

FAR CALL THE BUGLES, A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL ★

BLUE BOOK

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MARTIAN CARAVAN, by NELSON S. BOND

**FULTON GRANT • THOMAS DUNCAN • TRACY RICHARDSON
CHARLES L. CLIFFORD • H. BEDFORD-JONES**



Colonel Lawrence with his associates in the great Arabian adventures. In front, at Lawrence's right, stands the Emir Feisal, now Viceroy of Mecca.

Plymouth

22. X 32

Dear Colonel Turkey

You have been long, and are proposing to go on being long. Meanwhile I lie in quiet, thank to the R.A.F. which over us.

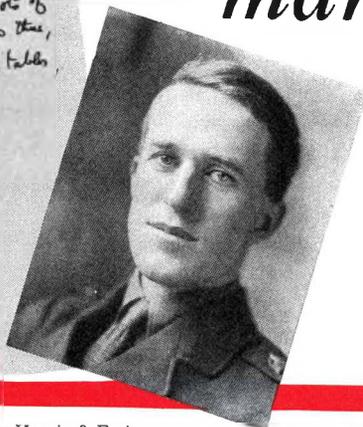
My annual leave has been taken, for this year, so there is no likelihood of my reaching London until 1933. Plymouth is very much too far off for a day-visit, unless the voyage is really great. Ex-Bombay is 130 miles away.

I did not know you lectured. Lots of Englishmen go to the States, or need to go there, to lecture. I am glad you turn the tables, and hope you do so profitably!

These far-Asian aircraft are remarkable machines. I wish we could take their boots or amplicians now coming.

Yours
J.S. Law

The Mystery of Aircraftsman Shaw



Under the nom de guerre "Aircraftsman Shaw," Colonel Lawrence fled from fame while he worked on a super speedboat for the British Navy.

Lawrence of Arabia And His Super-Speedboat

"For this we owe him a separate debt. It was a princely gift," said Winston Churchill of Lawrence's work as "Aircraftman Shaw." . . . We'd thought that plain courage was the main British secret weapon; but—has Lawrence's 90-mile-an-hour speedboat also helped to rebel invasion?

By COL. CHARLES
WELLINGTON FURLONG

Colonel Furlong's achievements are too numerous even to summarize here: his record fills a full column of "Who's Who in America"—and includes the winning of a world's bull-riding championship at Pendleton, Oregon! More important are his many exploring expeditions; his service as a member of the American Delegation to Negotiate Peace, and as a Military Intelligence Officer in the Balkans and the Near East; and his many books like "The Gateway to the Sahara" and "Gibraltar, Key to the Mediterranean."

AT just five minutes to one, on a late October day in 1932, I stood on a quay in Plymouth, England, and watched a speedboat head toward me. I was standing by a rectangular stone, set in white cement in the pavement, placed there to commemorate the departure of the Pilgrims. It was the last stone step from which Edward Winslow and his band of adventurers had embarked in the small boat which conveyed them to the *Mayflower*.

The speedboat, coming from Mountbatten Airport and carrying a white bone in her teeth, shot like an arrow across the water of Plymouth Harbor and swung gracefully alongside the end of the quay. A small blond man, nattily dressed in the gray-blue of the Royal Air Force and carrying a swagger-stick, stepped lithely ashore and walked toward me. He wore no insignia of rank; only the wings of the R.A.F. decorated his uniform.

As we shook hands, I greeted him as "Mr. Shaw,"* aircraftman. Then I

*Thomas Edward Lawrence, of Arabia, when a private in the Tank Corps, assumed the name of Ross and later when an aircraftman that of Thomas E. Shaw.

stepped back at attention and saluted him as Colonel Lawrence, of Arabia.

The reminiscence of this event is brought about by the significance of the recent German bombing of Plymouth and the Nazi threat to use super-speedboats, hundreds, perhaps thousands of them, in a Channel and North Sea "Blitzkrieg" on Britain. That this is no idle boast is evident from the fact that this new weapon in modern warfare is being increasingly used in the present conflict.

These small, swift boats, less than sixty feet in length, armed with a small cannon and two torpedo tubes, and carrying a crew of only four men, were first used in the Norwegian campaign, then in the attack on Holland, and are known as "E" (enemy) boats by the British. Because of their shallow draft, they were ideal for use in the maze of Dutch waterways, and able to skip with a minimum risk across mine-fields. Zigzagging at a speed of more than forty miles an hour, they were more difficult to hit than larger, steadier and slower-going craft.

These little craft are already credited with having sunk a British destroyer in the North Sea during the opening action against Holland and Belgium, and another off Dunkirk. During the remarkable but tragic evacuation of that port, these German speedboats, jabbing like hornets at the British transport fleet on the open sea, claimed two victims, and the total toll reported is six destroyers and two submarines. There seems little doubt that Germany is counting on this type of craft as an important factor in her plan to invade England.

(Please turn to page 188)



BLUE BOOK



DECEMBER 1940

MAGAZINE

VOL. 72, NO. 2

A Book-Length Novel

Far Call the Bugles By Charles L. Clifford 123
Illustrated by Jeremy Cannon and Percy Leason

Short Stories

From Out the Dark Water By Michael Gallister 4
Illustrated by Frederic Anderson

The Mummy of Phineas Clough By Fulton Grant 14
Illustrated by Austin Briggs

The Wickedest Woman By H. Bedford-Jones 26
Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

Think of a Number By Howard Rigsby 84
Illustrated by Charles Chickering

Soldiers of the Jungle By Tracy Richardson 92
Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

Bank Night Is Murder Night By Thomas Duncan 102
Illustrated by Orson Lowell

Daniel Boone and the Isebile By William Byron Mowery 114
Illustrated by Peter Kuhlhoff

A Novelette

Martian Caravan By Nelson Bond 38
Illustrated by Charles Chickering

A Serial Novel

Gold Ahoy! By Gordon Keyne 60
Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

Prize Stories of Real Experience

Lawrence of Arabia and His Super-Speedboat By Col. Charles Wellington Furlong 1 and 188
A former Military Intelligence officer tells of his long talk with "Aircraftsman Shaw" about the famous Briton's later work for the British Navy.

Bulldog Mickey By Mickey Walker 182
Damon Runyon introduces the famous champion, who then tells his own fighting story in his own inimitable manner.

Our Readers Forum 37

Cover Design Painted by Herbert Morton Stoops

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.

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Prize Offer for Real Experiences

BLUE BOOK is glad to receive and to print true stories of real experience, running from one thousand to four thousand words each. For each of those accepted each month we will pay, according to our appraisal of its length and strength, an average price of \$50. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Real Experience Editor, the Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. Preferably but not necessarily they should be typewritten, and should be accompanied by a stamped and self-addressed envelope for use in case the story is unavailable.

A pen name may be used, but the writer's real name and permanent address should accompany the manuscript. Be sure to write your name and correct address in the upper left-hand corner of the first page of your story, and keep a copy as insurance against loss of the original; for while we handle manuscripts with great care, we cannot accept responsibility for their return. As this is a monthly contest, one to two months may elapse before you receive a report on your story.

Statement of the Ownership, Management, Circulation, Etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933,

of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE published monthly at Dayton, Ohio, for October 1, 1940.

State of New York, County of New York, ss.

Before me, a Notary in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared John D. Hartman, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Treasurer of McCall Corporation, Publisher of The Blue Book Magazine and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:
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 Editor: Donald Kennicott, 230 Park Avenue, New York, N. Y.;
 Managing Editor: None; Business Managers: None.

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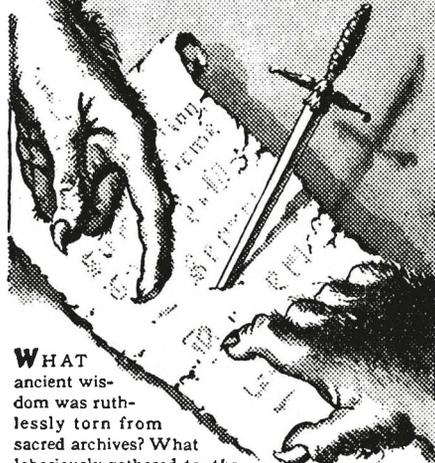
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John D. Hartman, Treasurer.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 10th day of September, 1940, William J. McCarthy, Notary Public, New York County, New York County Clerk's No. 100. My commission expires March 30, 1942.

SUPPRESSED KNOWLEDGE OF THE AGES

Forbidden Facts



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"Anything Might Happen"

A swift-moving novel of 1940 South America by F. DRACO . . . In our next issue



From Out The Dark Water

SIR JOHN, in some astonishment, looked down at the slope leading to the Dark Water.

He had found four mountains in five miles, and never a road nor a sheep track; there was not so much as a croft or a shieling within a half-day's tramp, as he knew to his cost. Yet here below him was an old man tending eight or ten sheep as old as himself, to judge by their scraggy appearance.

With his knapsack and musette bag, Sir John was obviously on the tramp. He had a big frame, a brown face with a high nose, and a man's smile beneath level eyes.

"Good day to you," he said, approaching the old man, who was looking at him from a face like the granite itself. He expected a barrage of unintelligible Scots.

Instead, he was pleasantly surprised to hear English as good as his own.

"The same to yourself, sir, though the best of the day has passed."

"I didn't know anyone lived around here."

"No one does," came the reply. "But there's a bit of a shelter, if you'll share it. That is, unless you're for walking into the Dark Water yonder; that's the end of this road."

Sir John smiled. He eyed the westering sun, tucked tobacco into his pipe, and offered his pouch to the old man, who accepted gladly.

"I'm not walking anywhere. I've come from nowhere," he said as he smiled. "I don't like the past, and I've grave fears of the future, like most Englishmen these days. I accept your hospitality and my



By MICHAEL GALLISTER

Illustrated by Frederic Anderson

name's John Beale, at your service. Nor will I miss a bed."

"There's none here to miss." The old man returned the pouch and held the proffered match to his battered pipe until he had it alight. "I'm Ian Macleod."

"Waiting for someone to come, are you?" Sir John asked facetiously.

"Aye," said Macleod—quite seriously.

They sat together, watching the rocks and the far Atlantic stretching over to Iceland, exchanging few words, until Macleod lifted an arm and pointed to the high promontory. This was Athnam Head, black against the sunset.

"This is the loneliest spot in all the world," he said. "Now that they've doused Athnam Head light, it's naked and dark of nights, as it was in the days of the Picts. The old Picts, in the stone

age, had a fortress yonder, as they did on every head of rock jutting into the sea. They had more sense than the English have today. Between here and Athnam Head things have happened, here along the Dark Water."

Sir John found the man astonishing.

"Give us English folk some credit, Ian Macleod," he observed. "Out yonder are mine fields. We need our fortresses for other spots, where bombs blow the face of England into shreds and where we have our backs against the wall. What's the meaning of this name, Athnam? Has it any meaning?"

"It had," said Macleod. "Two Gaelic words meaning High Rock. It was from the water and the patch of beach at our feet, within a stone's throw, that the queen of the Little People appeared, to



give Ian Ogue Macrimmon the magic pipes. The Macrimmons of Borreraig were the hereditary pipers of Macleod, you know. The silver chanter of those magic pipes is the one I use in my own pipes. . . . Aye, the same one. But the point is, John Beale, that if the Little People came out of the Dark Water ages ago, they may come out again."

"Or other people might," said Sir John over his pipe. "I begin to understand you, Ian Macleod. So you are a piper?"

The old man nodded. "I piped at Khartoum and under Boer kopjes, in the passes of the Northwest, and in Flanders; I've piped for many a king and queen, and for greater men. Now the Macleod pipers are all dead, for the last one died on the sands of Dunkirk, and they say that I'm an old man with a deluded mind. They laughed at me, and they laughed at the offer of my gun; and God forgive 'em, they laughed at the magic pipes of the Macleods! So let 'em laugh, and here I sit. Have you any rations?"

"I have, and plenty," said Sir John, with a nod at his knapsack.

"Then come you with me, friend, if you can stand rough quarters."

Sir John followed, off among the granite outcrops.

"ALL stuff and nonsense, Beale," headquarters had said rather huffily, to Sir John. "Mine fields and nets are more than sufficient up there; not a particle of danger in that quarter."

"Yet one of their subs got into Scapa Flow," retorted Sir John. "And I tell

you, I've studied charts and ordnance maps! And if I were a Nazi and wanted to get a base established on these islands, I'd use common sense and get the base established as far from human contact as possible. And such a spot is that strip of coast near Athnam Head."

He knew how Ian Macleod had felt when they laughed at him for a doddering old piper. They could not very well laugh at Sir John Beale, so they had given him a left-handed blessing and let him go his own way.

Old Macleod was a practical man and an admirable campaigner. There was no house of any kind here, but he had made himself rudely comfortable under an overhang of the rocks, where in bygone days someone had lived. There were roofless walls of loose stones fitted together and a fireplace of stones that drew well; there was a spring of water not too far. And with a fire lit among the stones, not the least reflection showed anywhere, as Macleod pointed out with some pride.

"Belike someone hid out here during the Stuart troubles," he said. "If one can live on little, the place is not bad."

He lived on little, certainly. He had a dog, bedded now with a hurt leg, but on the mend; a wise, kindly-eyed dog who listened to Sir John's voice and took him into friendship at once. He had tunic and sporran and other bits of uniform neatly tucked away, with a string of medals, not ribbons, on the tunic's breast; and, even more carefully disposed, the bagpipes.

LATER, their frugal meal done, Macleod detached the chanter from the pipes, and put it in Sir John's hand. And this was a great trust, a symbol of rare friendship and confidence, as Sir John comprehended.

"That's the fairy chanter," he said simply. "The queen of the Little People fell in love with Ian Ogue, Young Ian, because of his wonderful piping; this is the magic chanter she gave him, out of the sea. He used to sit here where we sit. In those days there were more people along this coast. It was before Cromwell moved the Picts all over to Ireland."

Sir John examined the chanter. It was of silver, curiously engraved and kept highly polished.

"Anything magic about it?" he asked.

"The tone is sweet," said Macleod, who seemed a man without any humor whatever. Sir John reflected that a humorless man is always terrible as an enemy.

"It has no tricks, if that's your meaning."

"An odd thing, certainly!" observed Sir John. "Think of turning an oboe into a bagpipe! That's what the inventors did. *Tibia retricularis*, the Romans called it; they fetched it along to Britain and your Picts took it over. It was invented long before the days of Rome, however."

"I see you're not altogether ignorant on the subject of the pipes," Macleod said approvingly.

"I must hear you play."

Macleod shook his head.

"If the necessity arises, yes. Not otherwise, for I got a bit o' German shrapnel in my lungs at Mons, and it's there still, and it interferes." The old man carefully tucked the pipes away and covered them from the sea air.

They sat talking far into the night, but Sir John was too weary to maintain the vigil until dawn, as did Macleod, who slept by day and watched by night for the Little People.

IT was far from nonsense, as Sir John was well assured. All legend held a grain of truth. Who were the Little People that came out of the Dark Water, drawn by the piping of Young Ian Macrimmon? What was the fact behind his fanciful account of how he got the silver chanter?

He fell asleep thinking of these things, and slept late next morning. On waking, he found his way down to the sea, leaving Macleod snoring; and in that almost invisible little cove where there was a strip of sandy beach, the same cove where Young Ian had been given the silver chanter, he stripped and had a plunge in the icy water.

Today, he reflected, was the 19th. Tonight, then, he should find his signal answered from Athnam Head. He looked out at that craggy mass of granite jutting above the water, some miles away. The sea heaved gray in the sunlight; the gray cliffs topped by gorse were naked and ominous; the water, hereabouts, had a sinister tinge—the Dark Water, it was called. So the Picts had fortified that craggy cape in ancient days, eh? More fools they.

It was borne in upon him, as he reflected, how wise he had been to come here, how shrewd old Macleod was to seek this point. Not the cape, yonder; not Athnam Head, which looked out upon the sea for uncounted miles! Not

there, but here. The danger lay not out at sea, but at this one shelving strip of beach where ships invisible might come up, as in the dark dawn of history the Little People had come up, out of the Dark Water.

"I'm a fool for my pains, no doubt," thought Sir John, as he poked about among the rocks. "And yet the Nazis have eyes, as I have. They have charts and ordnance maps, as I have; and they have hardihood and brains, as I have. They know that the main thing is to get a foothold, no matter where. To land a few men, a score or fifty, and then dig in while reinforcements come by air or sea. A foothold, no more." . . .

And if no foothold was obtained, no reinforcements would come. All very simple.

Sir John clambered about, between the hungry Atlantic waves and the hungry granite rocks. He sighted from odd angles at the little patch of beach, and repeatedly shook his head with a dissatisfied air. He went to the beach itself and sighted here and there along a driftwood stick he had picked up.

A grunt escaped him, his face cleared, and he headed for a niche just above but to one side of the sandy strip, a little niche between two masses of granite, a hundred yards away. As he neared it, a shape moved and old Macleod came into sight in the niche.

"GOOD morning to ye, sir," said he. "Though it's close to afternoon."

Sir John halted and broke into a laugh.

"Upon my word, Macleod! Is there such a thing as coincidence?"

"Precisely the question I've been asking myself, while I watched you speerin' hither and yon," said Macleod, his craggy old features like stone. But Sir John fancied a frosty twinkle showed in his eye. "And here's Angus to wish you the top of the morning."

The dog limped into sight, halted, cocked his ears at Sir John and wagged his tail.

"The same to you, Angus, and I'm glad to see you're getting around," said Sir John gravely. "As one gentleman to another, do you know that you're standing on the choicest bit of ground anywhere about this spot?"

Angus laid his ears back and smiled, as a dog does if he's of the right strain.

"Aye, so I found it," stated Macleod. "Twice there have been airplanes high overhead, and I picked the spot with

proper care. No plane can see into this nook, and besides, it has the correct angle, as you figured for yourself."

"Planes, eh? And over this spot?" Sir John started slightly, as the implication took hold of him. "Good Lord! If I'd only known this when I was in London! That's an important thing, Macleod. It goes to show that I was right, and that you were right."

"I've never doubted that I was right," said the old man stiffly. "And now, if you'd care to see what's here, neither I nor Angus will object."

HIDDEN by the two towering rocks, and protected by them, was a tiny nook that looked slap down at the thin beach. And in the nook, covered by a tarpaulin which old Macleod snatched away, was a machine-gun.

Sir John looked at it in some astonishment. As a relic, he thought, it must be priceless, but he did not voice his thoughts. Macleod stooped and touched the gun lovingly and spoke.

"One of the first Maxim guns, sir, and as beautiful as the day it was made! My fourth cousin, Brechan Macleod, brought it out of South Africa with him, and I took it over after he died in the last war. I've had it ever since. There was a keg of ammunition, and it's all here."

"I hope to God it's still good," said Sir John doubtfully.

"It is, sir. I've tried it. But it's a trifle difficult for one man to work the gun, which may stick at times," said Macleod quite proudly. "So it's as well you turned up."

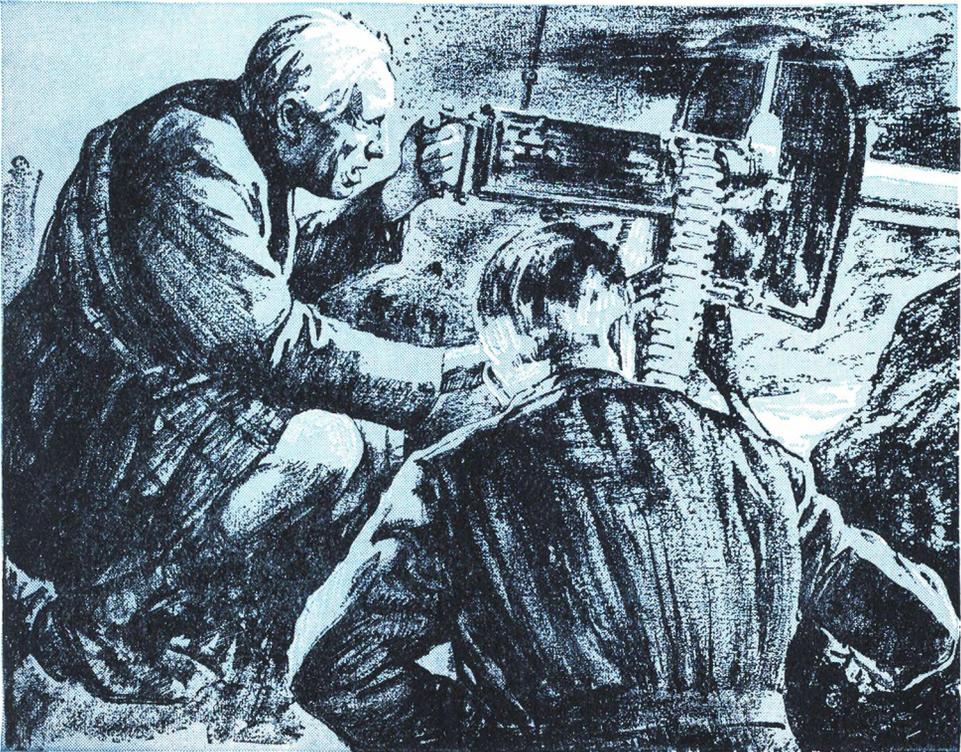
"It is indeed, and not far from providential. Planes, eh? Not once, but twice! None of ours over this bit of coast, either." Sir John nodded thoughtfully. "Well, I could do with a bite of breakfast, such as it is. And you, Angus? Then come along. Oh, by the way!" He stopped and looked at Macleod. "I have credentials, you know, if you'd care to have a look at them."

Macleod sucked at his empty pipe, and nodded sagely.

"Aye, you have, sir. Have you ever noticed how a dog judges a man? By his eye, every time. And goes by the look in the man's eye. And this is something no other animal does, except man himself; but a dog never makes a mistake. . . . I think a bite to eat would be an idea of the best, and I'll join you gladly."

He covered up the gun again and they went back to the house that had no roof, with Angus limping along most happily.

That afternoon Sir John talked at length of the war, whose details had



reached Ian Macleod only sparsely and fitfully in this far district; and Macleod talked at length of the Little People and the Picts; and Angus made a bluff at resuming his interrupted duty of keeping watch on the ancient and decrepit sheep.

Old Macleod spoke of the Little People with a certain intimacy of knowledge. He had never seen them, but there was little he did not know about them.

"It's only at night they come out of the Dark Water," said he wisely. "That's a reason no one lives in these parts. Men have disappeared at night, and sheep, for the Little People have a fancy for sheep. That's why I brought these old sheep along, as a temptation. And watching by daytime would be wasted work."

Sir John smiled. "A curious parallel you draw! But you've never seen anything by night or by day, either one?"

"Last night there was the flash of a light on Athnam Head."

"A man I sent there to await word from me."

"Oh! I suspected as much. The Little People never appear where the Picts had their strong places," the old man said calmly. Whether in his own mind he really confused the Little People and the Nazi invaders, was hard to determine. Sir John rather imagined that Macleod was playing a quietly enjoyable mental

game all his own. "Does he know where you are?"

"He will at midnight tonight, when I flash him a signal. That is," Sir John added, "if you have no objection."

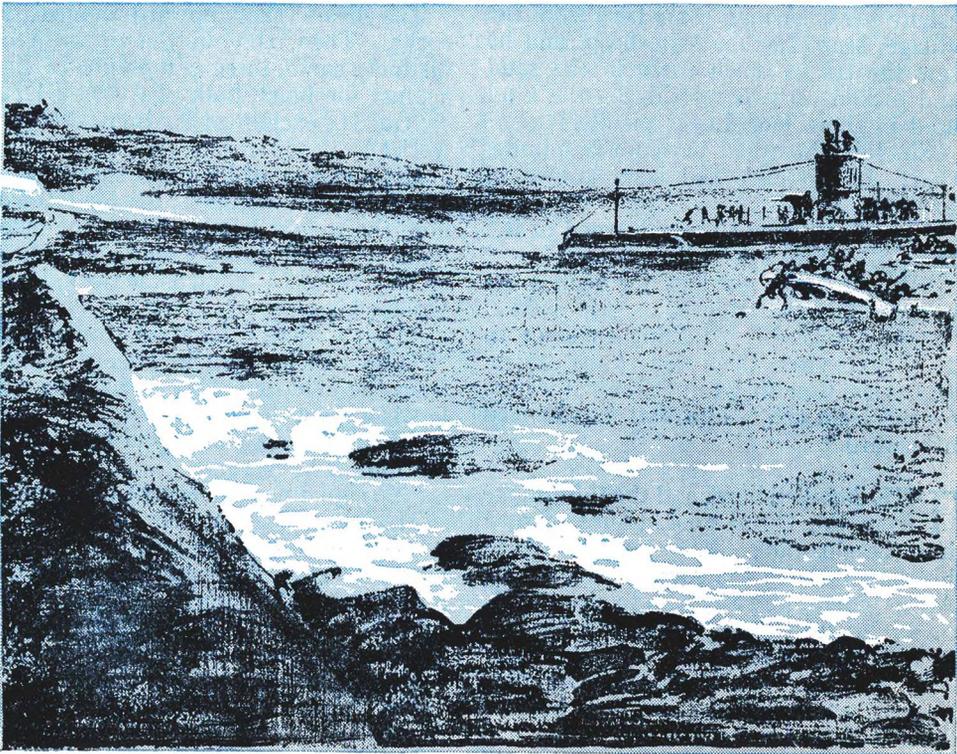
Macleod pondered this, and gravely said there was no objection; but what earthly good would it do to have a man posted on Athnam Head?

"That remains to be seen," said Sir John, biting at his pipestem. "He might assist the magic of your pipes, for now the moon is coming to full and the high autumn tides are upon us, and all this hints at magic. Besides, the Picts had a fortress on the cape, and it's an excellent idea to follow their example."

AT this quiet thrust old Macleod's eye twinkled, but he only nodded dourly. Said he, it might be well to divide the long night watch, each of them keeping Angus with him to wake the other; the dog would understand perfectly.

"For when the Little People come, sir, it's with no warning whatever. They come out o' the Dark Water quietly and suddenly, and a man waiting to catch them at it must have all his wits about him."

"No doubt, Macleod. And if any others come, they'll sweep the shore with a searchlight and have machine-guns



ready; it's not a healthy business to get caught watching for the Little People."

"Aye, belike. But many a fair white bosom, and many a grand upstanding hero's heart, have fallen to dust around these stones; if you had the Gaelic, sir, I could quote you the poem that says as much. And where could one find better company on the last march?"

The afternoon wore along, toward sunset, with the skies clear and every promise of a high moon, and all the while Sir John gently but tactfully probing. He would have given a good deal for the queer knowledge locked away within this white head. The notion stuck to him that there must be something more definite than fairy lore to have stationed Macleod here both day and night.

The sun was at the Atlantic's rim when he got what he was after, unexpectedly, and it made him sit up hard. Macleod was glowering over his pipe at the empty sea and speaking of the Dark Water below. No rocks were in it, he said; what caused it to be so dark was a mystery. Perhaps its depth, for it was steep-to. Sir John nodded.

"So the charts say; but they show no landing-place."

"What's been done once, will be done again."

"Once?"

"Aye, in the last war. They put men ashore here. A man came here from the village, searching for lost sheep, and he saw the tracks down there in the sand and picked up two cartridges—the kind used in those long Luger pistols."

Sir John breathed hard for a minute. God! If this fact had been known in London!

"The Intelligence never learned of it," he said. "Why wasn't it reported?"

"Who'd be laughed at for such a report? Two cartridges in the sand!" Macleod sniffed. "Nothing came of it. If they landed, they went away again. It was the time they put Casement ashore on the Irish coast, him that was hanged afterward."

THE day died hard, and the thin smoke from the frugal cooking-fire merged into the gloaming. Macleod departed to his watch above the sandy strip, taking Angus, counseling Sir John to sleep while he might, for the dog would lick his face to wake him at need.

It was hard to sleep, for pounding pulses. So they had come once before! This would have changed everything, had

it been known at headquarters. Not too late yet, thought Sir John as he lay staring at the stars. At midnight he would relieve Macleod, and would flash a signal to his man on Athnam Head—the man who should be there with a radio sending-set. Headquarters would hear of this ere morning! But midnight was the hour. His man would expect a signal then. Hard, hard to wait!

HIS alarm-clock brain wakened him before midnight; he was surprised to find that he had been asleep. With the flashlight from his kit, he struck out and found Macleod above the Dark Water; not so dark now, with the moon high and full, and the white horses of the surf rolling in under its radiance.

"A good night for subs to run on the surface," said Sir John. "All clear, eh?"

"Aye. Will ye signal your man?"

"At the witching hour of midnight, to the minute, when the Little People walk."

"I'll wait to see it."

The minutes crept. Sir John played with the alert ears of Angus and watched the never-still water, and looked out to the inscrutable mass of Athnam Head bulking black under the moon and the stars.

"Midnight," he said, and pressed the catch of his flashlight three times.

The beam shot upward against the rocks. Then, tiny in the distance but distinct, came three pin-points of light against the black bulk of Athnam Head.

"Good!" exclaimed Sir John. "Now to work!"

His message, of long and short flashes, was duly acknowledged; tension fell from him, the weight left his heart, the moonlight streamed down serene and unbroken once more. He laid aside the light and got out his pipe.

"That's that," he said contentedly. "Planes can be here in twenty minutes from the field at Loch Donn. The wireless is a great thing."

"What chance would you have to signal him, if they came?"

"No signal needed, except the gunfire."

Macleod stood up. Sir John saw that he was in complete uniform, sporran, kilts and all. Throwing the plaid over his shoulders, he turned.

"I'll be resting a bit. Angus, stay here, lad, unless you're sent to wake me."

He strode away among the rocks. . . .

Sir John smoked and talked with Angus and watched the restless water

below. It was easier to watch than the shore, for the moonlight on the rocks played tricks with the mind, and a bit of gorse waving in the wind looked like one of the Little People signaling. But the ceaseless movement of the waters held a cadence all its own. One could follow this cadence almost subconsciously—wave after wave, curving up and breaking upon the rocks to north and south, or rolling in to fall upon the strip of sand and shatter in silver fragments that glistened and were gone.

Angus lifted head and ears. After a moment Sir John heard a step and looked up, to see Macleod with the bagpipes under his arm.

"Sleep I could not. I'm out of the habit," said the old man. "I'll step back among the rocks and give the Little People a bit of a tune, for luck. Bide here, Angus!"

He was gone again from sight, and after a little the drone of the pipes broke lightly upon the night air, Angus cocking his head and listening intently, with evident joy.

Any man can touch the keys of an organ or the chanter of the pipes and bring forth a roar of sounding melody, but only an artist can temper the pitch to soft moonlight; and Sir John knew he was listening to piping so rare that it might have come from the land of the Little People under the Dark Water.

It was a strangely wild and mournful air; Angus put chin down on paws and listened with ears up straight, and Sir John felt the wistful tug of the strains. He had never known there could be such sweetness in the pipes. He stared down at the Dark Water, and wondered if the Little People could hear this minstrelsy, and if it would bring their queen up from the depths to meet with her lover, Young Ian Macrimmon, as when she had given him the silver chanter so long ago.

STARTLED, Sir John leaned forward. Something was breaking the cadenced flow of the waters; something long and dark was thrusting up through them, a hundred feet from shore. The Little People. . . . No, by the Lord Harry!

"Angus! Get him, lad!" he exclaimed sharply. "Go get him!"

The dog was gone like a shadow athwart the moonlight.

Sir John stared and his heart was thumping. High and ever higher, her conning tower clear, her decks awash and then clear; her hatch was open, men

were streaming out and running down the decks, gun crews to stations. Voices were guttural on the wind.

The piping had ceased, fortunately.

More men coming out all the time, gangs of them working at something along the decks, the hiss of compressed air sounding now and again. Queer bulky things grew and then were slid overboard, as the submarine slowly edged in closer to the land; collapsible rafts, inflated to enormous size.

A quick step, a quick breath; Macleod came into the niche from the rear, and sank down beside Sir John, with a mutter that Angus was guarding the pipes.

"Get to your gun, and I'll feed," said Sir John. "But hold your fire till I give the word, mind! Those rafts are inflated; aim at them."

"Aye, sir."

SIR JOHN peered out; he well knew what hell would break loose here, at the first shot. The guns of that sub would rip out the whole hillside! No matter, if the old Maxim would do her work first. . . .

Guttural orders sounded. Raft after raft was inflated and set ready. Some were being loaded with supplies and guns. The sub was barely fifty feet from shore now, hanging there against the Dark Water.

One raft, crowded down with men, was starting for shore. Sir John knew she must never land; yet he waited, waited. Another started, and another. Two of the supply rafts were off. He thought of those men, loaded with equipment, and of the deep water steep-to; and he thought of Dunkirk, and his blood raced.

"Finished!" came a call in German. "The last man ashore signal to haul back the floats! Once landed, scatter and scout!"

Sir John waited. He could hear the fierce, panting breaths of old Macleod, but his gaze was riveted on that foremost raft. Amazedly, he counted the dark figures; twenty. A hundred or so men were on the way ashore, and more waiting to come; why, they must have been packed in that sub like sardines! And all so cocky and confident in themselves, so desperately eager to get landed, that no scouts were sent ahead! He heard his own voice suddenly, and was almost shocked at its coolness.

"Clear the first raft, then sink the others. Let 'em have it."

Macleod grunted. The old Maxim began to leap and roar like an insane thing. The crowning incredible touch was its gushing smoke. Sir John vaguely recalled that smokeless powder had come in about the time of the Boer War. Too late for these cartridges, though!

The wind blew off the smoke on the instant. The first raft was gone like a pricked bubble, twenty feet from shore; the laden men went down as though they were stones. Bullets were spraying those other rafts, back and forth. They too collapsed; and the Dark Water was full of men, but not for long. It bubbled and seethed in the moonlight as the rafts disappeared. . . .

Forward, aft, amidships, the length of the submarine jettied flame. A savage oath burst from Macleod; the Maxim was jammed. Then the air was filled with demoniac shriekings as lead struck the rocks and ricocheted.

"Oh, God!" thought Sir John, and pulled himself out of the niche. A contact shell struck twenty feet away in a white-hot burst of explosive. The savage stutter of machine-guns was rending the night. He dragged himself frantically along for shelter of a patch of gorse and dived into it. A hit, a hit! The impact slewed him around and he lay quiet, wondering why there was no pain.

SUDDEN silence descended like a thunderclap. The rafts were gone; their loads were gone. A searchlight struck out at the empty, naked shoreline. It did not come from the sub; it came from behind her. A second craft of some kind was there, but so blinding was the streaking glare that to detect anything was impossible.

However, the Nazis were not through by a good deal. Orders broke out, voices pealed, men were busy, while the searchlight played up and down and across, revealing the fact that there was nothing obvious to oppose the landing.

Sir John twisted about and sat up. His right leg, above the knee; he wondered, as he worked, whether he would lose the leg and be a cripple the rest of his life. Somehow he found the source of the blood, though he felt no pain, and got his handkerchief twisted in place. A machine-gun stuttered again . . . merely a blind burst spraying the rocks with lead. He stretched out once more and lay quiet.

Across the deck of the submarine streamed the finger of light from beyond. Men were frantically working; they must

have guessed that there was nothing to stop them now. And then, startling as a woman's scream in pitch night, the bagpipes blared forth.

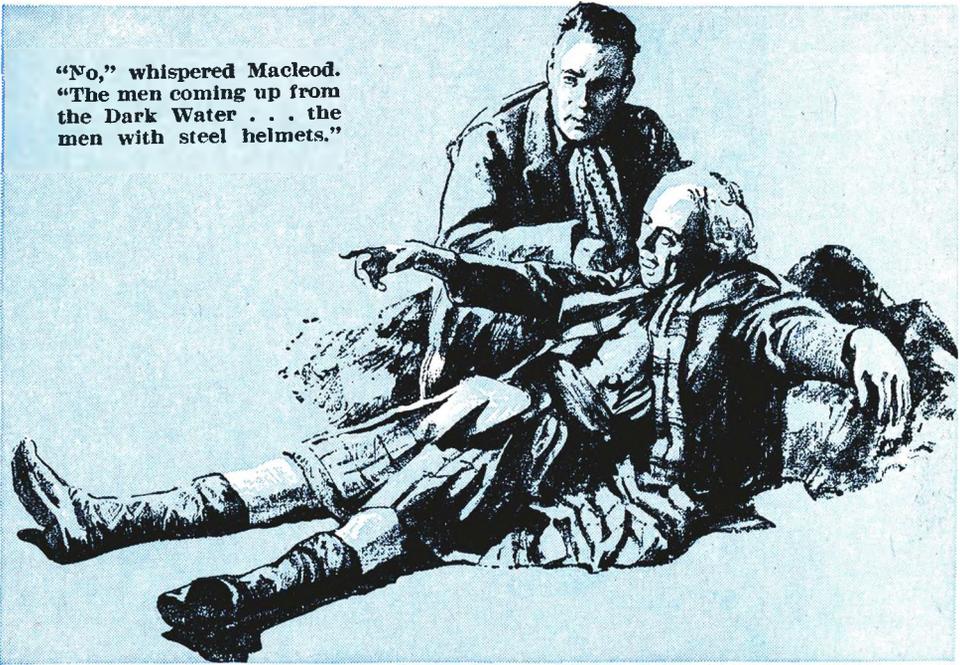
No soft moonlit music now! Here was a screech to chill the blood, and then the lilting stirring march of the Campbell men. It broke off halfway; and Sir John could have sworn that a second piper was playing a regimental march, growing and increasing until one would think a thousand men were swinging along somewhere over the crest. The searchlights roved all about, but came nowhere to rest. Macleod was evidently not in sight.

Still another march now; Sir John knew not what it was, but he had heard it in regimental parades somewhere afar. Never like this. There is something about the pipes that lifts the very soul in men, goading them into frenzied battle, to superhuman effort.

All this and more rang in these wild pipes that skirled and screeled over the Dark Water and ripped the moonlight into a fierce storm of soul-piercing fury. Sir John peered out. The searchlight, swinging back and forth over the submarine, showed him that all work had stopped aboard her. The Maxim was something these men from the sea could understand and answer; this blaring voice in the night they could not discover nor comprehend, yet they knew it spoke of marching men and battle. Their vantage of surprise was lost. Instead of desolate solitude, battalions of killed fighting men awaited them, and the very thought of cold steel and hard work face to face was something that wilted all the four arms of their crooked pagan cross.

FROM the pipes, midway of their wild march, burst one frightful discordant screech and a low descending wail that ended in silence. But their work was done. Frantic cries were coming up from the sea and the searchlight sputtered out. Sir John could see the long black shape of the submarine, now headed away from the shore, and beyond her in the moonlight another and larger shape, both of them lessening in the water. From one came a furious repeated jetting of crimson fire spouting heavenward . . . an anti-aircraft gun blazing away. Looking up, he caught a gleam of moving radiance, heard a sudden rushing roar of engines. As he cried out with fierce delight, everything swam in his brain, and his head fell forward.

"No," whispered Macleod.
"The men coming up from
the Dark Water . . . the
men with steel helmets."



LATER, he wakened, and the sea was empty. Something warm was beside him; a tongue was licking his face, Angus was there with importunate voice.

Sir John sat up, dizzy with the pain of it. He got out his flashlight and explored himself, methodically; there was just the one hurt, but that was plenty. A bullet had torn through his upper right leg above the knee. The bone was untouched, the bleeding had coagulated and quenched; still, it was a grisly wound.

He bound it up as well as he could and then dragged himself off, his right arm about the neck of Angus. It was slow progress, yet he had not so far to go.

Old Ian Macleod sat with his back against a lump of granite, looking out over the Dark Water, the fallen pipes beside him and his medals glittering in the moonlight. He had a whisper in his throat, no more.

"Not hit, no. . . . The old hurt, the iron in my lungs—"

"Steady," said Sir John. "It's done, man. You did it. I don't know whether the planes got 'em, but no matter; they're gone. And it won't be long before we'll have help, for my men and others will be on the way by now."

"It'll be too long for me," said Macleod in his faint whisper. "Look there, sir! Look at the water! D'ye see the Little People coming up from it?"

Sir John peered around at the water, and there were no waves to be seen.

"By gad!" he exclaimed. "Oil, that's what it is! The planes must have got one of the blighters!"

"No, no," whispered Macleod, his eyes wide and staring. "The men coming up from the the Dark Water . . . the men with steel helmets and heavy burdens . . . the men, and the Little People helping them . . . and the queen of them all coming this way! She's smiling at me, sir, it's speaking to me she is!"

He uttered a Gaelic word or two and fell silent. So terrible was his earnest conviction that Sir John turned with a half shiver, hearing Angus utter a low whine, and stared all about. The gorse was blowing in the wind, but nothing else moved. Below, the Dark Water ran slick in the moonlight, but nothing else was to be seen there, either.

From Angus came a bursting mournful howl. Sir John turned about to speak, then held his peace, for Ian Macleod was staring out upon nothing and smiling as he had not smiled in life.

Before the dawn, they found Sir John lying there beside the dead man, his arm about the neck of Angus. They wakened him and cared for him, and at his bidding picked up the bagpipes and put them in his hand. They were safe, but there was no chanter; the silver chanter of Ian Ogue was clean gone.

"Never mind," said Sir John, as they began to search for it. "You'll not find it, lads."



The Mummy of Phineas Clough

The author of "A Million for John Destiny" here gives us a dramatic New England murder-mystery.

By
FULTON
GRANT

"LET not man," I said, "put asunder." Those words made me a little conscious of my age, and I had a rushing knowledge that I was now an old man.

I managed, however, to weather my emotion and to complete the ceremony by which I was making those two old and tragic people man and wife. Ragg stood there, stiff and surly and almost defiant, as though someone might yet challenge his right to Julia. Then he stuck a great protective paw under his new wife's arm and gave me the other.

"Much obliged, Squire," he said, which for Ragg was deepest gratitude. Julia

stepped toward me with a world full of knowledge in her eyes. She said nothing but she gave me a quick, impulsive peck of a kiss before the two of them went out my door.

In front was a crowd of people, come as much like hounds to a mort as moths to a flame. I heard their chattering stop short as my front door opened and Ragg stepped out with Julia. Were I a writing man with a gift of words, I might somehow be able to make you understand the drama of that hushed instant. There was victory and vindication in it. And there was fear and hatred and bitterness and suffering and humiliation. But the thing



Illustrated by Austin Briggs

of importance, just then, was the happy ending to a thirty-year-old tragedy. Julia Clough and her man Judson Ragg were united; in that moment death had been forgotten, life remembered.

I did not follow the two to my door. But I envisioned Ragg stalking and Julia walking with her prim old-fashioned dignity, through that cluster of curiosity seekers whose fathers and mothers had all but destroyed the lives of the two they gaped at.

I felt the touch of Mrs. Warren's hand on my arm. I heard young Warren cough nervously, as his wife said:

"You must be very, very glad, Squire."

I said, "Amen," which was not an answer to her remark at all, but the close of a small prayer which I had been making in my heart.

And when I could hear the rattle and clatter of Ragg's buckboard driving away, I knew Julia had gone up into the hills.

"Amen," I said again. "Amen."

NOW, this is a topsy-turvy beginning to this history. Already I have started with the finish, and I must needs perplex you the more by plunging into the middle. Yet I can see no other manner of writing down the story of Judson Ragg and Julia Clough.

And so I begin with the Warrens:

The Warrens were city folks, and absolute babes in all that concerns life in the rugged Connecticut Berkshires. Unlike most of the urbanites who come here in the vacation season, though, they admitted their ignorances, laughed at their own blunders and wanted to learn from all who would inform them.

I LIVE down in Bart proper, where I have a small shop and a smaller office in which to practice my profession and the simple duties of a country justice of the peace. But I own that fifty-acre tract up in Mudge Mountain just below the Warrens' run-down place, and I like to spend a week or so up there in the hot weather. Every summer I open up the little cottage, light my smoky oil-stove and escape from the domineering rule of my housekeeper Mrs. Snogget for a season of comfortable, disorderly and lazy bachelorhood. That habit of mine accounts for the chain of coincidences which led to the solution of the forty-year-old case of Judson Ragg and to the "happy ending" I began with.

I had just opened up the house last summer and was wrestling with pots and rusty pans in my kitchen when Mrs. Warren dropped in. She had a likable, breathless way of speaking.

"We've heard a lot about you, Squire Bray," she said. "You're such a famous person up here, you know. And we want so much to know all our neighbors, and so—well, anyhow, how do you do? I'm Zelda Warren."

Frank, nice, girlish and very flattering, that woman. Her crisp black curls and her tiny sharp features reminded me a little of someone I had lost in death years ago. She wore slacks and sandals, and a floppy straw hat over one of these things called a snood—the sum total of the ensemble being as good as a badge saying: "See me? I'm from the city."

But before I really knew it, Mrs. Warren had righted the wrongs of my kitchen, arranged my pans and pots and was serving me tea on my own veranda. Good feeling! She made me far more comfortable than a bachelor of my years and cantankerousness deserves to be.

"It isn't that we feel lonely," Mrs. Warren protested. "But after living in a four-room flat, you know—"

And she went on to tell me that Daniel, her husband, had a lung condition which would not tolerate cities, and that he had an urge to get closer to nature.

But the point of her visit came out a bit later. They had called on their farmer neighbor, Judson Ragg, and had been driven off his place at the point of a shotgun.

"It isn't that we want to be stuffy and citified and resent manners and customs up here," she said. "But don't you feel that's a little—forbidding is the word, I think?"

"Forbidding!" The word scarcely describes Judson Ragg, and I said as much. I told her that Ragg had actually used his scatter-gun more than once on trespassers, and would-be Izaak Waltons who ventured to fish in his creek. I told her of the decades-old feud between Ragg and the rest of Sunnyside County, and how the man's name had got to be a sort of household word symbolic of crime, devilishness and witchery. I forgot, of course, that she could not know Ragg's tragic story. She would be too young.

"He sounds a bit of a Tartar," she said. "But he used to be handsome, didn't he? He looks like a Viking or something. What's wrong with him? People aren't like that—or are they?"

"He's *the* Judson Ragg," I remember saying, as if that would explain everything. It didn't.

"*The?*" she repeated. "Have more tea, Squire."

So I told her the story of Phineas Clough and the aftermath which made a sour misanthropic old hermit out of handsome Judson Ragg.

THIRTY years ago Phineas Clough died a brutal death, or so said the Court. A body was found without a head, and although identification was incomplete, Judson Ragg, his neighbor, was accused of murder, tried, convicted—and finally acquitted.

That there had been "bad blood" between the two men was common knowledge. They were both young men of strong passions, albeit to my own mind those of Clough were mean, unhealthy passions, while Ragg's were manly and immensely human.

Just how the feud began is a matter of speculation. Our local *Enoch Arden* story concerns Julia Hackett, for the love of whom Judson Ragg went out into the world to make his fortune—and who, thinking him lost to her after long years of waiting, had married Clough. When Ragg, one day, returned to Bart Corners and took up his property adjoining the



With a certain awed sense of its meaning, I inducted that passage into the plain legal ceremony: "Whom God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

Clough farm, there was some kind of a scene. Rumor gives it many forms, all purely fictional save that one clear fact runs through all of them: Clough's treatment of his wife was mean, brutal, unkindly and in character with the man himself.

There were more scenes, too. Ragg's cattle one day strayed onto Clough's land, and Clough held them for ransom at ten dollars the head. Clough's dog was caught in a trap on Ragg's land, and Ragg killed the injured beast to put him out of misery. Clough threatened Ragg with a gun, to which Ragg replied by tossing Clough over his own fence bodily, after administering a violent beating.

Next day the body was found by some small boys in a hazel-wood copse on Ragg's land. There were evidences of unspeakable brutality, not to mention the fact that the head had been severed from the torso. The clothes were Clough's.

So was the watch, a family heirloom. So, likewise, was the bunch of keys in the dead man's pocket. The murder charge was inevitable.

I defended Judson Ragg. I had known the boy from childhood. We had gone to school together. I knew him to be violent, emotional, quick to anger; but I knew him also to be fundamentally decent, deeply religious—and above all, that his love for Julia Clough was violent, rough, but entirely chivalrous. . . . I was convinced in my own heart that Ragg was no murderer.

AT the trial at the county seat, Ragg was convicted. I carried the case to a higher court, where the lack of proof obtained an acquittal. Still, in the minds of our community he remained guilty, a symbol of hatred, violence and evil.

Let me avoid the details of the trial beyond saying that I traveled to a small city in Iowa where Clough's brother lived, and discovered that three days before Clough's alleged death, this brother



Something peculiarly personal gave Julia a special niche among our local women.

had left for Bart Corners. An uncle had died, leaving Edward Clough a considerable fortune and a few thousand dollars for Phineas, appointing Edward administrator of the estate. While all this proved very little, it seemed clear to me that somehow—I could not explain how, unfortunately—this legacy was concerned with the murdered body found in Ragg’s hazel-wood. At all events, there seemed no trace of either of the Clough brothers, Edward or Phineas, after Edward boarded the train in Iowa.

“And so you will understand, I think, Mrs. Warren,” I opined to her after giving the story, “that Judson Ragg is more to be pitied than blamed, if you will pardon the triteness of the expression.”

“Not trite,” she said with a shiver. “Tragic, rather! And what about the woman—Julia, you said?”

“She remains a widow. She lives a mile or so from your own house—the Clough farm.”

“And she loves Judson Ragg?” It was feminine intuition, I suppose. “She loves him, and goes on living alone because of opinion, probably not speaking to him even, nor seeing him? She’s growing gray with emptiness and frustration. She believes in him, probably; but if she should go to him, it would give proof to all the community that *she* had been the motive for murder—just as they thought, of course. Isn’t that right, Squire? Just like a play, isn’t it? Oh, I must tell Daniel!” She seemed excited. “Daniel’s a playwright, you know—he wrote ‘The Inner Yearn’ and ‘Other Men’s Wives’ and a lot more.”

Which brings me, finally, to the point of my story, the third act, so to speak.

I DID visit the Warrens. Daniel was a nice fellow and a proper husband for Zelda, although a trifle on the ethereal side for my taste. Certainly he was not born for the rough and tumble of this hard world. But I liked him. What he lacked in stamina, he made up for in enthusiasm. He was like a bird-dog on its first outing.

“I want to make an amateur survey of my land, Squire,” he told me after dinner that day. “Our deed isn’t very clear, and I wish you’d take a walk around our place with me and tell me where the general boundaries are, and who owns what. Would you have time?”

After we had tramped through the thick fringe of second-growth timber on the Clough side of his place, and were taking the old swamp road back toward his house, Warren suddenly asked me:

“I say, Squire—I know I’m awfully ignorant, and you’ll probably laugh at me, but what kind of a gadget would be set in a tree, sort of a box with no door to it, all nailed up? I noticed one the other day over here, and it puzzled me to guess why anybody should nail up a wooden box on all six sides so they couldn’t open it again. Any idea?”

I didn’t have any idea as he described it, and so he took me to the top of the ravine which goes down into the swamp and showed me the phenomenon. No mystery at all, of course. It was a wooden box about two feet high and a foot square with a piece of roofing-paper nailed to the top, and despite myself, I felt the countryman’s faint contempt for the city fellow.

“That? Why, it’s a salt-box,” I told him. “If you look at it carefully, you’ll see a crack or slot at the bottom where

salt comes out for the grazing cattle to lick."

Stubborn, these city men are! Warren shook his head.

"I thought of that, Squire," he said. "But if *you* look at it closely, you'll see that there *isn't* any slot. It's nailed tight, too. And it's heavy."

There was some salt in it, nevertheless, and I showed him where it had melted in the rains and was leaking through the cracks a little. He still was not satisfied.

"But how do the cattle get it out if there isn't any slot? There are three others on the place, Squire, and you can see where the salt came out—they're all empty, too, and this one is full of something."

We let it go for then, and I went away laughing inwardly at the man's perverse determination for finding mysteries where no mysteries were. Plainly the box was a salt-box which had been hurriedly and rather badly made. It was possible that the wood had been left a fraction of an inch short at the bottom, for the salt to pass through by gravity, and then it had swollen with age, until the slot was closed. Anyhow, it seemed to me to be trivial and not worth all this puzzling.

It was two days later that young Warren came to my place, however, and I could see that he had something rather heavy on his mind.

"Please don't tell Zelda this," he began. "But I opened that salt-box, Squire, and—well, there was salt in it, all right. But there was something else, too. Something that takes it right into your province. Rather ghastly, it is."

"Well, what is it?"

"A human head."

He spoke the words one at a time to give me the full measure of their ghastliness, and he succeeded.

NOW, politics in Bart Corners is an odd business, and the results must seem quaint to outsiders.

Since I am one of the old inhabitants of the county, and the only lawyer for miles around, there has never been anyone to contest my election to several different offices. I am also a deacon of the church and therefore I am justice of the peace, since in the fancy of the townsmen I am able to mingle both the legal and the church ceremonies at weddings. I am, as well, coroner, deputy sheriff and county marshal—titles which, I confess, bring modest incomes, with no little work but a great deal of local prestige. The word

"Squire" is the local manner of designating me as a sort of institution, and I am perpetuated in office as much from the habits of my constituents, I fancy, as from any intelligent voting on their part.

My defense of Judson Ragg, years ago, is another factor, too, which is ironical enough. There is a potent feeling around Bart Corners that Ragg, whom they believed to be guilty of Phineas Clough's murder quite as fundamentally as they believe in hell-fire and brimstone hereafter, was only freed from the penalty of justice by some smart legerdemain on the part of "Ol' Squire Bray." They resent me for it, I don't doubt, but it makes me a "right smart feller" in their homely opinion, disregarding altogether that I have never, before or since the trial of Judson Ragg, defended any criminal for any crime, not even so much as a chicken-thief.

All of which gets me votes, explains my title—and is by way of being a diversion from the track of this history.

SO as justice, coroner and marshal, the discovery of a human head in a salt-box was as young Warren had said—in my "province" officially. A rankly unpleasant province too, I thought it.

I went with him to the spot, of course, and saw the gruesome thing. Warren had taken the box from its perch on the tree and had pried it open with a small wrecking-bar. And sure enough, inside, buried in semi-solidified salt crystals, was the dome, the hair, the well-preserved flesh, of a decapitated human head, almost perfectly mummified.

You guess it, of course: I identified it at once as the dried head of Phineas Clough. . . .

The machinery of law is a heavy business, and a ruthless one besides. I knew my duty well enough. I also knew another thing—call it "friendship." I had *believed* in Judson Ragg, these thirty years; and believing, I had been the man's one and only friend in Sunnyside County. And now by coincidence I had stumbled upon overwhelming evidence of his guilt. I liked the man. God knows, he had been punished, if ostracism and being pursued by hooting boys and the pointing finger of hate and scorn and suspicion can punish a man. And yet it was clearly my duty to go straightway across the fields to Ragg's farm, call him out in the name of the law, and charge him with a murder which time had almost erased from memory.

That was my duty: I could not face it then.

"I must study this out," I told Warren. "I'm asking you to say nothing of it to anyone until I shall have arrived at a plan of procedure. We must make no mistake, Warren."

But I knew, and so did he, that I was dallying with duty, that I was deceiving no one but myself.

Next day I returned to the Corners and took up my official life again. Next day, too, Mrs. Warren came down in her rattletrap flivver to visit me. She had something on her mind, that girl.

"What's happened, Squire? Daniel is doing the cat-and-canary act, and I know you two found something queer out on our land. What was it? I'm in it too, if Daniel is."

Equivocation was no good with Zelda Warren, though I tried it, and finally I told her the ugly story. She took it without shock. A strong girl, that Zelda Warren, and tigerish in her desire to protect her husband.

"I guessed," she said, "there was something like that. I don't want Daniel being mixed in it, Squire Bray." I had a strong sense of the leopard mother in her.

Then she asked, suddenly:

"Have you told him? Mr. Ragg, I mean."

I shook my head, muttering some vague explanation about wanting to be sure of my ground before reopening the Ragg case, but I could see that such trifling with the truth was futile. She ignored it.

"And the woman—Julia?" She went on: "Not that it is any affair of mine, Squire, but I'm inclined to see the woman's side of it first. I think you should talk to her. I have a feeling about Mrs. Clough, Squire. I made her acquaintance the other day. She's quite a person, isn't she, Squire Bray?"

That was the very truth.

THERE has been, I know, an undercurrent in this narrative which concerns Julia Hackett Clough, and I don't doubt that you have remarked it. Call it an undercurrent of *omission*. I have steadfastly avoided any dwelling upon her, lest I betray my own emotions. But it is time, now, that I faced this among other things.

Let it be brief: my admiration for Julia Clough amounts to something little short of passion. I have admired her since that first day in the little schoolhouse, years ago, when she put us all to

shame with her uncanny perceptions, her quick wit and her remarkable ability for warming cold facts and applying them to the life about her.

Julia was a nameless orphan, "hired out" from an orphan home to work for Silas Hackett and his sick wife. When Amy Hackett died, Silas adopted the girl and made her his heir. She developed rapidly. With the limited education which local schools afford, she seemed to acquire a natural culture far beyond her years. It was more than her voracious reading, more than her astounding ability to retain what she read. It was something peculiarly personal which, along with her delicate beauty, gave her a special niche among our local women—our "first lady," so to speak.

HER romance with Judson Ragg was typical of her, too. Ragg was a farm boy, determined to become an engineer, and Julia was his muse and inspiration. If one day he left Bart Corners to seek a fortune in cities or in far countries, it was with an almost hallowed sense of desire to make himself worthy of Julia Hackett. She had that effect upon men—upon me, as well, I confess.

What the vicissitudes, what the adventures of Judson Ragg in those ten years of absence, I do not know, and likely never shall. It is a fact, however, that he did come back to Bart Corners, tall, powerful, cultured, distinguished and apparently rich—only to find Julia had married Phineas Clough. Clough had made money, meanwhile. Smart in an evil kind of way, he had snapped up a considerable property acreage locally by discovering that many of the deeds hereabouts had never been legally registered, and that taxes were woefully delinquent, until he was perhaps the largest landholder in Sunnyside County.

Albeit this seems scant credit to Julia Hackett, marrying Clough instead of waiting for Ragg, it must be said for her that she did so only in the defense of her foster-father and benefactor Silas Hackett, who would have lost his highly prosperous farm to Clough had not Julia sacrificed herself—and Ragg, whom she had not heard from in nine years—to save him. It was, you may be sure, not a marriage of love.

Small communities are sometimes evil-tongued, evil-thinking. Julia was not one to murmur, to explain herself, nor to make a public avowal of her sacrifice; and so the rumors which circulated in

Sunnyside County concerning her marriage with Clough were not kindly ones. "She knew," so they said in smug whispers, "which side her bread was buttered on! . . . Trust," they added, "one of them orphans to do well for herself."

Then came Judson Ragg. I dare say he learned of Julia's recent marriage before he left the train at Bart Corners, for love of gossip is a weakness in these parts; yet he betrayed no sign, no inkling of jealousy. Without a word of explanation, without any account of his ten-year absence, he returned to his property on Mudge Mountain, forsook a high position as a construction engineer in the Government service, and went back to the land.

"I see," he told me during a short visit at my office, "that the soil has soured here. I must lime it. It is not good to surrender the land to the ravages of uselessness."

But there was something in his face when he spoke that made me wonder, later, whether or not there was some double meaning in his words.

I KNOW nothing of the details of life between Julia and Phineas Clough beyond what was said when Julia came to my office on a midwinter day.

"Old friend," she said in her quaint, rather bookish manner, "I'm needing advice—legal advice. Will you give it?"

When I had put myself at her service, naturally, she went on,

"Divorce," she said, "is an ugly word hereabouts. 'Whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder,' says the Scripture. And yet it is not decent nor good that two shall live under one roof without the twain are mates. Tell me, friend, is there not some other way? Not divorce?"

Such matters were not much in my line, but I made a study from my lawbooks to discover about separations by agreement, and I told her what I found. That day she instructed me to proceed in drawing up papers, but the very next day she came back to my office, saying:

"I'll not do it, Squire." And when I ventured to ask why not, she only shook her head and said:

"It is written that whosoever stealeth my purse shall steal trash, but who taketh my good name—" She shrugged, and walked proudly out of my place with no more word. . . .

Soon enough, there were rumors of a none-too-subtle nature. "Things," it was

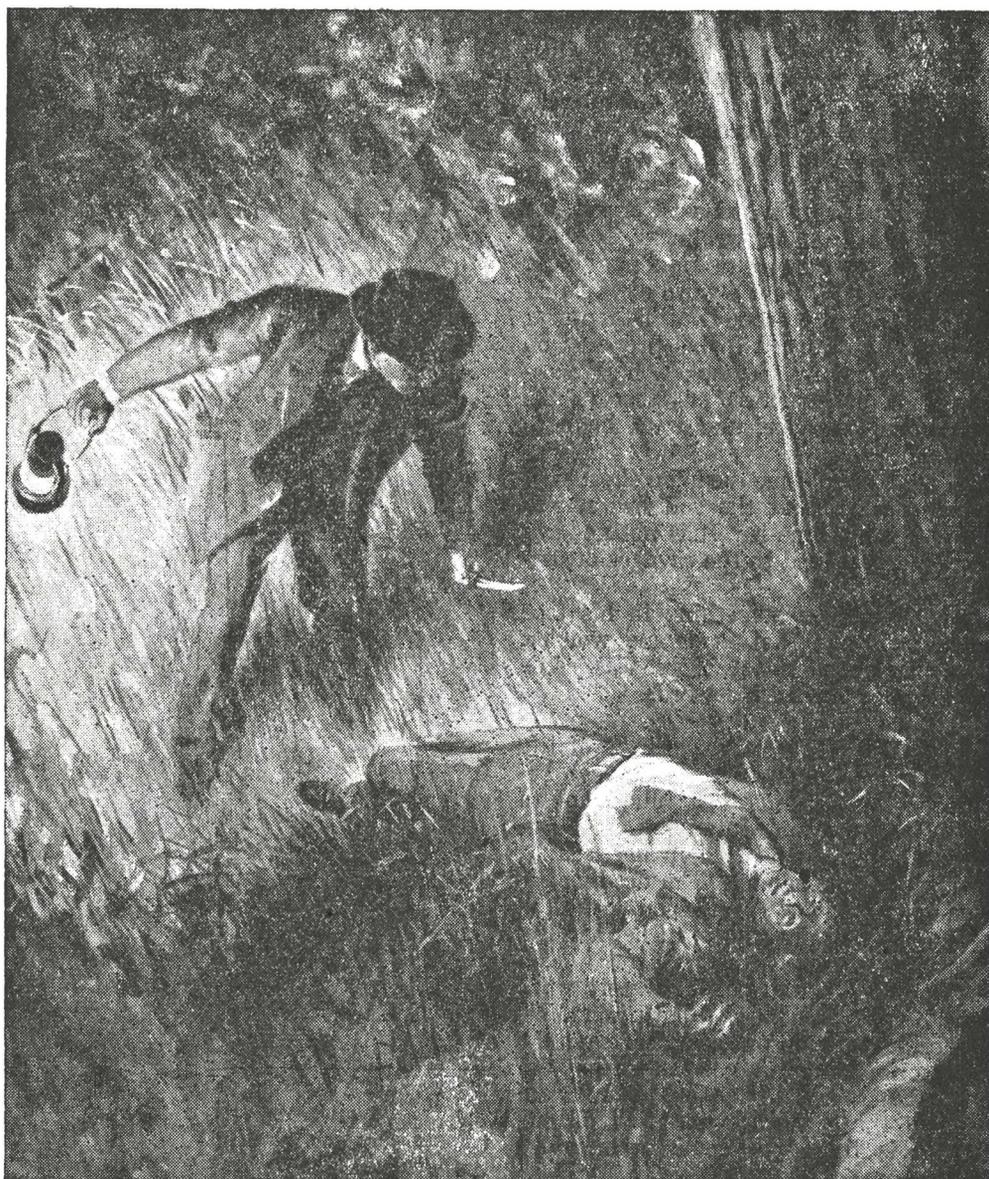


"How do you do?" she said. "I'm Zelda Warren."

said, "are fouling on the Clough homestead. Could it be that Judson Ragg lives too near by?"

And next week came that fierce fight between Ragg and Phineas Clough which was quickly followed by Clough's death. . . . I have said that I defended Ragg. I did so only because Julia came to me and asked me, point-blank, to do so; for I am not a criminal lawyer, and have no love for meddling in the sufferings of my fellow-men.

"You'll not let them," she said, "hold Jud guilty, Amos. You'll fight for him.



"He killed him . . . then changed clothes with him."

Tell me you will, now." And I said I would. "For," she went on, with a curious note in her voice and with an uncanny understanding of those two men which was to become so remarkable years later, "if there's murder done, believe me, Amos Bray, it's not Judson Ragg who did it like that. In a temper he might kill, but he would be the first to report it. Phineas, now, was of different mold. You'll save Jud, Amos."

And as it turned out, I did save him, though it was not much of my doing.

Now, it was Mrs. Warren's idea, and her insistence that I do so, which made

me bring the startling news of Warren's discovery to Julia Clough. Julia was fifty-odd now, and her face was like a St. Gaudens medallion in Carrara. Years of living in solitude, shunning the world and keeping pain in her heart, had made her a little strange. But it had given her a saintlike quality so nearly tangible that a hallowed radiance seemed to glow about her head.

She listened to every word, erect, strong, immobile in her chair. Then she said:

"And who is it bade you come to me first, Amos? 'Tis not like you to do so."

And so I told her about Zelda Warren. "Will you send her to see me, this Mrs. Warren?" she asked, and I said I would.

But when I came back to the subject in hand, asking her, "Would you like to tell Judson Ragg yourself, Julia?" she shook her head and said, oddly under the circumstances:

"And why? The duty is yours, Amos Bray. And are you so convinced, then, that Judson is a murderer?"

"Evidence," I said. "It was lack of proper identification that freed him. Mr. Warren has found that identification."

"I will not," she said quietly, "believe it. Send me this Mrs. Warren."

And so I did.

I WENT to Ragg's farm that night. The man stood defiant across his driveway to bar my car from coming in, his shotgun in hand, looking like the wild, touselled, half-mad old hermit that he had become. But when he recognized my face, he lowered his weapon and shouted:

"What is it ye want with Ragg, Amos Bray? Ye'll not be coming for a visit now."

And I told him.

He laughed. Call it, rather, a cackle. He laughed as loud and wildly as a wild animal might howl at the moon, and it struck me that his mind must be altogether gone. I began forming plans in the back of my mind to get his sentence modified, on grounds of insanity. Young judges, I knew, would be lenient with a sixty-year-old man whom solitude and suffering had unbalanced. But the laughter faded from his grizzled face suddenly, and he stared at me.

"Amos Bray," he said abruptly, "do ye believe I killed him?"

I had no good answer.

"It looks bad, Judson," I said.

"Then go to hell," he said, "before I blast ye there with my own gun." And there was no doubt he meant it. . . .

The case was reopened within the month. It required a posse of seven deputies using modern weapons like tear-gas to bring poor Judson Ragg out of his mountain lair and in chains to the county seat. I had purposed not to be present at the trial, but Mrs. Warren changed my purpose. That girl had a way of tangling the skeins of my life, I'll be bound.

"Surely you're not going to let that poor old man stand trial without trying to defend him, Squire!" she said.

"Only the innocent need defense," I said, but she routed me:

"Merely because you found the head of Phineas Clough doesn't prove that Mr. Ragg killed him, does it?" And when I countered that if the head had been found thirty years ago, he would not have been freed for lack of identification evidence, she only scoffed.

"That was thirty years ago, Squire," she insisted. "Things have gone forward since then—legal procedure and criminology and such-like, I mean. It would be for the good of your old soul to rub up against them. It might affect the outcome of the trial, too. Besides—wouldn't you defend him if Mrs. Clough asked you herself?"

I had to admit that I probably would, for Julia; and I confessed that I had stayed away from her expressly to avoid any such demand. It was no use, however.

"That does it, then, Squire," said Mrs. Warren. "I've been staying at Mrs. Clough's place for a week now. She's not very well, or she would have come in person. She gave me this letter for you."

The note began: "*Dear trusted old friend, I need you, now.*"

So I defended Judson Ragg the second time. . . .

It was Daniel Warren who inspired it all. One would scarcely believe that so frail a man would possess such determination, such an inventive mind.

"I'm siding with Zelda in this," he told me, "even though she's trying to keep me out of it. I'm sure Ragg is innocent, and I'm going to help you prove it, whether you like it or not, Squire. How many witnesses have identified that mummy head?"

"Four," I told him, "including myself."

"But you aren't going to testify, naturally," was his comment, to which he added a remote: "And who's the oldest dentist hereabouts?"

I gave him old Doc Banner's name in Quentinville, and he replied in a way that struck me as curious at the time.

"Thanks," he said, "I have a thirty-year-old toothache that needs an old-timer to fix. I'll be seeing you later. Very much later, Squire."

THAT night he left town while Zelda was visiting Julia Clough. I gathered that Zelda was hurt and troubled by his departure, though she made no direct comment on it in my hearing. He remained away two weeks, while I fumbled

around making a pretense of organizing a defense in which I scarcely believed. Then came a wire from Iowa. It read:

PIN JULIA DOWN TO DETAILS OF NIGHT OF MURDER STOP GO SEE ABOUT MY TOOTHACHE STOP TELL D.A. TO GET BIG NEW HAT TO CONTAIN RABBITS STOP BEGIN MEMORIZING THE FOURTH PARAGRAPH PAGE FIVE-TWENTY-SIX IN ZELDA'S PRAYERBOOK.

DAN WARREN

That telegram, I confess, puzzled me as much as it must puzzle you, and I resented its flippant tone. However, I took it straightway to Zelda Warren, thinking that perhaps she was still ignorant of her husband's whereabouts—only to find that she was, as the saying goes today, far ahead of me.

She clapped her hands and exclaimed: "He's done it, Squire. He's gone and done it! I never told you that Daniel used to work for a private detective agency once, before I married him and he began writing the plays he'd always been dreaming about. Well, I knew he had a yen to get into this case, and when he went away, I was pretty mad at him. But when he wrote from Des Moines—well, read this paragraph of his letter for yourself!"

I read it. It was dated a week earlier.

The old snoop is snooping and having fun thereby, darling, so powder your nose and stop pouting and start praying. If you see Squire Bray, don't tell him I wrote but suggest that he reserve a special corner in the county gallery for that mummy. It will make a fine museum piece.

As to Julia Clough, she told me the same story concerning the night of her husband's death as she had told in court thirty years before. Her memory was precise in its detail:

"We had not held conversation with each other for several weeks," she admitted, "and so it was natural that I did not ask him where he was going when he left the house at about quarter to ten that night. I only recall that he did not hitch the horses, but seemed to be going away on foot. Had I thought about it, I might have wondered, for he was not a man to love physical exercise."

I drove to Quentinville and talked to Doc Banner.

"That young feller Warren was here, and he made me go to the county morgue and see that there thing, I don't know why. . . . No, I didn't notice anything

much, only I wondered how it come that Phineas got gold in his lower molars when he wouldn't never let me sell him nothing but amalgam and cement. Didn't know he got other dental work done. Howsomever, I'm not one to grumble over dead men. It's a filthy business, Squire. Wisht nobody never found that head. Seems like Jud Ragg's got his punishment enough for this here world, anyhow."

Then I knew why Warren had sent me. It was then I began my defense.

The fourth paragraph on Page 526 in Mrs. Warren's prayerbook was a formula for the wedding ceremony according to the Episcopal Church. It contained those same words with which I began this story, "*What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*" And it came to me—with the prompting of Zelda Warren, I admit—that Daniel Warren had found indisputable proof that Judson Ragg was not only innocent, but that he would be able to marry, at long last, Julia Clough. What I did not understand was that strange remark about the rabbits in the District Attorney's hat, and the stranger one about the mummy of Phineas Clough being a museum piece.

BUT when I went to the county seat next day, the D.A. himself made that all very clear:

"This young Warren you deputized to help you, Squire," he said, "is a smart young man."

I interrupted him testily:

"I never deputized anybody!"

"Well," said the District Attorney, "you should have, if you didn't. He's on his way here from Iowa, bringing Phineas Clough. One of my men is with him. He sent me a telegram some days ago asking me to get a warrant and an extradition-order in that name."

I said: "I'll be damned!"

"Possibly," said the D.A. "But try to postpone it until after the trial, Bray. The State is making a new case of it—against Phineas Clough, for the murder of his own brother Edward. When old Doc Banner discovered that the dental work in the mouth of that mummified head did not check with that of Phineas Clough as he recollected it—that is, with the habits of the man, since dental records in those days were somewhat inaccurate and nebulous—my department became interested. I imagine you yourself had some idea of building your defense around Banner's observations, eh?"

I admitted that I did have some such idea, albeit rather indefinite.

"Then don't bother, Squire. A defense will hardly be necessary, I fancy."

"Why?"

"Young Warren found an Iowa dentist who treated Edward Clough years ago, and who was smart enough to make clear records of his work. He identified the gold bridge-work in the mummified head from a photograph we sent—conclusively proving that Edward and not Phineas is dead. There will be no real trial of Judson Ragg, in that case, Squire."

"Oh," was all I could manage to say. He went on:

"The State will try to show that Edward actually did come to Bart Corners. He must have arrived on the nine-fifteen train from New York. Phineas must have known from a letter of his intended visit, though we have not as yet been able to find one. We will try to prove that Phineas met Edward's train, brought him to his home—on foot, mind you—and killed him. A broken lantern, rusted but susceptible of identification still, was found within fifty feet of that salt-box. We conclude that Phineas then severed his brother's head, changed clothes with him, put the head in that salt-box as it was found, both to escape detection by confusing identification, and also to let suspicion point to Ragg. Then he left town with his brother's identity substituted for his own—the resemblance between them was very close, I am given to understand."

"But—how did—"

"Phineas knew Edward's way of life. Edward was a traveling salesman and accustomed to be absent from home for long intervals. Moreover, thirty years ago it was much more difficult to trace a man than it is today. Edward had the title of administrator to the inherited estate, which was considerable. Phineas wanted it. He spent a year or so in various cities before returning to Iowa, masquerading as his own brother and thereby allowing the business of Ragg's trial to die down and cool off. He has lived in Iowa openly for the rest of that interval, Squire, and Warren has definitely unmasked him."

"Good grief!" I exclaimed.

"All this is largely a hypothesis, as to detail," the District Attorney admitted. "But when we get Phineas here, I fancy we have ways and means to obtain a confession from him. Anyhow, I thought



"There was salt in it, all right. But something else too—a human head."

you would be glad to know that the trip you made to Iowa years ago, while it proved nothing much then, was actually on the right track."

The rest of this, of course, is newspaper history. Phineas Clough never did stand trial. The man seemed to break under the strain after he had been in jail a few days. He made a full confession and more or less confirmed all the details of the District Attorney's hypothesis. Then one morning they found him dead in his cell. He was a curious mixture of frantic daring and abject cowardice, that man.

IT WAS three months after the death of Phineas that Judson Ragg married Julia. The case of life and of death became closed, thereby. Secretly I like to call it ironical that I should have officiated at that wedding ceremony, for what man is not weak, at times, before the onrush of self-pity? And yet I had committed to memory that beautiful and penetrating passage on Page 526 of Mrs. Warren's prayerbook, and I inducted it into the plain, stern legal ceremony with a certain awed sense of its meaning.

"Whom God hath joined together—let not man put asunder."

And while Zelda's hand touched my arm as the married twain departed from my office, I breathed an inward prayer.

"May God," I prayed, "bless those two who have suffered. May His face shine upon them and in them! May their lives end in peace."

And while the buckboard rattled away, I heard my voice, tremulous with age perhaps, saying aloud:

"Amen." And again: "Amen."

Another story by Fulton Grant will appear in an early issue.

The lovely and notorious Nell Gwinn persuades the poet Dryden to help her rescue poor blind Milton from a court cabal. The ninth story in the series "The World Was Their Stage."

The Wickedest Woman

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

ON this dark and chilly evening the narrow London street was filled with traffic of all kinds and all conditions. Link-boys escorted sedan chairs or cried their services; coaches rumbled along with drivers bawling; barrow-men and hawkers crowded along anywhere. In the thickest of the jam, as it came to a momentary halt, was a plain dark closed carriage.

The driver turned to his fare, a girl well under twenty, handsomely attired in peach satin, an Indian shawl flung about her head and bosom.

"I be main sorry, mistress," he quavered. "It baint my fault—"

She broke in, laughing: "Then there's naught for sorrow, and Drury Lane must wait!" Her voice was fresh, eager, and cheery, but her tongue obviously had no education. "Ha! Look there, look there! Oh, the beasts!" she cried suddenly, leaning out at the window.

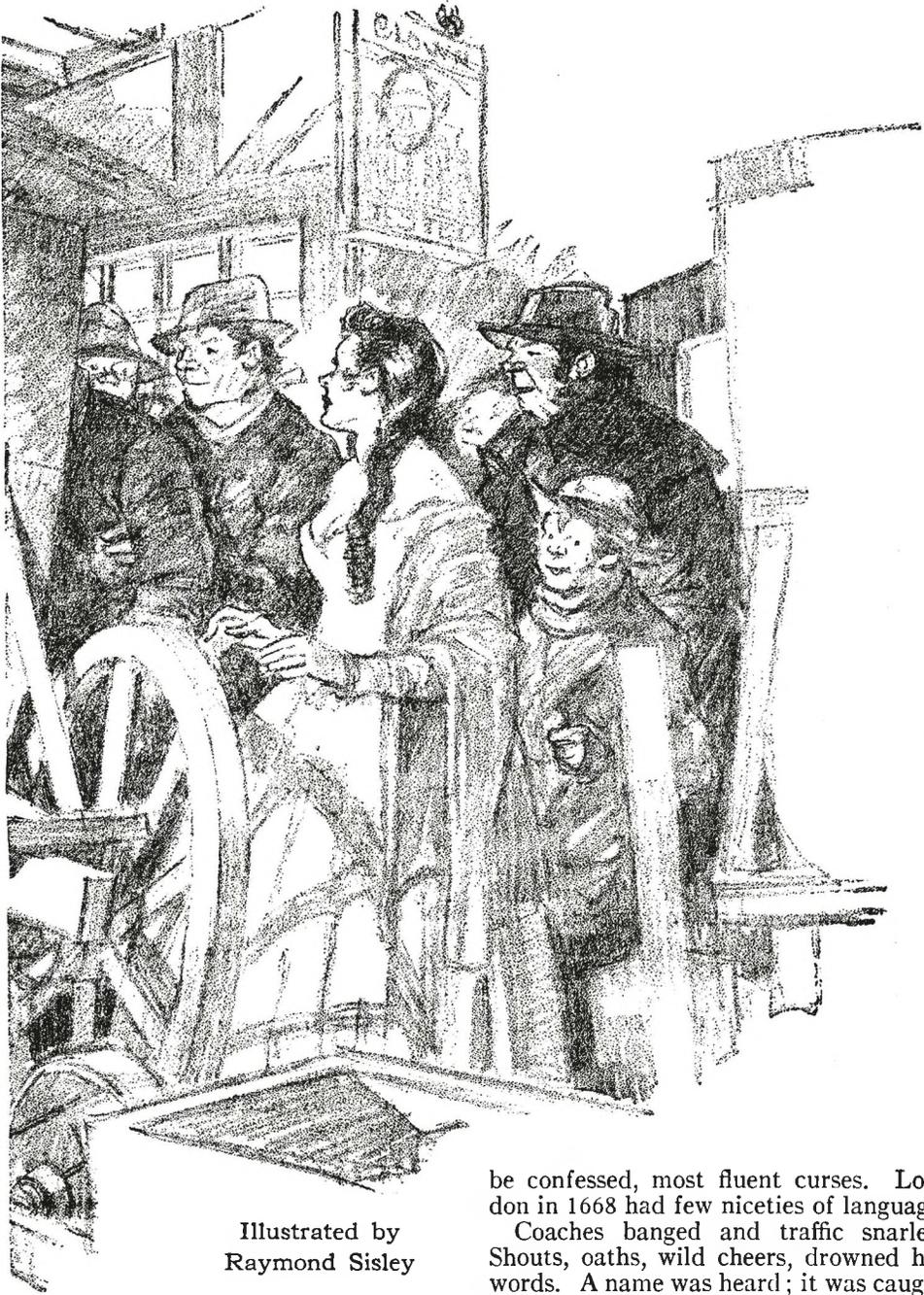
Two link-boys were chivvying a frightened dog, a lost, bewildered, worthless cur that had dashed into the street just



Men leaped to her aid; the unconscious man was lifted into her carriage.

as the traffic started up again. Their flickering torches lit him as he stopped short, terrorized.

An angry shout peeled up. A young man darted forward and scooped up the hapless cur in his arms. . . . He was too slow. A coach was upon him, its driver shouting him aside, and lash flicking at him; he was struck by the pole and knocked sprawling, senseless.



Illustrated by
Raymond Sisley

With a most unmaidenly oath the girl whipped open her carriage door and sprang out into the street. The torches struck upon her figure as she darted to the side of the senseless man; the dog had wriggled away and was gone. She faced the horses fearlessly, waving her hands at them, sending them into a frenzied rearing. Her voice rang out in a torrent of furious objurgation, threats and, it must

be confessed, most fluent curses. London in 1668 had few niceties of language.

Coaches banged and traffic snarled. Shouts, oaths, wild cheers, drowned her words. A name was heard; it was caught up instantly; it swelled into a roar of recognition and admiration.

