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THE Illustrated BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

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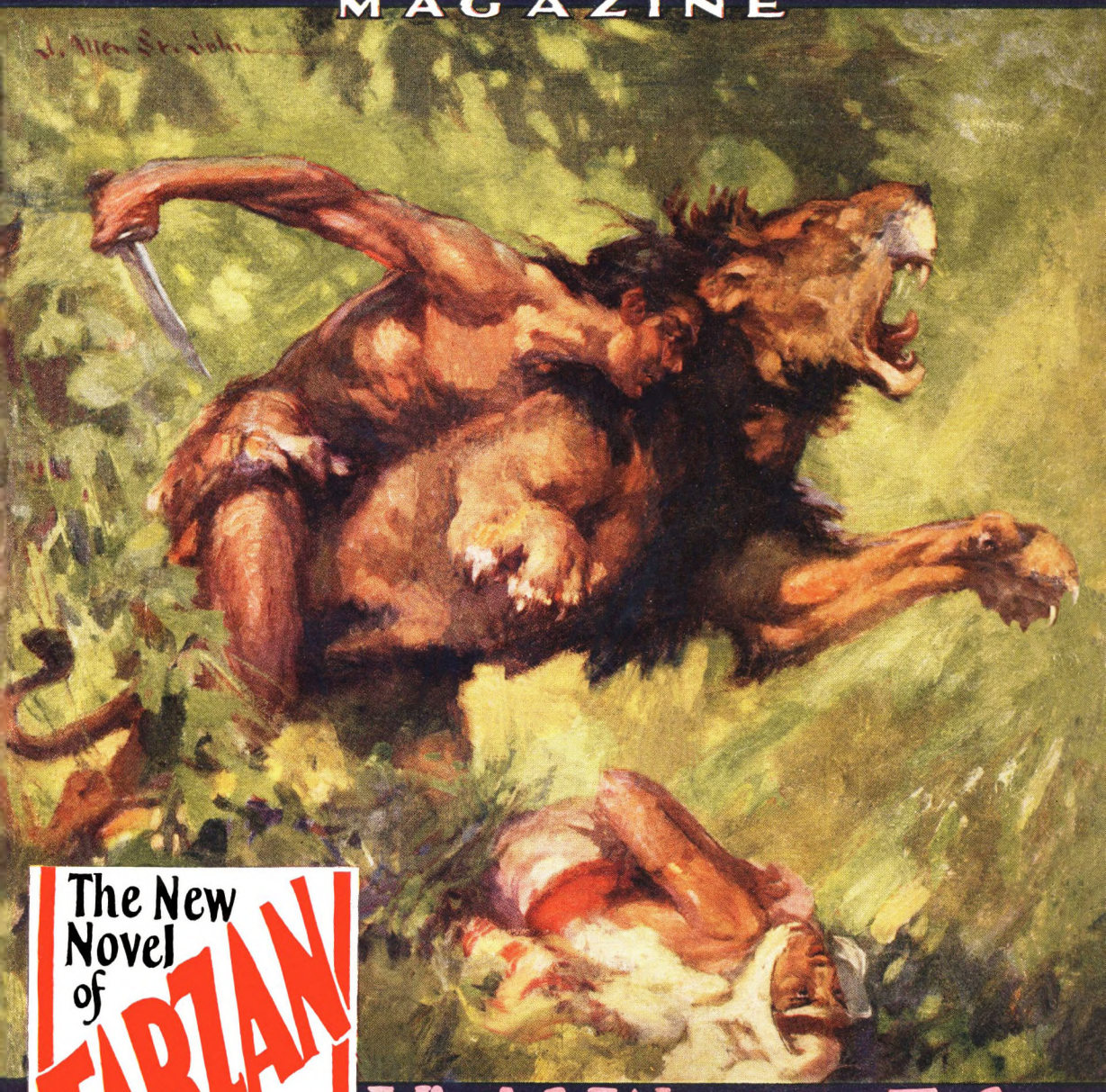

The New Novel of TARZAN by Edgar Rice Burroughs

Vivid Western Tales

Forbes Parkhill, Bertram Atkey, Clarence Herbert New, H. Bedford-Jones & Others

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The Blue Book Magazine [Vol. 46 No. 3, January 1928] ed. Edwin Balmer (The Consolidated Magazines Corporation, 25¢, 196pp, pulp, cover by J. Allen St. John)
· "The Alamo" · Austin Jewell · fp
· Rock of Ages · H. C. Wire · ss; illustrated by Paul Lehman
· Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle [Part 2 of 6; Tarzan] · Edgar Rice Burroughs · n.; illustrated by Frank Hoban
· The Shield of His People · E. S. Pladwell · ss; illustrated by William Molt
· A Flutter in Wives [Captain Cormorant] · Bertram Atkey · ss; illustrated by Frank Hoban
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· The Crag in the Dolomites [Hercule Poirot] · Agatha Christie · ss The Sketch March 19 1924; illustrated by William Molt
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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 46 JANUARY 1928 No. 3

Where Men Are Free and Equal

"IN three places in the history of mankind," an acute observer (Owen Wister, if we are not mistaken) once remarked, "have men been free and equal: in Paradise before the Fall, in the Declaration of Independence, and in the West before the barbed-wire fence came."

In recognition of this peculiar fascination which the life of the wilder West exercises, we have always devoted special attention to the fiction that reflects it; during the past year we have featured Will James' "Cowboy's Calendar;" and we propose to follow this with a series recalling specially dramatic episodes in that glorious pioneer history which is our precious heritage. The first of these, devoted to the gallant tragedy of the Alamo, appears on the following page. And throughout the magazine, in "Rock of Ages," in "The Shield of His People," in "The Lucky-Piece" and "The Box L Mystery," you will find fiction of the best sort presenting the picturesque drama of our frontiers.

The magazine does not stop there, however—is not restricted or dulled by confinement to a single theme: in "Tarzan" you will find the enchantment of life as it was lived in the primeval wilderness; in "La Belle Marquise" and "The Crag in the Dolomites" you will find detective stories of the most engaging sorts; you will likewise find in the many other stories enjoyment of a widely varying but consistently worth-while sort.

Next month, too, will bring you the return of similar attractions along with many new ones. In particular, Harold Titus' thrill-crammed novel of the lumber country, "The Tough Nut," will give you real entertainment. Mr. Titus' previous novels, "Timber," "Spindrift" and "The Last Straw," have won him a high place among American writers which this new story will assuredly confirm.

There will also be a novelette of special merit, Rollin Brown's "Forgotten Country," a splendid tale of swift adventure on a remote California ranch. And "Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle" will progress to some of the most engrossing episodes in a novel not hitherto equaled since Rider Haggard's "King Solomon's Mines."

Old favorites—Clarence Herbert New, with one of his best stories, Lemuel De Bra with a Chinatown tale, Warren Hastings Miller with a drama of the Foreign Legion in the Sahara, Culpeper Zandtt with an Oriental adventure of Dr. Galt —will be well represented also. And we have set aside a remarkable group of Real Experience stories by our readers from which to choose the five prize-winners for their fellow-readers' enjoyment. Anticipate fine things from this February issue; it will not, we believe, disappoint you.

—*The Editors.*

Drawn by Austin Jewell

"Thermopylæ Had Its Messenger of Defeat: the Alamo Had None."

ONE hundred and eighty-three men, scantily sheltered by the far-flung walls of an old Spanish mission, had fought five thousand trained soldiers during long desperate weeks.

They had chosen this hopeless battle when retreat would have been easy; they maintained their choice during many further days when retreat would still have been possible. Now they were ringed about, doomed, by an enemy who had announced that no quarter would be given—the Mexican general Santa Anna, against whose dictatorship they had revolted.

On March 6th, 1836, the five thousand at last dared to storm the old mission; David Crockett, Colonel Bowie on his sick-bed, and the other survivors met their death along with many hundreds of their enemies. They died, these men; and by their death was kindled a flame that won the freedom of a great State.

Rock of Ages

By H. C. WIRE

In this story is the one touch of nature that makes the whole world kin. You will not soon forget it.

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

OLD Jack Snow, "Tawny" Jack, riding the near wheel mule and driving his twelve-span with a jerk-line, topped a rise in the Panamint road and called a halt.

His, "Whoa thar!" brought instant response from the tired mules. They stopped with steps half-taken, and stood with heads drooping, long furry ears relaxed into dislocated angles. A swamper, perched on the high freight-wagon behind him, grabbed the brake-pole, and with a grinding of shoes the cumbersome thing settled motionless in its cloud of dust.

It was an outfit that belonged in the early '90's, though a few, like this one of Tawny Jack's, are still to be encountered beyond the railhead on the northeastern reaches of the Mojave, from Searles Station to the gold camps of the Panamint Range. The great box wagon on its six-foot wheels was fit to hold the caged lions in any circus parade. That appearance was furthered by the twelve span of animals, with red tassels hanging from each headstall, harness studded with brass rivets, and the jerk-line running from wheeler to leader through a succession of ivory rings.

Those hard-worked mules were the pride of Tawny Jack's life. No man could have given his family more care. True enough, he cursed them all day over the desert roads, but his foulest names were the most affectionate, and at night he all but tucked them into their sandy beds. When the day's haul was done, feed and water for the animals came first; then he would make his own camp.

Tawny Jack himself belonged in that earlier time, before prospectors took to prospecting in flivvers, and fleet, pneumatic-tired trucks made mule outfits almost worthless. He sat now while his team rested, shading his eyes against a lowering sun. In spite of some seventy years, his body was still as lean and straight as an Indian's. His beardless face was likewise as brown as a Mojave Piute's.

An inevitable stamp of the desert was upon his features—the seamed, leathery skin stretched over high cheek-bones and long, sharp jaw; the firm set of mouth; and unblinking gaze of blue eyes. In all, Tawny Jack's expression was hard and relentless, with no outward mark of sentiment in his make-up. Only the fierce, sympathetic care he gave his mules, showed that human emotions were still alive within him.

HE turned in his saddle and flung a gruff voice backward to the other man. " 'Bout two more miles, aint she, Tom?"

The swamper nodded, wrapped a lank leg around the brake-pole, thus relieving the strain from his arm, and pushed up the brim of his hat. He too was of the desert breed: lean, leather-faced, gray-haired.

"Two miles should make her," he answered. "The critters sure is tired."

Tawny Jack continued to stare down the road. Shadows of evening had already filled the valley flats, merging the lifeless soda bottom into a purple haze from distant cañons.

Nothing was visible down there now, but in about two miles they would come to Cache Rock. It stood halfway across the forty miles of desert, a solitary, flat-topped chunk of lava, large as a cabin. Here on each incoming trip Tawny Jack deposited three bales of hay, for no feed was to be had in the Panamints, and this served as his supply on the way out.

By leaving his bales on the rock he was certain that bands of wild burros could not get at them. They were safe there. No man would dare steal such a cache. A grim penalty of the desert saw to that.

Tawny Jack flicked his jerk-line against the sides of his mules. "Two miles, boys," he promised.

Twenty-four heads lifted slightly. Twenty-four pairs of long ears came backward. The heavy wagon had settled half a foot into the sand. Tawny Jack cast an appraising eye along the wheels. Then he took a deep, whistling breath. Twenty-four mules squatted against their collars.

"Now, damn you!" roared Tawny Jack.

In one combined heave the animals brought up hard into their chains, pulled with bellies close to the ground, and the great wagon came lumbering on.

AN hour later the white sides of Cache Rock appeared out of the night. Full darkness had come, blotting out all save the lava chunk. It was the swamper Tom, having an advantage from his higher perch, who first gave a muttered oath.

Tawny Jack looked up at him. "What the hell?" he demanded.

"Aint certain yet," said Tom. "Looks like—no—yep, sure as I'm a horned owl! Jack, the feed's gone!"

Tawny Jack squinted ahead. His team approached closer to the rock. He stared again, and for once he was speechless. Oaths choked in his throat. Red, blazing fury shot before his eyes.

When at last he found his voice, it was not to roar his rage. His anger was never displayed so cheaply. Instead, it settled upon him in deliberate movements and brought a deadly calm into his speech.

Coming abreast of the rock, he gave a short pull on his jerk-line, saying: "Whoa, boys." The outfit halted. Then he swung down from his mule and began a slow circuit around the lava chunk. His eyes were on the ground as he walked, searching among the countless tracks of wild burros.

Suddenly he stopped, bent over and called: "Come here, Tom."

The swamper secured his brake-pole, then leaped down to join Tawny Jack. "Found somethin'?"

Jack pointed to the sand. "Them's boot-marks. Been made this afternoon." He straightened up and followed along the footprints, with Tom close behind.

In a short distance there appeared the two ribbons left by wagon-wheels. The footprints multiplied, as if two or more men had stood by the wagon, struggling with some weight. Tawny Jack bent down again, drew his fingers over the sand, and held up a fist full of hay.

"That settles it!" he said. "I reckon they've got two or three hours' start, but they'll be camped down the road."

"What are you aimin' to do?" Tom asked.

Tawny Jack turned savagely, speaking as only one partner can speak to another. "You ask the damnedest questions!"

Having unburdened himself that much, he strode back to the freight-wagon, jerked a rifle from the grub box swung underneath, then mounted his mule. Tom climbed up to his seat.

Ahead, the two lead animals turned to look back inquiringly. Here was the stopping-place. They knew it.

"You poor dumb critters," said Tawny Jack. "I know how you feel. You've done your twenty miles, and now some low-down thievin' skunk has run off with your grub. But he haint gone far—and sure as hell, he wont go no farther!"

He flicked his jerk-line. The outfit moved on. Mules' feet made but little noise in the sand. Only an occasional groan of wagon-wheel told of the caravan lumbering down through the night.

Tawny Jack shifted in his saddle and looked up at the other man. "Reckon they've camped at Dry Tank. We'll stop just this side of there and go in afoot."

He turned away then, and for a time sat glowering with vengeful thoughts. Five minutes ago, if a man had said his cache was robbed, he would have called him a liar. In his time he had seen just two men who had stolen desert feed. They were both hanging from a pole between two freight-wagons. That had happened years ago when you might expect anything. But now—

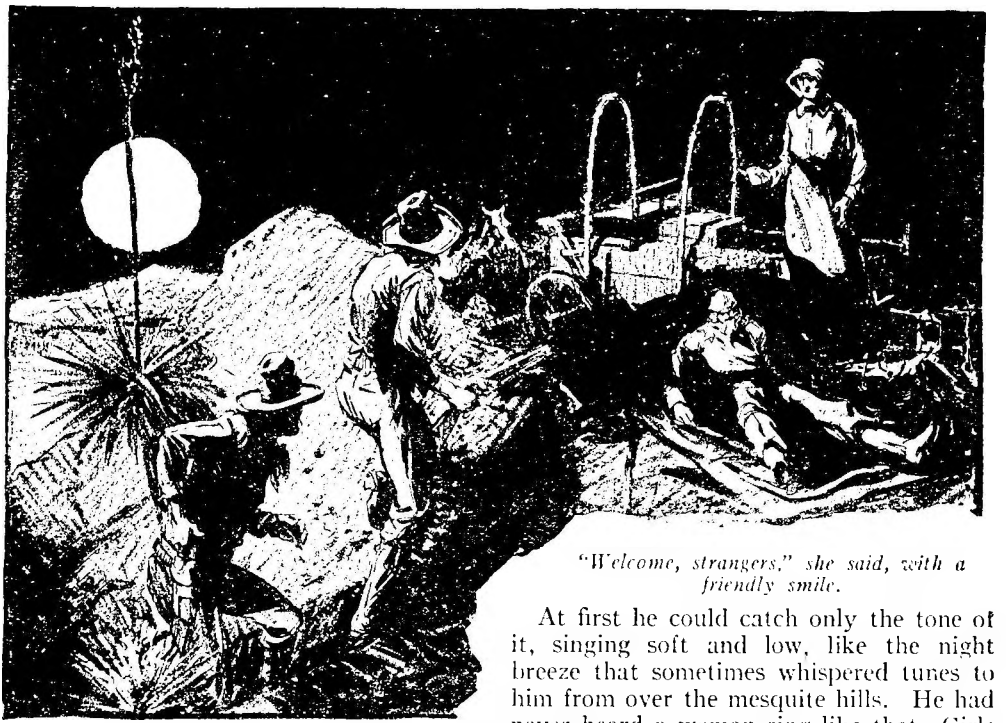
"It's plumb onthinkable," he muttered, adding grimly as a surge of rage swept over him, "It sure aint going to happen twice!"

