had paddled out from the coast, the two marines were lost in admiration. That sort of work was not in their book at all.

Their earnestness, their utter sincerity, was not in doubt. The navy, in general, was bitterly anti-British and in favor of Vichy; but plenty of its rank and file were Free French. Still, said Yves, if it came to a fight, the issue was doubtful; the old submarines and other craft at Diégo-Suarez were commanded by Vichy partisans. Others had been weeded out.

"You didn't find out from M. Lynch," questioned Sylvie, as she and Bagot were alone for a moment, "why he was so excited on learning that the fleet units and transports were at Diégo-Suarez, instead of elsewhere?"

"Never thought about it," said Bagot. "I think it was your imagination. Nothing excites him, except a crack below the belt! Which reminds me that my lips are still in bad shape—"

She held her face to him in the starlight, for a moment; then the steps and flashlights of the returning men broke them apart.

All aboard, then: with a joyous heart Bagot settled down before the helm of the launch, as the engine began its roar and warm-up. The sense of ruin and loss had dwindled. There was still plenty to which he might turn his hand in the days to come—though he could scarcely expect any longer to profit by the good offices of Lynch, in this respect.

But what had seemed hopeless and impossible a few short hours ago, was now actually accomplished; luck had indeed turned! Nothing now to stop them or hinder them. Ahead lay the open sea stretching across to Africa. Once beyond the coral reef that encircled the little twin islets like an invisible chain, Madagascar was washed up for them until they should return in some new day.

The engine steadied to a sustained drumming. The two men were forward; Sylvie was bedded amidships on some blankets, refusing the dubious comfort of the tiny cabin. In an hour or so the day would come up, reflected Bagot, as the boat moved away from the shore at slow speed.

"The reef opening is around at the south of the island—you know it?" said big Jules. "This craft can't pass over the reef, especially as the water is down."

"I know the spot," said Bagot.

He swung out to round the south tip of the islet, for the channel. A laugh broke from him.

"How true it is, Sylvie!" he exclaimed. "Do what the day brings! Ordinary, trite little words, a motto to be ham-

mered into children; and yet how they've served us! Or me, at any rate. Now that we—now that we—"

His words failed, dying off into silence as he peered ahead, trying to make out what looked so queer, there in the starlight. True, the tide was at ebb, but it had been well down when they came this way; those were not bits of the reef towering up—

A low, subdued groan broke from one of the men. Sylvie caught her breath, started to speak or cry out, and checked herself. Bagot saw what it was now, that looked so singular: his heart contracted, his breath leaped, as though some ancient monster had crawled out of the reef recesses to meet them.

WORSE, perhaps! Motionless, poised across the reef channel, silent, lay two long and powerful patrol cruisers. Bagot cut the engine; the launch drifted down upon them.

Any escape was totally out of the question—that reef, girdling the twin islets, prevented it, even had the launch possessed sufficient speed to run from the quick-firing guns of these super-launches.

Somebody laughed aboard one of the two waiting craft. A voice spoke out:

"Thank you, messieurs! It was kind of you to take so much exercise with your flashlights; they spoke of your activity afar off. Now let's see whom we've caught here; surely not our two faithful guards?"

That voice! Sylvie moved spasmodically, as though in alarm and horror. Bagot felt a chill creep up his spine. He recognized, at once, the voice of Fréjus.

A light and another broke upon them; a line was passed. Yves, silent and despairing, took it. Fréjus, in the boat to the right, gave no indication of surprise on recognizing his catch—though, by his own words, he must have been quite ignorant of their identity until the light betrayed them. Half a dozen armed marines and an officer were in each launch.

"Good morning, Madame Dessarts!" he exclaimed. "So I'm to repay your hospitality? How charming! Passage to Maintirano? But of course, of course! And our excellent M. Bagot, no longer *capitaine de vaisseau,* unfortunately, not having *de quoi*—as I think some English poet remarked of the charming little cherubs who could never sit down. Come, come aboard, both of you! I've something here for you, M. Bagot from America! —Lieutenant Caron! Take those two men aboard and put them in irons. Send two other men ashore to replace them here, then return to Maintirano."

He came to the rail, as he spoke, and bowed politely to Sylvie, his face quite blank and expressionless. At his gesture, several men surrounded Bagot, but the latter made no resistance; he was stunned, crushed. He scarcely realized what was happening when his wrists were brought together and handcuffs snapped upon them.

"We have two pleasant cabins; they are for you, m'sieur and madame," said Fréjus. "At Maintirano, more suitable quarters will be found, but I fear we shall not arrive there until much later in the day. If either of you desire to discuss matters with me, a guard will be ready to summon me."

He remained unanswered. . . .

The two cabins were indeed tiny but well appointed. At any other time, Bagot would have welcomed this luxury as a gift of heaven, after his days and nights by sand and sea. Now he scarcely looked around, but switched off the tiny electric light and threw himself across the bed. The craft was already in motion.

To be thus suddenly cast down from absolute triumph to the very pit of defeat was cruel; more, it was numbing. There was something horribly inhuman in the way Fréjus, sighting the flashing lights and crawling quietly up, had waited in darkness and in silence for his victims to drop into his hands.

Bagot could not think; it was just as well. That long paddle, on top of a hard day and his set-to with Lynch, had left him on the point of utter exhaustion. He had not even sufficient energy to avail himself of the shower-cabinet in the corner. His eyes closed, and to the rhythmic pulsing of the engines, he was asleep almost at once. . . .

He wakened to the silence of engines, as a sailor does. There was life and motion, however; two of the crew were in the cabin, grinning at him. One held a basin and napkin.

"We were sent to shave M'sieur, if he will permit," said the barber.

"Shave? Oh, sure! Why this solicitude for my comfort?" demanded Bagot.

"Nobody would believe M'sieur is an American, with that excellent beginning of a beard." The one marine got him into a chair; the other stood, obviously, on guard. "*Hélas!* What a pity, what a heartbreak, to spoil this noble affluence of hair! However, M'sieur is to be displayed as an American; therefore he must look like an American. To work!"

Shears and razor went at the job. Bagot had no objections.

"We're at anchor? At Maintirano?"

"No," came the reply. "That comes later. Where? I cannot say, M'sieur; I have not yet learned to pronounce these long Malagasy names. But I have a message to deliver from M. Fréjus. Whenever M'sieur desires to leave the ship, he is at liberty to jump overboard from his porthole, here. No one will hinder him. But, as our only attendant boat has gone ashore with M. Fréjus, no one would be able to rescue M'sieur from the big shark under our counter."

The two jolly fellows made the most of their joke, and removed the handcuffs long enough to permit Bagot to get a shower; then, his sorry garments replaced, clicked on the bracelets and departed. They had, at least, left him a bottle of wine and a tray of food.

Before eating, he went to the porthole. By good luck this was on the landward side of the craft; he stared out at a strip of shore and trees and water that was vaguely familiar. Suddenly he placed it. This was the very village from which the canoe had come—the village of their Sakalava friend Mike, where Lynch was staying! Fréjus, therefore, had come here to pick up Lynch. The patrol launch was lying off the bar of the river-mouth.

Bagot went back and attacked the tray, then settled down to wait.

In the way of creature comforts, he was doing well; that shave had done him good. But mentally, the less said the better. Everything had gone to smash, and no mistake; the final effort had brought final defeat. He had been all through that before; oddly enough, his chief regret now was for those two marines, big Jules and sallow Yves, who had come across so wholeheartedly for the cause. Theirs, he could guess, would be no enviable lot. Big Jules would be a long time seeing his Arab girl of the scarred cheek again.

Of Sylvie, Bagot tried not to think at all. She too had lost the last desperate gamble; but it had been a gallant try.

"Do what the day brings!" he reflected. "Well, the phrase still holds good. The day has brought all sorts of things, one time and another; now there's nothing to do except keep a stiff upper lip and take my medicine. I can do that, too. I can do it a damned sight better now, than I could have a week ago!"

HOUR after hour the vessel hung here at anchor. The tide turned, and she swung around gradually with it. When Bagot looked again, the shore and trees had vanished, and he was staring seaward with the islands in the distance; it was that same patch of water across which he and Sylvie had paddled under the stars, so use-

lessly. Sharks, eh? They had not thought about danger from sharks, last night.

He figured: he had slept late, and by the sun it was now afternoon. If they put out soon, they would get to Maintirano sometime in the evening. He caught a *pad-pad* of feet on the deck, a stir of voices. He could see nothing, but knew a boat was coming aboard. Then, from somewhere, came the tones of Fréjus, evidently addressing the officer in command of the vessel.

"All right, Lieutenant. You can pull out at once. We should get into Maintirano about eight or a little after, eh? Good."

And then a voice, lazily negligent, that brought Bagot to his feet:

"Have you any wireless aboard? Might be a good thing to pick up a bit of news."

Lynch, eh? But of course; Fréjus had come here to pick him up and gather the loose ends together.