"Nell Gwinn, lads! Mistress Nell, God bless her! Back, back! Make way for Nelly!"

Men leaped to her aid. The unconscious young man was lifted into her carriage. She climbed in and supported his head against her shoulder. Amid more hearty cheers, the traffic moved on once more. She called sharply to her driver:

"Turn aside! Get out o' this whirlpool; we must take him home."

"But mistress, you're late now!" replied the driver. "Drury Lane is waiting—"

"A pox on Drury Lane, and you too!" she stormed. "A man who could risk himself for a dog is worth all the cursed theaters in the world. Do as I tell you!"

Capricious, headstrong, utterly regardless of anything except her own whims, Nelly Gwinn was to be obeyed. She was the idol of the stage, of the King, of half London; the other half execrated her very name as a symbol of shameless vice.

The young man stirred a little. He was not good-looking, and he wore sober Quaker gray. But there was blood on his cheek, and she quieted him with tender deft voice and hands.

"Calm 'ee, now. . . . Quiet, lad, quiet! You're safe. Rest 'ee gentle-like. Whither bound?"

"Artillery Walk in Bunhill," he murmured. "Important. . . . Mr. Milton's house—" He went limp, drifting again into unconsciousness.

"All right, coach!" said Nelly briskly. "Artillery Walk, Bunhill. Find Mr. Milton's house, wherever that is."

"It be a dreary way to Bunhill Fields, mistress! Let me take you first to—"

Mistress Nell's furious gust of language staggered even the coachman.

"Besides," she concluded with more practical assurance, "I'm late now, and if I get there in time to speak the epilogue, naught else matters. And Mr. Dryden won't be there this night. . . . Drive, drive!"

The carriage creaked on, endlessly, through the evening.

AFTER a time the young man came to his senses, but only dazedly. Finding himself in the arms of a charming sweet-scented young woman who sopped his wound with her kerchief and babied him, he was dumfounded and awkwardly shy.

However, he came to himself in time to direct the driver to the house of Mr. Milton. Nelly now found that his leg was hurt as well as his head; she sprang out and insisted that he lean upon her. He did so, and they walked up the garden path together. Nelly pounded at the house door. It was opened by a woman, who uttered a cry at sight of the young man.

"Why, 'tis Tom Ellwood!"

"Whoever he is, he's hurt," spoke up Nelly tartly. "He gave this address—"

To her intense disgust, a hullabaloo arose; three girls of varying ages, whom she mentally designated at one glance as slovenly minxes, and two rather doltish young men of Puritan aspect who stared round-eyed at her, helped Mrs. Milton take care of the young man, who yielded to their ministrations with a groan.

The young men might well stare. Nelly had tied her bloodstained kerchief around the hurt head; and although she now made shift to pull the shawl about her bosom, she hated the fools for staring. And she meant to have the kerchief back again, for it was valuable.

"**W**H^O is it? Who's arrived? What's the noise about?" drifted a voice from another room. Nelly walked in and saw a man sitting before a cheerful fire, a long clay pipe in his hand, and on the table beside him a cup, a liquor-flask and a bowl of herbs.

"A fine sloppy tarradiddle of a house!" she flung at him. "I bring home a hurt man, and they all fall upon him like clucking fowls! What kind of women have ye here, anyway?"

"One kindly soul that full deserves the name," said the man, lifting his head, "and three prattling, useless vixens who despise their own father and are not worth their salt. Ha! A new voice in this dull world, a voice of youth and energy and fine splendid bravery! Come hither, voice, that I may judge thy face."

Nelly shut the door behind her, to close out the noise, and came forward. She saw that the man was blind; a fair, rugged, aged face. With impulsive contrition, she dropped on her knees before him, caught his outstretched hand and pressed it against her lips.

"I'm a silly prating wench! I'd not have hurt you for the world, master. You talk like a play-actor."

"A compliment of which I am not worthy." His words rang with such scathing sarcasm that Nelly was startled, then remembered. A Puritan household, a nest of sanctimonious Roundheads, no doubt! She knelt motionless. His fingers, gnarled and stiff with gout, touched her wealth of hair, slid down her face to shawl and dress. "Why, voice, you have youth and beauty and fine raiment!"

"Never mind me. This is Mr. Milton's house, so I suppose you're him," she broke in. "Look 'ee, the lad has a golden heart! That damned cur—"

She told of what had happened; and her uncouth tongue told more than she



"I'm a silly prating wench! I'd not hurt you for the world, master."

knew, no doubt, for he smiled a little as he listened.

"Voice, what's your name?" he asked whimsically, when she finished her tale.

She plucked at the first name to mind.

"Dryden—Ellen Dryden."

"What!" he cried out. "Not a kinswoman of my friend Dryden the poet?"

"La, no!" Her dismay was real enough now. "I never heard of him. My father—at court! He's none of your fine gentry and poets—"

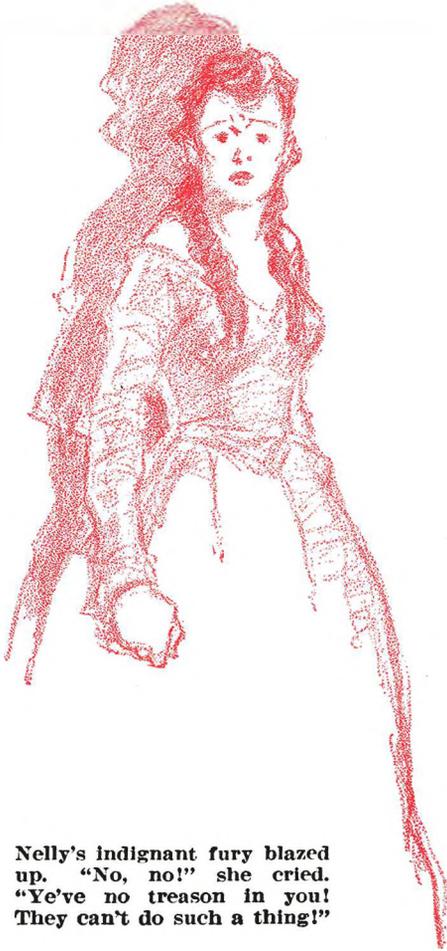
"Oh, at court!" His face darkened. "The vilest court on the face of this earth!"

"That's true. They're all thieves and rascals," she said happily. "A pack of dogs that deserve the gallows, and betray their master daily. Foul-witted

dogs, fawning upon him and snarling against each other; treacherous—"

Her impulsive words, incongruous upon such a tongue, made him smile again and lift the long clay pipe to his lips. She, checking herself, rejoiced that she had concealed her real name. It would be ill liked in any godly Roundhead household such as this.

"So ye fetched Tom Ellwood! An honest Quaker lad, and doing a sad errand for my sake—but let that pass," ruminated the blind man. "He has a golden heart indeed; but you, sweet Ellen, have one decked with pearls of price! You'll stop and sup with us.... No protest! I'll have your carriage sent away. I heard the wheels in the lane. We'll get you another. Why, child, you're a very



Nelly's indignant fury blazed up. "No, no!" she cried. "Ye've no treason in you! They can't do such a thing!"

shaft of sunlight sent to lighten a dark hour in this house! Or are you a child?"

"No, thank God! I'm nigh eighteen. If it would please you, indeed, I'll stay and gladly. But," she added doubtfully, "I'll say you fair: I'm none of your Puritan breed, so I mistrust my welcome."

Milton broke into a laugh.

"Dear Ellen, you'd be thrice welcome, even were you that scarlet Nell Gwinn in person! I'm still master under my own roof. I can feel your presence like sunlight. You bring a rare breath of honesty and bravery and beauty into the room; it delights my heart. Now, lass, put herbs from the bowl into this cup, and water, and liquor. Not too full, since temperance becometh all men. Dost know what this drink is?"

"Why, yes!" Nelly obeyed his command, and sneaked a round gulp of the heady liquor for herself. "Lord Buckhurst hath a fancy for it—though not with temperance! Julep is the name."

"Aye. From the Arabic *gulab*, or perfumed water. Many thanks." He sniffed at the cup she put into his hand, and

tasted approvingly. "Excellently mixed. This joy, to life so friendly and so cool to thirst! Child, can you see this cordial julep, that flames and dances in his crystal bounds? Is't not warming to the eye?"

"Nay; this cup isn't crystal," she said in her practical way. "You—you spoke of Nelly Gwinn. Do you know her?"

"God forbid! The wickedest woman in London!"

"Well, I saw her once. She didn't look wicked at all."

"Sweet child, Satan never looks his part! That poor abandoned creature who shares the vicious life of a vicious Stuart is the unhappiest wight alive."

"Well, she didn't look unhappy, either," Nelly said tartly. "You know nothing about the King, master, so speak no ill of him. And if you know her not, what right have you to judge her? I think you have a good ear for gossip, and a tongue too devilish ready to enlarge upon it!"

The blind man chuckled. "I stand rebuked, and most worthily. I have a sarcastic, infernal tongue, 'tis true. And you a loose one, far too apt at oaths for seventeen! Where did you pick up these words and phrases, that sound so ill upon the tongue of modest youth?"

She evaded this question merrily. The man charmed her; he used words beyond her comprehension, and yet in his blinded presence she felt a sense of awe and veneration—why, she knew not.

"La! Would it please you, master, if I played the prim innocent godly child of modesty? I can do that most admirably, and whine a psalm through my nose as good as Praise-God Barebones himself."

With a catch of the breath, she broke off: "Oh, forgive me, forgive my cursed damnable vixen temper! I meant not to make a mock of you or of your beliefs—honestly, I did not!"

HE patted her cheek with his stiff fingers.

"Mock all you please, and I'll echo your mockery. My beliefs? I have none; all are fled and gone and scattered like dry leaves." He had a way of pronouncing his *r*'s hard, which lent harsh bitterness to his words.

"I mind something the great Galileo said, when I saw him in Florence long ago," he went on, as though talking more to himself than to her. "He was an old man then. 'The sere leaf that hath lost its stem of faith,' said he, 'is but a sorry

thing.' And now I'm an old man too; all I've lived by is swept away, and faith's an empty parody. Aye, mock all you will, and I'll cry you havoc and let loose the dogs of skeptic mirth!"

She looked up into his rugged face. "Why, master, that sounds like Shakespeare!"

"So it does; the noblest of poets, laughed to scorn these evil days!" He uttered a curt laugh. "Even honest Dryden, who makes a god of tinkling rhyme, says Shakespeare is done for and forgotten, because he was no rhymer. Where on earth did you hear of him? Who reads Shakespeare in these rotting times?"

"Read? Oh, la! I've never learned reading," she said carelessly. "But I can trace letters, master; that is, my initials. It's a useful art sometimes."

He seemed not to hear, and was lost in his own thoughts.

"Shakespeare! Aye; he wrote four words I envy him, and would that they were mine. *'The multitudinous seas incarnadine.'* What a glow they hold! And he too knew the emptiness of fame. What a play he would have made of Samson, had he writ it! Yet I may make a fair poem there, since my own days are like those of blind Samson, and as futile."

He broke off, fumbled for his pipe, and then voiced rounded lines:

*"Though fallen on evil days,
On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues,
In darkness, and with dangers compassed
round,
And solitude—"*

Nelly stared, while he puffed the pipe alight and then continued:

"Dangers! Think of it, after these years, the hounds are giving cry once more! I publish a poem, a book, and they suddenly remember me, to yap of treason and prison!"

"Oh! Then you're a poet!" broke out Nelly, and clapped her hands. "Why, that explains it! I mean, the reason I like you, master. There are too many sour people; that's what makes wars. I like poets, because they're gay and kind. The same as you are, if you'd just watch your tongue. I have to watch mine too."

"Ah, child, you're a delicious morsel!" The blind man lost his bitter mood, pinched her ear, and smiled in affectionate amusement. "Yes, a brave honest breath of sunlight, a joy to the heart as you must be to the eye! No guile, no deceit. . . . I can feel a dishonest heart as though it flaunted banners. Yours is

open as the day. Ah! I hear my good wife's step—"

All in a flash, Nelly pulled up a chair and was seated demurely, hands in lap.

THE door opened, and Mrs. Milton came to them, her face anxious.

"John, I have sore news for you," she said. "Tom's not greatly hurt; I've put him to bed. But he brought an evil word. I must speak with you alone."

"Nay, speak out, speak freely!" exclaimed Milton. "Good wife, this is Mistress Ellen Dryden. A maid with somewhat Bœotian tongue but purest Attic heart; a sunbeam for blinded eyes. She stays to supper. And now let's know the worst."

Nelly guessed that his phrases conveyed meanings beyond her grasp, but it did not matter in the least. Her heart had gone out to this blind man. His personality, his character, had encompassed her like a tremendous force. A poet, a blind man, and in danger!

Yet she was a primly modest lass, making Mistress Milton a deep curtsy and taking the edge of her chair again.

"You've welcome, my dear; we owe you much for your kindness to Tom Ellwood," said the good woman, and turned. "John! He saw Sir Thomas Agnew. There's naught can be done. Annesley is helpless, as he wrote you today. The charges are to be pressed hard. That rascal Morely hath the ear of the Council, and his venomous envy has poisoned their hearts—"

Milton waved his hand. "Enough, enough! Ye said it all in five words: There's naught can be done! Let that end it. The pinpricks of envy are too little things—"

"But John! The Tower's no little thing! And treason!"

Milton smiled. "My dear," he said quietly, "when one thinks of all the great and noble men whose heads have fallen to that false cry of treason, doesn't it make the heart leap and quicken? What a goodly company to welcome one poor blind rascal across the threshold! The very concept brings a benison of grace!"

Like a force loosed upon the room, his presence filled it, compelled the two women motionless. His words rang and lifted sonorously; his face was alight with grave majesty that held them in awe.

"The more the flame, the more the law has found to burn in man. So said poor Bacon, in his last days; true words! The mind hath grown too great for the en-

during of lesser minds, and is cut away. The greater the mind, the less can the world endure it, in these evil days. *There's naught can be done*; splendid words! I'd not lift a finger to stay this compliment of envy. I'd not lift my voice to rebut the perjury and hatred—"

Nelly, in sudden comprehension, was on her feet. Her indignant fury blazed up.

"No, no! Ye can't mean it!" she cried hotly. "A good man, a noble man like you? It's a lie! Ye've no treason in you! A cursed rascally lie!" She faced Mrs. Milton, her blue eyes twin coruscating pools of wild wrath. "They can't do such a thing, and they sha'n't! He's a poet, and he's a good man, a good man!"

Milton smiled. "Child, before I was a poet alone, I was a meddler in affairs of state. Now, like many a better man, I'm a blind beast of burden, a scapegoat. Let it be. Vex not yourself with my affairs. Wife, is she not a sweet precious thing? A brave heart, a lovely child!"

"Brave indeed; dear lass, for your words I love you." Warm-eyed Mrs. Milton drew Nelly to her in a swift embrace. "Fret not about these matters."

"Fret not? Why, devil take me, I'll do something about it! Damme if I don't speak—" The shocked expression of the good woman brought Nelly to herself; she checked her outburst. "I'll speak to my father. He's got a post at court—" She broke off, lamely.

"Nay, now, think no more of it." Mrs. Milton, still startled, patted her hand. "Dryden, is that the name? Perchance a relative of our good friend the poet? But he'll be here presently himself. Tom Ellwood saw him too, and he'll bring us better news, I trust."

Panic seized Nelly. She could not stay to sup with them; she invented excuses, stammered truthfully that she was no relative of Dryden's, did her best to get away at once. No use; the blind man insisted that her promise be kept. For his sake! And in the midst, one of his three daughters came, a bit sullenly, to announce supper ready.

NELLY gave up, and resigned herself to fate. None the less, emotion seethed within her; every time she looked into that rugged yet gentle blinded face, her heart swelled for the evil of the world, evil which she knew full well. Indeed, she knew little else.

They sat about a candle-lit board, not bountiful but well provided; a little old silver, a little rare crystal, fine bleached

hollands linen: The three daughters, slatterns who winced under the blind man's biting tongue. The young men had departed; Tom Ellwood was asleep in another room.

Nelly noted that her hostess murmured grace, but Milton, with a sarcastic scowl, ignored it. When one of the girls made some mention of religion, he lashed out cold words that checked the mention instantly. Nelly shrewdly held her peace and offered no mockery; she sensed that Milton, despite his words to her, would welcome no levity in this respect.

MIDWAY of the meal, the knocker sounded. The eldest daughter answered, and called back to them:

"It's Mr. Dryden, Father."

Nelly braced herself; then, as Dryden appeared, desperately held a napkin to her face. He came into the room, tall, smiling, elegant: a man of forty or thereabouts, handsome, resplendent, with the sardonic wit which had made him famous. He bowed to Mrs. Milton, touched his lips to her hand, exchanged a warm clasp with the blind man.

"I've an engagement to sup later, thanks," he said, "but I'll sit and smoke a pipe with you. This news is frightful—" Nelly lowered her napkin. He looked at her, saw her for the first time, and froze. Into his staring gaze came amazement and incredulity.

"Good God!" he said under breath.

"Ellen, my dear, allow me to present my friend John Dryden," said the blind man. "A child who bears your own name, Dryden, but claims no relationship. A sweet child, a dear lovely lass, unspoiled and primrose-fresh."

"Oh, la!" exclaimed Nelly, staring round-eyed at the man she knew so well, who had written for her his wittiest and wickedest comedies. "Not the great Mr. Dryden, surely? The poet who is said to have written an entire epilogue of twenty lines rhyming with the word *door*? Oh, sir! I am truly overcome!"

Dryden swallowed hard. The word was not *door*, but no one else here knew of it. She smiled and extended her hand, and her eyes challenged him. He came to her and gallantly bowed over her hand.

"Stop it, you she-devil," he breathed.

She laughed happily. He could not take his eyes off her. He lit a pipe and listened to all the story about Tom Ellwood, and ever his gaze came back to her.

"Zounds, Mistress Ellen!" he said, when the tale was done. "You should go

THE WICKEDEST WOMAN

upon the stage! I'll warrant that you'd become the toast of London."

"Oh, Master Dryden! A poor wench like I?" she exclaimed. "The stage is 'a wicked place, they say; full of temptations and such-like."

"But you remind me somewhat of Nelly Gwinn," said he. "You have the same—"

"Dryden!" broke in Milton with quiet force. "I'll have no such talk at this table! Make no comparison between this sweet unspoiled child and that accursed vile creature who flaunts her vice openly in the face of God and man, and holds this sorry Stuart king of ours in her chains! An orange-seller, poor wicked lass!"

Nelly put her tongue in her cheek. Dryden choked, colored, and apologized with a stammer. But turning to the blind man, Nelly spoke abruptly:

"Oh, master, be not so harsh in judgment, I pray you! My father says the King is kind to all; and those closest to him best know his fine qualities."

"Aye," put in John Dryden wickedly. "Those closest to him should know!"

She ignored the thrust. "And as for the orange girls," she went on, "they're not all bad. They mew and tweet a lot, but they live and die no man's friend and all women's haters—"

She checked herself. Milton laughed.

"Child, hast no hard words for anyone?"

"Aye, for those who would cry treason upon you!" said she.

THEIR laughter died, and faces lengthened, as she thus brought to the fore what lay so anxious in every heart.

Dryden leaned forward. "I've heard about it, and I can't fathom it," he said. "What charge can stand, in God's name? After the Restoration and your first troubles, the Indemnity Bill secured you against future charges. You can't be touched now for anything that happened."

"Apparently that isn't the question," said Milton dryly. "The poem I published last year is the thing that's raising the torch now. Treason, they whisper; a veiled allegory in which our honest Charles Stuart is typified as Satan."

Dryden swore in hearty astonishment, apologized quickly to the ladies, and brought his fist down on the table till the dishes rattled.

"Absurd! Oh, foul ignorant absurdity!" he cried indignantly.

"Nothing is too absurd to be made a candle for envy's flame," observed Milton calmly. "No, friend; absurd it may be, but the fact remains. I had a note this afternoon from Annesley. The Council meets tomorrow; he says arrest is certain."

"Annesley!" echoed Dryden in blank dismay. "If the Earl of Anglesea can't protect you against these rascals— Why can't he see the King?"

"He talked with Charles Stuart this morning and was told that one pestilent poet more or less mattered nothing in the world." Milton's lips twisted with appreciation of the sarcastic utterance. "Annesley protected me before, but he has no power now."

DRYDEN exploded in a burst of tempestuous fury that minced no words. Mrs. Milton gave her daughters a glance; they rose and left, and signaled Nelly to come with them. But Nelly had no such intention.

"'Paradise Lost'—the greatest work of poetry that's appeared since Marlowe died, to be thus libeled and made into a tool to serve envy!" Dryden was in a passion. "It's past all belief! You, the greatest poet in England, to be thus treated! It makes the blood boil!"

"Cool it with tobacco, good friend." Milton smiled and put out a hand for his pipe. Nelly seized it, filled it, lit it over a candle and handed it to him, while Mrs. Milton watched in shocked astonishment.

"Does Mr. Dryden think you a better poet than Shakespeare?" asked Nelly innocently.

"I fear not." Milton drew at his pipe. "Neither of us are good rhymers, in his opinion, and there's no poetry possible without rhyme—eh, Dryden?"

"He should know," murmured Nelly sweetly. "Just think! Twenty rhymes to the word *door*, and all beautiful poetry too!"

Dryden flung her one look of white-hot fury, choked down his wrath with an effort, and turned to the blind man.

"You're the greatest poet in England, in the world!" he said gravely. "Yet I do think that if your 'Paradise Lost' were in rhyme, it would be still greater. And I'd love to prove it by taking your own magnificent lines, putting them into a play, rhyming them—"

"Why not?" said Milton indulgently, puffing at his pipe. "By all means! Tag my verses if you please! Your cunning artistry would honor me."

"I thank you," said Dryden, pleased. "Now, back to more pressing business. Somehow, somewhere, this vile affair must be nipped before it comes up in Council! But who can do it? Whom can we reach? Rochester's at Bath, taking the cure. Buckingham's in disgrace. Ha! There's Buckhurst, Earl of Dorset to be!" he exclaimed, and drove a maliciously sardonic glance at Nelly. "The Gwinn woman was his mistress. . . . Now he's playing like a moth with the King's latest flame, the Frenchwoman Louise."

"Oh, I saw her the other day!" spoke up Nelly. "She was long in the flank like a sway-back horse, and had a neck like a swan!"

Dryden could not repress a grin.

"Well, I'll get to work tonight, now! Somehow, the King must be reached. He'll be supping with one of his mistresses. He must be made to stop this nonsense; he can do it with a word. Luckily, I'm in funds. These venal creatures who surround Charles—"

"Wait!"

WITH the word, everything seemed to stop; the world itself. The blind man laid down his pipe. His voice broke upon the room like an organ-tone, so deep and great was his emotion and his grave majesty.

"My friend, you mean well; you're a true man, a loyal friend," he said slowly. "But I forbid you to carry out your intent. Venal creatures indeed! Bribery!" He appeared to choke upon the thought, then continued:

"All I have left are my pride, my sacred honor and my self-esteem; I'll not have them sullied and brought to naught at this late day. It is to my pride that evil rogues seek my life. It is to mine honor that the rulers of the land would do me away by perjury and hatred, because they fear my writings. And my self-esteem brooks not that I should grovel before such men. Much less would I have you or anyone else seek the influence of public prostitutes. . . . Good God, that this English realm should sink to such a level!

"No, John Dryden! I charge you, upon your immortal soul, permit no such action! Smirch not my name by putting it into the hand of vileness, seek not the wiles of vicious women. Why, it's an insult that leaves the soul affronted and appalled! No man can harm me, do what they may, and I refuse to harm

myself. I would writhe in agony to know that this vile body's salvation was wrought by the foul touch of Cleveland or Gwinn or any such— No, no! You have my mind, Dryden. Obey it."

DRYDEN bowed his head, as though before a nobility that left him overwhelmed.

"Greatness," he said slowly, "has walked among us like a ghost, this night."

That he was deeply moved, was evident. He glanced at Nelly; she sat very white and quiet. But now, upon the silence, she stirred and put forth her hand, and laid her fingers upon those of Milton.

"But I shall go to the King, Mr. Milton," she said in a low voice. "I shall go to him and tell him that you be a main good man, and the best poet in England or the world, and that he must not permit this crime. May I do it?"

Milton's rugged face softened, and he lifted her fingers to his lips.

"Dear child of sunshine, dear child of brave heart, you speak the impossible; you cannot reach Charles Stuart, nor speak with him."

"But if I can, have I your permission to tell him what a good man you are?"

"Why, of course!" he said, lightly smiling. "Tell me, Mistress Ellen, when shall I see you again? For we must meet; you must come here often. We have music of the evenings—" He checked himself; one could read the thought in his face. Perhaps he would not be here of evenings, but in the Tower, or worse.

"I'm sorry," she said. Her eyes flitted to Dryden; he was sitting watching her, in disgust and cold anger. "Not for a long time, perchance; you see, we all be going north in a day or so, north to the Humber for a long visit."

"You have a coach, Dryden? Will you take the child home? Do, I pray you."

"Why, yes, because you ask it," said Dryden. Again his look was cold. In his face Nelly read a chill resolve. "Tell me, mistress, do you spell your name with a *y* or with an *i*? In our family it may be writ either way. So may that of the most charming actress and the wickedest woman in London, Nell Gwinn."

She knew that he was playing with her in his cruel way, that he meant to reveal her true name, that he was infuriated because she had won Milton's consent by tricking him.

Quietly, she went up to Dryden and looked into his eyes; her back was turned to Mrs. Milton. Under Dryden's hard



"Are you afraid?" he said, half sneeringly. "Yes, but not for myself," she replied.

gaze, her face became a piteous pleading thing.

"I've heard it said that Nelly Gwinn herself spells her name with an *i*, Mr. Dryden," she said. Two tears gathered at her lashes and fell on her cheeks. "But I've never learned spelling, or such things. It will be mortal kind of you to take me home; the kindest action in the world."

Her words were nothing; her face, her eyes were everything. They held her whole soul, in pleading, agonized beseeching. Dryden was shaken; he was still more shaken when she put out her hands to his, and he found her fingers cold and trembling.

"Are you afraid?" he said, half sneering. Still her great eyes held their grip on his own.

"Yes; but not for myself," she replied.

With an effort, he brushed her aside, broke into a laugh, and loosed the tension.

"Why, 'tis a pleasant child and full of strange fancies!" he exclaimed cheerily. "Yes, we must off at once. John Milton," he said, going to the blind man with a

hearty hand-grip, "you shall have your way; I obey your desires. But I shall see Annesley tonight if possible. I shall do what I can, as you would have me do it; that's a measure of my tribute to you."

FIVE minutes later, farewells said, he was handing Nelly Gwinn into his coach, a fine handsome coach. But as he got in, he paused and spoke to the man on the box.

"Drive down the lane. At the corner, stop and wait till I give you orders."

He slammed the door; the horses started; the coach creaked and swayed down the narrow way, and presently came to full stop. Then, in the darkness, Dryden broke the silence.

"Nelly, you damned vixen, I gave in to your pleading!" he said in a hot passionate voice. "I could not shame you before them. But I'm going back and tell 'em the truth. You tricked him basely; by the Lord, I'll not have it! There's the noblest man in England, and I'll not stand by and see him toyed with in his blindness by a wench—"

"You may say too much; better stop," said Nelly. "What will happen when you tell him? Shame me? No, you can't do that. But you can betray him, poison him, hurt him to the very quick—you and your devilish misdirected friendship! La, what a prattle-tongued fool you would be, worse than any old gutter harridan shrieking bad words at the wind!"

"What do you mean?" he demanded quickly. "Hurt him, betray him? Not for the world!"

"Perhaps he guessed Nelly Gwinn's heart better than you could," she said. "He thinks Mistress Ellen is a pleasant child of sunshine. . . . Why, John, he has a kind memory of me! To find he had blasted Nelly Gwinn to her face would make him writhe; he's a gentleman, more so than any gentry of the court."

"And you think he'd accept his life at your hands?" said Dryden scornfully.

"Not at the hands of Nelly Gwinn. No. But at the hands of Ellen the child, yes; he said so himself. Still, he'll never know; not a soul will ever know, John. I'm supping with my friend at midnight."

It was thus she spoke, aye, and thought, of the King.

"Before he sups with me this night," she went on, "Charles will write a letter and send it to the president of the Council. You know that I never meddle in anything; this time, I'm meddling. And you must never tell Mr. Milton or anyone else." She laid her hand on his arm, and suddenly her voice broke: "John, John, this is my greatest part—the greatest rôle I'll ever play. . . . For God's sake don't spoil it!"

At last he vouchsafed grudging words.

"He's become the greatest poet in England. Men of wisdom and renown seek him out daily. His fame has returned. The whole country would cry out in horror if he were beheaded. . . . And should I let him be saved in a way he has himself refused?"

"You fool, would you rather see him beheaded?" she cried out impatiently. Anger consumed her, all in a moment. "Very well—choose, then! Choose, and a pox take you! Choose, you damned virtuous high-minded gentleman, with the filthiest wit in London! Let his death or life be your decision—yours, whose pretty lines make the very painted statues blush to hear 'em spoken!"

She paused, then went on, scathingly:

"You, whose greatest boast is that you amuse the gallants of the court—what

with? Vile words you'd not dare speak in his house, foul jests and conceits that would shame you to have uttered at his table, or brought before his mind. And you, you—on such a man as you, on such a devil's poet as you, hangs the life or death of this man! Not on you, but on your imitation flashy nobility—"

"For God's love, have done, Nelly!" he broke in, and his voice twisted upon the darkness like a groan. He reached out and took her hand in both his own. "Upon my soul, you have the noblest heart in the world! Let it be as you say. I'll not spoil your rôle, upon my honor; I did not understand, Nelly. But I do now. And I honor you, sweet child of sunshine; Mistress Ellen, to me also you shall ever be as you were this night. There shall be this secret between us. I pledge you my word."

He brought her fingers to his lips.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, sitting erect. "What you said a moment ago about the whole country crying out—why, that's the very thing! That will spell sense to Charles. . . . Good! Hurry, John!"

DRYDEN opened the window, gave the coachman directions, and the coach jounced away.

"One thing more," she said. "I hated you, when you sat there eying me in cold anger; and I admired you too. Never mind my shrewish tongue. There's great loyalty in you, John Dryden, and there's great loyalty in me, and there's damned few people in London who know what the word means. So we'd best stick together and be friends."

"Egad, wench! An admirable notion, a most excellent notion!" he said, in his old light voice of gayety. "You and I and the Theater Royal against the world! What will Charles Stuart say to it, I wonder?"

Her ringing laugh joined in his, and put emotion to flight.

"If I'm any judge, he'll say that you'd make a devilish good poet-laureate of England—sink me if he won't!" Then her laugh died suddenly. "But I'm sorry—oh, John! I'm sorry with all my heart for one thing that must happen."

"What?" he demanded.

She was silent a space, and sighed, and answered sadly: "That the child Ellen has played out her part, and can never again meet the noblest man in all the world."

"Amen," said Dryden, after a moment.

Our Readers' Forum*

LET'S WRITE AMERICAN

Let's "write American." Too many people seem to think this is the first time the United States has ever faced trouble and danger. Have we forgotten our past?

Surely there's enough material in Americana to keep your writers busy. How about some stories of the men who froze and starved at Valley Forge—of Ethan Allen strolling into Ticonderoga—of the men who fought at Gettysburg—of white-topped wagons rolling west—of early settlers who had a "planned economy" of roots and nuts?

The men and women who suffered and died to make a nation! We want to read more about them.

M. L. Goodwin
Andover, New York

LIKES BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

I thought it would be a good idea to emulate the celebrated Dr. Gallup so have made a sort of selective poll of several friends who like myself are subscribers to BLUE BOOK, and am surprised to find how closely we coincide. We all agree on its improvement of late. We all enjoy and approve of the "book-length novel" innovation, and agree that the most interesting story is a really clever intricate detective yarn such as "Death on the Doorstep"; while the serial "When the Devil Drives" is fine. All like good sea stories or tales of the far-flung places of the earth, but so few today can write them.

Having spent many years of my youth on the grand old skysail-yard clippers, they bring back such glorious memories. . . . Two of us have taken BLUE BOOK long enough to remember your great Clarence New. If only he were alive now, what thrilling exploits his "Free Lances" would be doing now in all this intrigue and treachery! . . . Anyway, it is up to our editor to please everyone—a notoriously impossible task. Skool! From your well wisher
W. R. Pearson
Irvington, Va.

DOESN'T LIKE BOOK-LENGTHS

Would like to see the book-length novel discontinued in favor of more short stories or novelettes. BLUE BOOK, to me, is a twenty-five cent investment that pays mighty interesting dividends in armchair enjoyment. But when one is a little out of step with the novel, dividends are almost halved.

When sitting down to some vicarious adventuring, I like to travel the American scene with Raymond S. Spears. He rang the bell with "Swamp Angel." It was authentic as a

case history and twenty times more interesting. Gave me the feeling I could go down to that section and really know my way around.

H. Bedford-Jones' history lessons with their sugar coating are always pleasant reading. He's at his best, however, when he pipes us down with a good blue-water yarn. A salt-water voyage with Jacland Marmur or Bedford-Jones at the helm gives me everything but horny palms and a rolling gait. And Leland Jamieson on aviation.

Let us have also, each month, the illustrations—the most distinguished feature in the physical make-up of the magazine.

John W. Innes
Norfolk, Va.

A "BEASTS AND MEN" SERIES

It has always been a pleasure to know that the price paid for a BLUE BOOK bought full measure of good fiction. One or two pages of advertising can be skipped over without comment; more is irritating. A small space for readers' remarks is acceptable; but don't substitute a readers' department for editorial judgment.

I'd like to see a "Scientifiction" fantasy included a little more frequently. Also the idea of a series of stories with a central motif, such as "Arms and Men," is excellent. Why not a series on "Beasts and Men," featuring man's step by step progress in association with his animal contemporaries?

War stories are an excellent means of presenting the issues of the day forcibly. (Do I hear some one say "Phooey! He means Propaganda!") However, too many in any one issue tend to stamp a magazine as a specialty. Specialties come and go with the ebb and flow of public opinion, but good fiction in general always has a steady current of popularity. Here's hoping the BLUE BOOK never risks loss of prestige by deserting the general fiction field for a specialty, however timely.

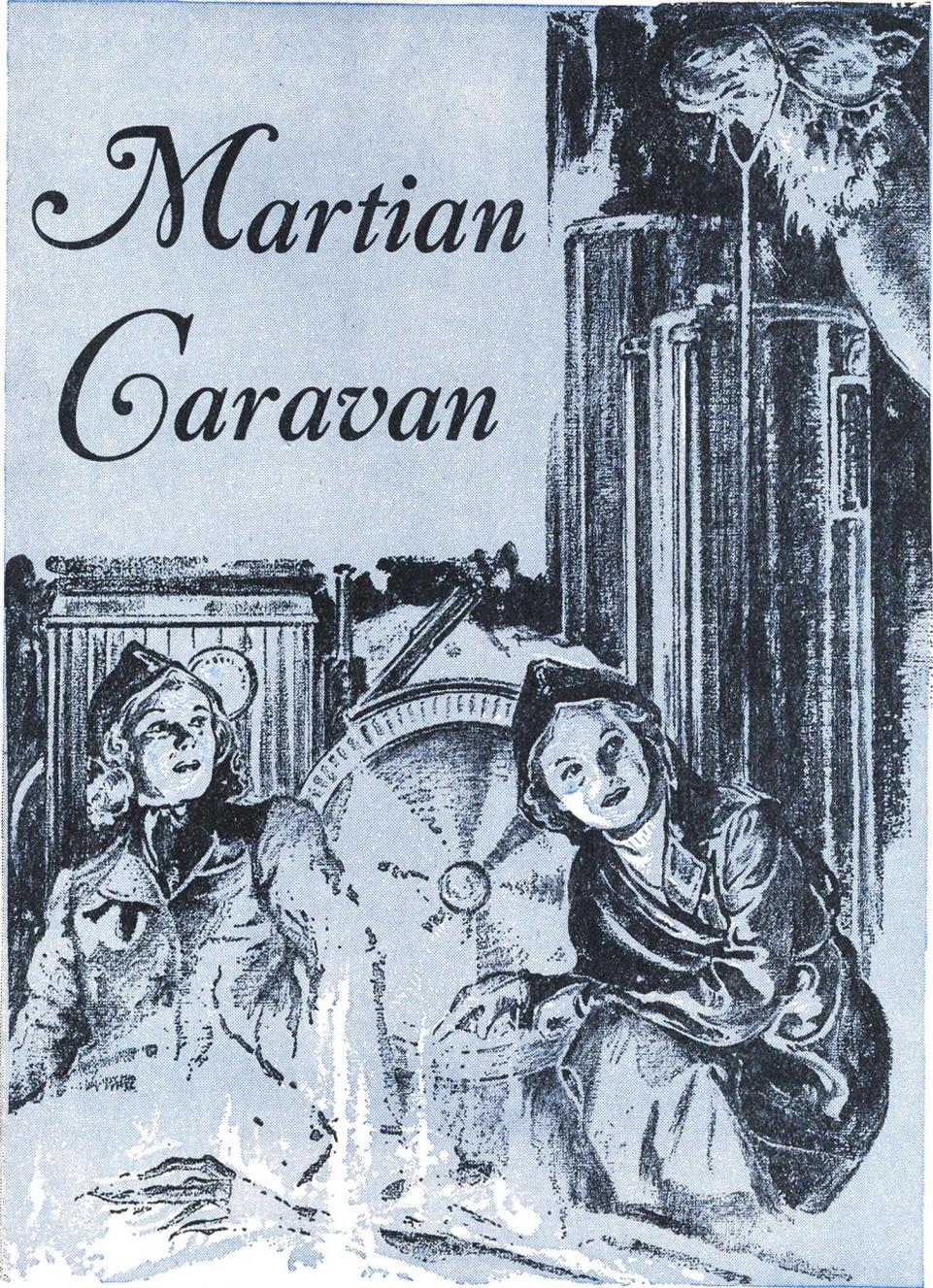
John J. Falby
Oak Park, Ill.

*The Editors of the BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestion; and for the half-dozen or so we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words; no letters can be returned, and all of them will become the property of McCall Corporation. They should be addressed to: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York.

The response to our invitation has been so generous that we find it impossible to print as many as we should like to—or to give each one the personal acknowledgment it deserves. We therefore wish here to thank the many other readers who have written to us.

Martian Caravan

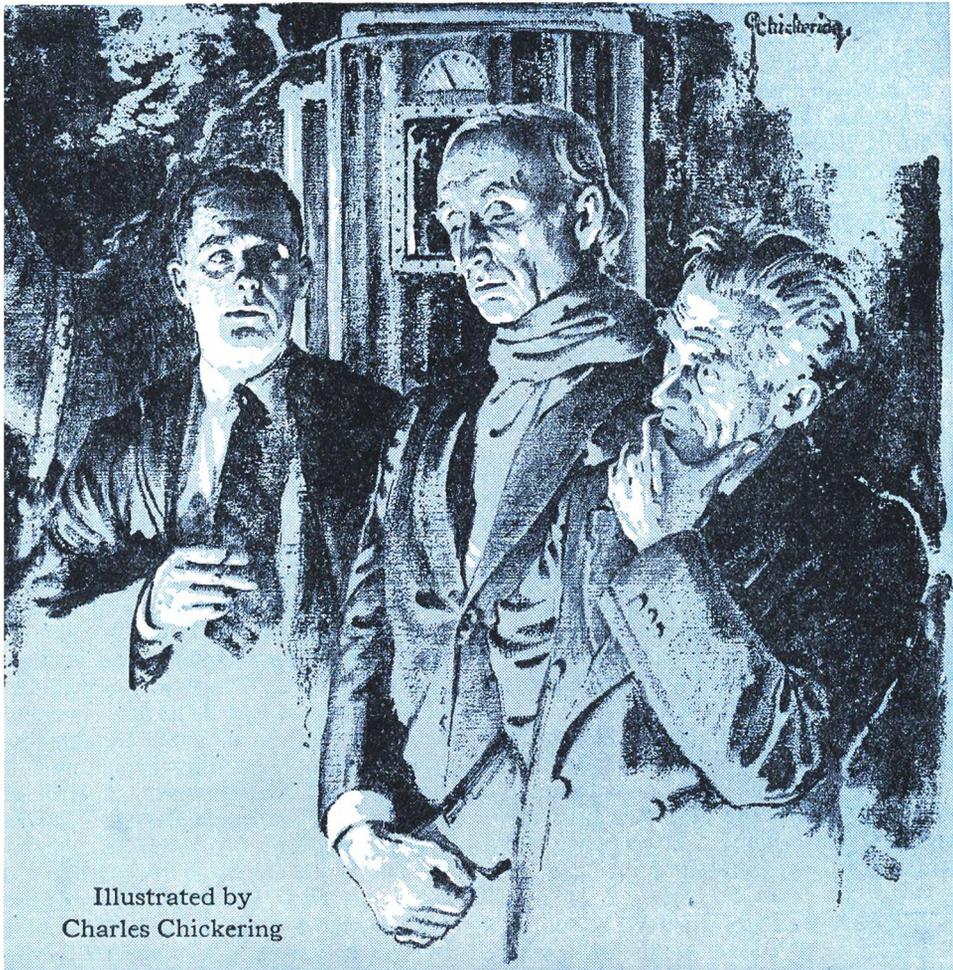


"**C**AMELS, Mr. Corrigan!" bubbled the girl in the tan sunsuit. "Camels! Why, it's just like being back on Earth. In Egypt or somewhere. It's so cute and romantic. I *do* hope—ooooh!"

She clutched convulsively at the pommel of her high saddle. The sleepy-eyed beast beneath her had lurched to one side. Now, gingerly, it was picking its way around a shallow pockmark in the desert

sand. "Long Tom" Corrigan's sunburned arm leaped out to steady the girl. He said: "Now, see what I meant, Miss Andreisen? It isn't safe up here. You must stay back with the rest of the caravan. You really must!"

Ruth Andreisen's fragrant weight depended on Corrigan's arm for a moment—until Long Tom's bronzed neck burned redder still, and "Blinky" Billings, riding beside him, snickered aloud.



Illustrated by
Charles Chickering

A fascinating novelette by the author of "Dr. Fuddle's Fingers."

By NELSON BOND

"Oh, Mr. Corrigan! You're not going to be cross with poor little me, are you? Just because my silly old camel was afraid of a hole in the ground?"

Blinky snorted. Lips concealed by a week's stubble parted to emit a stream of ruddy *mekel*-juice at a horny spine of cactus.

"Camels," he drawled to the world at large, "is got more sense'n some people. Know what that there hole is, Miss Andreisen? It's a silicoid pit. An' unless I'm greatly mistook, it's got a resident."

"A—silicoid pit! Gracious!"

Long Tom grunted soberly. His job was to reassure, not frighten, the members of his caravan. But a little scare should do this particular pest no harm. He glanced back distastefully at the

crude circular mound so oddly dull against the flaming red-gold bosom of the Martian sands, and pulled a wry mouth, knowing from experience what lay in wait beneath that leprous spot.

"Yes, that's a silicoid pit. You can tell 'em by the color. One step into that and—blooie! Like quicksand, only worse. Because there's a flesh-eating creature in there—waiting!"

The girl stared back at the pit, wide-eyed. A tiny shudder stirred her soft shoulders. Then she smiled.

"But you wouldn't let anything happen to *me*, would you, Mr. Corrigan?"

Again her mount nudged closer to Long Tom's. Faint perfume tantalized his nostrils. Corrigan groaned. "Why, of course not," he said in what he hoped was

an untroubled tone. "Blinky, I—I think I'll drop back along the line and see if everything's all right."

The guide nodded, squinting at the sky.

"Yeah. Better, Tom. Here comes Phobos, like a bat outa hell. We oughta pitch camp directly."

"Soon as I get back." As Corrigan wheeled his awkward mount, Ruth Andreisen smiled and tugged at her reins. "I'll go with you, Mr. Corrigan—"

"You," said Blinky curtly, "stay here!" "Aint you," he demanded, "just a little bit ashamed o' yourself?"

Ruth Andreisen stiffened.

"Ashamed? I'm sure I don't know what you mean!"

"Not," sniffed Blinky, "much! It aint gonna do no good, y'know. He's woman-proof. Aw, come clean! I mean the way you're carryin' on with Tom Corrigan."

"Really, Mr. Billings! You jump to conclusions, I must say. Mr. Corrigan is the leader of this caravan, is he not? And am I not a paying member of the party? I consider it my right to expect professional services and attention."

"Listen here!" Blinky wheeled to face the girl sternly, his desert-faded eyes shrewd with meaning. "Looks to me like you don't *comprene* that this here caravan aint just a picnic. It's a tough game which is played for keeps!"

THIS aint Earth, Miss Andreisen. It's Mars, an' where we are now, where we're goin' to, aint even civilized yet. When we pulled out o' Mars Central two days ago, we left behind us the last hot-an'-cold runnin' water you're gonna see for seven hundred miles. We got almost seven days of travel ahead of us, an' in this country travel is spelled *t-r-o-u-b-l-e*.

"We're gonna have boilin' hot days, an' nights cold enough to do funny things to brass monkeys. We're gonna run into sleet-storms an' mud-storms mebbe, an' dust-storms certainly. We're liable to have to do some fightin'. Vegans an' silicoids an' loopies an'—well, the whole damn' kit-an'-kaboodle of 'em, the creatures that hang around the Martian waste-lands waitin' for durned fools like us to come along."

"If you think I'm afraid—" began the girl hotly.

"Hell, no, I don't think you're afraid. If you'll pardon my Esperanto, I think you got more damn' guts than any she-male oughta have. Else you wouldn't of signed up for the trip. But I also think you done it for the same reason that

you're now makin' passes at the squar'est-shootin', swellest guy that ever got thin-air wabbles—Tom Corrigan.

"Because you're spoiled, Miss Andreisen. Your old man owns half o' the Cosmos Company, an' your whole family's so reekin' rich they don't know what to do. Which prob'ly explains why you're here. 'Cause you got bored on Earth an' decided to take a Martian caravan-trip for a thrill.

"Well—that's okay by me. An' by Corrigan. Only, now that you're in this to your ears—wise up! Lay off the lovey-dovey stuff and try to play ball—"

RUTH ANDREISEN'S voice was very cold and sweet.

"I suppose you realize, Mr. Billings, that you are in the employ of the Cosmos Company? And that your delightful little sermon will cost you your job when we reach Sandy City? I hope you won't be out of work too long!" She spun her mount viciously, and was gone. Blinky sighed. There was a wan blade of *clab*-grass ten yards away. He speared it neatly with a shimmering stream of liquid root. The sallow sun hung like a rusted bowl in the west. A chill east wind keened across the desert. The caravan plodded on.

Long Tom Corrigan rode back along the line slowly. His watchful eyes missed nothing. He studied the harness of the burden beasts, paused once to loosen a chafing breeching, once to cross-lock a sliding hitch. He counted, as a matter of habit, the sleeping-tins and tarps; noted a leaking water-cask and jotted a mental reminder to fix it. He inspected the camels' pads as he rode by, cautious against bruises and small cuts. It had cost the company plenty to bring these "ships of the desert" to the red planet, even more to acclimate the delicate animals to the thin Martian air. But they were the only dependable means of conveyance across the Martian sandy wastes. Motors were worse than useless, horses impossible. Earth's aircraft were valueless in this attenuated atmosphere, though Corrigan had heard rumors of a new invention, a new type of super-stratoplane.

He stopped beside the foremost riders of the caravan. "Hey, folks! Doing all right?"

The short, dumpy man in serge stared at him mournfully. "All right, he asks! *Aiee*, such a question! I know one thing, Captain Corrigan. There's a fortune waiting for the man who opens the first

tourist-rest here in the desert. Millions! Such saddle-boils I got—*aiee!*”

“You’ll live, Gebhardt,” grinned Tom. “How about you, Reverend? You all right?”

Eagle eyes glared at him affectionately from under jungled eyebrows. “‘The Lord is my strength,’” answered the scarecrow in rusty black, “‘and my salvation. In Him shall I place my trust.’ Verily, Brother Tom, all is well with me and mine. Can you say the same for your soul?”

“You should know,” grinned Long Tom. “You’ve been trying to save it for years.” He meant no offense; the tall preacher took none. They knew each other, these two. But then, everyone on Mars knew “Salvation” Smith, the lean-jawed missionary of the waste-lands. “We pitch camp in a few minutes. See you later.”

He passed on, pausing to exchange a greeting with big Djan Kaldren, the miner, Kaldren’s wife Marta, and their two youngsters, Michel and Lisa. They were undemonstrative, but Long Tom knew that in their own slow-moving, slow-thinking way they were glad to see him. Humble folk, they felt out of place in this cavalcade; they would be more at home after they were settled in a neat miner’s cottage at the corporation digs in Sandy City, along with others of their kind.

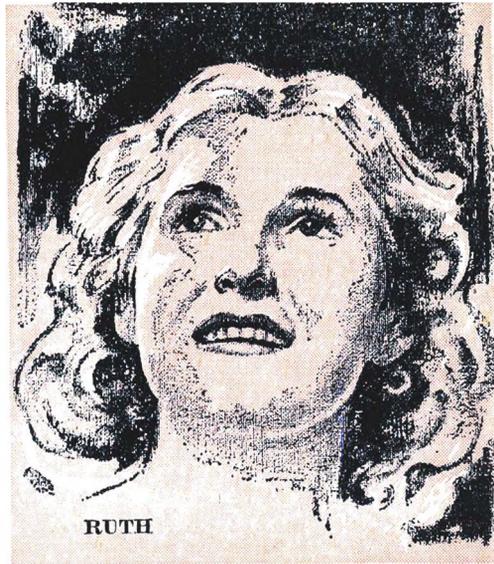
In contrast to their polite semi-silence, he got a noisy greeting from the next group. Burly Mike Murphy, newly become a prospector after years as a blaster on a space-liner, roared at him joyously as he reined up beside them.

“Hey, Cap! You’re just in time to settle an argyment. Sandoni, here, says I’m nuts to go prospectin’. Says that when his damn’ union gits organized on Mars, the corporation’ll hafta do all the huntin’, an’ we’ll git paid to sit down all day. I say he’s nuts. Whadda you say?”

“The same,” said Long Tom frankly. He stared at the swarthy man. “So that’s why you’re going to Sandy City, eh, Sandoni? To stir up trouble amongst the miners? Watch your step, fella!”

SANDONI’S laugh was more of a sneer. “Oh, another company man, eh? You don’t believe in unions?”

“In unions, yes. Controlled unions, operated honestly for the mutual benefit of workers and employers alike. Not your kind of outfit. Don’t forget, Sandoni, the corporation made space-flight possible, settled Mars, brought Earth a



new colony and new wealth. The miners of Sandy City are a loyal bunch. Talk too long and loud, and you’ll find trouble riding your coattails.”

“Skip it, pal!” yawned the organizer. “You’re ’way behind the times. When I get done with ’em, they’ll be eating out of my hand.”

“Or,” interpolated the third member of the group, “out of the soup-kitchen. You talk big, Sandoni, but I’ve met your kind before. All wind, no action.” She laughed, and her voice was low-pitched, throaty. She was not, Long Tom thought, bad looking—or wouldn’t be, if she gave herself half a chance. But too-blond hair, lips too ripely crimson, blood-red nails, eyes deeply shadowed with blue, put her under suspicion.

Sandoni made an insulting reply; and Murphy swung toward him threateningly.

“Cut it!” Corrigan gave his mount the knee, eased between the two men. “I’ll have no fighting in this caravan. If you have differences, you’ll have to wait till we reach Sandy City to settle them.”

Sandoni laughed. “I’ll settle with you later, Murphy!” He raked his mount’s flanks angrily; lurched forward. Corrigan turned an impassive face to the girl.

“I hope you’ll allow me to make his apology for him, Miss Milnar. It won’t happen again, believe me.”

The girl’s voice was deep and shaken. “That’s okay, Captain. I guess he was—well, anyway, thanks! And thanks to you, Murphy. You shouldn’t ought to have done it, though.”

Mike Murphy mumbled: “Aw, that’s all right.” Long Tom rode on.

Professor Fallonby greeted him eagerly: "Ah, Captain! I was just about to ride up and ask if we couldn't stop soon. This is a *wonderful* place to make camp. Such subjects for study! I'm particularly anxious to have a closer look at that schist outcropping over there. A most interesting formation—especially in view of Dr. Longworth's theory of diluvian periods in the Early Martian era. Might we—"

"In a few minutes. I'll let Blinky ride over with you. Standing the trip well, Mrs. Barlow? Miss Fallonby?"

Both girls nodded. Long Tom couldn't help thinking that this trek was graced with—if nothing else—lovelier examples of femininity than any other haul ever made across the lorn land. Mrs. Barlow was, as Blinky had declared upon first setting eyes on her, "a whipperingin' hummeroo!" Of course, that was to be expected. Lieutenant Ki Barlow, junior officer of the Sandy City outpost, had been bragging for months about the bride he had left on Earth.

IT was Joan Fallonby, though, who did crazy things to Long Tom's usually sane thought-processes. A slender girl with skin the pale gold of wakening dawn, hair brown as the fruit of the *luublo* tree, with a quietude soft and deep and soothing as the murmur of deep waters on a forgotten sea isle. The kind of woman, Long Tom caught himself thinking, to whom a weary man, worn and drained by activity, might turn for new strength and courage.

She said now, demurely, "We're getting along well, thank you, Captain," and her eyes smiled on him. Ki Barlow's bride was more communicative. She laughed: "You really ought to spend more time with us, Captain Corrigan. We're having so much fun! Mr. Vanderling is awfully amusing."

Long Tom said: "Nothing like laughter to make the journey seem short. That finger of yours better, Vanderling?"

The slender, pale-haired chap said dubiously: "I—I hope so, Captain. It still throbs a little. Dr. Fallonby promised to look at it when we pitch camp. You don't think there's any danger of infection?"

"It'll be all right," said Long Tom impatiently. "Well, we'll pitch camp now, I reckon. Get your sleeping-tins down before dark. Drane, will you help with the cooking?"

The last member of the party nodded somberly, spoke not a word, but rode to

Corrigan's side. They joggled to the fore of the caravan in awkward silence. Drane did not speak, and Long Tom didn't know what to say. He knew, as did all of the others, Drane's reason for joining the caravan.

Four months ago Drane had been Lieutenant Drane, in command of the I.P.S. scoutship *Uranus*, which had crashed into a rogue planetoid nine days out of Io City. Of the crew, every man had perished save Drane, who had been picked up in a life-boat by the mailship *Iris*.

At the court-martial, the whole story had come out. On Drane had fallen the stigma of being the first man in the Interplanetary Service ever to show a yellow streak in the face of danger. Panic-stricken at the moment of impact, the young officer had abandoned his ship, cast off and fled in the only undamaged safety-skiff.

The court had named him a deserter in time of stress, branded him a coward, stripped him of his rocket and given him a suspended sentence—which was worse than a more stringent punishment, for it sent him out to face a sneering world.

Drane, Long Tom knew, would not end his journey at Sandy City. Remote as that outpost was, the story of his cowardice would dog him there. Drane had chosen that city as a "jumping-off place;" from there he would strike out alone into the barren wilderness. With luck, he might find in that desolation wealth enough to buy his way back into a certain stratum of society, a certain kind of friendship. But without luck—well, some day far removed, wondering strangers might find and bury, in grateful anonymity, the remains of ex-Space Lieutenant Howard Drane.

THE last thin arc of the sun clung desperately to the horizon as they reached the head of the column. Blinky spat and swore softly.

"Beginnin' to think you'd got yourself lost, Chief. Scenery purtier back there?" He winked, his leathery face a network of crinkles. "Or wouldn't she give you a tumble?"

"You," said Long Tom shortly, "talk too damn' much. . . . Okay, we flop here. Give the signal."

The caravan wheeled into a tight circle. The languid dromedaries, groaning like weary men, kneeled ponderously, sighed as their loads were lifted, lay quiet, jaws moving endlessly. Dark night crept in from the east. With the

darkness came cold, incredibly bitter. The caravan rested.

"Its period of revolution," said Professor Fallonby, "is seven hours, thirty-nine minutes and fourteen seconds. It is this which causes it to rise in the west and sink in the— Ah, Captain! I was just telling our friends about the lesser satellite Phobos. Perhaps you would—"

"Where's your sleeping-tin?" demanded Long Tom.

"My—er—" Fallonby looked bewildered. "Why, on one of the camels, I suppose. I presumed that—er—you or Blinky would prepare it for me. I—"

"Go get it!" snapped Long Tom. "No—wait a minute! I've got something to say. The rest of you listen too. Get it straight, once and for all:

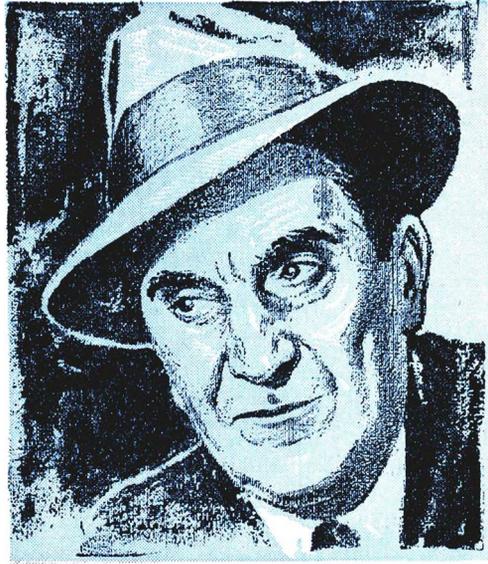
"Blinky Billings and I are your *guides* on this trip, not your nursemaids! For the past two days we've overlooked your little mistakes and pass-the-buck tactics, but that's all over now. From tonight on, every member of this caravan must shoulder his share of responsibility. That includes getting down your own sleeping-tins, washing your own dishes, sheltering your own mount each night. Blinky and I will take care of the pack-camels. . .

"Skip it, Vanderling! If you've got any squawks to make, save 'em till we reach Sandy City. Tell the corporation—and see where it gets you! I know some of you folks are rich, and some of you are talented, and some of you have more brains in your left ear than I have in my whole cranium—but while we're in the desert, you'll do as I say.

ANOTHER thing—this party has been breaking into too many cliques. When I rode along the line this evening, it was more than a half-mile long. And all because of a lot of petty snobbery, jealousy and dislike. Well, from now on, *that's* over too. When we ride tomorrow, we ride in close formation—in the order I designate.

"All right, now, hop to it! Professor, go get your sleeping-tin. And don't give me any argument; I'm not going to ride into Sandy City with a frozen Fellow of the Royal Society in my cargo. Gebhardt, bed your camel down. And make sure the tarp is over his head. Vanderling, get your dirty mess-gear washed and out of sight. The rest of you stay by this heating unit where I can keep an eye on you!"

He moved away from the hypatomic range which served as a heating plant.



The members of the party, startled looks on their faces, stirred to action. One figure, feminine despite the fat, furry night-parka so necessary on Martian evenings, followed him. Ruth Andreisen's voice was amused.

"Well, Mr. Corrigan! The steel hand in the velvet glove, eh? You surprise me."

Corrigan said tightly: "In the future, Miss Andreisen, you will be kind enough to address me as 'Captain' Corrigan. Didn't you hear my orders? That all members of the party are to stay by the range? Now, if you please—"

"I appear," said the girl thoughtfully, "to be making a number of mistakes today. First about Blinky. And now you. Well—" She moved away, stiffly. Her place was taken by another figure, the gangling height of the waste-land missionary.

Long Tom said: "Get back to— Oh, it's you, Padre? Sorry about the blow-off. You weren't included."

Salvation Smith smiled, his breath weaving spirals in the thin, cold air. "Whom the Lord loveth," he said, "He chasteneth." I know, son. They had it coming to them. They're all Earth-lubbers; they don't realize the dangers of this journey. And it is true they've been splitting up into small antagonistic groups. 'Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.' He laid a thickly gloved hand on Corrigan's shoulder. "But now we two are alone. *Why* did you clamp down on them?"

Corrigan hesitated a moment. Then: "Loopies!" he said succinctly.



"Loopies? Here? We're too far south, Tom."

"That's what I thought. But when Blinky took the Professor over to study that rock formation, he found tracks—fresh ones. You know what they look like. Thick ribbons of slime exuded by those colloidal doughnuts as they roll—"

"Proteid, Tom," corrected Smith gently. "Like the Venusian proto-balls. 'God works in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform.' But I never could figure out why He made loopies. Foul-smelling sons of Satan! Do you have any spray-guns?"

"Four."

"I'll take one. And mind you give me a pair of new gloves, too. I got an acid-burn once in West Sacchi, fighting those loopies. Ah, me! 'Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward!' You figure seven more days on the trail, Tom?"

"About that."

"Hard riding."

"Not too hard. And we're not overburdened with rations. Besides, all the plateau springs will be dry this time of year. We'll have to get by on what water we have. Until we reach Mud River, of course."

Smith nodded. "Very good, lad. You may count on me in case of need. I'd better turn in now. Good night, and God rest you."

"Good night, Padre." Corrigan lingered in the semi-darkness for a few more minutes, puffing savagely on a cigarette, lamenting its tastelessness in the thin

air. He flicked the glowing butt away, sought his sleeping-tin in the pile of duff. Despite its seven-foot length, the vacuum-chambered cylinder of beryllium was light. He tucked his sleeping-bag inside the tin, opened the air-vents and set the thermostat. Blinky Billings strolled up beside him, stared at the cylinder lugubriously.

"Aint they the damndest, though? Canned man. We must be nuts, Tom, to wanta live where we hafta sleep in tin cans like them. Damn' things scare me half to death, anyway. I'm alluz 'fraid I aint gonna git the top off some mornin', an' there I'll be, stuck like a sardine without oil."

"Sixty below," said Corrigan, "is cold. Or didn't you know? See any more tracks, Blinky?"

"Nup. But I reckon we oughta keep a watch tonight. Just in case."

"Good idea. You tuck those gallant wayfarers into their beddy-byes; I'll stand the first trick."

Blinky said: "You're leadin' this here expedition. You need your sleep. I'll stand watch."

"You heard what I told them back there? That I'll lay down the law around here? Well, that applies to you too, Blinky. I say I'll stand watch!"

Blinky chewed thoughtfully for a moment, then spat. Then drawled: "Gittin' biggety, huh? An' me old enough to be y'r pop—if you had one? Go to hell, Tom!"

Long Tom grinned. "Comets to you, pal. I'll go to sleep, instead. So long."

BUT he slept lightly; slight noises disturbed him; he woke once, suddenly, to peer through his quartzite face-port and find Blinky missing from before the hypatomic range. Fifteen metal night-cubicles glistened about the unit; the other members of the caravan were all right, then.

But where was Blinky? He rolled his tin, discovered that the noise which had awakened him was the sound of Blinky pegging the tarpaulin down over a restless camel. Blinky waved reassuringly, and Tom closed his eyes. Sometime later he stirred again, this time to hear harsh granules pattering against his tin. A stiff breeze was driving down from the north, bearing with it a sleet of coarse sand. The hypatomic had been turned to half power; it glowed dully in the midst of the sleepers. Blinky had taken refuge in his own tin, which was stand-

ing on its base. As Tom watched, a brief spark reddened and dimmed in the guard's tin. Blinky was awake, then, and enjoying an illicit cigarette. Long Tom murmured drowsily: "Damn' fool! He'll burn himself up—"

Then sleep found him at last, sleep burdened with dreams. He was lost in a cavern somewhere in the Crazy Mountains; a horde of vicious Vegans had traced him to his hide-out, were clamoring, now, to get him. Their thick, leafy faces were contorted with blood-lust; their wooden fingers scraped dryly at the boulder he had rolled before the cavern mouth. Clawing hands made a harsh tattoo in his ears. The sound became louder—louder—

He woke suddenly, fully awake and alarmed. Blinky was pounding on the lid of his tin, hissing through the air-vent: "Tom! Git up, lad! Loopies!"

HE threw open his lid; the pale tawny-ness of dawn struck his eyes; his breath congealed as the warm air of his container was supplanted by the frigid morning breeze. A twist and a wriggle, and he was stamping his feet on the dry ground. Blinky thrust something into his hand—the bulbous nozzle of a spray-gun.

"Thataway. See?"

There were a good dozen of the noisome creatures. Bulging, quasi-circular blobs of grayish matter, smeary with the exudation that enabled them to propel themselves ball-wise over the desert, quivering, astir with a sentience that let them know there was warm life, flesh and blood, in the vicinity. Food!

A neighboring tin opened, and a startled face appeared: Sandoni. His morning-drowsy voice quavered: "What's the matter, Captain?" Other tins opened. From one a figure started to emerge. Ruth Andreisen called: "Captain Corrigan! What are those things—"

"Get back in your tin!" Corrigan put his hand on the girl's head, pushed firmly. "All of you stay where you are. You're perfectly safe in those metal containers. Loopies won't attack metal. No, you *can't* help, Miss Andreisen! You'll help us most by keeping quiet. They're after the camels. —Blinky!"

"Yup, Cap?"

"Get Salvation. Give him a spray-gun—and a pair of gloves. We'll put the run to these babies."

"We got four guns," reminded Blinky.

"Rouse Drane. He's no Earth-lubber."

In a few minutes there were four of them shivering before the hypatomic. The others watched anxiously from the face-ports of their sleeping-tins. Tom gave his orders:

"Split up; we'll each guard a quadrant. They're not smart; they'll probably all attack the same spot. If so, we'll all shift to cover that spot. Use your spray sparingly. It doesn't take much. Just enough to set up the reaction. . . . Okay, let's go!"

Drane said feverishly: "This gun, Captain—it's no good! It's only a water-pistol! I've got a needle-gun in my bag—"

"A needle-gun's worthless against these things; it just destroys cells, and they can rebuild cells instantaneously. These guns spray a pepsinized fluid that acts directly on the protein matter of the loopies. Turns 'em into flaky peptones. You'll find out!"

Long Tom spun away. The camels, sensing danger, were moaning and stirring restlessly; one or two had risen. A hundred yards away, in the quadrant Corrigan had chosen as his own, the loopies were bobbling querulously back and forth as though still uncertain. The rising sun streaked colors of mottled hue on their slimy bodies. Long Tom wasted none of his ammunition. The spray-guns were, as Drane had said, little more than grown-up pressure pistols. Their range was approximately twenty yards; but at that, as any lesser range, they were effective. Tom waited.

The charge came suddenly. As if reaching some obscure telepathic agreement, the entire family of proto-balls wheeled and swung into action at the same time. Their glistening bodies made flapping, sucking noises at the golden sand as they rolled down upon the camel-caravan at a point between Salvation and Tom.

THE two men moved closer together, placed themselves squarely before the now-squealing beasts. The loopies loomed larger, whirling upon their prey greedily. Tom yelled, "*Now!*" and his spray merged with the stream from the preacher's gun to form a greenish barrier mist.

The foremost loopie rolled headlong into the liquid, stopped as though struck with a sledge and tried to roll backward. Great brownish flakes mottled its glistening hide; the flakes spread, grew, ate deeply into the plasm beneath. The ball collapsed soggily like a pricked pan of dough; pale gases steamed upward, and

a rotten, fleshy stench choked Long Tom's nostrils.

The loopies behind rolled on insensately, fell prey, like their leader, to the mist of liquid death. A half-dozen rotted into brown crustation before Salvation and Tom charged forward to account for the remaining three that, dimly aware their attack had failed, had now whisked away at dizzy speed. After one of these, Salvation fired a parting shot; the blob of matter faltered a moment, rocked, then began flaking.

SALVATION clapped Long Tom on the back. "How do you like *that*?" he roared delightedly. "Winged him at thirty yards! Some shot, lad! —Our gracious Lord, look!"

Before their eyes, the wounded loopie was undergoing a strange metamorphosis. Its motion had ceased. It was no longer spherical, but had widened, thickened, broadened, into a crude dumbbell shape. As they watched, the connecting tissue divided; where there had been a single proto-ball, now were two. One whole and healthy one, one in the final stages of dissolution, even now flaking into death.

"Subdivision!" gasped Corrigan. "Well, we might have known. They're nothing but colossal cells. *Drane!*"

For the healthy daughter cell, free now of its scabrous parent, had swung in a swift arc halfway around the camp, was whirling at frightful speed toward the quadrant supposedly guarded by Drane. But Drane's attention had been focused on the other battle; his back was to the charging loopie. Now, at Corrigan's cry, he wheeled, stared dazedly.

"Shoot it! It can't stand the spray! Shoot, damn you!"

Drane's hand squeezed once, wildly. The stream discharged yards from the spinning proto-ball. Then Drane's hand faltered, the gun dropped from nerveless fingers, and he raced to the center of the camp, his face ashen.

And one invader found its quarry! A horrid, almost human scream quavered in the air as a tethered camel strove to escape the rolling death that catapulted upon it. Then slimy pseudopods writhed from the loopie, clutching the beast in a deadly suction; the ball seemed to burst open, spreading and flowing about its prey, sucking it into its gaping maw, ingesting it.

Salvation was at Tom's side as he leaped across the open circle; their two gun-hands raised as one. But even so,

they fired too late. It was Blinky Billings whose spray-gun misted the banqueting monster proteid. For a moment the ugly creature seethed and quivered and flaked sickeningly; then it disintegrated, disclosing beneath it the raw, half-devoured body of what had once been a camel.

Long Tom turned on Drane savagely. "Blast you, man! See what you've done? Lost one of our best pack-camels! For two cents—"

He stopped. Drane's face was sheet-white; his eyes were haunted. His pale lips opened twice before words came. He said: "I—I'm sorry, Captain." He turned abruptly, moved away. His hands were tight knots at his side.

Long Tom gazed distastefully at the half-ingested body of the camel, at the puddles of slime rimming the northern arc of the camp-site. He said: "I think we'll move on a few miles before we eat, Blinky. Breakfast in these surroundings—"

Blinky scratched his head.

"Well, what about it?" he demanded. "It's breakfast-time, aint it? Okay, then, let's eat. Cripes, don't tell me you got a weak stummick?"

LONG TOM grunted: "And of course it had to be *that* camel!"

"Huh? What diff'rence does it make?" Blinky looked again, whistled softly. "Hey, one o' the grub-packers! That aint so good, Tom. About a quarter of our supplies is ruint. Whaddya think we better do? Turn back?"

"We'll eat light," said Corrigan grimly, "and keep going. All right, everyone —hike! On your toes!"

The distant sun scorched the high plateau with merciless beams. Flesh parched beneath its burning impact, tanned to coarse-grained leather beneath the constant bombardment of unshielded ultraviolets. The dunes danced in a gold haze; breathing was a strenuous effort. But Long Tom Corrigan held doggedly to his course.

He did not show by word, action or expression the disappointment he had just experienced. For ten hours he had been promising himself that when the caravan reached Yawning Springs, he would halt the procession, rest the camels and let the travelers drink their fill of fresh cold water.

Now Yawning Springs was on their right, gliding by them unnoticed, unrecognized by all save himself, Salvation

MARTIAN CARAVAN

Smith and Blinky. Tom dared not meet their eyes. There was no reason to stop. A few cacti wilted dispiritedly where months ago had been, where weeks hence would again be, a pool of crystal water. Now there was nothing.

There was movement from the close-packed company behind him. A jaded camel, spume-lipped and gummy of mouth, bobbed to his side. Mark Sandoni's face was blistered, raw; his voice was cracked and shrill with hysteria.

"Corrigan, for *God's* sake!"

Long Tom said mechanically: "You have been ordered to keep your place in line, Sandoni. Get back where you belong."

"I won't. You can't make me. You can't drive us like this, Corrigan. We're men, human beings—not animals! Do you realize we've been traveling for three days on short rations, at forced speed, with only a few mouthfuls of water apiece to—"

"I realize," said Long Tom tightly, "all that and more. Get back to your place!"

He turned his camel's head. The move was meant to force Sandoni's mount about, but the once dapper labor-leader was now a frayed bundle of nerves. Into the movement he read some menace; with a shrill squeal he dug heels into his animal's flanks, jolted the weaving beast forward. It plunged away from the caravan blindly, wildly.

Corrigan cried: "Look out! You damned fool, be—"

He spoke too late. At that instant the weary camel stumbled, plunged forward, fell, spilling its rider to the hot sands. Corrigan cursed. The camel's foreleg had disappeared into a dull, lack-luster pock-mark. Even now, as Sandoni screamed and scabbled out of danger in desperate, crablike fashion, the dead patch stirred to slumberous life, widened and spread, disclosed itself as the trap it was.

THE camel snorted, its breath thick and bubbling. It kicked viciously, trying to drag its foreleg from the treacherous sands, but each motion served to drag it deeper. It bellowed then, toppling forward into an ever-widening hole, feeling death upon it.

Corrigan drew his gun from its saddle holster. He cried, "Stand clear, Sandoni!"—and fired. The camel ceased its struggles. Its ungainly body continued to ease slowly into the sandy trap; crimson stained the dull gold of the desert.

They stopped fifty yards beyond,

waited for Sandoni to rejoin them. His face was green beneath its coat of crimson burn. He babbled: "A silicoid, Captain! A silicoid! My camel—"

"Now you know," said Corrigan, "why I lead the caravan. You haven't done much to improve conditions, Sandoni. Blinky, what can we spare most?"

"Not the grub," said Blinky ruefully, "or the water. There's a load of merchandise for the Armand Company, a load of tools and equipment for the mines, charts and instruments for the Sandy City observatory—"

"Cache that. It's Government equipment; we'll pick it up the next time. And if you lose *this* camel, Sandoni, by God, you'll *walk* to Sandy City!"

The man said defiantly: "I don't want to go to Sandy City! Not enough to die on the way there. This is the last straw. We're tired and sick and hungry. The way we're going, none of us will live to reach there. I want to turn back to Mars Central. I want to—"

"That will do. Unload the camel, Blinky."

PROFESSOR FALLONBY coughed, spoke: "Perhaps—hmmm—he's right, Captain Corrigan. I think many of us feel the trip is becoming too troublesome. Perhaps we *could* turn back?"

Long Tom stared at him somberly, studied the faces of the other voyagers in turn. He said slowly: "So that's the way you feel about it? Well—you know the law of the desert. The guide bows before the majority vote. We'll have a show of hands. But—wait a minute! Before you make your choice—"

He scratched a rough sketch of their route into the sands before him. "There's Mars Central, where we started from; here's Sandy City, north and west of us on the shore of Lake Dawes. And here *we* are—five hundred miles west of Mars Central, five hundred from Sandy City.

"You've swum half the ocean; now you've decided that you can't make it, and you want to turn back. It's going to be just as hard either way. If we return, we've got to retravel the country we've just passed through. You know what that's been like. Bleak, desolate, not a drop of water anywhere.

"If we go forward—by tomorrow night we should be on the banks of Mud River. The terrain there is no better. But at least we'll have water again. So—" He shrugged. "It's up to you. Well, Sandoni, do you still want to go back?"

"Yes. At least we know what we have to go through. Anything may lie before us. You said yourself—"

"Vote," said Corrigan; "don't preach. Well, Salvation?"

"I have chosen my path," said the grizzled missionary gravely; "henceforth will I cleave to it." Let's go on to Sandy City, Tom."

"Murphy?"

"Whatever you say's good enough for me, Cap." The space-man glanced at the girl beside him. "An' for Miss Milnar, too."

"Good. Vanderling? Gebhardt?"

"I'm sick, Captain," complained the blond socialite Vanderling. "I need attention and medical care. I can't get it in Sandy City."

GEBHARDT said: "I'm with you, Captain."

"One for; one against. Professor?"

"My daughter and I," said Fallonby, "would prefer to return."

The temptation hovered on Corrigan's lips to demand that the girl be allowed to speak for herself. But his eyes met hers and found them blankly obedient to her parent's wish. He nodded curtly, angry and dissatisfied. "Kaldren, the trip is hardest for you and your family because of your wife and youngsters. What would you like to do?"

Djan Kaldren said slowly: "There is work waiting in Sandy City, Captain. For happiness, a little discomfort now we can stand. We will go on."

Long Tom looked at Ruth Andreisen. Her once petal-like skin was now browned by the sun, coarsened by the whiplash of flying sands; her eyes were dark with fatigue. But she met his gaze unwaveringly. "I signed up to go to Sandy City, Captain Corrigan. I expect to go there."

That was enough. Long Tom did not even need the superfluous votes of Mrs. Barlow and Howard Drane. His jaw set. "You've heard the vote. You may all rest for a few minutes till we cache the instruments. And then—we go on!"

On and on. The blazing sun beat down upon them until dusk, its downpouring like the pressure of a massive fist. Then it sank sullenly behind the sand-dunes, and a cold wind stirred from the north, bringing with it a howling gale-lashed sandstorm. Supper, such as it was, had to be delayed four hours. The members of the party ate, finally, huddled about the cheering warmth of the hypatomic range. Then they sought their sleeping-

tins. Salvation and Mike Murphy volunteered to stand watch.

In the morning a mouthful of water, flat and tasting of the metal that contained it—but wet. Reduced rations. Then on again, with the sun at their backs, the grating sand ever before them, about them, engulfing them in a dull silence of red waste.

On and on. And evening again, and the red of evening striped against the red of the desert; the red lowering into darkness, the tiny dot of Deimos rising to remain for its allotted three-day reign of the skies, dim satellite that ran its course sluggishly, while lesser Phobos hurtled thrice daily around the planet. And the shadows deepened. Blinky looked at his leader worriedly.

"We oughta be there by now, Tom! It's gettin' dark; I can't see a damn' thing I remember in this lousy desert. We couldn't be lost, could we? We couldn't of got off onto the wrong trail?"

"We could," said Tom. "But *this* couldn't." He tapped his wrist-compass. "We must be near there now, Blinky. Keep looking— *There!*"

He himself did not realize, until he shouted aloud, the full extent of the strain under which he had been riding. But the word that burst from his lips was like a prayer of thanksgiving.

Before them the red desert sheered away sharply into a ribbon of green. Mud River! Water, life, the last lap of their tortured trip. Salvation Smith bared his head; in a sonorous voice he proclaimed: "I have looked on the waters of Canaan, O Lord, and found them sweet."

"We'll go on," said Long Tom Corrigan. "We'll camp by the river tonight."

THE campfire spluttered cheerfully. A real *fire* of driftwood—not one of your ranges fueled with atomic energy. The camels munched their cuds gravely at the perimeter of the camp circle; about the campfire the travelers lounged, comfortably replete with food and drink, confident, now, that they would win through.

All but one. One member of the party was at Tom's side as he stood at the river shelf, staring out across that sluggish sea of mud into a sky bright-spangled with pinpricks of light. South of the pole star, green-shining and beckoning, was another that tormented Long Tom with a strange, nostalgic urge.

"Look," he said. "Earth! From forty million miles away it sends its message

of cheer and good will. Sometimes I wonder why I ever left. Men are fools, aren't they?"

Her face, rimmed by the deep, furry parka-hood, was a white mist in the moonlight. She said quietly: "Are they, Captain?"

"You know they are." His voice was gruff; the citadel of reason toppled suddenly before the onslaught of illusion. "If they weren't, would I be standing here without—" He seized her suddenly, whirled her to face him. "Joan—" he said. "Joan—"

Her lips were cool against his, cool and yielding and quieting.

He said: "Joan, listen to me. I've never met a girl like you before. Perhaps I haven't looked; I don't know. All my life I've been a seeker, a voyager, an adventurer—"

She said, strangely: "You need so little, Captain."

"So little? I don't understand. What do you mean? Joan, I need you."

"Do you?" she said. "I wonder! Shall we—shall we go back to camp, Captain?"

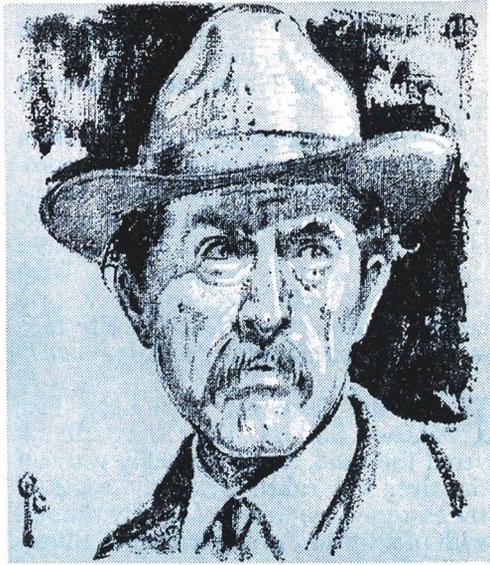
Blinky Billings, amiable again, now that his belly was silenced and his cheeks stuffed with cut-plug, was regaling the voyagers with wisdom culled from years of wasteland wandering.

"And don't judge that there river," he say saying, "by the way it looks on top. Mud River, they calls it, an' a mud river it is. That there crust on the surface is so thick, some times o' year, you can almost walk on it. But that's just from the silt an' loess blowed in by the sirocco. Underneath the water's clear as—as—well, it's clear. An' it's travelin' faster than any river you ever seed or heard of. Fifty mile an hour, some calc'late; sixty, others say."

Professor Fallonby said: "But if that's true, Billings, why—er—why don't we make the last stage of our journey by boat? With a current like that."

"Puffessor!" Blinky spat disgustedly into the fire; a kindling twig hissed reproof. "I'm s'prised at you! Why, because for one thing we aint got no boats. For another, they aint no boat made which would stand the beatin' that mud river would give it. Only thing'd do any good in there'd be a submarine. Which some day the Gov'ment 'll use, I expect, to make the river naveegable."