"Say, Jack," Tom called down from his perch, "there's a light up ahead. Campfire, I reckon."

Immediately Tawny Jack halted his team. "Aint as far as Dry Tank?"

"No. This side of it."

Jack scowled into the dark. "That's



"Welcome, strangers," she said, with a friendly smile.

funny. Why didn't they go on? Camped near the road, Tom?"

"Just off the right."

"Then we'll walk onto 'em from here." Tawny Jack swung to the ground, went to his lead mules and unhooked their chains, then brought them back to one wheel of the wagon. He tied these and let the others stand hooked. Tom clamped the brake-pole and thus the freighter stood anchored in the middle of a desert ocean.

"NOW, then," Tawny Jack offered as they started on, "we'll keep together and go quiet. I'll do the talkin' if there's any to be did. If they hear us first, we'll maybe have to go in a-shootin'. Don't give a damn who it is!"

The campfire was not far ahead. The two men walked swiftly, Tawny Jack clutching his rifle, Tom with one hand near an old six-shooter in his belt. They were still too far off to see how many figures were in camp, when both came to a sudden halt.

Jack uttered the first sound. He started to say, "For God's sake!" but couldn't, somehow, and merely expelled his breath. He listened, and knew his ears were tricking him. The heat had done it. He was locoed—hearing things that weren't. Yet he was aware that Tom was also standing spellbound. Then it must be real, this voice, a woman singing here on the desert!

At first he could catch only the tone of it, singing soft and low, like the night breeze that sometimes whispered tunes to him from over the mesquite hills. He had never heard a woman sing like that. Girls in the dance-halls whined and wailed. This one was happy.

Then he caught the words: *"Rock of ages, cleft for me—"*

Beside him, Tom voiced the one expression that could possibly spring from his shocked senses. "Aw, hell!"

Tawny Jack said nothing. In silence they moved forward until they stood close to the outer limit of firelight. There they paused. A slight crunch from their boots had suddenly ended the woman's song, and she stood motionless, facing them.

She was not alone. There was a man. Jack saw that instantly; then his glance went to the camp's animals, for upon the desert a man is known by the team he drives. In one swift survey Tawny Jack knew that here was no person of his own kind.

Two horses, starved to the point of unbelievable gauntness, stood tied to the tongue of a light spring wagon. Behind them was a cow, or rather the standing skeleton of one. In his quick judgment they must have been two weeks without enough feed. But they had plenty of it now—three bales of hay, one freshly opened.

HE saw all that in an instant before anyone spoke. Then he looked at the woman. She had advanced a step toward him, not retreated, and now looked across

Down the moonlit road from the Panamints rolled a twelve-span freight outfit.

the intervening twenty paces of firelight with a friendly welcoming smile.

His own age meant nothing to Tawny Jack, but he stood in amazement before a woman who must be at least seventy years old. She was very small. She wore a blue dress. Aside from those two things, he knew only that she stood unafraid in front of himself and Tom, and smiled, and then spoke in a voice that still seemed to have a song in it.

"Welcome, strangers," she said.

Jack looked at his partner.

Before Tawny Jack could speak, the little woman began again, talking as if she held some great piece of news that must be told immediately.

"We haven't much to offer you for supper. Until this afternoon it looked as if we were just going to die right here on the desert. You see, we're new. I guess you'd call us greenhorns. We rode from Vermont on a train as far as Nevada, then bought this wagon and came west. We're looking for farm land."

She paused and looked down upon a man who had remained propped against a bed roll. Tenderness filled her whole expression, and when he smiled, she put a hand reassuringly on his shoulder. He was thin and sick-looking, with the flesh of his face showing as white as his long beard.

"Our name is Wilton," the woman continued, "and as I was telling you, this afternoon it looked like we would die here on the desert, our horses were that weak from want of food. Then what do you think happened?

"Providence led us straight to a rock, and on top of it were three bales of hay and a keg of water! They couldn't have got there any other way except by His goodness. That's what I told my husband, and so here we are, all safe."

"Prov—" Tom snorted, but Tawny Jack silenced him with a thrust of his elbow. The woman had turned to throw a sage root on the fire.

Jack lowered his voice. "You shut up a minute! I'm runnin' this. Whose water was that on the rock? We didn't leave no keg."

Tom's eyes widened with a new interest. "That's right, we didn't. Must belong to McCannel. I saw old Mac drunk as usual and loadin' ore at Ballarat when we came through."

TAWNY JACK scowled. McCannel had a hard reputation. He'd probably come along tonight. A moment ago Tawny Jack had entered this camp heated for blood. He stood now puzzled and undecided. He could have handled men. But this little old lady, singing out here—

"Hell!" he muttered.

"What's that?" Tom asked.

"I said there's our feed, and we ought to get it. We've got twenty miles to the next station. Are we a couple of fools?" Tawny Jack clamped his jaws savagely. "Come on," he said.

"It's these critters I'm thinkin' about," said Tawny Jack.

The woman turned from her fire at the sound of his footsteps.

"You'll have supper?" she offered, then added laughingly: "Cornbread and salt pork—it's what we've had for a month; I guess you can stand it one meal!"

Tawny Jack halted. "Say now," he began, "look here—" A swift sidelong glance from Tom checked his words. The swamper's head gave a short nod backward. It was a barely perceptible movement, yet one full of meaning—the danger signal—some one in the brush behind!

The next instant a bare-headed, gigantic figure of a man lunged into the opposite edge of firelight, a stream of the desert's roughest oaths pouring from his snarling lips.

Tawny Jack nudged his partner. "Go shut him up."

Tom walked toward the other man, saying quietly: "Easy, Mac—there's a woman in camp."

"Woman!" McCannel jeered. "So you and that other—" Suddenly he whirled. Without warning his heavy fist shot up to Tom's jaw, and the swamper fell. In the same movement McCannel jerked out a revolver and fired beyond the motionless heap.

Across the firelight, Tawny Jack crumpled face-down. A roar of drunken triumph burst from the giant's throat. He lurched into camp, his gun trained on the woman and her man.

"You next!" he snarled. "I'll teach you somethin'. Throw your stuff out of that wagon!"

His shifting eyes dropped to Tawny Jack, lying rigid across a rifle. McCannel walked to him, stooped and reached to take the gun. Instantly his hand was caught in a grip that all but broke the wrist-bone, and forthwith he was jerked downward on his face—a hob-nailed boot planted at the back of his neck.

Tawny Jack was standing now. "Pretty good shot," he scoffed, "but not good enough!" He recovered McCannel's pistol, ordering: "Get up, you fool. If you've killed my partner—"

But Tom was not at all dead. A little dazed, he stood up and walked into the light. Tawny Jack surveyed him, saw he was unhurt, and again faced his captive.

"I'm keepin' your gun till you sober up," he growled. "Now climb aboard your wagon and head down the road. If you so much as look back at this camp—" He wagged the rifle meaningly. "Get out!"

McCannel obeyed. Tawny Jack and Tom walked behind him.

"Here," the woman called after them, "stay and tell us about this."

Tawny Jack turned suddenly. "That's right, ma'am, I plumb forgot. This here's just an argument. Don't you worry none. Now you just turn off this road at Trona and head for the San Joaquin Valley. Better not go on to Searles Station if you're lookin' for farms. Better not stay in this part of the country at all. Aint no farms here. Not any!"

DOWN the moonlit road from the Panamints rolled a twelve-span freight outfit. Tawny Jack, riding the near wheel mule, turned a solemn eye backward to his swamper. "It's these critters I'm thinkin' about."

There was a long time of silence, broken only as twenty-four mules padded on through the sand.

"You aint!" said Tom at last. "Neither am I."

"Well, then," agreed Tawny Jack, "maybe not. There aint many women a-singin' here on the desert."

TARZAN, Lord of the Jungle

By

EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

This, the most captivating romance of our times, here continues with ever-mounting interest through a swift succession of daringly imagined wilderness episodes.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

The Story So Far:

DEEP in the African forest Tantor the elephant dozed in the shade; and upon his great friendly back likewise dozed that strange being Tarzan —English boy who by curious chance had been brought up by the giant apes of Africa, had renounced civilization and become lord of the jungle.

Deadly peril threatened Tarzan: for journeying toward the Abyssinian hinterland came the Arab sheik Ibn Jad, seeking to loot a rumored treasure city: and a hunting party from the camp of the Arab raider spied Tantor lolling in the shade. The Arab Fahd fired at Tantor—and missed; but the startled elephant plunged off headlong through the forest; and Tarzan, knocked senseless to the ground by an overhanging limb, was made captive by the Arabs.

Brought bound into the presence of the Sheik Ibn Jad, Tarzan asked by what right the Arab invaded this domain of his own lordship, and demanded his immediate release. The Sheik insisted that he was not a slave-raider as Tarzan supposed, but a peaceful trader; and he offered to release Tarzan in exchange for permission to pursue his journey unmolested by the forest folk over whom Tarzan ruled. The jungle lord declined, and was placed in a tent for the night to think it over.

The Arabs, however, decided to murder him, and, claiming he had escaped, to hide the body. Indeed, Tollog, the Sheik's brother, had already attacked the captive with a knife, when Tantor, returning, snatched the tent from over the unequal combat, hurled Tollog into the jungle, and made off with Tarzan.

The elephant, however, was unable to untie the thongs which bound his friend, and only the arrival of Tarzan's old associates the great apes enabled him to gain complete freedom—and to deal with a new menace. For two American hunters, Blake and Stimbol, had arrived with their safari of negro porters. Because of Stimbol's brutality to the blacks, the two had quarreled, and had decided next day to divide the safari and go their separate ways, Blake with his camera and Stimbol with his wanton rifle. . . . . A rifle-shot aroused Tarzan: swinging swiftly through the jungle from bough to bough, he found Stimbol pursuing a gorilla which, even as he arrived, was attacked also by a giant python.

Tarzan at once leaped to the rescue of the gorilla—first by killing the python with his knife and then by ordering Stimbol to halt.

The American declined to recognize Tarzan's authority, but his negro porters tried to make him understand that Tarzan was indeed lord of the jungle. And Tarzan further exercised his lordship by ordering Stimbol back to the coast and granting Blake permission to continue making camera studies of the wilderness folk. He would return in the morning, he promised, and direct the division of the safari. *(The story continues in detail:)*

of
"I am Tarzan of the Apes," he said. "Those of you who wish to live will do as Tarzan commands."

CHAPTER VI

Ara the Lightning

BEFORE dawn the camp was astir and by the appointed hour the packs were made and all was in readiness. The porters loitered, awaiting the word that would start the safari upon its eastward journey toward the coast. Blake and Stimbol smoked in silence. The foliage of a near-by tree moved to the swaying of a branch, and Tarzan of the Apes dropped lightly into the camp. Exclamations of surprise broke from the lips of the negroes —surprise clearly tinged with terror. The ape-man turned toward them and addressed them in their own dialect.

"I am Tarzan of the Apes," he said. "Lord of the Jungle. You have brought white men into my country to kill my people. I am displeased. Those of you who wish to live to return to your villages and your families will listen well and do as Tarzan commands.

"You,"—he pointed at the chief headman—"shall accompany the younger white man whom I will permit to make pictures in my country where and when he will. Select half the men of the safari to accompany the young *bwana*.

"And you," he addressed another headman, "take those men that remain and escort the older *bwana* to the rail-head in the most direct route and without delay. He is not permitted to hunt and there will be no killing except for food or in self-defense. Do not fail me. Remember always that Tarzan watches and that Tarzan never forgets."

He turned then to the white men. "Blake," he said, "the arrangements are made. You may leave when you please, with your own safari, and go where you please. The question of hunting is left to your own discretion—you are the guest of Tarzan."

"And you," he addressed Stimbol, "will be taken directly out of the country by the shortest route. You will be permitted to carry firearms for use in self-defense. If you abuse this permission they will be taken away from you. Do not hunt, even for food—your head-man will attend to that."

"Now just hold your horses!" blustered Stimbol. "If you think I'm going to put up with any such high-handed interference with my rights as an American citizen you're very much mistaken. Why, I could buy and sell you and your damned jungle

forty times and not know that I'd spent a cent. For God's sake, Blake, tell this poor fool who I am before he gets himself into a lot of trouble."

Tarzan turned to the head-man he had selected for Stimbol. "You may up-load and march," he said. "If this white man does not follow you, leave him behind. Take good care of him if he obeys me and deliver him safely at the rail-head. Obey his orders if they do not conflict with those that I have given you. Go!"

A MOMENT later Stimbol's safari was preparing to depart and, at Tarzan's request, Blake's also was moving out of camp. Stimbol swore and threatened, but his men, sullenly ignoring him, filed off into the jungle toward the east. Tarzan had departed, swinging into the trees and disappearing among the foliage, and at last Stimbol stood alone in the deserted camp.

Thwarted, humiliated, almost frothing with rage he ran after his men, screaming commands and threats that were ignored. Later in the day, sullen and silent, he marched near the head of the long file of porters and askari, convinced at last that the power of the ape-man was greater than his, but in his heart burned resentment and in his mind rioted plans for vengeance —plans that he knew were futile.

Tarzan, wishing to assure himself that his instructions were being carried out, had swung far ahead and was waiting in the crotch of a tree that overhung the trail along which Stimbol must pass. In the distance he could hear the sounds that arose from the marching safari. Along the trail from the opposite direction something was approaching. The ape-man could not see it, but he knew what it was. Above the tree-tops black clouds rolled low, but no air stirred in the jungle.

Along the trail came a great, shaggy, black man-thing. Tarzan of the Apes hailed it as it came in sight of his arboreal perch.

"Bolgani!" he called in low tones.

The gorilla stopped. He stood erect upon his hind feet and looked about.

"I am Tarzan," said the ape-man.

Bolgani grunted. "I am Bolgani," he replied.

"The Tarmangani comes," warned Tarzan.

"I kill!" growled Bolgani.

"Let the Tarmangani pass," said Tarzan. "He and his people have many thunder-sticks. I have sent this Tarmangani out of the jungle. Let him pass. Go a little way from the trail—the stupid Gomangani and the Tarmangani, who is stupider, will pass by without knowing that Tarzan and Bolgani are near."

FROM the darkening sky distant thunder boomed and the two beasts looked upward toward the broad field of Nature's powers, more savage and destructive than their own.

"Pand the thunder hunts in the sky," remarked the ape-man.

"Hunts for Usha the wind," said Bolgani.

"Presently we shall hear Usha fleeing through the trees to escape." Tarzan viewed the lowering, black clouds. "Even Kudu the sun fears Pand, hiding his face when Pand hunts."

Ara the lightning shot through the sky. To the two beasts it was a bolt from Pand's bow, and the great drops of rain that commenced to fall shortly after was Meeta, the blood of Usha the wind, pouring from many a wound.

The jungle bent to a great pressure, but as yet there was no other noise than the rolling thunder. The trees whipped back and Usha tore through the forest. The darkness increased. The rain fell in great masses. Leaves and branches hurtled swiftly through the air; trees crashed amongst their fellows. With deafening roars the elements unleashed their pent anger. The beasts cowered beneath the one awe-inspiring power that they acknowledged as supreme.

Tarzan crouched in the crotch of a great tree with his shoulders arched against the beating rain. Just off the trail Bolgani squatted in drenched and bedraggled misery. They waited. There was nothing else that they could do.

Above them the storm broke again with maniacal fury. The thunder crashed with deafening reverberations. There was a blinding flash of light and the branch upon which Tarzan squatted sagged and hurtled to the trail beneath.

Stunned, the ape-man lay where he had fallen, the great branch partially across his body.

THE storm departed as quickly as it had come. Kudu the sun burst through the clouds. Bolgani, dejected and still

terrified, remained where he had squatted, motionless and silent. Bolgani had no desire to attract the attention of Pand the thunder.

Soaked with water, cold, furious, Stimbol slopped along the slippery, muddy trail. He did not know that his safari was some little distance behind him, for he had forged ahead during the storm while they had taken refuge beneath the trees.

At a turn in the trail he came suddenly upon a fallen branch that blocked the way. At first he did not see the body of the man lying beneath it, but when he did he recognized it instantly and a new hope sprang to life within his breast. With Tarzan dead he would be free to do as he pleased; but was the ape-man dead?

Stimbol ran a few steps, and, kneeling, placed an ear to the breast of the prostrate figure. An expression of disappointment crossed his face—Tarzan was not dead. Then the expression upon Stimbol's face changed—a cunning look came into his eyes as he glanced back down the trail. His men were not in sight! He looked quickly about him. He was alone with the unconscious author of his humiliation!