"No," responded Fréjus. "Sorry; we must wait until we get back to Maintirano. Shall we go down and take a look at your friend?"

A moment later, steps sounded outside the cabin door. The key turned in the lock; Fréjus and Lynch stepped in.

Chapter Thirteen

EXCEPT for a bruised cheek, Lynch displayed no sign of the recent encounter. In fact, he greeted Bagot with a smile and a wave of the hand. "You see, old chap?" he exclaimed. "I told you the only sensible course was to give yourself up. Would have saved no end of trouble. But no—you wouldn't listen!"

Bagot nodded. "Well, no hard feelings!" he rejoined.

"None whatever," said Lynch. "Sporting and so forth. Any questioning, Fréjus?"

"Not now," Fréjus viewed his prisoner with cold, dispassionate eye. "As an American aiding the seditious elements, it's a matter for higher decision. At Maintirano I'll wire the governor-general regarding him, and hold the usual preliminary examination. Sorry, Captain Bagot. I warned you, remember."

"I don't imagine either of us would pay much heed to warnings," said Bagot pleasantly. Take his medicine like a man, he reflected. "Are these handcuffs necessary?"

"Get used to them," Fréjus replied. "Lynch, you'll drive to the capital with us? I imagine we'll go tomorrow, by car."

"Perhaps," said Lynch. He turned to the door. As he did so, he gave Bagot a most unmistakable wink. "Wait and see. Never can tell what the morrow will turn up, eh? We may all be dead, or in the moon, by then. What, by the way, becomes of Madame Dessarts?"

"To the capital for trial, if the administration so decides," Fréjus said stonily. "Treason is treason, in man or woman. By the way, Captain Bagot: there's an American consul at Tananarive, and I presume you'll be permitted to get in touch with him as soon as we reach the capital. We are, of course, interested only in strict justice."

They passed out. Lynch asked some question Bagot did not catch; but he caught the reply of Fréjus just as the door closed, and it was significant.

"Oh, no. I imagine he'll get ten years at hard labor. They'd hardly shoot an American."

Bagot sat down and looked at nothing. Ten years, eh? Fréjus was not the man to indulge in idle humor. He was now, indeed, entirely impersonal, for the case was out of his hands, though he still held every thread of it. Maintirano meant the telegraph-line to the capital and a relentless grinding of official gears for both Bagot and Sylvie Dessarts. The prospect was neither pleasing nor romantic.

They were in the grip of self-seeking Vichy officials who were desperately fighting for life and position; well, that had been the gamble, and now it was definitely lost. The flicker of kindliness on the part of Lynch inspired a faint hope. Having apparently won his own game, whatever it was, Lynch might possibly find it in his heart to ameliorate things for them. He bore no grudge, obviously.

"Him and his blasted wire to Capetown!" grunted Bagot. "As though that code telegram of his were so devilish important! He's a queer beggar. So vitally important to have Fréjus hanging around here that he actually turned us in to make sure of it! Important—but why? The hell with him!"

He dismissed Lynch from his mind with scorn. . . .

The patrol launch made its northward way, giving Bagot glimpses now of islands, now of shore-line. The latter was low and sinister. The entire coast here consisted of long wooded island stretches lying in front of the real coast, with the red hills lifting in the distance inland. And with the dying day these became more red against the sky, an ominous blood-color intensified by the sunset light.

A supper tray was brought in. Bagot made the most of the meal, and with descending darkness could see little more of the land. Of Sylvie he had heard nothing whatever. He finished the last of the cigarettes he had taken from Lynch, switched on the cabin light, and waited again.

From his study of the charts he knew that the approaches to the new town of Maintirano, which was built on high ground above the mouth of the Namela river, were devious and unsafe, and there was no harbor here worthy the name. He was not surprised when the engines slowed and the launch crept along at a cautious pace.

At length the engines ceased altogether and the sullen plunge of the anchor resounded. As the craft swung about, Bagot had a glimpse of the other patrol launch at moorings; and beyond it a dark mass lying in the shallows. Something familiar about this caught his eye. He recognized, in the starlight, the mastless hulk that had been the *Zaidee*.

A farther swing on the cable, and voices. Surfboats appeared; the lights of the shore and the town came into sight. Steps rang at his door; it was unlocked, and two armed marines motioned him forth.

"We're a mile from solid ground, M'sieur; surfboats will take us," said one.

Bagot accompanied them in silent compliance. The surfboats were coming alongside; on deck everything was being made snug, the gun forward covered over. At one side stood Fréjus, Lynch and Sylvie; she moved, as Bagot appeared, and stepped to his side.

"Heart up, comrade!" she said quietly.

"No communication between the prisoners," snapped Fréjus. She reached out, touched the manacled hands of Bagot, and returned to her place. Fréjus turned to the officer.

"We'll land first, Lieutenant; then you may bring all your men ashore. What's that object near the river-bar?"

"A native craft of some kind, monsieur," was the reply. "Wait—" A shouted query to the natives in the approaching surfboat revealed that the native craft was a large cattle-boat that had come in during the day from Mozambique.

THE prisoners and their guards descended into a surfboat, with Fréjus, Lynch and several of the marines; another boat would take the remainder ashore. The rowers fell to their job; a nasty surf was pounding in from the sea, thundering upon the beach. As the boat drew in toward the wharf and sheds, lights appeared everywhere ahead and on the higher ground where the town extended.

"Bring the prisoners direct to the Residency," ordered Fréjus, and added to Lynch: "I must consult the governor in regard to prison accommodations. Also wire Tananarive."

"You will, perhaps, permit me to accompany you?" asked Lynch with deference. "I'd like to get a wire in to the capital too, if I may."

Fréjus merely nodded.

They came at last to the wharf and landing. Here, under the lights, were a few clumps of soldiers and officers; Fréjus gave them a negligent glance and strode on. The others followed; to the large, square Residency building was a stiffish climb.

As the party approached it, the sentries saluted. An officer came out, and Fréjus spoke with him.

"Where is the governor? I must see him at once."

"I believe he has gone to the Arab village, monsieur," was the response. "There was an outbreak of some sort; it has been repressed. Will you have the goodness to wait in the large salon?"

"Very well," said Fréjus. "Send me the officer in charge of communications; I desire to get into touch with Tananarive immediately."

"At once, monsieur!"

And the officer summoned an orderly.

"What was this boat that arrived today from Mozambique?" snapped Fréjus. "Have the crew been permitted to land?"

"Yes, monsieur," the officer replied. "They are, I believe, in the proper custody. I was not on duty at the time."

Apparently reassured by this information, Fréjus went on into the building, Lynch at his elbow; the prisoners and guards followed.

They came into a large, floridly ornate room that served the governor as a reception-hall. Several officers, seated about a table in one corner, glanced up but paid no further attention to the arrivals. A sentry stood before a door at the far end, and Fréjus nodded to him.

"His Excellency is not in his private office?"

"No, monsieur."

"Very well. Let these two prisoners wait in there—"

"Pardon, monsieur," said the sentry firmly. "I am ordered to admit no one."

With a gesture of irritation, Fréjus turned away. He accepted a cigarette from Lynch, and his cold gaze touched upon Bagot and Sylvie, who stood silently between their guards.

"A chair for madame—" he began.

She broke in upon his words.

"Thank you. I prefer my present company."

Bagot met the eye of Lynch; to his astonishment, he was certain that Lynch made him a gesture of caution, of silence. The long-nosed agent's face was alight and excited; Bagot sought in vain for the reason. The officers clustered about the corner table came to their feet and stood talking and laughing. One approached Fréjus, who nodded in recognition.

"*Quoi de neuf?* Any news while I've been gone?"

"*Rein*," answered the other, with a shrug. "There has been some trouble with the wire, monsieur. No news has come in since yesterday. . . . Ah! Here is the officer who has been placed in charge of the telegraph, to relieve the local superintendent."

A weary disdain pressed upon Bagot. All these titles and this ceremony, here at the edge of nowhere! These French officials, he thought, loved their gold braid and red tape even in a little remote village—

SUDDENLY he perceived that something was happening; what, he could not tell. The other officers from the corner table were approaching the group with intent, serious faces. The features of Lynch, however, took Bagot's eye; the English agent stood there in slack-jawed incredulity. His amazement was almost ludicrous.

Following his gaze, Bagot looked at the officer who had come up to Fréjus.

"You have charge of the telegraph now?" Fréjus demanded.

"Yes, monsieur," was the reply. Only then was Bagot sure of his own eyes. He caught a slight, repressed exclamation from Sylvie, and realized that she saw the same thing:

This officer was Grenille!

"What's this story about trouble with the wire?" barked Fréjus.

"It has been out of order most of the day, monsieur." Grenille, as he spoke, glanced at the others; at Lynch, at Sylvie, at Bagot himself—and not a trace of recognition came into his face.

"And why was it not repaired?" snapped Fréjus.