"Don't laugh, Gebhardt. That aint as ridiculous as it sounds. When I fust come to Mars, twenty-odd years ago,



folks was laughin' at the ideer there'd be a monorail transport from Mars Central to New Chicago. But they got it now, aint they? Anything can be done, an' Earth's engineers 'll do it. Just you see!

"Hey, Kaldren. Heave me another hunk o' wood; the durn' fire's going out. Ooops! That's it. Now, we'll—"

His chatter died suddenly. His eyes narrowed. He turned swiftly. "Chief—"

But Corrigan had already glimpsed the "branch" Kaldren had tossed the guide. So had Salvation. Both of them stepped forward. Salvation flung the thing into the flames; Corrigan said swiftly: "Well, folks, getting late! Guess we all had better turn in. Let's go, everybody—"

But Mrs. Barlow had seen the thing too. Now her voice raised in a startled little shriek. "That branch! It didn't look like a branch at all, Captain. It— it had fingers. It looked like an arm!"

Long Tom decided. He faced the travelers squarely, said in an emotionless voice: "Very well. I guess you ought to know the truth. Mrs. Barlow was more nearly right than she thinks. It *was* an arm. The arm of a Vegan."

A few faces remained blank. Sandoni quavered: "A Vegan, Captain? What's that?"

"It's danger," said Long Tom gravely, "in its worst form. Native outlanders of the desert country. Monstrosities devised by an outraged nature. Half animal, half vegetable. That's why they're called, 'Vegans.' They're manlike in form, thought, habit; vegetable in the

fact that their bodies are covered with a tough, thick cambium."

"And that—that arm, or whatever it is?"

"Means there must be a colony of them somewhere in the vicinity. They reproduce by abscission and budding. In the breeding season they haunt the river margins in search of food. In time of need they can extract sustenance from damp soil, but—" He hesitated, then proceeded grimly: "But their favorite food is meat; their favorite meat is—*man!*"

IT was not dawn yet when Long Tom awakened Billings. Hoar frost still silvered the sand, and the muddy crust of the river was caked hard; the edges of the eastern dune were but faintly rimmed with promise of the day to come. Blinky yawned once, prodigiously, then snapped into full awareness.

"Oh, you, Tom! Whazzup? 'Smatter? Vegans?"

"Everything's all right. Hasn't been a sign of 'em all night. But that doesn't mean they're not around. They've just missed seeing us so far, that's all. Come on, guy, get out of your capsule. We've got to get going."

"Where to?" Blinky climbed from his sleeping-tin obediently, strode to the fire and chafed his hands over its blaze.

"Remember Old Fort Wade? It's only about eighteen miles north of here. If we can get there—"

"Have you slipped your gravs, Tom? There aint nobody there. The place is deserted, fallin' to pieces. Since it was wiped out in the Upland Rebellion—"

"I know all that." Impatiently. "But it still has walls. And even broken gates are easier to defend than wide open spaces. Come on, get going!"

"It might not," said Blinky hopefully, "be necessary to guard nothin'. They might not ever see us."

For a while it seemed his optimism was justified. The caravan creaked into motion; refreshed camels moved at a brisk speed, and they followed the river on its northward course, entertained by the diurnal miracle of freezing-thawing that characterizes Martian bodies of water.

It was not until the old outpost was almost within sight that the alarm was given. Blinky Billings, guarding the van, loosed a wild halloo.

"Tom! There's a handful of 'em!"

Corrigan swung to Salvation.

"Take the lead, Padre! Murphy, come with me! And you, Kaldren. Got those

flame-pistols I gave you last night? Come on, Blinky—" As the older man galloped up: "They may be all alone. We've got to wipe them out before they get back to their tribe and tell them—"

But the effort was in vain. The Vegans, having spotted the earthlings, had already turned and were racing toward the river base, where presumably the rest of their clan was encamped. After a short pursuit, Corrigan reined up.

"No use," he gritted. "They can run like the wind. Faster than these camels. Their light weight, and this gravity— Well, we'd better get back to the caravan. And quick."

Kaldren asked stolidly: "It means what, Captain?"

"It means that we can expect an attack. We'll dig in. And you, Blinky—you've got to ride into Sandy City."

Blinky coughed on his chaw.

"Me? Me!"

"You're the only man besides myself," said Corrigan, "who can do forty-eight hours in the saddle without falling apart. And that's what it means. Two full days' run. To get help! The rest of us," he added slowly, "will hold the fort until you get back with aid—I hope."

Blinky said: "Tom, I aint gonna do it! You an' me been buddies a long time. I aint never run out on a fight yet. I aint—"

"Fifteen lives!" said Tom. "Fifteen lives depend on your bringing help. That should be fight enough for any man. See, there's the fort now. We'll pack you light, Blinky, on the swiftest camel."

THUS it was that an hour later Long Tom addressed a group from which his old friend and lieutenant was missing.

"You see these walls around you. They're damaged; the gates are worn. But they're the only things between us and the afterworld. We've got to hold this fort for four days—till Blinky gets to Sandy City and brings back help. Padre, you've been working on the worst sections. Can you make them hold?"

"With the help of the Lord," said Salvation tightly, "and with a flame-pistol—they'll hold!"

Long Tom turned to Corrigan.

"Murphy, the gate? I noticed the lock-bars were all broken."

Murphy grinned. "That Kaldren's a genius. He took a rafter outa the old store-shed an' is planin' it down to make a new cross-bar. It'll hold. Besides, now you can study astronomy while—"

"That'll do," said Long Tom hastily. "Now, remember—these creatures don't die as easily as the loopies. Their 'skin' is made of layer upon layer of cork cambium; it burns, but not instantly. You have literally to bathe them in the flame of your pistol.

"And they're fighters to the last ditch. Make sure you've killed one before you turn your back on him. Don't try to use an ordinary bullet gun unless you're a crack shot. The only vulnerable spot is between the eyes, dead center to the brain. And in the last resort—" He grimaced. "They're half wood. Axes, swords, anything sharp.

"Well, that's all I have to say. They're likely to plan a night attack; they see as well in the dark as in the light, and cold doesn't bother them. So I expect every single man to stand guard tonight. The women and children will stay in the old officers' quarters."

HE turned away. Two people were at his side instantly. Each started to speak, paused, waiting for the other.

"Well, what is it?" snapped Corrigan.

Ruth Andreisen spoke for both. "We don't want to sit around idly while the men are working. Isn't there something we can do?"

"Together?" he said—and immediately bit his lip. Amazement had trapped him, amazement that the spoiled, wealthy brat could thus deliberately team up with a girl as obvious as Flossie Milner. Then he stammered: "I mean— Why, yes, of course. Get the first-aid equipment out of the packs, set up a sort of field hospital. We may need it—"

Flossie Milner turned away without a word. Ruth Andreisen lingered a moment, her eyes flaming, her voice cold.

"As a private in your army, *Captain Corrigan*," she flared, "I have no right to question anything you do or say. But as a *woman*—"

Her fingermarks burned white against the heavy tan of his cheeks long after she had moved away.

Just before nightfall, Salvation thought he glimpsed dark figures in the shallows of the river margin which sloped down from the east side of the fort. But by the time Corrigan reached his side, there was nothing to be seen but a slow, steamy haze, filming the mud-clotted waters, nothing to be heard but the thick suck of mud stirring sluggishly.

"It may be they, though," said Long Tom. "They're probably waiting till it's

completely dark. All you men know your stations?"

He had placed his three most dependable men in the three strategic corners of the fort; he himself watched the southeast corner, that which abutted the river bank. Murphy, Smith and Kaldren held the other three positions. The fort being roughly oblong, there were stations for two others on the east and west sides. Between Murphy and Kaldren watched Herman Gebhardt and young Michel, who insisted on holding the place next his father. Sandoni and Fallonby took their posts between Long Tom and Salvation; Vanderling was stationed at the south side; Drane had erected his sleeping-tin in the center of the north wall.

The sleeping-tins would be necessary sentry-boxes, once night fell, and the bitter cold swept in. Corrigan's orders were clear: alternate watches were to be stood at three-hour intervals. At the first sign of danger, all would be roused. Below the ramparts, in the buildings, the women had arranged their nocturnal vigil; throughout the night, one or another of them would be awake, keeping hot tea on the range, standing by to wake the others if necessary.

Dusk lingered, casting weird shadows across the thick *sudd* which caked the waters of Mud River. Even knowing, as he did, that beneath that slow-moving crust was a turbulent river boiling its ferocious way down to Lake Dawes, Long Tom found it hard to believe. The river-crust moved with almost glacial slowness; in a few hours it would be a thick sludge of frozen mud. Yet beneath, the water surged on violently in a frothing channel.

"Tom!"

That was Murphy, calling his name softly. Long Tom moved from his post, glided past Vanderling, who had already sought the warmth of his sleeping-tin, to the ex-space-man's side. "Yes?"

"Over there. Is it shadows, or—"

DARKNESS was complete. Phobos was gone from the sky; Diemos was little more than a first-magnitude star. It might, or might not be, a shadow. Corrigan's cheeks felt the tense, tight tingling of excitement. He said: "There's one sure way to find out!"

He whipped the heat-gun from his belt; his fingers tightened on its trigger. A thin, ruddy streamer mushroomed from its nozzle, spanned the black depths below, sought and found a victim. Light

blossomed; a thin and reedy voice rang shrill with pain. Something glowed, something that turned and tried to run, but Corrigan's heat-beam followed the fleeing Vegan inexorably. There came a moment of brief, coruscating flame, the sound of snapping twigs, a convulsive moment and a crackling light.

"Gawd!" said Murphy awedly. "They burn like rotten firewood!"

"If you can keep the beam on them," reminded Corrigan tightly. "There'll be more. Wake the others!"

But that matter was already being taken care of. Salvation Smith's booming voice was enough to rouse the drowsiest sluggard. "'Wake and gird, O sons of Israel!'" he bellowed. "'For come is the hour of thy trial! Tom, lad! The things have surrounded us!'"

AS if his words had been a signal, came the attack. Grating voices cried out from the river margin below, from the wall bases on either side of the fort. From every side, scudding figures were approaching the fort. Reedy cries of pain and fury answered the flames that spat from the guns of the defenders; crude missiles sang through the air to splatter harmlessly about those within the fort.

Long Tom cried out uproariously. "Give 'em plenty of heat! They can't do us any harm at a distance. They're nothing but savages. They don't have any weapons except their fingers—"

He didn't add what he and Blinky and Salvation knew—that in close hand-to-hand conflict, there could be only one end to a fight between an earthling and a Vegan. In those gnarled, semi-wooden hands there was prodigious strength, and deadly, clawing force.

He found himself wondering, briefly, about Blinky. Had he won through? Or had the Vegans found his trail, dragged him off his camel, taken him to one of their camps?

There was no time to think of that now, though. It was fighting time. The shouts of his companions added to the roaring bedlam. From beside him, the weak voice of Vanderling: "Captain—I'm wounded! Oh! My—" Silence. A steady, almost exuberant singsong chant from Salvation's post. "'Who is this King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty. The Lord mighty in battle. He is the King of Glory!' *Aaah!*" A desperate wail from the far end of the fort. "Captain! Captain Corrigan! They've broken through the split wall—"

Corrigan rapped to Fallonby on his left: "Move over here! Hold this position. Sandoni, fill in Salvation's place. Padre, come on! They need us over there!"

He raced toward the once-repaired, but now-again-ruptured vent in the wall which Murphy and Gebhardt had been defending. He paused but once when a hand found his shoulder, and Howard Drane's parka-rimmed face stared into his desperately.

"Captain Corrigan. Listen—"

Corrigan's patience snapped.

"Back to your post, you!" he gritted. "And try to fight like a man!"

He plunged on. Gebhardt had not cried out needlessly. Two uprights had been ripped by main force from the damaged west wall; through this the leafy-faced, skeletal-armed invaders were writhing. A dozen of their number were charred and smoking shards of ruin about the opening, but the others continued to sieve through. He opened fire even as he ran—then stopped, cursing. He saw, now, why Murphy's and Gebhardt's defense had been futile; the heat-ray that destroyed the Vegans also scorched greater the hole through which they entered!

He thrust his heat-gun back into his pocket, seized his automatic instead. With uncanny deadliness he accounted for two of the three who had already wriggled through the torn wall; his third bullet thudded futilely into the corky chest of a Vegan.

THE Vegan's scaly face split in a grimace of unholy delight. Swift feet scraped dryly against flooring as he raced toward Murphy. The big Irishman roared angry bewilderment, hesitated. Long Tom yelled: "Run, Murph! Don't let him get near you—"

His arm raised—then lowered. Flying figures burst from the door of the women's refuge; blonde hair spilled from a parka hood as a slim figure raced toward Murphy. A heavier figure moved directly into the charging Vegan's path; an arm raised, cold starlight glinted on keen death. There was one sodden, splitting sound. The Vegan stumbled, sprawled grotesquely on the charred flooring, a gaping rent cleaving its leafy head from pate to throat.

Mrs. Kaldren grinned at Corrigan.

"Is like splitting wood, no?" she said. "Now I am glad I am splitting wood so often when I was a girl on the farm."

MARTIAN CARAVAN

The heavy cleaver was balanced like a feather in her broad, work-calloused hand. Ruth Andreisen was at her side, Mrs. Barlow, Flossie, Joan. The cajoling feminine note had left the heiress' voice; there was a fighting timbre in her words.

"You men get back to your posts. We'll hold this opening!"

Cold steel, thought Long Tom! Cold steel and brave women. Murphy was tugging at his arm.

"They're right, Cap. If it hadn't of been for Flossie—"

Tom nodded, raced back to his own post. Parka-clad figures clustered menacingly about the one vulnerable spot in the entire fort; sharp steel took its toll of the dwindling numbers who tried to force that pass. And from the outer positions, cherry-hued flames burned a ring of death through the futile, screaming besiegers.

SO, all the long night, they staved off sporadic attacks. But with growing confidence as the hours waned, as Earth, the evening star, dipped lower on the horizon and disappeared, as the unchanging constellations wheeled their majestic way across the purple-black vault of heaven. And in the drab shadows of dawn, the Vegans disappeared.

Hollow-eyed from want of sleep, Long Tom Corrigan made a check-up of his puny garrison.

Professor Fallonby had passed out cold. The night's strenuous activities had proved too much for his years, his diminished strength. But his condition was safe enough. A good sleep, and he would be sound again.

Flossie Milnar looked the worse for wear, with bandages criss-crossing her cheeks and forehead. She flushed at Long Tom's anxious question. "My own dumbness, Captain. I let one of them Vegans get too near me before I bopped him. Those fingers of his'n—it's like running into a brier-patch." She grinned ruefully. "Pretty this way, aint I?"

It was on Corrigan's lips to tell her that, strangely enough, she was. Soap and water had been a preliminary stage of her first-aid treatment; the hectic flush of rouge was missing from her cheeks; her mouth was no longer a vivid scarlet slash across her face. The natural shape of her lips, noted Long Tom with mild wonderment, was soft instead of hard, warm instead of cynical, challenging.

But he said nothing. He turned, instead, to Michel Kaldren. The fourteen-

year-old youngster proudly exhibited a thumb voluminously shrouded in gauze.

"Burnt it, I did, Captain. Me, I'm a—a casualty of war, huh?"

"You are indeed," said Long Tom gravely. "And a mighty good soldier too, Michel. But if there's any more fighting, you'd better stay down here. With a hand like that, you don't want to take any chances."

"Down here? With the women?" The boy snorted disdainfully. "Not me, Captain. Anyhow, I can shoot with the other hand. Ask Pop. I'm a good shot, and I'm—I'm amphibious!"

Vanderling lay mutely on a pallet at the far side of the sick-bay. As Corrigan approached, Joan Fallonby straightened, motioned for silence. Long Tom felt a swift pang of fear shoot through him. He whispered: "It's serious? I didn't know. I thought—"

Her voice was low and accusing. "We should have turned back, Captain Corrigan. Father and 'Gene both wanted to. You wouldn't let us."

Long Tom said wonderingly: "But how did he get hurt? They don't have any weapons to amount to anything. He wasn't near enough to—"

"They have slings. There's a dreadful gash in his scalp, just above the temple. A few inches lower, and—" She shuddered. "Now if you'll please go away and leave me with my patient—"

Long Tom left, abashed. Salvation Smith's eyes glinted scornfully toward Vanderling's cot as Corrigan joined him. "You've been seeing our casualty, Tom? Did you see his wound?"

"It's bad, isn't it? Joan says—"

"IT would keep a rheumatic grandmother in her bed," growled Salvation, "two and a half minutes. You put iodine on bumps like that and forget them. 'Thou makest the coward to grovel, O Lord, and the weakling to quail—' Oh, well! 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit—'"

"—the girl," said Corrigan bitterly.

Salvation stared at him.

"Eh, son? What say?"

"Nothing. Skip it. Where—" Long Tom glanced up curiously. "Where's Drane?"

"Haven't seen him. Probably still in his sleeping-tin. Ahoy, up there! Sandoni! Kaldren! Is Drane in his tin?"

There was a moment's bustle on the rampart walk. Then Kaldren's slow voice, now slower still with wonderment:

"No, Father. He's not up here. He's gone, and—and so is his sleeping-tin!"

Long Tom cried: "The damned fool! The damned yellow fool! He must have been crazy! He—" And the wasteland preacher's hand moved in the sign of the cross before him as he intoned: "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust—"

"What's that for?"

"For his immortal soul, my son. He is dead by now. He was a coward; he feared death, and in seeking life surely died. I fed the camels this morning. There were none missing. Can you imagine what would happen to a man who tried to escape across this desert, walking? Carrying a night-tin? May God have mercy on his soul. . . . What's that?"

Corrigan's ears had caught the sound at the same moment. Without a word, he led the way to the lookout, found confirmation for his hunch.

"Vegans! Ten times as many of them. They've gotten their whole damned clan together; decided to wipe us out!"

"But—but in the daytime? I thought surely we were safe enough till tonight. They never attack in the daytime!"

"Maybe they don't," said Long Tom grimly, "but this doesn't look like a reception committee coming toward us. All men to your posts! Vegans!"

WEARINESS evaporated in the face of renewed danger. While the horde Tom had seen and heard moved closer, began to circle warily, at a distance, about the decrepit fort, the others took their positions about the walls. Holes gaped in the defense line: the posts of Fallonby, Drane, Vanderling. Corrigan sought the hospital room, strode to the side of Vanderling's cot.

"Get up! Get up and stop whimpering like a spoiled kid! This is the showdown; we need every man and woman!"

"But my head, Captain! It's—"

"Fight now," said Corrigan harshly, "or be a meal for the Vegans. Take your choice, Vanderling!"

Joan Fallonby thrust herself between them, and raised cool, unfrightened eyes. "You can see he's in no condition to fight, Captain. I'll take his place."

"You'd make a better soldier," Tom said, "at that. Come along, then."

He led the way to the position between his own and that maintained by Murphy. But there was already someone in that deserted post: Ruth Andreisen. She had dressed hastily; her hair was jammed beneath a crude mob-cap; her slim shoul-

ders sagged beneath the weight of two bulky cartridge belts. There was a light of combat in her eyes. She spoke directly, abruptly, to Joan Fallonby.

"I'm filling this post. They'll need you below."

Corrigan opened his mouth to protest—then closed it again. For without a word Joan Fallonby had accepted the gambit, turned on her heel and was returning to the hospital. Ruth Andreisen laughed in his face, harshly.

"You continue to amaze me, *Captain* Corrigan. It's obvious how you feel about her. But I never thought you'd allow her to expose herself to a potentially dangerous position."

Corrigan snapped: "Nor will I let you! This is no place for a spoiled brat. Get below where you belong!"

Ruth Andreisen said coldly: "This *is* where I belong. A spoiled brat—you and Blinky agree on that. But I happen to be, also, the Women's Eastern Rifle Champion. Maybe your soft-mouthed light-o'-love can match *that*?"

Corrigan turned away. He felt a dull, thwarted anger within him, but it was not altogether anger. It was something else, a rankling sense of uncertainty. He had been mistaken about this girl. And she had made him swallow his mistakes.

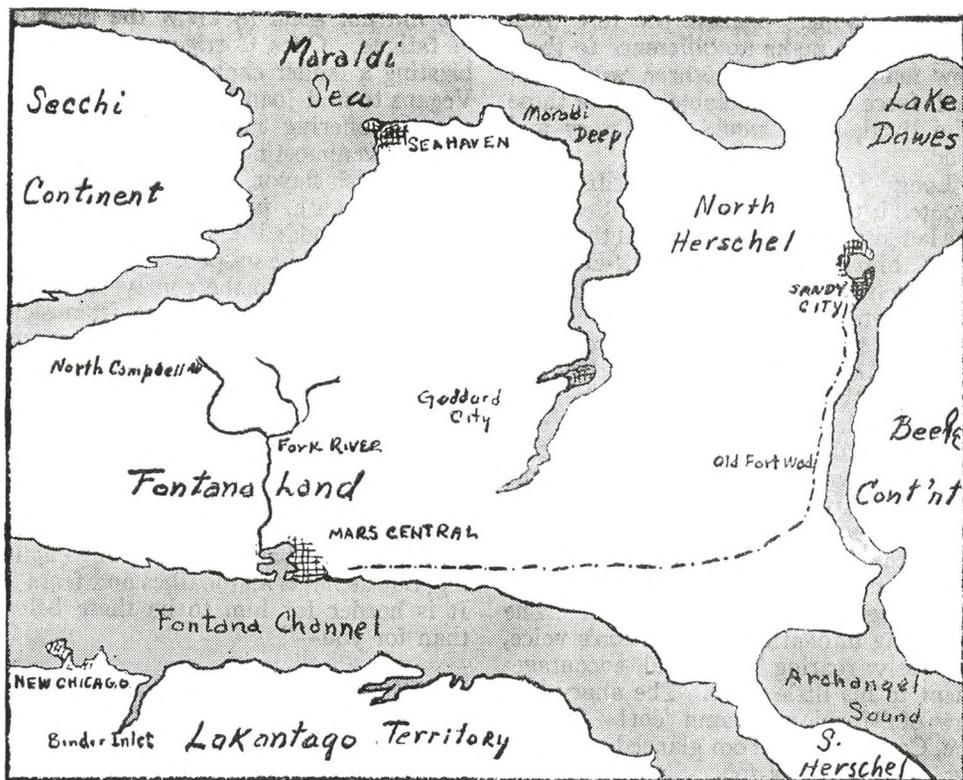
Then he returned his attention to the advancing host. For it *was* a host, and it *was* advancing. There was something dreadful about this slow, creeping advance. It was not like last night's fruitless charge. That had been a period of high excitement, tense combat. Now there was vengeance as well as hatred and hunger in the Vegans' mien. They had gathered their full strength; come death or destruction to a score or a hundred, this time they would take the fort.

And with that determination, Corrigan knew, this attack would succeed. Not forever could a handful of Earth men and women hold a battered front against creatures whose wooden strength was as great as that of the ramparts against which they flung themselves.

Blinky? That was a wan dream now. Blinky, even if he made a record run to Sandy City, would not reach there before tonight. It would take two more days for help to arrive; one if they had sand-skis. But under heavy siege, this fort could not be held that long.

He spoke to Salvation. "We could use your blessing, Padre."

The grizzled missionary clasped his hands on the barrel of his heat-musket.



His voice was low and vibrant, the only sound in the breathless silence of the fort.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble. Therefore will we not fear—"

From the women's quarters below, a stumbling figure appeared; aged Dr. Fallonby was coming to join his comrades in the last stand. He looked about uncertainly, finally took the place vacated by the runaway Drane.

"There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High—"

Long Tom's eyes sought the river. Its thick crust had thawed again in the burning heat of the sun; the viscous surface glistened oily, and a spout of the fierce waters beneath broke the surface, jetted skyward like a fountain.

"He maketh wars to cease unto the ends of the earth; He breaketh the bow and cutteth the spear in sunder; He burneth the chariot."

Kaldren stood, head bowed, with his hand on his young son's shoulder. Murphy's eyes sought, restlessly, the girl in the courtyard below; Sandoni's swarthy face was immobile but somehow less sneering, more thoughtful. Salvation's voice rose to a clarion pitch.

"The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah!"

"Selah!" echoed Long Tom Corrigan. Herman Gebhardt said: "So be it!"

Then the brown horde was upon them. Afterward, Corrigan had no clear recollection of the opening of that attack. For minutes that seemed to stretch into countless hours, he was conscious of only one thing: Of the weapon in his hands, barrel scorching his fingers, that must be raised, held upon the enemy until at least one small section of sand lay strewn with charred embers, lowered, recharged with fresh ammunition, raised again.

He caught fitful glimpses of those about him. Once he heard an exclamation of pain from the girl beside him, looked in time to see Ruth Andreisen rip a sleeve from her blouse and bind it around her left hand. Before the fingers disappeared under that swaddling blanket of silk, Long Tom saw the livid blisters searing the entire hand where the gun's breech had backfired a painful blast of flame. But she fought on.

The attackers brought with them this time ladders, crude affairs of cross-bars lashed at right angles to single uprights. They broke into little groups; each group concentrated on the task of getting one

of these ladders against the fort wall. It seemed to make no difference to them how many of their brethren were lost; their force was incalculable, and for those who lived, there would be victory and food.

Long Tom adopted a swift plan, shouted it to his companions. "Ray down the ladders!" And twice he did that very thing himself, tumbling swift-climbing Vegans back to earth as flames burned the ladder out from under them.

Below, the women held the once-again-repaired breech as valiantly as they had the night before. And this time even more effectively, because during the morning Kaldren and Mike Murphy had braced it with beams which defied the Vegans' every effort.

Flame and heat from the guns, heat from the burning sun, tumult and the crisp crackle of dying enemies, the labored breathing of those about him. The rumbling intonation of Salvation's voice, endlessly roaring Scriptural encouragement to his little flock. The angry belch of Murphy: "Damn 'em! Winged me, Cap!" Long Tom glanced up swiftly. The burly ex-space-man was standing at his post, glaring with impotent ire at a left arm that dangled helpless from a broken shoulder. At his feet was the sling-hurled rock that had put him out of the fray. As Tom watched, Murphy stooped, smashed the rock viciously into the hate-filled faces below, and winced as the movement rasped a file of pain through him.

DESPERATELY Tom shouted: "Gebhardt! Move into his position!"

But another had heard Mike's shout. Flossie Milnar was already scrambling up the rampart, shoving her ax into Murphy's good right hand, wrenching the heat-gun from him. "Okay, sailor! The Ladies' Aid Society for you! I'll handle this clip-joint!"

And Mike's gun—her gun, now—spat its flame into the horde below. Mike grinned. "Some gal, huh, Cap?" And down he went to take his place beside Marta Kaldren and Mrs. Barlow.

The sun rose higher, burned a red haze before Long Tom's eyes. But there was no respite for him, nor for any of the besieged. Twice he yelled for fresh ammunition; it was brought to him by Kaldren's eleven-year-old daughter. Her face was black with grime, her body bent under the weight of the ammunition-belts; but like the others of her family,

she did not seem to know the meaning of fatigue. Once Corrigan turned from blasting a ladder choked with mounting Vegans to find Joan Fallonby at his side, silently offering him a canteen. The water was almost hot and it had a metallic, brackish flavor, but it moistened his parched mouth, put new strength into him. He nodded his thanks, gulping. "Vanderling?" he gasped.

She motioned to the courtyard below. Vanderling had finally come from sick-bay, and was standing guard over one of the precariously mended gates. His face was pallid, but he was there. Long Tom said: "Anything can happen, can't it? If even that fellow'll fight—"

Joan Fallonby said: "I told you once you didn't understand women, Captain. You don't understand men, either. He's a braver man than you. You love fighting, but he hates and loathes and fears it. It is harder for him to be there below than for you—"

SHE stopped and slipped away. Ruth looked at Corrigan, an impish smirk unsuccessful because her hair had tumbled down about her eyes; her face was scratched and dirty; sweat had streaked a network of white channels down her cheeks and throat.

"And they were such nice ears too, Captain," she mocked.

"What?"

"But that's all right. They look nice pinned back that way." Then she returned to her endless order of fire, reload, fire again.

Thus for what seemed to Long Tom Corrigan hours. The end came suddenly. One moment the battle was in stalemate. The next—

"Captain!"

That was Fallonby's voice, quavering fearfully. Tom glanced up, moved. The enemies' plan of attack had finally achieved success. Somehow, despite the withering fire from above, an entrance had been effected. Fallonby was stumbling backward from his post; where he had stood a moment before, a green-grown, leafy head was thrusting itself upward. Another—another! Barky arms rasped on the ramparts as the Vegans threw themselves up the ladder, over the wall, into the fort itself.

Kaldren and Smith had necessarily turned their fire into the heart of this new threat. But in doing so, they had to stop guarding against the ground crews that strove to erect ladders in *their* positions.

MARTIAN CARAVAN

The first Vegans to gain the fort died beneath a raking cross-fire that smoldered them into oblivion. But for every one who died, there were two more clambering over the wall; for every two who clambered over the wall, there were a dozen others thrusting swift ladders into other positions.

Corrigan bawled: "Drop back! Everyone drop back immediately. To the officers' quarters! You below, there, get out of sight. We'll make a last stand in the building!"

He was the last to leave the rampart. He saw that Ruth Andreisen was down, Gebhardt, Flossie, the Kaldrens and Fallonby. Vanderling, Joan and Mrs. Barlow had already taken refuge in the new position, were hastily shuttering the windows of the old officers' quarters. Long Tom and Salvation gathered up Mrs. Kaldren and her daughter, thrust them before them into the last defense post. Gebhardt threw his weight against the door.

"Wait! Murphy—where is he?"

That was Flossie Milnar. Vanderling said: "In the supply-shed. He went for more ammunition. Here—here he comes now!"

The injured Irishman was racing—if his lumbering pace could be called that—across the flagstoned courtyard. His shoulders were weighted low with ammunition, supplies, canteens. But his motion was as that of a snail compared to the swiftness of the Vegans, who, screaming reedy exultation, were now dropping from the walls like leafy rain, charging across the courtyard toward him.

"He'll never make it!" groaned Salvation. Flossie screamed. Long Tom roared: "If he doesn't, we're sunk! We need those supplies!" He broke for the doorway.

BUT a short, swarthy figure blocked his passage. Mark Sandoni's dour grin had a trace of his old mockery. "Equal rights for all, Captain. You're needed here. This is my job."

They were all witness to the last great madness of Mark Sandoni. He had dropped his rifle; his hairy paws clutched two flaming heat-guns. He waddled through the doorway and called to Murphy.

"This way, sucker. Get the lead out of your pants! I'll hold 'em!"

His rays burned a corridor of death through which the stumbling burden-bearer could plunge toward him, past

which the Vegans dared not advance. He stalked forward on mincing feet, shrewd-eyed, daring, calculating. As Murphy reached his side, he reversed his weapons to keep open the avenue to the shelter.

The Vegans, unable to reach their intended prey, vented their fury on the newcomer who had made his escape possible. With mad squealings they flooded down upon Sandoni, a deluge of ravening woody terror.

The guns in Sandoni's hands were the ruddy balance of life and death; they spat an incessant stream of fire into the attackers. A dozen, two dozen, withered into lifelessness before that flaming stream. The red flames began to move backward as Sandoni retreated toward the door. Long Tom's heart gave a leap.

"He's done it! Murphy, drop that stuff here, and rest, man! Come on, Salvation! If it's a fight they want, we'll give 'em one! Hold on, Sandoni! We'll get you out of there!"

Sandoni's olive features turned toward the building in swift anger.

"Damn it, I say no! Shut the doors! Can't you see—"

THEY could see. Even as he spoke, the heat-gun in his right hand had faded out, its charge exhausted. And from that side the Vegans, twiggy fingers clawing hungrily, were moving in on him. And now the other gun's charge had run its course. Its red beam faded into an orange, to a wan yellow, wavered and disappeared.

"Sandoni! Sandoni!"

That was Mike Murphy. There were unashamed tears on the big Irishman's face, his voice was high and tremulous as that of a girl.

"Sandoni!"

Then they were upon him. Long Tom saw the first woody fingers groping for the laborite's throat, saw the torrent of vengeful Vegans piling upon him like a writhing heap of faggots. He shuddered and turned away.

"Close the door," he said.

It was Djan Kaldren who broke the silence that followed. In a quiet, unimpassioned voice he asked: "How long, Captain? How long you think, before—"

Long Tom said somberly: "It's hard to tell. Maybe hours. Perhaps a whole day. At least we have here a solid building. They can't smoke us out, because they fear flame worse than we do. They can't starve us out, thanks to Mike and

Sandoni. But they know how to use tools when they find them. And there are tools in the supply-shed. They'll break down the walls. And then—"

Salvation said: "There is nothing we can do now but wait—and pray. Blinky, Tom?"

"We'll have to pray a long time." Grimly! "He's almost to Sandy City by now, if he got through at all. But it'll take another two days or so before we can expect help. By that time—"

Murphy said: "We're not going to get two days, Cap. Do you hear what I hear?"

THROUGH the bedlam that howled outside, they heard other noises—the sound of heavy objects being dragged across the courtyard, mutterings among the Vegans, rasping sounds of metal being tested against wood. Long Tom moved to one of the shuttered windows, squinted through a chink. There was someone at his side. Ruth Andreisen said wearily: "Yes, Captain?"

Tom shrugged.

"Taps for us! As I feared, they've found the tools. They're going to dig us out of here while the fever is on them. A tough break for you, sister. You had everything you wanted on Earth. But you came here to find—this."

The girl smiled wanly.

"Must you always be wrong, Captain? I didn't have everything I wanted on Earth. I came to Mars seeking adventure. I found it. And I—I found something else, too."

"Something else?"

"You wouldn't understand. You never do. Anyway, you've gone all calf-eyed over that pale little nincompoop who—Oh, damn you, Captain Corrigan! You're self-satisfied and dictatorial and brave and stupid, and I must be crazy, but—" Her hands were on his cheeks, drawing his face down to hers. Then she thrust him away, and there was something like a sob in her voice. "Isn't it silly, Captain Corrigan? That the thing I found should have been *you*? And that you were too blind to see it while there was still time?"

Corrigan said dazedly: "Ruth! Ruth—"

But she was gone. And Salvation was at his elbow.

"The rear wall, Tom. The one without windows. They're drilling it into cheese. This is going to be a sorry last stand."

Tom Corrigan's cheeks were flaming, as were his eyes. "That's where you're

wrong, Padre! It's going to be the damnedest last stand anyone ever made! Die, eh? I won't die now if I have to *saw* my way through the whole mob!

"Murphy—you and the gals get on that rear wall. Bust drills, fire through the holes they make, do everything you can to slow them up.

"Vanderling, you and Gebhardt and Michel lay out all the guns and ammunition we have on that table, arrange them so we can have easy access. Padre, come with me! There's a skylight through this roof. We're going up topside and raise hell with these Vegans. . . . *Listen!*"

The tumult from outside had altered subtly. Raw, grating voices were raising in a note of apprehension; there were sounds of frantic movement. And above all, there was a dull, throbbing sound that sounded like, must be—

"But it couldn't be!" cried Long Tom. "There's no such thing on Mars! And anyway, how would they know—"

But he was racing toward the ladder that led to the skylight. As he ran, the sounds outside became more definite—and they *were* sounds of flight! There came another sound, the sharp, crackling hiss of a Mallory-gun; shrieks of pain accompanied it. The throbbing sound grew nearer and nearer.

With fumbling hands that bruised himself on rusty locks, Long Tom broke open the skylight. The raw red sun of Mars spilled rusty gold into the room. The sky burned blue above, but Corrigan had no eyes for the sky. What he saw was a silver giant settling to earth at the fort, a giant metal monster from whose gun-ports spewed the death and destruction which was driving the Vegans to their lairs like scared rabbits!

On the prow of this vessel was an emblem: the red star and pyramid of the Border Patrol. And from the lock of the vessel, as it bellied gently to ground, surged a company of dun-clad constabulary.

And in the van of these rescuers was one in tattered garments at the sight of whom Long Tom's mouth dropped open. There was little strength in his gasp of recognition:

"*Drane!*"

COLONEL LARCH said proudly: "No, Captain, we won't think of allowing you to ride the rest of the way into Sandy City. The last caravan has fought its way across the Martian wastelands. From now on, travelers will jour-

MARTIAN CARAVAN

ney in comfort and peace. Now that we have *this!*"

His eyes rested happily on the huge aircraft that had borne his company to Old Fort Wade, that soon would carry the battle-worn caravan to Sandy City.

"We've been hearing rumors for months, of a new type of aircraft that would fly in the thin Martian atmosphere. It arrived only last week. The boys were frantic, hoping for a chance to try it out. Then your messenger came—"

Corrigan said confusedly:

"I—I still don't understand, Colonel. How did—"

Drane said: "In my sleeping-tin, Captain. I remembered what Blinky had said about the terribly swift current underlying the surface mud of Mud River. And I knew he would never reach Sandy City in time to bring help. I tried to tell you what I was going to do, but—" He stopped, his cheeks reddening.

Long Tom remembered, then, his last words to Drane. And he too flushed. Colonel Larch stared from one to another of them and said: "It was a feat of bravery that will be remembered in Sandy City for a long while. You should have seen this man when he arrived, Captain. He was battered and bruised almost beyond recognition. He was half frozen with cold. Those waters are icy, as well as fierce. He arrived before dawn, too, and had to lie there under water, before the dam, two hours before the crust thawed enough to let him break his way through. It was, if you'll permit me to say so, a very gallant thing, Mr. Thompson!"

DRANE said: "Thompson?"

"And," continued the Colonel imperturbably, "I've been waiting impatiently to offer this suggestion. You seem to be a strong, courageous, intelligent young man with no particular aim in life. I wonder if I couldn't interest you in becoming a member of the Border Patrol? We're a rough and ready bunch, but we respect a man with guts. A man who can, when the chips are down, come through, fight his way back, so to speak."

Drane's laughter was harsh and half bitter.

"Sorry, Colonel. You've got me all wrong. I wish I were those things you say. I'm Drane—Howard Drane. The man who—"

"I'm sorry," said Colonel Larch querulously, "but I don't hear very well.

Would you speak a little louder—Mr. Thompson?"

Salvation Smith gripped Drane's arm tightly. "The Colonel is right," he said. "Drane is dead. We buried him yesterday. Sandy City is a new world. A man can forget the past there, start over."

Drane looked at Corrigan. Long Tom nodded. And the Colonel said: "Well, Thompson? Your answer?"

He *was* a new man. There was a new lift to his shoulders, a new light in his eyes; a spark of reckless daring that Long Tom could understand and love. He raised his hand in gay salute. And—

"Very good, sir," he said. "Recruit Thompson reporting for duty, sir!"

FOR the last time, Tom returned to the pack-train. He hated to leave the camels here; he felt it was his duty to see them safely to Sandy City. But Colonel Larch was right. The day of the caravan was over. Soldiers would take these beasts back to Sandy City. There was no longer need of them. Now that aircraft had come to Mars, the desert would flower like a garden. Civilization would sweep across the face of the desolation; the frontier would be pushed back and ever farther back. He sighed.

Mike Murphy stood beside him, his arm linked through that of Flossie Milnar. He said: "Cap, howdja like to be a best man?"

"A best—" Long Tom grinned. He approved of this new Flossie Milnar. She would make the burly space-man a better wife than some flighty flibbertigibbet who hadn't been through the mill, who hadn't learned to recognize worth through black experience. "Swell!" he said. "I'd like it fine. Only—a prospector leads a rough life, Mike. I don't think it would be so pleasant for Flossie."

Mike Murphy said slowly: "I'm not goin' prospectin', Cap: I changed my mind. I'm gonna pick up his job. It's the only way I can show— Well, anyhow, there's good unions an' bad. We'll build us a good union at Sandy City, make it fair an' square for the workers. The Mark Sandoni Chapter of the Allied Mine Workers."

Colonel Larch called: "Ready, Captain? We'll take off as soon as you're ready."

"Right away," answered Long Tom. He moved toward the plane. It was funny, in a way. He couldn't help thinking what a laugh it would be on Blinky when he got to Sandy City to find them

MARTIAN CARAVAN

already there. For old Blinky would make it. There wasn't much doubt about that!

Vanderling brushed by him; Joan Fallonby paused at his side momentarily. She said evenly: "A happy ending after all, Captain." Her eyes were glowing. Long Tom, staring into them, wondered briefly how he had ever thought this was the girl for him.

He knew, now, that what he had mistaken for quietude in Joan Fallonby was merely a placid, almost bovine stupidity, unreasoning acquiescence to the will of others. Her lips, so cool and soothing, were the chaste lips of a woman who was the eternal mother, the guardian, the nurse. Not the kind of woman who would stir a fighting man's heart to greater heights but the kind who would drain him of all eagerness, turn him into a dull sit-by-the-fire.

Vanderling was her man. His very weakness brought forth the fierce maternalism within her. Long Tom nodded. He said: "Yes, Miss Fallonby. A happy ending."

Then his eyes turned, questing. They found Ruth at the door of the plane, searching him. And he moved forward with a strange, hot eagerness. He knew, now, what he wanted—what he must have: A woman whose will was as steel-strong as his own, whose heart was as mad and courageous, whose feet—like his own—burned endlessly for the soil of far, lost lands. A reckless, daring woman, who would seek, with him, adventure in the ends of the universe, asking nothing, giving all. A selfish, careless, headstrong woman with a temper of flame and a melting swiftness of heart that would burn her lips upon his own. A woman like Ruth Andreisen.

Their hands met and clung briefly. Then she drew him with her into the plane, into the seat that, as in the future they would share all things, they were now to share together.

Behind them the tawny sun wearily lurched toward a beckoning horizon. Its dying rays streaked the desert with dancing gold. A forsaken camel moaned and bubbled fretfully. Motors thrummed; sand grated beneath their skids. The day of the caravan was ended.

Next month we publish a novel of South America, tentatively entitled "Anything May Happen in Parador," by a new author who knows whereof he writes, and who signs himself, simply—"F. Draco."

GOLD

A foreign plot to seize Hawaii in the turbulent times of the California gold-rush is the basis of this fine novel by the author of "They Lived by the Sword."

By
**GORDON
KEYNE**

The Story Thus Far:

ABNER DENT of Marblehead was fed up with the wild San Francisco of gold-rush days and longing for a first mate's berth again when he met and befriended Mary Clum, who was masquerading as a boy while she searched for her missing father, Captain Ezra Clum, a shipmaster. Nahiena was her name, she told him—a Sandwich Island name. "My mother was a missionary's daughter there," she told Dent. "We went to Valparaiso when I was a child. Father settled us there; you see, he had his reasons. But Mary's my name also, if you like that better."

They learned that Captain Clum had been shanghaied aboard a ship bound for Honolulu, and Nahiena announced that she must go to seek him at once—he was in terrible danger. She found passage offered on the *Eliza*, a ship bound for the Sandwich Islands; and Abner Dent signed on as mate.

Before the ship sailed, however, a British soldier of fortune, Sir Francis Fairhaven, sought Dent out and tried to buy his help in a daring scheme—a "play for a throne," he described it. And a weird old witch of an island woman named Keave, who was with Fairhaven, brought up the name of Nahiena. Puzzled, Dent refused to join Sir Francis—at least until he knew more.

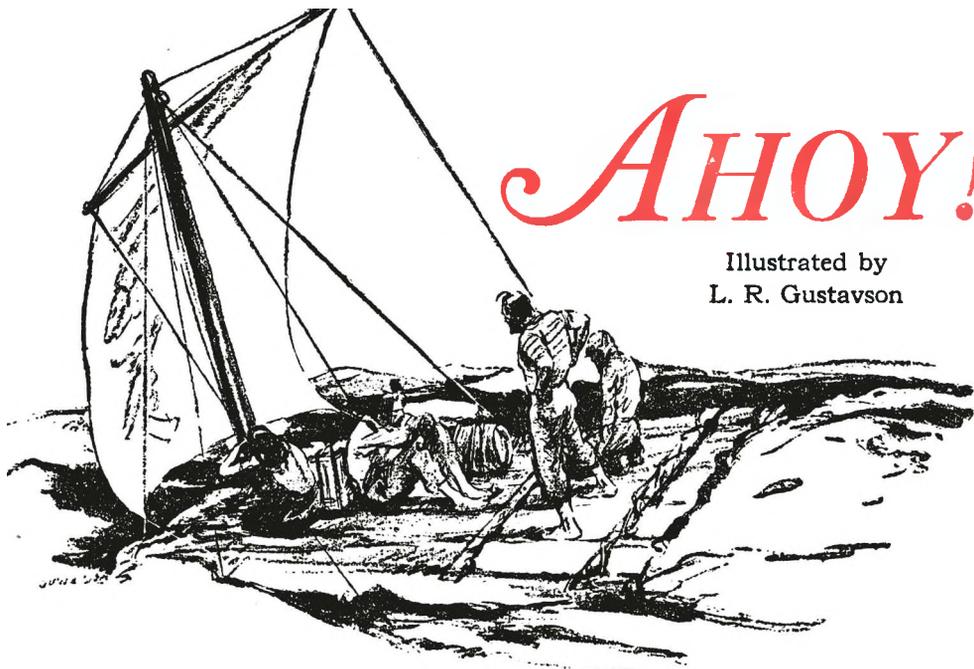
"What's your interest in Cap'n Ezra Clum's daughter?" he asked.

Sir Francis' voice was steely:

"She doesn't know it yet, but she's not his daughter. She's no more related to

AHOY!

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson



him than you are. Her father, Mr. Dent, was a king."

Dent pretended agreement with Sir Francis' terms and scheme—he could protect Mary Clum better that way. But even before they sailed, Dent was publicly accused of planning a revolt in Hawaii, and set upon by a waterfront gang. He fought himself free, more puzzled than injured. Was Sir Francis "building him up" as a scapegoat if the enterprise should fail?

Not far from Hawaii a sudden squall wrecked the ship. Sir Francis, Mary Clum and most of the sailors got off in the boats and made shore. Dent, the second mate Saul Gorman, old Keave, and Mary's devoted old drunkard friend—a former actor who was known only as Thady—were left aboard the sinking ship. (*The story continues in detail:*)

THE cavern in the lava gorge was a huge shallow recess, scarcely thirty feet from front to back, and twice as wide. At the rear of this, however, was a narrow but deep cavern proper that must have been there before the lava flowed down and around, for it ran far back into the hillside.

Dent sat on a mat—it was a glorious Nihau mat of golden yellow and rich red rushes—and gazed out at the gorge and the green immense ferns and the cold gray lava, with eyes as dead and lack-luster as the lava itself. Memory was blurred and dim. Everything at hand was dreamy and unreal. The vivid boy-

ish interest was gone from his eyes, the humorous twist from his wide lips; the firm, chiseled lines of his features were hidden by the short beard that had cloaked them these last days.

He had been like this from that dreadful morning when they wakened to find the *Eliza* staggering and groaning under their feet, and a bluish patch on the sky to denote the peaks of Hawaii swimming above their clouds. Gorman thought it was the reaction after their days and nights of unending, inhuman toil; Thady assented, but rather dubiously. Nothing could rouse Dent to any interest in his surroundings.

It was Gorman who had taken hold, there at the last, to knock a makeshift raft together. It was Keave who had pointed to the far peaks, recognizing Hawaii, and who had piloted the raft during three days while the wind pushed on their scrap of canvas; it was she, too, who had talked with the men in two fishing-canoes, who met and brought them all into land—here to this place, away from any habitation. Gorman and Thady had been too spent and gone to care what happened.

Now things were different with them; but not with Dent. They, full fed and heartened, knew what was happening; but he neither knew nor cared.

The two of them were bringing out rolled mats from the inner cave, as Keave had bade them—enormous mats of Nihau weave, rare and wonderful, mats fifty and sixty feet long, to cover

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the entire floor of the outer cavern. The sunlight did not penetrate to the depths of the gorge; giant trees and luxuriant foliage helped to place the cavern recess in obscurity, even at midday, while the rear of the cavern and the cave-mouth behind it was almost in complete darkness.

Thady paused, casting anxious eyes at the seated figure.

"No change; I don't like it! This isn't the man's nature, Saul!"

"It's like something broke in him," observed Gorman. "He aint been the same since that last night."

Thady gave a sudden start.

"Angels and ministers of grace, defend us!" he exclaimed sonorously. "Right you are! I see it all now, all of it!"

"Let's have a look, then."

Thady turned to him. "You remember, that last night, the old crone brewed us a drink with herbs? She said it would put life into us."

"Aye." Gorman nodded. "And it did. We kept going at them pumps till eight bells."

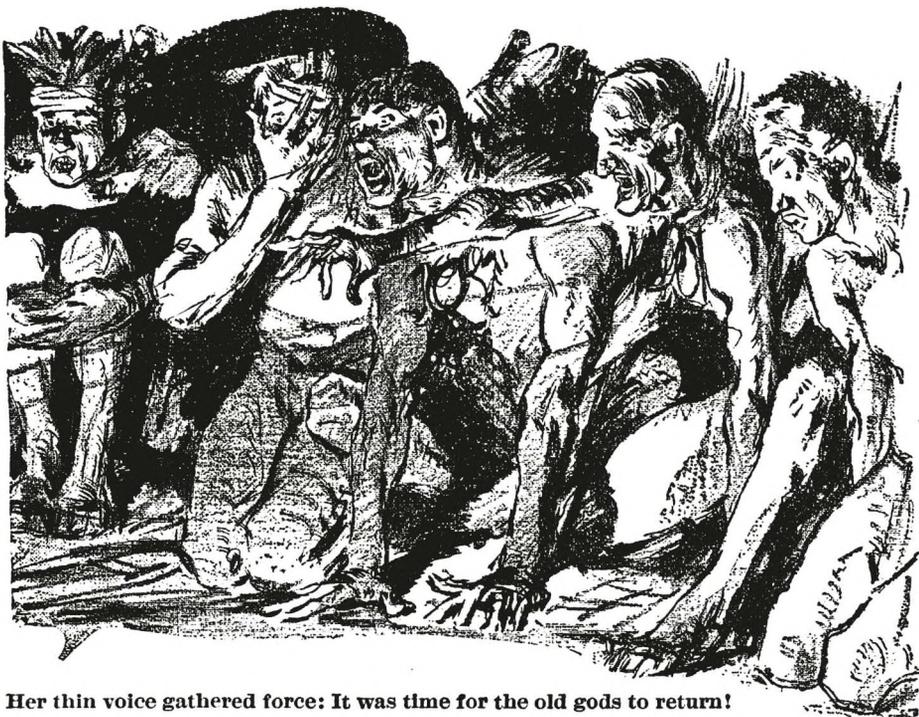
"But Dent slept—and when he woke up next morning, he was this way! Saul, the old witch put something different in to his drink!"

Gorman, who had kept his razor and made shift to shave, fingered his chin thoughtfully.

"That don't stand to reason, Thady," he said. "We've all agreed to pitch in together and lend her a hand. We're going to help her and Sir Francis make Miss Clum queen of the islands; we know the French are going to help, too. We know that the boats got here safe,

"Fair enough, I suppose," acknowledged Thady grudgingly. "And to think that old she-devil talks as good English as we do! Well, well, come along."

The cave in the rear went back into the mountain a long distance. The entrance, now cleared away, had been cunningly concealed, but there was to be no more concealment. Although this spot was only a few miles from the mission station, it was little known. The gorge ended vaguely in lava beds and thorny *ohia* thickets. Like most of this arid lava coastline, it had no water or creek, except in the rainy season. The natives rarely visited the interior of the island, whose volcanic features repelled them;



Her thin voice gathered force: It was time for the old gods to return!

that Miss Clum's over at the mission station, and that Sir Francis will be back. Keave has the natives all working with her. Dent agreed to lend a hand. Now, why would she try to poison him? She needs him too much for that."

"I didn't say she poisoned him, but she drugged him," Thady insisted obstinately.

"Well, s'pose we ask her about it later," said Gorman. "Time's getting on, and we got this big palaver to hold this afternoon. Once the chiefs and big men get back of the ball, everything's good as settled. Then we can go after her about it. How's that?"

and they seldom or never visited this forbidding gorge, whose memories of the heathen gods instilled them with superstitious fears.

In that hidden cavern at the rear was a small spring of water, however, and with it many other things, for this was the final refuge of the ancient deities.

The mats spread, Gorman and Thady brought forth what had been hidden away these many years, since that bloody battle which ended the old faith forever. Here came the two stone images, rough and uncouth creations, the sea-gods of Ranai. Here came Tairi, the god of war of Hawaii, an image five feet high, of

wicker covered with red feathers, locks of human hair surrounding the helmeted head and fierce features.

Here was Karaipahoa, the deity of Morokai Island, which Kamehameha had carried with him always; here was Tika, the goddess of Maui, and others. These were curiously carven of the hard yellow *nioi* wood, and their faces adorned with mother-of-pearl and sharks' teeth. The great mask of Keave, more than life-size and fitted with long human hair, was not in sight; but all the others, famous and most renowned in a past generation, were here. The two men ranged them against the inner wall of the recess, to right and left of the cave opening. Here one did not become aware of them readily, because of the obscurity.

"All done like she wanted," said Gorman, filling a pipe. Before the outer cave or recess, near Dent's position, tendrils of gray smoke drifted up from a slow fire burning without enthusiasm. Gorman lit his pipe from a coal, and looked at Dent. "Suit you, sir?"

Abner Dent, only vaguely aware of the question, smiled and made no response. Thady came and nudged Gorman.

"She'll come pretty soon. We'd better get him out of sight, before anyone comes."

Gorman nodded. At their urging, Dent offered no objection, but rose and accompanied them, a puzzled frown drawing down his brows, to the inner cavern; and all three vanished in its depths.

The fire smoked on, its thin grayish plumes wavering straight up on the listless air of the gorge. The trail that had once ascended to this point was now grown over and gone from sight; but a trail long-trodden by man is one of the things that never entirely disappear. The sun was westering, the shadows were deepening under the trees, when hands pushed the green leaves aside. Three men appeared, irresolute, staring in wonder. They wore native dress—a *maro* about the loins, *lets* of flowers. One an old man, had a scarf about his shoulders.

VOICES sounded from behind. They came forward, and other figures appeared, all in native costume, the missionary garments discarded. Some were old; some were in their prime. Some, by their stature and lighter color, were chieftains. One, who was given much respect, was the island's governor.

They came on to the mats and sat down. Exclamations broke from them

at sight of these mats, which were rare and valuable, and nowadays seldom seen. Other parties arrived. They stood or sat in groups at the outer edge of the recess. Suddenly every voice ceased. Heads were turned; eyes were directed at the inner wall of the recess, as a sharp cry burst from one of the old men.

The silence was broken by murmurs of awe, of incredulity. The gods, seated there against the lava wall, had at last been seen. One after the other, the older men gave tongue, recognizing those figures; the shrill voices fluttered and vibrated on the still air. An old man, with a sobbing breathless wail, flung himself on his face before the sacred objects. Two or three others followed suit. The remainder of the group exchanged startled, hesitant glances.

NOW over thirty men had arrived. They were seated along the range of mats. At a scraping footstep they turned abruptly, nervously. Keave was coming from the greenery, alone; the old woman scuttled forward, passed among the seated men, and disappeared at the back of the cavern. Her voice came back to them, thin and hollow and muffled.

"The *hare o Keave* has been forgotten, but here the house of Keave once more exists. The gods and the kings are alive here. Keave lives, and you shall see him, and the great Kamehameha."

The men were uneasy. They exchanged low-voiced words and their eyes rolled. They all jumped to attention when Keave appeared again and came forward, the necklaces strung about her withered neck and breasts in a jingle of bone and shell. Keave—she who bore the name of an ancient king and a god, she who had been a priestess of the gods!

Her thin voice gathered force and eloquence as she spoke to them: It was time for the old gods to return. . . . Time for the seed of Kamehameha to come back from Oahu to Hawaii, to give up carousing and luxurious living, to become once more vigorous and alive and great. And one of that race had been sent by the gods to wear the robe of royalty and to lead the chiefs of the islands.

Her words rang and pounded at them with forceful reiteration. The French had promised help; the old king and his family would be cleaned out; another of the blood royal would sit upon the throne. In return, one of the islands would be given the French outright; all the rest would belong to the natives as of old, and



"Undo what you've done!" cried Thady. "Or I'll pin you to the rock!"



no white men would be allowed to land, under penalty of death.

This was the burden of her harangue. The chiefs did not smile; the reappearance of the former gods had stunned them. The white men's teachings fell away from their minds. And then, against the dim background, something moved and moved. One man gasped; another cried out in terror unashamed. She went on talking without pause.

"It is Kamehameha himself!" burst forth an old, old man, lifting a shaking hand. "I knew him well; I served him."

"And those are his very robes!" broke in another, quavering in fear. "When I was a boy, I saw them often. No others were like them. My mother helped to repair that helmet, one time. . . . *Ai*, the king, the royal king himself!"

Fear and horror and a chill panic laid hold upon all those men. The moving thing had come forward; it displayed itself as a man, of stature more than human, even as the great king had been—its height emphasized by the golden feather headdress shaped like a Greek helm.

His robe, too, was of the royal yellow feathers. No ordinary cloak, but one that fell to his very heels, rarest of the rare. His face was only dimly visible in the shadows. He held a spear before him, and now stood leaning on it. Those closest could see that it was tufted with yellow feathers, the haft inlaid with shell. The spear of Kamehameha, gone since the bones of the kings vanished from the original House of Keave!

"It is he, it is he!" lifted the old wailing voices. "It is he—"

The voices hushed. The old priestess passed among them, and was gone to the path among the trees. Yet again something moved there in the darkness—a figure that stood forth beside that of Kamehameha. All knew instantly what this massive shape was; they knew it by legend, by a gasped name, by the great mask forming the figure's face. Keave himself, Keave, the ancient king, the deity! No yellow cloak here, but cruder weapons and garb; yet the actual ones that had been laid up in the House of Keave. The old men, and some not so old who had known the repository intimately, bore witness volubly to the fact.

THERE was a general movement of reverent prostration, due as much to sheer amazement as to superstitious terror. Before it ceased, the priestess reappeared and passed among the chiefs, and prostrated herself before Kamehameha.

"Lord, here is the daughter of your house," she said loudly. "She in whom runs your blood, she who is to be queen where you were king! Speak to her, that all may know you acknowledge and welcome her!"

The chiefs looked around, and saw no one. But Kamehameha, whether it were he returned to earth, or the mere ghost of him made visible, lifted his spear suddenly.

"*Aloha!*" he said in greeting. "*Aloha nui! Nui, nui maitai! Aloha, Nahiena!*"

Much love, great good—to whom? Where was this Nahiena? The chiefs looked around again. A gasp broke from one, a heavy word from another. She was there, parting the green leaves and coming forward, flower-garlanded, her head bare, but the glorious royal yellow robe rippling from throat to knees, and in her hand one of the royal yellow feather fans adorned with pearl and tortoiseshell.

STUPEFACTION fell upon them all. She stood there smiling; even one who knew Mary Clum would not have recognized her in this lissome lovely creature, brown and gleaming with smiles and flowers! She was real. They could reach out and touch her. The yellow feather robe was real, a creation of the ancient time that was no longer made. "*Aloha, aloha!*" They could hear her voice; they made reply; the old priestess greeted her as queen.

She went on, left them, came to the towering figure of Kamehameha. He said something they could not hear. She started, caught his hand; her yellow cloak blended with his. Then the old priestess was shrilling at them:

"Go, and tell your people! Send word over all the island of what you have seen, to every village! Let the other chiefs come and see for themselves. I will tell you when the time comes, when her friends come from Honoruru. . . . Go!"

"*Aloha! Aloha nui!*" floated the voice of Nahiena after them, as they rose and left, stumbling away in awe, amazement and chill terror.

They were gone now; the greenery had closed behind the last of them. Keave, that ancient king and deity, removed his great mask and grunted, flung off his flower-wreaths, and the girl turned to him with a laugh.

"You! Mr. Gorman! And Thady—oh, is it really you—"

Her words were checked abruptly.

Kamehameha moved, came forward, and an angry word escaped him. His spear came down, and he drove with it at the figure of the priestess. It pricked her; a squawk of protest and anger broke from her as that towering figure approached. She started back, and stood against the wall of the cave, arms outflung, as the spear-point touched her withered breast.

"Now, you servant of the foul fiend, undo what you've done!" cried Thady. "You gave him a drug; give him another that will bring him to himself! None of your squirmings and your lies! Give the

drug to him—or I'll have your life, and pin you to the rock!"

She screamed shrilly in fear and pain, for the spear was sharp and pricked her. Nahiena turned upon Gorman, in questioning amazement.

"What is it? Where is Abner—Mr. Dent?"

"Oh, he's back yonder." Gorman jerked a thumb at the cave-mouth, gloomily eying the scene. "Aint been himself lately; Thady allows she gave him a drug. Maybe you can get the truth out of her. Gosh, miss, I surely didn't know you for a spell!"

Ignoring him, Nahiena flew at Thady, poured a stream of Kanaka at the old crone, seized the spear and dragged it aside.

"Stop it, do you hear me, Thady? She says she'll make the brew. She'll do it."

Reluctantly, Thady lowered his spear. "All right. She understands me well enough, but you make it emphatic, miss. Tell her I'll kill her if she doesn't fix him up, and warn her not to try any tricks!"

Frightened, angry, spitting vindictive words, old Keave scuttled away. Nahiena followed her into the cave. Thady cast off helm and robe, dropped his spear, and met the dour gaze of Gorman.

"Well, we done it like you said," the latter growled. "And you were right; my hat's off to you. But I don't like this playing at gods. It's unchristian, and I'll have no more of it, not even to help make her queen! No good will come of it!"

Thady shrugged. "Nonsense; it's no more than a bit of stage-strutting, Saul. And I must own," he added, with a wide-eyed glance at the discarded paraphernalia, "that I find it strangely to my taste. Often I have worn the trappings of kings, but never the real mantle of a real king, as here. It has a strangely disturbing, pleasant sensation that pricks the inmost parts to vanity."

"You rolled off them native words real fine," said Gorman, and cocked an ear toward the inner cave. "D'you imagine she's fixing that drink for him?"

"She'd better." Thady scooped up the immense spear again. "If not, she'll never get out of here. Go see, will you, while I stand guard?"

INVOLUNTARILY, Gorman moved to obey. Then he checked himself, and flung Thady a look, only to turn and go on again with a grumble about who was giving orders around here. He disappeared into the cave.

Presently a faint burst of voices reached Thady; almost at once, Gorman made his appearance, breathing hard and cursing to himself. He broke into a laugh.

"I nigh got into trouble. Miss Clum's washing, getting off the brown stuff that was on her. She'll be right out, she says, and the old critter has give Dent the drink. She allows he'll be himself when he wakes up in the morning."

"GOOD." Thady put the spear down. "Can't get into our clothes till she clears out? Well, no harm." He looked out at the gorge, up toward the patch of blue above. In his scant native costume, darkened and browned of skin, his angular frame took on a suggestion of savage majesty. A different man, here, from the broken and unkempt scarecrow who had vanished in San Francisco. "It's darkening fast, down here, but plenty daylight left up above. Are you sure about the French share in this business? And the money?"

"Positive." Gorman, sucking at his pipe, nodded. "That Britisher himself gave me the lay of it. He sent on some men awhile back; where they are, I dunno. The French are sending a brig o' war to stand by, and support the new queen at the proper time; once they get a toe-hold, they'll take over all the islands when they get ready."

Thady frowned. "I never thought to be working in company with Sir Francis! Frank Fairhaven, he was called around the diggings, and a proper gentleman gone wrong he was! Still, if Dent has agreed to work with him, that's good enough for me."

"It's a juicy bit o' work," said Gorman, grinning. "No end of pickings later, too! Sir Francis needs officers; that's why he wants me and Dent. He's already got a ship for us; what she is, I dunno. The game is to win over all the other islands, like this one, then stand slap into Honolulu harbor, loose a broadside at the king's palace if he don't give up, and chase him out. Then the French land some men and run up their flag. Some of the island settlers will be with us. There's sure to be anywhere from six to fifteen whalers in port, and some o' their crews will pitch in. We'll clear out all the missionaries and settle down to be island kings ourselves. . . . Here comes the girl now."

Nahiena came out into the fading daylight. A broad native cloth was wrapped

about her body; the brown stain was gone, and she had become white again. She came to them and smiled, but her eyes were red.

"He—he is going to sleep," she said. "It was terrible; he knew me, yet didn't know me! Keave has sworn by her gods that she'll make it right. She swears it will do him no harm; she wanted to be sure he wouldn't interfere. I think you can trust her now."

"Well, miss, I never thought to see you like this," said Thady, glancing at his own costume and shaking his head. "I'm glad all's safe. We had a time of it."

"Keave has told me about it," she replied. "Sir Francis got us here; he's a wonderful man, really! So you know all about his plans, and about me!"

"Yes'm," said Gorman, awkwardly. "All of us are in on it, too."

"I'm glad!" she said brightly. "But everything's not settled yet, remember; not till my father gets here. Sir Francis is bringing him; they may be here any time now. He's the one to decide about—well, about me, you know!"

"I thought that was all decided!" said Thady. "Dent seemed to think so, when he talked with us and old Keave about it."

"We'll see. I must get back to the mission now, before they miss me. And—Thady!" She put her hand on his arm, and looked into his eyes. "You made a grand king! Tell Abner that I'll be back here sometime tomorrow, probably late in the day, to see him. Good-by!"

She was gone, running swiftly and disappearing on the green-enclosed trail.

Keave came out, shrinking a little fearfully from Thady, and mumbling that men would bring hogs and chickens and fruit, plenty of it; food would be abundant now. Gorman nodded and rose.

"Suits me. Come on, let's go in and get into our own clothes!"

The two men vanished in the darkness.

Chapter Eleven

TO Abner Dent, it was a day of amazement—surprises, some of them none too pleasant, following each other in a steady stream as he talked with Thady and Gorman. Not the least of these surprises came when the old hag Keave shambled to his side and sat down and opened her heart to him.

His memories ended with that night aboard the barque, when doom and the failure of all their weary work lay clear

ahead, and Keave had brewed them a drink of island herbs. After this, the world was darkened for him.

Now the other two men recounted everything. They were jubilant that he wakened to himself, faculties alert and dimness gone. But Dent, as he learned everything that had taken place, felt more and more appalled by the consequences of his own making. It came hard not to burst into explanations, especially to Thady; but he saw no good to be gained by this, and kept silent. After all, a Marbleheader is good at silence.

IT was quite natural, he saw, that they had misunderstood him, aboard the barque, when he talked with Keave. He had been intent only on convincing her that he was in the plot, that Sir Francis had bought his services; he had done this, and had made the crone talk freely at last. He had fully intended to set Thady aright in this respect, but crisis had intervened.

And now he found Thady and Gorman alike heart-set on the venture, thrilled to the very core with it. His amazement at this sudden waking to solid earth, to Hawaii itself, to peace and rest and safety, gradually faded away under their exultant words. Nahiena herself here! This too faded in the light of their information about the previous day's doings. The fact that she seemed hand in glove with Sir Francis, lending herself implicitly to all his plans, showed Dent the necessity for silence.

And after that, came Keave—the old crone, squatted beside him, mumbling away in her imperfect English, strangely touched his heart. She denied nothing. She made him see why she had given him that draft of oblivion. He had saved them all from the sea, but had wrecked himself doing it. That night aboard the barque, she had pitied him; she had seen him at the verge of utter breakdown, physical and mental. So she gave him the drink, in order that perfect lassitude of body and mind might save him. She wanted to rescue him for the great work ahead, for the sake of her own deities. And despite resentment, this did touch him, revealing as it did the depth of human feeling in the heart of the old crone—even the burst of ambition for return of her old gods and her former power.

“How long have we been here?” he asked Gorman.

“I don't rightly know; days and days,” replied the other. “We've got to lay low

and keep out of sight, until Sir Francis gets back from Honolulu. And to think of you and me fighting over the whole thing, when all the time you were slated to take command of that vessel he's got here! Well, the sea beat us out, but we did a damned good job all the same. Nothing else matters.”

“A good job—nothing else matters,” repeated Dent, and smiled. “Right you are. We'll keep on doing it.”

He did not bother to correct Gorman as to the cause of their queer battle.

Amid all this increase of knowledge regarding the great dream of Sir Francis, the most singular item came from Keave.

The old crone had no love for this island of Hawaii. It was necessary to win over the chiefs here to Nahiena's cause, and the new queen would make this once more the capital, but at the moment Keave wanted badly to reach the island of Maui, twenty miles northward. She had come from that island; she had exercised her power as priestess there; its craggy, volcanic mountains rifted with green loveliness held her ancient secrets. There too was the center of the intrigue Sir Francis was carrying on. Amid those mountains his men could be hidden, and the chiefs there were the first to back his plans. The men and guns and ammunition he had sent ahead were all at Maui. How many men? She did not know exactly; fifteen or twenty picked white men, she thought. Some were Frenchmen who had failed in the gold-fields and had taken up the pursuit of glory afar, and others were Americans.

On all this Dent mused, thoughtful. Even the fact that sometime today Nahiena would return, could not make him forgetful of greater things; for her sake, he perceived, he must watch every word and action. He too must await the coming of Cap'n Ezra Clum.

WITH afternoon, Keave slipped away and was gone for hours. She came back suddenly, unexpectedly, in a flame of excitement that caught hold of the three men at her news. Sir Francis was back! At least, a sailing-vessel was in sight, an unknown vessel coming from the direction of Oahu; she proclaimed it to be Sir Francis, and set them to work in mad energy. Waiting was at an end; all plans were changed; the world was rocking under their feet! The old hag was mad, frenzied, out of her head with a fury of eagerness. Certain of the idols, the mats, the wondrous feather robes and helmets,

"Now look, my good friend," Sir Francis said. "I'm offering you fortune. What in the devil's name will tie you up with us?" "Nahiena," Dent replied. "Miss Clum."



had to be rolled and made ready for transport. A wind was striking down the gorge, the weather was changing.

And amid all this, with afternoon nearly gone, came Nahiena, in sunbonnet and ill-fitting white dress.

Dent was out in front of the recess and cavern, alone, when she emerged suddenly from the green tangle. He turned toward her; then, somehow, they were together. She clung to him. He held her tightly with a babble of broken words, cheek to cheek, heart to heart. All that had never been said between them was said now, in the silent anguish of joy and mystic rapture. Then they drew a little apart, smiling into each other's eyes.

"I did think—you were gone, forever," she said, tears on her cheeks.

"Thank God for you!" Dent kissed her on the lips. Through him stormed recollection of all that she had meant to him before, all she meant now. "You'll never again go out of my life if I can help it!"

"Nothing more wonderful will ever happen to me, Abner, than knowing you!" She kissed him again, and broke into quick joyous laughter, flinging her arms about him anew. But Dent uttered a swift, grave word.

"A crippled man, Nahiena? A crippled man—"

She seized his left wrist, kissed the iron hook, and laughed once more.

"There's your answer! You're a better man than most others, my dear; I heard Cap'n Whidden say so. . . . And

you're well again! Keave promised me you would be. Where is she? Where are the others? I can't stay a minute; I ran up just for a word with you, my dear. . . . Do you know the ship's here? I must get back at once."

"Hold on!" Dent broke into her eager flow of words. "How do you know it's the right ship? Keave told us one was coming—"

"Sir Francis is flying the signal he promised. Do you understand? It means he's found my father. . . . I must get back, must be there when they come ashore! He'll be amazed and delighted to know you're all here. . . . I'll bring him up later, perhaps."

THADY and Gorman emerged from the cave, Keave following. The excited girl greeted them hastily and then was gone with an impetuous rush.

"So Cap'n Clum's come, has he?" exclaimed Thady, beaming. "Well, now we'll soon have everything straightened out, once we all get together!"

"You seem to have changed your opinions about Sir Francis," said Dent dryly, "since we first discussed him up the Sacramento."

"I know him better," said Thady simply. "He's not as bad as I thought. And if he's got Cap'n Clum safe, and they're working together—why, that suits me! He wouldn't be a bad match for Miss Clum, eh?"

A harsh laugh escaped Dent. "Maybe I wouldn't, myself!"

Thady stared at him in astonishment, but Saul Gorman chipped in shrewdly:

"He aint the marrying kind; besides, I've talked wi' that limey, and I've met up with a lot like him. They're all the same style. They don't take a shine to a fine young female like her, somehow."

Dent gave him a hard look. "What d'you mean? Not interested in women?"

"Hell, no! Interested, all right, but not in her kind. They got a bad streak in 'em, every one! Take this limey, now; for all his fancy ways, he's likely got a couple island gals on the side, or a wench or two aboard ship. He'll sheer off a fine upstanding lass like her, sort of like being afraid to touch her."

GORMAN pursued his theme with details curious and abstruse from his own experience. To himself Dent admitted that the man was very largely right. A man like Sir Francis, of startling and exceptional gifts and talents, too often had a broad basic streak of almost incredible coarseness and sensuality, and as a rule, rigorously kept this in its own place. He found the reflection singularly heartening, and ultimately he found it quite correct.

Keave, everything here arranged to her liking, slipped away and did not return. The daylight faded. The three men, building up the fire, laid to roast among the embers a young pig which had been brought that morning with fruits and yams, by a local chief. It was long in cooking; the juicy yams were slow to bake; their appetite was edged by the appetizing odors that filled the recess, when through the darkness of the gorge pierced a yellow gleam of light, and here came Nahiena, swinging a lantern, with Sir Francis and Keave following.

The delight of Sir Francis was untempered and cordial, as well it might be. Here were aides and dinner; his plans furthered admirably; this time, as they shook hands, Dent found no ice in the blue eyes.

"Wonderful! Marvelous!" exclaimed Sir Francis. "I'd given you all up for lost; this is simply miraculous, 'pon my word! We've news all around. Where to begin?"

"Begin with Cap'n Clum," said Dent, in his harsh, direct way. "Where is he?"

"He's at Maui!" Nahiena excitedly waved a paper. "Look, a letter from him! He'll meet us there; he says every-

thing's all right, and he hopes to see me a queen soon!"

Dent checked her. "Belay everything. Now, Sir Francis, I'll have a word with you in private; but let it wait until we've eaten and exchanged news. You found him well?"

"Well, but with a hurt leg; he's gone to our headquarters at Maui to rest up and get things into shape there," replied the Englishman. His gaze crossed that of Dent; each of them knew a settlement was needed, but it could wait. "Dent, the schooner in the bay is for you and Gorman. I fetched her here, with half a dozen men, to get Nahiena—"

"Miss Clum," struck in Dent, unpromisingly. Sir Francis bit his lip and assented.

"Yes—Miss Clum. . . . Queen Nahiena to be!" And he swept the girl a gay smile. "In view of what Keave tells me, we'll take some of the chiefs to Maui with us. They can come back by canoe. We've already sent out word, and we're leaving tonight."

"Tonight?" echoed Dent.

"Right. Miss Clum's said good-by to the missionaries; all's arranged. Midnight finds us at the harbor beach to meet the chiefs who are going."

"All arranged, but they didn't like it at the mission," said Nahiena merrily. "Poor Mrs. Bishop! I think she was terribly shocked. Well, I'm hungry! We can talk as we eat, can't we?"

"Some can," said Dent. "Good idea."

DESPITE the cordiality, the warm laughter, Dent could not help the queer sense of prickly challenge that rose in him; no sooner was he face to face with Sir Francis than hostility rose between them—a meaningless animosity, without apparent reason.

He fought to check it, as they ate and drank and talked. If Ezra Clum had agreed to the plan, if Nahiena were acquiescent, then it was none of his business, he told himself; he might, rather, lend all his efforts to further her ambition and seat her on a throne. He asked her outright if this was her desire, and she smiled.

"Why not, Abner? Of course, it depends on what my father says; also, I want a promise from Sir Francis."

The latter waved his hand gayly in the lantern-light; his laughing words came with blithe assurance.

"Miss Clum, on the score of beauty, you have any promise that I can give;

on the score of royalty, I am your humble servant to command. Count it given. What is the subject?"

"The missionaries," she replied. "I've heard some mention of ejecting them from the islands. I'll never consent to that."

Dent caught a swift flash in the blue eyes; it gave the lie to the words of assent.

"Right! I'm with you there!" Sir Francis declared heartily. "It would be impolitic, too; in many quarters the natives are firmly attached to missionary interests. The present king has largely broken away from missionary control. You, as queen, need only keep matters as they are. Dictation should not be allowed, of course, but neither should ejection be mentioned. Am I right?"

Nahiena clapped her hands, her eyes shining.

"Good! I was afraid to speak of it before. . . . Now everything's all right!"

Sir Francis looked at Dent, and rose. "And shall we try to make everything equally right, Mr. Dent? I trust we can do so. I'm heavily in your debt for all you have done, and am indeed gratified that you've reconsidered your refusal to join the enterprise. Shall we have our little walk?"

"Good idea," said Abner Dent. He pressed the hand of Nahiena, and came erect. "Needn't go far. We'll be back shortly, everybody."

"If you want to talk private," said Gorman, "take the lantern and go back in the cave. Won't nobody hear you except them idols."

Sir Francis laughed, caught up the lantern, and at a nod from Dent led the way. They strode back into the narrow but lofty inner cave, until they came to the things ready packed beside the trickling rill of water. Sir Francis put down the lantern.

"All right, Dent." His smile was gone now. "Now, what have you in mind?"

"Miss Clum, mostly," Dent replied, meeting the blue eyes calmly. "What's the truth about her father?"

"You heard it. He's agreed to join with us; he's gone to the base at Maui, because of a hurt knee. And, remember, he's not her father."

"I haven't heard him deny it, yet."

A FLASH of angry irritation lit the countenance of Sir Francis.

"Dent, I don't quite understand this attitude," he said crisply. "You tell the

others flatly that you're one of us; now you seem hostile; you imply that I've not told the truth; you're a menace to the harmony of our party. What do you want? Money?"

"Truth," said Dent calmly. "Money be damned! What I said to you in San Francisco about cheaters still holds true. Since then you've tried to get me murdered or left behind. Why? You've admitted you had Clum shanghaied; now you claim he's acting with you. Is that likely? If you'd lie about one thing, you'd lie about a dozen. How do we know that the French are backing your venture?"

"French gold talks! It shouts!" And Sir Francis broke into rapid persuasion: "Confound you, Dent! I've had need of you from the start; Gorman is only a lump of muscle. Money persuaded Clum—money and power. Can't you realize that we've the pickings of all these islands in our pockets? Clum saw the one creature he loves being made a queen, and himself behind the throne; that convinced him. It should convince you. Estates, land, houses, commerce—a week after we strike, everything belongs to us, everything!"

"That's robbery," said Dent.

"NOW look, my good friend," Sir Francis said softly, "I'm offering you fortune; I'm making no threats. What in the devil's name *will* tie you up with us?"

"Nahiena," Dent replied. "Miss Clum. She's waiting on her father's word, it seems, to decide. If she's in for it, so am I—not for what I get out of it, either. If Clum's in for it, well and good."

"Is that a promise?" asked Sir Francis quickly.

"It is."

"And you'll come along, command the schooner, give us your best efforts, go with us to the Maui base, and act on Clum's word and on hers?"

"Aye. But mind you, if it's a program of loot and robbery, neither she nor Clum will sign articles with you!"

Sir Francis laughed, and put out his hand in the obscurity.

"Shake on it! You, she, Clum—all decide at Maui! Until then, which will be day after tomorrow, we're friends."

Dent shook hands, not happily. He had the feeling that Sir Francis had somehow evaded him once more, that the man's confidence and arrogant assurance was based on trickery and deceit. Yet he could not say why or how.



"Abner, what am I to you?"
"Everything," he answered.

"Tell me one thing," he said, as they started back together: "Why am I of any value to you? What is it you want of me? Why do you have need of me?"

"Because," said the other, with an earnestness that rang true, "you have the singular force, the personality, that makes you obey. I've got a rough crowd. God knows what we'll find at the Maui camp!

Besides our own men, we've a lot of islanders coming to join us there—Kanakanaka chiefs and others, a hard lot. I can handle that sort, and you can also."

"Thanks," said Dent with grim irony, and said no more. . . .

Half an hour later, they were all on their way to the sea and the harbor, lugging the bundles Keave had prepared.

Dent and Nahiena went together, carrying the feather robes and other garments—the actual ones possessed by Kamehameha, as Dent discovered to his surprise. He did not conceal from her that his future share in the venture now depended on her and upon Captain Clum; he did not share his misgivings with her, however. He refused even to discuss them with himself. Up to a certain point, he had a working agreement with Sir Francis, and proposed to keep it.

THE girl beside him, in low-voiced confidence, said: "I've been talking with Keave." He realized how eager she was, how a repressed excitement burned within her. "What do you think, Abner? She knows the place I used to know, as a child—the house, the creek and pool, everything! She says it's on Maui, where we're going! And my father's there to welcome us."

"You seem to think more about that than being queen," commented Dent.

"Oh, that!" She tossed her head and laughed. "It would be nice, I suppose; that is, if it's true. It would help make up for not being—well, for not being Mary Clum."

"Most people wouldn't care whether it was true or not, Nahiena."

She halted, her hand on his arm.

"I care. And you care, Abner."

"I haven't said so. At least, to you."

"No need, my dear! From the first moment I saw you at the door of our California shack, you've stood for hard and uncompromising truth. It shows all over you, in your looks and walk and voice, in all that you are and do! That's what I so like about you, Abner. No matter what I asked, you'd tell me without evasion or squirming or pretense. Isn't that so?"