He thought he was alone. He did not see the shaggy figure that had silently arisen as the sound of Stimbol's approach had come to its sensitive ears and was now peering at him through the foliage—peering at him and at the silent figure of the ape-man.

Stimbol drew his hunting knife from its scabbard. He could slip its point into the wild man's heart and run back down the trail. His men would find him waiting for them. Later they would come upon the dead Tarzan, but they would not guess how he had met his end.

With a curse Stimbol turned—to look into the hideous face of Bolgani.

The ape-man moved—consciousness was returning. Stimbol realized that he must act quickly and at the same instant a great hairy arm reached out through the foliage and a mighty hand closed upon his shoulder. With a screaming curse he turned to look into the hideous face of Bolgani.

Frenziedly he struck at the shaggy breast of his antagonist with his hunting knife, but the puny weapon was torn from his grasp and hurled into the bushes.

The great yellow fangs were bared against Stimbol's throat even as Tarzan opened his eyes.

"Kreeg-ah!" cried the ape-man sharply, in warning.

Bolgani paused and looked at his fellow beast.

"Let him go," said Tarzan.

"The Tarmangani would have killed Tarzan," explained the gorilla. "Bolgani stopped him. Bolgani kill!" He growled horribly.

"No!" snapped Tarzan. "Free the Tarmangani!"

The gorilla released his grasp upon Stimbol just as the first of the hunter's men came in sight of them and as Bolgani saw the blacks and how numerous they were, his nervousness and irritability increased.

"Take to the jungle, Bolgani," said Tarzan. "Tarzan will take care of this Tarmangani and the Gomangani."

With a parting growl the gorilla merged with the foliage and the shadows of the jungle as Tarzan of the Apes faced Stimbol and his boys.

"You had a close call then, Stimbol," said the ape-man. "It is fortunate for you that you didn't succeed in killing me. I was here for two reasons. One was to see that you obeyed my instructions and the other to protect you from your men. I did not like the way they eyed you in camp this morning. It would not be a difficult thing to lose you in the jungle, you know, and that would put a period to you as surely as poison or a knife. I felt a certain responsibility for you because you are a white man, but you have just now released me from whatever obligation racial ties may have influenced me to acknowledge.

"I shall not kill you, Stimbol, as you deserve; but from now on you may reach the coast on your own and you will doubtless discover that one cannot make too many friends in the jungle or afford a single unnecessary enemy." He wheeled upon Stimbol's black boys. "Tarzan of the Apes goes his way. You will not see him again, perhaps. Do your duty by this white man as long as he obeys the word of Tarzan, *but see that he does not hunt!"*

With this final admonition the ape-man swung into the lower branches of the surrounding trees and was gone.

WHEN Stimbol, after repeatedly questioning his men, discovered that Tarzan had practically assured them that they would see no more of him he regained much of his former assurance and egotistical bluster. Once more he was the leader of men, shouting at the blacks in a loud tone, cursing them, ridiculing them. He thought that it impressed them with his greatness. He believed that they were simple people whom he could deceive into thinking that he was not afraid of Tarzan, and by flaunting Tarzan's commands win their respect. Now that Tarzan had promised not to return Stimbol felt safer in ignoring his wishes and so it befell that just before they reached a camping-ground Stimbol came upon an antelope and without an instant's hesitation fired and killed it.

It was a sullen camp that Stimbol made that night. The men gathered in groups and whispered. "He has shot an antelope and Tarzan will be angry with us," said one.

"He will punish us," said a head-man fearfully.

"The *bwana* is a bad man," said another. "I wish he was dead."

"We may not kill him. Tarzan has said that."

"If we leave him in the jungle he will die."

"Tarzan told us to do our duty."

"He said to do it as long as the bad *bwana* obeyed the commands of Tarzan."

"He has disobeyed them!"

"Then we may leave him."

Stimbol, exhausted by the long march, slept like a log. When he awoke the sun was high. He shouted for his boy. There was no response. Again he shouted and louder, adding an oath. No one came. There was no sound in camp.

"Those lazy darkies!" he grumbled. "They'll step a little livelier when I get out there."

HE arose and dressed, but as he was dressing the silence of the camp came to impress him as something almost menacing, so that he hastened to be through and out of the tent. As he stepped into the open the truth was revealed at almost the first quick glance about. Not a human being was in sight and all but one of the packs containing provisions were gone. He had been deserted in the heart of Africa!

His first impulse was to seize his rifle and start after the blacks, but second thought impressed him with the danger

of such procedure and convinced him that the last thing he should now do was to place himself again in the power of these men who had once demonstrated that they felt no compunction in abandoning him to almost certain death. If they wanted to be rid of him they could easily find even a quicker means if he returned and forced himself upon them again.

There was but a single alternative and that was to find Blake and remain with him. He knew that Blake would not abandon him to death in the jungle.

The blacks had not left him without provisions, nor had they taken his rifle or ammunition, but the difficulty that now confronted Stimbol was largely in the matter of transportation for his food. There was plenty of it to last many days, but he knew that he could not carry it through the jungle together with his rifle and ammunition. To remain where the food was would be equally futile. Blake was returning to the coast by another route; the ape-man had said that he would not follow Stimbol's safari further; it might be years, therefore, before another human being chanced along this little used game trail.

Stimbol clawed his way to the branches of the tree, where he clung, weak and panting.

He knew that he and Blake were now separated by about two marches and if he traveled light and Blake did not march too rapidly he might hope to overtake him inside a week. Perhaps Blake would find good camera-hunting soon and make a permanent camp. In that case Stimbol would find him even more quickly.

He felt better when he had definitely decided upon a plan of action, and after a good breakfast he made up a small pack of provisions,—enough to last him a week,—filled his belts and pockets with ammunition, and started off along the back trail.

It was easy going, for the trail of the day before was plain and this was the

third time that Stimbol had been over it, so he had no difficulty in reaching the camp at which he and Blake had parted company.

As he entered the little clearing early in the afternoon he determined to keep on and cover as much ground on Blake's trail as he could before dark, but for a few minutes he would rest. As he sat down with his back against the bole of a tree he did not notice a movement of the tops of a clump of jungle grasses a few yards distant, and if he had he would doubtless have attached no importance to the matter.

Finishing a cigarette Stimbol arose, rearranged his pack and started off in the direction Blake's men had taken early the preceding morning; but he had covered but a rod or two when he was brought to a sudden halt by an ominous growl that arose from a little clump of jungle grasses close in front of him. Almost simultaneously the fringing grasses parted and there appeared in the opening the head of a great black-maned lion.

WITH a scream of fear, Stimbol dropped his pack, threw aside his rifle and started on a run for the tree beneath which he had been sitting. The lion, itself somewhat surprised, stood for an instant watching him and then started in pursuit at an easy lope.

Stimbol, casting an affrighted glance rearward, was horrified—the lion seemed so close and the tree so far away. If distance lends enchantment to the view proximity may also at times have its advantages. In this instance it served to accelerate the speed of the fleeing man to a most surprising degree and though he was no longer young he clawed his way to the lower branches of the tree with speed, if not with grace, that would have done justice to a trained athlete.

Nor was he an instant too speedy. Numa's raking talons touched his boot and sent him swarming up among the higher branches, where he clung weak and panting looking down into the snarling visage of the carnivore.

For a moment Numa growled up at him and then, with a coughing grunt, turned away and strode majestically in the direction of the clump of grasses from which he had emerged. He stopped to sniff at the pack of provisions Stimbol had discarded and, evidently piqued by the man scent clinging to it, cuffed at it angrily.

The pack rolled to one side and Numa stepped back, eying it warily, then, with a growl, he leaped upon it and commenced to maul the insensate thing, ripping and tearing until its contents were scattered about upon the ground. He bit into tins and boxes until scarcely an article remained intact, while Stimbol crouched in the tree and watched the destruction of his provisions, utterly helpless to interfere.

A dozen times he cursed himself for having thrown away his rifle and even more frequently he vowed vengeance. He consoled himself, however, with the realization that Blake could not be far away and that with Blake there were ample provisions which could be augmented by trading and hunting. When the lion left he would descend and follow Blake's trail.

NUMA, tired of the contents of the pack, resumed his way toward the long grass, but again his attention was distracted—this time by the thunderstick of the Tarmangani. The lion smelled of the discarded rifle, pawed it and finally picked it up between his jaws. Stimbol looked on, horrified. What if the beast damaged the weapon? He would be left without means for defense or for obtaining food!

"Drop it!" shouted Stimbol. "Drop it!"

Numa, ignoring the ravings of the despised man-thing, strode into his lair, carrying the rifle with him.

That afternoon and night spelled an eternity of terror for Wilbur Stimbol. While daylight lasted the lion remained in the near-by patch of grass effectually deterring the unhappy man from continuing his search for Blake's camp—and after night fell no urge whatever could have induced Stimbol to descend to the paralyzing terrors of the jungle night even had he known that the lion had departed and no sounds had apprised him of the near presence of danger; but sounds did apprise him. From shortly after dark until nearly dawn a perfect bedlam of howls, and growls and coughs and grunts and barks arose from directly beneath him as if there had been held a convention of all the horrid beasts of the jungle at the foot of the tree that seemed at best an extremely insecure sanctuary.

When morning came the jungle lay silent and peaceful about him and only torn canvas and empty tins bore mute evidence to the feast of the hyenas that had passed into jungle history. Numa had departed leaving the remains of the kill upon which he had lain as the *pièce de résistance* of the hyenian banquet for which Stimbol's pack had furnished him the *hors d'œuvres*.

Stimbol, trembling, descended. Through the jungle, wild-eyed, startled by every sound, scurried a pitiful figure of broken, terror-stricken old age. Few could have recognized in it Wilbur Stimbol of Stimbol & Company, Brokers, New York!

CHAPTER VII

The Cross

THE storm that had overtaken Stimbol's safari wrought even greater havoc with the plans of Jim Blake, altering in the instant of a single blinding flash of lightning the course of his entire life.

Accompanied by a single black, who carried his camera and an extra rifle, Blake had struck out from the direct route of his safari in search of lion pictures, there being every indication that the great carnivores might be found in abundance in the district through which they were passing.

It was his intention to parallel the route of his main body and rejoin it in camp in the afternoon. The boy who accompanied him was intelligent and resourceful, the direction and speed of the marching safari were mutually agreed upon and the responsibility for bringing Blake into camp safely was left entirely to the negro. Having every confidence in the boy, Blake gave no heed to either time or direction, devoting all his energies to the fascinating occupation of searching for photographic studies.

Shortly after leaving the safari Blake and his companion encountered a herd of seven or eight lions which included a magnificent old male, an old lioness and five or six young, ranging from half to full grown.

At sight of Blake and his companion the lions took off leisurely through rather open forest and the men followed, awaiting patiently the happy coincidence of time, light and grouping that would give the white man such a picture as he desired.

In the mind of the black man was pictured the route of the safari and its relation to the meanderings of the quarry. He knew how far and in what directions he and his companion were being led from their destination. To have returned to the trail of the safari would have been a simple matter to him, but Blake, depending entirely upon the black, gave no heed either to time or direction.

FOR two hours they clung doggedly to the spoor, encouraged by occasional glimpses of now one, now several members of the regal group, but never was the opportunity afforded for a successful shot.

Then the sky became suddenly overcast by black clouds and a few moments later the storm broke in all the terrific fury that only an equatorial storm can achieve, and an instant later amidst the deafening roar of thunder and a blinding flash of lightning utter disaster engulfed James Hunter Blake.

How long he lay, stunned by the shock of the bolt that had struck but a few feet from him, he did not know. When he opened his eyes the storm had passed and the sun was shining brightly through the leafy canopy of the forest. Still dazed, uncomprehending the cause or extent of the catastrophe, he raised himself slowly upon an elbow and looked about him.

One of the first sights that met his eyes aided materially in the rapid recovery of his senses. Less than a hundred feet from him there stood a group of lions, seven of them, solemnly regarding him.

The characteristics of individual lions differ as greatly from those of their fellows as do the characteristics of individuals of the human race and, even as a human being, a lion may have his moods as well as his personal idiosyncrasies.

These lions that gravely inspected the man-thing had been spared any considerable experience of the human species; they had seen but few men; they had never been hunted; they were well fed; Blake had done nothing greatly to upset their easily irritated nervous systems. Fortunately for him, they were just now merely curious.

But Blake did not know all this. He knew only that seven lions were standing

within a hundred feet of him, that they were not in a cage and that while he had pursued them to obtain photographs the thing that he most desired at the moment was not his camera but his rifle.

Stealthily, that he might not annoy them, he looked about him for the weapon. To his consternation it was nowhere in sight, nor was his gun-bearer with the extra rifle. Where could the boy be? Doubtless, frightened by the lions, he had decamped. Twenty feet away was a most inviting tree. Blake wondered if the lions would charge the moment that he rose to his feet. He tried to remember all that he had heard about lions and he did recall one fact that applies with almost axiomatic verity to all dangerous animals—if you run from them they will pursue you. To reach the tree it would be necessary to walk almost directly toward the lions.

Blake was in a quandary; then one of the younger lions moved a few steps nearer! That settled the matter as far as Blake was concerned, for the closer the lions came, the shorter his chance of gaining the tree ahead of them in the event that they chose to prevent it.

In the midst of a tremendous forest, entirely surrounded by trees, Nature had chosen to strike him down almost in the center of a natural clearing. There was a good tree a hundred feet away and on the opposite side of the clearing from the lions. Blake stole a longing glance at it and then achieved some rapid mental calculations. If he ran for the further tree the lions would have to cover two hundred feet while he was covering one hundred, while if he chose the nearer tree, they must come eighty feet while he was going twenty. There seemed, therefore, no doubt as to the greater desirability of the nearer tree which ruled favorite by odds of two to one. Against it, however, loomed the mental hazard that running straight into the face of seven lions involved.

JIM BLAKE was sincerely, genuinely and honestly scared; but unless the lions were psychoanalysts they would never have dreamed the truth as he started nonchalantly and slowly toward them—and the tree. The most difficult feat that he had ever accomplished lay in making his legs behave themselves. They wanted to run. So did his feet and his heart and his brain. Only his will held them in leash.

Those were tense moments for Jim Blake—the first half dozen steps he took with seven great lions watching his approach. He saw that they were becoming nervous. The lioness moved uneasily. The old male growled. A younger male, he who had started forward, lashed his sides with his tail, flattened his head, bared his fangs and came stealthily to meet the man.

Blake was almost at the tree when something happened—he never knew what the cause, but inexplicably the lioness turned and bounded away, voicing a low whine, and following closely after her went the other six.

The man leaned against the bole of the tree and fanned himself with his helmet. "Whew!" he breathed, "I hope the next lion I see is in the Central Park Zoo!"

BUT even lions were forgotten in the developments that the next few moments revealed after repeated shouts for the black boy had brought no response and Blake had determined that he must set out in search of him. Nor did he have far to go. On the back track, just inside the clearing, Blake found a few remnants of charred flesh and a blackened and half molten rifle barrel. Of the camera not a vestige remained. The bolt that had bowled Blake over must have squarely struck his gun-bearer, killing him instantly, exploding all the ammunition he carried, destroying the camera and ruining the rifle that he had carried.

But what had become of the rifle that had been in Blake's hands? The man searched in all directions, but could not find it and was finally forced to the conclusion that its disappearance could be attributed only to one of those freakish tricks which severe electrical storms so often play upon helpless and futile humanity.

Frankly aware that he was lost and had not the faintest conception of the direction in which lay the proposed camp of his safari, Blake started blindly off on what he devoutly hoped would prove the right route. It was not. His safari was moving northeast. Blake headed north.

FOR two days he trudged on through dense forest, sleeping at night among the branches of trees. Once his pitiful

"Doubtless the fellow were a Saracen, Paul," said the black, "a spy, perchance!"

slumbers were disturbed by the swaying of a branch against which he was braced. As he awoke he felt it sag as to the weight of some large animal. He looked and saw two fiery eyes gleaming in the dark.

Blake knew the beast to be a leopard as he drew his automatic and fired point blank. With a hideous scream the great cat sprang or fell to the ground. Blake never knew if he hit it. It did not return and there were no signs of it in the morning.

He found food and water in abundance and upon the morning of the third day he emerged from the forest at the foot of a range of lofty mountains and for the first time in weeks reveled in an unobstructed view of the blue sky and saw the horizon again and all that lay between himself and it. He had not realized that he had been depressed by the darkness and the crowding pressure of the trees, but now he experienced all the spiritual buoyancy of a released convict long immured from freedom and the light of day.