"Oh, I believe it's in shape now, monsieur!" replied Grenille almost gayly. "We just got a message through about the trouble at Diégo-Suarez."

"WHAT trouble?" exclaimed Fréjus, with a frowning glance around. "This is a most extraordinary thing, this! The governor gone, apparently no one in charge! What did you say about trouble? What sort of trouble?"

Grenille paused briefly.

Fréjus, who was facing him, did not observe a number of marines who advanced into the room and closed about the two prisoners and their guards. The two guards were replaced by two others, who wore wide and exultant grins. The uncomprehending Bagot stared at them amazedly; the two were big Jules and the sallow Breton, Yves.

"It seems, monsieur," said Grenille, "that a large number of men landed on the narrow isthmus below Diégo-Suarez, and have been making their way across it in order to reach the city by the back door—as, you comprehend, the Japanese reached Singapore. The last message we got said that a fleet of some size was attacking frontally, by paratroop and plane and landing-parties. Our fleet tried to leave the harbor; some did, and were sunk, others were bottled up—"

Fréjus was now white with passion.

"You unspeakable beast! To dare show yourself in this drunken condition—you swine!" he cried furiously. "Blind drunk, indeed! Your name, at once! I'll have you court-martialed for appearing in this condition! Your name?"

"Oh, I'm quite sober, monsieur, I assure you! —My name? Grenille, temporary captain."

"In what regiment?"

"Ours, M. Fréjus!"

The answer came, not from Grenille, but from the other officers around. Their number had increased; more were coming into the big room at every minute.

Those who had now spoken, had encircled Fréjus—and not they alone, but the pistols in their hands, pointing at him. One of them reached out and disarmed him.

"Diégo-Suarez is being seized by an English force," said another. "We, on our part, have seized Maintirano. Look around you, and you will see old friends, old faces—yes, M. Fréjus, you are under arrest. . . . *Vive la France Libre!*"

Silence, strange and terrible, fell upon the room.

Fréjus comprehended; the pistols, the words, the faces, left him no doubt whatever. He stood as though stupefied; a twitch of the muscles, a spasmodic movement, and then he squared his shoulders slightly, and his eyes stabbed around. He was alone, caught, helpless amid a ring of men whose virulent and frightful hatred showed in their silence and their deadly, unrelenting eyes.

That silence held Bagot enthralled. Sylvie, flushed and radiant, stood tensely under its spell; the hush upon the room was unearthly in its very force. Fréjus broke it.

"I am at your service, messieurs," he said, with a quiet, simple dignity. At this instant, from outside, from the space before the Residency, burst a ringing, tumultuous sound of cheering, shouting men—cheers and laughter mingled in a sweeping wave of excited enthusiasm. One of the officers facing Fréjus gestured.

"The crew of your patrol launch, monsieur, seem to rejoice with us that France is not yet in slavery. Will you

step into the private office? There is a gentleman who has asked for a few words with you. He will arrive in a moment."

Fréjus looked at the speaker in evident astonishment, then, with a slight inclination of his head, followed to the door of the private office. He vanished inside; the sentry, with a grin, stationed himself before the door. It was obvious that this scene had been arranged long in advance.

With this, the tension burst. Vociferous voices welled up on all sides. Grenille uttered a shout and seized Bagot in his arms; the handcuffs were removed; men and officers alike gave way to uncontrollable excitement and rejoicing. More figures came flooding into the room.

"I say, Lynch!" cried one of them, whose English khaki looked strangely somber amid those horizon-blue and white and dark aviation tunics. Grenille was babbling out frenzied words and smiting Bagot on the shoulder. Lynch and the English officer were gripping hands. About Sylvie was gathered a tumultuous throng of officers, hiding her from sight.

"But this is amazing, amazing!" Lynch was saying. "I never dreamed of this—I knew the expedition was timed—"

"We wouldn't leave you in the soup, old man!" Grenille was shouting at Bagot's ear. "These English, they are superb! We came back, landed here in the guise of Arabs, took the place without a shot fired! The crews landed from the patrol-boats and walked into the trap."

Bagot escaped from him, to face Lynch, hand outstretched. Lynch seized and wrung it.

"So this was what you meant all the time!" Bagot exclaimed. "Telling us to surrender!"

"No, not this, not this!" cried Lynch. "I knew nothing about this—it was the Diégo-Suarez expedition I had in mind—didn't dare breathe a word of it to a soul, even you! That's why I wanted Fréjus kept here. . . . Where is she? I must ask her pardon—"

Together they broke through the group and faced the radiant Sylvie. Tears bubbling on her cheeks, laughing and crying at once, she held out both hands to them.

Bagot never knew what was said. Emotion had burst all restraint; rank and sex were swept away; men embraced, wept, laughed; Sylvie caught one after another in her arms, then came to rest with both hands in those of Bagot, her amber eyes glowing like sunlight.

"What the day brings, comrade!" she cried.

Grenille crowded in upon them. "It'll bring plenty, Cap'n!" he burst forth. "They're making a place for you, understand? For you, Cap'n, and for me! We'll have work to do—"

Suddenly his face changed. His words died. He had realized abruptly that his voice was the only one upraised. Once more a silence had descended upon the room. Bagot glanced around; then he heard a choked cry from Sylvie. She was staring, trembling, swept by terror—

And when he saw, a chill hand of horror gripped at him.

Chapter Fourteen

EMOTION, laughter, noise had all died down. The groups of officers and men fell apart. They left a clear space down the room. And along this space was advancing a man. Unhurried, looking neither to right nor left, he was advancing toward the door of the private office where Fréjus was. Noise rioted outside, but the doors apparently had been closed; here the silence was deathly. Upon its tenseness rang the click of heels as the man went toward the office, holding a pistol in his hand.

The man was Luchard.

Bagot, recognizing him, absolutely ceased to breathe for a moment, then caught his breath with a gasp. Sylvie cried out a choked word; Luchard turned his head toward her, gave her one gloomy look, and went on.

It was impossible, Bagot thought wildly, impossible! Luchard was dead. The fact was no secret; it was well known. Yet here he was, this trim, precise captain of engineers with the taciturn and almost tragic air. . . .

Bagot felt his neck-hairs lift with a thrill of superstitious fear. He glanced around, and to his new amazement, saw no fear on the faces around, no astonishment; those faces had become grave, settled, expectant. Even Grenille was watching tensely.

"Not Luchard—it can't be!" Bagot gripped Grenille's arm. "He died at Mojanga—he was killed—it was suicide—"

His own stammering phrases angered him; he tried to pull himself together. Grenille answered only with a gesture. Lynch, who had not known Luchard, wore a puzzled expression; his face cleared as the English officer murmured low words at his ear.

Luchard came to the sentry before the door. The sentry saluted and stepped aside. Opening the door, Luchard passed into the private office.

A choked, frightful cry of recognition in the voice of Fréjus lifted and then was stilled. A moment passed; there was a murmur of voices. Luchard reappeared. He came out and closed the door. Now he no longer held the pistol in his hand.

Without a word or a look at anyone, he walked down the open lane and so out of the room. He was gone.

Grenille moved slightly, wiped sweat from his face, and leaned over to Bagot.

"Luchard? No, Cap'n," he said. "This was Luchard's twin brother, who was down at Tulear when Luchard died. He has given the pistol to Fréjus—the same pistol that Fréjus gave to his brother in Mojanga—"

From the private office came the muffled burst of an explosion. . . .

When, with morning, the sun came up above the red hills behind town, bugles rang and drums blew. About the high flagstaff on the cliffs were rank upon rank of men and officers, shoulder to shoulder. Rifles cracked forth a volley, as a flag fluttered up the staff and blew clear—and a burst of vociferous voices roared forth greeting and fealty to the Cross of Lorraine.

"These chaps always have an eye for the dramatic, what?" said Lynch cynically.

But Bagot, with Sylvie beside him, looked up at the flag of reborn France, and stood at salute. To reborn France, as to him, the words stood serene and clear:

"Do what the day brings!"

ANSWER TO CROSSWORD PUZZLE ON PAGE 101

S	W	A	T	H	S	■	B	A	B	E	■	F	E	E	D	S
H	A	R	R	O	W	■	O	P	E	N	■	L	E	V	E	E
A	V	I	A	T	E	■	R	E	S	T	A	U	R	A	N	T
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A	M	A	S	S	■	S	P	I	R	E	■	P	O	S	E	R
B	I	Z	E	T	■	S	A	N	S	■	B	O	O	■	■	■
O	N	U	S	■	F	L	I	T	■	C	U	R	R	A	N	T
D	O	R	■	S	L	E	D	■	D	O	N	E	■	V	O	W
E	R	E	C	T	E	D	■	B	I	N	D	■	C	O	R	E
■	■	■	R	A	W	■	G	I	S	T	■	G	U	I	S	E
S	P	R	A	Y	■	B	R	A	C	E	■	E	M	D	E	N
T	R	I	G	■	E	R	O	S	■	M	E	N	U	■	■	■
R	I	P	■	P	L	E	A	■	E	N	V	E	L	O	P	E
A	M	P	E	R	S	A	N	D	S	■	I	R	O	N	E	R
S	A	L	V	O	■	S	E	E	N	■	L	A	S	C	A	R
S	L	E	E	P	■	T	R	E	E	■	S	L	E	E	T	S

CHINA'S HINDU ACE

by Gordon Enders

LATE one February evening, Chu Ta-shin and his Fourth Squadron landed in the dusk at the Hungjao Airdrome outside of Shanghai. I was forewarned of their coming and was on hand to greet them.