Dent smiled. "I guess it is, Nahiena. Might be kind of hard, though; when you love a person, you want 'em to think well of you. Hope you're not aiming to ask me anything I'd hate to answer."

She dropped her bundle and caught him by the shoulders. They were in the lower gorge, where the trail was open. The others were on ahead. A drift of moonlight struck down upon them; the scent of flowers was swept along by the rising breeze. Dent was aware of her eyes searching, searching his face with grave tenseness. He suddenly realized that she was very serious.

"Something important, Abner," she breathed. "What am I, to you?"

"Everything," he answered, but saw she was not satisfied. "What d'you mean, anyhow?"

"Am I just a pretty girl, to be pleased with pretty speeches? Am I just an island woman, a Kanaka *wahine*, a scrap of laughter floating in the night? That's what I am, to all these others, all!

"Queen!" She mouthed the word with swift passionate contempt. "Am I a fool, not to see what it means? A puppet of white men, whose guns lift me above my own people—if they are my people! A doll, to do what I'm told, to obey the French and make them powerful and rich! A thoughtless, easily managed, luxury-loving girl, an excuse and means to help selfish men slake their lust and greed and ambition. To the others, just that, Abner. Not to you, I hope. What, then? What am I to you?"

He was startled, amazed, fiercely delighted, by this outburst; it made him want to vent his happiness in a gale of joyous laughter. Puppet? By the gods, no!

"I'll tell you what you are to me," he said. "What you are now and always will be! Ezra Clum's daughter, by God, and that's plenty!"

Her hands tightened and her lips sought his in glad hunger, careless that the trail awaited them, and the shore, and the harbor beyond, where a schooner's canvas flapped in the moonlight, poised for the short flight to Maui.

Chapter Twelve

IN the sunrise, Dent looked out upon the towering crags of Maui.

The *Felice* was a slovenly French trading-schooner but of good size, brought over from Tahiti. She was slipping along under a light breeze, a dozen empty native canoes towing astern, her decks filled with the golden-brown men. Hawaii's peaks lifted into the sky behind.

Half a dozen seamen, the crew of the schooner, were all Frenchmen. Nahiena was stowed below out of sight; the less these native chiefs knew about her, the better, and she had refused to don native attire except upon state occasions—if then. Dent, installed with Gorman as master and mate, could find none of the crew who understood him. Sir Francis, chattering French like a native, chuckled at his predicament.

"Plenty of bully boys at the base, to form into a crew—many of them Americans," said he. "You can take your pick

of the lot, Dent. Due to the uncertain anchorage ahead, we'll moor the schooner snugly and leave enough men aboard to run her offshore in case of a blow. Also, to protect her. You'll have your hands full."

"How?" asked Dent.

"I've got two sixteen-pound carronades stowed in the hold. Mount 'em, and mount a dozen more log dummies. No natives aboard while it's being done, either. Cover them with tarps until we're lying off Honolulu town; then send a couple of shot ashore, and you'll sleep in the king's palace!"

Clapping Dent heartily on the shoulder, he went his way. The natives seemed to adore him; he had a knack of making men like him.

FINE men, these native chiefs, forty of them crowding the decks; stalwart, laughing men with a hint of savagery in their faces despite their European clothes. All had weapons, most of them had muskets or rifles.

Maui grew, ahead. Its attendant islands were left to the westward; guided by a native pilot, the *Felice* held to the eastward coastline, rugged and rocky crags lifting out of the sea to dizzy heights, the volcanic slopes broken by occasional green valleys. Two islets appeared, and the schooner headed inside them to anchorage. The shore hereabouts was naked and wildly desolate, but men appeared on the beach, waving greetings; two of the company, said Sir Francis.

Dent got the schooner moored. The fore hatch came off, and cases of supplies were handed up; these the natives took ashore, manning their canoes. Then, with shouts and a spattering fire of guns, the canoes sped off to right and left, heading around to other parts of the island, whose chief men were being gathered here within three days. Many of the natives had been in America; many spoke English; many had served aboard whalers or other craft. With a couple of thousand of these men assisting, success was certain. The raid on Honolulu would seize power there at one blow.

A boat was put out, and except for the guard left aboard, all hands disembarked. From the green rift splitting the lava heights, came shouts and saluting gunfire—the company was coming to welcome its chief. The little band broke out upon the open beach, yelling joyously; some twenty men in all, the greater part Americans. And they were a hard lot.

Gazing at them wide-eyed, Nahiena drew closer to Dent.

"He's not here! But I forgot; his leg is injured. —Sir Francis! Where is he?"

"At camp, Miss Clum, up the valley." Sir Francis, surrounded by the yapping throng, turned to her. "Come along, and we'll be off. Keep Keave with you. . . . Gentlemen of the Honolulu Company! Three cheers for Miss Mary Clum, who's to be Queen Nahiena! And this is Cap'n Dent—and Mr. Gorman."

Thady, stalking somber and wide-eyed, was left to make his own introductions. No one cared. Nothing mattered. Every tongue was wagging of gold and loot and women. They fell upon the supplies and began to file away. The road was no more than a trail among giant trees. Sir Francis joined Dent and Nahiena.

"All's going well," he declared, mopping his blond, shaven cheeks and keeping down the excitement that threatened to break forth; he was expansive, laughing, eager. "The natives are friendly; there's no lack of food; all's as it should be! This afternoon we'll have a meeting of the company and issue instructions."

"And my father?" demanded the girl.

Sir Francis nodded at her. "In splendid shape, they tell me. An hour, and you'll see him for yourself. Dent, they've been making the dummy cannon; they're ready and painted."

KEAVE, satisfied that her precious bundles were safe, scuttled ahead of them like a furious old crab, and Sir Francis chuckled anew. She had her own goal, it seemed. A few miles up the valley, at the first water, was the camp; it had been established here by a native of the island, who had come from San Francisco with the recruits. On beyond that was the place Keave sought, where a temple of the ancient gods had stood.

"She says it's sacred even now; whether the natives are Christians or not, they so regard it," Sir Francis declared. "Beyond that, the valley's a mere lava gorge that ends nowhere. It's had a bad name, for some reason. No natives close by, no village. In the old days it was tabu, before the tabu was abolished by Kamehameha II; and the superstition no doubt still lingers."

They marched on, climbing into the depths of green, with the forbidding naked lava masses rising in occasional glimpses. Voices, French and American, lifted in jubilant snatches of song; the Honolulu Company, as Sir Francis grandiloquently

titled his recruits, seemed in excellent merry humor. To all of them, even with the strangeness worn off, this was a new and luxuriant world where one could live indolently and well, with promise ahead of loot and women and power, with scope for venting lusty energy, and with an acrid spice of gunpowder to add savor to life.

Hard men, rough men, able men, nostrils wide with the flare of adventure. This generation was the same everywhere, thrusting out and out—to California, to Mexico, to Oregon and Central America, to a kingdom in Wisconsin and Michigan, to a new dominion in Utah, to whaling oceans and distant lands—thrusting over the horizon with rifle and pistol and rude wills set to conquest.

Dent's gaze touched upon man after man. They were well picked. Only twenty of them? But twenty such men could well overthrow one such island kingdom, or a dozen! His gaze touched on Sir Francis; already he suspected that which he was to learn so soon: here was a fit man to lead such a venture, a man bold, cruel, efficient in all things good or bad, with the end ever justifying the means—another Cortez or Pizarro.

"*I have captained ships from China,*" he had said. Well, what of it? If a man were to be forever damned because he had once been in a rascally business, what man could escape? No *conquistador* could afford to have a conscience. Here was a leader, a great leader, one certain of success. With a few natives, with a French warship, the whole royal power of the Sandwich Islands could be toppled down in an hour's time by such a man, and a new kingdom erected under the protectorate of the Tricolor.

Dent cast over in his mind what he had learned, what he had heard, what was told up and down the seas, about Honolulu. Now that he was close at hand, with twenty men ripe to change history, the sum of it all was clear to see. Wealth unprotected; this was the answer. There were guns and forts, yes, but they would not fire a shot. There were ships, glorious craft built of the rarest woods, fitted in the most exquisite detail; ships that had never sailed to a record, and would haul down their flag at the first speck of blood. Appeasement and compromise render the savage a despot, but the iron will to fight paralyzes him.

IN spite of himself, Dent began to warm toward this vision of empire, realizing what determined men could do with these

thousands of square miles in mid-Pacific. From behind came a rollicking lift of voices, as one of the seamen started up a pumping chantey and everyone roared in on the words. The swing and go of it started Dent's blood tingling, and flung him from cold reflection upon right and wrong into a gay reckless mood, as they sang:

*Fire in the galley, fire in the house!
Fire in the beef kid, scorching souse!
Fire! Fire! Fire down below!
Fetch a bucket of water!*

*Fire down below in the cotton bales!
Fire in the main hold, stowing nails!
Fire! Fire! Fire down below!
Fetch a bucket of water!*

*Fire in the tar-pot, fire in the scum!
Oh, Honolulu! Hyar we come!
Fire! Fire! Fire down below!
Fetch a bucket of water!*

The camp, the "base" as Sir Francis called it, opened abruptly before them.

They had come up the left leg of an inverted Y to the fork, the main valley splitting here. Ahead was a level flat, with a tiny stream of water that dashed off by the right-hand fork toward the sea. On this flat were a few tents forming a slipshod camp, with canvas shelters spread across tree-limbs.

Beyond the flat, the valley lifted and narrowed again, apparently ending in a low, flat hill to which Sir Francis pointed. Here lay the former temple of the native gods, and the figure of Keave, far ahead, was seen pressing on toward her goal.

And here, as they came into the camp, was Captain Ezra Clum of Marblehead, a shape incongruous and startling to see, in this environment.

This was not the stalwart, uncompromising figure Dent so vaguely remembered. Now Clum was stooped and shrunken, leaning on a stick; he wore an ill-fitting suit of blue broadcloth, and a stovepipe hat, no doubt picked up at Honolulu. The features, however, were the same, clean-shaven and framed within long sideburns—features stark and high-boned and massive, with great square chin and beetling brows. Clum smiled and opened his arms as Nahiena ran to him, and Thady followed her in glad greeting.

Dent turned away. It was none of his affair as yet.

Sir Francis nodded to him.

"Right; leave 'em to their own greetings, eh? Make yourself at home. We'll eat first and get things shipshape afterward."

"Abner!" Dent turned again. Nahiena was calling him. He strode on to where the three stood, Thady grinning widely. "Father, this is Abner Dent, of Marblehead."

"We've met before. Good day to you, sir," said Clum, and extended his hand.

Dent gripped it. "Glad to find you well," he said awkwardly. "I'll let you and Mary talk awhile. Guess you'll have plenty to say."

That was all, but it was far from all, for he was conscious of strangely perplexing things in that level, challenging look from Clum's deep eyes. The rocky countenance was cold, neither friendly nor hostile. It was marked by suffering, and just now by intensity, an almost agonized intensity, of silent questioning. In the eyes, too, lay this same questioning as they searched Dent's face.

FATHER and daughter disappeared into one of the tents. Dent pondered that strangely searching expression; it left him startled and uneasy. Then he was aware of Thady speaking.

"Seems all right, but he's changed, oddly. And what a way with him! As though he were looking for something, looking desperately, and unable to find it!"

"Aye, you've hit it," said Dent, with a nod. "Looking desperately—for what? Hard to say. May be all imagination."

It was not, as he well knew, but Thady seemed satisfied.

Dent's attention centered on Sir Francis, whose popularity with the men, despite his air of absolute command, was amazing. By the time the midday meal was ready and served, he had them all, French and American alike, gripped in a rhapsodic thrall of assurance, of utter confidence, of anticipation which brooked neither doubt nor cool reasoning.

That meal was a feast, a celebration; although there was no lack of liquor, it was doled out sparingly. Sir Francis kept a tight rein on all these men, both French and others, and was the more respected for it.

Cap'n Clum and Nahiena, whose sex and radiant delight held most of the men in awkward embarrassment, sat with Dent and Sir Francis. Clum said little or nothing; his dour air, his grim-eyed peerings, impressed Dent strangely. Thady was right. The man did have the appearance of one who was queesting, queesting something unseen, seeking desperately for something unknown. Why?

The meal ran its course; then Sir Francis came to his feet. He was at his most affable, and had donned clean linen and a brass-buttoned blue coat for the occasion. There was no affability in his eyes, however; they held a cruel and indomitable purpose.

"Gentlemen of the Company, let us to business," he said. "By this night, parties of natives will be coming in to join us, so it were as well to settle our own affairs and reach an understanding at once.

"Captain Clum!" He turned to the grim, bent man, his blue eyes very sharp and bright. "Is it true that many years ago you took from the islands a child who was the daughter of the late king, Kamehameha II, and raised her as your own?"

Clum's deep gaze flitted about the circle, touched on Dent, touched on others. His features showed no emotion whatever. Certainly, thought Dent, he gave no hint of exultation or gladness.

"Aye," he said briefly.

"And this is the young lady now gracing our company,"—Sir Francis bowed to Nahiena, with an air of gallantry,— "whom we know as Miss Mary Clum, and whose native name in Nahiena?"

Again Clum's gaze flitted about. It was singular, thought Dent; the man really seemed frantically in search of something! Again Clum spoke:

"Aye."

"And you wish to restore her to her rights?"

Clum wiped sweat from his brow, though the day was not hot.

"Aye," he said.

Sir Francis turned to Nahiena. "Dear lady, will you permit the Company of Honolulu to place you upon the throne of these islands, as your foster-father desires?"

Dent found the eyes of Nahiena upon him. He waited, immobile.

"Why, yes!" exclaimed the girl, looking up. "Since he wishes it, yes!"

"Three cheers for Queen Nahiena, lads!" shouted Sir Francis.

THE cheers were given, British style. Dent met an excited smile from Nahiena, and nodded to her encouragingly. He saw that Ezra Clum was sitting harsh and silent, eyes fastened on the horizon, face like a stone. Queer! Well, it was settled now; all doubt was ended. Sir Francis turned to him.

"Mr. Dent, you are satisfied?"

Naturally. My efforts are pledged to the happiness of Queen Nahiena."

More cheers, yips and yells of excitement, Frenchmen kissing their hands to the girl, Americans roaring wildly. Then one of the Americans spoke up.

"Hey, Cap'n! This is a kingdom, this is. Aint no queendom, or whatever you call it. These Kanakas have a king. Will they take a queen instead?"

"They'll take what they're told to take!" yelled somebody, and more cheers followed.

SIR FRANCIS held up his hand and got silence.

"A good question, gentlemen," he said suavely. "However, females of the blood royal are here regarded as equal with princes. The sister of the king, for example, ranks as his equal, occupies a position corresponding to premier, and also rules. If there is no male issue, the female takes precedence. At the moment, I believe that a granddaughter of Kamehameha the Great will be welcomed as heir to the throne. Certainly the natives will give her welcome."

"The natives aint got too much say about it," spoke out another man sagely. "I hear they got whites in all the big jobs."

"The Tricolor of France will also support Queen Nahiena," Sir Francis said. "Within a few days, a French ship-of-war will be anchored at Honolulu, ready to back up our action. And now, gentlemen, for the orders! First, there is to be no brawling with the natives. Any man who engages in a fight with a native, will receive thirty lashes. For a second offense, he will be shot on the spot. If quarrels arise, bring them to me or to Queen Nahiena for settlement. Is that thoroughly understood? There'll be no excuses accepted later."

Thirty lashes—execution! A sobering reflection. Still, it was just. A growl of assent went around. Sir Francis continued:

"Mr. Dent, pick what men you desire, and get both real and dummy cannon mounted aboard the schooner. You, as captain, and Mr. Gorman as your lieutenant, will take her in charge. Best be about it within the hour, too, because she's in a poorly sheltered bight. You might have to run out to sea in a blow. Understood?"

"Understood," said Dent, with a nod. Sir Francis turned to the men again, cocked an eye at Nahiena, and picked his words carefully.

"Natives will be gathering; on the third day from now, there's to be a ceremony at the heathen temple up yonder." And he



Perplexing things were in that challenging look from Clum's deep eyes.

indicated the hill at the head of the vale. "Until then, you lads watch your step with the natives. Fight among yourselves all you wish, but strike a native, and you know the punishment. There's no objection to your scattering, if you're invited to the villages for a bit of fun," he added significantly, and wild applause greeted his words. He stilled it again.

"Now for the work ahead: Word will be brought the moment the French warship reaches Honolulu; that's our signal to sail. Two native schooners from other islands will join us there; a fleet of large canoes will accompany us from here. We shall operate under the French flag. During the past ten years, the present king has evaded pressing and repeated demands for commercial treaties from France. This time, there will be no evasion. We sail

into the harbor, send a shot or two ashore, and land. The result is quite certain, I assure you."

More cheers, again stilled.

"Once ashore, no scattering, no looting." The blue eyes searched the watching faces. "That will come later, lads; I promised you much; you shall receive much, but all in due course. I expect you to do nothing that will disgrace our queen. Understood?"

That touch got the Frenchmen. The Americans, at first disgruntled, joined in the applause after a moment, and the smiles of Nahiena quickly won them over.

DENT rose and went to her, shaking hands with her and with Clum.

"I'm off," he said. "I'll see you later. Just now, work's to be done! When you can get around a bit more freely, Cap'n, come aboard and look us over. —The guns, Sir Francis?"

Logs cut to shape were ready, only awaiting a coat of paint; gun carriages had also been prepared. Dent and Gorman picked ten seamen, the others of the company aiding in getting the log-cannon to the beach. Looking about for Thady, Dent saw nothing of him, and so got off about his business.

All the way back to the cove, he kept to himself, in a mood of savage uncertainty. So, the die was cast! Nahiena had smiled; yet he read some odd strain in her smile. That last handshake with Clum lingered in his memory; the man had been stony, unmoved, unresponsive. Queer! As though to him this whole affair were a joyless, sinister thing, thought Abner Dent. Then why? Why those haunted, searching eyes?

Sir Francis had done his plain speaking just in time. Before reaching the beach, Dent and his party encountered a dozen brown men on their way to the camp. Merry, laughing men, stalwart figures decked with flowers and gleaming with coconut oil, who exchanged gay greetings and went on.

Sunlight and sea, boats and schooner and bracing wind all alive—why, it was like coming into a different world! Dent paused and thought back, watching Gorman getting the cut and shaped logs down to the beach. What was wrong? What secret, sinister thing boded in that valley? The temple of the old gods, yes; there must be something more.

"Clum has thrown in with the scheme, sure enough," Dent reflected. "He has verified the old yarn; Nahiena is not his

daughter, after all. Yet she seemed so damned cheerful about it! Why? Apparently there's much I don't yet know."

He closed his eyes and let his thoughts circle aimlessly about. It was an old trick he often used, under the sun and stars, when he sought escape from some dilemma or needed to reach the heart of some riddle that perplexed him.

His mind drifted. He deliberately thought of nothing at all and held himself in a blankness. Chaotic mental images came and went, forming and breaking again like waves ruffling a calm reef pool. What was the focal point, back up yonder? What had been the center of that bizarre scene, the one vital, compelling thing—

The face of Ezra Clum leaped before his mind's eye. The stony, emotionless face with searching eyes. The face of a man under terrific inward tension. All else dwindled away; the others, none of them, mattered. The eyes of a man searching with desperate tensivity, searching—searching some ray of hope, some gleam of help.

"By God, that's it!" decided Abner Dent suddenly. His own eyes flew open. He looked out at the beach, at the cove, at the schooner. "That's it—and I never knew it till now! That man's in hell. Why? He was the one powerful figure, the one towering over them all; the eyes of a damned soul! Yet she was smiling. Guess I'd better find out why."

He drew a deep breath, and moved on toward the boat and the men waiting. His features, newly shaven, settled into rugged lines of satisfaction. Thoughtfully he fingered the iron hook on his left wrist, and his wide lips lost their grim tension. He had solved the riddle at last. Nothing mattered now, except Clum.

But he had the conviction that to him, to Nahiena, to Sir Francis and all the rest, somehow Ezra Clum mattered most terribly. Like a brooding, gathering force of terrific power, potent with destruction, upon which hung trembling all the future, and the life or death of men, and the slow charging momentum of destiny.

Chapter Thirteen

UPON the following afternoon, Sir Francis came down to the cove, and aboard the schooner. He was alone.

"Upon my word!" he exclaimed, looking around. "You've wasted no time! This is a grand bit of work!"

So it was, too. In the bows were mounted the two carronades from below. Dummy log guns ranged down the waist. Ports had been cut in the bulwarks, five to a side. Guns and carriages glittered with black paint. Even the muzzles of the logs had been bored out, so that except at very close view, it was impossible to tell that they were false. Sir Francis, inspecting them with the eye of a connoisseur, nodded glowing approval.

"Honolulu's as good as taken this minute!" he said. Dent had rigged a canvas over the quarterdeck, and the three were in the scanty shade, Gorman abandoning the work of repainting the bulwarks to join the other two in a drink.

ALONG the beach, canoes were now ranged everywhere, many of them enormous craft well able to take the open sea. Others dotted the water beyond the reefs, where natives were fishing. Sir Francis eyed them.

"Natives coming in fast! We'll have three or four hundred in camp by tomorrow night," he said. "Any trouble keeping them from coming aboard?"

"None," said Dent. "They're good fellows, mostly."

"Savage beggars when they're roused up to it. Used to be cannibals, and a bloody lot, too," observed Sir Francis. He cast an eye aloft. "Hello! What are you doing to the rig, Dent?"

"Changing it about a bit and replacing some of the canvas," said Dent. "I never saw a topsail schooner with such blasted slovenly rigging! Those topsail braces were rove up through the blocks at the head, in through the spanblock at the collar, up through the yard block, and seized to the main. I'm reeving them up through a block at the head, down through the brace-block, and seizing them to the collar of the main stay. This confounded French rig is a mess all around."

Sir Francis laughed heartily. "Cheer up! We'll make you a present of her, when she's served her purpose; and you can stand her as she is for a week or two. By the way, Gorman: Day after tomorrow, I wish you'd come up to headquarters bright and early. Our friend Keave is going to have a ceremony in the temple toward noon, and says she has need of you."

"What?" Gorman lost his good humor. "More o' that heathen worship? I'll have none of it, sir. I didn't sign on for that."

"Come, come! She says you're exactly the build required for the part you take. Don't turn up your nose at being a god," added Sir Francis, smiling. "It's a rare chance! Most men would jump at it. Why, Captain Cook allowed these natives to take him for a god, and on a Sunday, too!"

"And he got et," said Gorman. "Yes sir! I've heard tell of it. That's why he got cooked and et. No good will come of such goings-on." His shaggy features settled stubbornly. "I've done it once, and that's enough."

"And no harm came of it, either." Sir Francis lost his smile. "Listen, Gorman: It's very necessary that you play the part, just this time. I'll not ask it again, I promise you. But it's vitally important that these natives be impressed to the full. They're largely chiefs, of the high families, and we need their full support. So take on the job this time, and we'll respect your scruples in future. It's an order."

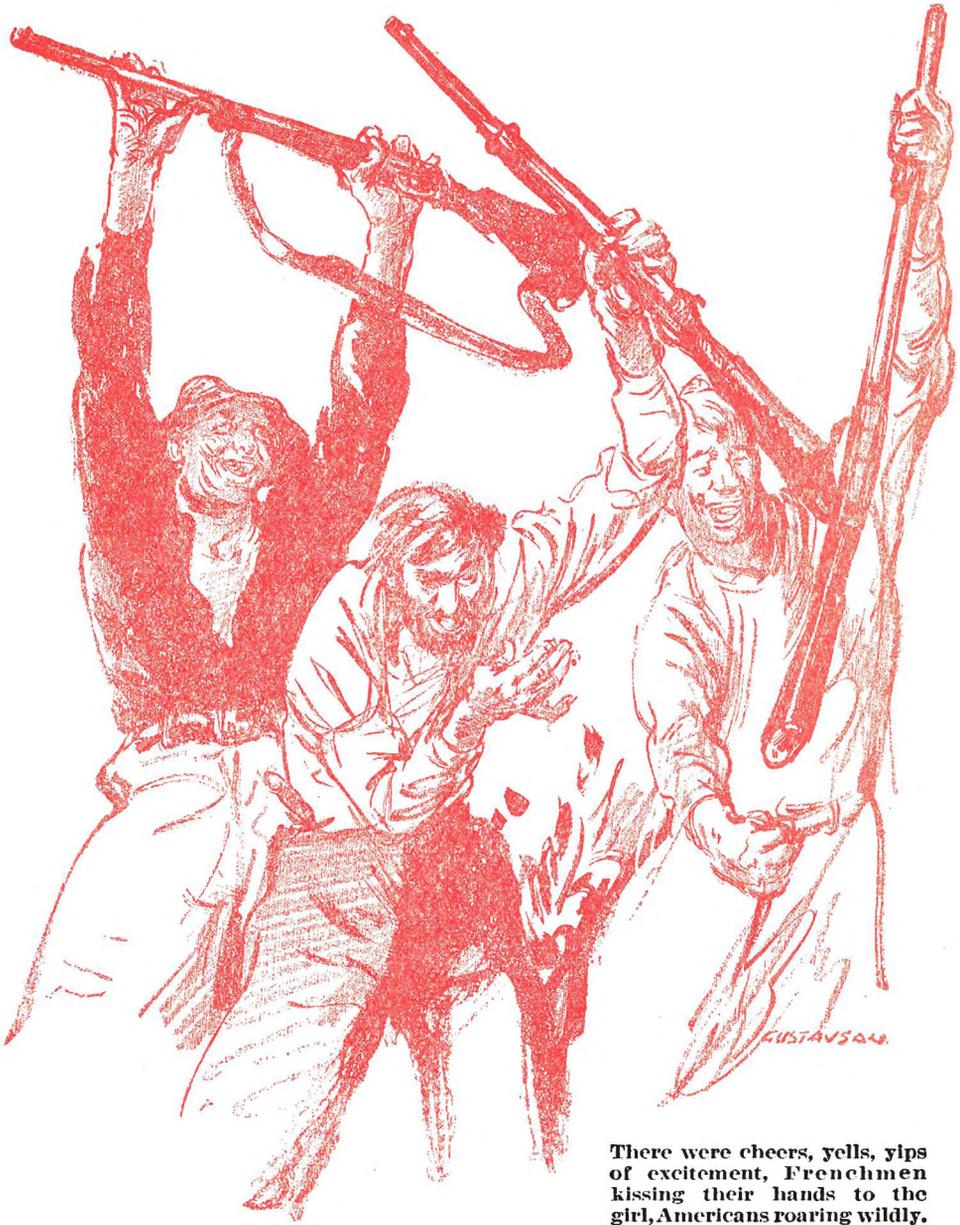
Gorman swallowed hard, seemed on the point of refusing flatly, then met the cold blue eyes for a moment and sullenly assented. Sir Francis poured him another drink, and the matter was settled. Gorman downed his liquor, rose with a scowl, and went back to painting the ports and the bulwarks.

"A good man, but too limited," observed Sir Francis, and looked at Dent. "Well, Monsieur Bras de Fer, as the Frenchman call you, here is what you refused in San Francisco." From his jacket pocket he produced two heavy little rouleaux, gold-pieces stacked and tightly wrapped, and dropped them into Dent's lap.

"When the job's completed," he went on complacently, "you get the balance—five thousand in all, plus this schooner and your pick of plantations or other property in the islands. I advise looking into commercial concessions; these will ultimately be the richest picking of all. The sandalwood industry, for example, which at present is the exclusive right of the royal house, provides a tremendous revenue. When taken over and put on a properly commercial basis, think what can be made of it!"

"Apparently you give me a great deal for very little service," said Dent slowly.

SIR FRANCIS winked. "Don't fool yourself! Yesterday I pictured swift, easy conquest; it'll not be so simple. These Kanakas seem like gentle souls;



There were cheers, yells, yips of excitement, Frenchmen kissing their hands to the girl, Americans roaring wildly.

but when their blood's up, they're madmen! Yes, they can fight. The point is to make them fight for us, as well as against us; let them kill off one another, and the more the better, while we sit tight. I need a fighting lieutenant, and have him in you, my inscrutable Yankee!"

Dent pocketed the gold. He wondered if the other man could hear his heart hammering, could feel the waves of recoil and repulsion surging within him. His brown features were indeed inscrutable at this moment. A slight smile curved his wide lips, and his eyes, which of late had become intent and hard and no longer alight with boyish interest, met

the cynical gaze of Sir Francis with a trifle of whimsical humor. It was well assumed.

"And Queen Nahiena?" he said, a sardonic touch in the query. "I think she is not informed of your real plans regarding the islands? It seems to me that yesterday you spoke of law and order and no looting whatever."

Sir Francis threw back his head, laughing heartily, but his eyes watched Dent carefully.

"Right," he assented. "I'm to be governor, for France. She's a mere figure-head, of course. And I've been waiting to have a word with you about her, Dent, for you appear to have some interest in that

quarter. It won't do, my lad; get her out of your head. She's to marry a grandson of old Keave, who by right of descent is hereditary king of Tauai. Thus the two royal families of the islands will be united in the one rule. Oh, romance if you like, by all means!" he added, with a careless wave of the hand. "No harm in that, so long as you remember not to take it too seriously. I trust you understand."

Dent looked down, in order to veil the fury in his eyes. Here, he perceived, was the real reason for the visit of Sir Francis. Despite his negligent air, the man was delivering an ultimatum. . . . Careful, careful! No false step now!

"If I did not understand?" he asked.

"That would be a pity," said Sir Francis suavely. "You are far too intelligent, Mr. Dent, to make such a mistake. The rewards of intelligence are in your own hands. There is, I fear, going to be much bloodshed at Honolulu; it would be a great regret to me were it not confined to natives."

THE threat drew a smile to Dent's face. He looked up, and laughed.

"Sir Francis, you're the most callous man I ever met in my life! Rather, cold-blooded."

"Thank you. I look after my own ambition; it's important to me. Your answer?"

"I have no choice," said Dent calmly. "You've covered everything remarkably well, I believe. Even to convincing Miss Clum herself that she's merely an island girl!"

"Oh, that!" Sir Francis relaxed a little, and grinned. "Clum's word was all that we needed, there. Yes, everything's covered. Keave is working for her own ambition, to see her grandson made king. . . . Very lucky thing she turned up in San Francisco, very! I trust all is now clear between us, Mr. Dent?"

"All is clear." Dent touched the rouleaux of gold. "Money, I've come to believe, is really the best argument of all. I suppose the Clums are at the camp?"

"No. The good Captain wanted to visit this vessel, but I thought it wiser not. He and Queen Nahiena are far up the valley, at a hidden point which is unknown to anyone else; it was there, indeed, that he once lived long ago. He is very happy there. And," added Sir Francis, "as the spot is well guarded, the young lady will be undisturbed. May I be quite sure that all is understood?"

Dent looked into the blue eyes and laughed again.

"You may, Sir Francis! I'm no fool, I hope. I shall pay the strictest attention to my own work. . . . There's plenty to be done aboard here."

"Splendid! Then I'll be going. I see you've plenty of fruit and fish; the Kanakas will bring whatever you need. I'll have a pig sent aboard, too."

Dent went down to the cabin, plumped himself into a chair, put the two packets of gold on the table, and lit a pipe.

Now, sitting here, utter despair crept into his heart. His shoulders drooped, for as he reviewed the situation, he knew it was absolutely hopeless. The attitude of Ezra Clum, that once stalwart and unbending man, he could not understand in the least. From Clum's own lips he had heard the matter settled; yet he could not accept it—he could not!

"And Nahiena smiled!" he muttered. "That's the most amazing thing of all; she smiled! I know how she actually feels about the whole thing, but instead of being crushed, she smiled happily! I must see her, must find out what's behind it all. There's something I don't know."

See her? Not likely; Sir Francis had attended to that. He remembered how she had spoken about her home as a child, about Keave knowing the spot. She and Clum were there now, somewhere back amid this maze of lava. And guarded; an ominous note! If the place were hidden—why any guards? Clum was not a free agent; that was why!

"If she knew the truth about the whole thing, it'd break her heart!" thought Dent. How much of the truth did she know or guess? He had no idea. He had scarcely had a word with her since that evening on the trail, going down to the schooner. That she would have given her assent to the scheme, knowing what was intended, was impossible. Yet she had consented, gladly. She had not been told about the grandson of Keave.

LIES, lies! Thought of Sir Francis Fairhaven burned in him. The man was utterly cynical, halting at nothing to gain his ends. "*I have captained ships from China.*" . . . Yes, a man who had captained those slave-ships of hell was capable of anything. That remorseless will, that driving energy, that agile brain, were supreme here.

A step on the ladder. Dent rose, stowed away the packets of gold, and turned as

Gorman came into the cabin and threw himself into a chair, still sullen.

"What you need is a few flower wreaths," said Dent sardonically. "An up-and-coming god ought to be blithe and cheerful."

"I don't aim to be joked about it," Gorman replied. "I didn't like it the time before, and I like it less now. You heard what he said. It's gospel, about Cap'n Cook being took for a god on the Sabbath, and liking it. And he was et."

"I didn't know that your religious convictions were so strong," Dent observed.

"It aint that, Abner." The other unbent a trifle. "You remember Cap'n Whidden, and his dream, and how it come true? That's what I'm scart of. I had a dream last night. I was wearin' that durned mask and outfit, and everything all around, even the rocks, was blood and flesh and squirming naked men. It woke me up."

Dent frowned at him in astonishment. "You don't mean to say you believe in dreams?"

"Not a durned bit," said Saul Gorman. "But I aint takin' chances, neither. And now I got to do it. I dunno rightly why I give in to him, but I did. Oh, well, I guess it's all nonsense," he added sheepishly. With a grin, he took a handful of gold-pieces from his pocket and clanged them on the table. "Sec this? French gold—he give it to me afore he left: advance. Plenty more in Honolulu. Gold ahoy! That's better'n dreams, any day!"

"And a lot more solid," said Abner Dent. "Gold ahoy! Sounds like California. Only this is a different kind of gold; got a king's head on it. Don't jibe, somehow, with a New England conscience."

Saul Gorman scowled, gathered up the gold, and thrust it into his pocket.

NEXT morning Dent sat with his pipe on the schooner's transom, eying the lava ridges with a spy-glass, telling Gorman to do what he pleased with the rigging and the paint. He himself had abruptly lost interest in the vessel; rather, he was unable to spur himself to take any further interest in her. That conversation with Sir Francis had settled everything for him, had put a stop to everything.

"I paid him out in his own coin, for once," reflected Dent with some satisfaction. "Took his money and spoke him fair, and fooled him. Now it's my trick at the helm, so to speak. Now I'll get back of all his lies, see Nahiena and her

father, and find out what's what. Cap'n Clum still owes me that two dollars, too."

Easily said: see her, end this miserable voyage of delusion, yank her out of it and perhaps Ezra Clum as well—but how? After all, did they want to be yanked out of it? He could be sure about nothing, except Nahiena's heart and mind; but this certainty was all he needed.

THE day dragged on and he found no opportunity to do anything. More canoes arrived; stalwart brown laughing Kanakas were everywhere. The lava peaks showed naked and bleak, except for the high strips of green where valleys split them. To barge up to the camp and demand speech with Clum, he knew, were insane folly. To get past it, even to the temple of the ancient gods, were impossible. To find Ezra Clum and Nahiena, was simply a thing out of his human reach. And he, alone, wanted no showdown with Sir Francis; that would be suicide. . . .

Afternoon came. The guns were under tarpaulin. Natives had fetched fish and fruit aboard. Dent and Gorman, seated aft, were hacking at a ripe pineapple when Gorman vented an oath and gestured toward the beach.

"There's that old she-devil now."

"Um!" Mouth full, Dent grunted recognition of the old crone's figure. Bedizened with her savage charms and necklaces, she was coming toward the canoes. She ran one of the small ones down to the water, hopped aboard, and paddled out toward the schooner.

"Orders are to let no natives aboard," said Gorman, sourly watching her.

"Orders be damned; don't apply to her," Dent rejoined. He was curious: Keave was coming to the schooner for some definite purpose, he realized. Probably some message from Sir Francis. When he said as much, Gorman shrugged.

"You're the cap'n. I don't relish her a bit," he said, and called to the men to let her come aboard.

Keave brought her craft to the gangway and mounted to the deck. A glance around, and she approached the two men aft. She was not a pretty object. A skull was woven into her hair, lending her height and grinning hideously; a native cloth about her waist was her only garment, together with the clicking, rustling necklaces of bones.

"She's gone savage, and no mistake," observed Dent. "And to think she was a pet of the missionaries!"

She approached them, unsmiling, intent, beady eyes glittering.

"*Aloha!*" she said, and looked at Gorman. "You come tomorrow?"

"Oh, shucks!" groaned Saul Gorman. "Keave, you can get along without me, this time—"

"You come!" she spat out. "Yes?"

"All right. I'll come."

"Morning. Good time. Yes?"

"Yes, durn you!"

"*Get out.*"

Her order, her voice, her gesture, were imperative. Gorman glared at her, cursed under his breath, then rose and stalked forward, muttering something about hell-fire in her eyes.

She swung around and flung Dent a searching look.

"You help make Nahiena-ene queen?" she demanded.

"Don't ask silly questions, old woman," Dent said calmly. "You know very well she's to be queen and marry your grandson. Isn't that correct?"

"*Maitai! Nui nui maitai!*" she responded with vigorous nods. "Much, much good! Cap'n Clum send you this."

She extended a scrap of paper. Astonished, Dent took it, opened it out. He read the few words scribbled there.

His face became gray and drawn; his eyes closed. Conscious that the old hag watched him with intent and glittering gaze, he made a supreme effort, looked up at her again and forced a smile.

"**S**IT down, Keave, and let us talk," he said. Obediently, she squatted, her regard still searching him. He frowned, striving to mask his inner whirl of emotion.

"Cap'n Clum wants to see me," he said. "Now, that's impossible, because I don't know where Clum is. What's more, Sir Francis won't let him see me, and has warned me not to come ashore. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"Plenty good," she rejoined. "I take you."

Dent shook his head. "That won't do, Keave. Sir Francis wants to keep me out of that valley where the camp and temple are."

"I take you," she repeated confidently. "You come. Another way."

Dent repressed the quick catch of his breath. Another way!

"*Maitai!* Good!" he exclaimed. "When? Tonight?"

"Now. Nobody see us. I take you."

Why not? Her canoe was alongside. Gorman and the other men aboard did not know that he was forbidden to go ashore. Besides, he was in command here. . . . His heart hammering, Dent stood up.

"Very well. Wait till I get one or two things."

He went below quickly. It was too good to be true; yet it was true! This old crone cared no whit for Sir Francis. No doubt she had a twisted, incorrect mental picture of the entire plot. She could take him; she would take him; the impossible had suddenly come to pass! Perhaps Clum had prevailed on her to come and get him.

IN the cabin, Dent buckled on a belt he found there, holding two brass pistols; both were loaded. He donned his jacket, buttoning it over them. Then, taking out the scrap of paper, he stared again at the message, almost incredulous of those words:

"*Mary has told me about you. For God's sake, come help us! E. C.*"

A quick, deep breath escaped Dent. He had been right, he had been right! Ezra Clum was somehow, somewhere, the dominant force in all this affair, the focal, vital point of it. Those eyes, so desperately searching for some gleam of hope or help, had found what they sought. "Mary has told me about you." That explained everything. And here was a plea no less desperate and terrible than the questing eyes. "*For God's sake, come help us!*"

Across Abner Dent's mind flashed those words Gorman had uttered, like a prophecy. . . . Blood everywhere, blood and flesh and naked squirming men. He gulped, as the horror of it struck him full. If he answered this call for help, that dream might well come true. It meant meeting Sir Francis face to face, breast to breast; it meant battle, one man against them all.

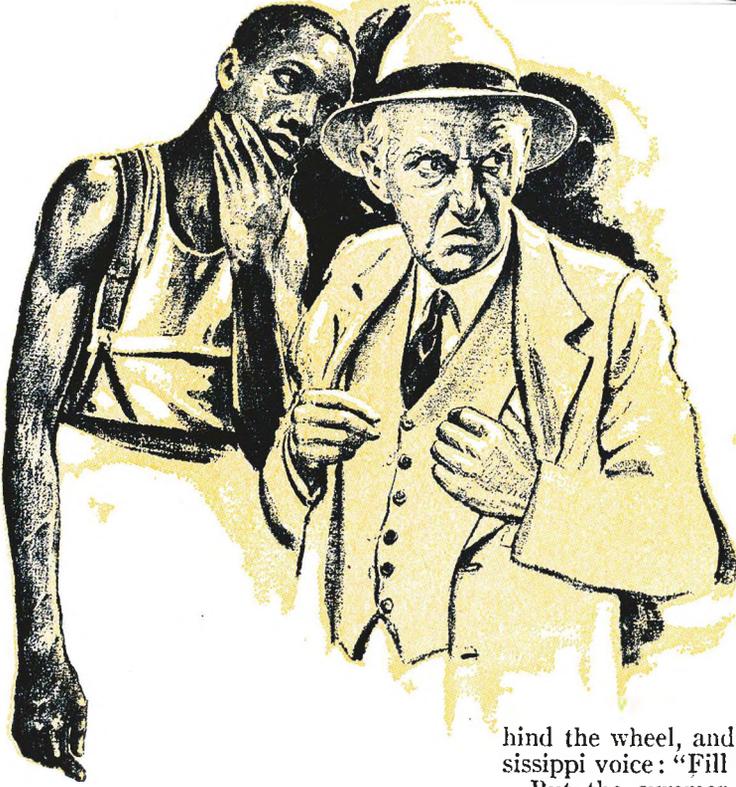
"And it's hopeless," muttered Dent, with a low groan. "It's hopeless. I can do nothing, I can do nothing! Whatever it is that they need and want, I can do nothing."

His head sank, for a moment, as the sense of his own futility overwhelmed him. Then it came up. The thought of Nahiena's face, of her smiling eyes, struck into him. His shoulders squared, and he turned to the companion ladder.

"But," he said aloud, "but, by the Eternal, I can try!"

The concluding chapters of "Gold Ahoy!" will appear in our forthcoming January issue.

Think of a Number



THERE had been wind and a sudden drenching rain that morning; but by noon the Florida sun was again beating on the roofs of the Paradise Overnight Cottages. Sylvester, his threadlike figure casting almost no shadow of its own, detached himself from the scanty shade of the gas-station, and turned his glistening black face unhopefully north. Up that way U. S. 1 leaped, a brilliant, rapidly widening white ribbon, from a growth of palms. It swept past the Paradise station, swooped up a half-mile south for a drawbridge, and then plunged on.

For Sylvester, all things arrived on U. S. 1. He loved to hear the far-away whine of a car, and he could tell by the time one was fairly out of the palms if it was considering a stop. When one did turn in, he was right there while the wheels were still moving, whipping out his cloth to get the windshield. Mr. Bob would come out and grin at the face be-

hind the wheel, and say in his soft Mississippi voice: "Fill her up, suh?"

But the summer had seemed endless and the burden of traffic on U. S. 1 had been of no account. There had been days when all the tires screamed on past and Mr. Bob had sold only a few gallons to the local jalopies.

Sylvester knew that it would be another month before the rich caravan came streaking down from the north. And Sylvester also knew that old Mr. Gissel was mad and wanted his rent. He'd heard Mr. Gissel tell Mr. Bob that he'd get the Sheriff to evict him right out onto the highway if he didn't pay him up some money. Big money—thirty or forty dollars. . . . It made Sylvester dizzy just to think about it.

He walked around the station, past the lunchroom, where they had sold only three sandwiches in two weeks, to the first cottage. Little Robin was chirruping in his crib on the back porch. A blonde girl, looking scarcely older than the adolescent Sylvester, was bent over a wash-tub. She turned to wring out a diaper, and Sylvester felt a sudden choking mis-

By HOWARD RIGSBY

Illustrated
by Charles
Chickering

The able author of "Unlike Leonardo" gives us another lively and unusual story—in which a game new to us, "bolita," plays a prominent part.



ery seize his throat: Young Mrs. Marsh was crying.

Sylvester went up the steps and took the washing she had wrung out. As he passed the baby, it gurgled and stretched up its hands for his hair. He wagged a long finger at it and flashed his teeth, but the misery kept him from speaking.

He hung out the clothes and then stood with one ear cocked toward the highway. U. S. 1 brought all things, and now it was bringing more trouble: Sylvester recognized the car it drove. As if it wasn't enough that Mr. Bob and Mrs. Marsh had a fuss at breakfast-time, and Mr. Bob gone off with a crazy hunted look on his face for town, now old Mr. Gissel had to come bothering around again. Sylvester noted with relief that the Law wasn't with him.

Mr. Gissel was a hard-faced hard-talking old man, and he owned half the county. First of the month, when he drove along the back roads on his rent rounds, you'd never see a soul. Folks hid; and when Mr. Gissel's heavy fist sounded on the door, the pickaninnies covered up their heads.

Sylvester fiddled with the clothespins while Mr. Gissel and Mrs. Marsh talked through the back screen. He wondered why Mrs. Marsh, since she had no rent-money, didn't grab up Robin and hide.

"I told your Mister day before yesterday," Mr. Gissel was saying. "He said he'd have me the money by today, sure. Now you say he's gone off to town. Well, I can't wait no longer. Tomorrow you folks pay up, or get off the property."

"He's in town trying to get some money," the girl said. "If you'd only give us a little time, Mr. Gissel. It isn't as if we were so terribly far behind. If you'd give us till the season starts and we rent some cottages, nights. If you'd do that, we'd be able to pay it up easy—every cent. Bob—Mr. Marsh—he has worked so hard here. He's repaired the cottages. We've spent our own money to improve your property."

"That aint helping me pay taxes," said Mr. Gissel. "You tell your Mister to read his lease." He tipped his stained Panama. "Good day, ma'am." He drove away.

After a while Sylvester went in. Mrs. Marsh was sitting at the kitchen table.

Robin's little bank was lying open on the table, and Mrs. Marsh was counting coins—nickels, dimes, pennies. She finished counting and looked up at Sylvester.

"Robin's got two dollars," she said.

"Yes ma'am," Sylvester said. It was a lot of money for a little baby!

"Robin won't care if we borrow it. He'd want us to, if he knew how things were."

"Yes ma'am."

"We can't be any worse off than we are. Two dollars won't make any difference. You have any dreams last night, Sylvester?"

Sylvester scratched his head. "No, ma'am. I don't remember doin' no dreamin' las' night."

"I didn't dream either," Mrs. Marsh said. "Oh, if I just had a real good hunch! This is one time when we need one, Sylvester."

"Yes ma'am," Sylvester agreed. "Seems to me now maybe I was dreamin' of some cake. Mightn't of been las' night, might of been night befo'."

"Cake?"

"Yes ma'am," he said.

"You could stop by Gracie's and see what number her dream-book gives for cake."

"I sure could do that," Sylvester said. "On'y, it mightn't of been cake. Seems like it was cake."

"Can't you *think* of a number? Think of one right now, Sylvester. Think—real quick!"

Sylvester's eyes got big with effort, but after a few minutes he said sorrowfully: "I jus' don' seem to be able to think of no number."

MRS. MARSH rested her head on her hands. When she looked up, her face was absurdly grim. "We've just got to be lucky," she said. "We haven't had any luck, and we deserve our share, just like other people." She looked at the coins. "How much would we win on two dollars?"

Sylvester gazed at the ceiling. "Backin' a number up—big money—thirty—fo'ty dollars, maybe."

"More than *that*!"

"Yes ma'am. Maybe so."

She scooped up the coins. "Put out your hands."

Sylvester extended his hands, palms up, and watched the coins fall into them.

"Go right now, so you'll get there for the afternoon throw."

"Yes ma'am!" Sylvester turned to go.

"Wait!" Even feeling as she did, she could laugh. "What's your number?" she asked. "Have you got a number?"

Sylvester shook his head.

"Well—listen. Take the first number you see after you leave the station. Hear? When you're walking in to town, look for numbers; and the first one you see, that's ours!" She sprang up from her chair, and her blue eyes had a light in them that Sylvester hadn't seen for weeks. "I just *know* we'll win today," she said. "I feel it, Sylvester. This is going to be our lucky day!"

"Yes ma'am."

"And back it up!" she called after him.

He paused long enough on the porch to nudge Robin's stomach with a finger-tip. "Mr. Robin," he said, "you goin' to win a heap of bolita money today."

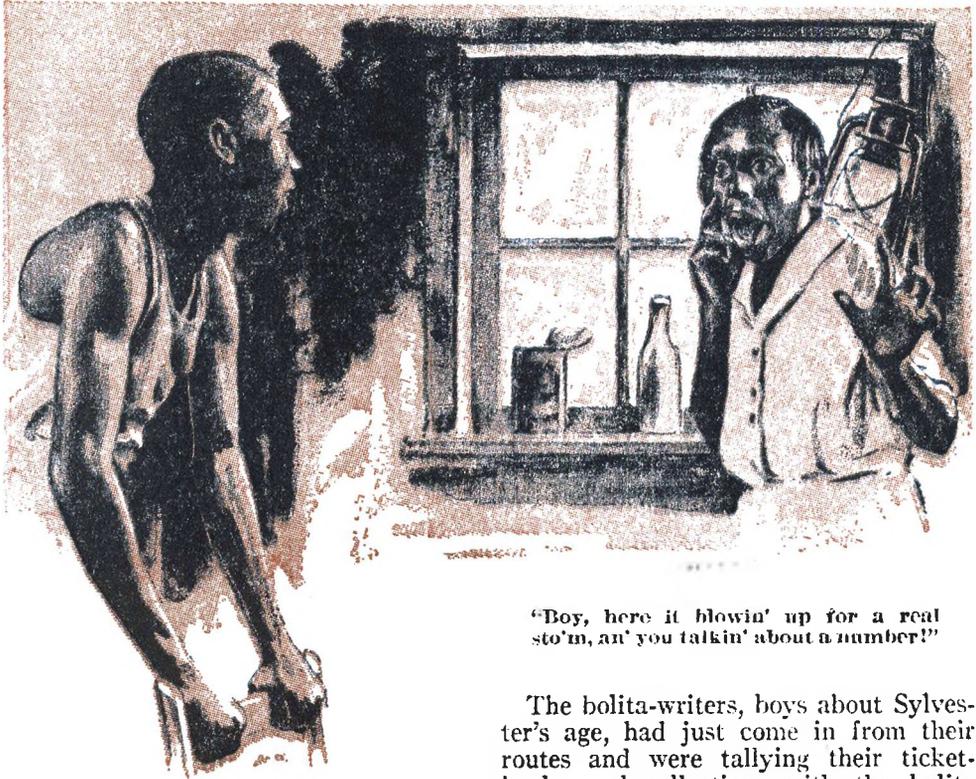
HE knew there were no numbers between the station and the drawbridge, but he kept his eyes open. It was a terrible responsibility to have to see that number. He walked slowly, conscious of the weight of the coins in his pocket. The number wasn't in the sky, wasn't in the sand, wasn't on the highway cement. But it was around somewhere. It was waiting for him to see it, to take it to the bolita house and win little Robin a heap of money, so's old Mr. Gissel wouldn't come round with the Law in the morning and evict little Robin out onto the highway.

He came to the drawbridge, which had just swung closed after letting through a tug. The tug was headed up-river, towing a long barge laden with coquina.

There was no number on the bridge; but Sylvester, his eyes darting ahead, knew now where the number would be. He would see that lucky number at the Good Bay Gas station just across the bridge. As he advanced he could see it: *Gas 21c*.

Behind him the little tug coughed slowly up the channel. The bridge-keeper came out of his house and leaned on the bridge-rail. He spat into the water, reading the letters stenciled on the barge's stern: *State of Florida. Dept. of Waterways. Barge No. 27*.

On the far end of the bridge Sylvester hesitated. There was the number—twenty-one. But he had to be real sure. He turned suddenly and saw the barge. His lips moved, "Twen'y-seven." He looked over at the gas station. "Twen'y-one." But the barge won. He'd seen the gas-



"Boy, here it blowin' up for a real sto'm, an' you talkin' about a number!"

station number first, but he should have been more careful and seen the barge. That was the number, all right—Twenty-seven.

Once he had made up his mind, he walked fast for town. That almost intolerable burden of responsibility was gone; the matter was, Sylvester felt, now out of his hands. "Twen'y-seven," he kept repeating. "Back it up, it make seven'y-two. Twen'y-seven an' seven'y-two, a dollar each one."

He passed through the town, a sliver of shadow moving along close to the hot fronts of the store buildings. "Twen'y-seyen an' seven'y-two. A heap of money fo' little Robin." On the town's sandy outskirts he turned off the highway, entered the deathly pink gates of an ancient subdivision, its lots long reunited in triumphant desolation, its rusted lampless lamp-posts, like burnt pines, staggering along boulevards choked with palmettos.

The XYZ Bar occupied the lower cavity of a two-story stucco, a furtive tubercular-looking building, its frail pine ribs showing where the mottled epidermis had peeled off. Sylvester went around back where a number of cars were parked. He stepped through a doorway and climbed some stairs.

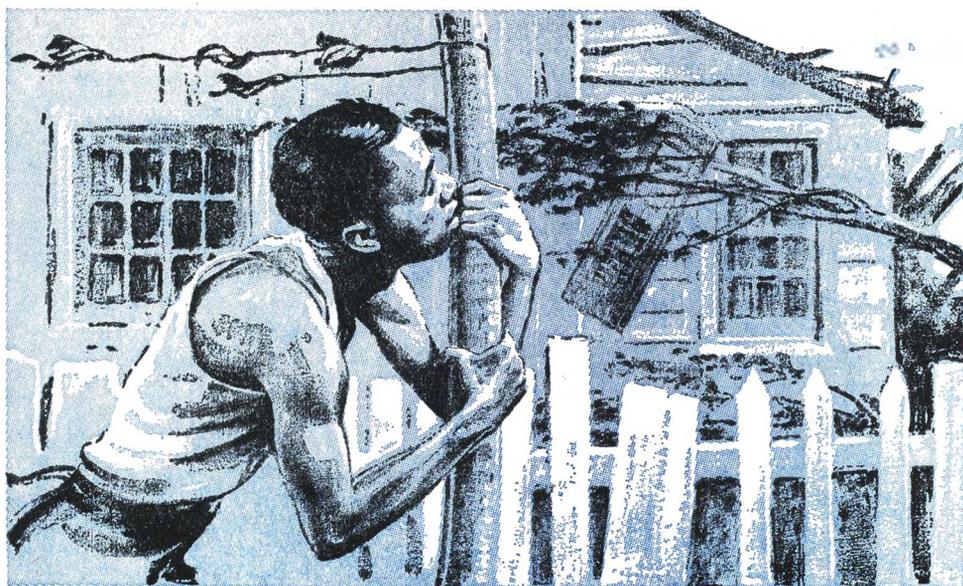
The bolita-writers, boys about Sylvester's age, had just come in from their routes and were tallying their ticket-books and collections with the bolita man, who sat behind a counter at the far end of the big room. At a corner table a poker-game was going on. A man with an eyeshade marked up odds and racing results on a blackboard. Around the walls on benches men sat smoking or leaned back, hat-brims on noses, sleeping.

As soon as the writers were through at the counter, Sylvester went up and got the bolita man to make him a ticket. He paid over the coins and retreated to a vacant corner. He slouched there, holding the ticket carefully between thumb and forefinger. At the top, the ticket said "XYZ" and gave the date. Below that, the bolita man had written "27—72," and beneath it, "\$1.00—\$1.00."

WHEN the big clock behind the counter said three o'clock, the bolita man came out and stood in the center of the room. He carried a rack of small white balls with numbers on them. A boy held an empty white cloth bag.

The men asleep on the benches woke up and leaned forward to watch.

"Goin' to throw!" the bolita man said. "Who's got that lucky number? Comin' out!" He picked the balls swiftly from the rack, holding each one above his head a second, and calling its number before dropping it into the bag the boy held open



for him. When he called out "*Twenty-seven!*" Sylvester trembled, and a smile flickered on his lips. Twenty-seven went in the bag.

When all the hundred balls had been dropped in, a man from one of the benches was summoned to tie the neck of the bag and shake the balls around.

"Now, who wants to grab his own number?" the bolita man asked.

A fat man with a cigar stuck in his lips got up. He removed the cigar and yelled: "Throw her! Come here, you old Fifty-three ball!"

The bag whirled through the air, and the fat man's hand closed on it. He had grabbed one of the balls through the cloth of the bag, and the bolita man tied that ball off from the rest with a piece of string. He opened the mouth of the sack, and ninety-nine unlucky balls tumbled into a basket.

"Come out," Sylvester whispered. "Come on out of that bag—you old Twen'y-seven, you."

He hung forward from his corner as the winning ball was untied, his eyes following every movement of the bolita man's fingers.

The ball was held aloft. "Number Twenty-one!" the bolita man cried. "Who backed up Twelve?" He tossed the lucky ball into the basket, marked the number on a board, and went behind the counter to check the ticket-carbons for a winner.

The men on the benches sank back. The man who had caught the bag swore and walked out of the place.

Sylvester stared unbelievably at the number on the board, and then at his ticket. A look of bewilderment came into his eyes. He swallowed, as if there were dust in his throat. The ticket floated from his fingers to the floor.

The sharp blue eyes of the bolita man rested on him.

"Don't hang around here, boy!"

A puff of wind hit him as he stepped out into the road. By the time he got to the pink gates, it was whipping his shirt-tail out and taking his breath away. The rain, in whistling pellets, came just as he reached the town. He could see the store-keepers out on the sidewalk with their aprons flapping, putting on the storm shutters. He ducked into the lee of a palm and leaned against it, his eyes stinging.

Little Robin's bank-money was all gone, and Mr. Gissel would come in the morning with the law. That Twenty-seven was the first number. That's what she said, take the first number. But it didn't come. Might be, he thought, it comin' on the six o'clock throw. He sure should have kept a dollar of that money for six o'clock. That Twenty-seven'd come out sure enough at six o'clock. That was the lucky number; he felt it in his bones.

He stepped out from the shelter of the palm tree, and the storm sought purchase on his narrow body. It boosted him up a narrow side-street, flung sand in his ears and wafted a palm-branch over his head. A chicken soared by, squawking frantically. Sylvester had a hard time

stopping himself when he blew up to Gracie's house. Gracie had cooked at the Paradise lunchroom until business fell off to nothing.

"BOY," Gracie exclaimed when he told her, "here it blowin' up fo' a real hurricane sto'm, an' you talkin' about a number! Sure mus' be good!"

"Twen'y-seven," he said, his eyes feverish with conviction. "It really comin' out."

"Why you so sweet on that bolita to-day, 'Vester?"

"Mr. Gissel," Sylvester said, "he goin' to evict out Mr. Bob Marsh and Mrs. Marsh an' little Robin Marsh. That Twen'y-seven goin' to pay old Mr. Gissel his rent-money."

"Sure enough!" Gracie said. "That swamp buzzard goin' pickin' on them po' young folks an' that cute baby. I on'y got one two-bit piece, 'Vester. Here!"

"It come out," Sylvester promised; "we give you a piece of the winnin'."

He stepped off Gracie's porch and was whisked on up the street. In front of his uncle's house he succeeded in catching hold of a palm, but he couldn't let go of it to get to the house. He could see his little cousins staring at him through the windows, lots of white showing in their eyes. The fronds of Sylvester's palm departed one by one, until he clutched a naked stump. Sure was blowin'!

Finally the empty center of the storm arrived. All over town debris settled back to earth. Sylvester left the remnant of palm and entered his uncle's house. There was no one there but the kids. He went to the sugar bowl on the top kitchen shelf where his Aunt Ida kept the savings from her wash-money. He borrowed a quarter. It was getting late. He had to hurry, get back there to the bolita-house before six o'clock. . . .

Upstairs at the XYZ the men were talking about the storm. Over a radio a Miami announcer was tracing its progress. Sylvester went to the counter and put down his quarters. He had the bolita man write the whole fifty cents on Twenty-seven; he didn't back it up. Twenty-seven was the number.

The last of the storm now rattled the loose tiles on the roof. It blew the writers in with their books and their coins. Because of the weather, they had not been able to get around to all their clients, and the bolita man frowned sourly when he came from the counter with his rack of balls.

"Comin' out!"

Sylvester closed his eyes as the numbers were chanted. He could hear the white balls clicking into the bag. Come out, Twenty-seven! Come out, lucky number, for Mr. Bob and Mrs. Marsh and little Robin Marsh. Come out, lucky number, so he could wipe all the dirty windshields from the North, so he could sit on guard outside little Robin's door when they were all gone into town to the pictures. Little Robin would get his fingers in Sylvester's hair and pull it. He sure could pull; and he'd laugh, that little old baby, when he done that!

The white bag whirled through the air and was caught. The lucky number was already in a man's hand. Sylvester crossed his arms and hugged his body. The bolita man was holding up the ball.

"Twenty-one! Twice in a row for Twenty-one! Who played that lucky Twenty-one? Who backed up Twelve?"

Sylvester watched the number marked up on the board. The chalk numerals wavered and then grew bright. The number Twenty-one started coming for him like a meteor.

AFTER a while Sylvester mumbled. "Twen'y-seven," he said.

The bolita man got up off his knee. Sylvester opened his eyes and saw the smoke wavering above him, and the circle of faces.

"Fainted," the bolita man said.

Sylvester scrambled to his feet. He cast a frightened look at the board. Twenty-one twice. The men yawned and went back to their benches. Sylvester turned and slunk down the stairs. Gas had been Twenty-one, but he'd looked at the number on the barge. He'd lost little Robin's bank-money, Gracie's money, Aunt Ida's wash-money. He'd felt in his bones it was Twenty-seven, but it had been Twenty-one all the time. Oh, *gray* day!

Cars coming up the highway from the south were beginning to snap on parking-lights. The air was clean and soft with the good salt smell of wave-tops in it. Sylvester moved along slowly, heedlessly putting his feet down in puddles. Behind him the beat of an old motor fell off; it passed him, braking, and came to a stop a few yards ahead. It was Mr. Bob.

Sylvester got in. He had never seen Mr. Bob look like he was. Mr. Bob's face looked as if there was something hurting him so bad that he just wanted



A fat man yelled:
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"Yes suh!"

"I'm goin' to let you in on a little secret, 'Vester. I'm one hell of a man. I can't even support my wife an' my little baby. I'm just a shif'less Mississippi boy, 'Vester. The only thing I ever could do good was play football, an' it don't take much brains for that. This livin' an' supportin' business, it does! It takes brains, an' you got to work hard, an' that aint all. Now an' then a man's got to have a little piece of luck. But all I got to give's hard work."

"Yes suh," Sylvester agreed. "A man do need a little luck." Mr. Bob talking to him like that made him sad and uncomfortable, and terribly proud.

"I went to Miami," Mr. Bob said. "Nobody'd let me have the money. I sat down there in a bar an' took a drink. I couldn't see no way. I just don't know what I'm goin' to do. It's so different now. When I quit up at Ol' Miss', Sally and me started off in my flivver, and we didn't have only maybe twenty dollars, but we didn't worry none."

to yell right out loud, but couldn't. It made him look reckless and dangerous, like he really didn't care what he did. When you knew Mr. Bob, knew how calm he was, how soft he always spoke, even though he was a powerful big young man who used to tote a football, it was real frightening to see him that way. Sylvester sat rigid, looking out of the corners of his eyes.

"'Vester," Mr. Bob said, squinting through the windshield, "you been real good. I'm sorry I can't pay you."

"Yes suh," Sylvester said. "You don't owe me no money. I already los' Robin's bank-money."

Mr. Bob stared at him. "You *what*?"

"Mrs. Marsh, she borr'ed the money fo' bolita. She tell me to take the first number I see, an' that's the lucky one goin' to pay Mr. Gissel his rent-money. She say this was our lucky day."

Mr. Bob stared at the highway.

"I taken the wrong number," Sylvester said.

"Our lucky day," Mr. Bob repeated after a minute. "Little Robin goin' to save us with the pennies in his bank!" He laughed, hard, as if laughing hurt him. "'Vester," he said, "you know that old shotgun of mine?"

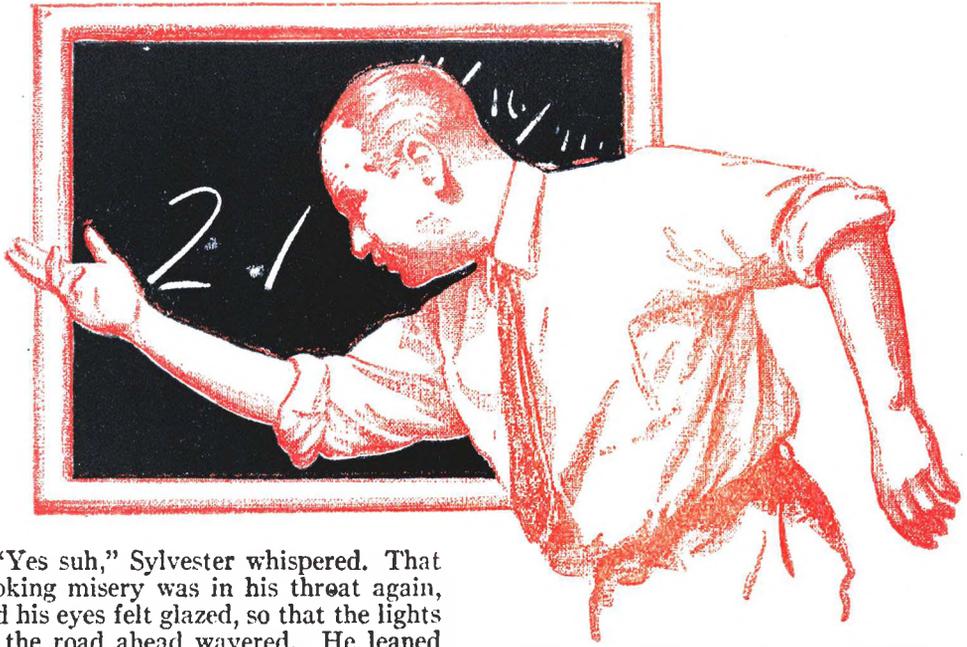
"Yes suh. I sure do," Sylvester said.

"I'm goin' to take that shotgun, an' when Mr. Gissel comes around, I'm goin' to blow him all to little pieces."

THEY were passing through town: and Sylvester, stealing a look at Mr. Bob, saw by the street-lights that his face looked dreamy now.

"We just slept right out under the stars," Mr. Bob said. He was talking just as if he was remembering things out loud, just as if Sylvester wasn't sitting there beside him staring hard at the vibrating dashboard.

"Then little Robin come along. Robin's got to have fresh milk regular, an' those green things in the little cans, got to have a bed to sleep in. My papa was right. He said was I to quit college an' get married, I'd be yellin' for help inside a year." Mr. Bob's voice had sunk way down in his chest. "Only I aint," he said. "Not to anybody." He pounded the steering-wheel with a big brown fist. "'Vester, I'm just thinkin' about Robin. that's all."



"Yes suh," Sylvester whispered. That choking misery was in his throat again, and his eyes felt glazed, so that the lights on the road ahead wavered. He leaned forward, wondering what all the lights were there for.

Mr. Bob started touching the brakes. There were cars by the drawbridge, and cars parked in the Good Bay Gas station. As they stopped, Sylvester could see a big orange highway-truck drawn up at the end of the bridge, its spotlight streaming down on the water below. They got out of the car, and he followed Mr. Bob.

The bridge was half open, and there was a crowd standing around in the beams of the headlights from their cars. A barge, full of coquina, had piled into the drawbridge and messed it all up. The barge lay jammed there, its splintered timbers tangled with the twisted girders of the bridge. A tug was tied up at the bank, and the tug's captain was standing on the brink of the disaster telling the highway department people about it.

"There was waves forty foot high comin' down there," he said. "An' every one of 'em would toss me back on that load of stone. I tell you, there wasn't nothin' for it but to cut her loose 'fore she run right over me. Then I chased her. We tried to get lines on her an' snub her to the bank, but you just don't know what that river was."

The water was calm now; they could all see it in the beam from the spot, scum-covered, moving languidly out to sea. A young highway engineer in khaki pants was rubbing his chin and studying the mess.

"How soon we goin' to get through?" someone wanted to know.

"Got help comin' from Miami," the engineer said. "We got to yank that barge out of there; then we got to burn out those girders an' patch the bridge. You might get through in the morning."

"I got to get up to Jax tonight!" a man said.

Others turned and looked at him, but no one answered him. "I got to get up to Jax," he repeated.

SYLVESTER felt Mr. Bob's hand hard on his shoulder. "Look!" Mr. Bob said. He was pointing across the wrecked bridge, up U. S. 1 toward the Paradise Overnight Cottages.

There were lights burning in all the ten cottages, lights in the lunchroom, lights in the gas-station, and they could see the wet, gleaming cars—parked by the cottages, and parked densely around the station.

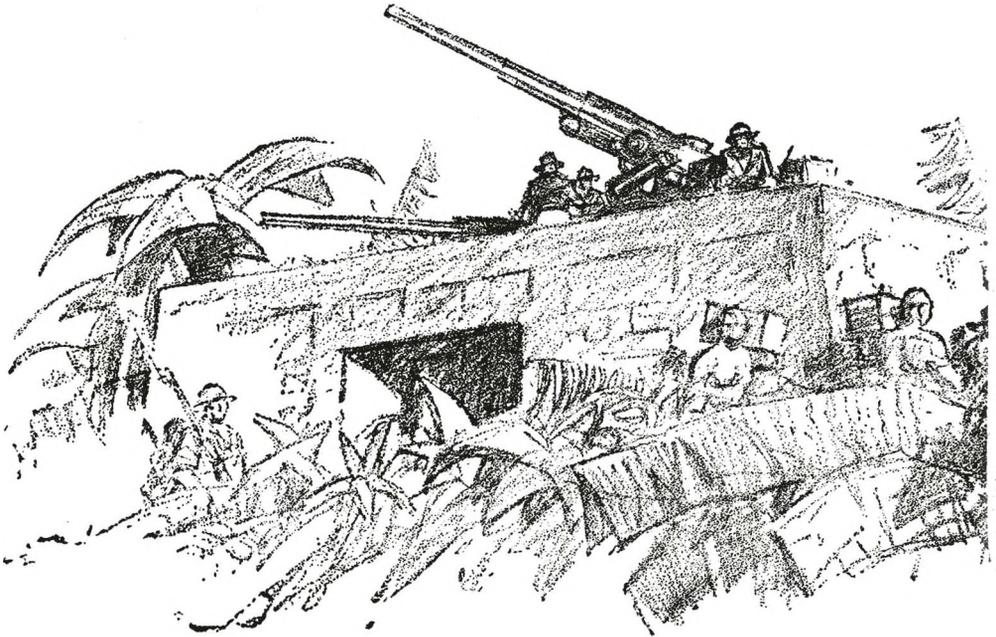
"They can't get through!" Mr. Bob yelled. Then he began to laugh, yelling it again. "They can't get through! They got to stay," he told the man who wanted to get to Jax. "They got to rent my cottages; they got to eat in the lunchroom; they got to buy gas and oil!"

He broke through the crowd and leaped down onto the bargeload of coquina. He ran across the stone and jumped on the far side of the bridge. The people watched him sprinting up the highway.

For a moment longer Sylvester stood there, his eyes slitted with joy, and his teeth gleaming. He looked down at the barge. "Old Twen'y-seven!" he crowed. "She come out. She sure come out!"

SOLDIERS

Of the JUNGLE



TO the sensitive ears of Peter Grand, the familiar sounds of the jungle were out of tune. The night monkey's call was a squeak of warning instead of a soft love-call, and the night air carried alarm.

Peter tried to believe that his forebodings were foolish, but instinct and long training told him he was right. Somewhere out there in the darkness of tangled vines, underbrush and giant trees, something was happening, something that had alarmed the denizens of the forest and keyed them to instant action. Peter felt it was the blood alarm. Out there in the darkness a killer was at work; all the jungle-folk knew it. And Chupie was out there prowling, searching, and hours overdue.

Peter's thoughts were interrupted by the shrieking alarm cry of a night bird.

He strained forward, listening, and then he heard it, something stumbling through the bush, coming toward their camp. That wouldn't be Chupie; for night or day, the Indian moved through the jungle as silent as any wild animal. Then he heard voices, one rambling, incoherent, the other soothing. He recognized the Indian's voice and called out softly: "Chupie!"

"Coming, Peter! Kick up the fire a bit. I've got a visitor."

As Chupie came from the jungle blackness, his shadow widened and danced in the flickering firelight, and in the rays of his flashlight Peter saw he was supporting a man. "Bring him inside," he called as he led the way toward the thatched hut they used for developing their films. "I'll light the gasoline lantern. Who is he, anyway, Chupie?"



*The war comes to Latin America—and
is sent home to Europe.*

By TRACY RICHARDSON

"Don't know. Can't tell by his looks, but he talks like an Englishman. Found him bungling around in the bush, crazy as a loon. All I can make out is something about the Baron."

"Any papers on him—anything to help us identify who he is or where he's from? People just don't happen, out here in the jungle."

"No—not even a match in his pockets. I'll get hot water ready while you get his clothes off. He's a mess."

"My God! I'll say so. Looks as if he'd had a run-in with a tiger."

Chupie laid his burden on the camp cot. The bright light of the gasoline lantern revealed his condition in pitiful clarity. Peter gave a gasp of horror as he saw the man's face, criss-crossed with raw welts, some of them festered and swollen. One eye was closed, and the other open a mere slit. The stranger was a slender man, dressed in what had once been a good tweed sport-suit.

The heat from the gasoline lantern made it stifling inside the hut, and sweat dripped from Peter's nose and chin as he worked. As he stripped the clothing from the man's body, his horror grew. The skin was a mass of raw welts encircling the body. Peter remembered having once seen a native in Africa whipped with a *sjambok* of rhinoceros-hide. The results reminded him of this.

Chupie brought a pot of hot water, and from a metal box Peter took bandages, ointment and antiseptic tablets. With a strong solution of Dakin's fluid he cleansed the wounds on the stranger's face and body, and the man groaned at the bite of the solution. Then Peter applied ointment to the open cuts and bandaged the face so that only a slit remained for the nose and the good eye. Then he went outside, where Chupie kept watch by the fire.

"WELL, what d'you make of it?" Chupie asked from where he was sitting with his head very close to the ground. "What you figure happened to him?"

"For a guess, I'd say someone had worked him over with a rawhide whip. He's not so deeply wounded in any one place, but his nerves are shot. Another day in the jungle and he'd have been done."

"Is he asleep or unconscious?"

"A bit of both, I guess. I'll give him a drink of *tequila* pretty soon, and see if I can't bring him around. It looks, Chupie, as though something mean and dirty had come into our nice clean jungle. Hear anything?"

"Nothing unusual. The jungle is all quiet, and that means no humans are prowling."

For half an hour they sat by the fire speculating on the stranger; then Peter went inside. . . . A shudder shook the man as Peter poured the fiery Mexican *tequila* down his throat. Then he struggled to rise, but Peter held him firmly.

"Damn you, Baron!" came the man's ghastly croaking voice. "Kill me! Kill me!" His voice trailed off as he sank back in a stupor. Peter eased him down on the cot, satisfied he would come around all right by morning. Right now rest was the most important medicine.

He rejoined Chupie at the campfire. "This bird was cussing some one called the Baron," he told Chupie. "Don't mean a thing to me, but I think he'll be able to talk in the morning. I'm going to get

some sleep. You take the watch until two, and I'll finish out. May be some prowlers. This looks screwy enough for anything."

THE night passed quietly and Peter watched the false dawn brighten and then fade. He listened to the stentorian voices of the howler monkeys as they greeted the rising sun, and he heard the other jungle people come to life. Flights of macaws wheeled overhead as they made their way to their feeding grounds, the sun glinting on their colored wings. All these signs told him that everything in their immediate vicinity was as it should be: peaceful.

Peter loved these American tropic jungles. This was virgin country as far as human habitation was concerned, but old from the point of civilization. He knew that in the forest around him, hidden by tangled vines and trees, there were ruins that dated back years before the discovery of America by white people, ruins left by that long-gone, unknown and almost forgotten race, the Mayas.

Like a wild animal, Chupie came to life with the sun, shook himself, made a hasty toilet and started things cooking on the fire.

They carried the sick man out into the sunlight. Peter changed the dressings of the wounds and was glad to see that the inflammation had subsided somewhat. The man opened his good eye and watched them silently for a few minutes; then he spoke through his bruised lips. "Who are you? Where am I?"

"You're all right," Peter said soothingly. "We're friends, and this is our camp. Looks as though this party you call the Baron had treated you rough."

"The Baron!" The man's voice rose in excitement. "Damn him! Let me up. I've got to get out of here and down to the coast!"

"Take it easy," warned Peter. "Not so fast. You're in rather bad shape. Tell us about it, and we'll see what we can do."

"You're Americans?"

"Definitely. I'm Peter Grand, and this is my brother Chupie Grand. Who's this Baron you've been raving about? Sounds German."

"I don't know. German or Red Russian—he might be either an Englishman or an American. Whatever his nationality, he's a devil. Tell me, am I all right? I mean, will I get well and be able to carry on? Or will I—"



"Damn you, Baron!" came the man's croaking voice. "Kill me! Kill me!"

"You'll get well, all right, but you've had a bad nervous shock. You'll be on your feet in a week or ten days."

"A week!" The man groaned. "I can't stay here that long! I've got to get out and down to the coast."

"You wouldn't last an hour on the trail, man! And on foot it's ten days' hard going to either coast. You'd better tell us about it—perhaps we can help."

The man's one open eye roved over them. "Listen—it hurts to talk, but I've got to do it, same as I've got to trust you. I'm Captain Hilton-Smythe, British Mili-

tary Intelligence, attached to the Legation at the Capital of Maduro—"

Chupie interrupted: "If you'll take a drink of *tequila* and get some of this soup into you, you'll feel more like talking. Come on, buck into it."

Captain Hilton-Smythe sucked his lips greedily. "Fancy I'm hungry—don't remember when I ate last."

Bucked up by the drink, the rich hot iguana soup and a cigarette Chupie rolled for him with a corn shuck and a pinch of black tobacco, the stranger told his story, halting to rest or to puff at his smoke.

Peter and Chupie listened intently, not interrupting except as Chupie rolled fresh smokes for him. Peter sniffed at the aroma of the smoke, said nothing, but recognized the faint smell of the coco leaf that Chupie had added.

With a companion, the British agent had been sent into the jungle wilderness to locate a radio station that was relaying broadcast propaganda from Germany. They had found the place, and his companion had been killed. Hilton-Smythe—or Smythe, as they soon shortened the name—had been captured and tortured by the man he named the Baron—whipped with a manatee-hide cane, beaten until he lost consciousness, while the Baron tried to make him talk.

HORROR struck Peter as he listened to the story of torture. He knew that nothing inflicted a worse cut than the raw hide of the sea-cow or manatee. In most tropical countries the use of manatee-hide canes and whips was outlawed.

Smythe and his companion had discovered, before they were captured, that the station was also a depot for supplies, arms and munitions, for a projected Red *coup* to take over Mexico. Their plans were to spread into Central and South America and use those countries as a base for a campaign against the United States. Hundreds of agents were working over the country, and this radio station was the key, their means of receiving and distributing orders from Europe for the timing of their campaign in the initial conquest of Mexico.

"Where is this radio station?" Peter demanded as Smythe finished his halting story.

Smythe shook his head. "I left there yesterday morning—that is, I think I did. I've a vague memory of hitting a guard on the head and crawling for miles and miles. I seem to have lost track of time. . . . But I think I can locate it on a map."

Peter brought a large-scale map and placed it before Smythe. The man's shaking finger traced a course from the south until he jabbed his finger triumphantly at a spot. "That's it—not a hundred yards from the river! It's an old Mayan ruin—stone buildings, thick stone walls. A regular fortress. They've got bombs, light artillery and machine-guns. It will take artillery, an army, to dislodge them. You've got to go out and get help."

Peter laughed silently. "My friend, I believe you—but millions wouldn't. That spot is in one of the most inaccessible jun-

gles in the country. Archeologists will deny there are ruins there, because they've never seen them. Military men would say that transportation of arms through that country would be impossible. Politicians will say there is no truth to the story of a projected conquest. They'd put you in the bughouse if you went outside with that story, even in these days of warmongering. What proof have you, other than your bare word?"

Smythe's eyes gleamed wildly. "Proof! Look at me, and then ask for proof!"

"Yeah, proof. Most anyone would swear you'd been clawed by a jaguar. Wait a minute!" Peter added hastily as he saw the look in Smythe's eyes. "I said I believed you. I'm just trying to show you what you're up against. Take it easy—we'll try and help you."

"You! What can two men do against twenty-five? I'm sure there are that many there, perhaps more." Then he brightened. "You might hide around their camp and keep them worried. Pick them off one at a time with rifles."

"That might work, except for the fact that we have no rifles. I have a light target-pistol, and Chupie uses a bow and arrows. We're not hunters or killers. We're orchid-hunters. Our best weapons are our cameras."

"Well, I don't know anything else I can do about it. Only for God's sake, hurry—they're getting in more supplies all the time, bringing them in by seaplane from a ship somewhere out in the gulf. They can land near by in the river."

"We'll have to locate the place first—Chupie will attend to that; then we'll see what can be done. Right now the thing for you is rest and food."