Rescue was, he felt, no longer problematical, merely a matter of time. He wanted to sing and shout; but he conserved his energies and started toward the mountains. There had been no native villages in the forest and so, he reasoned, as there must be native villages in a well-watered country stocked with game, he would find them upon the mountain slopes.

Topping a rise he saw below him the mouth of a canon in the bed of which ran a small stream. A village would be built on water. If he followed the water he would come to the village. Quite easy! He descended to the stream, and was deeply gratified to find that a well-worn path paralleled it.

Strongly encouraged by the cheering belief that he would soon encounter natives and believing that he would have no difficulty in enlisting their services in aiding him to relocate his safari, Blake followed the path upward into the canyon.

HE had covered something like three miles without having discovered any sign of habitation when, at a turn in the path, he found himself at the foot of a great white cross of enormous proportions. Hewn from limestone, it stood directly in the center of the trail and towered above him fully sixty feet. Checked and weatherworn, it gave an impression of great antiquity, which was further borne out by the remains of an almost obliter-

ated inscription upon the face of its massive base.

Blake examined the carved letters, but could not decipher their message. The characters appeared of early English origin, but he dismissed such a possibility as too ridiculous to entertain. He knew that he could not be far from the southern boundary of Abyssinia and that the Abyssinians are Christians. Thus he explained the presence of the cross; but he could not explain the suggestion of sinister menace that this lonely, ancient symbol of the crucifix held for him. Why was it? What was it?

Standing there, tongueless, hoary with age, it seemed to call upon him to stop, to venture not beyond it into the unknown; it warned him back, but not, seemingly, out of a spirit of kindliness and protection, but rather with arrogance and a sullen hate.

With a laugh Blake threw off the mood that had seized him and went on, but as he passed the great white monolith he crossed himself, though he was not a Catholic. He wondered what had impelled him to the unfamiliar act, but he could no more explain it than he could the strange and uncanny suggestion of power and personality that seemed to surround the crumbling cross.

Another turn in the path and the trail narrowed where it passed between two huge boulders that might have fallen from the cliff top towering far above. Cliffs closed in closely now in front and upon two sides. Apparently he was close to the cañon's head, and yet there was no slightest indication of a village. Yet where did the trail lead? It had an end and a purpose. He would discover the former and, if possible, the latter.

STILL under the depressing influence of the cross, Blake passed between the two boulders and the instant that he had passed them a man stepped out behind him and another in front. They were negroes, stalwart, fine-featured fellows and in themselves nothing to arouse wonder or surprise. Blake had expected to meet negroes in Africa; but not negroes wearing elaborately decorated leathern jerkins, upon the breasts of which red crosses were emblazoned—close-fitting nether garments and sandals held by doeskin thongs, cross-gartered halfway to their knees; not negroes wearing close fitting bassinets of leopard skin that fitted their heads closely and reached to below their ears; not negroes armed with two-handed broadswords and elaborately tipped pikes.

Blake was acutely aware of the pike-tips, for there was one pressing against his belly and another in the small of his back.

"Who be ye?" demanded the negro who faced Blake.

Had the man addressed him in Greek, Blake would have been no more surprised than he was by the incongruity of this archaic form of speech falling from the lips of a twentieth-century central African black. He was too dumfounded for an instant to reply.

"Doubtless the fellow be a Saracen, Paul," said the black behind Blake, "and understands not what thou sayest—a spy, perchance."

"Nay, Peter Wiggs, as my name be Paul Bodkin he be no infidel—that I know of mine own good eyes."

"Whatsoe'er he be, it is for ye to fetch him before the captain of the gate who will question him, Paul Bodkin."

"Natheless, there be no hurt in questioning him first, an' he will answer."

"Stop thy tongue and take him to the captain," said Peter. "I will abide here and guard the way until thou returnest."

PAUL stepped aside and motioned for Blake to precede him. Then he fell in behind and the American did not need to glance behind him to know that the ornate tip of the pike was ever threateningly ready.

The way lay plain before him, and Blake followed the trail toward the cliffs where there presently appeared the black mouth of a tunnel leading straight into the rocky escarpment. Leaning against the sides of a niche just within the entrance were several torches made of reeds or twigs bound tightly together and dipped in pitch. One of these Paul Bodkin selected, took some tinder from a metal box he carried in a pouch at his side, struck a spark to it with flint and steel, and having thus ignited the tinder and lighted the torch, he pushed Blake on again with the tip of his pike and the two entered the tunnel, which the American found to be narrow and winding, well suited to defense. Its floor was worn smooth until the stones of which it was composed shone polished in the flaring

Fahd aimed with great care, and pulled the trigger. Then he threw down the musket and leaped upon the startled Zeyd.

light of the torch. The sides and roof were black with the soot of countless thousands, perhaps, of torch-lighted passages along this strange, tunneled way that led to—what?

CHAPTER VIII

The Snake Strikes

UNVERSED in jungle craft, overwhelmed by the enormity of the catastrophe that had engulfed him, his reasoning faculties numbed by terror, Wilbur Stimbol slunk through the jungle, the fleeing quarry of every terror that imagination could conjure. Matted filth caked the tattered remnants of his clothing that scarce covered the filth of his emaciated body. His once graying hair had turned to white, matching the white stubble of a four days' growth of beard.

He followed a broad and well marked trail along which men and horses, sheep and goats had passed within the week and with the blindness and ignorance of the city dweller he thought that he was on the spoor of Blake's safari, and thus it came that he stumbled, exhausted, into the *menzil* of the slow-moving Ibn Jad.

Fejjuân, the Galla slave, discovered him and took him at once to the sheik's *beyt* where Ibn Jad, with his brother Tolleg, and several others were squatting in the *mukaad,* sipping coffee.

"By Ullah! What strange creature hast thou captured now, Fejjuân?" demanded the sheik.

"Perhaps a holy man," replied the black, "for he is very poor and without weapons and very dirty—yes, surely he must be a very holy man."

"Who art thou?" demanded Ibn Jad.

"I am lost and starving. Give me food," begged Stimbol.

But neither understood the language of the other.

"Another Nasrâny," said Fahd, contemptuously. "A Frenjy, perhaps."

"He looks more like one of el-Engleys," remarked Tollog.

"Perhaps he is from Fransa," suggested Ibn Jad. "Speak to him that vile tongue, Fahd, which thou didst come by among the soldiers in Algeria."

"Who are you, stranger?" demanded Fahd, in French.

"I am an American," replied Stimbol, relieved and delighted to have discovered a medium of communication with the Arabs. "I have been lost in the jungle and I am starving."

"He is from the New World and he has been lost in the jungle and is starving," translated Fahd.

IBN JAD directed that food be brought and as the stranger ate they carried on a conversation through Fahd. Stimbol explained that his men had deserted him and that he would pay well to be taken to the coast. The Beduin had no desire to be further hampered by the presence

of a weak old man and was inclined to have Stimbol's throat slit as the easiest solution of the problem, but Fahd, who was impressed by the man's boastings of his great wealth, saw the possibilities of a great reward or ransom and prevailed upon the sheik to permit Stimbol to remain among them for a time at least, promising to take him into his own *beyt* and be responsible for him.

"Ibn Jad would have slain you, Nasrâny," said Fahd to Stimbol later, "but Fahd saved you. Remember that when the time comes for distributing the reward and remember, too, that Ibn Jad will be as ready to kill you tomorrow as he was today and that always your life is in the hands of Fahd. What is it worth?"

"I will make you rich," replied the American.

DURING the days that followed, Fahd and Stimbol became much better acquainted and with returning strength and a feeling of security Stimbol's old boastfulness returned. He succeeded in impressing the young Beduin with his vast wealth and importance, and so lavish were his promises that Fahd soon commenced to see before him a life of luxury, ease and power; but with growing cupidity and ambition developed an increasing fear that some one might wrest his good fortune from him. Ibn Jad being the most logical and powerful competitor for the favors of the Nasrâny, Fahd lost no opportunity to impress upon Stimbol that the sheik was still thirsting for his blood, though, as a matter of fact, Ibn Jad was so little concerned over the affairs of Wilbur Stimbol that he would have forgotten his presence entirely were he not occasionally reminded of it by seeing the man upon the march or about the camps.

One thing, however, that Fahd accomplished was to acquaint Stimbol with the fact that there was dissension and treachery in the ranks of the Beduins—and this Stimbol determined to put to his own advantageous uses should necessity demand, and an opportunity arise.

And ever, though slowly, the 'Aarab drew closer to the fabled Leopard City of Nímmr; and as they marched, Zeyd found opportunity to forward his suit for the hand of Ateja the daughter of Sheik Ibn Jad, while Tollog sought by insinuation to advance the claims of Fahd in the eyes of the sheik. This he did always and only when Fahd might hear, as in reality his own wish was to impress upon the young traitor the depth of the latter's obligation to him. When Tollog should become sheik he would not care who won the hand of Ateja.

BUT Fahd was not satisfied with the progress that was being made. Jealousy was riding him to distraction, until he could not look upon Zeyd without thoughts of murder seizing his mind—and at last they obsessed him. He schemed continually to rid himself and the world of his more successful rival. He spied upon him and upon Ateja, and at last a plan unfolded itself with opportunity treading upon its heels.

Fahd had noticed that nightly Zeyd absented himself from the gatherings of the men in the *mukaad* of the sheik's tent and that when the simple household duties were performed Ateja slipped out into the night. Fahd followed and confirmed what was really too apparent to be dignified by the name of suspicion—Zeyd and Ateja met.

And then one night Fahd was not at the meeting in the sheik's *beyt*. Instead he hid near the tent of Zeyd and when the latter had left to keep his tryst Fahd crept in and seized the matchlock of his rival. It was already loaded and he had but to prime it with powder. Stealthily he crept by back ways through the camp to where Zeyd awaited his light of love and sneaked up behind him.

AT a little distance, sitting in his *mukaad* with his friends beneath the light of lanterns, Ibn Jad the sheik was plainly visible to the two young men standing in the outer darkness. Ateja and Hirfa were still engaged in housewifely duties.

Fahd, standing behind Zeyd, raised the ancient matchlock to his shoulder and aimed—very carefully he aimed, but not at Zeyd. No, for the cunning of Fahd was as the cunning of the fox. Had Zeyd been murdered naught could ever convince Ateja that Fahd was not the murderer. Fahd knew that and he was equally sure that Ateja would have naught of the slayer of her lover.

Beyond Zeyd was Ibn Jad, but Fahd was not aiming at Ibn Jad either. At whom was he aiming? No one. Not yet

"What doest thou in the Valley of the Sepulcher, varlet?" he asked.

was the time ripe to slay the sheik. First must they have their hands upon the treasure, the secret of which he alone was supposed to hold.

Fahd aimed at one of the *am'dan* of the sheik's tent. He aimed with great care, and then he pulled the trigger. The prop splintered and broke a foot above the level of Ibn Jad's head, and simultaneously Fahd threw down the musket and leaped upon the startled Zeyd, at the same time crying loudly for help.

Startled by the shot and the cries, men ran from all directions and with them was the sheik. He found Zeyd being held tightly from behind by Fahd.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Ibn Jad.

"By Ullah, Ibn Jad, he would have slain thee!" cried Fahd. "I came upon him just in time and as he fired I leaped upon his back, else he would have killed thee!"

"He lies!" cried Zeyd. "The shot came from behind me. If any fired upon Ibn Jad it was Fahd himself!"

Ateja, wide-eyed, ran to the side of her lover.

"Thou didst not do it, Zeyd; tell me that thou didst not do it!"

"As Allah is my God and Mohammed his prophet, I did not do it," swore Zeyd.

"I would not have thought it of him," said Ibn Jad.

Cunningly, Fahd did not mention the matchlock. Shrewdly he guessed that its evidence would be more potent if discovered by another than he and that it would be discovered he was sure. Nor was he wrong. Tollog found it.

"Here," he exclaimed, "is the weapon."

"Let us examine it beneath the light," said Ibn Jad. "It should dispel our doubts more surely than any lying tongue."

As the party moved in the direction of the sheik's *beyt*, Zeyd experienced the relief of one reprieved from death, for he knew that the testimony of the matchlock would exonerate him. It could not be his. He pressed the hand of Ateja, walking at his side.

BENEATH the light of the lanterns in the *mukaad* Ibn Jad held the weapon beneath his gaze as, with craning necks, the others pressed about him. A

single glance sufficed. With stern visage the sheik raised his eyes.

"It is Zeyd's," he said.

Ateja gasped and drew away from her lover.

"I did not do it! It is some trick," cried Zeyd.

"Take him away!" commanded Ibn Jad. "See that he is tightly bound."

Ateja rushed to her father and fell upon her knees. "Do not slay him!" she cried. "It could not have been he. I know it was not he."

"Silence, girl!" commanded the sheik sternly. "Go to thy quarters and remain there!"

They took Zeyd to his own *beyt* and bound him securely and in the *mukaad* of the sheik the elders sat in judgment while from behind the curtains of the women's quarters Ateja listened.

"At dawn, then, he shall be shot!" This was the sentence that Ateja heard passed upon her lover.

Behind his greasy *thorrîb,* Fahd smiled a crooked smile. In his black house of hair, Zeyd struggled with the bonds that held him, for though he had not heard the sentence he was well aware of what his fate would be. In the quarters of the hareem of the Sheik Ibn Jad the sheik's daughter lay sleepless and suffering. Her long lashes were wet with tears, but her grief was silent. Wide-eyed she waited, listening, and presently her patience was rewarded by the sounds of the deep, regular breathing of Ibn Jad and his wife, Hirfa. They slept!

ATEJA stirred. Stealthily she raised the lower edge of the tent cloth beside which lay her sleeping mat and rolled quietly beneath it into the *mukaad,* now deserted.

Groping silently, she found the matchlock of Zeyd where Ibn Jad had left it. She carried also a bundle wrapped in an old *thorrîb,* the contents of which she had gathered earlier in the evening when Hirfa, occupied with her household duties, had been temporarily absent from the women's quarters.

Ateja emerged from the tent of her father and hastened cautiously along the single, irregular street formed by the pitched tents of the 'Aarab until she came to the *beyt* of Zeyd. For a moment she paused at the opening, listening, then she entered softly on sandaled feet.

But Zeyd, sleepless, struggling with his bonds, heard her. "Who comes?" he demanded.

"S-s-sh!" cautioned the girl. "It is I, Ateja." She crept to his side.

"Beloved!" he murmured.

Deftly the girl cut the bonds that held his wrists and ankles. "I have brought thee food and thy musket," she told him. "These and freedom I give thee—the rest thou must do thyself. Thy mare stands tethered with the others. Far is the béled el-Guâd, beset with dangers is the way, but night and day will Ateja pray to Allah to guide thee safely. Haste, my loved one!"

Zeyd pressed her tightly to his breast, kissed her and was gone into the night.

CHAPTER IX

Sir Richard

THE floor of the tunnel along which Paul Bodkin conducted Blake inclined ever upward, and again and again it was broken by flights of steps which carried them always to higher levels. To Blake the way seemed interminable. Even the haunting mystery of the long tunnel failed to overcome the monotony of its unchanging walls that slipped silently into the torch's dim ken for a brief instant and as silently back into the Cimmerian oblivion behind to make place for more wall unvaryingly identical.

But as there ever is to all things, there was an end to the tunnel. Blake first glimpsed it in a little patch of distant daylight ahead and presently he stepped out into the sunlight and looked across a wide valley that was tree-dotted and beautiful. He found himself standing upon a wide ledge, or shelf, some hundred feet above the base of the mountain through which the tunnel had been cut. There was a sheer drop before him and to his right the ledge terminated abruptly at a distance of a hundred feet or less. Then he glanced to the left and his eyes went wide in astonishment.

Across the shelf stood a solid wall of masonry flanked at either side by great, round towers pierced by long, narrow embrasures. In the center of the wall was a lofty gateway which was closed by a massive and handsomely wrought portcullis behind which Blake saw two negroes standing guard. They were clothed pre-

cisely as his captors, but held great battle-axes, the butts of which rested upon the ground.

"What ho, the gate!" shouted Paul Bodkin. "Open to the outer guard and a prisoner!"

SLOWLY the portcullis rose, and Blake and his captor passed beneath. Directly inside the gateway and at the left, built into the hillside, was what was evidently a guardhouse. Before it loitered a score or so soldiers, all uniformed like Paul Bodkin; upon the breast of each the red cross. To a heavy wooden rail gayly caparisoned horses were tethered, their handsome trappings recalling to Blake's memory paintings he had seen of mounted knights of medieval England.