Captain Chu Ta-shin and his men hopped out of their bombers and pushed them hurriedly into the empty hangars. The pilots stood in a group beside my car, flying-togs over their arms, and helmets still on their heads. Just before leaving for Shanghai City, Chu Ta-shin gave them their orders: They were to get a good night's rest. Next morning, at daylight, they were to motor out to the airdrome. Squadron Four would give the unsuspecting Japanese a surprise. For the first time in history, a Chinese air force would give battle to an invader.

In the chilly dawn I called for Chu and drove him through the Chinese outposts and pickets again, back to the flying-field. I was afraid to use my headlights, for the Japanese planes were already in the air; but we arrived without mishap.

There was not a soul at the airdrome.

We waited impatiently until long after sunup. Captain Chu's eaglets did not put in an appearance. . . .

Chinese boys are extremely gregarious, living their lives in crowded families and discovering that it is the family that counts, not the individual. They fight well when they are surrounded by their fellows, but they don't like to face solitary death in an airplane.

But Chu was an Oriental with an Occidental viewpoint. He felt that death was the same whatever the time, the place, the way in which it came. He knew he must inculcate that idea in his men or China's first air force would go down in ignominious defeat. He had brought his squadron with him by sheer force of will and on his own responsibility. He could not fail now. . . .

The Hindu of Hindustan, whose Chinese name was Chu Ta-shin, was a flying cadet unique in all the world. He was only twenty-one when I met him, just before I became Chiang Kai-shek's aviation adviser. Chu was short and very thin, with thick, blue-black hair, swarthy skin, and a smile which was startling because of the extreme whiteness of his teeth.

Chu Ta-shin had spent his childhood and youth in London. He was widely read and could discuss H. G. Wells, Sir James Jeans, or Karl Marx with fluent ease. In three months he had mastered his first thousand Chinese characters and had become skilled in Cantonese slang, exposition, and expletive.

After years of acquaintance with Chu, including many months of living cheek-by-jowl with him on active campaign, I can only guess at his history. He could (and did) get as much as ten thousand dollars merely by writing to India for it. I believe he was of the left-handed (concubine) branch of some Indian Maharajah's family.

THE morning wore on, and not one of the pilots put in an appearance. My companion raged inwardly. He walked up and down, scanned the sky, made fierce gestures with his slender hands. At the drop of a hat, he would have taken off against the Japanese single-handed.

Instead, I persuaded him to come with me on a hunt for his missing squadron. Two short calls in the city provided us with the information we needed.

By lunch-time we had every pilot rounded up and Chu ordered them to be his guests at the Great Eastern Hotel for lunch. It was a command and they came like lambs.

When the chopsticks were clicking, Captain Chu spoke. . . . He looked very puny and thin, but his burning eyes held a message.

"Men," he began without rancor, "comrades! So long as there is a war raging, you are China; the fighting men of China. . .

"I take it that you agree with me. China must be saved from the Japanese—by men such as you. I know that my orders to you, my authority over you, are not sufficient to encompass that miracle. Therefore, I will ask a small favor of you. Come to the Hungjao airdrome tomorrow morning. I do not ask that you bring your flying-clothes. I shall not ask you to take the air against the Japanese.

"I ask only that you come out—to see an outer barbarian die for China!"

NEXT morning, Chu Ta-shin was silent as we drove to the airport. I glanced uneasily at his still face.

"Suppose they don't come—"

"They will come," he said quietly.

The pilots were awaiting our arrival at the airdrome. Every man of them had his flying-helmet on, his flying-coat over his arm. The hangar doors were open. At sight of Chu the squadron let out a yell and began pushing the planes out to the tarmac. The Captain stopped them. There was one little fighter plane—a British Lincock trainer, a single-seater, faster than the heavy bombers. Chu ordered this Lincock fueled and its machine-gun belt loaded with ammunition. When this job was complete, we rolled the plane out, started the motor and helped Chu Ta-shin into his flying-suit. Then we stood and waited for a Japanese flight to come within fighting range.

Chu Ta-shin's quarry showed up presently—in force. A flight of three Japanese heavy bombers lumbered fifteen hundred feet overhead. They were outmoded Farmans from France, ugly, square-winged weight-carriers. High above them, at six thousand feet, flew their escort—a flight of three pursuit planes, old-fashioned Sopwiths from Britain.

Chu's cheeks were flushed and his fingers trembled when he grasped my hand to say good-by. By that I knew him for a truly brave man. . . .

The Captain, looking boyish and preoccupied, gunned the Lincock. He took off without flourish, full of business. Slowly he rose above the lines of distant trees and made a lazy turn for altitude. For the first time in any history, a Hindu pilot catapulted into Chinese skies to fight for the Dragon. I held my burning cigarette until its fire bit savagely into my fingers. My face was toward the morning sky.

In five minutes, Chu had his altitude. In another five minutes, he was in position—halfway between the upper and lower Japanese flights, well behind the tails of the bombers. In twenty-five seconds Chu had learned all there was to know about air attacks—and it was over.

He singled out the Japanese bomber which was on the outside right-hand of the V. He got it in a deadline with his two machine-guns, lifted the tail of his Lincock skyward, and came whistling down on the Japs. His wide-open motor roared above the growl of the planes of the Mikado. The desperate suicide dive gained speed.

At six hundred feet, he pulled the triggers of his two guns. They rattled and spat. The Japanese did not pay Chu the compliment of acknowledging

The remarkable story of a foreign volunteer who helped to bring out the fine basic qualities of the early recruits to China's ill-equipped flying force. Mr. Enders spent his youth in India and Tibet, and is now America's representative in Afghanistan.

his existence. The Captain was gaining his experience with lightning rapidity. An attacked plane does not fear the man who nervously opens fire while still out of effective range; the man to fear is the one who holds his trigger finger and ominously bores in closer, closer. Chu decided to halve the distance before speaking again.

At three hundred feet, another vicious burst from both of Chu's guns slipped harmlessly past the Japs. This time the slant-eyed Japanese machine-gunner in the rear cockpit knelt on the floor for a steady stance, and brought the ugly black muzzle of his gun to bear on the Lincock. But he held his fire.

CHU broke off his clattering abruptly. He decided he was still out of range. The distance shrank to a hundred and fifty feet. Again the Lincock's guns rent the air with angry lead. The Japanese disdained to reply; their pilot held a serene course.

Chu determined to rip down into the very cockpit of the Japanese plane. The gap between attacker and attacked drew in to a hundred feet—to seventy-five, to fifty; still Chu held his fire. The Japanese kept a steady gaze along the barrel of his gun.

At twenty-five feet, when the Lincock's propeller seemed to tear at the Japanese gunner's head, Chu yanked his triggers for the kill.

That was a bitter moment. One of Chu's guns choked out three rounds, then jammed. The other gun did not speak at all. The Hindu was in a bad way. Unarmed, he was diving at terrific speed a few feet off the black muzzle of the waiting Japanese.

He could pull his Lincock—hard; he could shoot straight up into the sky. But he knew better. His plane was not a true fighter, it was a trainer. The wings would pull off. Chu had no parachute. The alternative was not much better, but it held hope. Chu decided to roll off—downward—on one wing. He would flip the belly of his plane past the muzzle of the waiting Japanese gun.

Up went the Lincock's near wing, a scant ten feet from the Jap. Just as its silver side glinted in the early sun, the Japanese let go his first burst of fire. We who were watching below could see that he did not miss, that a stream of lead was pouring into the Lincock's cockpit.

But Chu did not falter, did not tear at his steady controls. He slipped down past the Japs too rapidly for a second burst to take effect.

For a thousand feet, Chu descended in a screaming slant. He seemed to be touching the tree tops before he began to pull the Lincock to an even keel. Smoothly he brought it out; making a wide circle, he headed back for the airdrome. He landed directly in the eye of the wind, easily and sweetly. He taxied up to the hangar door and, we shouted our relief.

But Chu had to be lifted out of his cockpit. The Jap's fire had caught the metal guide of his machine-gun belt, and splintered it within a foot of his left leg. One bullet had penetrated into the cockpit and had caromed around on the steel members. It had buried itself deep in the very center of Chu's abdomen. His left leg was bleeding at eight points, but he was raging with fury. He yanked at the dead triggers, he kicked the gun beside his good leg, he banged with an angry fist on the sides of the cockpit.