WHAT do you think of the story, Peter?" asked Chupie as they went back into the jungle to cut *ramon* trees to feed their mules. "Think this man has really found something?"

"He's not dreaming. He's seen things, all right. They could take this whole country before warning got out. Never had trouble start in the south before. With Fifth Columnists working inside the cities, it would be a pushover. I'll take care of Smythe while you scout out and see what you can find. How long will it take you?"

"*Quien sabe?* Two or three days, probably. If I'm not back in five days, you'd better start looking for me. This Baron seems to be a tough sort of *hombre*."

Chupie's preparations were simple. He was naked to the waist. He wore khaki

SOLDIERS OF THE JUNGLE

trousers, and on his feet the native *guaraches*. A machete and a small bag dangled from a leather belt, and over his back swung a palm-frond quiver filled with long steel-tipped arrows. In his hand he carried an ironwood bow. The Englishman looked at him in complete bewilderment.

Chupie flashed them a grin. "Remember, Peter, give me five days. Keep your eyes peeled and your ears to the ground. These people may be out looking for Smythe." He said something more that sounded like an angry clucking hen; Peter replied in kind—and Chupie faded into the brush.

"THAT language you were speaking—" began the bewildered Englishman. "I'm supposed to be a fair linguist, but that's a new one."

"Oh, that!" grinned Peter. "There's probably not more than four hundred people on earth who understand that. It's Carib—that's the tribe of Indians Chupie comes from. They're about the wildest Indians in all America. Chupie has a gift for tongues. He speaks German, French, Spanish, Italian—and can out-talk a Chinese mandarin about Confucius. Deceptive devil, that Chupie."

"I still don't understand. You call him brother—he has the same name; but he looks like a savage."

"Don't blame you. I've never quite got over Chupie myself. Twenty-five years ago my dad was in this country making a geological survey. He found a dugout canoe floating down the Passion River, and in the canoe was a little naked Indian boy. Father took him to camp, fed him on canned milk and later took him to the city, where Mother was waiting, with me. I was two years old then, and they decided on the experiment of raising the Indian along with me, to have equal opportunities in everything.

"Chupie—they gave him the name from the first words he spoke—blended right into the life. We went through grade-school together, then college and then—well, into orchid-hunting. We've been inseparable all our lives. Only when we come back to the jungle, Chupie sheds his civilization and is almost all Indian. Chupie—well that's about all I can tell you about my brother Chupie."

"I see," said Smythe; but Peter doubted very much if he did.

Peter devoted his entire time to camp work and taking care of Smythe, treating his wounds and keeping him filled with

nourishing food. Once he took a trip into the bush and returned with a bag filled with green leaves which he hung near the fire to dry.

"What's that?" asked Smythe, who was improving rapidly and was full of questions about the jungle.

"Coco-leaves—the plant from which they extract cocaine," explained Peter. "Farther south where it is plentiful, the Indians chew it, and it gives them great endurance and immunity to pain. I'm fixing this up for you. We'll be moving in a day or two, and you may need some extra strength."

"Not for me, Peter. No dope! I've seen too much of it in India and China."

"Don't worry. This isn't dope—it's medicine. It will keep you on the go so you can be in on the kill, so to speak. We're three to twenty-five, if your figures are correct, and we'll need everything we've got. It's the difference between being a help or a hindrance."

"Righto! I've made a mess of things so far. There's too much at stake for me to pass up anything. . . . You get the picture of this thing, don't you, Peter? The whole thing is planned to cause the United States enough worry to keep her at home. They don't want her helping Europe again. If their plans work out, the United States will be involved here—or, perhaps even better for them, with Japan."

"That just your own idea, Smythe, or have you proof?" Peter Grand's voice was suddenly hard, and all his frank boyishness had left him.

"I can't prove it, but the Baron boasted. He was so sure I'd never be able to tell what I knew, that he gloated over the things he had done and was going to do. His greatest ambition is to wreck the peaceful routine of the Americas. The man has an extirpation complex."

CHUPIE returned to camp late the third day—and brought with him three eight-millimeter sporting-rifles with filled cartridge-belts to match, and some packets of papers.

"This rifle," he explained, "belonged to one Captain Chowski, who gets letters from his sweetheart in Mexico City and from a wife in Moscow. This one belonged to Max Rueter, one-time coffee-planter in Brazil, later of Mexico. This last one belonged to a man with an American passport but a former member of the Loyalist army in Spain, during the last revolution. All of them workers, evidently, for 'the Cause'."

Smythe was speechless at this evidence of Chupie's success.

"I take it," said Peter, "that you found the camp. We may be able to use these rifles. Tell us about it."

"I found the ruins, just as Smythe reported. I don't know how many men there are there—I counted eighteen: Germans, Russians and Spaniards. They have made a fort of the ruins: guns, trenches and everything. It's impregnable except to artillery or aerial attack with bombs. It's a tough nut to crack—and just six hours through the bush from here."

"We'll take a stab at it," said Peter cheerfully. "We'll wait a few more days for Smythe to gain strength, and that will give us time to pack our stuff away where it won't be found, and fix our mules up so they won't starve. We'll travel light."

"Why wait?" cried Smythe. "Every day we wait they are likely to get in more men and supplies. I'm able to do my bit on the trail."

"Take it easy, old-war-horse!" chuckled Peter. "We can save a lot of time by waiting until you're in better shape. It don't matter if they do get in more supplies—they're too strong for us, anyway. Brawn won't get the best of them; we've got to dig up a brain or two and use that. Just take it easy, we'll figure it out."

IT was a week before Peter pronounced Smythe fit to travel. When he took the bandages off the Englishman's face, he with difficulty repressed a shudder at the sight. It would take a lot of plastic surgery to repair the damage done. But the man was game.

Chupie, as he led them through the bush toward the ruins, said to Peter: "This man Smythe is half dead, but he drives on. He thinks he's licked, but he wants to get a last crack at this Baron. I guess that's what they call the British bulldog spirit."

Straight through the jungle Chupie led them, right to the edge of the clearing, without meeting a soul. Concealed in the underbrush, Peter counted twelve buildings, all of square stone blocks that, to the eye at least, were as solid as the day they had been put in place. The underbrush had been cleared on every side for over a hundred yards, and a trench encircled the place. Connecting trenches led back into the ruins. They had established themselves for defense as well as offense.

Peter and Chupie crawled inside a huge hollow tree, and through a hole cut in the side, had a perfect view of the camp.



Illustrated by
Raymond Sisley

"Ye gods!" exclaimed Peter as he looked down on the outfit. "Chupie, all this wasn't done in a day. It's taken months to work all this out. Clearings, trenches, gun-emplacements! Unless I'm mistaken, those guns in the corners are anti-aircraft guns, and it looks as though those men working in the clearing were planting land mines. I wonder if they are expecting an attack, or if it's just habit."

Chupie grinned. "That's their European civilization, Peter. I'll bet they've spent a few sleepless nights since they found three of their men with Indian arrows through them. They know all about guns and knives—that's their stock in trade—but arrows are just too primitive for their imagination. And remember, Smythe escaped them. That won't make them feel any too secure."

Peter had kept his glasses to his eyes. Now he thrust the glasses into Chupie's hands. "Take a look at that bird just coming from the buildings! From Smythe's description, I'd gamble that's the Baron. Handsome devil, isn't he?"



"That's what I want!" exclaimed Smythe. "That's the proof!"

"Huh!" The way Chupie breathed the exclamation made it a curse. "My God! Cane, monocle, police-dog at his heels. What a get-up for this tropical jungle! I'm damned if he isn't wearing spurs! Is he ignorant or just confident?"

"I'd say confident, Chupie. He probably knows you couldn't convince anyone on this continent that what we are looking at could take place. The very boldness of their venture is their guarantee of success. I don't see how an inexperienced bushman like Smythe ever got this far against them; the man must have a lot of iron in his make-up."

"How about picking the Baron off from here? It's a cinch. Not more than a hundred and fifty yards. Easy for these high-powered rifles. What say?"

"No! Wait. We've got to be smarter than these men, at least jungle-smart. If

we start shooting, we play their game—they'd know what they were up against. We'll have to work out something they don't understand. The jungle's our friend; it will fight for us, somehow or other. Let's go back and tell Smythe how things are going. Poor devil, he's heart-broken because he caved in just before we got here. If it hadn't been for those coco-leaves, he wouldn't have made it as far as he did."

BACK to where they had left Smythe was fully a mile. They heard him yelling, before they got there, and they raced through the bush, wondering what had happened now to this child of misfortune.

Chupie spotted it first—a black column that crossed an opening and entered the cover where they had left Smythe. He shouted to Peter: "Army ants! I'll get *him*; you get ready to beat off the ants."

Peter turned aside while Chupie dashed into the shelter, seized the yelling Smythe by the collar of his jacket and dragged him away. Black ants were swarming over Smythe, and Chupie's hand where it held the coat felt as if it was in a fire. Free of the column of ants, he stopped, and Peter began with a tree-branch to beat off the insects. They moved again, then removed Smythe's clothing. He was a mass of tiny bites, each one of them burning like fire.

Peter dashed back to retrieve their packs, and with ointment they soothed their bites. Safe on the banks of the river, Chupie suddenly burst into chuckles.

"I've got it, Peter!" he called.

"Got what? More trouble?"

"The answer to our problem. You're right, no man can whip the jungle; and it's not often anyone gets the best of army ants. You may escape them, but you just can't lick them. Another ten minutes, and it would have been too late for Smythe. This is going to be good."

There was approbation in Peter's eyes that belied his words. "Chupie, for all your civilization you're still a savage at heart. O.K., I get the idea, and it's your show, if you can figure how to work it out. You've got a few million soldiers, but how the devil are you going to train them to fight for you instead of against you? Army ants don't understand neutrals, you know; they are definitely Nazi."

Chupie's laugh was triumphant. "Got it all figured out! Remember when we were in Nicaragua and saw them using alligator-oil to protect their coco trees from the ant pests? We'll kill alligators and render out the oil; then the ants won't touch us. *Sabe?*"

IT didn't take long to kill the alligators; the tough job was rendering the oil with the small cooking-outfit they had. While the fires were simmering away, Chupie ranged the bush with his bow and arrows. By the time the oil was tried out, he had a dozen wild pigs and several deer hanging behind their camp, polluting the air with their putrid smell.

Smythe was about again, a wreck, but chewing coco leaves and working like a madman. Watching him, Peter wondered which of the two was nearest to a savage—Smythe or Chupie.

They cut the rotten meat into small chunks and packed it in bags made from the bark of trees. After that they soaked their clothes in the rancid alligator-oil and set out at dark with back-loads of meat. They scattered trails of meat all around

the clearing, hurling pieces as far inward as they could. Peter contrived a sling and with it catapulted chunks of meat right into the center of the ruins.

Three trips they made with loads of meat; then Peter and Smythe parked in a good vantage-point while Chupie raced off into the bush with the last load of meat. On his efforts depended the success of their fantastic scheme. He'd been preparing for this part for days. He returned at daybreak, jubilant.

"It won't be long now!" he chuckled wickedly. "The ants are on the move. Come on—the oil makes us immune, so we might as well see how they work."

THEY squatted beside the broad line of black insects pushing relentlessly forward on the trail of the meat. "They'll eat anything in their path, dead or alive," Chupie explained to the bewildered Englishman. "Here in the tropics they call them the sanitary police. When they come along, there's only one thing to do: run—that is, if you get the chance. Otherwise you'll be eaten alive—as you should know."

Smythe shuddered at the remembrance of his narrow escape. "God, I wouldn't wish that kind of a death on my worst enemy! Can't we save them somehow?"

"You white people are all alike," growled Chupie. "Let someone beat you, nearly kill you, and then when you get the chance to get even, you go soft and don't go through with it! But you can't do it this time—it's too late. Chances are a thousand to one not a single man will escape from that bunch of ruins. Ants are already swarming over them. Get back in the bush if you don't want to look. I'll stay and see that a good job is done."

"You're a bloody savage," said Smythe resignedly; but he made no move to leave.

Chupie scowled. "Savage, yes! I was born in this country, but I was raised American. I love the country and the people. Cruel? Certainly it's cruel. But tell me, Englishman, what would you call it if the horde these few men control should swoop down on your home, and kill and burn, and make slaves of every person unfortunate enough to survive? I'm not a soldier, but I know they kill mad-dogs, and these people are worse. The only cure is to kill them."

Peter grinned at Chupie's outburst, but Smythe shrank back at his vehemence, and remained silent. . . . Gradually, as they watched, the ground enclosed by the trench system changed color and turned

SOLDIERS OF THE JUNGLE

black as millions and millions of army ants swarmed over every inch while they searched out the bits of meat and anything else edible that came in their way.

Suddenly a man rushed from one of the buildings, beating about him with his arms. He staggered blindly, fell into the trench with a wild scream, and nothing more was heard from him.

Other men came staggering into the open, covered with the biting insects which had attacked them while they slept. A man appeared with a five-gallon oil-can in his arms and began racing across the grounds. They saw him pause and pour some of the liquid over his body. Others followed his example.

"Damnation!" growled Chupie. "Someone in that outfit is smart. He knows that ants don't like oil. I'll fix that!" He raised the captured Mauser rifle to his shoulder and fired. The oil-can in the man's arms seemed to explode with the impact of the bullet.

But Peter had been right about one thing: these men understood gunfire. Automatically, despite the invading insects—or perhaps on account of the protection the oil gave them—they raced for cover of the buildings. Seconds later bullets were searching the jungle. A machine-gun opened up from some hidden post amid the ruins, and they had to take cover behind a mahogany tree. Other guns opened fire, and it looked as though—if by the use of the oil they could escape the ants—they'd win the fight; for the three attackers didn't have a chance against all those guns.

"Well, we made a good try, anyway," said Peter. "Maybe we can pick off a few of them with our rifles, but it's going to be some job. I'm going to try for that machine-gun in the corner."

CHUPIE was working back of them, muttering to himself in Carib.

"Watch this," he said grimly. "This will fix them."

He had an arrow ready; now he touched a match to a piece of bark fastened to the shaft. It blazed with a blue sparkle as Chupie drew the cord to his shoulder and let go. The arrow wavered in flight, straightened, and plunged from its arc fairly into the clearing. Another blazing arrow cut the air and landed close to the buildings.

Dark smoke puffed up; a trail of flame raced across the ground toward the ruins where the machine-guns were still chatter-

ing away. Cries of alarm could be heard, and then everything was covered with a black pall of smoke from which an occasional tongue of flame darted. Small explosions were heard in the ruins, ammunition blowing up from the heat. Then everything seemed to lift, smoke, fire and the building itself—then it settled back into a roaring inferno. The fire had reached their storage of oil and gasoline. Even Chupie was very quiet.

FOR hours they hovered around the ruins, unable to approach the burned building until the rocks had cooled. Other ruins yielded skeletons, their bones picked clean by the ants. In the radio-room they found papers scattered around as though someone had tried hastily to remove those of importance.

These papers Peter gathered together into a compact bundle for future examination. "That's what I want!" exclaimed Smythe. "That's the proof that you've been talking about! Now I'll be able to prove my words."

"Sorry, old man," said Peter, "but these papers go to Washington. This is the American continent—and we don't want your European war over here."

"But we're friends!" cried Smythe.

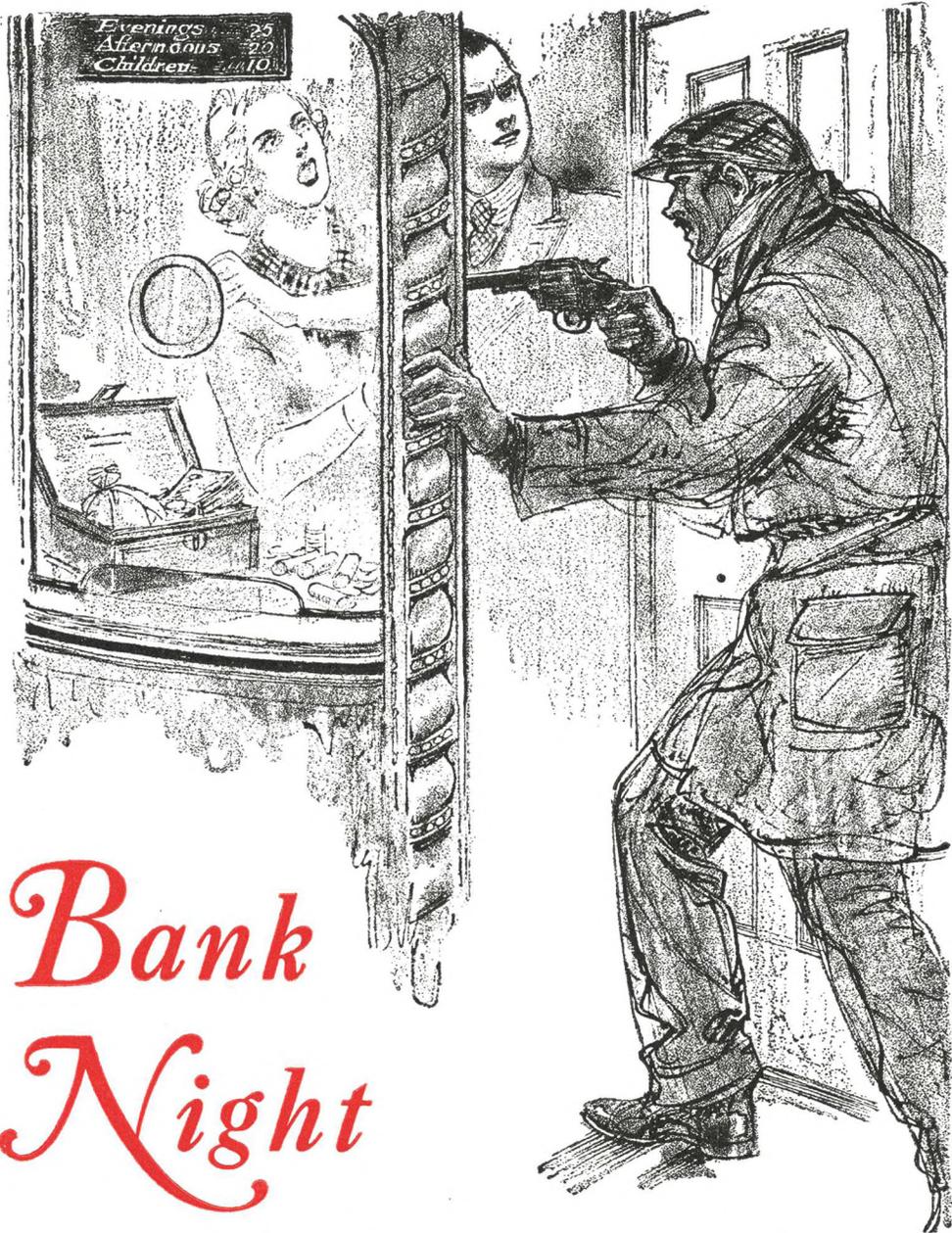
"Then let's stay that way. You take care of your war and we'll take care of things over here. You go back to the capital and tell them what you've seen here. They're not dumb. They'll make an outpost of this place and there are a lot of guns here they can use. We'll see that you get back all right."

"You're taking a lot on your shoulders, Peter, for an orchid-hunter." Smythe's tone was doleful. "But I feel better for knowing there are Americans like you. I'll get back to the capital, and carry on from there."

Chupie came in from his scouting.

"Peter, I can't find the skeleton of that police-dog. Might have been burned, of course. But I can't find a monocle around any of the skeletons. I did find their trail to the river, and there were a lot of crushed army ants on it. It looks as though some of them escaped, at that. We'd better be going."

"Right!" agreed Peter. "We've got their papers, ruined their food-supply and burned their ammunition, so they'll not come back here. Let's get the pack-mules over here, get Smythe out to the trail for the capital and get out somewhere where the jungle is clean. This place smells of war."



Bank Night

Is Murder Night

IT was a comedy, very funny, and the Bonanza Theater in the river town of Broken Ax was jammed. Everybody who could scrape together the admission price was there. Sheriff Jim Laurel was there, his sides shaking at the bright hilarity on the screen. Even Death was there, waiting. . . .

Outside, a freezing wind that had been born thirty hours before in the Mackenzie basin was screeching down the frozen Mississippi River channel, lifting whole acres of yesterday's snow off the ice, and racing with it for whirling miles. But let 'er blow! The town of Broken Ax lay snug in a cleft of the bluffs bounding the



By THOMAS
DUNCAN

west bank of the river; and within the warm Bonanza Theater you had only to gaze at the screen and be transported to sunny Palm Springs.

In that laughing audience two men did not so much as smile, or even follow the picture very closely. They were not sitting together, but their watches were to-

gether—synchronized to the second; and their thoughts were in the box-office. This was Tuesday. This was bank night.

Half a block away, beyond the queues of bundled people who huddled beneath the marquee, a third man waited. In years he was young, but his eyes were hard and old, and his mouth was hard—an oblique slit above his chinlessness. His long, lean bones were wrapped in a gray-checked topcoat; the brim of his gray hat flared low; and occasionally, standing in that dark doorway, he slipped his left hand from his pocket and consulted the watch on his wrist. His right hand never left its pocket.

In the doorway beside the young man three packages rested, wrapped in heavy brown paper. Identical in appearance, each was about the size to contain a pair of shoes, unboxed. It was evident that the young man's thoughts were on them, because occasionally he nudged them with his foot, making sure they were still present. He was a young man without trust—even inanimate objects, he seemed to feel, might double-cross you.

The other inanimate object which concerned him possessed four wheels, and it did not belong to him. It was a light sedan, almost new, and it stood slanting in at the curb, directly in front of the doorway. From a farm six miles west, it had carried Otto Dorfburg and his family to the bank-night show. An hour ago the young man had witnessed their arrival, and he had selected their car for the get-away. For the first lap of the get-away. It was to be complicated and bewildering, that get-away: foolproof.

The young man had been prepared to pick the lock of the car door and to do certain things to the ignition system, but that was unnecessary, for that dumb Otto Dorfburg had not even locked the door. More dumbly yet, he had left the ignition-key in its slot. A dope like that, the young man thought, deserved to have his car vanish.

It did not occur to the young man that this was an eloquent tribute to Sheriff Jim Laurel. In this river town and river county,—traditionally tough,—crime was rare, and unpunished crime still rarer. A stalwart old watchdog, Jim Laurel. . . .

On the theater screen the comedy ended, and the house-lights came on. A wave of excitement and hope, rippled over the audience. The hour lacked a minute of nine. All that money to be given away—pyramided to \$750 from weeks of unclaimed prizes. With \$750



He babbled: "Hold-up! They shot Sally and Frank!"

you could marry her, thought Ted Swenstrom, glancing at her blondeness; or pay everything off at one swoop, thought Otto Dorfburg; or go to Long Beach and pitch horseshoes, thought Grandpa Perkins.

Sheriff Jim Laurel, his rugged body filling an aisle seat, grinned at his favorite deputy, Todd Connor.

"Luck, son," he said.

"How about going halves if one of us wins?"

The Sheriff, looking like a benevolent St. Bernard, shook his head.

"Everything or nothing—that's the way I've always played it."

Velvet curtains had swept together, masking the screen, and before them the drawing was about to take place. Frank O'Brien, the young theater-owner, was repeating the rules that the audience knew by heart, and Mrs. Parker's little girl Janie was doing bashful things with her toes. Then Janie plunged her hand into the heap of capsules.

Frank O'Brien opened it, read the number, the name.

"Mr. Chid Moorhead," he repeated. "Is Chid Moorhead—"

Chid Moorhead wasn't in the audience.

"I think he's signed up, though," Frank O'Brien announced. "He usually does."

But a moment later O'Brien reported: "No, he isn't. Perhaps he's outside. Mr. Chid Moorhead has three minutes—"

Those one-hundred and eighty seconds ticked away, failing to bring Mr. Moorhead.

O'Brien said: "Too bad! This was Mr. Moorhead's unlucky day. Well, that means that next week—"

The audience murmured: "Yes, yes—next week—"

Sheriff Laurel said: "Too bad for Chid. I hear he's been hard run financially."

Todd Connor nodded. "He's been cutting ice alone. Trying to fill that ice-house without hiring help. . . . Funny he didn't buy a ticket and sign up this afternoon."

The Sheriff thumbed his jaw. "Maybe he just couldn't spare the admission money."

"Then why didn't he come and stand outside while they drew?"

The Sheriff shrugged. The velvet curtains were running apart, and the second feature flashed to the screen.

That was at nine-seven. By nine-eleven, those of the audience who had already seen the second feature had gone; and the people outside had wandered away, plowing homeward through the bitter wind. And half a block away, the young man with the three brown packages stepped into Otto Dorfburg's sedan, started it, warmed the motor. At nine-thirteen he backed the sedan from the curb and drifted it slowly along toward the Bonanza Theater.

THE second feature was noisy—a Western that opened with lots of shooting. The noise from the loud-speakers aided the two men with synchronized watches. At nine-eleven they rose from their seats and met in the foyer.

They were in their early thirties. One, a small, narrow man, with a thin little mustache, moved rapidly over to Harold Brush, the ticket-taker, and put the mouth of an automatic against his spine.

Very low he said:

"Keep still. . . . No, don't put up your hands."

Harold was earning extra high-school money by taking tickets, and his sixteen-year-old face went green.

"I—I—"

"Shut up."

Harold shut up.

"You're going in there."

The man inclined his head toward a door marked, "Gents."

"Y-yes—"

"Shut up. You're going in there and stay. You're not coming out. Oke."

Harold hurried, the man with the automatic accompanying him to the door.

"If you come out, I'll plug you," the man said.

Harold vanished within.

The man's companion, a bony fellow with big hands and an oversize lower jaw, was waiting by the door leading into the box-office. His name was Dingbat. "Easier than banks," he said.

The little narrow man did not reply. He rapped on the box-office door. Frank O'Brien opened it, then instantly tried to jerk it shut. But already the little man's foot was in the crack, his automatic trained on O'Brien's midriff.

"Don't get cute," the little man advised. "You and the broad keep your hands down, but don't get cute."

The little man was called Keeno, and his sharp dark eyes took in the situation with the rapidity of a Leica lens: a black steel box with wads of currency, a money-bag with silver; the blonde broad who sold tickets—she looked as if she might squeal: and through the glass of the ticket-booth, a car drifting into view on the street—driven by Bucky.

"Hand it over," Keeno said. "Not to me. To him."

He jerked his head at Dingbat, whose big hands floated into the booth.

O'Brien was sensible. O'Brien lifted the money-box and the money-bag and handed them to Dingbat. But the broad—you never knew what they would do, especially blondes.

Her name was Sally, and she was O'Brien's wife. They were young; it had been a struggle, buying a theater—light-bills, film-exchange bills, advertising bills. And now they were just getting their noses above water. And this money—they carried no hold-up insurance—

Suddenly she screamed.

"You can't, Frank!" she screamed. "Don't let them—"

She lifted both hands and lurched at Keeno.

He shot her. She looked surprised—so very surprised—for that split second before the pain streaked up. Then Keeno, very coolly, swung the gat toward Frank O'Brien and squeezed the trigger. The O'Briens went down together in that tiny ticket-booth, which wasn't much larger than a coffin.

"Come on," Keeno said.

Followed by Dingbat, he walked—not ran—through the door to the street, under the marquee, and into the back seat of the car that Bucky had stolen.

"Step on it," he said. "Give me a cigarette, Dingbat."

IT was a very noisy picture—cowboys, rustlers, Indians. Shooting on the screen had drowned out other noises; and when Harold Brush ventured into the foyer, he found it deserted. He scurried to the ticket-booth, and what he be-

held through the half-opened door nearly put him under.

Cold sweat sprang through his pores; his knees swayed; he thought he would gag. His thumb groped to a call button and he jabbed it urgently, giving the operator the signal to halt the show.

Obeying, the operator flipped down the arc-light shutter; stopped the motor, switched on the house-lights. The kids in the audience Bronx-cheered the management; they thought that there was film trouble.

Then Harold Brush was stumbling down the aisle, his wordless lips moving fast, his Adam's-apple bobbing; he swayed to a halt by Sheriff Jim Laurel and Todd Connor; he babbled: "Hold-up! They shot Sally and Frank!"

In that instant twenty years tumbled off Jim Laurel's big shoulders; from a mild, grandfatherly man he changed into a dangerous watchdog. He was on his feet and trotting up the aisle, his .38 coming from his shoulder-holster. A sudden silence froze the audience; the operator's head was craning out of the square hole in his booth, watching Laurel and Todd Connor.

A SWIFT glance at the ticket-booth was all Laurel needed. On the tissues of his brain that scene would be scorched forever. They were so young. . . . He turned away, saw several townsmen emerging into the foyer.

"Call the coroner," he ordered. "Keep folks away—from that door."

The words slid back over his shoulder; with Connor he was already knocking open the door to the street.

The empty street—wintry and wind-swept. For a bleak half-second the wind and the cold night filled him with a vast sense of impotency: Where to turn? How to begin? Then to Connor he barked:

"Somebody out here must have seen 'em leave. . . . Find somebody!"

He wheeled, jerked open the door into the foyer, saw Bob Ryan, one of his deputies.

"Start phoning, Bob—State police first—then all sheriffs within fifty miles. Go to my office—use that phone." And to Harold Brush he said: "How did it happen?"

Harold gulped out the facts.

"Did they have a car for a get-away?"

Harold didn't know. . . . Harold didn't even remember any too well what either of them looked like.

§ With angry impatience Sheriff Laurel shoved his way to the street. The news was flying now, along the arteries of town; men were gathering, the silver clouds of their breath whipped away by the wind. They clumped under the marquee and peeked into the ticket-booth. . . . A quarter of a block away. Laurel glimpsed Todd Connor and old Job Boeker, plodding across an intersection beneath a swaying street-lamp. He trotted to meet them.

Connor shouted above the wind whistling in store façades:

"Jeb saw a car—"

"A sedan," Jeb broke in. "Passed me on my way to Campbell's Café. . . . It was going fast. Wore chains. Three men—mebbe four. A feller in the back seat was lighting a cigarette."

"What'd he look like?"

"Couldn't tell. Just saw a match flare. . . . That car was whizzing. Turned south on Jackson Street."

"Get your car," Laurel told Connor.

"Understand they killed Sally and Frank O'Brien," old Jeb yapped on. "Too bad. . . . That car wore chains, Jim. Heard 'em banging. Mebbe you can track 'em by the chains. Doubt it, though! Bad night for murder."

A CAR with chains—a sedan—and it turned south on Jackson Street. A precious lot to go on! Laurel filled his lungs, tramped back to the theater. Beneath the marquee the bright coldness was a-jostle with people; and as he came from the shadows, he heard someone say:

"Laurel was in there."

"Well, why didn't he—"

He pretended not to hear. But he felt his years, suddenly—like a burden of rock strapped to his shoulders. They expected you to be more than human, if you were Sheriff. Twenty-four hours a day, and if you went to a movie and sat in the darkness, lost in the picture, they thought you should know by some psychic gift that two gat-men were looting the box-office. He felt their blind hostility, unreasoning, like a mob's thinking; and he was glad when Todd Connor's car slithered up to the curb.

Jackson Street wandered south out of town, becoming Secondary Road 9 at the city limits, and jogging along between the river and the bluffs. Even in summer it was little-traveled, and tonight Connor's headlights revealed it as two icy ruts into which the wind kept pouring snow.

"They were crazy to come this way," Connor muttered. "I—"

He broke off. Less than a mile from town, rounding a curve, the car sent its headlights flooding a sedan stalled in the middle of the trail.

His feet snapped up and thudded on clutch and brake, his hand going for his gun. Already Jim Laurel's .38 was out.

But what they expected did not happen. No gun-blazes flashed from that car. Instead, a young woman peered through the rear window.

"That's Mrs. George Patterson," Connor said. "What's she—"

They piled out into the wind, and kicked through the snow. The Pattersons were farmers, living four miles south of town; and when they reached the car, they found its motor purring. Another woman sat in the back seat with Mrs. Patterson.

"Having trouble?" the sheriff asked.

THE younger woman said: "Tire trouble. Blowout. And when George took off the spare, it was flat too. And no pump. So he hiked back to town for a garage-man. My mother and I are comfortable here—we have a heater."

"How long you been here?"

"We left the show right after the drawing. But we had this trouble. George should be back any minute now—"

"Then you left before the hold-up?"

"What hold-up?"

He told her, and added: "Those bandits were supposed to have driven south on this road. Seen any car?"

Both women shook their heads. "We've been the only car on this road—till you came along. We thought you were George and the garage-man."

The Sheriff's next words were rapid.

"If you ladies are all right here—we've got business—" He crunched back to Connor's car. "Make 'er fast back to town," he told his deputy.

The rear wheels spun, their chains biting the icy ruts; the car swung crosswise of the road and pivoted, heading north. Connor was a good driver; he could turn around on a dime, even an icy dime.

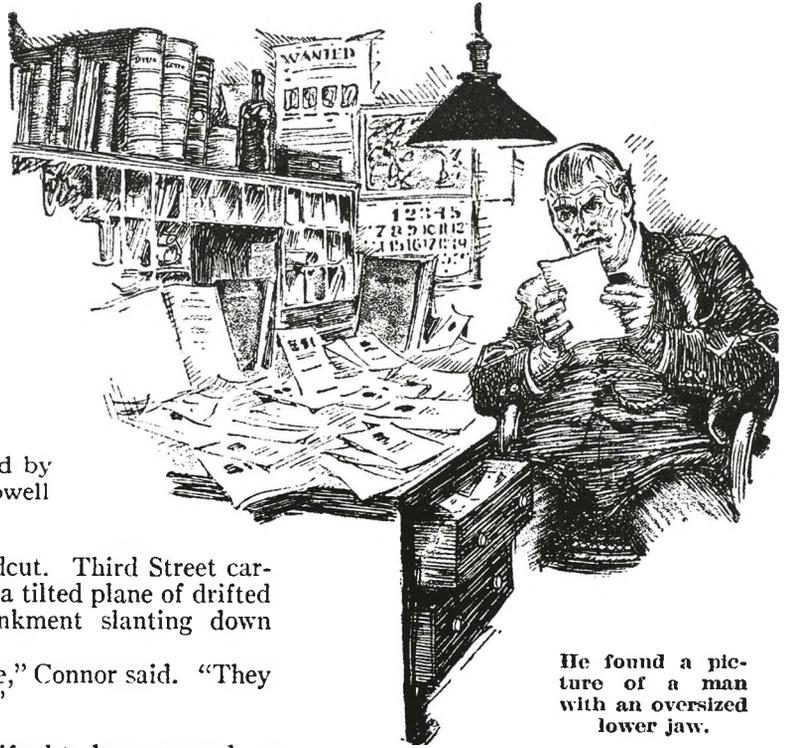
As they reached the city limits, the Sheriff said, "Turn east."

"You mean—"

"To the river. They must have come south on Jackson Street for just two or three blocks, and then turned east. And we've lost a lot of time figuring that."

Most houses were slumberous now: the town was all black shadow and white

Illustrated by
Orson Lowell



He found a picture of a man with an oversized lower jaw.

snow, like a woodcut. Third Street carried them east to a tilted plane of drifted snow—the embankment slanting down to the river.

“No tracks here,” Connor said. “They must not have—”

“Keep going.”

Connor gear-shifted to low, stepped on the gas. The car reared a little and gathered strength, then bucked and bounced down through the wind-smoked drifts, its hind wheels clawing madly for gravel footing. The headlights showed the frozen Mississippi sliding up to greet them; and when the car slid onto its surface, the ice cracked coldly.

“Now north—to the mouth of Second Street.”

You could make speed on that ice.

But where Second Street dipped to the river, there were only trackless drifts, unscarred ice.

“All right. Back to Fourth Street.”

Connor was almost enjoying this, whipping the car round and whizzing south with the wind at their back. When they skidded to the mouth of Fourth Street, the Sheriff pointed to wheel-tracks that had broken down through the drifts, and to the steel-gashed ice.

“Plain as rabbit-tracks,” he said.

Already Connor was swinging the car eastward, pursuing the chain-marks that notched the ice. This was a mile-wide highway, and Connor pressed the accelerator. As they left the shore, their headlights fanning out in flat milky planes, the full force of the wind struck them—that wind which had galloped stallion-wild along hundreds of channel miles. It hummed and sang in the car’s rigging; and sometimes it wolf-howled. Sometimes, too, it devilishly

hurled a miniature blizzard at them—clouds of snow it had carried for a score of black miles. They ran through drifts, or dodged them; but for the most part the wind had lashed the ice bare.

The tracks led them east, nearly to the Wisconsin shore, then swung due south, then southwest.

“What,” the Sheriff muttered, “were they trying to do?”

Then, a moment later, he comprehended. The tracks rounded the north end of a big island and ran along its west side.

“They must have been hunting for this place!”

It was Pond Island—an atoll-like formation that some mad whim of the river had piled up. An oval of land, grown over with cottonwoods and elms, nearly enclosed a jewel of a lagoon. In summer water-lilies grew lushly there; but on a winter night like this—

The chain-tracks swerved toward the island and entered the lagoon. Laurel’s gun was in his paw, his gaze straining ahead. The headlight rays spotlighted a car, parked by the inner bank of the island at the north edge of the lagoon.

Connor halted. They waited a minute, guns ready. The car looked empty, abandoned.

Connor went into low and drew alongside. One door hung ajar, idly swaying in the wind.

"The birds," Connor said, "have flown."

Laurel fumbled open the door and eased himself to the lagoon's frozen surface, the white fire of his flashlight shafting toward the abandoned car. He hesitated a second before touching the door. Fingerprints? Probably not: very likely those gat-men had worn gloves. Besides, the nearest Bertillon man dwelt two hundred miles from Broken Ax, and Laurel's constituency would consider it wasted tax money to summon him. They expected Jim Laurel to solve crime in a rough-and-ready fashion.



A quick flick of the flashlight showed the back seat empty, and in the driver's compartment the identification card announced that the car belonged to Otto Dorfburg.

"They must have stolen it while Otto was in the show," Laurel ruminated. "Then they drove here. But why? Probably they had their own car planted here—"

Connor nodded. "Switched cars here, and beat it. To St. Paul or Chicago—some place where they could hole up."

LAUREL sighed. A sheriff had his woes! His fingers felt as brittle as icicles, and the wind was a rawhide whip. He could hear it rushing among the island cottonwoods and elms with a sound like cascading waters. He sent his flashlight exploring the back seat again; on the floor the beam caught something square and white, with notched edges. It looked like a postage stamp.

It was a stamp, all right, but not postage. It lay pink in his palm, its white letters proclaiming: "*Cigarette Tax, 2*

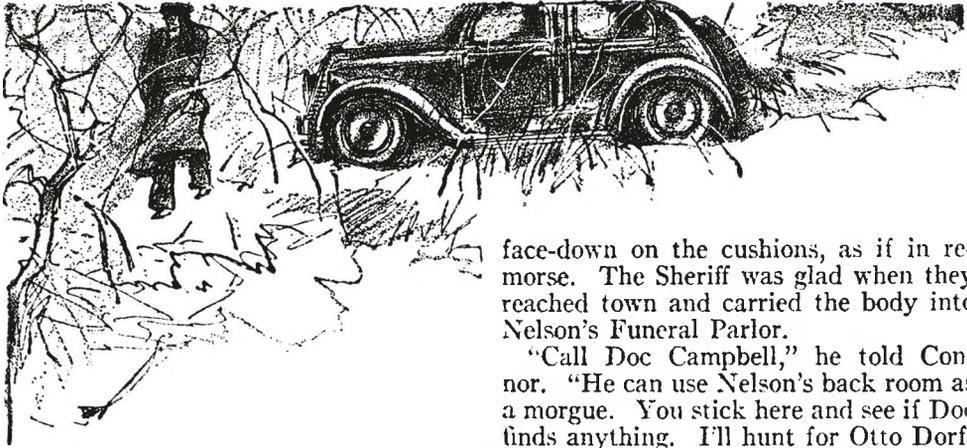
cents." And rubber-stamped on it in purple was the legend: "X451."

Laurel grunted. He had seen thousands of such stamps. Issued by the State to licensed dealers, those stamps had to be stuck on the cellophane of cigarette packages. Two cents State tax. And each dealer was compelled to rubber-stamp his own license number on every stamp. In that way, if he broke the law and sold fags to minors, he could be traced.

"Does Otto Dorfburg smoke?"

Connor shrugged. "Maybe. I don't know."

Laurel rustled the stamp into his vest pocket, then turned from the car. On



the ice, glassy as a black mirror, his flashlight revealed lean scars, long and curving.

"Skaters," he announced. "Wonder who—"

Feet wide apart, moving gingerly to avoid a tumble, he followed those curving ice-cuts. They slashed in toward the bank of the lagoon, and when the flashlight danced along the shoreline, it poured whitely over a body in the drifting snow.

"Find anything?" Connor called.

"Plenty."

Rather recently the corpse had been a man, a bony fellow with big hands and an oversized lower jaw. Above his heart a dark-crimson splotch was frozen to his clothing, and near one hand a pair of shoes lay half-buried in the drifts, their laces tied together.

"Know him?" the Sheriff asked.

Connor shook his head, then pointed to the man's feet. They were clad in leather shoes with flashing steel skates attached. Connor examined them.

"Brand new," he said. "New skates. Why do you suppose—"

"Maybe," the Sheriff said, "he was having a skating party all by himself. But I doubt it."

They left Otto Dorfburg's car in the lagoon. That could wait. Connor drove his own car to the lagoon bank; and into the back seat they lifted and shoved the man who wore skates. He was unarmed, and his pockets were empty—completely.

DRIVING back, Connor pressed the gas hard, and they said little. The wind was stronger now, and colder; and it squealed at the sedan windows, trying to get in. You could imagine cloaked figures riding that wind, invisible and evil. Now and then the Sheriff glanced into the back seat; the body sprawled

face-down on the cushions, as if in remorse. The Sheriff was glad when they reached town and carried the body into Nelson's Funeral Parlor.

"Call Doc Campbell," he told Connor. "He can use Nelson's back room as a morgue. You stick here and see if Doc finds anything. I'll hunt for Otto Dorfburg. I've got a question to ask him."

The show had not gone on. The Bonanza Theater stood dark, and on the windy street pedestrians were as rare as parked cars.

Jim Laurel plodded to his courthouse office and told central to ring Otto Dorfburg's farm. The receiver hummed in his ear, and he could imagine thin wires swaying out there in the darkness.

Finally, Otto Dorfburg answered.

"Jim Laurel speaking. We found your car."

"Oh, yah? Good."

"It's out in the middle of Pond Island."

"Oh, yah? Me and my woman and the kids—we had to get a neighbor to bring us home."

"You can pick it up tomorrow. It seems to be O.K. One thing more, Otto—do you smoke?"

"Smoke?"

"Sure—smoke. Tobacco."

"Yah—I smoke. Why?"

"Cigarettes?"

"Too much expense," Otto Dorfburg said. "And I like a pipe better."

"Has anybody ridden in the back seat lately who smoked cigarettes?"

"No—no one. Why?"

"You're sure?"

"Sure I'm sure. Sure, sure! Why?"

"Professional interest," the Sheriff said, and hung up.

From his pocket he brought that cigarette stamp and consulted its number: X451. Then he burrowed through the untidy drawers of his desk, finding at last a pamphlet which the cigarette-tax division of the State revenue department furnished all peace officers. Running a blunt forefinger down a list of numerals, he paused at X451. That license number belonged to the Riverman's Café, Joe

Arden, Prop., in the river town of Dorkin's Landing, six miles north.

He dropped the pamphlet and emptied the desk pigeonholes of the flocks of circulars stuffing them—circulars containing descriptions and pictures of enemies of law and order. Methodically, wetting his thumb, he went through them; and he found a picture of a man with an oversized lower jaw.

He was Everett Fogel, alias Peter Fox, alias Dingbat Tipton; and seven months before, he had vanished through the barbed wire of a Texas prison farm. Native of El Paso. Linked with hold-ups in Southern California, Arizona, Louisiana. There was no mistaking that oversized jaw; but to make certain, he called Nelson's Funeral Parlor and asked for Coroner Doc Campbell.

"Does that fellow," he asked, "have an inch-long scar on the inside of his left elbow?"

"He has a scar. I didn't measure it."

"And is the third toe of his right foot a hammer-toe?"

"Right."

"Then I've placed him. His name's Dingbat."

Doc Campbell said: "There's something else. His right leg was broken. Just below the knee."

"Broke and healed, you mean?"

"No. Broke tonight. Never set."

"Um-m-m. . . . Is my deputy still there?"

"Two of them," Doc Campbell said. "Todd Connor and Bob Ryan."

"Tell them I want them—that is, if you're through with them."

"Through with them!" the Doc joshed. "They've been a nuisance here for half an hour. I'll kick 'em right out."

FIVE minutes later, when the deputies entered the office, they found their chief bundled in a sheep-lined coat and a cap with ear-flaps.

"Boys," he told them, "I'm off on a little errand. I want you to stay here. Sleep, if you feel like it. But keep an ear open for the phone."

"On something hot?" Connor asked.

"Just possible."

"Then hadn't one of us better go along?"

Laurel shook his head. "You boys wait. And listen for that phone. I may call you."

He plodded along the dusky courthouse hall and pushed open the door to the midnight town, where streamers of snow

whirled in the blind wind. The starter of his car labored coldly against stiff oil, and at last the motor caught. He warmed it a minute, then headed north from town toward Dorkin's Landing.

THE turnpike was nearly deserted; only an occasional truck added its mechanical roar to the tumult of the wind. Far above Jim Laurel's hurrying car, the gusty sky arched in a blue-black vault, crowded with flashing stars. But on the ground yesterday's snow kept drifting, flinging itself like lacy surf-spray against the windshield. The road followed the base of the massive bluffs, sometimes within stone's-toss of the ice-muted river, sometimes far from it: the river swung back and forth in vast meanders over its flood-plain, miles wide. A mile north of Broken Ax, Laurel passed a narrow trail leading east to the river and Chid Moorhead's icehouse, and his sympathies winged out to that man who had missed the bank-night jackpot.

Dorkin's Landing, a village dating back to murderous log-rafting days, was a collection of houses straggling along a big C-curve of the river. Its brief Main Street had one side only: shabby façades looking riverward. Sheriff Jim Laurel parked outside the Riverman's Café—a cheap eating-joint whose plate glass was grease-glazed and still specked by last summer's flies.

Joe Arden, the proprietor, shaved and washed every Sunday whether he needed it or not. When the Sheriff entered, he was alone, preparing to close.

When he beheld Laurel, he nearly swallowed the cold stub of a cigarette dangling from his mouth, and he said:

"I aint done nothin', Sheriff."

The Sheriff smothered a smile.

"That punchboard's illegal," he said, "but this aint a raid."

"I'm losin' money on the punchboard." Joe said.

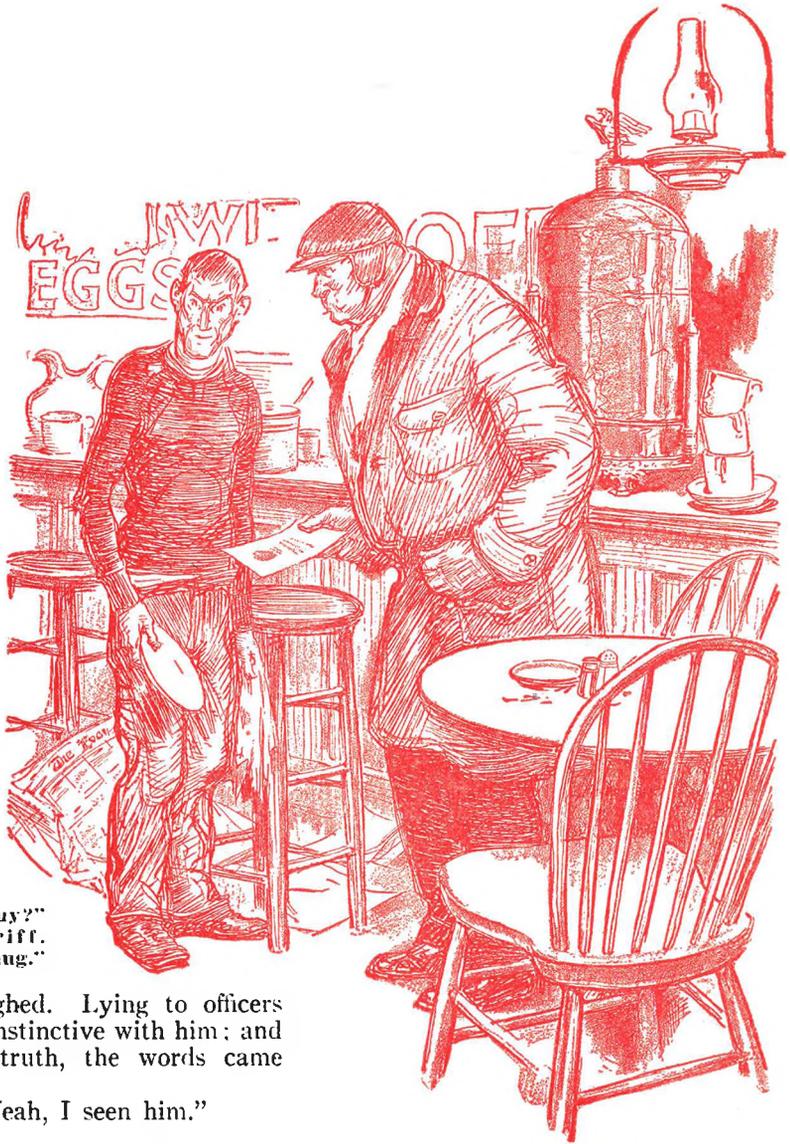
The Sheriff lounged against the counter and unbuttoned his coat, bringing a circular from his inner pocket. He dangled the picture of Dingbat Tipton before Joe's suspicious eyes.

"Ever seen this guy?"

Joe's tongue shoved the cold cigarette from his mouth; it bounced along his unbuttoned vest to the floor.

"No. No, Sheriff. Don't know the mug."

"Listen, Joe: There's enough small-time stuff against you to close you up and throw you in jail. I want the truth."



"Ever seen this guy?"
"No. No, Sheriff.
Don't know the mug."

Joe Arden sighed. Lying to officers of the law was instinctive with him; and now, speaking truth, the words came hard.

"All right. Yeah, I seen him."

"When?"

"This noon."

"In here?"

"Yeah—yeah, in here. Him and two other guys. They et here."

"What did the others look like?"

"One kind of a small guy and one kind of a bony guy. They came in a car. They et here. At that table."

"When they left, which way did they drive?"

"First they went into Jackman's hardware store. Bought something. Don't know what. Each of 'em had a package. Then they come back and got into their car. It was an old Chrysford. They drove east."

"East?"

"Sure, east. Across the river on the ice."

"When they were eating—did you hear them say anything?"

"Sure, I heard 'em." Joe grinned.

"What?"

"The little guy—he had a mustache—he said: 'These eggs are sure good—good and old.' And the guy with the jaw—he talked like he was from the South—he said, 'Salt and grease must be cheap in these parts,' and then he said to me: 'Doc,' he said, 'toss me a pack of coffin-nails.' Kind of a humorous guy."

Laurel turned.

"This table, you say?"

"That's where."

ON the table-top crumbs were still scattered, and on the floor beneath, other crumbs. Some were food and some were something else—tiny brown grains. At three spots on the floor, where their feet had been, Laurel found such grains.

Straightening, he said: "Joe, I'm glad you aint over-particular about sweeping out."

Joe shrugged. "I run a clean place," he said, "but I aint nasty clean like some of these guys. I was readin' the other day where some politician said if you washed too much, it meant you had a guilty conscience. My conscience is clear, Sheriff."

"It sure must be," the Sheriff agreed. "Uh—I want to use your phone."

He called the home of Theodore Jackman, the hardware man. After long rings had roused the merchant, he said:

"Three men were in your store this noon. Strangers. What did they buy?"

Joe was listening hard, but the Sheriff held the receiver so close to his ear that Jackman's voice was indistinct.

"I figured that would be it," the Sheriff said. "Thanks, Jackman."

Then he said good night to Joe Arden, went out to his car, and drove hell-bent for Broken Ax.

DURING the next hour one might have noted considerable excitement about the courthouse in Broken Ax. Several men arrived hurriedly, and these were deputies. Presently six men and four sub-machine guns left the courthouse, and three cars carried them northward.

A half-mile from town, that motorcade halted, and five men clustered about the lead car, at whose wheel sat Sheriff Jim Laurel.

"I don't," Todd Connor said, "like the idea of you going alone."

The Sheriff touched affectionately the machine-gun in the seat beside him.

"I won't be alone," he said.

After final details were settled, the Sheriff pointed to his fat silver watch.

"Remember—in fifteen minutes to the dot."

"That'll give you time enough?"

"Plenty. . . . Well, boys, I'm either a damn' fool and we'll scare Chid Moorhead out of his wits, or else—"

"Or else," Todd Connor broke in, "you're the best Sheriff in seventy-five counties."

"At least," Laurel said slyly, "I'm the best Sheriff in *this* county! Let's go."

Two of the cars turned eastward and plowed through drifted snow to the frozen surface of the river, then proceeded north. Laurel stuck to the highway, driving till the trail leading to Chid Moorhead's icehouse flashed past. He con-

tinued for a hundred yards, then parked, killed the motor, and tugged the machine-gun from the car.

Instantly the wind engulfed him, flapping his coat against his calves, filling his ears with boisterous bluster, shouldering him with the strength of ocean combers. He braced himself backward against it as he trudged south to the trail and crunched east along snowy ruts.

The moonless sky was black; but the snowy ground, catching stray star-rays, was a shining expanse of dull silver, darkly tarnished by clumps of bushes and bare tree-trunks. The trail dipped and twisted through the timber, opening finally on a clearing. Laurel paused.

All was cold quiet. Two heaps of shadow at the far rim of the clearing were blocked against the expanse of wintry river beyond. The larger heap was a building the size of a big barn: Chid Moorhead's icehouse. The other, his three-room shack, stood a few paces north of the icehouse. Glimmering between the two, Laurel could glimpse the faintly white snows on the river.

He chose his ambush on the north side of the trail, near the spot where it entered the clearing. Two elm trees grew there, about four feet apart, and between them a thicket of hazel-brush bristled. Laurel went to his knees in the snow and peered through the brush. From this spot, a gun could command anyone entering or leaving the icehouse.

HE settled to wait.

Minutes had never stretched so long. And the wind, he was certain, had blown no harder all this night. It had as many tones as a symphony orchestra: sturdily bass in the heaving branches overhead, and eerily flutelike in the crevices and outcroppings of the bluffs to the west. If the vast mysteries of the universe had room for ghosts, he fancied that the wraiths of Sally and Frank O'Brien were riding white horses in those whistling airs, and perhaps they looked down on Jim Laurel and said his work was good. Perhaps—

The realities of the moment jerked him from his reveries. Out on the icy river two pairs of headlights flashed. One pair shafted in from the northeast, the other from the southeast, and both concentrated on the little shack of Chid Moorhead. Then a spotlight flowered whitely on one car, its blade raking the clearing, and the shack. The cars' horns began blaring, and a fusillade of shots

BANK NIGHT IS MURDER NIGHT

shattered the crystal night. Men were shouting.

Jim Laurel tensed. But nothing happened—only those lights, the noise of horns and shouts and shots. He gripped the machine-gun till his corded arms ached, and sweat broke through the cells of his body. If this build-up crumbled and toppled, he knew what would be said in pool-halls and kitchens and shanties of this county: "*Jim Laurel, that old fool, he—*"

Then it occurred—that for which he had been waiting: It occurred casually, swiftly, with a sparse amount of drama.

A man left the shack and darted to the icehouse. He was a small, narrow man, very nimble, and he bounded with the speed of a rabbit.

From the drive which bisected the interior of the icehouse came the wheeze of a starter, the snort of a cold motor, the clash of gears. And then from the icehouse came the car itself—the winged hood and gray body of an old Chrysford. Its rear wheels, equipped with chains, spewed back froth as they bit into the snow. Roaring throatily, the car lunged across the clearing, toward the trail leading west.

Only one man was in that car, the driver.

Jim Laurel lifted his machine-gun.

The sweet, rapid crepitation of that steel friend cut the noise of wind; and the bullets hurtling from it smashed the car windshield and tore into the man at the wheel. Laurel saw him grip the wheel hard and half rise; and Laurel saw him suddenly slump.

The car swerved south off the trail and smashed through brambles. Clawing its way toward the bole of an oak, it bogged suddenly in a drift, and its motor died.

JIM LAUREL walked to meet his deputies.

"Just one came from the shack," Todd Connor yelped excitedly. "That's all we saw. Just one. Maybe the other's in there and—"

Laurel nodded. "He's in there, all right, I'll bet."

Connor grabbed his chief's arm.

"Maybe he's waiting—going to gun us—"

"Even money," Laurel said, "that he won't."

Followed by his deputies, the Sheriff kicked open the shack door, snapping on his flashlight.

The beam caught a man. He was lying on the floor, face-down, a lean young man in a checked topcoat.

"Shot in the back—by the nice guy who was driving the car," Laurel said. "When only one came out, I figured it that way. . . . Must have put it into his head, shooting Dingbat. He had to shoot Dingbat; and after he did it, he must have had the idea of shooting this one too, and having all the loot for himself."

"Why did he have to shoot Dingbat?"

"The play was this," the Sheriff said: "Those three knew that if they held up the theater and beat it across-country, every Sheriff and State policeman would be gunning for them. So they left their car here—in Chid's icehouse. They must have walked to town and stole Otto Dorfburg's car for the get-away. They drove it to Pond Island and left it.

THEY'D bought ice skates, attached to shoes, in Jackman's hardware in Dorkin's Landing. They were going to skate back here, hole in for a few days till things quieted, and then drive somewhere in their Chrysford. That way, no one would be on the lookout for a car such as they drove.

"It was a nice scheme; but this guy Dingbat was from the south—Texas. He couldn't skate—never had had practice. He probably thought he'd be able to—but as soon as he tried it, he must have fallen and broken his leg. So they shot him and left him."

"But—but Chid Moorhead," Todd Connor said.

The Sheriff sighed. "Chid wasn't at bank night. He always went. That's why I'm afraid that he—"

The Sheriff led the way to the icehouse. Inside, in a heap of sawdust in a corner, Chid Moorhead lay. The Sheriff muttered:

"Those guys must have come here a little before noon. This looked like a good hide-out. So they killed Chid, then drove to Dorkin's Landing for food and skates. Well, they left a trail."

"Trail?"

Laurel nodded. "They came in here out of the snow. The sawdust stuck to their feet. When they sat in Joe Arden's café, it melted off onto the floor under their table. When I saw that sawdust, I put two and two together. Icehouses are always full of sawdust—and Chid Moorhead didn't show up for bank night. That adds up to four, don't it?"

Another story by Thomas Duncan will appear in an early issue.



Daniel Boone and the Ipsebile

A drama of the middle South when automobiles were new—by the man who wrote "Keeper of the Light."

By WILLIAM
BYRON MOWERY

WITH Teddy beside him, Jude climbed a massive boulder for a better view of the bed. In the woods-cool under the beeches, its peculiar dark-green stretched out of sight up-slope, and down into the sweet birch beside the torrent; both ways along the hillside he saw no end to it among the tangled laurel.

It was such a patch of ginseng as young Jude and his shadowy brethren dreamed about, at their lonely beddings-down wherever night found them. He had loped the Hockings and Muskingums, the Cumberlands below the Ohio, to the red hills of the Tennessee; but in his twenty-two years he had never seen a bed half as large as this.

The seedlings and two-forks were a solid mass on the woods floor, and above them reared patriarchal plants as big as Hercules club, as old as Jude himself.

To Jude's knowledge, he was the only white ever to penetrate the hollow. On a previous trip he had found three Indian burials, fire-black in caves, and signs

which indicated some band had found haven in that fastness long ago. But no whites. The lumber outfits which repeatedly had swept the Hockings, first for walnut and big chestnut, then for the cheaper woods, then gleaning for railroad ties, had left the hollow virgin. A man in moccasins had a fight getting into it. A high rimrock so hemmed the hollow in that the only entrance was up the torrent ravine, where one had to crawl through matted laurel and rock jumbles. From the rimrock cliffs of Devonian sandstone, hunks as big as houses had frost-cracked off and tumbled down promiscuously.

"Golla'mighty!" Jude stood wide-legged on the mossy rock, his startled eyes ranging over his find. "Could Esther see this hyar, Ted, she wouldn't be so ag'in' our business, huh?" In his excitement over the strike, Esther had chief place, just as his torment about her colored his days and nights.

The patch left Teddy Roosevelt uninterested. Hackles raised, he stood close against his master's legs, his nose analyz-



ing the deep-woods smell and finding a taint he did not like. He was so much a part of Jude, pooling his keen scent and animal instincts in the partnership, that his uneasiness was Jude's own.

"What is it, Ted?" Jude whispered. He crouched down and froze, an arm around the young Walker, his sharp eyes and Teddy's sharp nose probing the surrounding woods.

Presently Jude's glance picked out a sprawl of white on the sphagnum up-slope. It was not the white of lichen, log fungus or birch tatter.

"Bones, Ted! Hell, kin it be a—"

He jumped from the boulder, strode up through the ginseng, and gazed down at a skeleton on the moss.

It was a white man's; the crumbling clothes showed that. It was about a year old. A digging-stick and a rusted rifle lay near.

Jude thought instantly of copperhead or timber rattler, but his bush years had taught him to read all signs, and twice, before drawing conclusions. He bent

down and searched for telltale minutiae, which he quickly found. "Ted! Looky! Look at this!" The fifth left rib was shattered, and a vertebra was smashed, where a bullet, a heart-shot, had plowed into the living man.

He picked up the old single-shot and found it loaded, and knew then this was no accident but a killing.

Patiently Jude crouched and scrutinized. The octagonal rifle looked vaguely familiar, but something else fired Jude's memory. "Ted! It's ol' Si Lammer! Lord an' all!" His eyes softened pityingly. "It's Si, Teddy. See them gaps in his jaws? That's whar huckster Plukarp jumped three miseratin' teeth fer him, two year ago. Mind how he yelped when Plukarp whanged the chisel?"

At his few contacts with humanity around there since drifting up from the Cumberlands with the spring, Jude had heard nothing about Si Lammer disappearing. The obscure hillikin had sunk out of human ken as quietly as this moss was shrouding his bones.

Jude thought of the numerous Lammer family in Sawmill Hollow, twelve miles across the hills, and wondered how they had been making out since—this. Hardly worse than before; Si Lammer, tramping the summer woods for roots and fiddling with a few traps in winter, had been a local proverb for worthlessness. Too poor for even a hog or a dog, the Lammer lived in a slab shack on a hillside clearing; but how they fed, no one knew. Yet it was said that Si and Heddie, when they were young, had been a jaunty pair, even journeying to the Centennial at Philadelphia.

"Deed double, Ted," Jude puzzled, "this is a stumper. How's come who killed Si walked off an' let all this 'sang untetched? Kin ye figger that?"

Teddy had paid no attention to the old bones. He was still growling in his throat. Jude watched him, uneasiness creeping back. For once he could not tell whether the Walker was scenting man or bobcat; but the skeleton reminded him that death had visited that beech drogue before; and he froze again, his eyes and ears alert.

In the midday hush the woods were quiet as a cathedral. From the head of the hollow, half a mile on, Jude heard the murmur of a two-hundred-foot waterfall, where the torrent came down from sassafras hills. Up at the near rimrock, where he remembered an overhang cave and turkey-buzzard chicks, a vireo was scolding as though at a snake. But Jude heard nothing else, and saw nothing. The dense woods seemed padded against sound; ferns hung from the rocks like draperies; the plushy moss mantled the boulders and ran up the hoary beeches to the first limbs.

Half an hour of nothing made Jude impatient. "Dog, if ye wind somethin', sic it; if ye don't, shet up." He put aside his rifle, pack and iron-shod stick. "I got a good deal to do."

He crossed Si's gun and digger upon the skeleton, and collected stones for a cairn; on it he placed a wreath of maidenhair and yellow woods-sorrel. From the torrent-bed he brought a water-polished slab and a colored pebble.

SILAS LAMMER
GOD TAKE HIS SOUL

After circling the ginseng patch to ascertain its limits, Jude climbed back on the mossy boulder and hung there, debating what to do. The patch would take ten days to dig and dry. It was

worth fifteen hundred dollars, straight weight alone, not counting the sizable extra for the man-shaped roots which would bob up aplenty among so many old plants. But Jude had an idea: If Esther could see this wild green treasure of the hills, instead of ugly roots, she might not wish him to leave the woods for town, to become a railroad fireman or a plumber.

Since the May night he met Esther and took her home from the Bethel, Jude had loped the hills in a strict radius around the Paxton farm, held by an invisible tether. Tinged with a poet's visioning, he saw the girl as a part of all beautiful things. He found her in the smoothness of a young beech limb. She was a fern-hung spring to his thirst. He saw her in the star mist of Berenice's Hair, that he watched through the summer nights.

Jude knew this, that Esther loved him with all that part of her which had not been made old by work and preachments. How she could love him and yet refuse marriage—she had even told him he must not see her again—was a mystery to Jude. One of those people who are either soaring with the winds of heaven or chained in torment, he had come to the point where something radical was bound to happen, quickly.

His wish to have Esther in the hollow while he harvested the patch seemed hopeless. Besides the burden of her motherhood to younger brothers and sisters, she had a woman's fear of appearances. But he thought that by some miracle she might come, as luck had led him to the miraculous patch.

LATE that afternoon Jude struck the sandy road leading up Big Hickory to the Paxton farm and on to the distant town. Around the first bend, where the roadside hung black with elderberries, he ran into a queer fancy buggy, sporting gaudy brass, big tires and two square dash-lanterns.

It stood in the road, no horse about, its owner fussing with something at the front end of the rig. Handsomely clad in city togs, the stranger was a well-fed, alert young man of Jude's age. He looked up from his fussing to see the silent-footed Jude staring at the outlandish buggy. He stared at Jude.

"Hi-yuh, Dan'!"

"Dan'?" Jude felt that the stranger thought him somehow amusing. "Dan' the hell who?"

"Dan' Boone!"



"What-fer a contraption did ye call this hyar?" Jude asked.

Jude clenched a big fist. The reference, he knew, was to his leather clothes and moccasins. "Make fun of me, an' I'll break you in two, dude."

They sized each other up like two young dog wolves getting acquainted. Jude spoke first; the solitary woods, he well realized, had made him awkward with people, and he wanted to appear socially polished. He inquired:

"Yer hoss run off, huh?"

The stranger slapped a leg and guffawed. "My horse! Oh, what a hillikin! Never seen an ipsebile before?"

"Hillikin, huh?" Jude slipped out of his pack-straps and jacket. "*Peel!*"

The stranger looked with respect at the lithe tough Jude. "Don't want to mess up my good clothes," he said. He did not seem particularly afraid; rather, practical-minded. "Anyhow, what's the sense to fighting? If you *are* a hillikin, you could break me in three and that wouldn't make you not a hillikin, would it?"

The logic impressed Jude, and the sunny grin thawed his anger. Despite himself he liked the stranger.

"What-fer a contraption did ye call this hyar?" He was puzzled that it had no shafts or tongue.

"An ipsebile. People call 'em ipsemobiles, automobiles, motobuggies, and so on; but *ipsebile's* going to win out. The

idee is they run themselves. You going up the road far, I'll treat you to an ipsebile ride, soon as I get this trouble fixed." He reached out a hand. "Name's Bob Halton."

"Jude Congrove. Please to meetcha."

"Happen you live here on Hickory?"

"Happen no. Cumberlander. Hunt ginseng an' hydrastis, an' trap winters, any ol' whar."

Talking, they worked on the engine, Jude holding wrenches and admiring Bob's dextrous mechanics. He readily learned that Bob Halton was from Scioto way, son of a well-to-do farmer; but where Bob was heading, up Big Hickory, in his Sunday clothes and shiny ipsebile—that Jude did not discover till the end.

DURING a rest they ate some elderberries, and Jude rolled a cigarette of Bob's good fine-cut.

"Like I told you, Jude,"—Bob talked incessantly and engrossingly,—“old fogies are laughing at these gas-buggies, just like their grandpappies did at the railroads once; but the big cities are breaking out with 'em like measles. I'd give a leg to get into the ipsebile business on the ground floor. If I had me a thousand for tools and such-like, I'd bust to Circleville, where they's graveled pikes, and start a garridge. I'd put a gasoline tank out in front where people could just



Lithographs
by Peter
Kuhlhoff

roll up and have it poured right in; I'd have a bench to fix clinchers; I'd hire me a coupla handy men to wrestle nuts—these out-and-unders take a lot of working on; and boy, I'd rake in the berries! But the old man wants me to run the farm, and won't let go a nickel for a garridge set-up. Says these ipsebiles are city foolishness and ag'in' something in the Bible!"

Bob added: "Once I got my Circleville garridge to humming, I'd start me one in Chillycothe, Lancaster, C'lumbus and all over. I'd trade and sell ipsebiles like the liveries do horses. I'd ride the ipsebile to, like they say, fame and fortune. But dammit, I've sunk all my saved-up calf-money in this Red Swallow here."

Jude thought proudly: "I got a 'sang patch would set up a garridge." He and Bob tackled the engine again.

"Where you heading, Jude?"

"To, uh, see a frien'."

Bob snorted. "Axle-grease! You're on your way to Saturday-night your girl, just like me."

"Wull," Jude said, "mebbe I'll git to visit her, an' mebbe I won't."

"Happen something don't gee 'tween you and her?"

Jude was loath to discuss Esther, as he would have shrunk from praying in

public. But he had to have confessional, and Bob was so practical a person.

"I can't figger the trouble," he said, "but it's bad. We're broke off."

Bob was point-blank. "Does she like you, or don't she?" And when Jude slowly nodded: "Then what's the hitch?"

"The onliest wuz a little contention about her wantin' me to go to town to be a railroad fireman er a plumber. But the big trouble—I jest dunno what. Nor she."

Bob chewed on a birch twig. "I got a hunch why she shies off, and don't know as I blame her, Jude. Fellow can't make a living, digging roots and trapping."

"Can't, huh? Say, sometimes I dig high as six, seven poun's of 'sang a month. Nigh a hundred dollars!"

"Yeah, but you can't feed a woman and kids on 'sometimes.' It's got to be something regular and sure. Besides, a woman hates to be stuck off in some hillikin hole. They got to have neighbors, church, school and such-like. Women are like old men for being cautious, Jude. It's their nature. It's all nature. You take a she-fox. Before she whelps, she looks around almighty good for a place with lots of game for her and her kits, and no dogs, and so on. She maybe don't know what she's doing, but she does it. Aint I right?"

Jude turned cold inside. Bob's factual philosophy made love seem earth-bound; yet he knew that Bob, in three breaths, had ripped right down to the heart of the trouble between Esther and himself. Instinctively Esther distrusted his way of life. He had vaguely felt this; now Bob's lecture set it before him as stark as a crown rock.

They fell to on the engine, but Jude stopped talking. Esther or the hills; that's how it was. His face grew long at the thought of leaving his native woods. Because of Esther he had tried on the harness once, at a box-factory. Five hours of it had smothered him. Through a grimy window he had seen a rabbit playing under a rain-wet bush, and had fled in panic. In a city, a routine life, he would be a wild 'sang plant lifted out of the cool woods loam and shriveled to a dried root in a sackful.

BUT other cannon roared in the battle in silent Jude. He recalled Esther crying when she told him not to come again, and he hated to have hurt her. His hunger for her clamored the more

demandingly, now that he saw how he could have her. His path was plain. With the ginseng strike, he could set up a garridge in Circleville. "Could whip these machine things easy," he was confident. "I'd work tremendous, too. Could ride the ipsebile to fortune myself. If—" That "*if*" meant, if only he could give his heart to it.

"Damn your hide," Bob swore at a recalcitrant cotter-key. . . . "There, she's in. And about time! I figure on spinning Esther to town for a soda and back before dark. That's how you get around with an ipsebile. No jogging along behind a meambling old horse. Throw in the tools—we're dusting."

Jude stiffened. "Esther—"

"Esther Paxton." And Bob pointed at the hanging crank. "Work this, like this, while I catch the magneto and gas."

"*Esther Paxton?*"

Bob was very busy. "Yep." He swung into the driver's seat. "That's her name—anyhow, till Tuesday a week. Then it'll be Esther Halton. Spin her, Jude."

Jude's mouth fell open. "Ye say—Esther an' ye—*marryin'?*"

"That's how. Got her all cut and shocked. Happen you know her?" And when the speechless Jude merely stared at him: "I'm taking her home tomorrow to meet the old man and Mom, and fix up our rooms. Fast work, Jude—four weeks from meeting her to getting tied. . . . Hey, spin that crank!"

Jude worked the crank, though torture blinded him. The engine coughed, caught, and settled into a clangy uproar. "Hop in!" Bob yelled. . . . "Say, what's the matter?"

Jude's face was a granite mask. The knowledge that in a minute or two he would be heading for the oblivion of the woods held him together. He felt that surely God had guided him to meet Bob Halton there, instead of at the Paxton home, to be laughed at, pitied. "Ye go on, Bob," he said. "To whar I'm goin', I better take the hill trail, I guess."

WHIPPOORWILL dusk that evening found Jude at the ginseng hollow. The patch had not drawn him back. In fact, he did not intend, then, to dig it. His savage purpose about the bed had not yet formed.

Out of long habit, his mind elsewhere, he prepared for the night. A clay-bank yielded some late dewberries, a log some oyster-shell mushrooms, good when salted

with gunpowder. He dug three bracken bulbs to roast, and shot two young rabbits for the Walker and himself.

While the food was cooking, he stripped at a torrent-pool, and with sand and water cleansed away the day's sweat and chiggers. After the meal and a kinnikinnick cigarette, he chose a snake-proof spot of bare ground, and crept into his canvas poke.

AT first, as he lay watching the stars, he was bitter toward Esther for her perfidy. Her price was a fat Scioto farm. Only a month since her sweet whispers in his ear, and now she belonged to another man! To this Bob-Dob mammy-boy who had squandered his calf-money, and who was tied to his daddy's purse-strings!

Gradually, as Jude thought about Esther's life, his bitterness changed. She had had no soft snap, with six younger ones to mother and a farmhouse to run. She had loved him, wanted him; and he had dilly-dallied, blind to her needs. Her expectations had been very humble, merely to be the wife of a fireman or a plumber. Her love for him had been the one wholly free and beautiful happening in her life, and its fruition had been denied her.

Jude's mind was of such imaginative cast that in Heddie Lammer and Si he could see Esther and himself. In all its human degradation, the Lammer slab shack rose before him; and he shuddered. That was what Esther could have expected from him, a 'sang-hunter. That was what her instincts had warned her against.

"She done right," he writhed. "Done right when it hurted her terrible."

Hours of tossing finally dulled his pain. He could even jest, although bitterly. "Dan'l Boone come out'n the woods an' saw an ipsebile! Hell, I'm Dan'l Boone, an' dead as him, only I never knowed it." The roadside talk with Bob Halton had opened his free-ranging brain to a certain great truth, where the practical Bob saw merely facts and money chances. Not only the ipsebile was new and epochal; wizards here and there were shooting messages through the unwired air; could bring far-off events alive again on a darkened screen; a man had set his heel on the Pole of the earth. . . . In a hazy fashion Jude felt that the land and the times hung poised on a moment of cataclysmic change, with vast stirrings abroad, while he was buried away in the

old woods of Daniel Boone. The old sweet woods of Boone, of unfettered man-ways, were going. The writing in the skies said woman-ways.

Jude slept and dreamed: he and Esther living in the Lammer shack; Dan'l Boone tearing across the hills in a red ipsebile, with a whoop and yell; Esther turning, bodily, into Bob's cunning she-fox.

ALL the way up the hollow, as he wormed through the laurel and rocks, Jude saw pictures of what Esther and Bob were doing that morning. In the Red Swallow, driving to Bob's home. At the church service, where Bob was introducing her to his kith and neighbors, and the fact of their engagement was being fatally established, and the preacher in his closing prayer was asking special blessing upon "the young couple in our midst today who are about to enter into holy wedlock."

A quiet like a Sabbath benediction hung over the old hollow. The gray squirrels had ceased cutting in the pig-nuts; the birds had finished their matutinal feeding and singing; chipmunk, marmot, black rock-squirrel were basking in the sun splashes that filtered down through the trees. But no peace or benediction rested on Jude. He was a savage mixture of martyrdom and jealousy. His purpose with the ginseng patch was at once magnanimous, vengeful, defiant.

Yesterday, before leaving, he had gathered wintergreen leaves for tea, gashed a sweet-birch root and hung a bark trough under it, and laid strips of carpety sphagnum beneath an overhang for their blankets. Now these preparations mocked him, and he destroyed them, not even tasting the delicious birch sap.

For a time, too, he failed to notice Teddy's same uneasiness as of yesterday.

First he collected flat stones and made a crude kiln; stone-drying was quicker than by sun, and he had a prodigious amount of roots to cure. Then, in the ethic of a true 'sang-hunter, he combed the patch and gathered the bright-red seed-pods so that later he could scatter them in the humus as he digged, and thus perpetuate the bed.

With his iron-shod stick he began at the lower fringe of the patch. He worked feverishly, his purpose like strychnine in his blood. After loosening the black spongy humus and lifting out a plant, he broke it off at the last stalk scar and thrust the root into his sling poke. Because only a cheap-jack took seedlings

or two-forks, when he inadvertently loosened one of these, he carefully reset the root.

His small poke full, he washed his take at the torrent, spread it on the kiln rocks, and built a slow fire beneath.

Since their return to the patch, the young Walker had kept close to Jude, growling throatily. As Jude stepped back to his digging, the dog pressed between his legs and grinned a white-fanged grin. As Jude lifted out a man-shaped root, with complete arms and legs and the suggestion of a head—a find worth twenty dollars in the Canton trade—he noticed the dog's quivering tautness.

"Ted! What's up?" Once it started, awareness of danger came over him in a flood. He dropped the root. His hands itched for the reassurance of his rifle, but it and his pack lay on a rock thirty steps away.

Teddy's red tongue curled out like a wolf's at bay. His breathing was like a hiss. To Jude, both signs meant man, and a man-scent that put fear into Teddy. The murder of last year, the bones up slope, flashed into his mind. Crouching, he clutched the dog by the scruff so that Teddy would not rush at the unknown slinker and get killed.

He realized, now, that the danger had been hovering there yesterday, at a distance, a sinister guardian over the big 'sang-patch. This morning it had watched the return of Teddy and himself; and as the digging began, it had crept close—for another heart-shot.

PARTLY shielded behind a clump of snakeroot, Jude searched up-slope. Though he saw nothing, in a minute he located the unknown danger. Above some buckbrush forty yards up the hillside a pair of yellow grosbeaks began sounding their "snake call," and a chipmunk set up his shrill little *chink-a-link*.

Very slowly, so that the movement would not betray him and draw a shot, Jude turned his head, glanced at the boulder where his gun lay, and studied the gantlet he had to run to reach his rifle. One jump to the shelter of that beech; another to the honeycomb rock.

Yesterday he had seen only mystery behind the killing and the untouched patch; but now, his thoughts racing, he saw an explanation. After shooting Si Lammer, this unknown had fled from the hollow, in a murderer's panic. But with the new spring he had been drawn back by the magnet of the rich bed. Probably



he was denning in one of the rimrock caves. Probably he was waiting for summer out to dig the bed when the roots were heaviest.

Afraid of getting killed, and almost as much frightened of having to kill, Jude tried to stave off an arbitrament by rifles.

"Frien'! Don't start a-shootin'. If ye 'low this bed is your'n, I'd ruther—"

Teddy started to lunge forward. Jude pinioned him. The movement, slight as it was, gave him away. In the buck-brush a rifle shattered the quiet of the hollow. An arm around his dog, Jude felt the young Walker give a violent jerk. The impact of the slug tore Teddy

out of his grasp and knocked the dog back upon the freshly turned humus. The Walker lay whimpering, dying.

Flattened on the ground, Jude reached out his hand. "Teddy! *Ted!*" He was aghast. His voice, his hand gripping his partner's leg, had no power to draw Teddy back from death. With a convulsive wag of its tail, the dog lay still.

Blindly infuriate, Jude came to his feet with a yell and jumped for the nearest beech. A bullet whined past him. Twisting and leaping, he sprang from shelter to shelter, untouched, grabbed his rifle from the boulder, and slid into a little side ravine that led up toward the buck-

brush. The shock of Teddy's death half-crazed him. It was as though a part of himself had been killed. More than merely a partner of the woods, the dog had been his bridge to the animal tribes, to the primitive ways of the hills.

Twenty steps from the buckbrush, the ravine flattened out. Jude raised his head over a windfall. Squatting between two rocks, gun-butt against a cheek, the man was a gaunt stranger of forty-five, shaggy, wild-looking. His moccasins and leather breeches told Jude that the man was one of his own wandering brethren, a 'sang-hunter, who had gone feral from the loneliness of his calling. All this Jude saw at a glance; and he had a flash, too, quicker than thought, of revulsion for the hermit life that cut a person off from other men.

Out of the corner of his eye the man glimpsed Jude and swung to kill him; but Jude beat him to the trigger-squeeze.

BY the spring-house Jude disclosed himself, in the owl dusk, to Esther's younger sister Frances, who would take over the motherhood at the Paxton farm now that Esther was marrying off.