There was so much of unreality in the strangely garbed blacks, the massive barbican that guarded the way, the trappings of the horses, that Blake was no longer capable of surprise when one of the two doors in the guardhouse opened and there stepped out a handsome man clad in a hauberk of chain mail over which was a light surcoat of rough stuff, dyed purple. Upon the youth's head fitted a leopard-skin bassinet from the lower edge of which depended a camail or gorget of chain mail that entirely surrounded and protected his throat and neck. He was armed only with a heavy sword and a dagger, but against the side of the guardhouse, near the doorway where he paused to look at Blake, leaned a long lance, and near it was a shield with a red cross emblazoned upon its boss.

"Od zounds!" exclaimed the younger man. "What hast thou there, varlet?"

"A prisoner, an' it please thee, noble lord," replied Paul Bodkin deferentially.

"A Saracen, of a surety," stated the young man.

"Nay, an' I may make so bold, Sir Richard," replied Paul, "but methinks he be no Saracen."

"And why?"

"With mine own eyes I didst see him make the sign before the Cross."

"Fetch him hither, lout!"

BODKIN prodded Blake in the rear with his pike, but the American scarcely noticed the offense, so occupied was his mind by the light of truth that had so suddenly illuminated it. In the instant he had grasped the solution. He laughed inwardly at himself for his denseness. He now understood everything—and these fellows thought they could put it over on him, did they? Well, they had come near to doing it, all right.

He stepped quickly toward the young man and halted, upon his lips a faintly sarcastic smile. The other eyed him with haughty arrogance.

"Whence comest thou," he asked, "and what doest thou in the Valley of the Sepulcher, varlet?"

Blake's smile faded—too much was too much.

"Cut the comedy, now, young fellow," he drawled in his slow way. "Where's the director?"

"Director? Forsooth, I know not what thou meanest."

"Yes, you don't!" snapped Blake with fine sarcasm. "But let me tell you right off the bat that no movie comedian in the world can pull anything like that with me."

"Odd's blood, fellow! I ken not the meaning of all thy words, but I mislike thy tone, which savors o'er-much of insult to fall sweetly upon the ears of Richard Montmorency."

"Be yourself," advised Blake. "If the director isn't handy, send for the assistant director, or the camera-man—even the continuity writer may have more sense than you seem to have."

"Be myself? And who thinkest thee I would be other than Richard Montmorency, a noble sir knight of Nimmr?"

Blake shook his head in despair; then he turned to the soldiers who were standing about listening to the conversation. He thought some of them would be grinning at the joke that was being played on him, but all about him he saw only solemn, serious faces.

"Look here," he said, addressing Paul Bodkin, "doesn't any of you know where the director is?"

"'Director,'" repeated Bodkin, shaking his head. "There be none in Nimmr thus y-clept, nay, nor in all the Valley of the Sepulcher that I wot."

"I'm sorry," said Blake; "the mistake is mine; but if there is no director, there must be a keeper. May I see him?"

"Ah, keeper!" cried Bodkin, his face lighting with understanding. "Sir Richard is the keeper."

"My Gawd!" exclaimed Blake, turning to the young man. "I beg your pardon,

I thought that you were one of the inmates."

"Inmates? Indeed, thou speakest a strange tongue and yet withal it hath the flavor of England," replied the young man gravely. "But yon varlet be right—I am indeed this day the Keeper of the Gate."

BLAKE was commencing to doubt his own sanity, or at least his judgment. Neither the young white man nor any of the negroes had any of the facial characteristics of mad men. He looked up suddenly at the keeper of the gate.

"I am sorry," he said, flashing one of the frank smiles that was famous among his acquaintances. "I have acted like a boor, but I've been under considerable of a nervous strain for a long time and on top of that I've been lost in the jungle for days without proper or sufficient food.

"I thought that you were trying to play some sort of a joke on me and, well, I wasn't in any mood for jokes when I expected friendship and hospitality instead.

"Tell me, where am I? What country is this?"

"Thou art now close upon the city of Nimmr," replied the young man.

"I suppose this is something of a national holiday or something?" suggested Blake.

"I do not understand thee," replied the young man.

"Why, you're all in a pageant or something, aren't you?"

"Od's bodikins! The fellow speaks an outlandish tongue! Pageant? What meanest thou?"

"Why, those costumes."

"What be amiss with this apparel? True, 'tis not of any wondrous newness, but methinks it be at least more fair than thine. At least it well suffices the daily service of a knight."

"You don't mean that you dress like this every day?" demanded Blake.

"And why not? But enough of this. I have no wish to further bandy words with thee. Fetch him within, two of thee. And thou, Bodkin, return to the outer guard!" The young man turned and reentered the building, while two of the soldiers seized Blake, none too gently, and hustled him within.

HE found himself in a high-ceiled room with walls of cut stone and great, hand-hewn beams and rafters blackened with age. Upon the stone floor stood a table behind which, upon a bench, the young man seated himself while Blake was placed facing him with a guard on either hand. "Thy name?" demanded the youth.

"Blake."

"That be all—just Blake?"

"James Hunter Blake."

"What title bearest thou in thine own country?"

"I have no title."

"Ah, thou art not a gentleman, then?"

"I am called one."

"What is thy country?"

"America."

"He hath a quaint manner of speech, my Lord Prince," explained Richard, "but I do not think him an enemy of England."

"America! There be no such country, fellow."

"And why not?"

"I never heard of it. What doest thou near the Valley of the Sepulcher? Didst not know 'tis forbidden?"

"I told you I was lost. I didn't know where I was. All I want is to get back to my safari or to the coast."

"That be impossible. We be surrounded by Saracens. For seven hundred and thirty-five years we have been invested by their armies. How came you through the enemies' lines? How passed you through his vast army?"

"There isn't any army."

"Givest thou the lie to Richard Montmorency, varlet? An' thou wert of gentle blood, thou shouldst account to me that insult upon the field of honor. Methink'st thou beest some low-born spy sent hither by the Saracen sultan. 'Twould be well an' thou confessed all to me, for if I take thee before the Prince he will wrest the truth from thee in ways that are far from pleasant. What say?"

Blake shook his head.

"I have nothing to confess. Take me before the Prince, or whoever your boss is; perhaps he will at least give me food."

"Thou shalt have food here. Never shall it be said that Richard Montmorency turned a hungry man from his doorway. Hey! Michel! Michel! Where is the lazy brat? Michel!"

A door opened slowly from an inner apartment, to admit a boy, sleepy eyed, digging a grimy fist into one eye. He was clothed in a short tunic, his legs encased in green tights. In his cap was a long, draggled feather.

"Sleeping again, eh?" demanded Sir Richard. "Thou lazy knave! Fetch bread and meat for this poor wayfarer and be not until the morrow at it!"

Wide-eyed and rather stupidly, the boy stared at Blake. "A Saracen, Master?" he asked.

"What boots it?" snapped Sir Richard. "Did not our Lord Jesus feed the multitude, nor ask if there were unbelievers among them? Haste, churl! the stranger be of a great hunger."

THE youth turned and shuffled from the room, wiping his nose upon his sleeve and Sir Richard's attention came back to Blake.

"Thou art not ill-favored, fellow," he said. "'Tis a pity that thou beest not of noble blood, for thy mien appeareth not like that of one low-born."

"I never considered myself low-born," said Blake, with a grin.

"Thy father, now—was he not at least a sir knight?"

Blake was thinking quickly now. He was far from being able as yet to so much as hazard a guess that might explain his host's archaic costume and language, but he was sure the man was in earnest, whether sane or not, and were he not sane it seemed doubly wise to humor him.

"Yes, indeed," he replied, "my father is a thirty-second-degree Masqn and a Knight Templar."

"'Sblood, I knew it!" cried Sir Richard.

"And so am I," added Blake, when he realized the happy effect his statement had produced.

"Ah, I knew it! I knew it!" cried Sir Richard. "Thy bearing proclaimed thy noble blood; but why did'st thou seek to deceive me? And so thou art one of the Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon who guard the way of the pilgrims to the Holy Land! This explaineth thy poor raiment and glorifies it."

BLAKE was mystified by the allusion, as the picture always suggested by a reference to Knights Templars was of waving white plumes, gorgeous aprons and glittering swords. He did not know that in the days of their origin they were clothed in any old garments that the charity of others might bequeath them.

At this moment Michel returned bearing a wooden trencher containing cold mutton and several pieces of simnel bread and carrying in one hand a flagon of wine. These he set upon the table before Blake and going to a cupboard fetched two metal goblets into which he decanted a portion of the contents of the flagon.

Sir Richard arose and taking one of the goblets raised it before him on a level with his head.

"Hál, Sir James!" he cried. "And welcome to Nímmr and the Valley of the Sepulcher!"

"Here's looking at you!" replied Blake.

"A quaint saying," remarked Sir Richard. "Methinks the ways of England must be changed since the days of Richard the Lion Hearted, when my noble ancestor set forth upon the great crusade in the company of his king. Here's looking at you! Od's bodikins! I must not let that from my memory. Here's looking at you! Just wait till some fair knight doth drink my health—I shall lay him flat with that!

"But stay! Here, Michel, fetch yon stool for Sir James. And eat, sir knight. Thou must be passing hungry."

"I'll tell the world I am," replied Blake feelingly, as he sat down on the stool that Michel brought. There were no knives or forks, but there were fingers and these Blake used to advantage while his host sat smiling happily at him from across the rude table.

"Thou art better than a minstrel for pleasure," cried Sir Richard. "'I'll tell the world I am!' Ho, ho! Thou wilt be a gift from heaven in the castle of the prince. I'll tell the world I am!"

When Blake had satisfied his hunger, Sir Richard ordered Michel to prepare horses. "We ride down to the castle, Sir James," he explained. "No longer art thou my prisoner, but my friend and guest. That I should have received thee so scurvily shalt ever be to my discredit."

Mounted, therefore, upon prancing chargers and followed at a respectful distance by Michel, the two rode down the winding mountain road. Sir Richard now carried his shield and lance, a pennon fluttering bravely in the wind from just below the tip of the latter, the sun glancing from the metal of his hauberk, a smile upon his brave face as he chatted with his erstwhile prisoner. To Blake he seemed a gorgeous picture ridden from out the pages of a story-book. Yet, belying his martial appearance, there was a childlike simplicity about the man that won Blake's liking from the first, for there was that about him that made it impossible for one to conceive him as the perpetrator of a dishonorable act.

His ready acceptance of Blake's statements about himself bespoke a credulity that seemed incompatible with the high intelligence reflected by his noble countenance and the American preferred to attribute it to a combination of unsophistication and an innate integrity which could not conceive of perfidy in others.

AS they rounded the shoulder of a hill, Blake saw another barbican barring the way and, beyond, the towers and battlements of an ancient castle. At a command from Sir Richard the warders of the gate opened to them and the three rode through into the ballium. This space between the outer and inner walls appeared unkept and neglected. Several old trees flourished within it and beneath the shade of one of these, close to the outer gateway, lolled several men-at-arms, two of whom were engaged in a game that resembled draughts.

At the foot of the inner wall was a wide moat, the waters of which reflected the gray stones of the wall and the ancient vines that, growing upon its inner side, topped it to form a leafy coping that occasionally hung low upon the outer side.

Directly opposite the barbican was the great gateway in the inner wall and here a drawbridge spanned the moat and a heavy portcullis barred the way into the great court of the castle; but at a word from Sir Richard the gate lifted and, clattering across the drawbridge, they rode within.

BEFORE Blake's astonished eyes loomed a mighty castle of rough hewn stone, while to the right and left, within the great court, spread broad gardens not ill-kept, in which were gathered a company of men and women who might have but just stepped from Arthur's court.

At sight of Sir Richard and his companion the nearer members of the company regarded Blake with interest and evident surprise. Several called greetings and questions to Sir Richard as the two men dismounted and turned their horses over to Michel.

"Ho, Sir Richard!" cried one. "What bringest thou—a Saracen?"

"Nay," replied Richard. "A fair sir knight who would do his *devoir* to the prince. Where be he?"

"Yonder!" And they pointed toward the far end of the court where a larger company was assembled.

"Come, Sir James!" directed Richard, and led him down the courtyard, the knights and ladies following closely, asking questions, commenting with a frankness that brought a flush to Blake's face. The women openly praised his features and his carriage, while the men, perhaps prompted by jealousy, made unflattering remarks about his soiled and torn apparel and its, to them, ridiculous cut; and indeed the contrast was great between their gorgeous dalmaticas of villosa or cyclas, their close-fitting tights, their colored caps and Blake's drab shirt, whipcord breeches and cordovan boots, now soiled, torn and scratched.

The women were quite as richly dressed as the men, wearing clinging mantles of rich stuff, their hair and shoulders covered with dainty wimples of various colors and often elaborately embroidered.

NONE of these men, nor of those in the assemblage they were approaching, wore armor, but Blake had seen an armored knight at the outer gateway and another at the inner and he judged that only when engaged in military duties did they wear this heavy and uncomfortable dress.

When they reached the party at the end of the court, Sir Richard elbowed his way among them to the center of the group where stood a tall man of imposing appearance, chatting with those about him. As Sir Richard and Blake halted before him the company fell silent.

"My Lord Prince," said Richard, bowing, "I bring thee Sir James, a worthy Knight Templar who hath come under the protection of God through the lines of the enemy to the gates of Nimmr."

The tall man eyed Blake searchingly and without the appearance of any great credulity.

"Thou sayest that thou comest from the Temple of Solomon in the Kingdom of Jerusalem?" he demanded.

"Sir Richard must have misunderstood me," replied Blake.

"Then thou art no Knight Templar?"

"Yes, but I am not from Jerusalem."

"Perchance he is one of those doughty sir knights that guard the pilgrims' way to the Holy Land," suggested a young woman standing near the prince.

Blake glanced quickly at the speaker, and as their eyes met, hers fell, but not before he had seen that they were very beautiful eyes set in an equally beautiful, oval face.

"More like it haps he be a Saracen spy sent among us by the sultan," snapped a dark man who stood beside the girl.

The latter raised her eyes to the Prince. "He looketh not like a Saracen, my father," she said.

"What knowest thou of the appearance of a Saracen, child?" demanded the Prince. "Hast seen so many?"

The entire party laughed and the girl pouted.

"Verily, an' I have seen full as many a Saracen as has Sir Malud or thyself, Lord Prince," she snapped haughtily. "Let Sir Malud describe a Saracen."

The dark young man flushed angrily. "At least," he said, "my Lord Prince, I know an English knight when I see one, an' if here be an English knight, then Sir Malud be a Saracen!"

"Enough," said the Prince and then, turning to Blake: "If thou art not from Jerusalem, whence art thou?"

"New York," replied the American.

"Ha," whispered Sir Malud to the girl. "Did I not tell you?"

"Tell me what—that he is from New York? Where is that?" she demanded.

"Some stronghold of the infidel," asserted Malud.

"New York?" repeated the Prince. "Be that in the Holy Land?"

"It is a great city, far across the ocean," explained Blake.

"And thou camest to Nimmr through the lines of the enemy? Tell me, sir knight, had they many men-at-arms? And how were their forces disposed? Be they close upon the Valley of the Sepulcher? Thinkest thou they plan an early attack? Come, tell me all—thou canst be of great service."

"I have come for days through the forest and seen no living man," said Blake. "No enemy surrounds you."

"What?" cried the Prince.

"Did I not tell thee?" demanded Malud. "He is an enemy spy. He would lead us into the belief that we are safe that the forces of the sultan may find us off our guard and take Nimmr and the Valley."

"Od's blood! Methinks thou beest right, Sir Malud," cried the Prince. "No enemy indeed! Why else then have the knights of Nimmr lain here seven and a half centuries, if there be no horde of infidels surrounding our stronghold?"

"Search me," said Blake.

"Eh, what?" demanded the Prince a bit sharply.

"He hath a quaint manner of speech, my Lord Prince," explained Richard, "but I do not think him an enemy of England. Myself will vouch for him, an' you will take him into your service, my Lord Prince."

"Wouldst enter my service, sir?" demanded the Prince.

Blake glanced at Sir Malud and looked dubious; then his eyes wandered to those of the girl.

"I'll tell the world I would!" he said.

CHAPTER X

The Return of Ulala

NUMA was hungry. For three days and three nights he had hunted, but always the prey had eluded him. Perhaps Numa was growing old. Not so keen were his scent and his vision, not so swift his charges, nor well timed the spring that heretofore had brought down the quarry. So quick the food of Numa, that a fraction of a second, a hair's-breadth, might mark the difference between a full belly and starvation.