"Get those guns to working again," he yelled. "I'll shoot down that Jap if it's the last thing I ever do!"

He meant every word of it, but we pulled him out of his plane and loaded him into my car. The Japanese bombers circled around and came down low for a look at the Lincock and at us. They did not even bother to machine-gun us. It was an insolent performance.

Little David Wong of San Francisco was the first to come to a decision. He grabbed the tail of the Lincock and turned it around so that it faced outward, and called his friends to help him with the guns. In a moment, the jabbering boys swarmed over the plane. One of them replaced the expended ammunition in the belt. Another cut away the jagged metal from the sides. A third put blocks under the wheels and swung the propeller. When both machine-guns revived and sputtered lead out over the airdrome, David Wong settled his goggles into place and climbed into the cockpit.

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He gunned the engine, which roared up smooth and steady. It died down, the blocks were pulled away; the Lincock moved out, lifted its tail, and took the air.

The Japanese planes saw it rise and came over in a hurry. They had David Wong at a fatal disadvantage, but the kid was game. He waited until they were well over to his right, and then he pulled up into a steep climbing turn. It was his only chance of making altitude, of escaping a three-barreled diving attack. His was a gesture in the grand manner, but the Lincock could not respond.

Heavily laden as it was with ammunition and fuel, the plane hung for a moment on one wing; it shuddered; it began to slip. With a ghastly swoop, like the flashing of a meteor, it sliced across the horizon toward the earth. It struck with a bone-crunching crash. Little David Wong was dead long before we reached the wreck.

I DROVE Chu Ta-shin slowly back to his three weeks in the hospital.

"I should have died in that plane," he kept repeating. "Now David Wong is dead—all on account of my foolishness."

I tried to comfort him by saying that China needed a dead David Wong—and a live Chu Ta-shin. He remained inconsolable.

But I was right. He was one of the men who helped to awaken China from a three-thousand-year sleep. Five years later, young Liu of his squadron, to my certain knowledge, shot down three big Japanese bombers in a single fight over Nanking. When the remaining Japs fled, Liu came in to land. His plane was full of holes, his ammunition expended; but he was untouched. He was so excited he forgot to put down his landing-wheels; but he stepped whole-skinned out of the wreck in the middle of the Nanking airdrome, ecstatically talking to himself.

Captain Chu Ta-shin of Hindustan, first to demonstrate that a man—even an outer barbarian—might love China well enough to challenge the Japanese in the air, became one of China's leading flying aces. He has continued to wage war against the invader.

Years of fighting the totalitarian Japanese have crystallized Chu's opinions. He knows now what it is he believes in enough to die for. He has resumed his British nationality. Today he is flying with the R.A.F.

The Déportés Attack

In the Guiana black-country a surveyor deals with escaped French convicts.

by A. G. BARNETT

I SHALL always believe that Mumbo-Jumbo saved my life in the jungles of French Guiana in April 1917—not actually the idiotic satanic bugaboo itself, but a definite reaction against the tomfoolery of it.

All three of the Guianas are "black" countries, where a few whites keep the upper hand through sufferance inspired by timely visits of naval vessels and intimidating parades of marines while the gunboats lie at anchor in the harbors. What amazes a newcomer is that nearly all white people who have lived for any considerable time in this atmosphere of superstition succumb to the black demonology, or at least half believe in it and secretly acknowledge the dread powers in one way or another.

Before I had been in Paramaribo a month I found out that the manager of a certain placer mine carried a charm to keep his servants from putting spells on him, and half a dozen formerly sane Americans told me impossible tales of the transference of information between far-separated tribes of the bush Negroes. When a governor of the colony had died, they insisted, the fact was known at the exact moment of its occurrence by a remote Saramacca tribe.

I had been in Dutch Guiana only three months when I was commissioned to lead a safari into French territory. After arriving in Cayenne, I found it would be nine days before a ship would be leaving for Mana, where I was to buy equipment and provisions and recruit the personnel of my party. During this tedious stop-over at the capital city I learned that the bush country was overrun with marauding bands of escaped convicts from the penitentiaries. Never before had the situation been so bad; for now the guards were a poor lot, all the able-bodied efficient men having been called to the colors. Supplies, too, were at a low ebb. All in all, it had seemed desirable to place little obstruction in the way of any of the most desperate *déportés* who might be inclined to make a break for freedom. For it was well known that most of the men who escaped would soon be drowned in the swamps or become lost and die of starvation.

But now the bush tribes were in a state of terror; prospectors and isolated settlers had been murdered by the refugees; balata bleeders refused to go out on their regular beats. My friend the *avocat avoué,* to whose guidance I had been committed, stonily refused at first to sanction my going into the infested district. Only after I had told him at length about my having been in Cuba with Leonard Wood and in the Philippines with Funston would he act to procure the necessary licenses and permits. And he then made it obligatory for me to take four more men than I had counted on having, and to provide firearms for every member of the party, and see to it that they never failed to keep their weapons near at hand—a fine pass for a surveying crew!

Having finally arrived at Mana, I had to submit to another irksome delay while the firm of Tanton et Cie. attended to the assembling of my outfit and the enlisting of helpers bold enough to venture (armed to the teeth) into the accursed back-country.

For this interim I took lodgings with a Canadian beachcomber who asserted he had once been a student at Oxford. A man of about sixty years, he had managed to build up a small importance as an *entrepreneur* in all the petty profitable activities of this corner of the colony. He could speak accurately about geology, chemistry, anthropology and the mathematics; but he had fallen under the bane of voodooism. He insisted that there were matters regularly taking place in the jungles that the mind of white men could not possibly grasp. When I demanded a specific instance, he told about an old Negro who could not be harmed by bullets. I said this fellow was a fraud, and my host angrily declared he was no such thing. Finally my disgust boiled over and I offered to bet a thousand francs that I could shoot this fakir with my service automatic and put him out of business for some time.

The outcome of this difference of opinion was that the Canadian promptly covered my money franc for franc, and we placed the "pot" with a malarial missionary, who half fancied I was going to be the loser. The next day my host casually informed me that of course there could be no test until the magician had worked himself into the requisite frenzied state of mind—which, indeed, he was unable to accomplish during my remaining five days in the settlement. This farcical experience left me seethingly scornful of the powers of Mumbo-Jumboism, and thereby prepared me for the crisis soon to come.

My party left Mana in two enormous native dugouts, each one manned by six paddlers and a steersman. We were provided for a month of jungle work. Twelve of the fourteen men were local creoles, underfed, boastful and timorous; two—the owners of the dugouts—were magnificent coal-black Negro savages of the Boni tribe. The huge Clement and his son Petit Clement were real men.

AFTER four days of paddling upstream against the flooded Mana River we reached a point exactly suitable for making camp. But a crew of four balata men had been surprised and murdered there by *déportés,* the creoles said. So in the end we nosed our way several miles up tiny Mana Creek to a thicketed flat that offered better hopes of concealment.

Here the men set to with a will, and in four hours put up as pretty a bush camp as the eye of explorer could demand: a hut for cooking and to house the supplies, three shelters for the crew, and a magnificent loggia for "Monsieur le Capitain"—impromptu structures but so expertly thatched and walled that not a drop of rainfall ever penetrated to the interiors.

The first day out on the trail, we found the skeletons of three *déportés* huddled about the charred remains of a fire; but old Clement said it was nothing. Shrugging Gallically, he assured me that "they die everywhere." That very night, however, there was an alarm. Two or three shots were fired. Then the cry, *"Déportés! Déportés!"* rang out. But before I could get into boots and outside, two of the vigilantes came to my doorway and besought that I remain tranquil. "Merely a pair of *déportés,*" they assured me. "We quickly disposed of them. It is regrettable that you had to be awakened." This childish byplay they evidently had devised to bolster up their courage, possibly fancying that the boom of shotguns would intimidate prowlers.

Actually, this midnight hullabaloo had precisely the opposite effect to what had been desired: it attracted a party of *déportés* to our hiding-place. The outlaws came to the borders of our clearing that night, but considered the situation for two days before deciding to make an assault upon us.

They had seen that they must not risk an open attack in the daytime when most of us were away running prospect lines, for the cook and his bodyguard of five men were fear-haunted to the point of keeping their guns always ready and never separating for an instant. And the odds were plainly against an onslaught at night upon fifteen men who slept with pistols and shotguns beside them

in their hammocks. So by intelligent watching the desperate men discovered our most vulnerable quarter-hour, the time immediately following the return of the surveyors to camp. In the fancied security of numbers, our men then momentarily laid aside their firearms to indulge in rough jokes and horseplay before changing into dry garments. With Clement and his son, whom I had appointed to be rodmen, I regularly came in behind the pack of bush cutters and tape-men, who were inclined to make a race of the last half mile or so.