"Tell her it's jest fer a minute, Francie. I aint hyar to cause trouble."

Frances went down the grape-arbor path to the house, and Jude waited. He ached in every bone from foot-slogging fifteen miles with a heavy load of ginseng, and he was weary of heart, too. Teddy lay dead in the woods loam; he had lost Esther; the 'sang-hunter he had killed had sickened him against the life he knew and loved. He wanted to have his bittersweet moment and then go. Nebulous ideas of drifting West to the Rockies and dying in a far land were in his mind.

A reddish moon was inching above the eastern hills. From garret to cellar, the Paxton house was aglow with acetylene jets; a dozen wagons and surreys stood under the old walnuts across the road. Esther's last night at home had drawn the neighbors from five miles around, for a pre-charivari and the bridal shower.

To Jude, it was a wake. One vow he had taken: he would never again look at Woman. They were calculating and soulless. Even Esther had forsaken true love for a fat farm. *Yea, there was no Godhead in Woman.*

Jude saw her coming toward him, ethereal in organdie. He stood proud and unbending, wanting her to know that

he would rather burn at the stake than yield his ideals.

Esther confronted him, hanging her head. Her face was pale in the wan moonlight, and Jude sensed she had been crying. That was strange, considering the happy feminine flutter and hard-cider gayety of the occasion.

"Why had you to come, Jude?"

He folded his arms and regarded her. "Fer to say good-by. Fer to say"—he said it with cold hauteur—"I love ye still. But don't leave that worrit ye; d'reckly I'm leavin' this country—"

"Jude, Jude!" Her hand crept out pleadingly. A word or touch from Jude would bring her into his arms. It was a shock to realize she loved him, was so chaotic and torn on her wedding eve.

"Las' week," he went on, drinking his martyrdom to the dregs, "I struck a big 'sang-patch, Esther. It would have set up a garridge fer us in Circleville. Wull, that belongs to be Bob's luck. Thar's the 'sang, close to two thousand dollars. I'm givin' it to Bob an' ye fer my weddin'-present, Esther."

He got no farther. All that evening Esther had been a taut bowstring. The sight of Jude had resurrected timeless June evenings. But it was his unparalleled act of giving his little fortune to her and Bob that swept her over the high cliff. Before they knew what, it was organdie against his leather, and Esther whispering:

"Jude, stay! I won't, I *can't*, wed with Bob. It's you, Jude, you and me. I'll go 'way with you—anywhere."

The undreamed-of surrender dazed Jude. He had not the sense to kiss her. For days he had leaned upon his disillusion about Woman and now the prop had suddenly fallen, with Esther willing to go with him to the world's end.

HIS heroic pose broke down. Organdie and Esther's arms—how sweeter and more natural than cold martyrdom! Fleetingly he felt remorse about Bob, whose girl and garridge dream he was preëmpting high-handedly. He thought also of his partner in the woods-loam, and of an ecstatic freedom as dead now as Teddy. But mostly Jude was filled with the true spirit of the ancient covenant between a man and a woman; God show him how always to be tender and good to this girl, to be strong for her sake, to bear courageously whatever burden he was taking up!

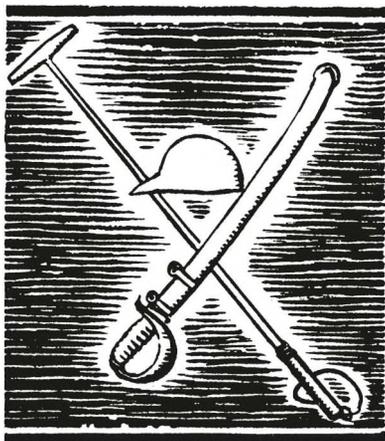
Another story by William Byron Mowery will appear in an early issue.

A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

By CHARLES
L. CLIFFORD

*Who wrote "Parade Ground," "Army
Girl" and "Too Many Boats."*



A SPIRITED NOVEL OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY IN THE PIPING TIMES OF PEACE AND PREPAREDNESS AND POLO . . . THE AUTHOR IS A LIEUTENANT-COLONEL OF REGULARS IN ACTIVE SERVICE.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE



Drawn by Jeremy Cannon

The fifth period started like a desert whirlwind. Despite all Cash could do, the Englishman slipped him twice, and made clean half-strokes for goals. Mark's eyes were deadly.

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

By CHARLES
L. CLIFFORD

*Who wrote "The Real Glory," "Army Girl" and
"Parade Ground."*

"I ADMIT it," Craig Malden said. "I *am* bitter. And I am seeking revenge, if you want to put it that way."

His daughter Angela smiled at him in a humoring way. "But don't you think that's rather a waste? A man like you, all these years; and such a useless thing, really."

"Not to me—it isn't useless. And there's a matter of pride to be considered that you don't seem to understand."

"I could understand, yes, if it had all happened a year ago. Or two or three years, even. But over twenty. . . . Lord, what price pride!"

He stood with his back against a chair, his sharp blue eyes moving restlessly about the big ranch-house room. "I'll tell you how strongly I feel about this," he said. "If I knew I had to die the day the thing came off, I'd still go on gladly."

She leaned back on the couch and looked him over. There was a warm look in her fine eyes. "Do you realize," she said, at last, "that Mark is over twenty-five?"

He made no answer.

"That Julian is twenty-three?"

He finished his drink, laid the glass down.

"That Hoyt is—"

He flared suddenly: "And Tony a damned poet!"

She laughed, then suddenly sobered. "But what are the others? Not even that. Not one of them could earn a dollar."

He grunted. "I'll tell you what they are: they're the best polo-players in the world."

"And," she said, quietly, "if each of them lost a couple of fingers, or a hand, or an eye, what would they be *then*?"

He made an exclamation of disgust. "A woman always takes refuge in that sort of retort when she can't meet a man's logic."

She half rose, then sank back. "I'll meet your argument! You pride yourself on being a square-shooter, father."

She smiled to herself at the instant challenge in his eyes. "Then," she said, "I'll make you a proposition. On that basis."

He made no sign of agreement; but she knew her father. She sat back.

At last he said irritably: "Well, go on. Make it!"

She tapped ash from her cigarette into a blue Mexican bowl on the table. "But you'll buck it."

He was beginning to get angry, but he was a ferret for knowing. He flattened his hands together sharply: "What's the proposition?"

She jerked her head toward the door. "Call in the wolves. This is cards on the table."

He hesitated, then gave in. She rose swiftly, swung the door wide, and called out into the great hall. Her call was in quick Spanish and a Mexican woman answered it.

Until Craig Malden's four sons came into the room, father and daughter sat in silence.

The three older brothers' eyes moved as one to their father. Tony looked first at his father and then walked toward Angela, and standing behind the couch, touched her shoulder lightly.

She reached back, caught his hand. "Sit here, Tony." He moved around the couch, watching his father, and sat down as carefully as though he were mounting a doubtful horse.

THE father still leaned against the chair. In the silence, he surveyed his sons. They were all dressed in riding-clothes, well cut but deeply worn fawn skin breeches and khaki shirts. Their heavy hats they had tossed on the table outside the big living-room. Julian alone wore spurs—beautiful silver things with just the suggestion of a rowel. Mark was the strongest: a great lot of a man, with heavy, tangled brown hair, wet with sweat. His shirt was torn open to the middle. His great bony hands plucked at it, remembering his father's fastidiousness in the house. He had dark, long-lidded eyes.

Hoyt—he was shorter than Mark. There was no smile in him. Squat, agile as an ape, he could hit a ball farther than any other of them. He said little, agreed with Mark in everything; and alone, ashamed that he might be heard, played marvelously on the guitar.

Julian was the dandy of them all. He wore gay Mexican clothes, a small dark mustache, and flashed frequently an almost professional white-toothed smile. He rarely spoke anything except Spanish, was the most beautiful rider of the four, and was censured continuously by his father for his desire to be spectacular upon the polo field. He was a true "grandstand-player," but a thrilling sight taking a ball down the field.

"And you, Tony," Angela said softly, following her father's gaze.

She looked over at him and smiled, while the others stood awkwardly waiting. Tony grinned, ashamed. Tony was the youngest—the most like their dead mother, Craig Malden had said. Tony was smaller, with big, bright blue eyes and something of a woman's mouth. Tony was the only one who ever confided his thoughts to Angela—his impossible thoughts.

Now Angela said: "We're having a showdown. Your father wants to throw you to the lions."

None of them spoke. Angela said: "At Meadowbrook. Very social lions.

He wants to put you all on a train. With your horses, of course. And he wants you to come back here with the polo championship of the world."

She saw Mark's eyes flash, saw Hoyt look at him, not in agreement, saw the sudden color in Julian's face, and his lips move for speech. "What do you think of that, Tony?" she asked, smiling.

Tony stared back at her. Tanned as his face was, it seemed almost white. As she turned, saw the grim look in her father's face, she thought: "Never believe they were father and son."

Mark said: "Dad! Honest?" He took a step toward his father, his hand lifted.

Craig Malden nodded. "If you can win the Open Championship this year,"—he looked defiantly at his daughter,—"you will be the champions of the world."

There was a harsh, exultant sound to his voice. His whole manner was infectiously dramatic. There was a full, eager silence in the room. He went on, slowly, distinctly: "The best team in the United States will compete; England's best team, the Argentines."

"Yes," Mark said.

"It will be more conclusive than the old International games. England can't bring teams over here good enough any more."

"No," Mark said.

"Father's waited over twenty years for this," Angela Malden said. She shot a bright glance at her father. "Shall I give them the works?"

MALDEN'S face twisted. He tried to manage a deprecating smile. "Your sister thinks I've been dishonest with you. Or at least, not quite fair. She thinks I haven't given you a proper break in life, keeping you here on the ranch instead of sending you to snob Eastern schools. Wasting your lives making polo-players out of you instead of allowing you to be doctors or lawyers or *writers*, when you were born to be cattle-men."

He paused, his eyes flashing around at them.

Angela smiled at him. "Go on."

The three older brothers twisted their hands and moved uncomfortably from foot to foot. Tony was staring at the mountain-lion skin at his feet.

Craig Malden said: "Your sister says I'm bitter. I *am* bitter. I've always been a man who couldn't forget a wrong or an injury. And more than that, I've always fought back. I'm fighting back

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

now, in my way. It may be childish—and I admit back in those days some of the things I did and thought *were* childish. But I swore I'd come back for my ante."

Mark cleared his throat and looked steadily at his father. "We've always known, I guess, there was something: The way you've spent years developing us and the best Mexican riders here on the ranch to play high-goal polo. The money you've put into fields and ponies. The discipline you've made us boys go through. We'd be fools if we didn't know there was something back of it; and as far as I'm concerned, I've never kicked and never will. I couldn't think of anything better for the rest of my life." He looked, with a sullen glower in his dark eyes, at the others. Hoyt met his look eagerly. "That's my sentiment," he muttered. Julian smiled broadly. He sensed that the bars were down at last, and his natural facetiousness took advantage of the occasion. "It's a great life if you don't weaken."

"BOYS," Malden said abruptly, "I believe Angela is right. I've taken her into my confidence in some ways when I have left you all out. I thought it was best. We've been a mighty clannish outfit here on the ranch. Too much so, plenty of people think."

"I'm one of them," Angela said quietly. She looked at Mark. "Years ago, Father got a dirty deal back East. They wouldn't put him on the International team because they never heard of any Maldens in the Social Register, and he was a poor cow-puncher selling horses. So he quit selling horses, and raised cattle and polo-players instead. I was the only miss, or you'd have had a spare player."

Mark's eyes gleamed. Hoyt cursed softly.

Angela said: "The sons of some of those men are playing now. He's got a list of them, in case you're interested."

"Ah!" Mark said, and he flexed the muscles of his great shoulders. "Leave it to us, Dad. I guess we've got the idea all right." He looked at the others. Hoyt nodded fiercely. Julian grinned back at him; Tony nodded, his eyes very serious. Mark looked at Angela.

"No, Mark," she said. "No. You're all wrong. . . . Father's wrong, hatefully wrong."

Mark's mouth opened. Hoyt said: "Go get some knitting."

Mark said: "Wrong? Wrong to ride those dirty—"

"Mark, you've never seen any of them. If you knew them, you'd probably like them. You must remember that twenty or more years ago polo was different. Rich men who belonged to exclusive clubs were the only good players. They had their own crowd, and naturally, wanted to play together. Just suppose, for instance, some unknown came down here and wanted to play on your team?"

"We're not getting anywhere like this," Craig Malden said. "I called you in to explain things. And I half agreed to a proposal Angela wants to suggest. I don't know what it is—after all this talk."

"I'll tell you what it is," she said, meeting his look. "In a few words. I'm not angry with you—any of you. I love you all too much. But I've been around. I've been to what you called snob schools. There were two girls there, daughters of some of these men you have this hate against, and they were swell girls. And all this time you've been building up this polo juggernaut to get a few minutes of spidery revenge. I say: chuck it. Suppose you win? Those people up there will pat you on the back and genuinely mean it. They probably won't have the faintest remembrance of any slight to you over twenty years ago."

"I gave them cause to remember it," Craig Malden said harshly. "I told them, two of them especially, in words they'll never forget."

She grimaced. "Well, that's bad. Suppose, then, that you lose?"

"They'll see some riding, and ponies, and hitting that none of them ever dreamed of," Craig Malden said. "Remember, *I've* seen them all play."

SHE did remember. Never were the boys allowed to see an outside team play. That was to drive them on, never let them know how terrifically fast and deadly was their own play. But every year, during the playing of the Open in September, Craig Malden had traveled East. Several times he had taken her with him. And she knew he was right.

She lit a cigarette. There was a silence in the room as she blew out the smoke. "You're determined, then?"

"I've looked forward to this year for centuries," Malden said.

"All right, then. Go on. And here's my proposition: win or lose, will you let it go at that? Never go back. Let

these boys—they're men now—let them go their way. Live somewhere besides on a polo-field or in polo stables. Let Julian go around and have his good time and pick him out a girl if he wants to."

At sound of his name, Julian turned suspiciously. "What are you talking about?" There was a faint look of fear in his eyes.

"And," she went on quickly, "let Hoyt take a trip around the world and get civilized, and Tony go to a good school of journalism, where he can write all he wants to, and—"

"What's the matter with you? You going crazy?" Hoyt asked fiercely.

MALDEN hesitated. He looked from face to face. The boys looked back, but none of them spoke.

"If the idea is that they're all in bondage—"

"That's precisely my idea," said Angela.

"You must be nuts," Hoyt said.

"Would you—er—like to take a trip around the world, Julian?" Malden smiled quizzically.

"I wouldn't mind. I'd sure like to take a crack at those fields in India. Maybe play a little in Argentina."

"And you, Tony? Go to a school and learn to write?"

Tony was horribly embarrassed. "I'd—I wouldn't mind going to New York for a while."

"I'm satisfied just the way I am," Mark said.

"But that would break up the team," Hoyt said angrily. "They'd ruin everything."

"Except their lives," Angela said. "How about it, Dad?"

Malden remained silent for a long time. Finally he said, slowly: "I'd like to think it over." It was the first indecision they had ever seen in him.

Angela said: "We're all here, and in the mood. Different moods, maybe, but we're aroused by the same idea. Let's settle it."

Anger at himself prompted Malden to snap: "All right." He was still king here. He wouldn't pass the buck.

"If you win this tournament, the boys each get their whack and can go their way? They're all over twenty-one."

Malden's eyes flared. Resentment at his daughter had been growing in him. Why had he allowed her to trap him into this situation?

"If you had any sense," Mark said, "you'd know a man can get hurt in a game. There's only four of us. We could lose a game that way."

"Five," Malden said in a queer voice.

"Don't be a fool, Dad!" Angela said, a quick flash of fright in her eyes.

"Hell, Dad's as good as any of us," Mark said loyally. "He taught us all we know, didn't he?"

"Oh, the fools, the fools!" she thought desperately. "All right," she said, getting up, "it's settled, then: if you win, you quit in glory; if you lose, with the team as it is, you just quit. Right?"

Her father was looking away from her, staring out the window. He turned his head slowly. "All right, Angela," he said quietly. "But if for any reason I have to play, the four boys are going to have their chance: another shot at it."

Angela Malden had accomplished more than she had hoped for. Each one of her father's words was significant and, she knew, grimly honest and unchangeable. An unaccustomed lightness of heart possessed her. She linked her arm through her father's. She flashed a radiant smile at them all. "Let's celebrate! Across the river: Mama Sancho's."



IT was a warm August night, the stars thick, glowing over the wide, barely moving river. On the red bluff on the Mexican side the town was bright with lights and gay with the sound of radios from the shops and cantinas. Guitars and mandolins of strolling street players fought with the radio music, and through it all came the beating undertone of the military band in the plaza.

Mama Sancho's place was entirely incongruous in this small Mexican border town. Moved bodily to the Jersey coast or the shores of the Hudson, road-house goes, once inside, would have sensed little novelty. True, the bartenders and waiters were all good Mexicans—white teeth, dark faces and smiling eyes. Mama Sancho herself was of the *pais*, her face not quite so dark as the others, but her welcoming smile just as warm. Her band was of local talent, though Mama warmly insisted that it was "imported."

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

Tonight was a night of *fiesta* indeed. In the afternoon the Fort Mitten polo team, from the American side, had played the Mexican army team of General Gruspe; and now, to celebrate, the General was giving a dinner at Mama Sancho's. It was a big night, and Mama Sancho surveyed the gala table with pride. Every other table in the place would be occupied, too. Especially one: that fine one by the railing with all the flowers on it. The Señorita Malden herself had telephoned about that one, from far down the river on the great rancho. The great, rich Señor Malden would be here, the American and Mexican officers! What an evening for the other, lesser guests, and for curious tourists! . . .

Cash Seddon had never met any of the Mexican officers before, not until just before the ball was thrown in that afternoon. He'd never played tournament polo on a dirt field before, either. That was a funny one: down in this border country, the boys just smoothed off a rectangle of the desert, put some sideboards up, and there you were.

After they had bathed in a room upstairs in Mama Sancho's place, they gathered at a big table in the bar. The Mexican players were in uniform. They wore heavy automatic pistols on their belts. They were very quiet, sort of embarrassed, but smiling a lot. All except Steve.

"You don' know Spanish, Captain?" Steve asked with eager disbelief.

Cash had been ashamed of the fact. The others on his team talked away in it, smooth enough, it seemed to him. "No. I wish I could."

"Not mind that," Steve urged. "Better for me. I like talk English."

"You talk it very well."

Steve colored with pleasure. Shrugged. "No! But I like talk English."

THEY were all having a drink. Soon the Mexicans were laughing. Their teeth seemed so white, their skins so dark, their hair so thick and smooth and polished! Seddon was delighted—glad he was here in Mexico. It was the first time. He noticed the Mexican general watching him. He was a big man with an unchanging face. A fighter on the field, and a long hitter. He tried to speak English to Cash. Got out a few words stubbornly. Then he shook his head, laughed and appealed to Steve.

Steve was more than willing. "He says you very good polo-player. The most

best he see—even Mexico City. Mexico City we got many better players anywhere."

But the Mexican officer wasn't satisfied. He talked to Captain Noylan. Cash knew they were talking about him. He hoped Noylan wasn't putting it on too thick; Noylan with a drink talked a lot, but he never knocked anyone.

Noylan told General Gruspe that Cash Seddon was the best player in the American army, that he had played all over the country for the past ten years, if you counted his cadet playing, and that he had even been given a tryout for the International team.

"Ah, yes! I know now!" The General's face was alight, and he smiled across the table at Cash. "The name—I didn't quite understand," he said to Noylan.

"We call him Cash—just the way we call Estéban, Steve. He got it somehow as a cadet at West Point."

The imported band was playing in the dining-room, loudly, when they went in. Most of the tables were already occupied. The General was a fine sight, sitting there in his greenish tunic, his broad shoulders thrown back, flashing smiles about the room. Almost everybody seemed to know him.

NOYLAN and Skeece went off to dance. They too seemed to know everybody. Doug Milford, the only married man on the team, grinned at Cash. "They know every girl on the border. And Steve here knows all the others."

Steve laughed. "All the Mexican ones. You like to dance at this minute?" he asked Cash.

"Not at this minute, thanks." Cash was looking out across the river. At night it was not just a broad mud-colored stream with ugly red banks and crumbling adobe shacks shadowing it. Now, in the soft half-light of the stars, it was a thing of mystery and beauty, the cool wind from it deeply, romantically satisfying. He could see the lights of the long bridge, twinkling bright against the night sky; and across the river, brave and showy, was the glow of the American town.

The summer dining terrace of Mama Sancho's was built flush to the buttressed bluff, and the tables were placed close to the edge. Natural trees grew up through the flooring, flowered over the heads of the diners and were garlanded with soft, colored lights. Along the rails great vases and pots of flowers

and vines were spaced, and hung above them were gay cages of brightly-hued birds.

The General, and the great Malden, both had tables reserved outside. Mama Sancho could not understand that Malden: he was a *gringo*, a man one never saw. And they said he greatly disliked to be seen in public. A man of mystery. A ranch of mystery. All Mexicans working there, and none ever crossed the river to his homeland. What kind of people could they be?

She stopped at the General's table, smiling. She knew she was a fine-looking woman, with her new black evening gown and her freshly marcelled hair, done that day at the hotel across the river. And she had large—some said beautiful—black eyes.

The General spoke politely, taking her hand. The other Mexican officers bowed, smiling. Yes, everything was good, the General assured her.

The blond American officer, Milford, she also knew. His thin, dark wife was not here tonight. No, just men, she remembered. Tired; they all looked tired, a little thinner than when she last had seen them. And no wonder, in that heat. An hour of it, they said, and all the time as fast as the horses would go—when they weren't rolling over on the dirty ground.

CAPTAIN NOYLAN and that other who looked something like a Mexican, they were dancing. And this other one—a gringo in a white suit, the biggest man of them all. Ah, *que lindo!*

El Capitan Estéban Flores smiling, saying: "Mama Sancho, it is Captain Cash of the American army. One of those we almost conquer today—but not quite, because he is the devil himself come to take us to task for our sins."

"For your whisky-drinking, you Estéban. He looks, you know, like my first husband. Nearly as handsome."

"The Butcher? The one who lined all the *Gachupins* up on the railroad track and had the troop-train roll them down flat as tortillas?"

"Devil!" she hissed at him.

"Or the one," Estéban grinned, "that dropped dead in a drinking contest with the last of a two-liter jug of mescal to his lips, down Torreon way?"

"That was your brother you are confusing him with," Mama Sancho said. "But seriously, Estéban, I look at you all as part of my family, now that we have

brought that subject up. So I want you to be very happy. If there are girls—"

Estéban laughed. "What girl would I not know? A handsome young Mexican officer and polo-player. I—I am the idol of the girls."

Mama Sancho looked briskly about; then she bent lower, her look mysterious. "There is one—not here yet, but coming. Of all the Northern women I have seen—" Mama Sancho's mysterious look rolled from Estéban to Cash Seddon, who, sensing the play between the two, was listening, grinning.

Estéban said to Cash: "My second mother, here—my beautiful sister—temptationing me. From the bottle of whisky. She is make promise about some beautiful girls to dance."

"They all look beautiful to me," Cash said. "As soon as I swallow about eight of these quail, I'm going to step out."

Mama Sancho hurried off, her cheeks full of color, her eyes bright. What a night, what a crowd!

THE graveled yard, walled high with T'dobe brick and well topped with broken bottles, was jammed with parked cars. Angela Malden wove the car deftly in, ignoring the guidance of the yard attendant trotting alongside. Her father, in spotless flannels, sat beside her, frowning. "Lord, if I'd suspected *this*—" He waved a hand about him.

"You'd never have come. Well, this makes it sweller and sweller. We'll all have a very good time." She lowered her voice so that the others in the back would not hear her. "How about the boys? Just this one night? Tomorrow's Sunday."

She had nagged him at intervals on the way over. Craig Malden liked to drink; he liked to see people around him drink, as long as it improved their spirits and their manners. But that tolerance had never included his sons. Once he had caught Julian drunk, and Angela tried never to remember that time. It had been almost as bad when he had smelled liquor on Hoyt at the Christmas barbecue last year. As for young Tony, the chances were that he had never had a drink; and, if Mark had, he'd been too smooth about it to get caught.

As she parked the car in the far corner of the yard, she could sense the eagerness in the boys. They could hardly wait. There were low words between them, Julian doing most of the talking.

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

Craig Malden turned his head. There was plenty of light in the yard, and he could see all their faces. "I'm going to break a rule tonight: Angela says it's a celebration. Just a walk for the ponies in the morning. No schooling, nothing for you."

Angela caught the jumpy, eager look in Julian's eyes. There was an indefinable, sudden difference in Hoyt's dark face, a questioning, faintly bewildered look in Tony's big blue eyes.

"Whole hog, you mean?" Julian said.

The father's face stiffened. "You're gentlemen," he said coldly, and got out of the car. Angela Malden laughed. The music came loud from the open windows, beating at them, urging them.

"Come on," she said, her voice rising.

The Maldens moved through the table-jammed room, the tall, straight-backed father leading. Most of the people were dancing, but those still at their tables looked up, staring. "Is that the army colonel from the post?" a woman asked. The men looked at Angela Malden. She wore a simple linen suit, with a bright, fluffed muffler at the throat; a softly molded Panama hat with a piece of silk like the muffler twisted about it. The boys, herded by Mark, followed.

Julian had wanted to wear the latest in tropical evening clothes: the latest from India; a gay cummerbund was the thing that appealed to him about that. Craig Malden had said no. Carefully he had tried to instill taste, clothes taste, into the boys. Each year an agent from one of the best English houses made a stop at the ranch. Malden relied greatly on his attractive manner and cosmopolitan experience to influence the boys properly in the selection of clothes. Julian and Tony usually proved difficult—because of Julian's peacock instinct to overdress, Tony's entire lack of interest. The other two took what was suggested, impatient to get it over with, and always slightly puzzled that such a matter should be considered by their father of any importance.

MAMA SANCHO appeared at the Malden table as if sprung from the floor beneath. She bowed and smiled and exclaimed. Julian screamed Spanish at her, grinning. He felt wonderful, and he wise-cracked about the flowers that colored the table. Mama Sancho smiled and talked all the time to Angela Malden. Ah, what a delight to see her again! And the flowers? A poor effort, but the result

of the most careful search. The wine was cooling; it was the best to be had in Mexico. She had only four bottles—undoubtedly the only four in Mexico—obtained from the Spanish importer, Rivas, in Mexico City.

Amid the great to-do of Mama Sancho's, the Maldens sat down at the gala table. Angela sat between her father and Tony; and Mark, by custom, sat on the other side of Craig Malden. Malden looked about, his face a little brighter. Angela could see that his effort had been made. It was like him, the best of him, she thought, to go through with a thing, in spirit as well as letter, once he was committed. "Well, this does look like a celebration," he said genially. "You lads want a cocktail here, or rather run out to the bar? Need any money?"

Now Julian's feet were tapping under the table, his eyes jumpy. He was half out of his chair. "Like to look around. Didn't bring a peso." His eyes were so bright, charming, disarming as he looked at his father. Craig Malden handed him some bills. "Could have changed it across the river three-sixty for one. Now it's three for one."

"Mama Sancho has to live," Julian said, with a wide smile. Tony said, surprisingly: "Think I'll go along too."

ANGELA got up after Julian and stopped him by the dining-room door. "Watch your step, Romeo."

"What are you talking about?" He was annoyed, moving away from her. She held his arm. "You know what I'm talking about. This seems to be a cards-on-the-table night. You've never fooled me—not lately. I know all about Rosa Telementez."

There was a quick flash of fear in Julian's eyes; then his handsome face grew sullen. "Beat it!" he said.

She went on steadily: "These people haven't worked for us for thirty years, like old Tacho Telementez. You keep your handsome eyes in the boat."

He gave her a hostile look. "You're getting too damned bigetty," he said. He took Tony by the arm and pulled him away.

Five minutes later he was dancing with an unknown red-haired girl, who hadn't left the bar since the crowd returned from the polo-game that afternoon. And Tony, the first Martini he had ever tasted clutched in his hand, leaned against the bar and stared eagerly about the narrow room. There were three

types of Americans strung out along the bar: as simple to separate, Tony thought, as cattle and sheep and goats. There were the cow-men in their big hats and their high-heeled fancy-stitched boots; the small business men and clerks from the other side of the river; the better dressed visitors from afar, always with packages in their pockets and women at their elbows.

Over Mama Sancho's dance-floor hung a huge ball, covered with a glass mosaic. During waltzes of a dreamy nature the room darkened, and spots played on the slowly revolving ball. It was turning now; and under it Julian and the red-headed girl danced. Her face was pressed close against the wide lapel of the new double-breasted coat; the rest of her was as close to him as their smoothly gliding steps permitted. The girl said nothing, wanted to say nothing. Julian talked lightly, cloaking his urgency with careless-sounding but key questions. Where was she from? Who was she with? Had she ever been to the Hotel Moderno? That was a hot spot for you.

But she was evasive. Actually, she was simply impatient at being disturbed. "Wait till the music stops, honey."

When it did, Julian steered her back to the bar. He was careful to guide her along the far side of the dining-room, out of sight from the patio. She clung to his arm and looked up into his face, smiling. "You're a hot dancer," she said.

HE was piqued by her casual acceptance of him. At the bar, earlier, there'd been only one vacant space, and she had been on the edge of it. She'd looked him over as he ordered the drinks. He always spoke Spanish to Mexicans, had since he'd been able to talk. She'd said: "What would I have done if you hadn't arrived? I've been making sign language for an hour for a champagne cocktail. I could make the *pop*, but I couldn't find a rooster around anywhere."

Julian thought that was funny; and when she'd finished the drink, which he could see she really enjoyed, she'd said, cocking her head toward the dining-room "That's 'Cielito Lindo.' . . . How about a dance?"

All Julian got out of the girl before they returned to the bar was her name, her first name, Ethel. Tony eyed the pair as they pushed toward him through the crowd at the bar. Julian had his arm about the girl, and he had that fool look

on his face. "We'd better be getting back, Julian," Tony said, giving his brother a warning look.

"We *are* back," Julian said, and shouted at the nearest bartender.

"Julian," the girl repeated. "Say, that's an awful nice name." She eyed the costly alligator bill-fold, fat with money, that Julian threw open on the bar. "Say, that's a honey! What do you do, Julian? You don't work around here, do you? Bet you're from San Antonio!"

"New York," Julian said. He grinned, and nudged Tony. He saw his face in the bar mirror, and the grin widened. He felt fine. "Big pocketbook-maker from New York."

ETHEL laughed, and pushed her face against his shoulder. "Say, you're a lotta fun. I bet you and I could have a lotta fun together, Julian."

A short, red-faced man laid a hand on Ethel's shoulder. "Hey, Ethel, Bill sent me down. I been lookin' all over."

"So what?" Ethel said, her green eyes hardening.

The man returned Julian's stare with a friendly, half-drunken grin. "Big night!" Then he looked at Ethel: "Come on, Ethel. Bill's kind of sore."

Ethel said: "I'm not going up those dirty streets to that Chinese place. I told all of you that before, didn't I?"

"It's more fun circulatin'. See the town. An' they got a fan dancer there. Bill says—"

"I don't care about any fan dancer. And I don't care what Bill said. He run off and left me here, didn't he?"

"He jest got a little mad. He's O.K. now. We thought you'd follow. Minnie Sue and him and me jest went along. We got to the Moderno jest in time to get the last table."

Ethel's eyes remained hard. "The *last table*," she jeered. "So you fell for that one again. Well, I'd rather be here, without any table, you tell that big-shot buckaroo!"

The man looked around helplessly. "But lookit, Ethel. You're over here with Bill. He sent me—"

"Can't you take a hint, Mister?" Julian asked. "The lady doesn't want to go to the Chinese place. She doesn't want to join you at the last table, nor see a fan dancer. Or maybe I'm wrong?"

"You're one hundred per cent right," Ethel said.

Julian saw Mark then, for the first time. Mark had that look you saw in

his eyes after he'd called "Leave it!" on the polo-field, and you'd hit the ball instead. He was a man to frighten anybody, Mark was, when that look was in his eyes. "Come on, Julian—Tony."

"Who's your friend?" Ethel said, looking out of the corner of her eyes at Mark. "Say, what *is* this? A new game? I never felt so popular in my life!" Mark ignored her. He took Julian by the arm. "The old man's going sour. He's been damned decent tonight. Don't spoil the show."

"Please, Julian," Tony said. "You know the way An's going to feel. She'll worry like hell if you jump the party. Spoil everything."

Ethel looked shrewdly from face to face as they talked. She ended with Julian, her eyes gleaming. "So that's it. Swell party this turned out to be. Like the last round-up." She swung about, grabbed the little man's arm and pulled him through the crowd to the door, disappearing onto the street. Julian glared at Mark, who was smiling thinly. "Now look what you did!"

"Some day," Mark said evenly, "you'll get a nice clean hole through you, my boy." And he swung his big shoulders through the crowd, making way for them back to the patio.



CASH had finished his quail. He'd been as hungry as he'd ever remembered being, and now he was full of good food, and happy. He had a *grande* of Bohemia beer before him, his pipe in his mouth, and he leaned back in his chair, taking everything in. Noylan and Skeed were back at the table with the two girls they'd been dancing with. One of the girls, a blonde, was doing most of the talking. Now she was talking about somebody called Malden—a man with a lot of sons and a daughter. The Mexican officers listened politely, not understanding her. Skeed just watched the pair, and Noylan scowled.

The blonde went on: "You'd think, the way they act, they were socially elite Easterners. My father knew Craig Malden when he had nothing but the horse and saddle under him, and mangy ones at that."

"They sho' got plenty now," the dark girl said.

"Just luck. Like any gambler might have," the blonde said. "He made a killing in oil, and he bought that big ranch when land was cheap."

"He was the first to cross white-faced with Indian humpbacked cattle," the dark girl asserted. "Ah reckon Malden's got somethin' above the ears. If Ah had all his money, Ah'd do like I wanted, too."

"Well, for God's sake," Noylan said, "all I asked was 'Who is the girl in the Panama hat?'—and I get this burst of machine-gun fire!"

THE dark girl laughed shrilly. Cash Seddon laughed too.

"Why doesn't someone bring this curio over?" he asked. "Do either of you gals *know* her?"

"I haven't any *desire* to," the blonde snapped.

Milly said, pointing: "Here comes three of the brothers now. Golly day, that tall one's good lookin'."

"That's Julian," the blonde said. "Tried to pick me up on the train from San Antone once."

Cash watched the brothers as they came through the dining-room door out onto the terrace. "What would you do, Milly, if an awful thing like that happened to you on a train?"

"I'd pick."

"Cash," Noylan said, "those Maldens have the best polo horses in the Southwest. Two grass fields like billiard tables."

"How would *you* know?" the blonde yapped. "Malden's got no use for the army. Everybody knows that."

"Flew over the place. Marvelous layout. Didn't know they had anything like that with the Panama hat hidden away there, though."

"They play polo?" Cash asked.

"You hear talk. Place is fenced in like it was the Grand Lama's in Tibet. Takes in damned near a county. No public roads through it."

"And believe me, the Produce people are going to make it hot for Craig Malden," the blonde said. "Just one road through there would save them thousands of dollars a year in truck-hauling from the Valley. They're working in Washington right now to make him open up."

"Giving the President hell, I suppose?" Skeed said.

Cash said: "What's this about this bird hating the army?"

Noylan laughed. "Long time ago one of our young Napoleons had a platoon in the Draper Trophy Test. There was a hundred-mile march in it, and during the night part he thought he'd pull a fast one and beat the other boys out. He tried a shortcut through Malden's ranch—"

"Yes, and they say Craig Malden locked him up in a Mexican house, and starved him, and took their guns away from his men, and—"

Noylan gave Allie May a hopeless look and shook his head slowly. "No, no. In this country, Cash, there are only two capital crimes: going on a man's land without permission, and leaving a gate open. The last one's like going into a hospital nursery and feeding poison milk to the boys and girls. And young Napoleon did it. It mixed up a lot of fancy bulls with the wrong kind of cows, or vice versa. But what happened was that a Mexican foreman caught him on a division of the ranch miles from the headquarters house. Malden was in San Antonio at the time. Maybe this spig rode with Villa, or something—anyway, he was a tough *hombre*. He held the young Napoleon, and all the gates were locked by then; and so what could Napoleon do? Nothing about that in the books. The whole post was in an uproar because, as far as we knew, he and his platoon had vanished into thin air. By this time, the kid was plenty scared, and he had sense enough to keep the men from getting out of hand. When Malden came back next day, he turned him loose—after giving him a hatful of hell. Naturally, it made him mad as the devil—whether against the whole army, I don't know—and don't give a damn. . . . How about a dance, Allie?"

"I'm mad at you."

STEVE had been dancing. He went by the door, waved, and grinned at Cash. He had a fancy Mexican girl in his arms. Pat Milford, who was married and had five children, shook hands all around, talked a little with the General and left in spite of the urging of the others. An important-looking Mexican finally led the General away, and that was the signal that everybody was on his own. Cash poured out some more beer and saw Mama Sancho approaching. "Everything all right?"

"Almost. Where is this beautiful lady you were going to have me meet, Mama Sancho?"

A shocked look came into Mama Sancho's eyes. "Oh, no, Captain! Show to you, not meet for you!"

"She thinks you're a vegetarian," Noylan said.

"You people go on and dance," Cash said. They were moving out to, anyway. The Mexican officers who were left at the table were arguing hotly about something. Mama Sancho lowered her voice mysteriously. "Is very pretty, this lady. From a big rancho. Is name Miss Malden. Sit over there with her brodder, her fadder. Very nice people. Very nice lady."

"With a Panama hat. Mm-huh. Well, I wouldn't be human if I didn't want to have a look by this time. What table?"

Mama Sancho made several grotesque peering attempts, through and on both sides of the little bamboo hut that shut off the Malden table from their view. "Better you walk toward bar, you can see."

"What good is that going to do me?"

She was all coyness. "But you can look. Is nice to look, eh?" She laughed and slapped him lightly on the back.

"I'd like a look at that draft beer at the bar, anyway." He got up, and a few strides later he saw Angela Malden for the first time. . . .

Noylan and Skeed brought the two girls out to the bar. Cash danced with Milly and later with the blonde. Both times the Malden girl was dancing, and he watched her curiously. The first time with a brawny fellow with cold, odd-looking eyes, one of the brothers. "He'd be a tough baby to get into an argument with," Cash thought. "He's not going to catch me staring at his sister." But the next time she was with the tall good-looking one the blonde had called Julian.

They were a great pair to watch. "I'd like to dance with that girl," Cash thought. "I'd like to know her." But there didn't seem to be any way it could be done; and Cash, suddenly sick and tired of listening to Milly and the blonde and his two brother officers, slipped out a side door.

THE air outside felt good. The exultance of a truant, of a condemned one newly escaped, overwhelmed him. He strode up the brightly lighted main street, the din of cheap bands and radios

in his ears. At the doors of the roaring cantinas sales-talks were shouted at him by barkers, urging him to patronize the greatest place in town.

"Mister! Is best place. Plenty good drink. You come in, sir."

"Look, got deer! Got wild bear. Many parrot talk English. Very fonna. . . You come see." A collared deer on a chain was munching peanut shells on the street.

A SHORT distance down the street he came to a two-story building, its front aglow with neon lights that gave it a tawdry brilliance. He went in, to be surprised by its size. The hot place of the town, all right.

Leaning against a table near the door, Cash noticed a Mexican policeman. His expression never changed. His Indian eyes were fixed over the heads of the drinkers, seemingly on some letter of the writing on the bar mirror. He wore a big cap, khaki, like an army officer's, a shabby Sam Browne belt and a shabby automatic close by his right hand.

There were some loud-talking women around Cash. One of them said: "Inny-way, she's nothin' but a cheap Yankih. Thinks 'cause she's got this job with the radio people, everbody figures she's somethin' bigetty. What Bill Kebler, best bulldogger in the U.S., can see in her to spend all his money on is more than I can figger."

"Listen at her! Sure it aint because Bill was a-courtin' you once, you goin' on thisaway, Ca'ie Lou?" a lanky cowboy drawled. "What you ever see in Bill Kebler, anyways? Good stiddy boy like me could show you a bettah time." He laughed loudly with the others.

Carrie Lou gave him a murderous look. "One thing—he's the biggest, fightin'est man ever you seen along this border, big-mouth. I notice you'd draw in your horns pronto if Bill Kebler ever come rarin' your way."

"She's comin' now. Bet she had another fight with Bill," one of the girls whispered in a warning voice.

Cash, having heard it all, turned to look at Ethel. She reminded him, in her overdressed, underdressed, too-eveningish silk dress, of girls he had seen on New Year's Eve in second-rate hotels back East. She had a voluptuous front on her, generously showing. He moved over to let her up to the bar. When her drink arrived, she moved her hands over her red hair before deliberately picking it up. She gave Cash a brief glance, with

no change in her face, then started to sip the drink, her eyes steady on herself in the bar mirror.

None of those who had been talking about her spoke to her. Not once did she look toward them. The girl, Carrie Lou, who stood on the other side of Cash, said in a low, scratchy voice to the cowboy: "You better lay low an' chirp sof', rider. I aint fixin' to get caught in no stampede when Bill Kebler starts snappin' his rope at that heifer."

"I reckon maybe you're right, sister," the cowboy said softly. He started to whistle and moved off into the crowd.

This, Cash Seddon told himself, is a Place. . . .

People came and went from the bar. The music came swelling out to them, and they answered its call. Through it all, the girl Ethel stood by his side.

A man came in on her other side. He had a fine sun-darkened face, white teeth shining as he smiled. She was looking at her long red fingernails. The man picked up her half-finished drink and lifted it to his lips, still smiling. The Chinese bartender grinned, hoping it was the joke it seemed. Cash half turned, watching the man, wanting to be a part of the act—for this was the Malden girl's brother, the one the blonde had said tried to pick her up on the San Antonio train.

The girl Ethel saw him in the mirror finally. She turned slowly, facing him. "What'd you do? Shoo her home? Or jest give her the slip for a coupla minutes?"

"I gave her the slip."

"Well, you don't have to annoy me."

"Where's your boy friend, Bill? And the little bell-wether?"

"You're liable to find out, if you stick around where you're not welcome."

"In that case, let's move on." He laid his hand on the girl's arm, and Cash saw that he was slightly drunk.

"Listen, smart guy—you'd last maybe five seconds with Bill Kebler. You run an' sell your papers."

CASH was fascinated by the look that came into this Malden's eyes. "Go tell him I'm out here," he said.

"He'd—" The girl saw it too, then. Sudden fright came into her own eyes. "Honest. Beat it. He's a killer. If he's got liquor in him, he aint afraid of the whole Texas Rangers. He like to killed three of them one night they raided a place on the other side. Honest, I

aint sore. I know you was jest havin' a little fun. Think of your wife. Maybe even you got a youngster. Bill, he don't do it halfways, ever."

Julian looked hard at the barkeeper. "You know a man named Bill Kebler?"

The Chinaman grinned widely. "He gottem table inside. He ridem all time rodeo, catchem steer go like hell. You likem sec?"

"Tell him to come out here. Tell him come quick: a man don't like him take his girl. You savvy?"

The girl let out a low cry. "No!" She swung around, her eyes wild, looking at Cash. "Mister, stop him, will you! Go stop that Chink. Stop him!"

Cash laid his glass down.

"You mind your business, fella. Just 'tend to your beer drinking," Julian said.

Cash said to Ethel: "Why don't you just get out? Why don't you use your head?"

She nodded sharply, turned. "Fong, come back here!" The Chinaman, still grinning, stopped, walked back toward them. "Lookit, Julian, I tell you what," Ethel said, talking fast. "Let's go back to Mama Sancho's."

"What's the matter with right here? Chino, give us a drink."

"No—look." She had him by the arm, her eyes thrusting desperately by him to the dining-room door, then back, cajoling. "There's something special I want there."

"You can get anything you want right here."

"No, I mean perfume. Number Five."

"I'm not going back to Sancho's. Not right now."

"We can get it maybe at the Owl Curio. Then we could dance at the Plaza Café. They got a swell outdoor place there, and good music."

HE looked at her awhile, with a hard smile on his face. "Chino, you got perfume here?"

"Gottem all kinds perfume." He pointed, a big smile on his face. Julian walked away and into the dining-room. The band was beating furiously. There were only a few people strung along the bar now. The Mexican policeman had gone out. Ethel leaned her elbows on the bar, swung her head so she was looking at Cash Seddon. "What's the matter with people, they got to go acting that way? I jest met this fella for a few minutes, and he acts like he owns me."

"I guess it's the Mexican air."

"Or, maybe,"—she lifted her glass, eying him coyly,—“the Mexican liquor.”

She was still smiling at him, talking, when Bill Kebler arrived. He moved fast and straight toward Cash Seddon. A few steps behind him, Julian Malden came jauntily, the largest package of French perfume to be found in the place clutched in his hand. The street door opened, closed, and Tony Malden and his sister stood in the room, their eyes searching the bar.

KEBLER swept Ethel along the bar with his hand, as an expert barman might slide a seidel of beer. He was a great rangy man, his eyes hot with liquor and hate. Cash Seddon was a big man too, but he didn't want any of this. Still, he couldn't point his finger and say: "There's your man, not I."

Bill Kebler swung at Cash Seddon. The blow caught him on the shoulder, and swung him hard against the bar. A glass crashed on the cement floor. Ethel screamed. She seized Julian Malden by the arm, her sharp nails digging, flexing, like a cat's.

Cash Seddon thrust himself out from the bar. He wanted to try to talk to this man, stop him from making a fool of himself. But there was no time. No time to say anything before the fellow'd be on him, killing him. He wasn't angry yet. He hadn't been hurt. But there wasn't time to think it was funny. There was nothing to be afraid of. He was as hard and big as this bird. And he was a good boxer.

He went in fast behind a feint and tied the man up. He realized then what he was up against as the knees came up viciously. He chopped with his right hand, and the man, with amazing, hating strength, yanked him over, threw him back hard against the bar. He was hurt now. To hell with the right or wrong of this! He fought back savagely, with everything he had. Through the fog of it, he heard a woman scream: "My God, they're *killing* each other! Stop it! Somebody *stop* it!"

Blood was on both of them now, their white clothing splashed and stamped with it. The breath was whistling from them in ugly jerks. A ring on Kebler's finger had torn a red gash along Cash Seddon's cheek, and the blood from it covered his mouth. His eyes were blinded by sweat and blood; and he knew, desperately, that he must get clear of those

terrible hands that held him close. Get away, tear loose just once. He still had the strength of terrific hate boiling in him, and he wanted to put all of it into one killing blow.

They fell, rolling and smashing at each other, and Kebler was on top. Cash felt stunned, and then, as Kebler got his hands at his throat, he knew that the man meant to smash his head against the cement floor. Then he saw a face. It seemed to be rushing at him, just face. It was Malden's face. "You—" Malden said to Kebler. "Get up and fight like a man!"

The searing hands fell away, and Cash threw the heaving body from him. He got to his feet, but Kebler was coming at him again. ("Not this time. You won't get those hands on me again.")

Cash breathed fast, watched Kebler warily. ("Come in. Come in. I want you to come in, fast.")

Kebler came in, hitting now, not reaching. Cash barely slid under his right, and hooked with all he had. He knew now, when it landed, that it was over, and he stepped away from the fallen man.

THERE was dead silence in the room. Then a glass fell from a girl's hand. A woman began to laugh, a high, hysterical laugh. A man said, "Come on, let's go back and dance. Let's get out of this."

Standing there, shaking, Cash saw the Malden girl. She was near the door, and she was holding to the arm of the man who was with her—but she was looking at Cash.

He wiped the blood from his eyes. He saw the other Malden brother, Julian, and then the girl Ethel. Her face was death white, and her scarlet lips looked like blood on her mouth. She walked unsteadily between Cash Seddon and Julian Malden. She said: "I didn't have time to do anything. Honest to God, I didn't have time." She moved closer to Julian, reached for his arm. "You going to take me home, Julian?" There was a whimper in her voice.

Angela said: "Julian!"

"Let's get going, Julian," Tony Malden said.

A little red-faced man was helping two others with Kebler. "He's been bucked off horses so much it won't bother him none," one of them said, pouring water over his face. "Let's take him out back; he'll be all right."

The little man said to Ethel: "I'll get you home all right, Ethel. Stick around a minute."

"The car's right in front," Tony said. "Come on, Julian."

Julian took Cash Seddon by the arm. "I'm going to buy you a drink."

"Julian! Please!" Angela came up.

"This is my sister," Julian said. "What's your name?"

"Seddon."

Cash Seddon looked at Angela Malden. "You'd better go along with your sister."

"You took a hell of a beating on account of me. I'm going to buy you a drink."

"I didn't take any beating. The other fellow took the beating."

Ethel said to Angela Malden: "Oh, Julian's your brother? We were playing around here, an' Julian went in to get me some perfume; and Bill, he just comes out and slugs this other fellow here. All *he* did was happened to be standing by me at the bar, not bothering anybody."

Angela just looked at her.

Cash Seddon took off what was left of his white linen coat. The shirt wasn't so bad—he might get by in the shirt; half the men around were coatless, anyway. "Here," Tony Malden held a handkerchief out to him. Cash grinned with his smashed lips, pulled his own out. "Guess I can get by with this." He was moved by the boy's sympathetic look. He wiped his eyes and his face, ran his fingers through his hair. He began to feel like a fool, standing there.

"Here," Julian said, and handed him a brimming glass. He drank it straight down. "Thanks," he said.

"You sure earned it, Mister," Ethel said.

Cash thought the thing to do was go back to the room they had dressed in at Mama Sancho's. His bag and polo things were still there. He could clean up. The Malden girl had drawn Julian aside and was talking earnestly to him. Those people had nothing to do with him. A freak accident had thrown him among them for a few minutes of his life, shameful minutes; that was all. Thing for him to do was beat it. He left the bar, looked up and down the street to get his bearings and started toward Mama Sancho's.

ACAR drew up beside him, a long, black open car. "Mr. Seddon! Can we take you anywhere?" The Malden girl was driving, the brothers in the back

seat. One of them said something, too, but Cash didn't hear it. "It would be a kind act," he said. "I'm going to Sancho's, but I feel like one of these nightmares where everybody's after you, and you can't lift your feet."

She laughed, and he looked at her closer. She certainly was a swell-looking girl. She started the car. "You don't talk like a Texan."

"I'm not."

"From the East?"

"Newly arrived."

"Rather a harsh introduction."

"Tell about it a year from now, and there's a great laugh in it, though."

"There mightn't have been. If the Mexican police had been around, the chances are you'd have ended in the calabozo."

She slowed up to avoid a wood-laden burro. He watched her face. As they moved on, he said: "Is it safe to ask if you're a Texan?"

"I am."

Cash heard Tony say to Julian: "Don't be a fool. He thinks An and I are dancing. I figured where you were, and we hopped right up there. You go in with her, and then I'll show up and say I was looking around. No one any the wiser."

They drove into Mama Sancho's yard and parked the car. When they got out, the girl stood for a moment facing Cash as the brothers started off. He liked the kind of smile she had on her face as she held out her hand to him. "Thanks, Mr. Seddon, for—for the—"

"Favor?" Entirely unintentional, I assure you."

They both laughed, and she turned and followed her brothers.

Cash moved slowly, keeping close to the shadow of the wall, and sneaked in the side door of Mama Sancho's.



AS the days moved on, the country grew dryer and dryer, and the heat became almost unbearable. Cash was unused to border weather, and he suffered, it seemed to him, more than the other officers of the regiment. To make things worse, the troops were subjected to an intensive training program in preparation for fall maneuvers.

Cash grew thin and irritable. Things went wrong with his troop. This was his first assignment with troops since he was a second lieutenant just out of West Point, and he was chagrined to discover that he had much to learn before becoming a good troop commander. At first, when his squadron commander pointed out deficiencies in training or discipline, he went at things with renewed zeal, wishing irritably that, like the other captains, his service had been entirely with troops. They performed their drill, range duties and field duties with a casual perfection that seemed amazing to him. True, he had a green first sergeant and a new and none too good troop clerk, but had any of the other captains been in his place, that wouldn't have mattered. They'd have done the work themselves until they'd trained their subordinates to function properly. Everything he did seemed to be wrong, and his Major made that clear. Twice the Colonel had had him up. He had a great admiration for the Colonel, and he felt terribly ashamed.

THE last time, the Old Man had said: "This may seem just a little harsh to you, Seddon, but it's a harsh game right now. This is a proud old regiment, and we just can't let it slip from its standard. The division maneuvers are also a tactical test of organizations. We've got to be tops there." He had smiled a friendly dismissal, but Cash had known a bitter moment of shameful inferiority.

He broke his brooding that night by pouring it all out to Doug Milford. They had been classmates, and Doug had stood at the foot of the class. But now, ten years later, he seemed to Cash a prodigy of military perfection.

Doug said, soothingly: "Forget it, Cash. All you did was neglect to send out a patrol. We've all done it." He smiled his warm smile.

"Major Radley didn't think it was so trivial. After the hell he gave me, he saw that the Colonel knew all about it."

Milford was silent for awhile. Pat, his wife, spoke up. She had been listening with only scant interest until Radley's name came up. "That Radley! For heaven's sake, Cash, don't let him get your goat. He's jealous, that's all. Because you've been on swell details, and famous all over for your polo. That's his pet hate: big-time polo-players and horse-show men. Sour grapes is the classical name for it."

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

Doug intervened. "No. Radley's all right. And he's a fine officer. Thing is, Cash, work every minute is the way he sees things. Does it himself. Always has. And he sees it only in terms of duty with troops. Thinks men on other details are slipping professionally. He's hipped on what he calls professional polo-players and glorified jockeys. Of course, you've gone around a lot on polo tournaments, and you've had this assignment at West Point—what was the other?"

"R.O.T.C."

"Well, naturally you couldn't keep up to divisional standards. Not your fault. In a year or so you'll be just as good as any of the lot here. Probably better."

"A year or so!"

Pat laughed. "Don't look so glum, Cash. Lord, if I was a man, I wouldn't trade the excitement and color you've had in the past ten years for all the Motts in the army. Wait till I get you a cold bottle of beer; you'll feel better."

Cash knew what all the books said. He'd memorized the drill-book and what to do under the classical tactical situations supposed to occur to troop commanders. But this strange country, with its miles of mesquite, range fences on every side and no convenient ridges to provide cover and firing positions, bewildered him. Here the conventional advance guards could be surprised, made almost useless by a tricky enemy who knew the country; flankers couldn't get out on account of the sacred fences; dust rose high and could be seen for miles. It was a game you had to learn all over again. And it wasn't in books.

ON a Saturday morning, Major Radley told his officers that, on Monday, the regiment was making a march out to the Beecher Ranch. It lay some fifty miles down the river in rough country. The owner, a friend of the Colonel's, had thrown it open for field exercises. Some of the exercises were to be squadron against squadron, and the Major gave them a long warning talk on what they might expect in the way of tactical action. He stressed the fact that there were no maps of the country available, that the going would be rough, fast and warlike, and that he expected his squadron to come out with better than second honors. It seemed to Cash that the Major's cold eyes were on him most of the time during the talk.

Cash went to lunch at the mess, feeling depressed. Saturday afternoon and

Sunday he had no duties, and he looked forward to the hot, useless hours ahead with loathing. He got an automobile road-map and studied it. It occurred to him that he might drive to Beecher's ranch and reconnoiter the terrain. As usual, he thought bitterly, it would come naturally, the whole business, to the other captains. They already had years of jump on him where troop leading was concerned. He'd at least give himself the break of knowing the ground. It might save some blunders, anyway.

HE drove off through the glare, in his battered car after lunch. He took the San Antonio road and turned south at Morris Springs. From a rise he saw the river, and a little later the Beecher Ranch sign over a high cedar-post gate. Old man Beecher was not at the ranch, but his foreman gave Cash a genial welcome and told him to go ahead. He sent a Mexican ranch-hand along to show him the roads and watering places. Before leaving, Cash had a rough but useful sketch of the area. He was hot and tired, but he felt a virtuous glow. Part of the dread of the coming week and of the cold stare in Radley's eyes were gone. He felt now that he could move a troop around this country and have some idea of what he was about.

"It's a better drive along the river, and not much farther," the foreman told him as he was leaving. He indicated the route on the road map. "When you get to the Los Angeles ranch—about here—you got to turn sharp north. That gets you to Maywell, and it's a good paved road right into the fort."

Cash thanked him and drove off through the heavy white dust. The heat hadn't abated, though the sun was low.

He thought back to that night in Mexico, to the Malden girl. What was she doing in a place like this? If they had all people said they did, why live in a place like this? Why not go to God's country and enjoy it? Go around on big liners and see the beautiful things of the world. Play on beautiful beaches, go to Switzerland for winter sports.

He slowed down for a turn. A high woven-wire fence loomed up in front of him, and the road turned from the river and ran parallel with the fence. He saw a rider through the fence, a Mexican on a dun pony. The man looked at him briefly, coldly, went steadily on through the mesquite. A fence-rider.

The sun was down. "I'll miss dinner at the mess," he thought. "Maywell's the railroad stop. Maybe I can get something there. Some chili and beans, and if I'm lucky, a bottle of warm beer."

He drove faster, the white dust billowing up behind him. He rounded a turn and saw a car in the road ahead. No dust around it, so it must be stopped. What would anybody be stopped in this wilderness for? Maybe somebody getting out. He jabbed at his horn button, and the repeated sounds were startling in the desert quiet.

Then he saw a woman standing by the car, and he slowed down. She wore a white shirt and a light brown skirt. No hat; and when she looked toward him, he saw it was the Malden girl. It almost frightened him, the sudden recognition. He stopped the car and stared at her. The car, he saw, was a shabby station-wagon run off to the side of the road. "I grabbed the first thing in sight," she said, smiling, "to run up to Morris Springs for a registered package. I'm flat out of gas."

"Might get some out of my tank," Cash said, feeling stupid.

She looked at his car dubiously. "You mean, down on your knees, sucking through a straw or something?"

"Well, I haven't got any straw."

She looked at the gas gauge, after wiping the dust off with a finger. "Or much gas, either. How far you going?"

"'Bout thirty miles."

"I'm on your way, sort of. Could you—"

She got into the little roadster and sat beside him. From what Cash had heard about the Maldens after his Mexican adventure, he wasn't especially flattered by this. A dame who probably thought she was all hell around this country, because her old man had been lucky when most of the cattlemen were starving. Too good for those people who had started out with the same humble heritage. Snobs with an Eastern complex in a Western country, who shunned the things and people around them. At least, that was the accepted version of the Malden legend.

CASH started the car. She leaned back, glanced at him. "You turn up at opportune times."

Cash had been thinking, with a growing sense of interest: "I'm going to see this Malden place. After all I've heard about it, I'm actually going to see it.

That's more than anyone else has, as far as I've been able to learn. I'm going to find out if all this talk is really true. See with my own eyes this mysterious forbidden ranch, and if they eat babies for dinner off gold plates, and old man Malden wears a diamond-studded crown." He laughed aloud, and the girl beside him laughed too. "With your kind of luck, I was just thinking a wheel might come off this, or something."

"That would be *your* bad luck. How far is your place from here?"

She had partly turned, so as to look at him. "You've been out in the sun. Without a hat. You shouldn't do that in this country at this time of year."

"Or anything else. Live here, even. It's the worst country I've seen, and I've been around a bit."

She stared at him. "Why, what's wrong with it? I've been around too, and I think it's the greatest country in the world to live in. You wouldn't want to live in some *city*, would you?"

"Any city."

SHE sat silently staring out at the rolling slopes of parched, mesquite-covered country. "That's the funniest thing I ever heard," she said.

They drove on in silence. Presently she leaned forward, said: "Here we are."

Cash slowed the car. Ahead, on the left, was a high stone wall, curving up on both sides to massive, square stone columns. Two huge wrought-iron gates spanned the space between them. He turned the car, facing the gate, and through the grille-work he saw a squat stone house with a red-tiled roof. A sturdy old Mexican, dressed in gray linen and wearing a wide white hat, stared impassively out. Angela Malden jumped from the car, called, "Tacho!" She talked to him in Spanish, smiling, and the old man grinned toothlessly at her, undid a huge brass padlock and swung the gates wide. Cash stepped on the accelerator, preparatory to driving in, but the girl stopped him. "Thanks ever so much for the lift. But I can phone from here, and they'll send a car down from the house."

Somehow, Cash felt almost as though he had been slapped in the face. All along he'd been—chagrined, he admitted it—anticipating arriving at the Malden ranch-house with this girl. As a companion, or an acquaintance, at any rate. He certainly hadn't felt as though he'd been like some dumb truck-driver from

whom she'd accepted a ride simply because she had to—and this casual dismissal came to him as a distinct shock.

He was about to back up, turn and speed off, when she came running back. He was aware, and ashamed of the awareness, that a new hope came to him as she called. But when she said, still smiling, "Oh, I left my package on the seat!" and thrust her hand over the door for it, the bitterness came out in him. "I'm sorry you didn't consider me presentable enough to drive you home, Miss Malden."

She started to laugh, until she saw his eyes. She had just touched the package. Her hand stopped, and she looked at him a moment without saying anything. "You're serious?" she said.

"Naturally. Isn't it obvious?"

Her eyes became cold. "Actually—I thought I'd put you to enough inconvenience. I'm sorry if I've given you an inferiority complex."

"As a matter of fact, you haven't. Just the opposite. I'm one hundred per cent, apparently, like everybody else in your neighborhood."

"Just what do you mean by that!"

He was a little frightened by the tone of her voice, but he went on: "I've heard of your mysterious ranch. That nobody's ever been invited on it. I thought it was a lot of hoocy, but—" He pointed at the great gates and shrugged.

Her face was very pale; her eyes had a strange luminance in them that fascinated him. She stood with one foot on the step of the car, not looking at him, seemingly staring at the iron gates at which he had pointed. There was no movement of breathing in her, but he saw a barely perceptible trembling of her mouth. Then she turned her head sharply, facing him. "I'm inviting you," she said harshly, "to dine with me. Tomorrow night. At seven."

He heard the paper of the package crackle as she clenched it. The car shivered as she sprang back. He watched her run through the gates and into the stone lodge. Then he pushed on the throttle and drove rapidly away from the Rancho de Los Angeles.

THAT night Cash got little sleep. He turned restlessly, sweating under the stifling mosquito-bar. He thought of the exact words he had said to the Malden girl, and her exact words to him. He felt utterly ashamed of himself. He felt bitter again.

The next day the heat was awful. Not a cloud in the sky. He played polo in the morning, and the long day dragged.

He'd been tempted to tell Milford or Noylan of his adventure of the day before, but some inner feeling stopped him. Now, sitting thinking about it, the crude truth dawned on him: When he'd met her again yesterday, he'd hoped to go on with it. It was the first really interesting thing that had happened to him since he'd been at the post. But he'd got the snub like all the others.

He had no intention, naturally, of taking up that bitter dinner invitation. He laughed aloud, thinking of it—picturing himself stepping into the Malden hall, bowing coldly to Angela Malden and shaking hands all around with the men of the family.

IT was so airless in his little frame bungalow that he was sitting on the porch. It was screened, and sun-withered vines clung to it, giving it a measure of privacy. He was dressed in a cotton shirt, with its collar thrown open and sleeveless, and a worn pair of linen slacks. He hoped no one would come by. Radley might, to talk over the week's work. He was always talking shop, and always dressed to the hilt. That would mean dart in and get dressed. Cash looked warily out through the screen. The walk and parade were deserted—too hot for the soldiers to play baseball, even. He had a fugitive guilty feeling. He could ask Pat and Doug Millford to go across the river. He wouldn't enjoy it, but he knew they would. Pat would like the dancing and the good dinner they could get at Mama Sancho's. As a bachelor, he could afford to take them both over and give them a good time; but poor Doug with his five kids—even an evening across the river where, the Lord knew, things were cheap, was more than he really could afford. . . .

The gun had gone off; Retreat and To the Colors had blown, and the listless flag had come down. He saw the band filing into the stand on the parade. "I'll get a band concert anyway," he thought, and he watched the bandsmen put up their little music-holders and arrange their chairs. Sure enough, they started off with a dreamy, complicated piece, and he wondered why they didn't always play gay marches, or popular tunes. But it was a good band, and probably what they were playing was a good piece of work. But the music made him feel worse—ut-

terly alone, and miserable. He went inside to get some tobacco, the music following him relentlessly; and when he came out, pressing the tobacco down into his pipe, he saw that a car had stopped in front, and that somebody was at the screen door. He wasn't in the mood to talk to anyone; but the screen door opened, and the Malden girl stood facing him.

Never in his life had he been so surprised. He just stood there, staring at her, his fingers fumbling with the pipe. She wore a sleeveless linen dress, and a soft, wide straw hat, and she looked as cool as though it were winter. As they looked at each other, the music burst into a roaring finale, ceased with a tingling crash. In the unnatural quiet that followed, it seemed impossible for Cash to say anything. Angela Malden said: "I'm making more of an entrance than I'd bargained on." She nodded toward the two shabby wicker porch-chairs. "Are you going to invite me to sit down?"

A gaunt, yellow-eyed cat with an incredibly long, thin tail, stretched and stared up at them from one of the chairs. Its sharply pointed ears were out of proportion to any cat's head, its paws enormous. As Cash, embarrassed, shook it from the chair, Angela laughed. "What in the world is it?"

"It's moved in on me here. Come to stay, apparently."

"It looks positively *Egyptian*. Have you named it?"

"I've been forced to."

Her eyes were all delighted interest. "What?"

"Martin."

"*Martin*? Why in the world?"

"It looks something like a man I knew by that name."

"Well! I hope he hasn't heard about it."

Cash laughed. He was still greatly embarrassed. But she seemed entirely at ease as usual. She lit a cigarette and looked out through the vines. "Are they going to play again? I wish they'd play 'Weenie-Weenie-Weenie.'"

"Not a chance."

MA RTIN pressed against her long, rounded legs, emitting high, evenly-spaced falsetto cries.

She reached down and stroked his bony back. "Do you feed him? Or maybe he wants the band to play."

"There's milk on the back porch." He picked the cat up to take it out.

He put on a tie and a linen coat, after dropping the cat on the back porch. He came out with two bottles of beer and glasses. The band had started to play again. She smiled at him as he put the things on the table between the two chairs. "A gay life, you soldiers lead."

"How did you happen to come here?" he asked.

SOMETHING in his voice made her stop smiling. She looked at him gravely. "Tacho—our man at the gate—saw the little yellow tag on your car. He said it was a Fort license number. So I concluded you must be an officer." She said it as though that settled everything, and began pouring her beer.

"But why did you come?"

"Well—" She watched the beer foam up in the glass, set the bottle down; then she met his gaze with those steady, odd-colored eyes. "I decided that I'd been rude, maybe ruder than you were."

"I'm sorry. It's just that—well, I've been rather miserable down here. The heat and the emptiness. This is my Sunday, for instance: my one day off in the week." He was stirred with his own words, and he jerked his hand violently to indicate the post about them.

She said: "I always had an idea the army was so gay. A sort of care-free life. Aren't there any nice girls here?"

"None of any sort. And it's too hot for dances or gay times. You can't feel gay in this heat."

"It's been a bad drought. It's not normal, really."

"Have you ever been to any new place and not heard that one?"

She laughed. "But it's really been bad. Fortunately, we have the springs and the creek through our land, and it hasn't hit us like the others."

They listened to the band then; and when the piece was over, she said: "I came to be sure you'd come to dinner. On afterthought, I remembered that yesterday's invitation hadn't been accepted."

Though her tone was light and she smiled as she spoke, it seemed to Cash there was a plea in her eyes, as though what she asked was important to her.

"How would you—explain me?"

"What do you mean?" The words came sharply.

"After what I said yesterday, there's no point in my not being frank, Miss Malden."

"Perhaps you'd better be."

"Well—I don't belong in this country, and I don't understand its functioning, socially or otherwise. I suppose I'm selfish. When I get my service in here, I'll be off, and probably never give the place another thought."

"I see."

"But while I'm here, I'd like to be as contented as I can. We work hard. I don't know what to do with myself on Sunday—like today. Or nights."

"What do the others do?"

"Almost all of them are married. Only two other captains and a few second lieutenants are bachelors."

"What do they do?"

"Well, the captains seem to have got used to it. Been here three or four years. And one of them's about to be married."

"And the lieutenants?"

"Just out of West Point. I guess the novelty hasn't worn off for them yet."

"But it has for you?"

"There never was any. The first fun I've had was that night in Rio Bravo. You were pleasant to me that night. And when I met you on the road yesterday—"

"Yes?"

"Well, I got the crazy idea we might be friends. You seem to know what it's all about—"

"What do you mean?"

He stammered and laughed, embarrassed. "Just that you were different from those girls Skeed and Noylan run around with. Their voices are like scratching on a slate, and they'd talk you to death about nothing. So you see when you—"

Her eyes were kinder now, thoughtful. At last she said: "So when I turned out to be just another horrible Malden, you suddenly believed all the wild stories you'd heard."

"I'll admit they seemed more reasonable."

"Look. How about trusting me a little? Will you?"

"Yes," he said.

She smiled gayly, nodded. "All right. Go in and get ready. I'll give you—well, fifteen minutes. All right?"

"All right." He was amazed at the stir of excitement that suddenly possessed him, as he strode into the house and turned the shower on.

LISTENING to the band there on the little porch, Angela Malden thought things over. She remembered the talk she had had with Tony the night before. She had said: "Remember that long polo

news-film Father showed you all, of last year's Open?"

They were sitting alone in the library, Tony buried in a book. He looked up, slightly annoyed. "What about it?"

"How he kept pointing out to Hoyt the way that Back on the army team hit it off the line?"

"Sure. He'd hit a short one, and then, before the opposing One could get to it, he'd whale it to the center of the field. Got away with it every time. Lord, how that man could hit!" Tony had laid the book down, and his eyes were alight.

Angela got up. "Look here," she said. The wall of the room was covered with framed pictures, mostly action pictures of polo plays. There were a few of teams lined up—great teams. And there were many of individuals. Craig Malden subscribed to a news-agency, and every year received great batches of such pictures. To his sons he pointed out flaws and perfection in the forms of the various players. He did the same with the thousands of feet of action films he used as texts for his constant schooling.

NOW Angela pointed to one of the pictures. It was of four men standing side by side, polo coat collars close about their necks, hair bedraggled, plastered to their foreheads. Underneath was written: **ARMY TEAM—WINNERS OF JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP, RUMSON, N. J.,** and a date. The names of the players followed.

"The Back on this team was the one in the film," she said quietly.

Tony leaned over her shoulder. "Captain Seddon, eh? Well, what of it?"

She looked at him queerly. "Remind you of *anybody*?"

"We had an hour of looking at him and hearing about him the other night, yes."

"I mean—Tony, that night in Mexico: remember that man in the fight?"

He looked at her, puzzled. "I suppose," she said, "there wasn't much to recognize that night. The way he looked. But I saw him this afternoon. He's the same man. Doesn't it seem amazing?"

She told Tony about the afternoon's experience. He was immensely interested. When she was through talking, Tony grinned. "Quite a romance!"

She laughed, not embarrassed. "I hope you know me better than that, Tony. But you know, the thing set me thinking. Do you realize, Tony, that people think we're queer?"

"We mind our own business."

"I mean our own people. If what this man hinted at is so—oh, don't you see? High hat, too good for them. Big shots with a lucky ranch, rich with water, while they—"

"An, do you know how many carloads—actual *carloads*, mind you—of feed Father's had dumped at every ranch in the county?"

"Feed?"

"You know the drought's killed the ranges. They're picked clean. Their cattle were starving. He's saved every damned one of them. And it's not the first time."

"Well, why do they— All this talk about—"

"Because he's Craig Malden. His way. He's done it so that they'll never know where it came from. He doesn't want their thanks, and he doesn't want to be a charity-giver. He doesn't think he's better than they are, either. Since that day we had the talk—I've understood him better. This polo thing is an obsession with him. Mad as it seems, it's the thing he wants most out of life. I've got so I hate the game. But in this Open tournament, I'm going to play the game of my life. I want to give back to him what he's given me—us. And then I can go my way with clean hands." He stopped, embarrassed at his fervor, and grinned. "Well, what about your friend Seddon? Think he'll take you up?"

"I know he won't. But for a while I was frightened. I thought: what if he should?"

"Well, why not? I'd say Julian owed the gallant Captain a meal, at least." He began to roar with laughter, and Angela had to join in. When that was over, he looked at her eagerly: "Look, get him to come. . . . I'll take the rap. I'll give him the big build-up with Mark and Hoyt. If he wasn't the great Seddon, I admit it would be beyond my puny powers."

"Hush! Here comes Mark."

AS the older brother came into the room, Tony winked at her. "No Malden ever refused a dare."

Mark overheard. He was feeling more jovial than usual, perhaps because he was king of the ranch while his father was away. "Do I hear you refusing to take a dare, Angela?"

She looked at him, a half-smile on her face. "Should I, Mark?"

"No matter what it is—take it. In a nice way, of course."

She continued to smile at him, but a change came into her eyes—a look that was distinctly Malden. "In that case," she said softly, "I'll shoot the works."

THE band stopped playing, and with a start Angela came back to where she was. She turned her head and peered through the open window beside her. Probably she shouldn't look, but she was curious. The room was square and small. There was a fireplace on one side, and a cheap, shabby rug on the floor. Something pathetic about that rug, she thought. There were a few nondescript chairs, a battered couch, a scratched radio and a worn mahogany table. The mantel was crowded with silver cups of all shapes and sizes, and in a corner of the room was a heap of polo mallets. Pictures of horses and polo-teams were hung haphazard about the wall.

She started guiltily as she heard loud singing, and then she laughed as the sound of the shower rose to a blast and then ceased. And suddenly her eyes became serious. She was aware of a pang of sympathy for this man as she realized what that singing meant. He was being released for a few hours from monotony, from this empty, unhomelike house. And she felt shame in her that it was not because of that urgency she had been prompted to come here.

"You seem entranced with the beauty of the place," Cash laughed. He was standing by the door, watching her. She started, smiled. He was dressed in a fresh white linen suit, and his dark hair was brushed so that it gleamed. He had nice white teeth, she realized, and shoulders as broad as Mark's. He did look very nice. . . .

The movement of the small sedan made a pleasant rushing breeze. Angela Malden drove rapidly. "Got to dress—a bit," she explained. She was occupied at the wheel, and he sank back, hardly thinking.

As they passed through the ranch gate and sped up a long, tree-lined road, Angela Malden said: "I'm sorry you won't have a chance to meet my father. He's away for a couple of days. Tony and Julian are the ones you met that night in Mexico . . . Julian being the *agent provocateur*."

"Tony the finger-man."

"He's a good boy. You'll like Tony."

"I saw one of the others in Mama Sancho's—big, dark fellow—looked like Victor McLaglen."

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

"Better keep that to yourself. That's Mark. He's the crown prince around here. Hard to know; but if he ever takes to anyone, you couldn't have a better friend."

"Isn't there another one?"

"Hoyt. A dour fellow—so *you'd* think. But he's a romantic at heart. He plays a guitar alone in his room, so low you can't hear it. Keeps it locked in a closet, *Bluebeard* fashion. Nobody can make friends with Hoyt."

"Your father—"

She gave him a quick, sidelong look. "Sometime maybe— His story is so marvelous. He's— Oh, here we are!"

Cash, listening to her, had paid but little attention to the passing landscape. Vaguely he had been aware of a smooth paved road, running wide and clean between rows of mountain ash. Now, as they swung around a curve, he saw in one complete picture the house and surrounding grounds of the Rancho de Los Angeles. It was as though he had closed his eyes in Texas and a second later opened them on Long Island or Bryn Mawr or Rumson. There were real lawns, great pecan trees, graveled paths and drives. To the left of the road was a golf-course, impossibly green. To the right were two smooth tennis-courts, and beside them, a tiled swimming-pool, its water a deep blue in the gathering dusk.

ON rising ground the house sprawled solidly. Flowers and privet hedges surrounded its stonework and red-tiled magnificence.

"Wheuh!"

She slowed the car and smiled at him. "Lord, it's wonderful," Cash said.

She laughed. "What was that you said about Texas?"

"You'll have to admit this isn't it."

She stopped the car. He looked about him. "It's the water," she explained. "—the 'Spring of the Angels,' the Mexicans call it. It's actually blue. You hear about blue water, but you never see it. Except—here. In the bathtub it comes out really blue. A beautiful turquoise blue. You can see it in the pool, and there's no paint, just the white tile."

"It seems miraculous."

"It is. It's the angels who live in the spring. When I was little, I'd go down there with old Tacho. He was old even then. We'd sit very still back of a big live-oak, and we'd watch. And then I'd make my wish. Tacho said I had to hold his old silver cross in my hand and close

my eyes and wish desperately—really hard. And then not look at the water, but turn around and walk back out of sight from it, because then the angels would be dancing on the spring, and if I looked, they'd fly off and be angry."

Cash was watching her face as she talked. It seemed to him that again she was a little girl, her eyes the eyes of a girl-child filled with wonder. It made him feel funny inside, watching her.

"Have you ever wished there since? When you were grown-up, I mean?"

HE saw that his words had broken the spell. She gave him a quick, almost startled look, and started the car. She glanced at the watch on her wrist. "It's zero hour," she said.

It was amazingly cool in the house. A wide hall ran the depth of it, and a cool breeze swept through to the patio in the back and rippled the shining blue pool. On the right of the entrance was the long living-room. Angela Malden waved toward it. Lights came on as she said: "I'll be fifteen minutes. There are cocktails there, and magazines and cigarettes. Or you can smoke your pipe. Don't wait for the men of the family, because they don't tipple—in spite of any historical evidence to the contrary. But—I'm not a man of the family. Follow me?"

"Closely."

She waved and darted away. Cash stared about the room. He couldn't have described it. There was no grandeur to it except the grandeur of simplicity. From the great cat-skins on the dark, shining floor to the mellowed stone fireplace, the beamed ceiling, the paneled walls.

The mantel was massive, simply but beautifully carved. Silver urns, cups, pieces of plate were spaced on its long top. Cash examined them curiously, with mounting interest. The dates on some of them were thirty years back. One was a miniature of the great Open Cup; and on it, besides the name of Craig Malden, were three others that would be eternal in the records of polo. Almost reverently Cash traced the names with his finger, and he wondered anew about this strange man, Malden.

A Mexican woman had slipped noiselessly out of the room as Cash entered, and he saw that she had placed a silver tray with a cocktail-shaker on one of the tables. He poured one out into a glass clouded with cold, observed for a

moment its clear amber lights, and took his first taste. Martini, and a good one. He lit his pipe and walked about the room. It was impossible for him to sit down in this room alone. It was too much of a temptation to walk about; to look out the widely swung windows at the blue, mysterious night; to watch the light reflected on the richness of those old silver trophies. . . . He heard a step and turned to face the brother he knew as Tony.

Tony grinned and held out his hand. "Glad to see you." He started to say something else when Angela Malden called from the doorway. Cash turned and looked at her. Her hair, parted in the center, rippled back to a smooth knot on her neck. She wore a flowered silk dress that left her arms bare and showed the smooth sweep of her shoulders. In the dull light, her eyes seemed almost black. Her mouth, Cash thought, seemed fuller and somehow, exciting.

"Way paved?" she said to Tony.

He grinned at her. "Like marble."

"I like people to take me at my word," she said. She picked up Cash's empty glass, refilled it and poured another. "Let's sit down."

HE had an odd feeling of exotic contentment as he sat back in a deep chair and sipped at the drink. It seemed to him all at once that, if he could just prolong these few minutes forever, with this girl sitting as she was, talking to him, smiling at him, listening to him, letting him look at her strange and never entirely knowable eyes, he would have achieved the wildest wish that even the Spring of the Angels could vouchsafe him.

"You look almost rapt."

He laughed, embarrassed. "I was thinking of the Spring of the Angels."

Tony grinned. "Oh, you've heard that one? Angela here, died hard on it. The pay-off was the time—"

"Ah, Tony, no!"

He grimaced at her. "She had a tame deer, and it suddenly disappeared. I sneaked up on her and heard all. 'Please, lovely angels, send Florita back,'" Tony mocked in a tone of falsetto urgency. "But the angels let her down. Florita had a date that no self-respecting angel would—"

"Please, Tony!"

Cash was startled at the feeling in her voice. There might even be tears in her eyes. He felt suddenly angry at Tony.

Just then the two older brothers walked into the room. The larger one, Mark, shook hands firmly with Cash. The one called Hoyt had a thrust to his hand like a steam shovel, and his eyes looked as ruthless. There had been a faint lightening in the face of Mark; but here, none.

Julian came in. He walked up to Cash, smiling, and shook hands vigorously. His fine eyes had a mocking light in them. "He's wondering if I'm going to spill the beans," Cash thought.

The Mexican woman announced dinner then, and Angela led the way to the patio. It was beautiful out there. There was a fountain in the center, surrounded by a square of bright-colored flowers. A white, wide-winged angel hovered from the fountain-top over the fine multi-colored spray.

The table was set on moss-covered flags, and the only lights were from tall candles whose spear-heads of yellow light dipped and fluttered in the night breeze.