Perhaps Numa was growing old; yet he still was a mighty engine of destruction and now the pangs of hunger had increased his ferocity many-fold, stimulated his cunning, emboldened him to take great risks that his belly might be filled. It was a nervous, irascible, ferocious Numa that crouched beside the trail. His uppricked ears, his intent and blazing eyes, his quivering nostrils, the gently moving tail-tip, evidenced his awareness of another presence.

Down the wind to the nostrils of Numa the lion came the man-scent. Four days ago, his belly full, Numa had doubtless slunk away at the first indication of the presence of man, but this day was another day and another Numa.

ZEYD, three days upon the back track from the *menzil* of the sheik Ibn Jad, thought of Ateja, of far Guâd, congratulating himself upon the good fortune that had thus far smiled upon his escape and flight. His mare moved slowly along the jungle trail, unurged, for the way was long; and just ahead a beast of prey waited in ambush.

But Numa's were not the only ears to hear, nor his nostrils the only nostrils to scent the coming of the man-thing—another beast crouched near, unknown to Numa.

Overanxious, fearful of being cheated of his meat, Numa made a false move. Down the trail came the mare. She must pass within a yard of Numa—but Numa could not wait. Before she was within the radius of his spring he charged, voicing a horrid roar. Terrified, the mare reared, and rearing, tried to turn and bolt. Overbalanced, she toppled backward and fell, and in falling unhorsed Zeyd; but in the instant she was up and flying back along the trail, leaving her master alone in the path of the charging lion.

Horrified, the young man saw the snarling face, the bared fangs almost upon him. Then he saw something else—something equally awe-inspiring—a naked giant that leaped from a swaying branch full upon the back of the great cat. He saw a bronzed arm encircle the neck of the beast of prey as the lion was borne to earth by the weight and impact of the man's body. He saw a heavy knife flashing in the air,

striking home again and again as the frenzied lion threw itself about in futile effort to dislodge the thing upon its back. He heard the roars and the growls of *el-adrea* and mingled with them were growls and snarls that turned his blood cold, for he saw that they came from the lips of the man-beast.

Then Numa went limp, and the giant arose and stood above the carcass. He placed one foot upon it and, raising his face toward the heavens, voiced a hideous scream that froze the marrow in the bones of the Beduin—a scream that few men have heard: the hoarse victory cry of the bull ape.

It was then that Zeyd recognized his savior and shuddered again as he saw that it was Tarzan of the Apes.

The ape-man turned and looked frowningly down at him.

"Thou art from the *menzil* of Ibn Jad," he said.

"I am but a poor man," replied Zeyd. "I but followed where my sheik led. Hold it not against Zeyd, sheik of the jungle, that he be in thy *béled*. Spare my poor life, I pray thee, and may Allah bless thee."

"I have no wish to harm thee, Beduwy," replied Tarzan. "What wrong hath been done in my country is the fault of Ibn Jad alone. Is he close by?"

"*Wellah*, nay! He be many marches from here."

"Where art thy companions?" demanded the ape-man.

"I have none."

"Thou art alone?"

"*Billah*, yes."

TARZAN frowned. "Think well, Beduwy, before lying to Tarzan," he snapped.

"By Ullah, I speak the truth! I am alone."

"And why?"

"Fahd did plot against me to make it appear that I had tried to take the life of Ibn Jad—which, before Allah, is a lie that reeketh to heaven—and I was to be shot; but Ateja, the daughter of the sheik, cut my bonds in the night, and I escaped."

"What is thy name?"

"Zeyd."

"Whither goest thou—to thine own country?"

"Yes, to béled el-Guâd."

"Thou canst not, alone, survive the perils of the way," Tarzan warned him.

"Of that I be fearful, but death were certain had I not escaped the wrath of Ibn Jad."

FOR a moment Tarzan was silent in thought. "Great must be the love of Ateja, the daughter of the sheik, and great her belief in you," he said.

"Yea, great is our love, and she knew well that I would not slay her father, whom she loves."

Tarzan nodded. "I believe thee and shall help thee. Thou canst not go on alone. I shall take thee to the nearest village and there the chief will furnish thee with warriors who will take thee to the next village—and thus from village to village thou wilt be escorted safely to the Soudan."

"May Allah ever watch over and guard thee!" exclaimed Zeyd.

"Tell me," said Tarzan as the two moved along the jungle trail in the direction of the nearest village, which lay two marches to the south of them, "tell me what Ibn Jad doth in this country. It is not true that he came for ivory alone. Am I not right?"

"Yea, Sheik Tarzan," admitted Zeyd. "Ibn Jad came for treasure, but not for ivory."

"What, then?"

"In el-Hábash lies the treasure city of Nímmr," explained Zeyd. "This Ibn Jad was told by a learned *sáhar*. So great is the wealth of Nímmr that a thousand camels could carry away not a tenth part of it. It consists of gold and jewels and—a woman."

"A woman?"

"Yes, a woman of such wondrous beauty that in the north she alone would bring a price that would make Ibn Jad rich beyond dreams. Surely thou must have heard of Nímmr."

"Sometimes the Gallas speak of it," said Tarzan, "but always I thought of it of no more reality than the other places of their legends. And Ibn Jad undertook this long and dangerous journey on no more than the word of a magician?"

"What could be better than the word of a learned *sáhar?*" demanded Zeyd.

Tarzan of the Apes shrugged.

The ensuing chapters of this thrill-filled story of jungle adventure are of even heightened fascination. Watch for them in the next, the February, issue.

The Shield of His People

By
E. S. PLADWELL

Illustrated by William Molt

"I AM a good boss," said Felipe Salazar. "I am extremely good."

He lolled in a cane chair, in neat white drill clothes. He looked like a tailor's mannequin. His swarthy laborers passed stolidly in front of his high concrete sun-porch, under the shining green leaves of many trees. They were on their way to the fields. Some of them looked up, showing the white of their listless eyes.

His guest sat puffing a cigar alongside him while watching these barefoot peons going past. The guest was Ingalls, a stout drummer, a fellow-student with Salazar at Yale.

"Huh!" said Ingalls. "Your men don't look different from others around here."

"But I have made many improvements."

"Where?"

"I have built this fine hacienda of concrete, no?"

"For yourself!" grunted the envious Ingalls. "You live the life of Riley. Cigarettes, cards, dances, wine, women and servants. Your peons work their heads off. No millennium here!"

"But I am a good boss," reiterated Salazar, with the gentle persistence of the Latin.

FROM far away came a dull boom. It quivered softly through the air. Salazar gave it no attention but watched a vivid green-and-yellow parakeet flaring in the sunlight among the leaves of the trees until a sudden flash of red beyond the furthest tree-trunk caused his brown eyes to go questing in that direction.

The red flash was cheap calico. Under it were thick but graceful brown legs. Above it was a statuesque brown neck and a head which was turned toward a barefooted young man who followed her and caught her, easing his machete into his left hand while his right arm yanked her toward him in a quick embrace before he released her and ran down the path to join his mates.

Salazar smiled, showing white teeth. He sat down his coffee-cup on a wicker table in front of him.

"Young love! Is it not nice?"

Ingalls squinted at him, suspecting banter. Salazar caught the look.

"No, no! I am not kid-ding. This is their springtime, the best time of life. It is sad to think how soon it ends, how soon he becomes a dull thing like the rest, while she grows fat and ugly. They have their day of heaven. Then they are clods again."

A really unusual story—lots of action, and something to think about as well. You will remember Mr. Pladwell for "The Lost Frontier" and "His Blaze of Glory."

With catlike swiftness she whirled and clawed at his face.

"But you want them to be clods!" exploded Ingalls.

Salazar frowned, fingering his waxed mustache.

"They must work, yes," he agreed. "They can know nothing else. But they must not be disturbed. No. They must have the right to live, to love. I give them this. I am a good boss."

He waved a well-manicured hand toward the girl in red, who was still standing by the tree-trunk, looking down the path where her lover had gone. Her face was almost beautiful under the lacework of lights and shadows coming down from the trees.

"She wears a ring on her third finger. It is made of tin and glass. Some one told Pablo that it was very classy to give rings. So their ring is very precious and their love is very precious. Should some one come to part them?"

"How?" demanded Ingalls.

"Who knows? Just now I heard a cannon speaking. This is not like your country, my friend. Here people of ambition make their own laws. If they wish Pablo, they take him. If they wish my plantation, they take it. I hold what is mine if I can hold it."

"Why, that's feudalism!" discovered Ingalls.

Salazar shrugged.

"Everything is feudalism south of your country."

Ingalls lit another cigar, looking idly backward and upward beyond this concrete porch and over the gray wall of the house itself, to where the slope of an extinct volcano towered toward the sky. The hill was almost without vegetation except for a half-dozen blobs of withered brush. The eminence looked like a pile of ash-colored rocks stacked on top of each other

in such a jumble that its frontal side was a great mass of knobs and pockets. There was no beauty to this heap. Ingalls glanced away toward more interesting things. He yawned. The day was already warm.

A PEON on horseback came riding down the trail which led along the upper river, arousing dust which blurred the air along the brownish flat plain behind him for a long distance. He bent forward when under the tree-boughs and then he dismounted, disappearing below the concrete wall, to emerge later in the doorway behind the two friends on the porch.

He took off his enormous hat and bowed low when Salazar nodded to him.

"They come," reported the peon.

"From up river?" inquired Salazar.

"From up river."

"How many?"

"Very many. Who can tell? There is also a boat."

"Revolutionists or federalists?"

The peon shrugged.

"Who can tell? They all dry their clothes in the same sunshine."

"Very well, Miguel. Now go. Tell Chico to ring the big bell in the house. Then go you back to these soldiers. Give their commander my compliments. Tell him I beg, I implore him to stay away from here. Tell him I am a man of peace. Tell him I wish to live and let live. Tell him that mine are innocent people who want no wars. Go."

The peon disappeared. Ingalls watched it, then stared at the host.

"What's happening?" inquired the guest.

"There are soldiers coming."

"I know; but what's it all about?"

Salazar's shoulders made a Latin shrug but his language had a tinge of Yankee flippancy.

"Oh, they come to save the country. It is what you call bull. A revolution."

"Oh. Comic-opera stuff, eh?"

Salazar's eyes became heavy-lidded. He puffed on a cigarette.

"No," he said, slowly. "There is nothing comic about bullets. But our people are children. The politicians fill them with this hot-air. Then our poor children kill each other. It is not comic. No."

A big gong clanged from the rear of the house. Then nothing happened. Ingalls wondered. He began to grow nervous and restive as if he felt a tension in the air. The minutes went past slowly.

Salazar calmly lit another cigarette.

"It is a good view from here," said he at last, after gazing upstream for some time. "Look!"

He pointed to where the river curved through the brownish flat country, which was only partly cultivated. Around the bend of the river came a long boat, blunt at both ends, filled with white-clad figures.

On both sides of this boat there trudged a mass of men towing it by ropes. These advancing cohorts wore bandoliers which gave a criss-cross effect to their white-clad chests. The ends of rifles stuck up behind their shoulders.

Behind this white array of about three hundred men in all came four wagons and a wabbling little car. Flanking these were soldiers on horseback. In front of them walked a huddled mob which had no weapons.

"Those are my people," said Salazar. "I see they are caught."

"What for?" demanded Ingalls.

"To fight. They are recruits. It is a pity, no?"

"My gosh!" exclaimed Ingalls. "Recruits!"

Faint noises began to be heard as the mob came closer: first the clacking of the car, then the rumble of the wagons, then voices, then the soft thumping of many feet and the clatter of accouterments. The vanguard of Salazar's peons reached the near-by trees, sending up questioning glances toward their master, who looked beyond them.

Some of these men in the forefront had red splotches on their clothes. One bore his right arm in a crude sling. Another held a rag to his forehead, which was running red, down into the neck-band of his cheap cotton shirt. He walked laggardly, but a soldier behind him prodded him with a bayonet, causing him to make sudden leaps. This was Pablo, the youth who had kissed the girl.

"My God!" yelped Ingalls, grasping the arms of his chair.

"You have not seen much yet," said Salazar, with a restraining gesture. "Wait!"

THREE riders clattered past the oncoming horde and proceeded to the forefront. One of them wore an olive-drab uniform and a flat-topped cap. A constellation of stars on his collar indicated that he was quite important. This stoutish

leader with his black mustache and popping eyes was followed by two slim officers who were decorated with vivid red-and-green sashes under their flashing gold-and-black sword-belts. Pistols and big cavalry sabers clanked at their sides, bouncing up and down as their horses galloped.

The man in olive-drab shouted an order which caused the column to narrow. The unarmed peons were shoved through the tract of land between Salazar's house and the river. They marched stolidly among the tree-trunks until they huddled together in front of the landing. Some of them continued to stare up at Salazar, who could see them plainly because of the cleared space between the porch and his wooden boat-landing, but he ignored them. He watched the advancing riflemen and the big supply-barge which was being hauled toward the landing. The barge was piled with cargo covered over by canvas tarpaulins.

The riflemen marched past the waiting peons and came below the rail of the concrete porch. Until now, the peons were in a position to dodge among the trees and to scatter around the corner; but they were too witless, too stolid, too indifferent—perhaps too fatalistic. Some of them shrugged their shoulders. Others stared dully at the ground.

"You fat-heads!" breathed Ingalls. "My God, what sheep!" Then, irritably, to Salazar: "You seem to take this cool, don't you?"

Salazar's languid hand made a gesture which might have meant anything. Ingalls frowned at him and then turned away, almost in disgust.

The general in olive-drab led his two colorful officers to the boat-landing, where he spied Salazar's rusty gasoline tug tied to a stake. It was not in sight from the porch, but the general's swift gesture and his exclamation of pleasure showed that the tug was a find. He shouted to the supply-barge. It began to veer away from the landing and to head toward the tug. Three men at the rear of the barge helped to steer it by means of paddles which churned white whirlpools in the quiet green waters.

SALAZAR arose from his chair at last. He did it leisurely, with the sigh of a tired man forced to go to work against his will.

The general at the water's edge observed his slim figure, standing out in front of the drab gray of the house wall. The general turned the head of his horse squarely toward the porch, looking upward while his soldiers did likewise as they leaned against their grounded rifles. Then he curved his right arm to his flat-topped cap, which he lifted high in the air with a slow and reverent motion.

"My fellow-patriot!" he shouted loudly. "Brother in arms! Benefactor of your country, enemy to tyrants, I greet you in the name of liberty!" He bowed profoundly over the neck of his chestnut horse. "See!" He waved his left hand toward Salazar's peons. "For you has been granted the honor, the glory, the privilege, to give these your men to the cause of justice of freedom—"

"Pablo!"

A wild shriek echoed from below the porch wall. The girl in red calico raced down between the trees, running straight toward the battered young peon who stood at the edge of Salazar's crowd.

He came to life suddenly, holding out warning hands.

"Maria!" he cried. "No!"

"Pablo!" she sobbed, throwing her arms around his bloody neck. "Pablo! By your ring—by my heart—no! Tell these men to go away! Tell them! See, they have hurt you! They cannot have you! No! *No!*"

She writhed in his arms while his eyes looked piteously toward Salazar. Salazar's handsome face was expressionless.

"Wait!" he commanded, holding up his hand to the general; but that person was ruffled. His oration had been spoiled.

"Take her away!" he shouted. "I am speaking! Let her make her noises elsewhere!"

"But no!" pleaded Salazar.

"But this is war, my friend!" reminded the general. "We must have discipline!"

A soldier yanked Pablo's arm from the girl's waist, pulling her backward. With catlike swiftness she whirled around and clawed at his face. He covered his eyes. Somebody laughed. Snarling, he grasped her throat. She shrieked as she reeled away.

Pablo cried aloud. Anger made his eyes widen and then silently he sprang upon the soldier, lifted him up, whirled him around, and crashed his head upon the ground.

The soldier lay still.

"Pablo!" cried the girl, staggering toward him.

She was shoved aside. Five men bore down upon him. One stood back to jab with a bayonet, but his own comrades were in the way. There was a quick, fierce struggle. The girl in red screeched like a mad thing until the whole raving tangle went to the ground.

The five soldiers came to their feet, panting.

"Damn!" said Salazar, from the porch.

"You allow that?" demanded Ingalls, whose face was covered with perspiration. "A woman! Isn't there something you can do?"

"Comic opera, eh?" reminded Salazar, with a little smile.

But Ingalls did not dare reply. His lips pressed together tightly.