At this favorable time, on the third day, the Frenchmen appeared. The first we knew about them, they were among us, cutting off the main body of the workers from their huts—six gaunt, pasty-faced, hairy ghosts of men with rifles. I had just emerged into the open clearing, and two of the intruders had me effectively covered. The others crouched menacingly above their weapons, threatening the entire segment of the camp. A military voice ordered me to drop my pistols and advance, and told the others to clear out.

CLEMENT, at my side, growled like a beast but stood stock still; Petit Clement dropped behind a log. But the miserable creoles turned and ran screaming into the bush toward the dugouts, unmindful of anything except their desire to get away.

At this electric instant something made my senses critical of the pointing rifles. Instead of dropping my pistols, I whispered to Clement, ordering him to make a rush with me to cut off the invaders, who had begun to move toward the tents. I fired twice and sent a man spinning, his gun dropping with a tell-tale lightness of impact. Then the three of us made a race of it and easily got between our enemies and their intended plunder of firearms. For though these men even then had the guts to attempt to beat us to the scattered weapons, they had scarcely strength left to move their bones beyond a walk. One after another they toppled over pitifully as they tried to run.

It had been a gallant try, well planned and well played out, but hunger and the privations of the jungle life had defeated it. Yet I shall always believe it would not have failed, after all, except for my newly sharpened sense of suspicion.

Soon we had our sprawling victims trussed up, and to the utter bewilderment of Clement I ordered that they be given a double tot of rum all around. For my brave helpers had deserted and would never stop paddling till they were back in Mana: and I had suddenly become inspired to offer the six captives employment for the remaining weeks of the survey. Besides this temporary respite, I had in mind a still higher bribe which I felt sure the Frenchmen would accept in faith and honor—the promise of jobs at my bauxite mines in Surinam. This I explained to Clement, and the trustful savage took my word for it that all would be well.

THE sequel to this is that after feeding the six Frenchmen for two days and doctoring the shoulder I had wounded with a .44 slug, I made them over into very useful helpers, and finished the survey on time. These resourceful derelicts, who had been able to whittle convincing rifles out of jungle wood, made me a splendid raft of poles for my return trip to Mana. I left them with abundant supplies, and a map showing where to cross the Maroni River and intercept a long survey-line leading directly to Moengo Mine. And when finally I had made my way to Mana and Cayenne and back to the Dutch Guiana bush, the six were on hand to welcome me home. They continued to work as miners at Moengo for more than two years. But no telling what they might have done there along Mana Creek if their bluff had been just a trifle more compelling.

HELL and HIGH AIR

Dropping leaflets over Paris proved a tough job—another R.A.F. adventure,

As told to

Michael Ventura

by Michael Seaven

Operational Training Unit,
Somewhere-in-England
27th July, 1940

WE briefed at 10:00. The A.O.C. himself talked to us. You can imagine our feelings when we realized we were going on a *pamphlet raid!*

A pamphlet raid! Shadwell snorted so loud, the A.O.C. suggested that perhaps "the sergeant in the center of the third row should report to the M.O. to have his tonsils operated on!"

Four ships were briefed, to be commanded by Angus, Peter Piper, Butch, and myself. I was to have *Old Glory*. I chose Bits as my second pilot, and of course Shadwell, Tich and Croydon as navigator, rear-gunner, and W/O respectively.

Jingo gave us a pep talk in which he said: "Don't expect the show to be a picnic, because it won't be. You will most likely meet with more than usually severe opposition. But your job is to see that you drop all your pamphlets in the designated areas, and do your best to get home in as short a time as possible, and in one piece."

You should have heard the comments from the other chaps afterward.

"Yah, sissies!" yelled one chap, and Butch bopped him on the nose.

"Mammy's little white-haired boys!" yelled another.

It went on like that until we were actually climbing into our crates—the entire aerodrome milling round in force. It was a grand send-off. All of us were grateful for it. . . .

So we took off, at exactly 14.00. I went first; four minutes afterward came Butch; then Peter Piper, then Angus.

Our course was 180° true. Paris lay 250 miles due south of us—just over an hour's run: actually, we had reckoned, about an hour and twenty minutes net. We were to drop most of our pamphlets over Paris itself, keeping some for Rouen on the way back, and Dieppe and Calais, provided we were still in one piece by then.

We were scheduled to arrive over the center of Paris at 15.30, barring "incidents." Until we got there and actually tested the defenses, we couldn't make any definite plans as to our method of approach. But since the sun was shining, and since it would be westering by half-past three, I'd tentatively decided that the best approach would be from around Chartres or Versailles.

I still believe in the last-war tactics of keeping the sun behind you, so that it will blind your opponent and make you invisible to him. By coming in from the sun, therefore, I knew that the Archie gunners downstairs would have difficulty in seeing us. Sound-locators are all very well, but there's no real substitute for eyes. If there were, why bother to use searchlights at night?

The moment we got into position, we flew in line abreast: Peter Piper, Angus, Butch, then me. My idea was to keep that formation, leaving our tails guarded by our rear-gunners, until we reached Pontoise. Here, we would fan out in an encircling move-

ment in opposite directions, meet over Versailles, form line astern, and run in in quick succession, diving low before we dropped our pamphlets.

But things didn't work out that way—they seldom do on bombing raids, unless your lucky star is in the ascendant. On this occasion, the Gang's wasn't.

The text of those pamphlets is interesting.

"Frenchmen," they read, "are you prepared to deliver all the resources of the country to the enemy? Will you agree to harvest for the Germans? Will you hew coal for the Germans? Will you make munitions for the Germans?"

Then they went on to give the actual terms offered to the French fleet, and to tell how French ships were given the opportunity of going to French possessions in the West Indies and other places where the Huns couldn't get at them. I hope they do some good. If *per ardua ad Paris* means anything, they should win the war tomorrow!

Until we reached the Somme, nothing happened. I saw Abbeville and Amiens quite plainly. How the sight of Amiens brought back memories of those fierce dog-fights of twenty-two years ago, in No. 48 squadron! Then we were up against Halberstadts, with one fixed Spandau gun firing through the propeller, and a speed of less than 100 m.p.h. at ten thousand feet. Now we're up against Messerschmitts, with eight guns firing through the wings, and a speed of 350 m.p.h. or more at twenty-five thousand feet. A big advance in two decades, but it's the same old hymn of hate fought in the same old way by the same young chaps with the same old spirit.

JUST south of the Somme, we were attacked by a squadron of Me's. There were twelve of them. They came hareing down out of the sun from way above us (we were flying at fifteen thousand feet), just like Richthofen's Red Aces of 1917.

Time slipped back. Again I was a twenty-year-old, sitting alone in the front seat of a Bristol Fighter, scared stiff, but ready to do or die, my observer thumping me in the back and pointing upward with a sardonic grin on his face.

But only for a moment. With the next breath, 1917 became 1940—so suddenly, as to give me quite a shock. For Tich yelled: "Yellowbellies to starboard, Skipper." And now I was forty-three again, and a bomber "truck-driver," no longer a fighter, free to give back with my own hands as much as I received. . .

Shadwell took charge of the front guns. Through the intercomm I heard him say: "Jest one, please Gawd, jest once, an' I'll die 'appy."

We altered formation and opened up into line ahead, stepped down, so that each of us was a hundred feet lower than the one in front.

As I've already told you, I think, fighters seldom attack bombers broadside on. If they did, they'd be able to fire only about a dozen rounds into the bomber before the latter was out of range, due to the bomber's high rate of speed. So the fighter attacks from the rear, either from above or below. He's got to get in his burst pretty quick, because his limit of sustained fire, even with a full clip, is no more than thirty seconds.

On the other hand, the bomber has guns everywhere, particularly in the nose and the tail, power-operated so that they can be swung easily to any point in a complete half-circle. The drawback from the bomber's point of view is the fact that the latest fighters are equipped with cannon. These have a far greater range than machine-guns, and therefore cannon-equipped fighters can get in and land an explosive shell on the bomber's *empennage* before the fighter is within the bomber's range.

Actually, of course, even when up against cannon, a bomber isn't so easily brought down. Faced with concentrated fire-power from all directions, a fighter has to get dead on his target before he dare fire a shot. Unless he's pretty slick as a marksman, and an adept at aerobatics, he'll be shot down before he knows what's hit him. If he's faced with Little Tich at one pair of guns, and with Shadwell at the other—well, it's just too bad for poor old Fritz!

Those twelve Me's did their best. Peter Piper reported a shattered windshield and a few minor holes in the fabric; Angus said his gunner winged a "horrrnet" with his first shot; Butch complained that the "lousy hoodlums've shot off a slice of rudder and beat up my navigator."