Cash thought of the monotonous mess, as he ate. He was hungry, and everything tasted—well, wonderful. He was glad that the Malden men all seemed half starved. All except Tony, who did most of the talking. Julian laughed occasionally and sounded off in an adolescent, trite way, Cash thought. The other brothers made serious business of their meal. Mark spoke rarely, and the sinister-eyed Hoyt not at all. Once Julian caught his eye and winked. He jerked his head toward the two older brothers. "Don't let 'em talk you to death!"

"What does he mean by that?" Cash thought. Julian went on: "What do you think of the layout?"

"Wonderful," Cash said simply. A hostile gleam seemed to spark in Hoyt's dark eyes. "Too bad you can't see the fields, Captain," Mark said tonelessly. "I'd like to—"

"No shop at the table," Tony said. Mark gave him a sharp look and went back to his eating.

WHAT was this all about, Cash wondered. He looked at the colored glassware on the tiled table, at the angel that didn't look like the angels you saw on tombstones, and on beyond, to the dark mass of giant trees that cloaked the valley below them, and thought: "Down there is the Spring of the Angels. Or I don't know my topography."

Angela was watching him. He nodded toward the trees. "It's there, isn't it?"

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

She said nothing—she seemed to be studying his face with her grave, dark eyes. Then she said softly: "Yes."

It seemed to him that he saw something then in her eyes that was rare: a brief, precious glimpse of some inner, cherished secret, startled from her by some quality in his words or look that touched her own instant thoughts.

SHE looked down the table, arose abruptly. Mark said, including them all: "Let's go into the library, Captain."

Curiously, Cash followed him. Once in the room, he noticed that Angela had left them. "Let's sit down," Mark said. When he spoke, every word seemed filled with command. He was like a strict colonel at officers' call, Cash thought. There were two cut-glass decanters of whisky, and several aged-looking wine-bottles, a silver bowl of ice-cubes and a siphon set on a silver tray. Mark indicated them, nodded at Cash.

"This," Cash thought, "is almost like a court-martial. Except for the makings, there. And if I'm going to be the accused, I'm going to get some measure of enjoyment out of it." Deliberately he poured a ruby flood of port into a large wineglass.

Cash lit his pipe. The starched Mexican woman who had waited on the table moved noiselessly about the room, serving coffee to the Maldens. None of them was smoking, Cash noted. They all had a quiet, serious air of waiting. Cash sipped his port, and his eyes wandered around the room. Big, fine, mellow, like the other one, he thought. Then he noticed the polo pictures that covered the walls, and he had a desire to get up and look at all of them. But Mark started to speak. His heavy voice had a flat, monotonous quality, the words spaced and uninflected like those of a child reading without interest or understanding. His eyes looked straight into Cash's as he spoke. "You played polo on that big army team a few years ago. It won the Junior and played in the Open."

Cash was startled. "I played on the last army team they had."

"They've stopped playing?"

"It's been a little difficult, I think, getting a team together the last few years."

"You mean—four men good enough?"

Cash was becoming annoyed at his tone. "We have to work hard in the army. We don't have the time to get about for high-goal polo."

"I thought you had it pretty easy."

Cash tried to smile, but he didn't want to. "You thought wrong."

Mark studied him in silence. Then he said: "But you were with the team that played the Argentines last year for the Cup of the Americas."

"As a substitute. I didn't get a chance to play."

"My brothers and I have a team here. We're entering it in the Open this year."

Astounded, Cash spoke without thought: "You're *what*?"

Mark stared coldly at Cash. Hoyt's eyes glowed. Tony was looking at some spot over the door. Julian let out a theatrical laugh.

Mark said: "We're not going up for the test matches. Expect to arrive just before the first game."

Cash wondered if he were hearing aright. Did these jackasses actually think they could barge into the most important polo tournament in the world just by getting on a train? Then a new thought struck him. Had the girl, when she discovered who he was, simply decided to make a convenience of him for her precious brothers? The suspicion angered him. He said shortly: "Are you a member of the Association?"

"We are," Mark said.

"You know a team entrant for the Open has to have a handicap of at least twenty-one goals?"

"Certainly. We have over that. Two teams, in fact."

CASH couldn't call the man a liar—and of course it was possible. He wished he'd thought to look them up in the book before coming here. He sat in silence because he couldn't think of anything to say.

"I'd like to ask you a few questions, if you don't mind," Mark said in a more friendly tone. "There are bound to be things up there—for instance: the team you substituted on last year, that beat the Argentines, is playing this year with the same line-up except for one man. Perhaps you'd give us a few pointers on their style of play?"

Cash said nothing.

"You wouldn't consider it disloyal, would you?"

"Lord, no," he laughed. "I'd only think *that* if you asked about our poor little twelve-goal team at the post."

"After all, you're from Texas now," Mark said with a smile. "And this is our first trip up there."

Cash took a big swallow of his port. Mark held out the bottle, refilled the glass. Cash relit his pipe, sat back and grinned. "Be glad to tell you anything I can." After all, he'd had the best dinner he'd ever eaten in Texas, was drinking the mellowest of wine, and for a few brief hours, was pleasantly away from that hot, empty house. "I'll be their little Tommy Tucker," he decided.

FOR nearly two hours Mark asked him questions, the technical finesse of which amazed him. Soon the others joined in, the growing eagerness in them bursting the apparently habitual reserve. Even the mute Hoyt asked Cash for bits of polo information, his sullen eyes gleaming as he pushed the deep-voiced words from his bull throat.

Julian, as usual, tried to take advantage of the unusualness of the occasion. When at last they sat back, the talk died out, he suggested gayly: "What say, Mark, we all have one in the Captain's honor?"

"I wish you would," Cash said, not aware of the situation.

Mark's words settled it. He ignored Julian and said to Cash: "We're in training for the Open." The absolute finality of those words impressed even Cash. "Lord," he thought, "I feel like a drunkard." And as though Julian's words had touched off a spark in him, Mark looked at his watch, got abruptly to his feet. "Say, it's almost ten!" The others got up too. For the first time, Cash credited Mark with a sign of embarrassment. It was obvious the man was torn between his duties as host and some stronger feeling. "We turn in at ten. Training," Mark explained.

"They've pumped me dry, and now I can beat it," Cash thought. But in spite of the pressure of that idea, he'd really enjoyed it all.

"I've got a tough day ahead tomorrow," Cash said, smiling. "I owe you a lot of thanks for giving me such a pleasant evening."

They were moving toward the door. Mark said, as though a sudden thought had come to him: "Would you like to come over some day next week? We've a team of Mexicans here at the ranch—very fast. We'll take them on for eight periods. Like to have you watch it, if you'd care to."

("You mean, use me again. Have me put out all the dope in me to help you polish up your rough spots," Cash

thought.) He said: "Glad to." And he knew he would, too. He was intensely curious to see the Malden brothers in action.

They all shook hands again, and Mark said:

"You can get back, all right? You've got a car?" And then Cash knew that there was something still more unusual here. Mark Malden had no idea that his sister had brought this strange man from the outside into the sacred Malden ménage.

Tony spoke up quickly: "I'll see the Captain out, Mark. Be up in a minute." Hoyt had already left, and Julian went whistling after him up the broad stairs leading from the hall. Mark nodded, and followed them. Tony grinned. "Just a little duplicity, but no harm."

ANGELA came to the door of the living-room. She held a magazine in her hand, and he could hear the radio going softly in the room behind her. "Well," she said, "has the supreme court adjourned?"

"I was about to see the Captain to his car," Tony said, and Cash saw the amused look he shot at his sister. "You get going," she said, "before Mark shoots you." She pointed to the stairs. Tony held out his hand to Cash. "See you next week, then. We'll phone you as soon as my father gets back." He turned and went noiselessly off.

"Like to sit and chat awhile?"

Now that he was alone with Angela again, Cash felt the weight of his earlier suspicions. Had he been unceremoniously hurried out of the house by Tony, he would have resented her lack of interest in him, but now—"I've got to be off on a march at six in the morning. Afraid I'll have to run along, Miss Malden."

She studied his face a moment before replying. "I thought—if you liked, I'd show you the spring."

There seemed an unnatural amount of feeling in her low-spoken words. There was such sincerity in them, that he felt a momentary sense of shame.

"I'd love to see it," he said.

She moved toward the wide front door. Her car still stood in the gravel drive where she had left it. In silence they walked across a smooth sloping lawn and followed a flagstoned path. The ground descended sharply as they left the immediate vicinity of the house. There was a small, bright moon high in

the sky; a tree-toad croaked in a steady deep-voiced chant. She touched his arm, guiding him, and the faint scent of her hair came to him.

They came to a long flight of stone steps. Before them the dark mass of the pecan grove seemed like a solid blackness against the thick mass of stars in the bright sky. She said nothing, and he had no desire to speak. They turned a spur of the hill, and Cash saw all at once the lovely pool of the Spring of the Angels. The surrounding trees guarded it, but shut out nothing of the beauty of the night. The mysterious depths seemed to absorb, rather than reflect, the moon and the starlight. There was no sound. In a voice almost a whisper she said, pointing: "There's the tree. Tacho says it's hundreds of years old."

The majesty of that great live-oak tree sent a thrill through Cash. Its huge roots seemed to reach, with a grasp of benign ownership, into the very water of the pool. Its tremendous spread of branches hovered high over the water, as though in eternal benediction.

"It's—wonderful!" he said. And he realized that she was holding to his arm, her shoulder touching his. He never could decide, afterward, what might have happened in the next space of time, if nothing had disturbed their rapt solitude. But he felt a sudden tension in the girl beside him, heard her catch her breath sharply, and then came a low, desperate mumbling of words. He moved with her as she stepped lightly, and then he saw—saw the kneeling figure of the man, the head bent so that the face almost touched the ground. He couldn't understand the words; but the desperate pleading in that shaking voice he could understand.

HER hand drew him away, its urgency unmistakable. He imitated her hurried, soundless tread as she urged him beside her up the path they had come. Not until they reached the front of the house and stood beside her car did she speak. Her eyes, wide and full of pity, raised to his. "It was Tacho," she said, in a barely audible voice. "And I know—I could tell from the tone of his voice, although I couldn't catch the words—that he is in—what he calls 'pain of the heart'."

"I'm sorry," he said simply.

She held out her hand. "I must say good-night." She called into the gloom by the steps, and a Mexican boy ap-

peared, standing very straight, listening to her quick, softly spoken Spanish.

"José will drive you back," she said to Cash, and with a wan smile she turned and ran up the steps and into the house.



THE regiment didn't march back into the post until the following Saturday forenoon. It was a blazing day, dust-ridden and airless. Then men and horses were caked with sweat-leavened alkali dust, their faces clownlike under its mask. Cash was soaked with sweat, dead-ly tired and disgruntled. Night and day they'd been at it, with little sleep and hard beds under the open sky. He thought he had done well in the field exercises. Once, indeed, he thought he had done more than well. He had felt exultant about it at the time. In a startlingly sudden meeting engagement with another squadron, Major Mott had had to give swift, brief orders for an attack. His own troop had been directed to make a flank movement, mounted. He knew the ground from his reconnaissance of the week before, and led his troop rapidly and under the best available cover to the jumping-off position in a cove of live-oak trees. It was a perfect surprise when his charging troops swept down on the hostile firing-line; and in the critique, later, the Colonel had so adjudged it. But not a word from Mott.

What Cash didn't know was that Mott had come up through the army in a hard school under some of the older, harsher colonels, men who were chary with praise and quick with criticism—and that, with Mott, it took more than one swallow to make a summer.

They had ridden thirty miles since sunup, and when Cash dismounted at the stables, his legs felt permanently bowed and lifeless. At his troop orderly-room he signed some papers listlessly, and then walked up to headquarters to look in his box. The Adjutant wanted to see him about some trivial matter, and while he waited, he read his mail: A few bills and one letter. He started with interest when he saw who the letter was from. It bore a Long Island postmark, and was from Tink Boyne. Cash sat down in

the Adjutant's office and started to read eagerness growing in his eyes:

As you may guess, I'm again forming a team for the Open. Yes, again! And this time, Father says it had better click. Or else. The "or else" being his promise that if Great Dunes doesn't lift the Cup, we go out of the game forever. And I go to work! Can you imagine the Boyne name out of polo? Nor I. So, with the prospect of fast becoming a pot-bellied banker looming before me, I've been desperately scouring the world for an unbeatable team. And I'm certain I've got it! The trouble with the old gangs I've played with is that they've been bemused by the odd idea that polo is just another game! To win, isn't a matter of life and death with them as it is with me. So, bearing that fact in mind, I've tossed the old, gay camaraderie stuff out the window. Polo boys, not playboys, from now on. I've collected Clyde-Morton, Miguel Ramos and Foster Test. How's that for a steam roller? I've got to have a fifth. You've probably gleaned in your rounding that several of the above boys are not any too reliable, outside of their ability to clout a polo-ball, and there's always the chance of accident before the tournament gets under way. Cash, you're the man I want for Back.

I'm going to be frank with you: Foster feels the job is his by divine right: right of the polo Fosters and all that la-de-da. He's a very fine player, but as you may know, he's an in-and-outer. Ten goals today and two tomorrow, and I've put it up to him bluntly just where I stand on the matter. I've simply got to make it this year—or reconcile myself to the pot belly and the mahogany desk. So, if you're up to your old game, it's you for Back. Otherwise, friend Foster.

From your none-too-recent last I gather that you won't be homesick in a month away from Texas. And on my own, I assume that the affairs of the military are not too involved to spare you a month's furlough or whatever you call it. Upon those assumptions, I've taken the liberty of sending you a ticket, and will expect you in time to play in the first test match Tuesday. I've not made it round-trip, because I've a lingering hope that when you observe once more how much fun we have, you'll ask for a transfer.

Cash still stared at the letter after he had finished reading it.

A voice spoke beside him:

"Not bad news, I hope?" He looked up into the friendly eyes of the Colonel, and gave way to a sudden impulse. "I guess it is, sir—to me, anyway." And he explained briefly. The Colonel smiled. "I'm afraid I don't follow you. I should think that would be great news."

Cash stood uncomfortably, unable to say what he felt. "Come into my office," the Colonel said, and when he had seated himself at his desk, he prompted: "All right, let's hear about it."

"It's just that I—can't make it."

"Why can't you? You're in good playing shape, aren't you?"

"It's not that. I couldn't ask for leave—at this time."

"Why couldn't you?"

"Well—you see, sir, I've been here less than a year. I've got my troop to think of. And the maneuvers are coming. After all, polo's just a game."

THE Colonel looked at him in silence. Then he said: "Everything's just a game. And if you play it like a good game, you're all right. Have you had any leave this year?"

"No sir. I haven't had any for about four years."

The Colonel looked at the calendar on his desk. "You'd better get away tonight if you want to make that game on Tuesday. I'll have your leave-order made out for one month."

Cash was so startled he couldn't say anything. He stood, embarrassed under the Colonel's steady gaze. Then the Colonel said quietly: "Seddon, always remember this: in a first-class organization, anybody can be spared. The very essence of our training in the army is that the man below can carry on—right down to the ranking private in a troop. Successful war demands that. And another thing: I'm a great believer in an officer taking what he's entitled to. He gets little enough for the demands made on him. He's on duty twenty-four hours a day. And his period of leave each year is a part of his recompense, just as much as his quarters or his pay. And I believe that that time is his, and that whatever his game is, he should play it like hell when he's on leave, and that he should work like hell when he's on duty."

The Colonel's eyes seemed to demand a reply. "Yes sir," Cash murmured.

"As for the maneuvers," the Colonel went on, "I'd feel as though I were at fault if every troop in my regiment weren't ready at any time to take the

field. Anyway, you'll be back before they start in October."

Cash started to speak, but the Colonel said: "You'd better get along now and get packed. And I envy you, and hope you have a fine time and win."

Cash went out into the blinding sunlight in a daze. It seemed impossible. A few minutes ago he was looking forward to the usual dreary week-end, the hopeless heat, the prospect of unending days of monotony; and then a smudged letter and a few words had changed everything. Forgotten now were his stiff legs and his grim-mouthed Major. As he started off across the parade to his quarters, his mail orderly saluted and handed him a registered letter. He signed and tore it open. Inside was the railroad ticket Tink had mentioned.

Tink had enclosed a hasty scrawl: "*Herewith the ticket mentioned in my letter. Expect you by Tuesday. Gatti sends her best.*"

In the shaded dimness of his tiny bedroom, Cash blinked the sun out of his eyes and stood regarding Gatti's picture. It was a big, fine photograph of a smiling girl with the devil in her eyes. Something to look at more than once, all right. Something you didn't see around this neck of the woods.

It was a long time before he turned away from the picture. A long time before he ceased thinking of the girl nicknamed Gatti.

IN the comfortable air-conditioned train Cash sat staring out at the green fields of New Jersey flashing by. In less than an hour he'd be in New York. He'd see Tink Boyne's genial face grinning at him through the train gate. For all his money and his impressive background, Tink was as regular as they came. Gatti Boyne, Tink's sister. . . . As the train rushed on, Cash thought of her. He wondered now just how he had felt about Gatti. Honesty forced Cash to admit to himself now that if it hadn't been for the extreme difference in their manner of living, his sensitiveness to the ever-apparent fact of Gatti's money and his own imminent departure for the border post, he would have asked Gatti to marry him.

At the Pennsylvania Station, Cash had expected to see Tink. Tink wasn't there, but as Cash stood by the gate, staring about him, he heard a cry: "Cash!" There was Gatti, her eyes bright with welcome. She wore a trim knitted suit, a

gay little hat was perched on her thick bright hair, and she came toward him with her arms out. "You old desert-rat!" She put her hands on his shoulders and kissed him.

It was wonderful, to see her. Wonderful to see how glad she was that he was here. He put an arm about her.

"Gee, you look wonderful!" Cash said.

GATTI laughed. "You always overworked that word! *You* look thin as a razor-blade, Cash, but sweet as ever! Tink couldn't get here. Seeing a man about a horse over at Westbury. Do you want to lunch in town?"

"Look—why couldn't we go right out? Go swimming. I've dreamed about it for over a year. Salt water. Surf."

"You poor darling! We'll go out right away."

Settled comfortably in the big car, Cash looked at Gatti. "She is wonderful," he thought. "She's got everything. If she were only an army girl!"

"What's all the scrutiny for? Have I lost my lure, or are you just dazzled?"

"You're—"

"Yup: *wonderful*. Like a polo-horse, or a swim, or a polo stroke, or anything else you happen to approve for the moment."

She was leaning back in the corner of the seat. The grin had left her face. "Why'd you run off the way you did?"

"I was ordered down there. My tour as instructor was up at West Point."

"The War Department doesn't forbid you to use a phone, does it?"

Cash didn't say anything. It was impossible to explain that he was afraid he would have made a fool of himself.

"And you wrote me maybe three letters. And I dunned those out of you."

"I never can think of anything to say in a letter."

"I noticed that."

They rode on awhile in silence. Gatti smoked a cigarette. Cash stared out at the unfamiliar sights. Gatti blew out a cloud of cigarette smoke. "And another thing: the family's away. You keep clear of that gang of Tink's: they're quite lively if you give them a chance. You're going to fatten up—be in shape for that Open. Tink says you're one of the best Backs in the world. That Cup's got to come home."

"I'll be all right. I'm not much of a playboy, you know. And I can't afford high jinks, anyway," Cash said. "Not on my pay."

Gatti gave him a quick look. "Are you broke, Cash?"

"No."

"Well, just sing out, any time."

Cash felt uncomfortable, especially as he realized that Gatti would have given him money—indeed, would give any of her friends money—and never think of the matter again, precisely as she would loan a handkerchief.

"Cash—tell me about your post down there. Everything you do. What the people are like. Are they funny?"

"No. They're fine people."

"Well, they can be *sunny*, can't they? Don't be so touchy about your old army. Who do you like best, and all?"

Cash told her about Pat and Doug Milford. About all the kids, and the creek swimming-pool and the school bus drawn by mules. And about Noylan, who spent his week-ends continuously riding on air-conditioned trains to escape the summer heat. She always listened to all he said, understood instantly. That's what he liked best about her.

THE car rolled on toward the big house by the sea—Great Dunes. Cash knew very little about the very rich. He'd grown up on a California ranch near Santa Barbara, and it was there he saw his first polo. The game had always fascinated him; he couldn't afford to play it, but he had a natural aptitude with horses, and in his second year at West Point had made the polo team. The polo coach at the Academy was the famous Snake Naxon, the only army officer who had ever played on an International team. To Cash, Snake Naxon was the *Beau Sabreur* supreme. Not only because of his nine-goal handicap; it went deeper than that. There were no airs about Snake; though he was a cavalry major and an instructor, no cadet had any qualms about going to him with his troubles. Everything Snake did to you, he made you like.

Before graduation, Cash went to Snake for his last advice. But he already knew what he would hear. "Cavalry for you, Cash," Snake said.

Years later Cash was ordered back to West Point, and he felt very humble at having Snake Naxon's old job. He too had become a marked man in polo, but it was only relative, he assured himself.

In the old days Great Dunes used to be the headquarters for the polo crowd in a homelike, go-as-you-please way. Tink and Gatti knew everybod, apparently;

all their world was welcome, and took advantage of the fact. But now—Cash wondered. Hardly any of the people on neighboring places came around; and the few who did seemed more bent on business than socially attracted: a few horse-dealers, managers of teams who wanted to arrange practice games, occasionally a woman friend of Gatti's.

The Argentine, Ramos, and the Englishman, Clyde-Morton, were quartered at Great Dunes. Cash had never met either of them before. Their being there, playing with Tink, was explained in his letter, of course. But it seemed odd to Cash that he couldn't have made up his team of Americans. Heretofore, Tink had teamed with friends on the Island, a neighborly lot who'd played college polo together. But this Ramos—Cash knew he was considered one of the best players in the Argentine. Why wasn't he playing with his countrymen? And Clyde-Morton? Both their countries had teams entered in the Open, and the two of them were said to be better players than any man on those teams. And the Englishman was from a titled family. Why should these two elect to play on a synthetic American four?

In the test matches they had played, he had encountered again several of the best-known players, men who a year or so ago had been cordial to him. But now they seemed stand-offish—polite, but nothing more. It struck him as rather odd. It was more puzzling because he had shown up so startlingly in the games. The newspaper men were writing him up, more and more. "Another Milburn," they were saying, "only a longer hitter."

Tink was enthusiastic about the way the team was going. "No use in putting out too much in these test matches. Take it easy. And another thing," Tink added thoughtfully: "Foster's howling for his place in the sun. I meant to put him in yesterday for the last half, in your place, but he slipped off and filled in at the other field with the Marshfield team, who had a man out. I hear he played a sensational game."

CASH said nothing for a moment. He knew he hadn't played up to his own standard the day before. He said quietly: "You know, Tink, I'm really the outsider here, anyway as far as Foster Teft's concerned. The trip and the practice games are a grand vacation for me. And you know me well enough to know I'd be glad to step down for

Teft. It means far more to him than to me to be on a winning Open team."

"Oh, the hell with that!" Tink said violently. "Foster's always crabbing. Can't take orders. Granted he's a very fine player; I insist on running my team my own way."

"If I weren't here, you'd play him."

"I wouldn't. And if he'd keep his mouth shut and play the way he can—"

"—You'd have just as good a team," Cash smiled. "And it would mean so much to his father—oh, I've heard the talk around—well, to both your fathers, because they played so long together on the old big teams."

Tink looked sharply at Cash. "Has Foster put out a lot of sentimental drivel?"

Cash laughed and shook his head. Foster Teft had talked to him once on the subject, but it wasn't drivel. He'd been honest, and conceded that Cash was the stronger man for the team. "At the same time," he had said in a friendly way, "if you suddenly had to go to war, or got an unfatal touch of ptomaine before the first game, I wouldn't go off and mope about it."



"**W**E'RE dining *en famille*," Gatti said on the day of Cash's arrival. "You've never met Clyde-Morton or Ramos, have you?"

"Seen them play once or twice, but never met them."

They were on the beach for the second time that day, and Gatti ran sand through her fingers as she talked. "I'm wondering how you'll get on with them."

"Is it especially necessary to get on with them?"

She smiled smoothly. "I'd say—yes. You see, it's Tink's idea that you all live here. Handier—horses here and the practice field and all."

"I see."

"No, look: I'd better tell you. I feel that I'm entertaining you. Polo aside, I mean. But the others—"

"Are a necessary evil?"

"You're making this involved. I like George and Mike. And I like Mellissa and Neesa Bradley. I don't especially like them twenty-four hours a day."

"Let's hear about them."

"Well, George drinks too much, and his brother's a lord who hasn't much use for him, and probably gives him an allowance that wouldn't feed our horses."

"Why isn't he playing with the British team?"

"That I have no facts on."

"Oh, all right."

"Mike isn't a pleasant fellow at times. But he's off the liquor for the present. He's most polite. I've never heard what his source of income is, if any. He's very handsome."

"I'm sorry. Why isn't he playing with the Argentine team?"

She was slow answering. "He says he had a row with the team captain. Mike has a vile temper. But we said—facts."

"Who's Mellissa? That's an intriguing name."

"She's an intriguing wench. Married at sixteen. Twice more since. Good family but sort of avoided, if you know what I mean. Last trip to Reno, she got into some kind of a scandal. If you didn't read it in the papers, I won't go into it."

"I didn't read it."

"Good. Neesa's what was known in a more romantic era as a clinging vine; in our more cynical times, a yes-girl. She's got, apparently, what it takes. Tink thinks so, anyway. Who am I to judge?"

"What about Foster Teft?"

"Not in the inner circle. Tink has a mad on Foster. You'll never be told; but once there was a girl. She's Mrs. Foster now. His father and mine started the old Great Dunes team. You see?"

"I see. What's Mellissa's function?"

"George likes her. She likes George. His girl-friend, as it were."

"Whose girl-friend are you?"

He looked up from the sand, smiling; but she stared moodily at the sand sifting through her fingers. Finally she said, slowly: "I suppose you could say I was engaged to Mike. But that was almost a year ago. Some things happened. . . . Let's go in for a swim, shall we?"

ON that first night, the dinner-table was set on the terrace overlooking the water. It was a starry, warm night with a faint but steady breeze from the sea.

There were no cocktails served, no whisky or wine at the table. Cash thought of the Maldens. With them, it was the order of things, he supposed. But here, among the rich of Long Island, it was decidedly unusual.

Gatti announced to Cash in front of the others, using his own army expression that so amused her: "Tink has us all up the pole until we fill that Open Cup with champagne."

That first evening passed pleasantly. None of the undercurrents so surely running here was apparent to Cash. Tink and Neesa, Mellissa and the Englishman settled down to bridge after dinner. The Argentine remained stubbornly at Gatti's side, though he included Cash in all his talk with pleasant formality. She left them early with the excuse that she had some letters to write.

THEY lined up for the first time the next day in a test match. And the first unpleasantness occurred. "I'm giving Electra to Cash," Tink said to Ramos. "He's heavier than you, and she's a real weight-carrier."

"She's my best pony," Ramos said, his eyes burning. "I'm used to playing her. She's a little difficult for a stranger."

Cash, standing there, felt extremely uncomfortable.

"I've seen him play ponies most men can't ride," Tink said sharply. The Argentine bowed slightly and stalked off. But when Cash finished the first period on the big bay mare, his exultance far outweighed his embarrassment. She was the greatest pony he had ever been on.

Tink, though concerned with the management of the team, played a fast, heady game. And the Englishman at Number One was amazing. He rode beautifully and his shots for goal were uncannily accurate. On Tink's fast ponies he was off time and again before the opposing Back could touch him.

The days passed pleasantly for Cash. Gatti swam with him; and the Argentine, who didn't like to swim, would come down to the beach with them and sit under an umbrella and watch them. He protested to Cash: "It is bad for the polo muscles. It makes the muscles slow, swimming."

"I haven't seen anything slow about his hitting yet," Gatti laughed. "But I saw you muf a couple in the last test match."

Ramon smiled. "Ah, but I am talking about what they call stale. Going stale. When the tournament begins we must not be stale. This swimming can do that."

The Argentine was bitterly resentful of his presence here, Cash knew. Neesa Bradley had bumbled; and one day, lying

on the beach talking, Mellissa had told him more. Mellissa said: "You're the It man now. And dammit, I'd say you're just what Gatti needs. Not some foreigner who'll get her down to some weird country and treat her like hell after a few months and after her money's in his control. And she's impulsive. Especially where men are concerned. Doesn't know her own mind. But you just grab her, and you're the type that won't take any of her nonsense."

"But why should there be any nonsense? If a woman loves a man—well, why should she want to indulge in any nonsense?"

Mellissa looked at him, her dark eyes half closed, the smoke from her cigarette curling up about her warm-colored oval face. "Ah, you're the simple, old-fashioned type, Cash. The life you lead doesn't give you even a glimpse of what is really going on in the world. Girls like Gatti are not like your army girls. Not a bit. She could love you just as much as one of them—more, probably; but you'd have to pay the price for it. More uncertainty, more quarrels, but a lot more excitement—fun. You'd have to be less old-fashioned."

Cash laughed uncomfortably. "Well, I'm just a poor army officer. Be stuck on the border all my life. That's an even more weird country."

Mellissa studied him through her half-closed eyes. "Cash! Now don't tell me you'd try to be that kind of a clown. Not with a girl like Gatti. What's weird about *this* country? New York? Long Island? Gatti's got all the money you'd ever need. Nowadays men don't act the idiot in matters like that. What's hers is yours when you marry. It's only fair to you. You make the sacrifice, is the way to look at it. You give up your career"—and Mellissa laughed—"to please her. She's responsible. Why shouldn't she do her share?"

CASH started to reply, and Mellissa jerked her cigarette at him. "Now, listen: I'm trying to put a little sense into your head. It isn't as if you were deliberately going after a girl for her money. Some girl you didn't give a hoot about. We're talking about a girl who'd have men after her if she worked in a five-and-ten-cent store. Real men. And also a girl, unless I'm blind, you're in love with. I'll be damned if I can see where there's even any argument. What *are* we arguing about?" And they both laughed.

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

MELLISSA didn't mention this to Cash again, but she spoke of George. It was after the second game of the tests. They'd played a very strong team, one that conceivably they'd meet in the Open. The day was unusually hot, and Clyde-Morton, wan, sunken-faced, took a great drink of brandy before going up for the last period. Mellissa, who had walked over by the ponies, saw him. Cash saw her standing, watching him; saw the tragic look in the girl's eyes. Saw her turn and almost run away without speaking to the Englishman. Cash felt a little sick and terribly sorry for her. They won the game, and afterward gathered at the Boynes'. George was quietly drunk. He sat away from the others, silent in his wet polo clothes, his coat collar pulled up about his thin, white face. Mellissa drank too much too; and later, before she left, she talked to Cash. Now she was not the smooth, almost cynical Mellissa, with the wisdom of the world in her eyes. She was like a broken child. She clung to Cash's arm. "It's because I love him so damned much. So terribly. And I know there's nothing that can be done about it."

Cash tried to soothe her. "Why? Why can't there be anything done about it?"

She shook. Tears were all over her face. She pushed up from the couch where they were sitting and tried to smile. "Oh, hell, I'm just making a damned fool of myself. You wouldn't consider it any problem. George hasn't a cent. But he's fairly young and the liquor hasn't killed his strength yet. Not yet."

"George is all right."

"Yes, he could go to work. Earn a living. That's what you're thinking?" "Yes."

"But you're wrong. All the other men we know could; but not George. This polo. Sometimes, Cash, I think of it as an awful drug. Like cocaine. It makes addicts. It makes me so— If George hadn't discovered he was a marvelous polo-player, he might be all right now. He wouldn't have left the army, become a polo bum."

"But you'd never have met him."

"No, I'd never have met him. And sometimes I've prayed—I've wished I never had."

Cash said nothing for a time. Mellissa was drawing patterns in the sand with a brown finger. "Well, considering what you said to me once," Cash ventured, "—haven't you any money, Mellissa?"

She smiled at him quickly. "Ah. Yes. A nice fat alimony. Now do you see?"

"I see," Cash said slowly.

Gatti came out of the water. Smooth as a seal she looked, Cash thought, watching her come toward them. As a golden seal. "You two do too much talking," Gatti said, dropping down on a beach rug and reaching for one of Mellissa's cigarettes.

"I got a letter this morning," Cash said. "From Pat Milford, thanking me for a lot of electric trains and dolls and stuffed rabbits, and denouncing my extravagance."

"Who's Pat Milford?" Mellissa asked indolently.

"A swell lady with a bunch of kids," Cash said.

"Living on a captain's pay within about a thousand miles of a toy-shop," Gatti said. "Well, did they like them?"

Cash reached over and took Gatti's hand. "Thanks. They're going to mention you in their prayers instead of me as soon as I can get a letter back."

"Poor damned little kids!" Gatti said.

IT was things like that about Gatti that stirred Cash. A typical act. She hadn't forgotten what he had told her about the Milfords. She never forgot things he told her. It was the part of Gatti he liked best. Better than her fun-making, ridiculing people, things—mostly conventional things.

"I can understand a woman loving two men," she said to him one night. "At the same time, even." They were alone in the half-dusk of the terrace, watching the lights of a steamer going out to sea.

Cash said nothing.

"You're angry. You don't like me now."

"Yes, I like you—but I don't like your talking that way, Gatti. You don't mean it."

She was sitting on the terrace wall. She looked straight into his face. "I do mean it," she said quietly. "I've done it—proved it to myself."

"Then it wasn't love."

She laid a hand on his shoulder. She said, huskily: "Not as much as I love you, Cash—right now."

That annoyed Cash. What she had said before took all the feeling out of it for him.

"I'm trying to tell you something, Cash. Trying to be fair with you. Do you want to listen?"

A sudden ugliness unnerved him.

"I don't want you to tell me anything. Anything like that," he said, and a few minutes later they joined the others in the house, and no other words passed between them except a cool good night.

LATER, Clyde-Morton came into Cash's room. George wore a silk bathrobe over his silk pajamas, and carried his inevitable bottle of whisky.

George was relaxed and pleased with things. "Well, we're going well in the test matches; not done too badly, have we?"

"George, I feel guilty about Foster Teft."

The Englishman regarded him quizzically through his pipe-smoke. "That ghost not laid yet, eh?"

"Tink told me today that I was to play in the Open. I actually think the team goes better with Teft. I watched him carefully in the four periods he played with you yesterday when I was down."

The Englishman kept looking at him in an odd way. "Did you watch Mike Ramos, too?"

"I thought they worked together beautifully."

"And Mike—er—doesn't with you?"

"Not the way he does with Teft."

The Englishman studied his pipe; then he said slowly: "After the game yesterday, Tink called Mike and me for a bit of gab. Then sort of a vote, if you know what I mean. There were two for you and one for Teft. Do I make anything clear?"

"Ramos voted for Teft," Cash said. The Englishman nodded. "You know, you're one of the few Americans I've ever really thought I understood. I'm a bit older than you, Cash. Been around a lot—too much, I expect. I was like you once—had a lot of your traits. All the damned fool ones, I fancy."

Cash tried to grin.

"Cash—" The Englishman was looking at his pipe again. "Mind if I ask you a personal question?"

"Of course not."

"D'you live on your army pay?"

"Yes. I do."

George lifted his eyes. There was no twinkle there now. "Look here—" He didn't quite know how to ask what he wanted to know without explaining why he wanted to know. He couldn't just say baldly what Teft's friends were more than hinting.

Cash, aware now that the Englishman was battling embarrassment with candor,

prompted: "I'd rather you said it right out."

Clyde-Morton nodded. "Right. Has Tink made any financial arrangements with you?"

"Financial arrangements? Why, what do you mean?"

The Englishman had found out what he wanted to know. There could be no doubt of that and the look that went with it.

The stunning truth came to Cash. Clear now, the reason people he used to know avoided him! "You mean," he said, the words feeling harsh in his throat, "that people think so?"

George didn't nod, but his look told Cash. "Forget it, old man. Hope you understand my asking. But you see—well, it builds up sympathy for Teft. These are his home grounds, you know."

"I—see," Cash said.

He felt sore inside. He felt shame before this Englishman whom he'd come so much to admire. "George!" He faced the other, his eyes hard. "Do you believe I'd take money to play polo?"

He wondered about the odd look the Englishman gave him. Could it be that he believed this monstrous thing? But then the faint twinkle came into Clyde-Morton's eyes. He picked up his bottle. "No, Cash. Somehow it's about the last thing I *would* believe about you. See you in the morning." He walked to the door, closed it softly after him.

CASH put out the lights and stood by the window, staring at the moon-filled night. An overpowering loneliness gripped him. So people thought that was all polo meant to him?

He was startled out of his bitter thoughts by the faint sound of a door closing. In the moon-lighted room he saw Gatti. She wore a silk dressing-gown reaching almost to the floor. Her face looked white, unreal, until she smiled. "I couldn't sleep, darling. Please let me talk a little."

He still stood by the window and she sat down, near him on a day-bed.

"George was just here. He says Teft's friends think Tink is paying me to play polo. Do you think that, Gatti?"

"Suppose he is? Other people—"

"Gatti! You mean you think I'd take money? That I'd even play on a team where such a thing happened?" He thought he saw in her face a startled, almost frightened look. "Shh!" she warned. "You'll wake the house! Oh,

Cash, let's forget this damned polo for a few minutes. I'm so lonely, and sort of miserable—"

"George might have seen you, Gatti."

"I know. I heard him leave. But if he had—" She leaned her head against him, reached for his hand. "I hate having you cross with me, Cash. Sometimes I'm nasty, I know. But you mustn't remember those times. Just think—"

"I'm not cross with you."

"You were—earlier. I can't be perfect, Cash. I've done things. I'm ashamed sometimes. It's only that I was trying to tell you, trying to be fair. Because I know how you are. You're awfully stern and rigid about some things—things that I'd never think so serious. Especially if I was sorry afterward and had learned my lesson."

"What things?" he said harshly.

"You see? I feel like telling you, and you choke me right up, the way your voice sounds. The way you look at me."

"Then why tell me?"

"Because you're the type that would hold things against me later. I don't want other people to tell you."

"What have you done? Murdered someone?"

She sighed, and leaned quietly against him. "Isn't it beautiful out—the sea and the moon? Nights when I can't sleep, like tonight, I lie and listen to it by the hour. I don't think I could live without it. It gives me a sense of peace, even when the weather's bad and the waves crash up on the beach all white and hissing."

"I love the ocean too."

"Do you love me, Cash?"

"I think so."

"I think I love you. Isn't it nice we can say it that way and not feel cheated? It seems so natural to talk like that to you. Most men want a lot of dramatics."

"Like Ramos, eh?"

"Cash, why did you say that?" She drew away from him and got to her feet. "I'm sorry. Forget it."

She moved to the window and stood staring silently out at the sea.

"Cash, come here."

He came over and stood beside her. "You like it here as much as I do, don't you?"

"Yes."

"You're the only one who does. It's just a place to live, for the others—in the summer. I'd like to stay here always. It will be mine some day; and I will."

"It's nice to feel that way about a place. I never have."

"Cash—we're going to get married, aren't we? We're going to live here together?"

She turned, facing him, and put her hands on his shoulders; her eyes searching his, he thought, with a needless plea. "Yes," he said, and with an excess of gentleness he took her in his arms.

She changed as she came close to him. "Cash!" she said in a stifled voice. "Oh, darling!"

He lifted her in his arms. At the door of the room he set her down. "Gatti! Go on, now."

"I don't want to."

He slapped her lightly. He could feel himself shaking. He kissed her head swiftly. "Go on now. I love you."

"Oh, darling! Then—" She stifled abruptly what she was about to say. Then: "Cash—about that money talk; don't mention it to Tink. It would annoy him."

"All right." He shoved the door gently, heard it click. He stood, still shaking, listening. And then after what seemed ages, he heard the faint sound of her slippers moving away.



WHEN Cash awoke the next morning, memory of the night before surged through him like an electric shock. There was a pleasant exciting tingling about it; a sense of having encountered incredible luck through a chance act.

Through an open window he could see people on the beach. He had slept late, and they were already out there for the morning swim. He looked for Gatti. She was in a white bathing-suit, sitting on the dazzling sand with Ramos and Tink.

He tried to shave carefully, but he cut himself twice. He kept up a nervous, tuneless whistle, and he realized that he was scared—that he would be self-conscious when he appeared on the beach. Already the events of the night seemed unreal, almost imagined. . . .

He walked out onto the beach. As he approached the group on the sand, his eyes only on Gatti, diffidence vanished. She looked so beautiful, so desirable. A burning exultance filled him. But Gatti

met his eager look blandly, smiling slightly, almost unconcerned.

She waved lightly to him. "What's the idea—trying to sleep your life away?"

She unfolded a part of her beach-towel for him to sit on, and smiled brightly. "We were just saying the Pacific Coast Championships would be fun this winter. How do you feel about it?"

HE felt hurt, dismayed by her casual greeting.

"None of this on-the-wagon stuff, and still we could have a lot of good polo," Tink said.

The Argentine nodded gravely. "But you have to go back to service soon?" he said to Cash.

"Yes."

Gatti tapped Cash's hand and gave him a long look. "But you'd rather play in California. It's marvelous at Del Monte in the winter. Cash comes from out there, you know."

"That's right," Tink said. "Maybe your grandmother could get sick or something, Cash."

"I think I like Santa Barbara better," Ramos said.

"By the way—" Tink looked at Cash. "Ever heard of a Los Angeles team from Texas?"

"No, I never did."

Tink laughed. "They must have delusions of grandeur or something. They're entered in the Open, but they're so hot they can't be bothered with practice games. Just dropping in, in time for the first game."

Of a sudden Cash realized that he must mean the Maldens. He had mentioned them casually to Tink, and told the whole story to Gatti. She had thought it extremely amusing. Now she said, when he explained: "Oh, I don't want to miss *them!* Think of the laugh we'll have—the boys in their ten-gallon hats and their six-guns. And the sister—what is she like, Cash? Very funny-looking?"

"I'd say she was very nice-looking."

"Ah-ha!" Gatti gave him a look of mock suspicion. "A prairie flower!"

"They tell me those big ranchers made a lot of money lately on mohair," Tink said. "I suppose this is their way of showing it off."

Ramos exhibited sudden interest. "This is a large ranch?" he asked Cash. "I'm interested in ranches. My people have many at home."

"Very large. And they all speak Spanish like natives."

"Ah, I'll enjoy talking to them. I miss talking my own language so much!"

"There's a whole team of your countrymen near by," Cash couldn't resist saying.

Gatti gave him a cold look; the Argentine met his eyes for a second, then he got up, holding to Gatti's elbow. "Come, let us take a stroll, Gatti."

She went with him, and Cash watched them with a hard light in his eyes.

Tink smiled quizzically at Cash. "Another crack like that, and you'd better be furbishing up your saber, big boy."

"Well, it's common knowledge they don't give him any *abrazos*, though."

"Whatever that is."

"I heard it's because he let them down to play with you."

Tink rubbed the sand from his hands. "It's more than that. These Argentines have a touchy sense of honor, and Mike pulled a bad one once, and they think it reflected on them all. They all cut him dead, you know."

Cash asked: "What did he pull?"

"Charmed another man's wife away from him, shot her pile and then left her flat. Nothing original."

"For him, you mean?"

"For certain types of men and women. Ordinary enough, these days."

"But you don't mind him seeing a lot of Gatti?"

Tink rolled his eyes up in a pained grimace. "Oh, now! Gatti knows her stuff, you know. I'd get fat, wouldn't I, worrying about Gatti!"

Cash almost told Tink then about himself and Gatti. But Tink pushed himself up and stretched. "It's near lunch time. Let's get a swim in."

THAT day the Argentines played the Mill Valley team in one of the test matches. Cash left the Boyne box and strolled over to look at the Argentine ponies between the halves. A curious crowd surrounded the colorful Gauchos walking and swabbing down the magnificent string of thoroughbreds.

As he was inspecting the sensational mare Estrella Mia, he looked up suddenly to meet the eyes of a man he knew—eyes he never could forget. Then the eyes were lost, as the man turned and pushed into the crowd. It was so obvious that he meant to slip away that Cash hesitated. Then he sprang forward. "Major Naxon!"

The man's face colored painfully, but he stopped and took Cash's outstretched

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

hand. There was a shocking change in him since Cash had last seen him. His hair, under a shabby brown felt hat, was quite white. His once fine brown eyes, eyes that Cash remembered as the kindest he had ever seen, were sunk deeply in his head. There were deep lines in his thin, brown face.

It was impossible, looking at him now, to connect this shabby, broken fellow with the dashing Snake Naxon—the erect, smart-looking army officer women raved about. It simply couldn't be!

A newspaper sports-writer was grabbing at Cash's arm. Cash noticed Snake shrink away as a cameraman swung his lens toward them. "Like to get your reaction on the Argentines, Captain," the news-man was saying. Cash brushed him aside and took Snake Naxon's arm—half pushed him through the surrounding crowd. Alone by the sideboards, he said, trying to smile: "Well, it's been a long time."

"I've got to be pushing on," Snake said. "But I'd like to tell you how I've enjoyed watching you play. I saw you once or twice in the test matches."

"You started me. Really taught me the game," Cash said. "Lord, Snake—" He broke off, embarrassed. "You don't mind my calling you that, do you?"

Snake smiled. "Oh, no. I'd like it. There's the bell. You'll just have time to get across to your seat."

"I'd rather stay here, with you. After all these years, there are— Look, we've got to get together. Are you around here?"

Naxon was looking at the Argentines mounting up. He seemed not to have heard what Cash had said. Then suddenly a change came into his eyes, a hardness into his slack jaw. His eyes were burning as he faced Cash. He said, harshly: "How deep are you into this thing?" He swung a bony hand out to include the field, the stands, the Argentines now riding onto the field.

"I don't understand," Cash said, startled.

"You seemed to me, back there at the Academy, to have more than the average cadet, more in you. The sort of thing, I mean, that either makes or breaks a man in a big way. In a way I've followed your career, because I always felt strongly about you. You're the only really top player we've ever had in the army."

"You're forgetting about yourself."

"It's because you're like me. It sounds conceited, but I've always thought you've

charted your course almost identically as I did mine. And lately—" His voice died out, and it seemed that the sudden fervor inspiring his words died with it.

"Yes?" Cash prompted.

NAXON gave a low, bitter laugh. "I was thinking out of turn. For a minute there it was as though you were cadet and I your instructor. I'm not in the army any more. And you're a grown man."

Cash felt uncomfortable. No, the great Snake Naxon wasn't in the army any more. He had heard that years ago, and dimly he remembered hearing a lot of talk about how he had married into wealth and grandeur. There was also something about a divorce not so long after Snake had resigned from the army. Then he had dropped out of sight as far as his army friends were concerned.

The teams were lining up for the throw-in, but Cash wasn't even watching them. Naxon said: "You're on leave up here from your regiment, aren't you? Border?"

"Yes."

"Like it down there?"

"I can't say I do. Too monotonous."

"But you're going back to Texas. You're going back where you belong, aren't you, Cash—with your own people?"

Cash was amazed at the man's voice. Incredibly, in it was a desperate note of pleading.

"Trite as it may seem," Naxon went on quietly, "I feel sort of like a father to you, Cash. I feel that something of me is in you. Your polo, anyway." He smiled wanly. "You used to imitate me a little, didn't you?"

Cash flushed. He never knew that Snake Naxon had noticed that.

Cash said: "Snake, I'm in Boyne's box over there. Let's go over and watch the game, and afterwards we can have a talk." He knew when he said it that Naxon wouldn't go. And he knew, also, feeling shame at the thought, that he didn't want him to go.

Naxon smiled gently, reached in a pocket and wrote on a page torn from a small notebook. "Sorry I can't join you. But you can get me at this phone-number if—"

They shook hands and parted; and all through the game Cash sat in moody silence, hardly aware of Gatti's gay talk.

Gatti had abandoned him to his mood, and she turned her attention to Miguel. And during the drive back to Great

Dunes, she pointedly ignored him and devoted her gay sallies to the others. Cash said, suddenly: "Did you ever hear of a man named Major Naxon? Used to be a great polo-player."

For a moment the utter silence among them annoyed him. Then, not understanding, unwarned, he looked at the Argentine. The man was staring straight to the front, his handsome face livid. In the front seat Neesa Bradley giggled, and gave Tink a meaning, sidelong look. Tink took his eyes off the road, winked and shook his head at Cash, then started to talk loudly to Neesa. Cash leaned back in the seat and looked back at Gatti. Her eyes were steady on the back of Tink's neck. "I was just curious," Cash said, "because I saw him today. He used to be—he is one of my best friends."

Nobody said anything, and the rest of the drive passed almost in silence. "I seem to have stepped into something," Cash thought. A bitter sense of being not wanted, of being an outsider here, oppressed him. Gatti, who should be the closest to him of all these people, of any people, now seemed to him the most remote. The few words they had had since last night recurred to him; and that elusive look in her eyes when she had said to him: "It'll keep. It's more fun this way, not letting the world know, don't you think? Don't you see what a glorious blast it'll be?"

"Blast?"

"What a blast! Look: the night of the day you win the Open. I've already got the whole show planned out. We'll have all eight teams. It'll be the biggest polo-party ever heard of. You'll all break training: barrels, vats and firkins of champagne. And in the midst of it, we'll tell all. We'll rock the world."

Cash felt stunned. He had noticed, without wanting to, feeling disloyal in even admitting the fact, that Gatti had an inherent flair for publicity. At the games, newspaper and society magazine reporters were always snapping pictures of her. Her gay warning of the announcement party scared him, and desperately he groped for a defence.

"Suppose we don't win the Open?"

He was startled by the quick change—he had the incredible feeling there was almost a threat in her eyes, in her expression. She said, in a voice entirely devoid of softness: "That's not possible, Cash! It's practically conceded," she said, "that you'll win. Even if Foster

played. And to make it doubly certain, I saw to that."

"What do you mean?" he asked, intuitively disturbed.

"I went to the mat with Tink. Foster Teft's father and Mike Ramos have been working on him to put Foster at Back in your place."

Cash had a sinking, ashamed feeling. "I wish you hadn't. If I'm not good enough—"

Her eyes gleamed with intensity. She gripped his arm, and her fingers hurt. "You are! Don't you see, you're even better. Under the circumstances."

"What circumstances?"

"The peculiar circumstances that you love me. That you want to marry me. Isn't that circumstances enough?"

"I don't understand."

She considered him awhile before replying. Then she said: "I like my doings to be big. Whether I like it or not, I'm so constructed that I want my important acts to be dramatic. I can't stand being like the herd."

"In other words," he said tonelessly, "you'd rather be married in a balloon than on the ground. You'd rather have a baby in a submarine than in a hospital. You'd rather die in a rocket to the moon than surrounded by grieving relatives in a bed."

There was a condescending humoring in her smile, an irritated impatient look in her eyes. "All right, little boy."

Cash felt that real hostility was growing swiftly between them, and he was recklessly indifferent to it. "Foster can't rise to the supreme heights that may be necessary in case it looks like a beating? He hasn't the brute strength and lacks the priceless incentive that I have? And you're giving me that incentive by agreeing to marry me if—if I put that final game in the bag. Is that it?"

A swift change came over her. Everything about her seemed to go soft, limp. She made no reply. She just suddenly was in his arms, her face pressed imploringly against his, and he could feel the wet on it from her tears, and the trembling of her body, close to his own. All the anger went out of him.

AT dinner that night Cash tried to shake off his sense of depression. The talk was mostly of the afternoon's game and the terrific power displayed by the Argentine four. "We've got to go all out, to take them," George said, complacently fingering his sherry glass.

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

Near the end of the meal, Miguel said, looking sidewise at Cash: "I suggest the cinema. Mellissa tells me—"

"Oh, yes!" Mellissa broke in. "I forgot. Gatti, there's a grand news-reel. Shots of our game with the Mexicans in the tests. Myra Armstrong saw it yesterday. It's got that awful smash Cash took with the Mexican. And,"—Mellissa made a grimace,—"*a vurra, vurra roman'ic scene of you and Cash by the ponies afterward. Maybe you remember?*"

Cash remembered. God, had they got that thing? The damned snoopers! The Mexican player had been hurt, and while they took time out to replace him, he'd ridden off the field to change his own limping pony for a fresh one. Gatti was already there and threw her arms about him. He remembered the theatrical words of anxiety. Gatti always was so extravagant with her *darlings* and *loves* and *sweethearts*, to everyone.

HE looked at her now, annoyed at the knowledge that his face was coloring. The others were all exclaiming, laughing. But Gatti looked smugly pleased. She jumped up and grabbed Cash's arm. "Swing it! All right, Cooper, we're off to the big preview!"

There was a sullen glow in Cash's eyes. "I'm not going," he said. He thought she was going to argue with him, but she turned sharply away. "All right, little boy. For some reason you've been very nasty today." And she walked quickly away and left him standing by the table.

Mellissa, Cash saw, was taking it all in. She gave him her sly, friendly smile. "What's it all about?" she said. He couldn't help grinning at her. "Oh, a lot of things. Tell me, Mellissa, why should Snake Naxon's name freeze them all? He's the best friend I ever had, and when I mentioned him today, you'd have thought—"

She looked at him, that smile still on her face. "Ah! How long since you've seen him?"

Cash explained. She'd drawn him to a couch away from the others and she listened carefully, her eyes fixed intently upon him. "Oh, Cash, it's pitiful, really. It's all a damned shame. Naxon married Mimi March. You must have read of her? Lots of money, and a congenial fool where men were concerned. Mike met her at Cannes, walked off with her and shook her down for all she had within a year. Your friend Naxon never made a move. Took it all like a gentle-

man. He was an attaché, I think, in London, and he was playing one day at Hurlingham when he came face to face with Mike at the clubhouse bar after a game. He just walked up to him and beat him frightfully. They say he used to be a very fine boxer at West Point. Of course, it made an awful scandal, and he had to leave the army. Where do you suppose he ever came from today? No one seems to have heard from him since."

"I don't know. I only know I'm damned glad I said it."

SLOWLY he went up to his room. He didn't turn the lights on, but went across to the window, the same window he and Gatti had looked through that night. That night seemed ages ago. A feeling of utter desolation possessed him. A little later the voices from the porch below flayed his sense of self-pity. He heard George's mild voice: "Where's Cash?" And Gatti's quick, indifferent rejoinder: "Oh, he's worn out. Watching the hard game today." There were a few other indistinguishable words and then the roar of motors, the hiss of gravel and the hoot of a horn by the entrance gate. Then silence. Gone. Not another thought. To hell with him!

Cash lit his pipe, stared moodily out the window for a while; then a sudden thought stiffened him and he laughed.

He picked up the house phone and called the garage. A few minutes later he was driving away in the small car that was brought around for him. He drove the few miles to the village swiftly, and when he entered the movie house, he stood back for a while until his eyes became accustomed to the darkness. Then he saw the crowd of them; heard them, even. Heard Gatti, and noticed the people staring sharply because of her superior carelessness to the fact that she was annoying them.

Previews of coming pictures were showing on the screen. Cash dropped into a rear seat behind a wide-shouldered man, sat back and waited. The girl at the ticket-window had told him that the news-reel would be on in a few minutes.

The reel started with a hotel fire at Asbury Park, followed by a police interrogation of a captured gangster, a sailing regatta on the Sound—and then suddenly it came. It began with a view of the Meadowbrook Club and whirled swiftly into shots of teams. When the brief bits of the Great Dunes-Mexican game

flashed on, the announcer turned dramatic. "Watch closely now! No softy game this, bah Jove! Coming in on the ball now, yes, coming like an express train, you see the famous army player, Cash Seddon. Watch! Watch now! The Mexican Number One is tearing in, whipping, his pony going as only one of those *charro* boys from the Rio Grande can make 'em go. He's crossed! Crossed the American! It's a foul. Eighty miles an hour is the accumulated speed of those thoroughbred horses! They're down! Down under a ton of horses! Surely no man can live after that! But no! The horses have struggled up. The army man is on his feet, grinning. Tough men, tough game, this polo. Ah—now the Mexican is up. He's grinning, too, in spite of the pain. Yes, he's hurt. Wants to mount again. But they take him off. What a thrill! But it's not the only thrill for these centaurs. No, sirree! To the brave belong the fair, even as in the days of good King Arthur. Here we have fair damsel Guinevere. She rushes to her jousting knight! Ah, Launcelot! Perchance he wears her colors on that brawny arm. We cannot see because she is too quick for us. Ah, Launcelot, my hee-ro!"

There was a laugh from the audience, and high above it Cash heard Gatti's howl of delight. He felt cheapened, disgusted. He heard a woman in front of him say in a loud whisper: "That's the one they call Gatti Boync. Lucky for her she aint no daughter of mine!"



CHAPTER EIGHT

CASH sneaked out of the place, drove back to the house furiously. He went straight to his room and lay on the bed in the dark. He tried desperately not to think, to keep his mind a blank. And finally he fell asleep. He awoke feeling stifled and he got up. The luminous dial of the clock by his bed showed that it was after eleven. There was no sound in the house.

He had a morbid desire for companionship. He wanted to talk with someone. Tink. No—lately he had felt not close to Tink, on account of this Foster business. Palling around with Tink smacked too much of bootlicking. George

—George was the one. Cash stood looking out the window. "He's the best friend I have here," he thought.

The window let onto the flat roof of the long porch. It was really a railed upper terrace, and Cash considered it in the gloom. George's room was two down—Miguel's in between. No use banging about through the hall disturbing people. Chances were that George would be awake: he was always the last to bed and the first up.

Cash stepped out onto the smooth linoleum-like surface of the roof. His do-skin Mexican slippers made no sound. A faint square of light showed him George's window. So George would be up, his reading-light on, a book in his hand and a glass by his side—or vice versa. A sense of anticipation came to Cash. At least he would salvage something from the day. After a chat with the Englishman, he'd feel better. . . .

About to hurry his steps, Cash suddenly paused in his stride. He was almost abreast of Miguel's window when he heard the voice. With the sharpness of a blow, he heard Gatti. The window of the room was up, but the shade was pulled within a foot of the sill. The shade was a pale screen against the outer darkness, with a brighter slot of light below it. Gatti's voice was low, and he could not tell what she was saying. He heard the Argentine laugh softly. "It won't last. Those things never do, *querida mia*."

"That may be," Gatti said.

"It is just a new thrill for you, spoiled one."

"Well, what is life for?"

"Once," the Argentine said in a silky voice, "I thrilled you. You even said you loved *me*!"

AGAINST the house the first wind of the coming storm gusted. The window-shade flapped with a startling report, and the wood of it slatted against the frame. Gatti said: "I won't deny it. I did at the time."

There was a sudden quiet. Again the shade flapped, and this time Cash could see into the room. Like the sudden illuminating of night by a flashlight bulb, he saw Gatti, dressed as she had been at dinner, close to the Argentine, her eyes raised to his. Miguel was leaning toward her: "You came here, you drink with me, so you love me as before. I know."

She moved a little away from him. She said faintly: "Don't. Don't, Mike!"

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

He took her roughly in his arms, his mouth on her neck. She stiffened for a moment away from him, and then went suddenly lax. Her arms crept up about his neck. She lifted her lips to him.

THE wind died. The night was motionless. A feeling of ice was about Cash Seddon's heart. He stood for what seemed an hour of numbness, his hand pressed wet against the side of the house. At last he moved. . . . Almost without knowing what he did, he found himself at the telephone. Under the reading-lamp he stared at the penciled words on a ragged piece of paper. At last a voice answered.

"Is Harry there? I want to speak to Harry."

A coarse, sleepy voice answered: "This is the garage of the Masebaum estate. What do you want?"

"I want Harry! *Get him!*"

Fright and apology came into the distant voice. "Yes sir! Right away, sir."

"Just a minute. Is he close by?"

There was a pause, then: "Why, he's in his room, sir. Asleep, I guess."

"Well, look here. I've got to see him. It's quite important. No need to wake him up at the moment. If you'll just tell me how to get out there—"

"You don't know the place? Are you Mr. Masebaum's chauffeur?"

"Well, I'm one of them."

"What's your name?"

There was a pause. "I'm a friend of Mr. Masebaum's," Cash lied.

"Oh, yes sir. It's about horses, I bet." A scared joviality came into the man's voice. He went on, briskly: "Just where are you, sir?"

Cash told him. The chauffeur was all eagerness to please when he heard the name of Boyne. "You're quite near, sir." And he gave a few simple directions. "There'll be a light on at the garage. You'll see it when you turn into the back drive, sir. I'll be waiting. My name's Joe Malloy."

Cash called the town for a cab and met it at the Boynes' gate. He found Joe Malloy spick and span in his chauffeur's uniform waiting him at the end of a drive that led through great iron gates. He handed Joe a bill, and after a half-hearted demur at accepting it, Joe led the way to the stables in the rear of the garage, and pointed to a stairway lit by a single bulb.

"Right this way, sir. Harry's got a place by himself up there, being the

head groom. I'll be glad to wait up, sir, and take you back, seeing as you sent the cab back."

"No, I'll call for another. Thanks."

The man hung around, watching Cash curiously. "Please turn in. I'm sorry I disturbed you, Joe. Er—Harry can take care of me, all right."

The man went off, and Cash climbed the narrow stairs. Most of the crazy urge that had prompted this impulsive visit was gone. The abrupt knowledge that the once man-amongst-men, Snake Naxon, was hidden here as a humble groom, had shocked it out of him. At the head of the stairs there was a light in the small hall, and Cash stopped before a door, hesitated, but finally knocked. In the utter silence of the place the sound echoed hollowly. After a wait, he knocked again. Still no answer. On an impulse, Cash turned the knob. The room was lighted by a bare bulb dangling from a cord. Snake Naxon sat in a worn leather chair facing him. He wore a faded woolen dressing-gown, and his feet were thrust into shabby slippers. His thick gray hair was standing away from his head in disorder; his thin mouth was slack, his blue eyes burning from his pale, tanned face. One arm was along the elbow-rest of the chair. The bony, long-fingered hand held a half-filled glass. There was no movement of any sort about him, even of his eyes.

FOR a moment Cash stood staring: then he quietly closed the door. He never could remember the stumbling, embarrassed words he managed to get out. But whatever they were, they produced no noticeable effect on Snake Naxon. The man just sat there, looking at him, but without the slightest sign of any acceptance of his presence. Then, with slow deliberation, he reached for a bottle that stood on a table by his hand, poured a carefully estimated drink into his glass and took a deep swallow. He set down the glass, lifted the bottle and held it level, out at arm's length.

"You see that line I've drawn across the label? It's the halfway mark. One pint. No, two-fifths. One more drink till it's down to that mark. But the tough part of it is, it's all waste. Two-fifths won't do it any more. You see,"—he looked sadly at Cash,—*"I ration myself. On occasion I allow myself an emergency ration—say if it's hellish cold, and I've been out in the wet, or Army and Navy game day. But it's no good.*

Beginning tomorrow, I've got to step it up. . . . Won't you sit down?"

He indicated a chair; and Cash, as though on puppet strings, sank into it.

"PLEASE make yourself a drink," Snake said pleasantly. "Once I get in this chair, I never move of an evening." And when Cash fixed the drink and returned to his chair, he said: "You must not feel sorry for me. The human mind is a marvelously adaptive piece of mechanism. And happiness is entirely relative. Do you understand that?"

"I—yes."

"I'm afraid that you don't, Cash. Or not in the practical sense that I do. You see— Five years ago, if I woke up and found myself as I am now, I would have been horrified. The transition would have been too abrupt for even Old Mother Nature to handle. And then, there's the matter of your own character and temperament. Another man, most men probably, would not even now feel as I do, having been through the same experiences. You wouldn't, for instance, like me as you are in many outer ways."

"Snake, I—I don't know how to say it; but tonight—something happened. It's nothing I could talk to anyone about. It's only that—I'm a coward, I guess. A moral one, anyway. I just couldn't take it alone—stay with it all night without the sound of a friendly word. I didn't figure it, but I see now what a sad guy I am after all. I had to lean on somebody, and that's the rotten truth."

As he said the last words, Cash was startled at the transfiguration that had occurred in the other man's face. It was as though he were seeing the miracle of the old Snake Naxon as he once remembered him. And the greater miracle was that the vision persisted.

Naxon said softly, that old eager look in his eyes: "This is the happiest thing that's happened to me in years. I'm glad you came to me, Cash. Thankfully glad."

"Instinct maybe, or old habit. You remember I used to do it a lot."

"But you can't understand *how* I understand it. God knows, I've *ached* with the want that's in you. Too often." He sat in silence for a time. There was a half smile on his thin lips, and his eyes were bright, young-looking.

Cash's gaze wandered about the room. It was small and square, of varnished matched pine. There was little furniture: just the two chairs, a small table

and a neatly made iron cot. It was as orderly and as well policed as a plebe's room at the Academy.

Naxon lit a blackened briar pipe and smiled through the smoke of it at Cash. "We'll shake the blues out of you a bit later. But first we'll lance this thing."

"I feel better already."

"Good. Now—polo, eh?"

"I suppose so, in a way."

"More than you realize, probably. And if I weren't what I am, and what I've been, and what I once was to you, I wouldn't say another word about it. And if you just shake your head—"

"I want you to," Cash said.

"When is your leave up?"

"In about two weeks."

NAXON smoked, not taking his eyes from Cash's face. At last he said: "I'll let you have it in words of one syllable. When this thing is over, go back and *forget* it. Quit it—this high-goal tramp polo. Quit it in your thoughts: that's important. This polo isn't an army man's game, and these people aren't an army man's people. None of it's good for you. Stay where you belong and play where you belong. Regimental polo—it's the best fun in the world. And the people where it's played are the best in the world. I know."

Cash nodded soberly as Naxon paused and his thin face broke into a warm smile. "I'm not talking system, Cash. It might be all right for a lot of men. But not for you—not for me. You're the spectacular type—" He shrugged, and his mouth twisted into an unpleasant smile. "As I was, once. It got me, and I don't want it to get you."

"Yes, Snake."

"There's a woman in this, isn't there?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. It never misses. Cash, think of me the way you last knew me, not as I am now. Will you?"

"Yes, Snake."

"I always gave you pretty near the right dope, didn't I?"

"Always."

"Then, Cash—when you get back there, when you get ready, marry an army girl. They're just as easy to love as the others, and twice as easy to get on with. That's my last word. Here, let's fill up. I'm considering this an emergency. No more advice."

"But—Snake. There's something else."

Naxon was filling his glass. His smile was almost gay. "All right. Let's have it.

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

But we've settled all that's important. You're *taking* my advice, aren't you?"

"Yes. But I want to quit now. Go back to Texas tomorrow."

Snake laid his glass down and his eyebrows came up. "Whoa! Bad as that?"

"Bad as that."

"But—don't tell me they're not *playing* you?"

"It's not that. It's that I don't want to play. But I don't want to let three teammates down."

"For a girl. . . M-m-m."

"It sounds childish, I know."

"That kind of adolescent cowardice has caused a lot of unhappiness in the world. Are you being quixotic and want me to talk you out of it?"

"I don't think so. But it would be—I'd be miserable if I stayed on."

"Would it affect your playing?"

"I'm not sure. *Now*. It might."

Snake studied him for a while. "You've an extra man, haven't you? Teft? I keep up with things, you know; in the papers."

"Teft wants badly to play."

"And he's a goal or two higher than you."

"Two goals."

Naxon was busy with his pipe. Then he looked up sharply. "Cash, never run away when it's a woman. Face it out. I made a mistake that way once. Either kill the feeling dead or straighten the thing out. If you don't, you can't ever get away from it later."

"I've reached a point where I'll take what you say as gospel truth," Cash said.

"It's an awful position to be in, for me," Snake said. "And it sounds weak for you. It's just one of those things that don't make sense, and that other people would laugh at. You know, I had an odd thing happen once before. I played on a team in the Senior Tournament with Boyne's father and Teft's father."

"That's interesting."

"Yes. You see, the Senior is played on a handicap, and they were both high-goal players, and they wanted a couple of good low-goal men with them who were underhandicapped. They were a pair with an eye for the main chance."

"I see."

"The other man they asked to play was a Texan. Nice fellow; I'd met him at all the tournaments. He was a horse-dealer, and you know in those days they played small ponies and they had to be very handy. This chap provided the top ones at that time. He was a quick player,

and he rode beautifully. And as he'd trained most of the ponies himself, nobody could get the game out of them that he could."

"Naturally."

"Well, we won the Senior easily. But the point about it was the way this Texan developed. You couldn't get away from it that he was the best Number One of the season. He was a sensation. He was stealing their show—an unknown cowboy from Texas. The Internationals were coming up, and the papers boosted this man for the American team. It was unheard of in those days. Anybody outside of the tight social circle simply did not play on the big team."

"I suppose so."

"Yes. But even at that, some of them were for it. Their sense of sportsmanship and their real admiration for the man came to the front and they urged it. But it didn't come off. And when my Texan heard he was out, I thought he'd shoot up the place. You see, to him it just wasn't understandable. He knew he was the best man for the job. And he was a decent, clean-cut fellow; I know, for I went around with him a lot."

"What happened?"

THE older man stared off through his pipe-smoke. "What happened was typical—of him, I mean. He heard almost at once that Boyne and Teft had been instrumental in shutting him out—that Boyne had swung the vote for a cousin of his, who was killed later in the war. That Boyne and Teft felt they could beat the English with any one of a half-dozen men up at One."

"What did the Texan do?"

"Not what any of them would have done, of course: covered it up in what is known as a sporting way. No, Tex walked into the Club bar after the last tryout match and waited until the two were standing together, with a big congratulatory crowd around, all talking about the team. When they both told him how sorry they were that he hadn't been selected, he made a little speech. There wasn't a sound in the crowded room. You could have heard a feather drop. It wasn't a hell-roaring, Texas speech, you know. And he said it slow, and carefully: not a word of it that didn't sting like a hot whip. It was a classic, all right."

"I'd like to have heard it."

"No; you wouldn't have—I couldn't look some of those men in the face after-

ward. The worst of it was Teft and Boyne were innocent. Some gossip had started the talk out of thin air."

"But I'd hardly call that coincidental. No one's mistreated me."

"Are you sure?"

"Tink Boyne has been more than decent to me."

"Cash, I don't want you to play in the Open. If you were with an army team, yes. But, as it is—if your team wins, you'll go on. But the reason you came here isn't enough. I'm going to give you one that is enough—I hope."

Cash was silent, thinking of what Mellissa had told him earlier that night. Of course, Naxon knew Ramos was on his team. Maybe he had something against the Englishman too. Snake was a groom now, but grooms heard many things their masters never dreamed of.

"Snake—you seem to hear things. Have you—well, I've heard some people even think I'm taking money to play on the Dunes team."

Naxon looked up sharply. "Aren't you?"

Cash stared at him incredulously. "You don't think I'd do that?"

"It was one of the things I was afraid of, Cash," Naxon said. He hastened to add as he saw the look on Cash's face: "The other two are, you may be sure. Dammit, Cash, I'm glad. But please forgive me, old man. I didn't realize you felt so—"

Cash was on his feet.

"Look here, Cash! You mustn't—"

"I've got to get back, Snake." He held out his hand. Naxon laid down his pipe, regarded him closely, then got to his feet. "All right. But let me hear from you, won't you, Cash?"

"Yes." The door closed behind him. Naxon listened to his feet pounding down the stairs. Then he filled a glass, sat back, and a strange smile lit his thin face. "Maybe I'm some good after all," he muttered, and took a deep swallow.



TINK BOYNE sat up in bed, still shaking the sleep from his head. He blinked at the light by the bedside and then looked up, scowling at Cash Seddon. "What in hell, Cash!"

"It's something I've got to ask you, Tink. Sorry I had to do it this way."

Tink swung his feet over the side of the bed. Reached for a cigarette. "Hell, it's damned near morning." He lit the cigarette and blew out smoke, grinned. "Big idea, eh? How to win the Chinese war, or something?"

"No. Tink, I've heard—there's talk I'm taking money for playing with you."

"What? Oh. Well, what of it? You're not, are you?"

"No, I'm not."

"Cash, you look wild-eyed. You mean you're sore because someone said that? Don't be a clown. You know I didn't."

"Tink. Are you paying George and Ramos?"

Tink drew in a deep draft from his cigarette. He was wide awake now. "Dammit, Cash, what's that got to do with you? Or anybody else, as far as that goes."

"It has something to do with me."

"You mean how I spend my money has something to do with you?" There was an ugly edge on Tink's voice, and his eyes had become hard.

"No. I'm sorry I disturbed you."

"Just a minute, Cash. What is all this?"

"If you are," Cash said levelly, "I just can't go on with you. That's all."

"This is a fine time to inform me," Tink said. "Just before the first game."

"I'm sorry about that. If I'd known earlier—"

"Don't be a fool! You've been around polo long enough to know some things aren't talked about. You must have guessed. You know George and Mike haven't money enough to play on their own. They're gentlemen. They're too valuable to the game to leave out."

"And yet Teft's friends are panning me for the same thing, and I'm not even guilty."

"To hell with Teft and his friends. I'm thinking of polo only."

"Polo only. And yet if you weren't paying them, George would be playing with his own team, and Ramos with his. They'd have been mounted, and their living expenses wouldn't have been greater than if they weren't playing polo. They went to the high bidder. That's it, isn't it?"

Tink was angry now. He jumped off the bed and took a step toward Cash.

"Yes, dammit, that's it. So what? I'm not the only one who goes out to win in polo, not by a damn' sight. And I'm

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

out this time to win. If it costs me a million dollars—do you get that?”

“I get it. And what’s more, I don’t think other people do it. I’ve met most of the good players, and they’re the finest men I have met. I don’t believe they’d do a thing like that. To win any game.”

“And if you want another one for the book,” Tink said harshly, “I’m paying them damned well. And come to think of it, I’m adding a bonus. If we win the Open, they’ll split fifty thousand dollars. I’ll tell them the good news in the morning.” He was raging now. He had a bad temper when aroused, Cash knew, and now he was aroused beyond anything Cash had seen. No use going on. Tink was really a decent fellow. Too much money and attention had hurt him. But underneath—

“I’ll be pushing off, Tink. I’m sorry this had to happen.”

“At any rate,” Tink said, “when you’re judging the two Judases, you might bear in mind that neither one is a quitter.”

FOR an instant anger flared in Cash. That was a hard word; he wasn’t sure yet whether or not he deserved it. But he said nothing, just moved toward the door. At the sill, he turned. “If it wasn’t for Teft, who can do as good or better job than I can, I wouldn’t do this, Tink. I think you know that. I’d go through with it, in spite of my feelings.”

Tink made no reply. Cash closed the door quietly, went to his room and packed his things hurriedly.

George came in. He had on pajamas and slippers, and carried a glass in his hand. His fair hair was tousled, and his face looked thin and drawn, in the lamplight.

“I couldn’t help hearing the whole damned argument,” George said. “Windows open and right next door and so forth.”

“I’m sorry,” Cash said.

“I suppose you think me a damned rotter now? Of course, you’ve always thought that of Ramos—I know that.”

Cash looked up and met the Englishman’s eyes, serious now. “No, George, you know a damned sight better than that.”

“I’m not going into my personal affairs with you, Cash. It’s really none of your business, is it?”

“No, it isn’t.”

“But on the other hand— You know, ten years ago I’d have felt as you do now

under the same circumstances. And if I don’t now, it isn’t exactly because I’ve no ideals left, you know. After all, there’s no such thing as professionalism in polo. A lot of decent chaps make their living at polo. What you might call professionals. And let me tell you this: polo wouldn’t be the game it is if it wasn’t for those same chaps. They’ve slaved at making horses and perfecting strokes. They’ve taught the so-called amateurs all they know of the game. They risk their necks and bones every day to further the sport. And who the hell are you and I to say they shouldn’t live decently as well?”

Cash was surprised at the fervor in the man. And he suddenly felt as though he were being placed in the wrong by some incredible sophistry. The feeling angered him. George said, almost gently: “You’ve your profession, you know. You can afford to be critical.”

Cash straightened up from a bag. He felt an unaccountable shame. “I’m not criticizing, George. I just feel low as hell about a lot of things. I just want to get out—away—back where I belong. And possibly to you, I’m a quitter.”

The Englishman gave him a slow smile. “Not you, Cash. I’ve got to know you rather well, I think. I’m not sure but what you’re right about this. I would like one thing: there’s talk of going West to play when this show’s over. I’d like to stop off with you. Let’s say I’m a little army-hungry.”

Cash smiled. He felt much better. “That’s settled,” he said.



IN the first heat of things, Cash intended to take the next train back to Texas. But several things decided him against that. He still had half his leave left. And there was the natural distaste for facing the people of the post with the story he would have to tell. That story was simple: that he hadn’t made the team he had gone East to play on. But he hated to tell it before he had to. And there was another thing: he genuinely loved the game of polo, and the tournament this year would be the greatest ever held. He wanted to see those games.

The solution was very simple. He moved in with a classmate now in the air corps at Mitchell Field. Joe Gant was a big, genial fellow whose every thought was flying. He might have heard there was such a game as polo, but if so, he never mentioned the fact. He was delighted to see Cash when he appeared, bag and baggage, at his quarters.

EVEN the fact that it wasn't yet light caused no wonder in Joe. And he scarcely listened to Cash's explanation.

"Well, I've always hoped you'd get around to call sometime, Cash. I don't need any reason. There's your room; settle down. And stay as long as you want. I'm pushing off early. Ferrying a lot of new ships out to the Coast. Just pretend I'm here and have a good time. We can have breakfast together, and when I get back, we'll do the town."

"Fine, Joe. And I'm awfully obliged. I do need a quiet home for a week or so."

"Don't mention it. Just remember the time you pulled those two lugs off my neck in Highland Falls that night. And don't throw pipe-ashes on my beautiful Persian rugs."

Cash hated to see Joe take off. He was the one person who you could be sure would never mention polo. The other fellows in the mess were kindly, hospitable and tried to be entertaining. They took Cash for hops over the Island and the city; but even they were full of the big games about to be played near by.

Cash read every word in the sport pages of the papers about the tournament. He read with interest that Malden's team had arrived, and the ponies were stabled at a dealer's place not far from Mitchell Field. The news-men were delighted with the picturesque Mexican grooms that accompanied the Malden string. They compared them with the Argentine Gauchos, and there was a picture and write-up of old Tacho, whom they dubbed the Patriarch of the Charros. Cash wondered if Angela was along.

Once the desire to see her made him do what he later thought was a foolish thing. He called the stables and asked where Mr. Malden could be reached. At the Waldorf in New York City, he was told. That chilled him. If they had said some place near, he might have called that place. But the Waldorf! The very name took him aback.

But the folly persisted. Half-ashamed, later, he called the great hotel, and asked if Miss Malden was registered. He barely

avoided being connected by the efficient, impersonal action on the other end. Miss Malden was there. . . .

At the moment Cash hung up the receiver, hurriedly announcing to the operator that he did not wish to complete the call, Angela Malden was barely a foot away from the instrument in the drawing-room of the Malden suite at the Waldorf. The brothers were grouped about in chairs, eyes fixed on their father, who stood with his back to a window, his eyes bright as he talked. Angela, staring out a window, was still trying to shake off a sense of depression that had clung to her all day. The boys had been irritable; her father had been brusque, even sharp to her at times. He had spent most of his time at the stables on Long Island. One of the ponies had pulled a tendon in a game; a Mexican groom had got into a knife-fight and been badly slashed; a fire had started at one end of the box-stall line, and he'd come back that day with his clothes burned and his temper in tatters.

He had talked ceaselessly to the boys about errors they had made in plays, even though they'd won. Especially he flayed Julian for his attempts at the spectacular. It didn't matter that Julian's single-handed dashes had come off, and that by this time he was the hero of the yelling crowds, the darling of the sports-writers. That only made it worse. It wasn't good polo, Craig Malden raged. And he'd got away with it because of inferior competition. With the Great Dunes team, it would be different; that was the game that counted.

ANGELA turned now from the window, irritated at something her father had said. "It's just this," she said curtly. "It's *Der Tag*. Right?"

He smiled calmly. "Right. I've made it a point to keep the personal out of this since we first discussed this trip."

She smiled, too. "If you mean that old grudge business."

She saw the sudden change in his face, and wished she hadn't said that.

He said: "I told you once that two men had something coming to them. That something's got to happen tomorrow."

Angela knew who those two men were—just names to her, but already she hated them for all they had caused in her life.

Now she saw the great Mark hunch his shoulders, and a burning interest grow

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

in his eyes. Tony looked away from his father, embarrassed. The other two listened intently. She felt she had to speak, to make one last hopeless plea.

"Father! This can't affect the outcome of the game. The better team will win. Please!"

He looked at her steadily. An implacable look. "You want this game to be won as much as I do."

She said, wearily: "More so, I think. Because then it's the end of it. And I know now that I'd rather have that than anything else in the world. I'm sick and disgusted and ashamed of the whole thing." She burst suddenly into tears, and ran hastily from the room.

IN amazed silence they watched her. Not since a child had any of them seen tears in her eyes. Tony half arose to follow her. "Tony!" Craig Malden's voice was like the snap of a whip. Tony sat back in his chair, startled, his eyes wide.

Craig Malden flashed a stern glance across their faces. "Now then, the gloves are off. The better team doesn't always win. I don't know whether you are the better team. But you've got to win tomorrow. And if you're sons of mine, you're not going to forget for one second out there that a Boyne and a Teft are playing on that other team."

There was a tense silence after his words. The only movement in the room was the flexing of Mark Malden's big hands. Julian was the first to speak. "Boyne plays Two. I'll be on him; don't worry."

"See that you are," his father said coldly. "And not chasing that ball around the sideboards."