THE fat general started talking again. His sense of dramatics had shown him that this avenue between the trees was a stage, with the wharf for a background and the porch for an ideal gallery, so he had rallied his standards around him, as well as his junior officers, forming a colorful tableau with himself as the focal point. His dark uniform, in contrast to all these white ones, heightened the splendor of the picture.

This time he was haranguing his troops as well as Salazar. His arms began waving to emphasize his points:

"We march to liberate our country from the shackles of the tyrants. We march to strike death and terror to the scoundrels of tyranny until our glorious country is free and the so-triumphant armies of liberty march back to their homes, heroes whose deeds of valor shall go down in history—"

"Never mind that!" interrupted Salazar, with Yankee directness. "Who said you could do this to my workmen? Explain!"

It was a shock. It was so unexpected that the general's eyes rounded with amazement.

"Explain?" he gibbered. "You ask that, in such language? You, the grandson of the never-to-be-forgotten Don Cristóbal Salazar, who fought at the side of the great San Martin? No! No! It cannot be! My ears deceive me!"

"But what are you doing with my workmen?" insisted Salazar.

The general frowned, then shrugged. He looked baffled.

"But they are to be heroes, warriors for liberty. We recruited them in the fields. They joined us with shouts of joy!"

"Who said you could beat them?"

The general looked more pop-eyed than ever. This man Salazar was not playing the game!

"But that is discipline," explained the general, with a scowl of vexation. "You understand discipline, Don Felipe. It is very sad, but it cannot be avoided. It desolates me to think that any of your men behaved so."

"But did I give you permission to take my men away?"

The general rubbed his hands.

"Ah, but we knew your love for liberty, Don Felipe. We knew you would give these men with great gladness—"

"But you have made a mistake—"

"But no—"

"But I implore you to let my people stay in peace—"

The general's voice became strident:

"But our country calls! Who can hang back?"

"But you must let my people alone!"

The general blinked at the astonishing man on the balcony.

"I do not take orders, Don Felipe," reprimanded the general. "It is I who give the orders!"

Felipe Salazar hesitated.

"But," he argued at last, "your orders are not for me or my people, my friend!"

The general began to smile wryly. The purr of his voice indicated that he had made his decision in this matter.

"We are desolated if these are your sentiments, Don Felipe. To have you against us would be sadness indeed, for we would have to take all your horses and mules. We would have to levy a fine against you. We would need your home for supplies. It would be very sad."

"So be it," said Salazar, with a little whimper in his voice.

HE reached into his coat pocket, producing a cheap blue bandanna handkerchief.

He stared at it solemnly for a moment, crumpling it in his right hand while he appealed again to the general:

"But I implore that you and your glorious army go forward without us!" he begged, with a suggestive wave of his hand toward the outer country. "I beg, I entreat you to leave us in peace!"

Pablo sprang upon the soldier, lifted him up, whirled him around and crashed his head upon the ground.

"But no," purred the general, smiling more broadly. "We must bow to military necessity, Don Felipe. My heart is broken to think that you oppose us, but what will you? This is war. I must be stern. I must steel my heart. I fine you, then, one million pesetas. I ask you to open this front gate of your house so that we may appraise its use for military purposes."

"But I implore!"

The general snapped his fingers toward a line of soldiers.

"Seize that man! Surround the house!"

INGALLS had arisen. He was standing white-faced, mopping his forehead with a handkerchief while watching Salazar. Down below him, the white-clad soldiers began to move their hands and rifles. Ingalls backed up, grasping Salazar's arm. But the arm evaded him for the moment. The arm went upward, waving the bandanna violently in the air.

Then Salazar whirled around.

"Come!" he ordered.

Pushing the wondering Ingalls ahead of him, he rushed into the concrete house, closing the door.

Ingalls found himself in a room dark save for shafts of sunlight sent in through two small front windows. Behind each window stood a silent peon holding an automatic rifle. The peons looked like mahogany statues, making no movement. Ingalls gasped.

"But what—" he demanded.

"Listen!" hissed Salazar.

The air vibrated under a sudden demoniac crescendo of sound, as if several loud riveting-machines were let off at once. *Br-r-r-r-r-r!* The nerve-shattering noises came from both sides of the house and apparently from above it, tearing at the nerves and jangling on the ear-drums. Then came one terrific concussion.

"Bang!"

The peons swayed. Every chair, table, lamp and picture in the room reeled in unison—even the concrete floor. Ingalls felt it through the soles of his shoes. His head throbbed. His nose felt numb. His teeth were jarred.

"Three-inch field-piece," said Salazar in an excited voice. "Mine. Up above."

Ingalls swallowed, glancing out through the nearest window. His eyes widened at the scene outside.

A great geyser of white water was leaping upward alongside the supply-barge

in the river. The near side of the barge heeled over so that its flat bottom was revealed to sight. Its passengers dived over the other side. The barge righted itself slowly and rolled till its nearer rail was almost under water. Then it settled back.

There was a blinding flash. Another geyser of water hurled itself up through the center of the craft, blowing it into tiny little sticks which curved high in air until they fell back into the water, agitating its surface with many splashes alongside the swimming men.

"The timing of that shell was slow," said Salazar, trying to keep his voice casual. "We'll have to have more practice."

"Yes," said Ingalls dully. "Yes. That's right." He was still stunned.

Salazar's face was white. His delicate fingers were trembling; yet he opened his cigarette case, proffered one, took another, and tapped it on the monogrammed silver.

"This business I do not like," he confessed, hesitantly, "but what would you? There is no other way. Soon they will let us alone. Everybody. Yes."

Ingalls stared at him. Ingalls' brain was rocked by that demoniac racket outside.

"A hell of a life!" muttered Ingalls.

"Yes: but my people need me. I must stay. I can do nothing else. It is my duty."

THE throbbing ceased, so suddenly that the cadences seemed to continue while the ears tried to become accustomed to the silence. One of the peons at the window eased down his gun. The butt struck the floor with a clang.

"It is over," said Salazar. "Let us go out." His voice sounded like a requiem.

Ingalls screwed up his courage, and nodded; but when he went to the edge of the porch and looked down at the ground, he flinched back, covering his face with his hands. Yet he began to look through his trembling fingers. One item had caught his attention.

In the center of the shambles stood a crowd of unarmed and totally unhurt peons, staring with stupefied eyes at the house and the mountain above it. They were numb—dumb—rooted to the spot, unable to close their mouths or keep their eyes from rolling. A miracle had rendered them senseless. The only movement was close to the house, where Pablo and Maria were reeling to their feet, staring at Salazar.

He nodded at them, waved his hand, and turned away.

"So, you see?" he said to Ingalls, with a pathetic catch in his voice. "My people shall live and love and work, for I am a good boss."

INGALLS leaned weakly against the wall of the house.

"But—but these other poor devils—"

"They had no good boss. That was sad. They were the prey for anyone who wished to take them. *My* people are protected!"

Ingalls looked upward, over the edge of the squat concrete house. The occasional patches of brush on the hill had changed position, revealing the snouts of five machine-guns and a wicked field-piece emplaced in deep pits among the rocks. A few men loafed in these pits—twelve in all—all that was necessary.

"My gosh!" gasped Ingalls, trying to rally his wits. "But—but suppose this army had been federalists? Then you'd have fought the government!"

Salazar shrugged.

"Governments! That is our curse. But they will all let me alone. Yes. Today. I wanted this crowd to fall into my trap; I let them come; I wanted my people to understand how well they are protected. Now they know. They know they will live in peace."

SALAZAR pointed down toward the trees. Pablo and the young girl were staggering, arm in arm, along a lovers' lane strewn with dead bodies. Both were hurt, but not seriously.

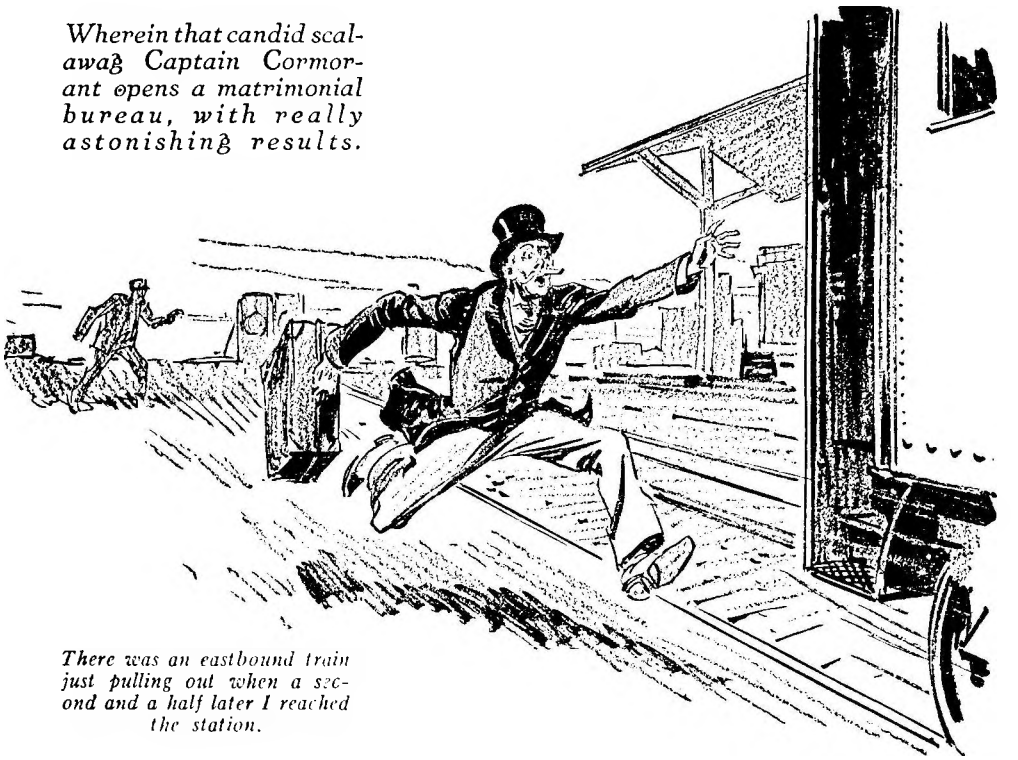
"You see?" insisted Salazar. "My people have the right to be happy. I have given it to them."

"Ugh!" rejected Ingalls.

"Yes—ugh! But this is a far different country from yours, my friend. I am doing what I am able to do. I am protecting my people. In your country I would be a maniac. Here I am a good boss."

And next day, as Ingalls gazed back in farewell upon fields dominated by a lone mountain whose hidden batteries could sweep this flat country for miles, he was forced to admit that it was so.

Wherein that candid scalawag Captain Cormorant opens a matrimonial bureau, with really astonishing results.



There was an eastbound train just pulling out when a second and a half later I reached the station.

A Flutter in Wives

By BERTRAM ATKEY

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

AMONG the more engaging customs of that afflicted man, Captain Lester Cormorant, late of the Bolivian Light Horse, was one which showed him—totally without morals good or bad though he was, Heaven help him (as he would say)—not wholly impervious to those impulses which do so much to make the good husband. He was accustomed to spend at least two evenings a week at home, amidst the extremely comfortable circumstances of domesticity, in the control and arrangement of which his wife—that placid lady to whom he had proposed in the dark—was so skilled that a superficial observer might easily have rated the Cormorant *ménage* at five thousand a year instead of the three thousand which was the true sum of Mrs. Cormorant's income.

It was on such an evening that the adventurer—somewhat battered, but with his six feet four inches of height, his colossal Wellingtonian nose, and his great drooping red mustache, still distinguished looking—and his adoring partner discussed the case of their friend, Sopley-Smyth.

"I see that poor Sopley-Smyth has filed his petition at last," said the Captain, over a glass of port.

"Yes, Lester," replied Mrs. Cormorant quietly. "It was bound to come."

The Captain sighed.

"It is a very tragic thing for a man's wife to run away from him—if she has a couple of thousand a year," he said. "I feel for poor Sopley-Smyth. I am sorry for the man."

"You would not like me to leave you, would you, Lester?" said Mrs. Cormorant playfully—even coquettishly.

The Captain looked very serious.

"Louise, my heart, don't say such things, even in jest! It hurts me—non-moral though the gods have seen fit to make me. I find life sufficiently arid as it is,"—he poured himself another glass of port wherewith, no doubt, to render it less arid,—"but were you to leave me, taking your

three thousand a year with you, I feel I should never be the same man again. No—never, my heart. You see—ever since that fortunate hour when, struggling in vain against my incurable moral infirmity, I stole your motorcar, with you in it, I have leaned upon you and—Heaven forgive me!—upon your income. Have I not, my dear child?"

"Yes," said the dear child truthfully, "you have, Lester."

"For every word of love I have desired, darling, to whom have I looked?"

"To me, Lester."

"Yes. And for every tenner—every fiver—nay, every modest half-quid—to whom have I looked, Lord help me?"

"To me, Lester."

"Yes, my own. And have you ever failed me? You have not. But Sopley-Smyth's wife failed him—with the result that he is now bankrupt. She, poor soul, has not the noble nature which you possess. She never really loved him."

"Never loved him?"

"No, my pearl. He told me so himself. Why, last summer she refused him the paltry sum of fifteen pounds for the worthy and patriotic purpose of running down to Epsom to see that noble horse, Lemon, make its gallant but unsuccessful effort to win the Derby."

"How dreadful, Lester!"

"Yes, you are right, Louise — it *was* dreadful! Let me give you a little more of this port. It is a better wine than the last."

"Yes, Lester. I took your advice and gave more money for it," explained Louise.

CAPTAIN CORMORANT leaned across and patted the pretty hand of his wife.

"That's my good girl," he said. "Now, Mrs. Sopley-Smyth would never have done that. Poor George did once venture to complain of the sherry. What do you think she did, Louise? Remember, that in some respects Sopley-Smyth was a fine fellow—not, like myself, a man foredoomed to drag his way through life suffering from a total lack of morals, good or bad."

"What did she do, Lester?"

"She put him on cooking sherry for a month!"

"How cruel!" said his adoring lady.

"Cruel and mean—yes, *mean!* You would never put me on cooking port, would you, Louise?"

"Indeed I wouldn't."

She poured him a little more port to prove it, and fondly chose him another cigar.

"Do you think he married her for her money, Lester?" inquired the lady, after a peaceful pause.

The Captain blew a fragrant cloud. "I fear so, my heart, I fear so," he replied.

Mrs. Cormorant shook her head sadly.

"Yes—it was a mistake. It always is a mistake," agreed her husband.

"You didn't marry *me* for my money, did you, darling?"

"As it happened, no. Fortunately, when I proposed—in the dark—I did not know you were well-to-do. I loved you, Louise. I think it was your voice that attracted me first of all, then the mystery of you, as you sat half-invisible inside your car—and the moonlight—the romance of it all."

"Ah!" sighed Louise.

"Had I known of your money, no doubt I should have married you for it—being what I am, Heaven help me! But I did not know. Ours, my dear, was an ideal union—a success. Usually a marriage where one party thereto is rich and the other poor is a dismal failure—such as poor Sopley-Smyth's. Almost invariably avarice intervenes!"

Captain Cormorant took a long sip of wine and repeated the last phrase, not without a certain fruity pride: "Avarice intervenes almost invariably."

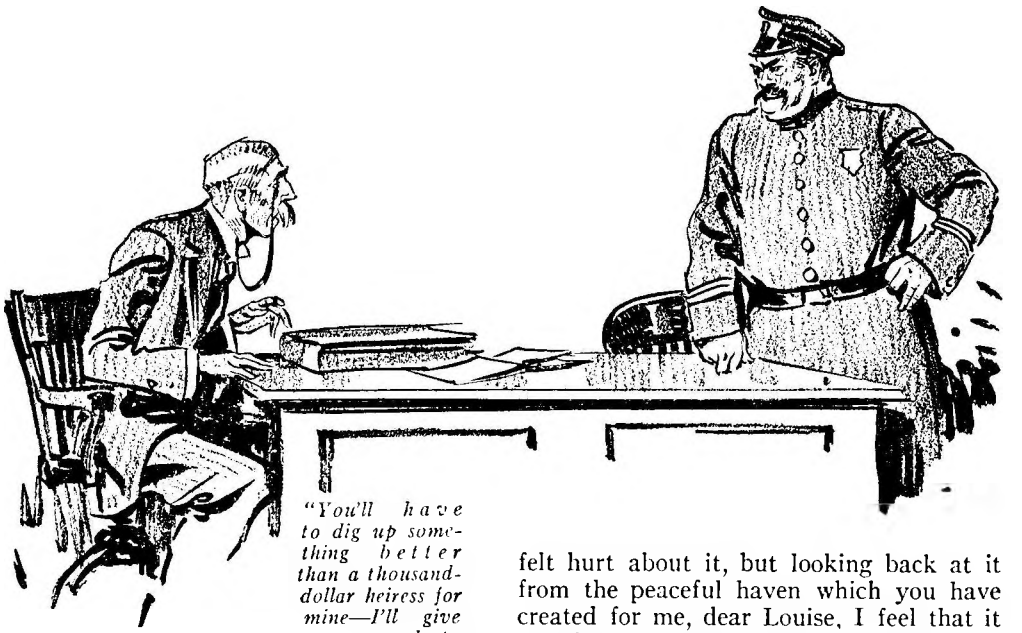
"You wouldn't let me become avaricious, dear, would you?"