All this happened within the first two minutes. You must always remember that air action takes about ten times as long to describe as it does to happen. On "ops," a split second is an hour; a minute is a day. Every tick of a second-hand means twenty shots per gun fired at you and by you. Twelve Me's and four Wellingtons have one hundred and twelve guns between them. Multiply that number of guns by twenty, and you can see that two thousand two hundred and forty emma-gee bullets are flying around *every second*, not to mention the cannon. So, when you're reading my slow-moving descriptions of action in the skies, bear this in mind!

Shadwell yelled back that he'd got a Heinie "clear in his yellow belly, the dirty so-and-so," and Little Tich announced very calmly that "a couple o' the stinkers have barged smack into each other and gone down locked in each other's arms just as if they was *Romeo* and *Juliet*."

As usual, there was nothing for me to do but "carry on," take avoiding action, and keep my fingers crossed. Automatically, I hummed *"It All Depends on You,"* waiting tensely for the direct hit that I felt certain would come any second.

Needless to say, it didn't come. But however much you try to school yourself not to cross your bridges, it's human nature, *when you're to all intents and purposes inactive*, to anticipate and to worry.

IN my time, I've experienced most everything that can happen to flying-men: I've caught fire; I've crashed; I've bailed out; I've been shot up. And what I haven't experienced personally, I've experienced vicariously.

When I first joined the Royal Flying Corps in 1915, I didn't know what fear meant. I was young and *ignorant*. Flying was in its infancy. . . We could see only the heroic side; we hadn't even *heard* of the blood, sweat, and tears through which it was necessary to go, to become a hero.

Now, I know. And knowing as I do what can happen, and what has happened, to others, creates the thought in my mind—and the fear—that the same things might happen to me. In any case, in this war, they're not trying to hide that side of it, the way they did in the last war. It's better so. Forewarned is forearmed.

But, although these thoughts and fears don't come uppermost, I think it's good to have them. A certain amount of imagination and fear makes you steadier, and more cautious, and calmer in a crisis. And in a bomber, recklessness doesn't get you anywhere—except deep down in the ground, pushing up the daisies along with four or five trusting members of your crew. . . .

And so *Old Glory*, and *A for Arthur*, and *B for Bertie*, and *R for Robert* carried on. The Me's losing four of their number in less than two minutes, hared off.

Peter Piper reported one engine missing badly; Angus said his right wing was down and wouldn't come up; Butch announced that the damage done to his navigator was negligible: "a slug through his left ear lobe—the guy's cussin' to beat the band because his gore's blotted Paris out on the map."

I asked them all if they were able to go ahead. Peter Piper said: "Rather, old top! I'll force-land at Le Bourget if I have to, and collar that blonde popsy I told you about, what?"

Angus said: "Hoch aye, *B for Bairtie's* all richt the noo, sae long as she dosnae hit the Eiffel Towerrr."

Butch said: "Whaddya *think*, buddy? Them pamphlets is goin' down *R for Robert's* hatch if I hafta go down wit' 'em and hand 'em out myself at all the street-corners."

We passed over Beauvais, and were approaching Pontoise, getting ready to fan out for our encircling movement, when Tich's voice came through the intercomm: "Twenty-plus Junkerschmitts coming in from the east."

I looked at Bits. Bits pursed his lips and said: "Don't worry, Skip. We'll drill 'em so full of holes they'll look like nutmeg graters."

I had to smile. No getting Bits down.

I canceled the fanning-out movement, and we all closed in to form a star. I led; Angus pulled in to my right, Peter Piper to my left; Butch brought up the rear.

Then the fun started. We were so near Paris now, that I was determined those pamphlets should go,-come hell or high air. Through an absolute inferno of machine-gun fire, we pushed on, and despite those murderous Me's, dived down and shoved the stuff through the hatches at about a million a minute.

Bits helped Shadwell, and so did Croydon. Neither let up until there wasn't a pamphlet left in the kite. Under the circumstances, it was pretty good going.

And we were catching it, too. I could tell that, by the way the ship was behaving. Every time a salvo hit her, *Old Glory* staggered and shook like a tenpin in a bowling alley. As I saw afterward, she registered hits in every part of her. I could barely keep her straight. First, she was right wing down, then left wing down, then tail down.

Battling with the controls was harder than steering a car through two feet of gumbo. I had to have Bits up to give me a hand.

He hadn't been in the pulpit long before I heard him shout through the intercomm: "Croydon's hit."

I said, "Okay, Bits—go see to him."

Bits went aft. A minute later, he called: "Groin wound. He's okay."

Then Tich: "One down, Skipper, but my turret's on fire."

I called through to Bits: "Rear gun turret on fire—give Tich a hand. . . Hello, Shadwell—carry on. Everything's going fine."

Shadwell answered back: "Not 'arf, Skip. I just got a daisy—"

Bits interrupted: "Hullo, Skip. Fire under, but Tich's got first-degree burns on his hands."

I switched through to Shadwell again. "Rear gun turret," I said, "quick."

Shadwell crawled through and winked at me, sticking his thumb up as he passed.

For a second or two there was a breathing spell. Suddenly something hit us. It was like nothing I'd ever experienced before. It felt as though it might have been a twelve-inch shell from one of those coast guns at Calais.

Old Glory gave a mighty lurch to port and started to sideslip, just as though we were "peeling off" intentionally. I pulled like hell at the stick, but nothing happened.

Then, "Fire amidships, Skipper," shouted Bits. "Hole as big as a frying pan."

All this time we were sliding downward to the left at an angle of about forty-five degrees. I badly needed another pair of hands on the controls. But Croydon was out, Little Tich was out, Bits was fighting fire, and Shadwell was manning the rear guns. Action? I had all the action *I* wanted. I thought my arms would come out of their sockets.

Old Glory was intractable: stubborn as the proverbial mule. In a few seconds, or so it seemed, we dropped from fifteen thousand to ten thousand feet.

Then Bits again: "Okay, Skip. Still alight, but under control."

I told him to come forward the moment he was able to.

Suddenly, *Old Glory* steadied up. At eight thousand feet, she stopped skidding, and shook herself like a dog. Then her nose went down.

Below, I could see Paris as plainly as I see my own face in the mirror: the Champs Elysées, the Arc de Triomphe, the Eiffel Tower, and even the Tuileries Gardens. It was like a motion picture of a stationary object taken from a moving train.

Even in the stress of the moment, I had to sentimentalize over it. Paris was Paris, war or no war, and I loved her. I thought to myself: "One of these days, I'll be back. We'll have one whale of a good time together, as we've done in the past."

In the bright July sunshine, and despite the Nazi flags which I knew were flying from every masthead, she looked as gay and debonair as one of her own courtesans. One of the most pathetic sights I have ever seen. . . . .

Then flak caught us. I wrenched at the controls to avoid it. *Old Glory* lumbered up growlingly. She must have lost half her elevator.

SUDDENLY something smacked the starboard engine. I glanced at the tachometer. From a steady 2500, the needle flopped down to 1500. As I looked at it, it wavered uncertainly—up to 2000; down to 1200.

In the confusion of the last few moments *Old Glory* had turned and twisted to such an extent that I found the compass pointed to only ten degrees off our reciprocal course—that is, our course home.

A lucky break. When you're unable to steer a ship, it's comforting to feel you're *heading* in the right direction, even if you aren't making much progress. Until I obtained help on the dual controls, I knew I couldn't do anything but hang on and let the kite go in any direction she fancied.

And that engine was behaving just like a jitterbug. . . .

My first instinct, of course, was to turn the petrol off. On counting ten, I decided not to. If I left the petrol on, the worst that could happen was fire, and all of us had parachutes. The *best* that could happen was a sudden recovery. If I turned the petrol off, *nothing* could happen, either good or bad. Strictly unorthodox to leave it on, but the situation was so precarious that taking one more odds-on chance didn't seem to matter.

Then Bits through the intercomm: "Hullo, Skip. Still smoldering back here, and the radio's gone."

I said: "Can you fix it?"

Bits said: "No—it's burnt up."

Then I laughed. "Well, we've still got one engine, and by the way we're drifting, we'll at least make Deauville."

"In the height of the season, too! Boy, what a caper we'll cut on the *plage!*"

I called to the rear gun turret: "Hullo, Shadwell. What's doing?"

"Nothin', sir," replied Shadwell. "No sign of no Yellowbellies, neither of the squadron. Tich is sittin' up and takin' notice and yelling for a pint o' mild and bitter. Bit of a shambles back 'ere, sir, but the guns is okeydoke, and so'm I."

Just at that moment, flak caught us again. It smacked us like a pile-driver, right under my feet.

Old Glory leaped upward, then began to fall. From a jagged hole in the floor of the cockpit a wisp of golden flame snaked up. It hovered in the air like a hobgoblin. Then it vanished. It was followed by another, and another— Fiery ballet-dancers.

I called to Shadwell, then to Bits. Myself, I could do nothing. *Old Glory* was too recalcitrant for me to let go of the controls. But it was getting hot in that pulpit. I began to roast. Smoke billowed up and almost blinded me.