Tony felt funny inside. He, as One, would be on the Back, Teft. He was sorry this had come up. It would spoil the fun of the game for him. He felt Mark's heavy eyes on him, and he colored painfully. "Teft's not too big for you to manhandle," Mark said. "You play your big ponies."

"You watch fouls," Craig Malden said to Mark. "I don't want any of that!"

"I'll keep inside the law," Mark said.

Desperately Tony wanted to take the talk from this unpleasant subject. "I wonder why they didn't play Captain Seddon? From what I've heard, he's a better Back than Teft."

Craig Malden gave him an ironical smile. "That ought to be easy to figure, Tony, if you think back to my story."

"Plenty simple," Mark agreed, and he laughed shortly. "But they'll wish they hadn't been so choosy when we get through with them. For one, I'm damned glad they didn't play him."

Malden looked interested. "He's the man you wanted to watch our practice. Well, I didn't want him or anyone else to know the answers until we got up here. Poor devil, it's tough to be shoved out of it like that, though—like a used match."

The telephone rang sharply. Craig Malden, always fearful for the safety and well-being of his horses, reached quickly for it. Bad news from the stables now?

But it was not from the stables. At once the brothers, watching, saw by their father's face that it was something entirely different. They heard him say sharply, suspiciously almost: "Who?" Saw his eyes go hard as he said: "Yes, this is Craig Malden." The rest of the talk was unintelligible to them. Then Craig set the instrument down with a sharp click, turned about and smiled strangely at them.

"A rather odd coincidence," he said smoothly, but they could see that he was unnaturally excited. "I just talked with Tinkham Boyne, Junior. He was very friendly and engaging. Quite chummy, in fact. Said he was sorry he'd never made my acquaintance, and wanted to drop around and remedy the defect. I explained I was extremely busy. And then he informed me that a newspaper friend of his had told some grand stories about me. Fellow used to work on a San Antonio paper, and so he knew all about the spectacular Maldens. Says I'm noted all over the West as a plunger. Once bet a whole Texas county against a railroad on the toss of a coin. Won a mine once in a poker-game."

THE boys were staring at their father, fascinated. "Did you?" Julian asked, grinning.

"I did win a mine. But not on the turn of a card. Damned near a week of playing, and then the thing was worthless."

"Anyway, our friend Boyne liked the idea. Made a cheery suggestion we bet on the game tomorrow."

"Ah!" Mark said. "You didn't let him squeeze out, did you?"

Craig Malden smiled. "I wouldn't have taken it with anyone else. But I told you all once I was coming back here for my ante."

"Good. You took him?" Julian said.
 "For fifty thousand dollars," Craig
 Malden announced.



CASH watched the first game of the Open, crowded in with a noisy, holiday-seeking baseball audience of excited people entirely ignorant of the game. At first it amused him to hear their comments. One woman was greatly perturbed because she didn't think it was fair for the poor Mexicans to have to play a team when they couldn't understand their language.

Cash felt a catch in his throat as his friend Garcia ran the entire length of the field for the winning goal. He spent that evening alone in Joe Gant's little house, trying to read a book on the Theory and Practice of Flying.

Malden's team was to play for the first time against the sensational Argentine four. The stands were packed. The newspapers had made an epic of the coming game. And finally they had got a picture of Angela Malden. It was a good newspaper picture, taken at the stables, natural, unposed. Old Tacho was in it too. Cash could see how it had happened. Probably gone out there with her father to look at the ponies, and the news-hounds had spotted her. He'd like to see her. He'd like to sit at this game and talk to her. But she'd be miles away, across the fields in the west stands. Only, actually, about two hundred yards away. But miles away, as far as he was concerned.

Cash lit his pipe and watched the teams line up. He had never taken the Maldens' polo seriously. It was impossible to believe that they had a chance in this deadly, efficient type of play.

But almost at once he knew that he was amazingly wrong. He couldn't sit in his seat. His pipe went out. He stared in fascinated wonder at the racing figures below him. The Maldens were in pure white jerseys with a great red star on their backs—the Lone Star! Cash felt a funny feeling in his throat as he watched those backs streaking, flying as fast as a thoroughbred horse could move, across that startling green turf. The ball never stopped. White, flashing,

it arched and leaped. And when it was anywhere near the Argentine goal, it had a Malden stick on it that moved so quick the eye couldn't follow. And a flag waved.

Cash felt stunned as he jammed his way out through the gate after the game. He was still seeing those Malden ponies. He had seen other ponies do the same thing—some of Tink's, some he himself had ridden. But never had he seen *all* the ponies of a team turn and flash back, as those ponies had done. There had been times when the whole Argentine team had been outturned, left bewilderingly behind as the Malden team had spaced out and started for the hostile goal. There had never been any doubt after the first period. Hard as the South Americans had fought, desperately, unbelieving, the Texans had gone on like a ruthless machine and taken the game by ten goals.

The papers were full of it next day. Only a heavyweight fight could give the sports-pages such manna. And to add to the glory of sport, the Great Dunes team beat the English two days later in a game that saw two ponies killed on the field, and an English peer carried away with a broken leg.

That was the situation when in the Finals, Great Dunes lined up against the Los Angeles team on a crisp September day for the polo championship of the world. So the paper solemnly announced. And it seemed as though the world were there.

Cash walked into the grounds with a strange feeling. He had watched Teft's play in the preliminary rounds; and he knew at last, for his own satisfaction at least, that he was the better player. He had noted mistakes that Teft had made. Biting hard on his pipe, he had cursed as Teft had failed often to cover Ramos as he went into the play. And Teft had missed backstrokes that had counted. "But it's easy to sit up here and play the game," Cash thought. "Maybe I could have and maybe not."

TODAY, somehow, he couldn't just walk up to that wooden seat. He wished he were playing. As he listened to the band, watched the flags fluttering from the stands, saw the ponies file by, he had a heartache that was stronger than any ideals he had ever had. He knew that he'd give the rest of his life to be out on the field today, to experience the feel of the gallant Electra un-

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

der him, to grip his hand about the handle of a mallet, to sense again the melting feel of the mallet head cutting into the white ball. To hear it click, see it arch away toward the hostile goal. To listen again to the thundering roar of the stands as he pulled his pony up after a wild run for goal. But that was out!

He stood by the sideboards watching. He saw George ride out from the Great Dunes string, quietly, almost limply, sitting the little gray he had named Soissons. Tink was already tapping a ball along the back-line, his red jersey bright in the sun. Ramos was about to mount up. Cash swallowed as he saw that he was getting on Electra.

Cash walked across the field, clear of people, and followed George. The field behind the west stands was empty. All the crowd and the noise and excitement was between the two stands flanking the long sides of the main field. Cash sat on the sideboards of the backfield watching George canter in wide circles, hitting for goal as a groom set up the ball. Soissons moved smoothly; George hit gracefully. Not a lost motion!

Cash wondered who he would be for today. It should be his own team, of course. But the Malden team had stirred him as nothing on a polo-field ever had: The magnificent machinery of the thing, the quiet efficiency of it. It excited his soldier imagination. The discipline—hardly a word out of them, just the barely necessary calls. And those in Spanish.

GEORGE caught him sitting on the boards. He rode over and smiled down at him. "Wishing us luck, Cash?"

Cash stood up, embarrassed. "You know I am, George."

"Got to be charging out there," George said. "Amazing, isn't it—these Texas chaps?"

Cash knew that George had been drinking. He knew all at once that he was for George, no matter what team he played on. "Watch that Malden Back, George. He hits under the neck in the knock-in. Play off on his near side when you come in to meet it."

"Right, Cash. I'd forgotten. Like to see you, old man, after the game. Can we arrange it?"

They were near the end of the field; people were still pouring in through the far gate and making their way to seats from the walk in back of the great stand. Just beyond the stand, not far

from them, were the Great Dunes ponies, the grooms busy with their bandaging and last adjustments of tack. People were calling greetings, stopping for brief reunions; everyone excited, affected with the wild spirit of the day. All fashionable America was here.

Cash was about to assure George that they could arrange it, when he looked away, smiling. Cash turned and saw Mellissa and Neesa Bradley coming toward them. George greeted them cheerily. Neesa pouted at Cash:

"I'm ashamed of you."

MELLISSA gave Cash an estimating look. George was dismounting; Neesa flooded him with superlatives about Soissons. Mellissa said to Cash in a low voice: "I don't know what it's about, but I'm sick about it, Cash. It's made George difficult. You know he never says anything, but he's taken an amazing liking to you. Whatever it is, it's hurt him like hell."

"Sorry, Mellissa."

"You'd rather not tell me? If there's anything I can do—"

"Nothing. I'm sorry, Mellissa."

"I'm glad you didn't disappear entirely. Is it—so bad you can't sit in the box with us?"

"I'd rather not."

Mellissa looked toward George and Neesa Bradley. Cash could see that she was deeply troubled. She turned her eyes slowly back to him. "I'm sick with worry, Cash. I've seen these Texans play, and I'm just scared to death."

"Don't worry; George can take care of himself."

"It's not only that, Cash. He's bet twenty-five thousand dollars on the game. I'm simply terrified."

Cash whistled. "Where in the world did he get it?"

"Gatti," Mellissa said simply. "She's very bitter, Cash. Like a fool, the other day I said I had an awful feeling we'd get beaten without you playing. She flared up like a rocket. She'd have bet a million right there if she'd found a taker. She offered all of us whatever we wanted to bet, and George took her up. You know how casual he is about money."

"Lord, I wouldn't bet a dime on it, one way or the other."

"The worst of it is," Mellissa said gloomily, "she'll laugh it off if she loses, but George won't. He'll be tied up in this polo worse than ever. The rotten

part is, if he ever could get twice that together, he'd be able to go back. He's been offered a half-interest in a military school being started at home, and he's crazy about the idea." She gave a hopeless shrug. "I wish, Cash, you could sit with me. I'd feel so much better."

"I'm sorry, Mellissa."

She gave him a bright smile. "All right. But Cash, please, before you go—just you and George and I, let's get together. Anywhere you say. Any time."

"We'll do that, Mellissa."

They joined George and Neesa Bradley and walked toward the end of the field. At the end of the stand, in front of them, were the Great Dunes ponies, and farther along across the field was the Malden string. There was still quite a crowd, mostly well-wishers saying a last good-luck to the players and admiring the hardy, conditioned animals. Cash saw Tink's father and the senior Teft talking earnestly. The old man was back, then.

THE saddling bell clanged out; the last-minute spectators started to hurry toward their seats, and the players drifted back to assemble by their ponies. Cash quickened his pace. His way led him by the Malden corner of the field, and he thought he'd stand back, unnoticed, and watch them mount up. And he could give those magnificent ponies a quick look-over. He was thrilled by a nervous excitement that no other game had ever given him. It was like a curtain about to go up on a famous play, the subject of which was familiar and exciting. And in a sense, he was behind the scenes here, a professional player.

He could see the Malden players in a group about a station-wagon; a tall erect man, hatless, in gray flannels, talking to them. "That's the father," he thought. "The famous Craig Malden." And he stopped a moment to watch. He saw the ancient Tacho. The old Mexican wore a great white hat with an elaborate band of filigreed silver about its crown. He wasn't in a *charro* costume, but the gay green handkerchief around his corded neck, and the red shirt and white trousers he wore made him look like a pirate on a holiday. Cash was tempted to go up to the old fellow.

A belated crowd of last-minute sight-seers hurried around from behind the ponies. Cash heard a woman laugh; a man protested, urging them to hurry.

Then he was face to face with Gatti Boyne. Mrs. Teft was with her, and two men whom Cash knew slightly. They all looked at him, Mrs. Teft blankly, and the men nodded. He saw they were extremely curious, but trying to be well bred about it. They moved on, and Gatti stopped. "Well!"

Cash couldn't think of anything to say as he faced her cool appraisal.

"What happened to you?"

While he stood hopelessly there, he got a shock of relief. Old Tacho, grinning wildly, came at him, a gnarled brown hand outstretched. "*Ai, Capitan—amigo!*" And he burst into a flood of eager Spanish. Cash gripped the old man's hand. "How are you, Tacho? I'm glad to see you." And he was, too, he thought; like finding water in the desert.

"You not goin' play? How you not goin' play today?"

"No, not going to play today, Tacho."

"You bring luck today. Be here with Tacho. For luck, today."

"Who's this merry-andrew?" Gatti asked.

"Señorita goin' be here. *Espera!*" He turned. "*Mira!*"

Angela Malden was within a few feet of them, walking toward them. She smiled, a hesitating, doubtful smile, as though she wasn't sure whether this was the thing to do or not. She wore a brown tweed suit and a soft brown hat with a single feather in it. There was a warm color in her face; her eyes looked almost black. She quickened her steps, held her hand out to Cash and smiled fully now.

"This is nice!" she exclaimed. "I'm awfully glad to see you."

GATTI half turned and looked at Angela Malden. Cash introduced them awkwardly. Old Tacho stood back and regarded the scene happily, muttering steadily.

Gatti said, coolly, studying the other girl openly: "Oh, it's your team that's playing us today?"

"My brothers."

"My brother's on the Great Dunes team, you know."

"Yes," Angela Malden said. She gave Gatti a steady look; then she said to Cash, smiling: "Tacho, here, wants you to stay with him and bring the team luck. He's got some stubborn idea that you're lucky."

"I'm afraid he's wrong."

"Cash wouldn't know luck if he saw it," Gatti said.

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

"Oh! I'm alone in our box. If you can resist Tacho's pleas—I'd love to have you sit with me," Angela Malden said; and he realized that she meant Gatti too, that she thought they were together.

"I've a seat on the other side—poor man's side," Cash said. "But if your father wouldn't mind, I really would like to see it from here."

"Of course he wouldn't mind—not a friend of Tacho's."

Cash heard a pony squeal, a sharp, vicious sound that meant a vicious kick with it. He heard Tacho curse, and noticed the quick, startled, listening look in Angela Malden's face. "That's the Bobcat," she said as she turned. Tacho was already running.

HOYT MALDEN was lying on the ground, a small crowd already collecting about him. His face was gray with pain, and he still held his hand gripped about his thigh as Cash got there. He was mildly surprised to see Snake Naxon kneeling beside Craig Malden over the prostrate man. Through set teeth, the big Malden son was cursing. A doctor came presently, and Mark Malden's heavy voice drove the curious on-lookers back. Angela, her face white, her teeth biting her lip, was down on her knees, her hand on the thick black hair of her brother. Cash caught a glimpse of Tony Malden's scared eyes, and heard Julian trying to talk cheerfully to the injured man.

Craig Malden had the doctor by the arm in a tight grip. The doctor said: "Femur. It's a break, all right. Get some blankets. We've got to get him moved right away."

Once more came that gritty cursing from Hoyt Malden; and he added, after another curse: "I've got to play."

The doctor smiled and patted him. "You won't play polo for some months to come, old man. Don't fret now."

There was an awed silence over the little crowd as they lifted the still muttering Hoyt and placed him in an ambulance that had appeared from the rear of the field. A man said, wonderingly: "I saw it happen. He just stepped up to the horse next to that black one, and she let drive at him like a bullet."

Cash stood stupidly looking about. The Great Dunes team was already on the field. Craig Malden stood talking, a heavy frown on his face, with Snake Naxon. The three Malden boys stood near them in silence, their eyes on the

ground. Old Tacho, tears streaming from his wrinkled face, stood with his hands clasped, watching Craig Malden like a faithful dog. The Mexican grooms were chattering in low, excited voices. Gatti Boyne touched him on the arm. "There goes the ball-game," she said coolly. "I understand they have no substitute. Want to leave with me and talk things over?"

He was staring at Angela. She stood by her father, her lips twitching, her hands crossed in front of her. He made no move to go. Gatti said: "I heard that white-haired man with Malden suggest that you go up for them. You couldn't do that, Cash." She had a tight grip on him now, pulling him, forcing him to look at her. "You don't belong to their team. The committee would have to approve it, and the other team captain: Tink. You couldn't do it, anyway."

He was annoyed. "What are you talking about?"

"You played one dirty trick on us," she said, sudden anger hardening her voice. "You ran out on the team and on me. You can't do this to us when we've got the game by default."

"I thought you said they'd all have to agree." He was looking at her now, as angry as she.

"Tink's a fool. And Father and old man Teft and Stanhope are here; that's three of the committee. And it only takes three."

CRAIG MALDEN was walking rapidly toward them. Naxon was a little behind him, and he waved at Cash and smiled.

Malden scarcely glanced at Gatti Boyne and said brusquely to Cash: "I'm Craig Malden. I hear you've not played in any of the tournament, so you're eligible to play."

"Yes?"

"One of my boys has just been hurt. We've no substitute. We've a kit here in the station-wagon I think you can get into. Will you go up as Back for us?"

At that moment Cash Seddon didn't realize the strain Craig Malden was suffering, or that the element of time was so vital to him. Also that Snake Naxon, his own friend, and a much older friend of Tex Malden, had suggested this and made it seem a matter for just a simple, hurried request. If Snake had asked, it might have been different. But after Snake's talk with Cash, he didn't feel that he should be

the one to urge Cash into something he had previously warned against.

Cash felt affronted at Malden's abruptness, at his impersonal approach and assured manner. Gatti Boyne said surprisingly: "Mr. Malden, you'd better look up the rules. Tinkham Boyne, my father, happens to be a member of the committee. And my brother plays on the Dunes team. Captain Seddon isn't a member of your team, you know."

Malden started. He looked at her with a sudden flash of anger in his eyes. Snake Naxon was behind Malden and facing Cash, and Cash met his eyes squarely. He said: "I'm through playing high-goal polo, Mr. Malden. I'm sorry."

The man's face lost its color; a hopeless look came into his eyes. Then he stiffened, his jaws tightened and he bowed slightly. Malden never argued; never begged. He turned, took Naxon by the arm and strode away.

Gatti laughed. "That's telling him. Come on, I want to talk to you."

He had been staring after Malden, and now he turned to look at her. Something in his look drove the brisk look from her eyes. "What is it, Cash?"

He told her, and she listened with no color in her face. She made no attempt to deny any of it. But at last she said, in a low voice: "You'd been nasty to me. You insulted Ramos coming home in the car that day. I suppose I wanted to get even with you. I drank too much when we got back from the movies. I did go up to his room, and I did let him make love to me. *You* wouldn't."

He looked at her, and he realized she still didn't think she had done anything that couldn't be forgiven. And she added: "It isn't as though we hadn't—well, I tried to be honest and tell you we'd had an affair. You can't break things off—things like that—in a second just by wishing to."

Cash didn't ever want to see her again. "Good-by," he said, and he started walking slowly away up the side boards.



THE stands were still packed, and an official was announcing something over the loud-speaker. Cash paid little attention to it. Something about the ac-

cident, delay and discussion among the officials. Cash wanted to get hold of Snake Naxon and go somewhere with him and have a drink. But Snake had gone off with Malden, and it occurred suddenly to Cash that perhaps Malden was the Tex he had mentioned in his story that night.

He stood by the boards, undecided whether to leave the field before the crowds jammed the exits, or to hang about in the hope that Malden might get a substitute and the game would be played.

He felt a touch on his arm and turned to confront Angela Malden. Her face was white, and her dark eyes tortured-looking. For a moment she didn't speak, and he saw that she was struggling for control. He stood staring at her. She said:

"Do you remember that night at the spring—when we heard Tacho?"

Somehow he couldn't say, "Yes, Miss Malden." He was surprised at his own voice saying: "Yes, Angela."

"Don't think me a morbid fool. Please don't! But that was real to me. It was real to old Tacho. He knew then about the big game that was going to happen worlds away from there. He knew how my father wanted to win it more than anything else in life. To Tacho, the Cup was a sort of Holy Grail. You see, Father had Tacho with him in the old days when they used to play up here."

"I understand."

"But you see—" A faint color came into her face. "Later, he told me about that night. He had a vision, he says. It worried him. He saw you in it—playing. And it worried him about one of the boys. And when he saw you today, he felt better. It was all right, you see. The boys were all right, and you came into the picture just as a good-luck omen."

"And you were in the vision?"

She looked out at the field. "Yes, I was in it too." She turned her head sharply. "Will you play today for me?"

He was so startled he couldn't speak.

At last he said: "For you?"

"Yes."

"I thought— You told me once you hated the game."

"I do. But if we win today, it's finished. Father's promised me."

He smiled. "And Tacho and you will be happy."

"It all sounds so sentimental and foolish. But it's true."

"I'm not a member of your team."

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

"Father's talked to the committee and the other team captain. They were very kind. They said any man he wanted, who hadn't already played in the tournament."

"There are lots of good players in the stands."

"Yes," she said. "They're looking around. Mr. Naxon and I had a hard time with Father, because he wanted to play. But he's too old. It would frighten me to death. I don't want one of those other players. It would be different if we won with a stranger playing. Don't you see?"

"I'm from Texas, you mean?"

She looked at him steadily. "And you're a friend."

He smiled down into her earnest face. "All right," he said. "I hope those clothes fit me."

FORMALITIES were easily disposed of. It was as though, if the devil himself were proposed as a substitute, he'd have been acceptable. The huge crowd had become wildly restive, with their growing feeling of frustration. It was inconceivable that this, the climatic game of the greatest series polo had ever seen, should go by default. Half a dozen hurriedly gathered players were shaking with the thrill of possibly being selected to fill the vacancy so dramatically occurring on the Los Angeles team. The decision, in fact, had almost been made when Cash strode up to Malden and Snake Naxon.

Snake's eyes and the sigh of relief he emitted made Cash smile. Malden's haggard face cleared. The knot of suggested players opened, and their eyes enviously followed Cash as he followed Craig Malden to the station-wagon to change into polo-clothes. They did fit well enough.

Later, Mark Malden and his father led Cash aside. Craig said: "Mark, here, is team captain. I believe you've met before."

Mark's handshake and greeting were perfunctory, and Cash thought: "There's just no feeling in the man; but dammit, he's a polo-player!"

Mark said: "Too late to go into any style of plays. You've seen us in the other games?"

"Yes. All of them."

"Good." He smiled ironically. "And I reckon you know how the other team plays: they've got a tricky, sharpshooting One there."

"Yes."

"Tacho, here, will show you your ponies. Hoyt had the heaviest hands of any of us boys. If you have to, don't be afraid to manhandle any of them. We've got plenty."

"All right."

"Hoyt's sticks and kit are laid out there. Tacho'll show you."

"All right."

Cash could hear the announcer explaining to the crowd. A great roar went up. They were to have their kill, after all. And because they had almost been cheated of it, their appetite had been whetted to the point of savagery. Or at least that was the way that wild, massed yell that rose from the stands seemed to Cash. His mouth tightened grimly as he followed Tacho toward the ponies. . . .

The other team was on the field when the Maldens rode out. Cash bestrode the sturdy mare Tacho had led out as his first pony. She moved smoothly, with beautiful collection, under him. George rode up, smiling, changed his stick and held out his hand. "Glad to see you aboard, old man."

Tink came up. He too gave Cash's hand a vigorous shake. There was an honest steadiness in his voice as he said: "Sorry it had to be this way today, Cash. Glad it's you, though."

Teft looked honestly pleased. Cash guessed that Tink had allowed him to think that he had been chosen because he fitted the team better. Teft said: "Hope there's no hard feelings, Cash. And I'm damned glad you're getting into it."

Even the Argentine smiled at him and waved his stick. Cash thought, as he moved up for the throw-in, that these men who played this high-tension game, whatever their faults, were of a superior breed. They had something that other men lacked; something special and magnificent. And then he thought wryly: Not a smile out of the Maldens. Not a word of greeting nor a handshake. He was wondering about it as he swung the mare's haunches, flexed his stick hand and eyed the ball in the referee's hand.

AS he knew would happen, the game started with a terrific burst of speed. And he also knew that not for one second of the hour of play would that awful pace slow. George picked the ball out from Tony Malden's very mallet and was streaking down the field like a flash of sun from a reflecting mirror. It was then

that he knew how fast the Malden ponies were. He caught George just as he was placing himself for the goal shot, and backed the ball out of danger, to the boards. The play turned, and Mark Malden lifted the ball with a hissing drive that just missed the Great Dunes goal and put it out of play behind the backline.

Teft knocked in magnificently, and again George went on with it, his pony flattened with speed. And he caught the Englishman, barely hooking his mallet as he flipped it back for a half-shot for goal. As they pulled up to turn, George grinned at him. His face was strained, his words jagged. "Habit with you, eh?"

"Hope so."

Again the play turned—turned again. The ball drove up and down the field, neither team scoring. The crowds in the stands were on their feet, their voices united in a steady roar. But when the ball went out of play at the end of the period, neither team had scored.

MARK MALDEN said to Cash, as they rode off to change ponies: "You're going great guns, Captain," and added, grimly: "Keep it up. That One of theirs is a hellcat."

"He'll tire later," Cash said, without thinking, and then felt ashamed. He felt disloyal to George, the guilt of disclosing confidence, as Malden smiled unpleasantly and nodded. "Good."

The Malden team scored in the next chukker. Julian slipped Ramos and ran the ball the length of the field, smashing it high between the posts. The crowd screamed acclaim. Few noticed the path Tony had opened for his brother by taking Teft out and clear of the goal.

Ramos and Tink scored shortly after, and above the earth-shaking beat of the hoofs, Cash could hear Mark Malden cursing Julian for trying to turn a ball instead of backing it. But as so often is unfortunately the case, Julian almost at once violated another polo commandment and made it come off in spectacular fashion. He made a cut shot under his pony's neck at an impossible angle, and the ball shot through the infinitesimal target for a goal. Once again the crowds rose to acclaim him, and Mark in his stirrups to curse. Cash thought he was going to strike his brother when they rode off at the end of the period. But Craig Malden's steady voice intervened. "Too late to instruct after the first bell, Mark." And he gave Julian a grim look.

At the end of the first half the score was six to five, in favor of Great Dunes. But Craig Malden let them rest on their blankets in peace; only Mark's rumbling voice warned them that they were going to lose the game, cursed them for wild shooting and for letting a bunch of marshmallows ride them off.

Tony grinned at Cash and exhibited torn breeches and a swollen knee. "No marshmallow did that."

Cash was tired, and he flared when he heard Mark add: "—damned army officer showing you up."

"I didn't ask to play, you know," he said harshly to Mark.

"We'd all better save our breath," Julian said, "or talk about something pleasant. Tony, did you see that heifer with the silver fox furs and the high withers that was around looking me over before we went out?"

Gatti Boyne was wearing silver fox, Cash thought. This damned Malden tribe! And poor George would be taking his snifter now. A big slug of brandy, and he'd go out there like a lion.

The fifth period started like a desert whirlwind. And like a lion George was. Despite all Cash could do, the Englishman slipped him twice, and twice he made clean, deadly half-strokes for goals. Mark's face was working and his eyes were deadly. But he said never a word. Alone he started out to save the game, and for the first time that day Cash saw him out of position. He himself doggedly stayed where he belonged, and finally, near the end of the period, he had a lucky chance near the center of the field. To his own wonder, the terrific stroke lifted the ball through the goal. Mark nodded savagely to him. "More of that! We've got to take every chance now. With that wallop of yours, you can make them from way back."

It wasn't good polo; it was chancy; but today it seemed that he was hitting farther and truer than he ever remembered. So for the next two periods he smashed the ball with all he had, and he smashed it as true as he could for that tantalizing goal. He scored four times, and twice set the ball up almost at the mouth of the goal for Tony to finish.

But the Great Dunes team was never for a moment disorganized. They played beautifully together, and Cash heard Tink speaking words of encouragement and compliment to them. They were still leading by one goal at the end of the seventh. At the referee's whistle Cash

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

found himself pulling up with George. He was tired himself, but a look at the Englishman's face made him forget his aching lungs. It was ghastly, the cheeks sunken, the eyes deep in his head, and he was panting like a sick dog. He knew that George ought to go down. But he knew also that the rules forbade that; that even if they didn't, nothing would drive him down except the last whistle of the game. And he knew that George would take another drink—a bigger one—to make it work. So he said nothing, just closed up and grinned. "Best game you've ever played, George."

There was a quick light of pleasure in the other man's haggard eyes. He had no breath to reply. He nodded and made a grimace of mock agony. But there was nothing mock about that agony, Cash knew. And he also knew what fifty thousand dollars would mean to George. He had once said wistfully to Cash: "Ten thousand pounds, and I'd be rehabilitated back home. I wish I knew an honest way of making it outside of grubbing the old life away."

George could make it if his team won this game. For the first time in his life, Cash Seddon was tempted to be dishonest. Or was it dishonest? These damned Maldens meant nothing to him. He didn't owe them anything. He was just a lucky happening, as far as they were concerned. And suppose their precious brother Hoyt had not been injured? Would he have played a better game than himself today? He doubted it. And on the other hand, suppose he had played with George? His friend. A man he liked. In place of Teft. He knew he'd played a better game than Teft today. Everyone knew it. Wasn't George entitled to a win? He and Mellissa? And also, what the hell as to this money business in polo? Couldn't a man be just as decent and play just as clean a game if he took money for it? Like a fighter or a golf or tennis player. There were no professional rules in polo. . . .

"All I'd have to do is miss a shot for goal—or a back stroke—or be a little too slow to ride George out. . . . Because this next period we're going to town. George is shot. It's poor old George who's going to lose this game for Tink, and whether anybody else knows it, I do."

CASH lined up for the last period. Mark, too, had sensed the weakening of the other team, and he growled at Cash: "Give that One hell this period.

He looks shot. Then get on that spig and give him the boots. We'll make the goals."

By the "spig" he meant Ramos. The Argentine had played a beautiful game, way above anything Cash had seen him display. It looked, indeed, as though he was headed for the ten goals he coveted. But several times he had fouled flagrantly, and one of his fouls had given the Malden team an easy goal. Now Cash could see the look on his face, an almost animal look, that seemed to Cash a prelude to any act that would cinch this thing he wanted more than anything else out of life. And once, during the heat of the play, Cash had smashed shoulder to shoulder with Ramos as Julian was tearing down the field in possession, and the Argentine was trying desperately to cut him off. Ramos had almost hissed a word at Cash, and a quick look at the man's hating face had spurred Cash to ugliness in the encounter. When they rode in after the period, Cash asked Tony Malden what the word meant. Mark had overheard. "Who said that to you?"

"Their Three, Ramos."

Malden looked at him steadily, not speaking, estimating him. "Are you any good on foot? With your hands?"

IT was almost insulting, the way he spoke. Cash felt like saying: "I think I could handle you, all right." But he said: "Why?"

"Even if you're not," Mark said deliberately, "the thing for you to do is take that fellow out behind the horses when this is over and make hog-meat of him. I—I know you can do it. That's the worst Spanish word you can use to a man."

That was as close to a compliment as Mark Malden was capable of, and Cash smiled. "If he says it in English, I will."

They rode out to the eighth period.

Cash was amazed at the rush the other team put on. And of all of them, George was the fastest. He picked the ball from the throw-in, and his second shot was the longest Cash had ever seen him make. And it had all the accuracy he was famous for. It was a goal. The crowd went wild.

Then Mark Malden went wild. He turned the backfield over to Cash, swept by Julian time and again, and alone scored three goals. It was unbelievable. He simply took charge of the ball and fought off all comers, his own team-

mates included. For a big man he was a marvelous rider, and his hitting was powerful, although earlier in the game it had lacked direction. But now every ball his mallet touched seemed to wing with fantastic accuracy straight between the goal-posts.

NOW, as the time grew close, the crowds stood, with no thought of sitting down until this unbelievable spectacle was over. Never in the memory of the oldest watcher, so they wildly declared, had such a polo-game been played. Never such color, such riding, such spills and such incredible hitting. Twice Cash's pony had gone down, hard. The last time, he and Ramos lay almost in each other's arms as the horses rolled away from them. And once again the Argentine used the word. Cash got to his feet and looked at him. "Say that in English," he said to Ramos. And suddenly Mark Malden was standing there. "He doesn't have to," he said, and he spoke a swift sentence in Spanish to the Argentine. But abruptly Tink rode up and seized Ramos, as the referee broke in with a sharp warning.

They mounted, and again the tide raced back and forth from goal to goal.

"It must be over. God, it must be time," Cash thought. "We've one goal on them, and it can't be a minute to play. They can't score. Dammit, I won't let them score. I'm on the best pony I've ever been on. Better even than Electra, and I won't let a man get by me with that ball."

And then a foul was called on Julian. Free shot from near the center of the field for the Great Dunes team. Mark rode up, an ugly scowl on his face. A hard-hit back-stroke had smashed his nose; sweat, blood and grime made a fearful mask of his face. Miguel cantered back to make the free shot; the Maldens disposed themselves to meet it; the others on the Dunes team covering them closely. Cash watched George, who was covering him a little beyond toward the hostile goal.

He never remembered whether he decided then, watching the Englishman's abnormal color and haggard eyes, or whether it happened in him an instant later as the ball hissed by and landed true and rolling just in front of George's already leaping pony. Or maybe he didn't consciously decide—just instinctively acted. Failed to act, rather. For normally he would have been off certainly with

his opponent. And he knew he had the faster mount. Loose with a ball, Clyde-Morton simply didn't miss them. All you could do was pray. But Cash didn't pray: a lawless recklessness possessed him now. He galloped, relishing the hoarse, warning cry from Mark Malden, but he only galloped. The mare ran but felt no whip, no urging. To stop George, he had to be caught by the first leaps of the Malden pony; a second's delay in making up that bare lead was fatal.

Cash Seddon gave him that second.

CLYDE-MORTON'S second stroke cut through the goal-line in a streak of white as a thundering uproar of voices shook the stands. The whistle blew; barely could it be heard in those shaking waves of sound. Cash had a flash of George's face as he pulled up, heard Tink's exultant acknowledgment of the goal that had tied the score and made an extra period possible, and saw glaring at him, as he trotted off, the stern face of Mark Malden. He was prepared for anything, but the Texan rode up to him, and with a faint shock of surprise, he realized that the man wasn't angry, that his feeling was that of sincere sympathy for a gallant failure. They rode together toward the ponies, and Malden said: "Lord, that was tough! But if any man can afford to miss one this day, I'd say it was you." His somber eyes lighted for a moment and the nearest thing to a real smile Cash had ever seen on his face was there now. "I reckon you think I'm mean. And maybe ungrateful some. But this game is just something I've set my heart on—and the old man too. . . . I'd—I'd like to tell you now I think you're the gamest, cleanest player I've ever met up with. And I really thank you for coming in with us. All of us do."

Cash had a strange feeling deep in his stomach. He felt suddenly weak, nauseated. His voice sounded high, utterly strange, as he said: "Your sister—I got an idea from talking with her that she didn't—well, doesn't care much for the game. Not much whether you win or lose."

"Oh!" Mark Malden's eyes were wide. "Hell, she wants to win this game more than any of us. It's going to break her heart if we miss." The old grim look came back in his swollen face. "But we won't. We're taking this next goal, *hombre!*"

And then Snake Naxon was standing, there as Cash dismounted. Five minutes'

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

rest, and Cash tried to avoid Snake; but Snake stood over him; his warm, friendly eyes anxious. He talked a little, encouragingly, as he squatted by Cash's blanket. But the sight of Snake had plucked back from the years a stunning memory for Cash. He could see the scene and he could hear the words now as though the whole thing were happening before his eyes.

It had happened his first year on the cadet polo-team at the Point. Snake had summarily dropped the oldest and best player on the team. He was a humorous, good-natured fellow, and he admitted to Snake that he'd slowed up deliberately, to let the opposing team, from a small military college, win. "One of those kids had to be on a winning team to make his letter," he explained.

Snake gathered the squad and explained his harshness. Cash could remember every word of it now, and they burned in him as he sat miserably avoiding Snake Naxon's eyes. Especially the last words: "Your best is never too good in any sporting contest. The importance of the game is not the criterion. You can't make a gift in sport: you haven't the individual right, and the other fellow gives you contempt, not thanks, if you try it. There's no reason in the world strong enough to justify it."

SNAKE said quietly: "Why did you do it, Cash?"

He could meet Snake's eyes now. He was glad Snake came out with it.

"I criticised a man out there for paying players, Snake."

"You mean you thought that would even it up?"

"No. It was something else. Until just now, when I saw you standing there, I still thought it was right—even though I think I did it without thought."

Snake said calmly: "It's never right, Cash. There'd be no point in sport if it were ever right."

"I'm going to tell Malden."

Snake laid a restraining hand on his arm. "And that won't make it right. Cash, I believe polo is the cleanest sport played. I think the players are the finest men in sport. Talking about this may ease your conscience; the hell it will bring down on you may seem a fit penance—"

Cash watched the sad smile come on Snake's face. "But it won't help polo. It may bring harsh words on the game, arouse unjust suspicions. There are

jingoes who would jump at it and make capital of it. You see?"

"Yes. But I can't—"

Mark's voice called: "Let's get up!"

"You can't change it," Snake said, "any more than any man can change his sins or his mistakes. But you can fight yourself clean. Plenty of men with the stuff in them have done that. Go out there and wipe it out!"

Cash felt as though a new heart had been placed in his body as he met Snake Naxon's eyes. And Snake knew that. He gave a sudden, boyish grin. "That's the stuff!"

Mark warned them as they rode out between the walls of silent people. "Remember, the first goal decides it. Seddon, you watch that Englishman the way you would a killer horse. Tony, don't let that Back draw an honest breath; and Julian—" his eyes hardened, as he stared at his grinning brother. "You better not come home if you try any more whoopee—hear?"

Cash was twitching with impatience. If he played his position properly, he had no business chasing that ball. But only by smashing it between the hostile posts could he purge himself. If they'd only change him to Two, where he could fight for that ball right from the throw-in!

The referee was drawing back his arm. He got a flashing glance of the charging players, saw that the ball had stopped ahead of him, heard the vicious click as Ramos' mallet picked it up. Then, he was neck and neck with George, the ball well ahead of them and still rolling toward the Malden goal. George was riding with all he had; he was the lighter man, and had speed to burn. It would be all over if he ever hit that ball. . . . And God knew, he'd never be able to hook the canny Englishman's mallet. George wouldn't swing that stick back where it could be hooked; he'd make one of those snakelike half-strokes, two if necessary, and they'd go straight, clean.

THERE was no heart beating in Cash. He seemed stifled, unable to breathe. The pony was giving him all it had, and it wasn't enough. And then, for the first time before a goal, Cash saw George miss a ball. Just a miss, topped it, but it was enough. He barely made his own shot to save goal, so close were they.

Mark Malden drove his man off, thundered down and beat the ball back with a tremendous back-stroke. Tony

almost scored, but was ridden off in the shadow of the posts.

The crowd was mad now. A steady, surging clamor came from the stands like the awful sound at a prizefight when two big champions stand flush and slug with all they have. The ball leaped and flashed back and forth, and minute after minute passed without score. Each team shot for goal and missed. Once again the Dunes team had possession, and Ramos drove over the back line from near the center of the field. It was anybody's game: two evenly matched teams playing their best polo.

Cash returned Ramos' drive, and Tony almost got clear with it. Ramos backed it, and they all rode over—all except Cash and George, who was riding him with the frenzy of madness. The ball was near the center; Mark Malden and Tink were turning; then Cash saw only that ball. It was there—only he and George now, and George's main job was to take him off. It looked as though he were going to do it. His pony was fast and thrusting courageously. His knee was ahead, and he was on the mallet side. "No off-side stroke," Cash thought. "If I make it at all, it'll have to be on the near-side, and nobody in the world ever hit a near-side stroke that far."

ON they came—fast, the beat of the hoofs and the unbroken roar from the stands deafening their ears. Cash hunched his shoulder away from George and then let him have it. It seemed as if he had lifted the Englishman completely off his horse for a moment. But George was still there, grimly thrusting when they came up to the ball, and Cash saw that it was there for him to hit—just barely. He had to hit so quickly that he knew he couldn't get real power into the stroke. But he must place it so that, when they came up again, it wouldn't be on George's side. With a sickening feeling he saw the ball rise, rocket-like, toward the leading ponies. Too low to clear them, it smacked the rump of one of them and rebounded. George was fighting for every inch now, and Cash for a brief instant, felt a surge of pity. But if that ball bounced wide enough and to the right, he knew the Englishman well enough to be certain of what would happen. He'd pull up, be back on it faster than any other man in the game could, and with that uncanny stick of his have it around with him and on its way along the boards.

But the ball bounced straight back, and they were on it. It was under their horses' feet, impossible to both, almost at once. But Cash had had his mallet ready, and it was in position for the stroke. A pony's foot caught the ball as it came in, and there, unbelievably, it rolled just enough to the front and to the left for Cash to pick it up. Only a tap was necessary to send it through the goal, and that was fortunate, for George's shoulder was into him, and he topped the ball badly. But it was enough—just enough; and as they tore between the posts, Cash got a glimpse of the white-faced goal-tender behind a post frantically waving his flag.



THE rest was a blurred picture for Cash: Mark's incredible exulting, Craig Malden's firm handshake and Snake Naxon's understanding eyes; old Tacho, grinning, blessing him in a string of Spanish. George's handshake, and Tink Boyne's honest word: "Cash, I'd rather have played this game and lost, than win anything in the world."

"They were even teams, Tink."

"They could play till doomsday one goal apart."

It kept up all the way to the Cup table; everyone shaking hands, talking breathlessly, mobbing about the sweaty, shaky-legged players. Cash saw Gatti Boyne standing with her father and Tink and the senior Teft. Avoiding watching her, he noticed the two men as they made their way to Craig Malden. He wondered at the steady, unsmiling face of Malden, and more as he saw Snake Naxon with them, smiling. Malden seemed stiff about the handshaking, but then Malden was a strange man. A little later Snake came up to Cash, nudged him. "Remember the story I told you that night? Well, there's Tex Malden, and you can see yourself he's laughing and talking to Teft and Boyne. It was a hard job, but I did it. Better get up there and get that Cup."

But he was watching Angela Malden. She was standing by the woman who was presenting the cups, Foster Teft's mother. She seemed to have been watching him a long time. He smiled at her, and she

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

came impulsively toward him. "I just want to thank you," she said in a whisper, and smiled, then walked over to join her father. Gatti was watching him too, he saw. She called: "Cash! Please."

He moved through the crowd toward her, and she came to meet him. "Cash, you can't hate me enough to refuse me one favor. Just one."

"I don't hate you. You know that, Gatti."

She looked up at him, her eyes wistful. "Please, then. Come to my party tonight. There won't be any regrets or recriminations or whatever they call 'em. Just come and have a good time."

Gatti's promise of a party-of-parties was certainly fulfilled. There was a moon, and the September night had turned warm. The Boyne estate looked to Cash like a Maxfield Parrish painting, as far as color and unreality went. All the great players were there, and Cash thought never could there have been as many beautiful women.

Cash found it hard to escape attention. Tink was cheerful and friendly. "Gatti said you'd had a row, and I'm sorry, Cash. But you and I needn't. I still feel the way I did, you know. I'd do it over again. Oh, I lost a lot of money on that game. But I've got a hell of a lot, and I'd have given more just for the privilege of playing in it. And George and Mike got their bonus, too: we as good as won."

"Tell me, Tink: Mellissa said George bet a lot of money on that game. He can't be much better off than when he started."

Tink laughed. "You know, George is a clown when it comes to making or spending money, but when it comes to *betting*, he's a witch. You know what he did? I told him I'd laid a big one with Malden. . . . Well, canny old George goes and calls him up, cool as you please, when I told him how arrogant Malden was. George got a bet on the *score*. He made a nice thing out of it: I think it ended with Malden adding five thousand for every goal they made short of the three."

SNAKE NAXON came up. Cash was amazed at the change in Snake. The haggard look was gone from his face. Of all the men there, he was the most distinguished-looking, Cash thought.

Angela Malden was on Snake's arm. Cash had never before seen her in evening dress; and she seemed to him impossibly lovely to look at.

"I had to fight our way out of those stags," Snake said. "We've been talking about you, and this girl says you've high-tailed her. I guess you've gone Long Island."

Then Julian, his hand never leaving Gatti Boyne's elbow, pushed toward them. And Tony, smiling shyly, hailed Cash. Tony said: "We've a new boss on the ranch, Cash—did you hear?"

"No."

Julian laughed, and squeezed Gatti's elbow against him. "Old Snake, here: Dad's long-lost pal. But you can ride the dear old range all day, *hombre*, and you won't see friend Julian! Or little Tony. We're off, eh, little fella?"

Snake, pathetically happy, wanted to talk over and over again about his reunion with Malden and his new job in Texas.

Then George appeared with Mellissa. She gave Cash a quiet, happy look and led him off to dance. "I'm not going to tell you all about it, Cash. But it's perfect. Tomorrow—" She squeezed his hand, and the look in her eyes made Cash's throat feel funny.

LATER, Angela and Cash sat with the wind from the sea beating against their faces.

"Do you remember that night by the Spring of the Angels?" she said softly.

"Yes."

"Well, old Tacho got his wish. Look what he gave me."

She held out to him a thin, worn chain, the bight of it weighted with a crude silver cross. "He said he'd never have need of it again. His greatest wish was granted. I'm to keep it for mine."

"What is yours?"

"I—I've had mine, too, I suppose. I'll never be able to thank you enough for making it possible."

"It would have come off if I hadn't played. . . . You know, a few days ago I felt that I didn't have a friend in the world. I felt—"

She seemed closer to him; without seeing, he could feel her eyes steady on his face. "I know," she said softly. "I've felt that way. Isn't it—*lonely*?"

"When are you going back?"

"Tony and Julian are staying. And poor Hoyt, for a while. The rest of us go back in a few days."

There was the sound of feet behind them, and Cash recognized one of the Boyne servants. "I beg pardon, sir. I was sent here looking for you. A gentle-

FAR CALL THE BUGLES

man from the army, I believe. He's waiting for you at the house, sir."

IT was Joe—big, gawky Joe, with his little flying-cap hidden under an elbow, his eyes popping as he stared from the terrace steps at the scene about him.

"Look, Cash," he blurted out. "We're taking off. That whole experimental squadron I was telling you about. Texas. We're being loaned to your damned cavalry division for maneuvers. Chance to try out our new stuff."

"They've called off the maneuvers. No land available with enough water. Got a letter from Milford about it."

"Well, *we* got a radio. Some big-hearted guy down there turned over a fancy ranch at the last minute. Rumor has it he saw about it in the papers and wired the War Department they could make a shambles of his place if they wanted to. Whole thing happened today. You coming?"

"*Me! Coming!*"

"I know. You're on leave. And this is a lovely, lovely set-up. But I thought maybe—"

Cash felt a wild stirring in him. The Boynes' grounds were gone; the laughs, the pops of the corks, the sound of music. Instead, he saw long lines of mounted men, the dust high above them; saw the shaking heat in waves among the mesquite, and above, in the colorless, hot sky, the tight-grouped planes roaring, diving, zooming. And then he saw Joe's hand outstretched. "What's that for?"

"My way of saying good-by."

"Where's your car?"

"Outside. Didn't dare bring it in: shame you."

Cash saw a gay group gathered about a table: George, in the center, was holding a filled glass above his head.

"To the greatest man in polo!" George shouted, and everybody echoed: "A-h-h!"

"To Tex Malden—of Texas!"

Joe's eyes popped. "Hell, it can't be that small a world: that's the angel that made this race for life necessary! The place we're flying for: Malden's Ranch."

"What! But Joe, I can't just run off. Without explaining or saying good-by."

Joe looked at his watch. "They take off in fourteen minutes. You coming?"

Cash took a deep breath, laughed and began to run after the long-legged airman. "I'm coming, soldier!" he yelled.

Two short novels, complete, by Andrew Wood and Thomas Duncan, will appear in our next issue.

Bulldog

*The autobiography of
a great champion*

By **MICKEY
WALKER**

(Himself!)

With a foreword by
DAMON RUNYON

I THINK the high spot of Mickey Walker's fighting career was the night before the Kentucky Derby in Louisville when he got up off the canvas at least five or six times in the first round, finally to overcome Paul Swiderski.

Walker fought many battles much greater from a strictly technical standpoint. I saw most of them—his amazing stand as a welterweight against Middleweight Harry Greb, his ferocious assault as a light-heavy on Heavyweight Jack Sharkey, his forlorn-hope charge against big Max Schmeling. But that Kentucky incident remains a blazing memory with me.

Walker, then definitely on the decline, entered the ring in careless physical condition against a bigger opponent superbly trained, and got tagged and knocked dizzy right off the reel. Swiderski swarmed over him, knocking him down time and again; but each time Walker struggled to his feet, punch-blinded, dazed and bleeding—and fought back.

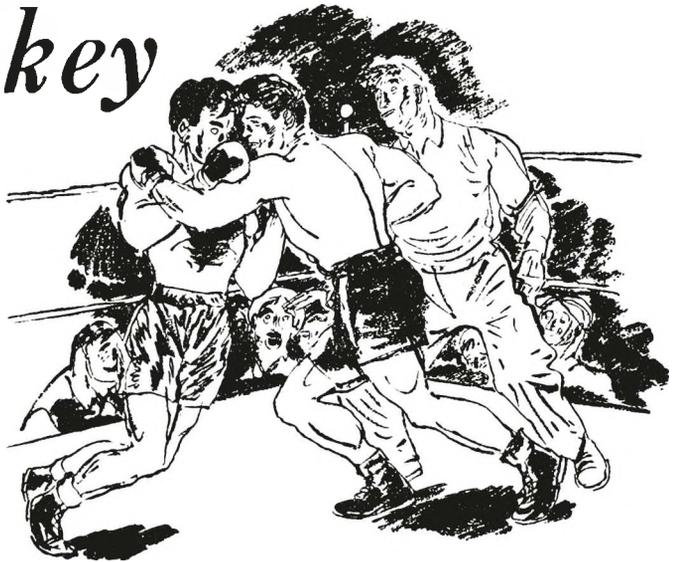
Sheer fighting instinct held him up—that, and the heart of a lion that ever beats in Walker's breast.

At the close of the first round, with the ring a bedlam of confusion, Manager Jack Kearns and Trainer Teddy Hayes literally carried Walker to his corner. It was one hundred to one that he

REAL EX-

Mickey

In this department we present true stories of life's most exciting moments, offered by our readers. (For details of this Real Experience story contest, see page 3.)



wouldn't survive the second round, but he staggered through that, and through the next.

And then his head cleared and he came on again to victory.

After the fight Big Jim Farley, then New York Boxing-Commission Chairman and afterward Postmaster General of the United States, shouldered his way into Walker's dressing-room and putting out his hand to the battered and still befuddled Mickey, he said:

"Walker, you are truly a great fighter!"

I could have told Farley as much years before.

I place Mickey Walker high on the list of my five all-time greatest fighters. Never a gamer man laced on boxing gloves. He was a great welterweight, a great middleweight, a great light-heavy and almost a great heavyweight. Only lack of size held him down there. He had to make up in fighting heart for what he lacked in poundage when he met the heavies, and he just missed making it do.

Six inches more of height and twenty pounds more of weight, and no man of his time could have stood before Walker for at least ten of the fifteen years of his fighting career.

It will be twenty-five years more before Walker's ability as a fighter is fully

appreciated. That will be when the historians of the ring consider his record with more care, and note that pound for pound he was one of the greatest of them all.

I knew Walker better, when he was active, than I knew any other fighter in thirty years of writing about boxers and boxing. I used to take my vacations in his training camps. He was a lot of fun.

Walker was one of the most intelligent fighters I ever met, with a terrific sense of humor. I first got acquainted with him when he was a kid just coming up, and he and his manager, Jack Bulger, used to visit Broadway as a great adventure.

On down through the years Walker was my favorite among all the gladiators of the roped arena.

I do not think I shall ever see his equal again.

—Damon Runyon

"MICKEY, you always were my idol —and you still are!"

Standing over me, pumping my arm, I recognized Paul Pirrone. My head was fast clearing.

Looking around the dressing-room, I began to recognize my seconds, and Bill Duffy, my manager. . . .

Then it came to me. I was flattened. Counted out. It wasn't a pleasant feeling, but I forced a smile.

"I always modeled my fighting after yours," Paul said. "You were my idol—"

PERIENCES



"You sure proved it tonight," I said, giving him some smile. Because it was Paul that had put me down.

But I was glad to have him say that. And to shake my hand. Not many come to shake the hand of the fighter who gets K.O.'d. (Good luck, Paul! You are a great fighter.)

Already I was feeling what it is to be a Has Been.

My thoughts drifted back to the days when I was a youngster around Kerryhead (Elizabeth, N. J.), and to the fighting days behind me.

Later on I will tell you how I came to put this into writing, but now I am going over the days when I was kid thinking about long pants:

I was born on Friday the thirteenth, dead, with a black eye.

Now please don't ask if I stayed dead. That was in July, 1901, when Teddy Roosevelt was the new President. I got many other black eyes.

I always felt Fighting was a great pal of mine.

A boxer has got his own life outside of fighting, and I want to tell about that. But my pal Fighting got me into pecks of trouble from the beginning.

I remember in school days I went the limit for my pal—my pal and a girl named Alma.

Alma was the most popular girl in the school. I was the proudest one in class the day she told me I was one of her fellows.

She kept a list of her fellows on a pad. One day I saw this list, and lo, my name did not lead all the rest. There was another name above mine, Joe, the most popular boy in school. There was only one thing to do—fight Joe for the love and the proud sweet hand of Alma.

So I lost Alma. And I got kicked out of school.

But my pal Fighting I didn't let down. Then started job-hunting.

My uncle Dan Higgins, who was a great influence in my life at this time (and later on too), had a talk with my dad and decided on an architectural career for me.

Uncle Dan fitted me out with an old suit of his and a collegiate hat he used on canoe trips—and a job with an architectural firm on Park Avenue.

This was my first pair of long trousers. I couldn't get used to them. I didn't pay much attention to the hat until I came into the station.

A porter carrying a big box looked at me, dropped the box and said:

"Boy, where did you get that hat?"

Right there my stomach fell into my shoes. I knew I wasn't going to like this job.

On my arrival at the office I was given a big table and told to be of help to the men in the drafting-room, tracing, running errands and any general use needed of me.

There were about forty draftsmen in this office, mostly young fellows. You can imagine what they put this fresh greenhorn kid through. I couldn't quit this job, as my father thought it was a great opportunity for me. To get fired was my only hope.

But they were very tolerant with me on account of my Uncle Dan, who is an architect. Uncle Dan helped Stanford White design Madison Square Garden, the old Garden. He didn't know his nephew was going to use it.

My break came some time later. Behind me was a little draftsman. One day he handed me a milk-bottle and a dime.

"Walker, go to the drug-store and get ten cents' worth of radium," he said.

"Sure," I said.

After I'd run halfway around New York City, a clerk in Liggett's tipped me off. I went back to the office burning up. Old pal Fighting was at my side.

"Listen, Mister," I said to the draftsman: "you wanna come outside, or you wanna take it here?"

He was only my size, but a strong, muscular fellow. I thought I could lick anybody my size or near it.

"Take it easy, kid," he said.

"I'll take you," I said.

But it didn't take him long to prove I was wrong. . . . I was bathing my nose at the ice-water cooler when the boss walked in. That was the end of my architectural career.

My pal caught up with me on my next job, in a leather works in Elizabeth, as checker boy.

A big fellow by the name of Teddy, who was what they call a piler, one day tried to take the box I was writing on. I jumped from behind it and nailed him on the chin. The floor was concrete, and his head hit it with a bang.

When Teddy came to, he went in and told the boss I hit him with an ax. The boss came out and said if I hit Teddy with an ax, he would chastise me himself.

Teddy's chin had busted my hand. I showed it to the boss.

"There's the ax," I said.

"Then how did Teddy's head get busted?" the boss said.

"He must of hit the floor," I said.

"So what're you fighting for?" he asks, sarcastic.

I try to explain about the box, but I can see that Teddy is a friend of his.

"If you're playing favorites, why don't you say so?" I said.

Anyway, my pal and me are looking over HELP WANTED signs again.

I never needed no ax to fight with, but on my next job there was a story about a sledge-hammer while I was there.

THIS was in a shipyard on Staten Island; I was a shipfitter's helper. Some others from Elizabeth worked there.

A fellow by the name of Eddie and I had an argument about something or other, and I decided to settle it after work in front of the shipyard.

Eddie was fighting preliminary fights on Staten Island, and he was very popular because he was on his home ground. Most of the shipyard employees were behind him.

It was a hard, tough fight. It lasted about an hour. I won. The next day I took the consequences of my victory.

I was down in the bow of a ship trying to fit in what they call a liner. A liner comes to a sharp point; it fits in where the big iron sheets overlap one another. They weigh from five to ten pounds.

That is what fell on my head while I was down there.

Some one of Eddie's gang dropped it. Then comes the hammer. The Elizabeth fellows was a minority on Staten Island, like the Irish and the English. But they felt strong about Eddie's gang.

The hammer dropped down on the head of a Staten Islander.

Next job was in a shipyard in Elizabeth.

I hired out as a heater, working with Georgie Ward and Al McClosky, who helped to pave the roads of destiny for me. (Al was matchmaker for most of my earlier fights. He was a good heavy-weight about ten years before this time.)

Sometimes in the shipyard I heated for Al. That was a pleasure.

I was on deck one day heating, when a big fellow knocked over my forge. When it fell, I got a burn out of the coals.

"Hey, you," this guy says, "keep out of the way of men that is trying to work."

"Huh?" I says.

"You heard me," he says. "You aint blind."

He was going to move away. Also he was much bigger than me. But—

This was my last fight in what is known as street fighting for some time. It lasted five minutes. The big hard-working man was stretched out on deck when the boss come up.

"What's the matter here?" the boss says.

Some of the men told him.

"Who's to blame?" he says, looking around.

"Aw," I said, "this mug just didn't know he was picking on a fighter."

My theme song was "*Old Pal Fighting*."

But the boss didn't see it.

"Get your money," he says. "This shipyard is no prize-ring."

New Jersey had just passed a bill to legalize boxing. There were boxing shows in Newark, but it was only four rounds and run under amateur rules. Gus Torgler ran these shows. He developed many a great fighter in his club. Most all the fighters of that time boxed for Gus. Now they were going to have eight-round bouts. I read about it in a Elizabeth paper and decided to be a fighter.

UP to this time I never saw a prize-fight in my life. The only boxing with gloves I had done was around the corner from where I lived, in Cal's store.

I told my mother about my ideas.

"All right, I guess," she said, "if you think you can fight."

"Old Pal Fighting!" again.

"But don't let your father know," my mother said.

So with what money I had from the shipyard, and a little borrowed from her, I bought some tights and a pair of boxing shoes, and launched into something

I knew nothing about. I got advice from some of the fellows in the neighborhood, as we had some good fighters at that time in Kerryhead. For instance, they told me I had to train.

I never did like training, although later I had intensive training under careful management. But I couldn't see much sense in training for that short time—gosh, didn't I fight for an hour at a time in the street? But soon I was to learn the difference between the two kinds of fighting.

I went up to the Y. M. C. A. with another fighter, Jimmy McCann, who was training for a come-back. From him I got the lowdown.

I didn't know what to do in a gymnasium, standing there in my new shoes and tights, watching the other fellows train. The Y used to be filled with spectators watching the boys work, as prize-fighting was something new in Elizabeth.

A fellow named Joe Orsini came over where I was standing and asked me if I would box with his brother. I was just his weight.

"Sure," I said.

I was glad he had asked me, because I lost that awkward and self-conscious feeling. We started boxing, and the first thing I knew I was sitting on the floor.

Orsini hit me on the chin.

I got up and started to let everything go, to make up for my ignorance of boxing. The spectators by this time thought they were at a real fight, gathering around and yelling their heads off. It was real, as far as I was concerned.

The next thing, Orsini was on the floor.

The physical instructor came over and made us take the gloves off.

Then I was introduced to the boy I was boxing. His name was Dominick Orsini, and I had been reading about him in the papers, fighting on Staten Island.

He was my first opponent as well as training mate.

THE matchmaker of the club happened to be in the audience that day. Coming down to the showers, he asked me if I would fight young Orsini.

"My card is all filled for next Monday," he said, "but it being the first fight night in Elizabeth, I want to give 'em a real fight night. I'll put you on as a added special."

I was offered ten dollars, and accepted.

And that Monday night we gathered

on our corner in Kerryhead, which is an Irish settlement. When we marched down the middle of the street to the fight club we were about two hundred strong.

Young Orsini came from an Italian neighborhood named Peterstown. There were five or six neighborhood gangs in Elizabeth, like all big cities. The two strongest were the two that would be represented in my bout. It looked like there would be plenty of fighting, and not all of it in the ring.

REMEMBER me telling you my father didn't like to hear of me fighting? Well, he heard of it. You see, his name was Mickey Walker too.

The fight club had put out posters, of course, advertising the star bout (Georgie Ward versus I forget who)—and the "Elizabeth Thunderbolt, Mickey Walker," *etcetera*.

He never saw the cards until one day on Broad Street he was going to work and met a friend of his who had seen them.

"Are you going nuts?" he says to my father.

My father was the strongest man I have ever known, a bricklayer by trade.

"What's eating you?" my father says.

"So you're the Elizabeth Thunderbolt now," this man says.

"Huh?" my father says.

"I wouldn't do it if I was you," he says to my father. "Not at your age. Fighting is a young man's game."

"I'll show you how old I am," my father says, "if you don't explain yourself in a hurry."

So they went down to where there was one of the posters.

My father didn't go to work that day. He turned around and came straight home. I was out doing some road work, but he sat down and waited for me.

Breathing hard from running, I got a couple of feet into the house and there was my father.

"I'll have a few words with you," my father said. "Is it you that is after being the Elizabeth Thunderbolt?"

"Gee, I didn't make it up," I said.

"Listen, my sweet little thunderbolt," my father said: "We won't talk more. If you get licked in that fight, I'll thunderbolt you back where you came from, you—"

My face was in a sweat. Those were not the only words my father used. He made it very clear to me.

But my father never saw me fight until

long after I won the welterweight championship. Even then he would duck out during the leather-pushing. He would come back when I was in my corner to see how I was making out. He never saw a round.

My first fight! Old Pal, I'm wearing gloves now!

From our corner in Kerryhead we marched down the middle of the street to the fight-club, two hundred strong.

Orsini versus Walker, and Kerryhead versus Peterstown. The City of Elizabeth was our oyster.

As we marched down, Jimmy McCann started talking.

"Listen, Mickey," he says: "You ought to have a manager."

"What's a manager?" I asks.

"A manager," Jimmy says, "is a feller to handle you, keep track of you, look after your interests."

"Okay," I said. "Get me a manager."

Outside of the club Jimmy met a fellow named Oscar Lamb and elected him my manager. It didn't take Oscar no time at all to go to work. Just at that minute I was eating some raisins. As I shook hands with Oscar with my right, I shoved some raisins down with my left.

"What're you doing with them raisins?" Oscar says, still shaking my hand.

"My mother read in a book," I says: "Raisins are good for the wind. She loaded me down with three boxes before I left home."

Oscar grabbed them out of my hand.

"You must be nuts," he says, "eating raisins before a fight."

MY new manager takes me down and puts me through his rigamarole. I do everything he says. About ten minutes before the fight, he lays me out on a table and starts to rub me with a liquid.

This liquid begins to burn like fire.

"Hey, what are you doing?" I says.

"Quiet, now," Oscar said. "I am rubbing you down, like all the best fighters."

"What's that stuff?" I ask.

"That is my own secret formula," Oscar says.

I must do what my manager tells me, but this stuff burns. When he got it all over me, I couldn't stay still.

Of course I'll never forget this fight. It was twelve minutes, but it seemed like twelve years.

As soon as I started to sweat in earnest, this secret formula of Oscar's runs into my open pores. I had to do a marathon around the ring to keep cool. I was



afraid it would get into my eyes and blind me. At the same time, I was feeling sick in the stomach from the raisins.

But it was a good fight. I was the winner.

Peterstown and Kerryhead were there, but they sprung a surprise on me. Instead of the expected riot, Peterstown cheered me. They made me their champion. I am still their champion today.

A sick champ, though, after the fight. Going down to the dressing-room, my manager Oscar was all excited over my victory.

"Boy, oh boy," he says, "you got the makings of a champion in you."

"Say," I said, "what is your secret formula made out of?"

Oscar grinned. He held up the bottle so I could see the label.

"Horse Liniment," I reads.

"We're gonna make you a champ," Oscar says.

"You're fired," I said.

Right then I didn't care if I never saw another boxing-glove. The ten bucks didn't seem to be enough for that grind, the sick stomach, and the whims of a fight manager.

But the next day I read the papers. I was a sensation all over the sheet in letters an inch high. My father didn't thunderbolt me. My stomach was better.

Maybe these boxing-gloves have something after all.

Old Pal Fighting and me!

I was right back to the fight-club for another fight.

At this time is where my Uncle Dan Higgins steps in again.

He saw me fight my first fight. He was a good judge of fighting as well as being an architect, as he himself held the amateur featherweight and lightweight championships. The smart managers tried to have him turn professional, but he only boxed for sport.

Uncle Dan thought I had something there. He insisted I go under the wing

BULLDOG MICKEY

of Johnny Anthes, himself a great amateur in sport.

There is an old saying in the fight game that fighters are born, not made. But an old saying is an old saying. They say lots of things are born, not made. If a fighter can be made, it was Johnny Anthes who made me. He would watch my training, my food, everything. He would watch over me closer than my own mother. He would send me on the road for ten miles, sometimes running with me himself.

After that Johnny would take me in the back room of his confectionery store and teach me the fine points. He found out I had a natural left hook, and for hours and hours he would stand there with me trying to perfect it. Later on, it was my best punch. Many an opponent I flattened with a left hook.

Uncle Dan also had us draw up a contract—the only manager I ever had a contract with. And this contract wasn't needed. We were great pals, and are yet today. If a fighter and his manager aren't pals, they can't work together. And if they're pals—what's a contract?

My first fight under Johnny was with a champion—the featherweight champ of New Jersey, Jimmy McCran (not my pal Jimmy McCann).

This fellow knew me from the shipyard.

"Mickey Walker?" he says. "I'll teach him a lesson for even thinking of fighting the Jersey champ. I'll murder him."

(A few years later when I was in England and looking around for sparring partners, I couldn't find anybody that wasn't a champ. They was the champ of this and that.) But now I was fighting my second fight. It was my first fight under a real manager.

I was still wearing Uncle Dan's old crown hat on the street, and Uncle Dan, himself a champ, was behind me. I was beginning to feel my oats in this new career.

It took me two rounds to put the champ in a flat position. Now I was getting somewhere. My name was in the Jersey papers, even the big Newark papers giving me a hand.

I was the featherweight champ of Jersey, and Uncle Dan's hat was too small for me. It was a great feeling while it lasted. But it didn't last long.

Until the next fight, is all.

Mickey Walker carries on his story in our forthcoming January issue.

Lawrence of

(Continued from page 1)

GERMANY is reported also to be building a slightly larger type of E-boat ranging from ninety to one hundred feet in length, ranging from fifty to ninety tons and with a speed of forty to fifty knots. In addition to torpedoes they carry a heavy automatic gun which probably fires 1½ inch shells, and have an endurance of about six hundred miles. Since the Dunkirk evacuation these boats, in coöperation with airplanes, have preyed on embattled British shipping in the English Channel. They have concentrated in particular about the twenty-two-mile moat which guards the battlements of Dover. Although as yet the Germans have been unable to stop Britain's use of those waterways, they apparently have slowed down her merchant traffic there.

Spain is reported to be at present massing large numbers of these armed, small speedcraft near Gibraltar; and Italy, this mid-September, is reported to have achieved the success of sinking at least one British submarine by one of her much vaunted MAS boats.

As this is written, Germany is consolidating air-bases and heavy artillery positions on the coasts of the Low Countries and France, and undoubtedly also is establishing there nests of these speedboats. British defenses will be sorely tried when air attack is supplemented by bombardment of the new monster guns, which, it is reported, can hurtle a shell one hundred and forty miles—from Calais to Oxford or "The Wash," from Cherbourg to London or to Cardiff, Wales; in other words, the distance from Brooklyn to Baltimore! Such guns could reach every main port of England and Wales, except Liverpool and Newcastle.

Under cover of these and lesser guns, and of aircraft, the value of the evasive little speedboats, because of their high maneuverability in restricted waters, and their hit-and-run methods, might well prove a determining factor in forcing the English Channel. It will be recalled that when, about three years ago, Mussolini was twisting the lion's tail and tying knots in it, he made threats against the British fleet in the Mediterranean. Some

Arabia and His Super Speedboat

By CHARLES WELLINGTON FURLONG

thought this more than a mere verbal challenge based on a new arm of the Italian Navy, the small MAS or mosquito boats. These craft were of steel, each armed with four torpedoes. One torpedo might even sink a first-class battleship. This worried Britain.

Mussolini's navy, with its 117 submarines, minus those recently sunk, plus powerful aircraft and her MAS boats, has recently forced Britain to dispatch strong units of her Grand Fleet to the Mediterranean, with Alexandria, Egypt, as her main base. If Britain, in addition to the loss of the French fleet, loses the use of all of the French Mediterranean naval bases, these MAS boats, plus German heavy guns, mounted above the heights of Tarifa, Spain, in the Sierra Bullones, Spanish Morocco and the International Zone in Tangier, may block the exit of her fleet via Gibraltar. A single vessel sunk crosswise in the Suez Canal would effectively block her exit by the Mediterranean's back door. Britain thus may herself lock her own fleet in the Mediterranean while the keys of its entrances may be in some other fellow's pocket. What is one of the answers to this dilemma, perhaps the final answer? May it not be Lawrence's speedboats? Fight fire with fire!

THIRTEEN years before I stood on the quay in Plymouth, when I was in Paris as a Major of the General Staff, U. S. Army, and a member of the American Delegation to the Peace Conference, I had a luncheon engagement which I never fulfilled. It was to meet Colonel Lawrence at the British Officers' Club in Paris. But a few hours before the appointed time, orders necessitated my leaving for the Near East. Although I subsequently served with General Allenby, King Feisal, Emir Nazir and a number of Lawrence's other colleagues in the Arabian-Palestine campaigns, Lawrence was to me as elusive a personage as he was to the Turks. So when in London I received a letter from Lord Allenby in Perthshire, where he was fishing, introducing me to Lawrence, I wrote the latter at once to the Royal Air Force in

Mountbatten, Devonshire, and eagerly anticipated his reply. It read as follows:

Dear Colonel Furlong—

You have been busy and are proposing to go on being busy. Meanwhile I live on quietly, thanks to the R.A.F. shield over us. My annual leave has been taken, for this year, so there is no likelihood of my reaching London until 1933. Plymouth is very much too far off for a day visit, unless the urgency is really great. Even Bournemouth is 130 miles away.

I did not know you lectured. Lots of Englishmen go to the States, or used to go there, to lecture. I am glad you turn the tables, and hope you do so profitably.

Those Pan-American aircraft are remarkable machines. I wish we in England would take flying boats or amphibians more seriously.

Yours sincerely,

T. E. Shaw.

A second letter concluded our plans, and we met for the first time on this dock at Plymouth.

Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of Great Britain, and Lawrence's friend and supporter, considered that the secret of Lawrence's stimulating ascendancy lay in his disdain for most of the prizes, pleasures and comforts of life. He was a dweller upon the mountain-tops, his pace of life faster and more intense than normal. "*He flew best and easiest in the hurricane. The fury of the Great War raised the pitch of life to the Lawrence standard. In this heroic period he found himself in perfect relation both to men and events.*" Had the war continued for a few more years, he might have marched triumphantly in '19 or '20 into Constantinople at the head of most of the tribes and races of Arabia and Asia Minor, and thus realized Napoleon's dream of conquering the East. But the bells of the Armistice rang too soon, and "*Lawrence was left once more moving alone on a different plane and at a different speed.*"

When I met him, he was a simple craftsman, stationed across the waters of Plymouth Bay on the premises of a military reservation where none could trespass. There he found peace and equi-



poise which a greater station or command would have denied him. It was there he wrote his work on the *Odyssey of Homer*, and visioned with crystal clearness the future significance of air power and speedboats in both traffic and war.

He was also able to devote, in peace, his time to aeronautics and his inventive genius to a new type of naval speedboat—which is what he meant in his letter by “thanks to the R.A.F. shield over us.”

The last paragraph in his letter to me, in which he says, “I wish we in England would take flying boats or amphibians more seriously,” attests to his foresight in military matters. Closely inter-related with aircraft was the new type of motor

speedboat, the small, swift naval war-craft upon which he was working. This, he proposed, was to operate as a supplementary arm of, and in conjunction with, aircraft. Not only the Germans, but the British, decided to use naval speedboats in the waters of the North Sea and English Channel during the World War, because those waters were particularly favorable for this type of craft. Italy a little later realized the waters of the Mediterranean were also propitious for their use, and “Presto!” the MAS boats.

And now, tardily, twenty-one years after the World War, the United States has realized that we, on this side of the Atlantic, have waters in which this kind

of boat might prove an important factor in our national defense. Last December an experimental program, including about fifty small speed-craft, some of British and some of American design, was laid down, in order that tests might be made to show which type is best suited to this country's defense problem. It is hoped that among the British boat plans was that of the Lawrence-Spurr super-craft. Twenty-three of these swift craft, twelve sub-chasers and eleven motor torpedo boats, designed for short patrol work in comparatively shallow waters, will be completed this month, and possibly even now may have joined the fleet for intensive naval trials.

These new "E" boats of improved type, capable of better than forty knots, are seventy to one hundred-and-ten feet in length. A few of them have aluminum hulls, and as far as possible, are outfitted with aluminum throughout, but most are wood-built. They are powered by gasoline engines, and are equipped with four torpedo tubes and two machine-guns. These are the lot of boats that the present Administration recently was considering selling to Britain as soon as they are off the ways.

"Suicide ships," some naval observers have dubbed our new craft, asserting that the crews aboard the tiny boats will have all the odds against them in almost any kind of sea combat. Naval authorities differ as to the efficacy and value of this mosquito-boat type in modern warfare: Italian navy authorities boast of the potential effectiveness of their large flotilla of these small speedboats, even in the event of their being used against the battle line of the British fleet. The Germans have stated that, "in view of the successes already achieved by German speedboats in the present campaign, it appears certain that motor torpedo boats will play an increasingly important rôle in operations in these waters in the future."

Italy claims to have a veritable hive full of these stinging hornets of the sea which she is itching to let loose. Germany, it is reported, now has one thousand of these speedboats ready for service, and is building more at the rate of three hundred a month. This mosquito fleet will be based on the Zuyder Zee at the mouth of the Rhine and Scheldt rivers, and at any of the captured French ports which can be effectively used.

Sneaking from their sheltered lairs, these vicious little craft will carry out the

purposes to which this type of boat is adapted, *i.e.*, preying on naval and mercantile shipping, spotting minefields and helping to keep open lanes for invasion by land forces and in the actual landing of those forces. Just how effective they will be in offenses against the battle-line of the British fleet is what causes naval authorities to disagree on their potency. But it would seem that in such half-landlocked waters as lie between Britain and the Continent, with their short distances, that Britain's best antidote is a speedboat in equal numbers, with an equivalent or superior design and greater speed. And here Lawrence of Arabia comes again into the picture.

THAT'S a fast launch you have just shot over in from Mountbatten," I commented, on our meeting.

"Yes," replied Lawrence, "she can make forty-four miles an hour." Then he added with a twinkle in his eye: "But it's an American engine, you know."

"Where would you like to lunch? You know Plymouth better than I."

"I don't know as they will let me in."

"Why not?" I asked, puzzled.

"Some of these places don't like a soldier's uniform."

"I don't believe we'll have any trouble," I countered. So, tucked away in a quiet corner in Genoni's little restaurant on High Street, I think it was, I handed him the wine-list.

"Thanks, I don't drink." I passed my cigarette-case. "I don't smoke." Then, from the appetizing list of the menu he chose a single, vegetable dish, bread and butter and no dessert. These were only symbols of the self-discipline which Lawrence so constantly practiced, and which may have helped to give him his ruddy complexion and his superb self-control.

The conversation turned to speedboats, of which Lawrence was an ardent advocate, particularly in operations in conjunction with aircraft; and it was the invention of a super-craft of this type to which he was devoting much of his time. All this was related to Britain's coastal defense and offense, and in association with the Admiralty and Winston Churchill. Notwithstanding the annoying self-effacement in Lawrence, and an alluring self-revealing in Churchill, these two men had many things in common.

Among things we discussed during the four hours or more we spent together that afternoon in Genoni's, the thing that impressed me most about this "un-

crowned King of Arabia" was the fact that, while all Araby would have followed him to the death, to his own people he was a lost leader. So, quietly, under the shield of the R.A.F., he was contributing in the development of aircraft and speedboats more than those outside his government realized. Churchill, referring to Lawrence's service and example, as a private in the Royal Air Force, during the last twelve years of his life, said: "*For this we owe him a separate debt. It was a princely gift.*"

Few know that Lawrence's genius was responsible for the most remarkable naval super-speedboat ever invented. In May, 1935, (shortly before he speeded to his death), with Mr. Edward Spurr as co-designer, he had completed and built an armed speedboat, one hundred feet long, with four torpedo tubes and other armament. This boat was virtually unsinkable, and seven engineers could easily take it across the Atlantic in suitable weather. This boat could carry nearly two hundred men, had the fabulous speed of *ninety* miles an hour, and was designed to cross the English Channel in twenty minutes. Thus, over five years ago, Britain had a type of boat that could literally sail circles around anything, in so far as known, which Germany and Italy have developed. Yet today Britain has a shortage of motor torpedo boats.

Always a great lover of speed and believer in positive action, Lawrence was afraid his government was not taking the flying ship and speedboat seriously enough. Britain's lack of aircraft already seems to have justified some of Lawrence's fear. As to that pertaining to the production of speedboats, the near future will show how far Britain has gone with both Lawrence's design and advice.

OUR country can profit by Lawrence's work, which should help us realize the importance of producing an adequate fleet of this type of craft. We are relatively immune from attack by swarms of such craft emanating from European bases, as are most European countries. But there is the possibility of an enemy operating from bases in this hemisphere. We have many semi-landlocked waters near at hand in the Bering Sea area where the Soviets have apparently established military bases on the Siberian coast, less than one hundred miles from the Aleutian chain; and if report from

Nome is true, they are now building an airfield and wireless station on bleak Diomed Island, four miles from the American side of the International Boundary, and only twenty-five miles west of the Alaskan mainland.

It is also reported that, during the past six years, the Soviet have secretly been deporting the Eskimo and other natives from the Bering Sea district and have sent tens of thousands of youthful Soviet workmen into this region. In this far northern area they have established a string of some dozen "Soviet bases of culture," which include fortresses, coast defense guns, radio stations, air fields and submarine bases. It is also reported that the Soviet navy has developed a seagoing torpedo launch carrying a crew of three, armed with one torpedo, one three-barreled hand machine-gun and a rapid-fire gun, and that they have an average speed of twenty-eight knots. The same report has it that along this little known Siberian coast, less than one hundred miles from the American owned islands in the Aleutian chain, the Soviet navy is said to have more than four hundred of these small, swift and elusive seagoing torpedo launches.

Along the coasts of Lower California there are colonies of Japanese fishermen with their steam trawlers; and even as long ago as the "Around the World Voyage," of our fleet in 1907, unusually large coal-supplies were "accidentally" found cached in Magdalena Bay. San Diego, California, is but seventy miles from the Mexican port of Todos Santos, and Yuma but sixty miles away from the head of the Gulf of California.

The entire region of the Caribbean Sea is already in the picture of our national defense because of questions arising from European possessions there, while the recent possibility of the acquisition of Iceland and Greenland by a nation who might be inimical to this country brings the Hudson Bay and Gulf of St. Lawrence areas into the defense problem also.

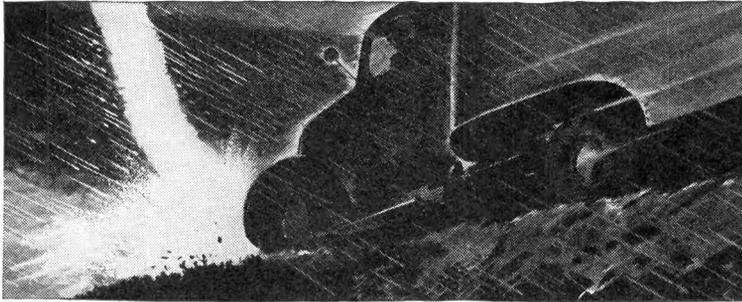
Within less than one hour's run of our country and its immediate possessions, by vessels of the Lawrence-Spurr type, are outposts of Russia, Canada, Mexico, two European possessions, two Central American countries, one South American and one Caribbean country. Fortunately, today these countries are in friendly hands, but—changes of territory and attitude occur rapidly these days.

Next month Colonel Furlong will tell of his visits to Gibraltar as a guest of the British Army, and will describe its much-discussed but little known defenses.

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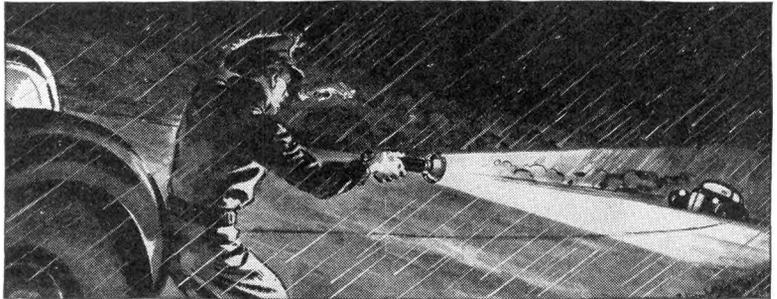


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