Then Shadwell arrived—none too soon. He'd taken off his sweater and his uniform jacket. Using first one, then the other, he banged away heroically.

Bits came in. He did the same thing. Between them, they smothered the fire, but not until it had burnt up the second pilot's seat and scorched my Mae West, and cracked the glasses of half the instruments.

Shadwell's face was black as ink. When he grinned at me, his teeth and

his eyeballs glared like Al Jolson's in "Sonny Boy." Bits was a wreck. He hadn't any eyebrows, and his mustache was a charred mess. At first glance, it looked as though he had been daubing mascara on it.

Without any word from me, he took over the dual stick, standing up. He couldn't sit down—there wasn't anything to sit on.

By now, we'd made some sort of progress—crablike, but at least in more or less the right direction. Shadwell went aft to his table. Bits pulled and pushed with me, and together we got *Old Glory* on an even keel.

But that starboard engine was still spluttering. I said: "Put her nose down, Bits—maybe we can get that motor going again."

Shadwell called through the intercomm: "Passing Vernon, sir. Following the course of the Seine. We're about seventy kilometers northwest of Paris. Keep going, sir, and we'll be at Lee Aver in another 'arf-hour—it's only a 'undred and ten kilometers."

A hundred and ten kilometers—seventy miles—in half an hour! Well, it had taken us thirty-five minutes to do those first forty miles.

I BEGAN to think we'd never make England. And Le Havre was a danger-spot—too much flak around there, and too great a certainty of running into a Balbo of Me's.

As long as we dared, we kept the nose down. At four thousand feet, that starboard engine suddenly picked up. What a moment! Bits looked across at me, grinned, and stuck his thumb up.

Then we climbed. I thought I'd try to make Fecamp or St. Valery, where it would be quieter.

But we couldn't climb far. I'd forgotten that the elevator was half shot. By nearly stalling, we managed to force her up to five thousand feet, but that was as high as she'd go. Fortunately, we were able to lug her round a little and keep her on a course of 315°, which I reckoned would bring us in somewhere between Selsey Bill and Littlehampton—*if* we could maintain height, speed, and direction.

The air-speed indicator registered 95 m.p.h., and the tachometer of the starboard engine just under two thousand r.p.m. We had to keep the nose down in order to prevent the ship from stalling.

With upward, then, of 150 miles to go, most of it across the Channel, I hoped for the best but feared the worst. We were losing about fifty feet a minute. In ninety minutes, which was roughly the time it would take us to make the south coast at our present rate of progress, we would drop forty-five hundred feet. Provided everything went according to Hoyle, that left us barely five hundred feet in reserve.

We carried on, praying that we'd avoid Le Havre, flak, fighters, barrage balloons, and any other forces of man or nature that might decide to shove their ugly noses up at us.

Of the others, there was no sign. Since that last conversation over Pontoise, I'd seen nothing of Angus, Peter Piper or Butch. Since our radio had gone dead, I'd heard nothing either.

I worried about them quite a bit. Shadwell said: "Buck up, sir—I never saw no crack-ups, 'ceptin' Heinies, and I was keepin' a good look-out. Neither did Little Tich. I wouldn't mind bettin' they're at 'ome, sir, guzzlin' Guinness in the mess."

The last straw came down on us—or rather *up* at us—just as we sighted the French Coast and the Channel beyond—still so innocently, beautifully blue. We'd drifted a little off our course; a southwest wind had sprung up, we learned afterward. Of all the foul luck, we found ourselves bang over Dieppe. We'd lost nearly three thousand feet by then, and weren't more than two thousand feet up.

Shadwell yelled: "Dieppe below, sir—look out for squalls!"

Even as he spoke, that damned flak opened up. We were just showered with it. I heard Shadwell say, "Christ!" through the intercomm; and although I called to him, there was no answer.

Bits turned and looked at me. I told him to go back.

Bits left the controls, and immediately *Old Glory* started to sideslip. I pulled her back as far as I could, but she still canted sideways. Bits yelled: "Shaddy's caught a packet in the mouth. He's lost a tooth."

I hung on. There was a series of thumps on both wings. The ship did half a slow roll, and nearly turned over on her back. Moving the stick to the left had no effect. Where before it had been as stiff and as difficult to move as a crowbar in a lump of concrete, it was now slack. I could shove it over with one finger. Something had happened to the port wing, but I hadn't time to find out what. *Old Glory* was practically out of control. I hesitated whether or not to tell the fellows to bail out.

Then Bits came back.

"Left wing smashed," he said, "right aileron in shreds, elevator torn out, rudder damaged, rear gun turret out of commission, radio gone, hole amidship, hole forrard, starboard engine on the blink—but we're still flying! This must be our lucky day, Sieve!"

Huh! Lucky day? Oh, well, I suppose so: Shadwell out, Croydon out, Little Tich out, but Bits okay, I okay, and one engine okay! What more could anyone want?

Our height now was eighteen hundred feet. Answering to nothing or nobody, *Old Glory* sailed through the flak and continued on over the Channel in her own sweet way, headed for Brighton, or Hastings, or Dover or—the bright blue sea beneath us.

Would we bail out?

"We will not," said Bits. "and that goes for the rest of us too. Croydon couldn't anyway, and neither could Shadwell or Tich—except at a pinch. So that leaves you and me. Well, you're the Skipper—what you say, goes."

We didn't bail out. Instead we sat silent, entirely at the mercy of the wind and the waves, and the steel and aluminum and tattered fabric of which we were only too much a part.

Old Glory kept crabbing—east-northeast by the compass—and the altimeter needle kept dropping. At three hundred feet it looked as though we'd end up in the briny.

Ahead, dimly, I could see the coastline, but it seemed a long way off. There was a bit of a haze, though, which made the judging of distance deceptive. . . . Then suddenly I saw the Leas, and the bandstand, and the Metropole Hotel, and the War Memorial at the end of the Road of Remembrance, and even the bathing pool. I knew them all so well. Many a happy holiday I'd spent at Folkestone. I'd seen "Irene" at the theater there in Bouverie Road West, and heard "Alice Blue Gown" sung for the first time—how long ago? 1922 or '23—eons ago. That night, I'd had my first romance, too.

I started to hum "Alice Blue Gown" there and then. I was still humming it as *Old Glory's* gray belly hit the water a hundred yards off-shore, to the east of Victoria Pier, and I realized that we were safe—*safe* in England!

Must I admit it? All right, I will—to you: I cried. Why? I'll tell you! Bits collapsed—rolled over cold as soon as he knew we were home. That's why I cried. *Wouldn't you cry if you saw a perfect honey of a Red Cross nurse rush over to your second pilot and take him in her arms, ignoring you completely?*

BITS came to about half an hour later, in a W.A.C. shelter. I sat at a table opposite him, drinking a cup of coffee. He opened his eyes, took one look at the vision that was bending over him, and promptly passed out again—only, he didn't lose consciousness the second time.

"Heaven?" he said to me over a whisky sour in the local lads' mess later that night. "If heaven's only half as nice as that, I hope I die tomorrow!"

Why is it the other fellows seem to have all the luck?

Readers' Forum*

(Continued from page 1)

FROM A PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

Way back when my head was thickly thatched and not infiltrated by renegade gray, the news-stands boasted a REDBOOK, *a* GREEN BOOK *and a* BLUE BOOK. *And I read 'em all.*

In those days I munched popcorn and cheered Pearl White in "The Iron Claw" and read everything I could get my hands on. Of late, cereal serials and soap operas, which I produce for the networks, claim my time, and there's less time for reading, but I still like a husky adventure yarn.

Recently, Thomas Duncan's name on the cover brought me back into the ranks of BLUE BOOK *readers. . . .*

And I got a bonus in a balanced diet of fiction. Hercule Poirot strutted through the pages, twirling his mustaches and exerting the "little gray cells." Still among those present was H. Bedford-Jones with an off-trail yarn. Atkey took us back to the past, and Fredericks projected us into the future. Western, bayou and river country, deep-sea stuff rounded out the menu. So—my two-bits is on the line next month.

Don Thompson,
National Broadcasting Company,
San Francisco.

THEIR SUNDAY PUNCH

Being a staid, settled schoolteacher, I must seek my adventure vicariously Until I discovered an old copy of BLUE BOOK *in a musty little bookstore, I had prowled through dozens of magazines looking for the right type of fiction.* BLUE BOOK *solved this want, and now I'm always the first fellow to the news-stand the day* BLUE BOOK *makes its appearance. My favorite authors are H. Bedford-Jones and Max Brand, who father stories in countless magazines. Yet it seems they always save their "Sunday punch" for* BLUE BOOK.

My only complaint is that war stories are occupying too much space. Listening continually to war news, and working consistently to help win it, I like to relax occasionally with my favorite magazine and forget. Outside of this one complaint, BLUE BOOK *is still the blueblood of adventure fiction.*

Frank Blair,
Loop, Texas.

*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestion; for the ones we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

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