"Never!" said Captain Cormorant reassuringly. "I have seen it break up too many homes ever to permit it to raise its venomous head upon our hearth, darling Louise. It was the only thing I invariably used to advise my clients to guard against, when I was a matrimonial agent."

"Were you a matrimonial agent once, Lester?" inquired Mrs. Cormorant, who was much too well aware of her husband's picturesque and picaresque past to be surprised at this new facet thereof.

The Captain nodded.

"During a period of financial stringency which overtook me through no fault of my own," he replied, "while once residing within the confines of that great republic the United States of America, dearest, I worked up quite an attractively remunerative business as a matrimonial agent. Indeed, I might still be prospering at it had I not been compelled to leave the town somewhat abruptly on account of a misunderstanding with the captain of the local



"You'll have to dig up something better than a thousand-dollar heiress for mine—I'll give you a week to find her!"

police who had been landed—through me, though entirely by reason of his unbounded avarice—in a position of some considerable difficulty."

The Captain stared into the fire, pulling fiercely at his mustache, his great Roman nose jutting out like a rock.

"He was a most avaricious man—a man who had never shown mercy to a dollar in his life, the hard-hearted hound!" he added. "They used to say he never carried a wallet or a purse."

"But where did he keep his banknotes, Lester?"

"In his soul! That was a joke, of course, dearest—it was what the bootblack said to Mark Twain."

"What happened to make him turn on you so savagely?"

"I will tell you, my jewel," said the captain. "It is an interesting story."

He smiled reminiscently, settled his cozily slippered feet on a soft hassock by the fender, and launched leisurely into the following narrative:

TO a lady so sagacious as yourself, heart of mine (he began) it will be obvious that a man who, like myself, is condemned by the gods to go through life unequipped with morals of any description, must have his ups and downs. As you know, there was a period in my career when my family felt itself called upon to make a determined and united effort to get me out of the country, and keep me out. At the time I felt hurt about it, but looking back at it from the peaceful haven which you have created for me, dear Louise, I feel that it was for the best. I had been forging my good old father's name to checks rather extensively, Lord help me! And he realized that we had come to the parting of the ways. Even that noble woman, my mother, who, with the sole exception of yourself, was the only woman who ever really understood the curse under which I am fated to drag out my existence, was compelled to acknowledge that the time had come when the family must choose between themselves and me. They chose for themselves.

I landed in America scantily equipped with funds, and, being younger and less experienced at that time, it was not long before my sole worldly wealth consisted of an empty suitcase, the clothes I was wearing, and a manicure set presented to me as a farewell present by my elder sister, who had been given a better one.

I will not conceal from you the fact that I went through a very bad time; so bad that I think only a strictly non-moral man could have survived it. But at length a time came when I found myself fairly established, thanks to my own efforts, as a matrimonial agent in one of the larger towns.

There are those—with you, Louise, at their head, I am glad to say—who consider me at least a gentleman. In my time I have been accused of many peccadilloes, ranging from barratry to arson, but I think I may claim ever to have remembered that I am a gentleman—in manners. Now, manner is essential to a matrimonial agent; without manner no man can succeed in

the profession. I succeeded. By the simple device of advertising in one-half of the newspapers that I desired to find a husband for a broad-minded, generous-natured blonde heiress, loving, pleasant, and fond of music,—and in the remaining newspapers that I was seeking a wife for a retired millionaire, young, handsome, dark, fond of home life, and of a surprisingly affectionate nature,—I filled eight large ledgers with applicants, all of whom enclosed the stipulated dollar for a photograph, with the sole exception of a gentleman from Missouri, who explained that he would gladly forward his dollar after he had been afforded an opportunity of satisfying himself visually that the lady actually existed. I had, in short, to show him an available heiress before he detached himself from the dollar for her portrait.

I then paired my applicants off as neatly as possible. I am afraid there were disappointments—particularly among those who could not control their avarice. And there were slight misunderstandings, of course. What sort of misunderstandings, you ask me, my heart? Well, for instance, as when I brought a full-blooded Chippehaha Indian squaw, of mature age, said to be a princess, and to possess a store of precious stones—which turned out to be a collection of Birmingham beads, old glass eyes, and a graduated set of blood alleys—into contact with a high-spirited gentleman from Carolina, one Major Bellew, whose great fortune was locked up in land, the key of the lock being in possession of the mortgagee. I still have the mark of the major's bullet in my arm, but the nails of the Indian princess, I am glad to say, left no permanent scars, deeply though she dug them. But that type of occasional misfire is to be looked for in the matrimonial agency profession—and is one of the reasons why among the privileges which an agent must be content to forgo may be reckoned the privilege of life insurance. No really careful company will entertain a proposal from one of these agents on his own life.

ONE day, while sitting in my office thinking over the problem of reconciling a literary lady of Boston to the terms of the contract into which, rather precipitately, she had entered by mail with an extremely self-made gentleman from Seattle, the captain of the local police entered the office.

"You're pulled, Montmorency," he said briefly. I was at the time calling myself Montmorency de Fleury, and he meant that I was arrested.

"Why?" I demanded.

"Well, think it out, Mont," he said. "Put yourself in my place for a moment. Here I am, me, Sim M'Gryde, police captain in this town, and a bachelor. And here *you* are, with a continual stream of heiresses flowing through this office. But, have you ever had the heart to invite me to chip in and collar one of the heftiest ones for myself? *Have* you? I'm asking you, Mont. Have you acted white to me? Did you ever think whether I was starved for a little love up at home? No, Mont, you never did. *You* never cared about me setting back there, lonely and poor, in that cold police office. I noticed it and it hurt me, Mont; but I am a proud man, and I set quiet and suffered. Have I ever lifted a finger against you? Have I ever allowed a cop to set his hoof inside this here Court of Hymen of yourn, Mont? I haven't, and you know it. What about that buck nigger from New Orleans that you offered as a 'brunette gentleman, very cheerful, fond of music, interested in melon-growing and chicken-raising, ample means,' to that prim New England school madam from Gloucester, Massachusetts? I tell you no lie, Mont, when I say that that dame came into my office like a harpoon. She wanted you pulled then. But did I pull you? No, sir! I said to myself, 'There's old Mont down there settin' down watching 'em file past, with a special eye open for me. First thing I know will be a hurry call from him offering a sweet little dame with, perhaps, half a million good United States dollars to lonely old M'Gryde.' Well, you didn't. And so you're arrested—for fraud! We'd better be getting along to the office."

I thought swiftly, Louise. It is necessary for a matrimonial agent to be a swift thinker. I confess that it seemed to me that M'Gryde's complaint was not without justification. He had been neglected—foolishly. In his place I should have felt much as he did—hurt and resentful. I should have pulled him and had him run out of the town.

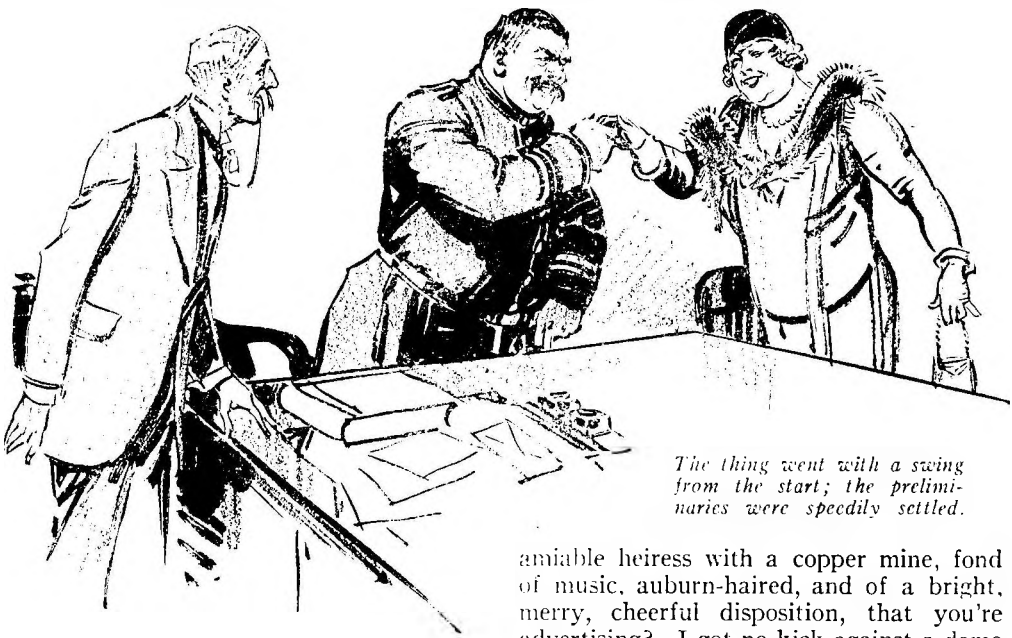
I saw it in that light, and I said so.

"Captain," I said, "everything you say is true. I apologize. In the rush of business I have been guilty of a grave *faux pas*—"

"How's that?" he said sharply.

"Of a *faux pas*—a false step. I have, I freely confess, permitted myself to do what no gentleman should ever do—I have neglected a strong, silent claim, all the stronger for being so silent. I am sorry—and ashamed—and I apologize again."

He nodded, mollified.



The thing went with a swing from the start; the preliminaries were speedily settled.

"White conversation," he said. "That goes—it's good enough, and it's enough. Now let's get down to business. How are the heiresses lining up? Have you got plenty? Is there a selection? How are you off for blondes? Do they run large? I like 'em large. Photos, now—let's have a look at their tintypes. Where's the gallery, Mont? Show me round."

It was clear to me that M'Gryde was not at all acquainted with the difficulties of the matrimonial business. Large blonde heiresses do not grow on bushes by the wayside, Louise, and I had nothing whatever resembling one on my books at the time. I was, of course, advertising a pair, but they were quite—er—fictional.

I REFLECTED for a moment, then decided upon a course of action.

"If you think, Captain, that I am the sort of man who would be satisfied to plant any ordinary blonde item on my books upon *you*, you misjudge me," I said. "I am going to provide you with something sensational in the way of a wife. She will take some finding—but she's going to be found! All I say is, 'Give me time.'"

He seemed a little disappointed.

"But haven't you got nothing likely in stock, Mont? I want to get married right now—I'm in the mood. And there's a little note of mine falling due next week that's got to be arranged for. How about that amiable heiress with a copper mine, fond of music, auburn-haired, and of a bright, merry, cheerful disposition, that you're advertising? I got no kick against a dame of that kind."

I explained gently that she was not available—that she was, as it were, a shop-window model—a fixture—that there was no such person. That she was, in short, advertising.

M'Gryde was immensely intrigued.

"Huh! I get you," he said. "And every poor fool who would like to hear more of this merry, amiable redhead sends along a dollar for her photo. Say, Mont, it's time I pulled you! But we'll decide what to do about those dollars later. Have you got *anything* in the heiress way to offer? A small brunette would do, failing a large blonde—but she must have the requisite mazuma."

By "mazuma" he meant money, Louise.

I ran through my ledger. There was nothing available with more than a thousand dollars, and the Captain was rather cold about these. He said so.

"I am not sure that I like this business of yours, Mont," he said. "It's paltry, and it's piking. You'll have to dig up something better than a thousand-dollar

heiress for mine—and it calls for quick action. I'll give you a week to find her—the future Mrs. M'Gryde," he said, "and if she aint here sharp on schedule time, *you* are due for a year or two in the cooler!" He then left.

I do not disguise from you, dear Louise, that for the next hour I sat in my office a prey to deep dejection. I was well aware that I was face to face with a problem so complex and difficult that it would have put a less non-moral man out of business, and almost immediately thereafter out of the town. Quite the last person an eligible blonde American heiress needs assistance from is a matrimonial agent. She is competent to find her own husband, and the lads over there are amply competent to find her—yes, indeed!

Yet here I was, practically bound to produce an extremely wealthy one for the police captain within a week, if I desired to keep on the comfortable side of the local jail.

My thoughts were slowly beginning to flow towards a consideration of that portion of the railway time-table which dealt with departures from the town, when a very remarkable coincidence occurred.

A lady entered the office, and was promptly shown in by my clerk.

She was, I perceived at a glance, a large blonde, and although past the first flush (and, indeed, the second flush) of youth, she was what one might quite reasonably term a well-preserved and comparatively handsome woman. She was dressed well, in expensive though not exuberant clothes, and her manner was extraordinarily self-possessed. An interview with a matrimonial agent is an uncommonly good test of self-possession, Louise.

She settled herself comfortably in the chair which I placed for her at my desk, and for a few seconds surveyed me in silence.

I saw anew that she had once been an extremely beautiful woman, though the considerable remnants of her once dazzling loveliness were marred slightly by a certain austerity or severity—I may even say, hardness—of the eyes and mouth, and a small, peculiarly-shaped scar on her left cheekbone. It was almost a perfect crescent. I became aware of a feeling that she was wealthier than the usual run of my lady clients. Upon the whole, she made an excellent impression upon me—excellent. She would make—in spite of that faintly chilling severity, that hint of fierceness—an admirable wife for a high-spirited man.

HER impression of me must have been favorable, for her peculiar, rather mysterious and vaguely alluring almond-shaped eyes brightened a little as she looked at me. She smiled faintly.

"You are Mr. de Fleury?" she inquired.

"Entirely at your service, mademoiselle," I said, with a certain courtliness. I felt that a degree of courtliness would not be wholly out of place—and, of course, dear Louise, a matrimonial agent would never dream of using any mode of address but "mademoiselle" to a lady client at first glance—even though she were obviously most excessively married.

"I am Eleanora Colone," she said, in a carelessly impressive way. She placed a gold net handbag of obvious worth on my desk, and looked at me attentively. I had never heard of her in my life, but I confess that I felt that I should have done so. That she was a stranger to the town, I knew, of course.

"No doubt you will think it singular that I should avail myself of the service of a matrimonial agent in the matter of selecting another husband—for I am a widow, as probably you are very well aware—and I desire it to be clearly understood that, whatever my reasons, I do not propose to reveal or discuss them," she said.

I murmured an appreciation of what I believe I spoke of as "a very natural inclination" and she nodded.

"I desire to marry again," she said imperiously, "and, because of the reasons to which I have alluded, I am not disposed to be too critical. I prefer a man of tall, distinguished appearance, with good manners, and some knowledge of the usages of polite society. He need not be strictly handsome, and I do not wish a man who is popular, and who possesses shoals of friends. Money is of no consequence whatever. He may be poor, but that will be of no importance—though, as a guarantee of his integrity and honesty of purpose, I shall require that he insures his life to an extent compatible with his position as my husband. And he must be prepared to change his name, should he possess one which grates on my ear or jars my sense of harmony. That, I think, is all."

She paused, and surveyed me keenly.

"I should be grateful if one of you gentlemen could direct me to the house of Mrs. M'Gryde."

"Are *you* married?" she asked calmly.

I reflected swiftly. It was quite clear that I could, with perfect propriety, regard the inquiry as a proposal—but, for some indefinable reason, I hesitated. Was it some strange, sweet presentiment of you, dear Louise, that rose to the surface of my mind? I have often wondered. But my hesitation saved me.

It was not complimentary, I fear—certainly it was not very courtly—and a momentary expression of intense anger, so fierce, so hard and even terrible, flashed across her face, that, mentally shaking hands with myself, I made haste to answer. I rose and bowed with that courtly, old-world grace which, as you have often been so kind as to say, Louise, is one of my more attractive attributes.

"Alas, dear lady, I grieve to say that my personal matrimonial affairs are in a state of such intricate and incredibly involved complication that he would be a bold man who could say offhand whether I am married, half-married, divorced, semi-divorced, a widower, or single. A curious position of affairs, you will say, for a matrimonial agent, and indeed you will be right. But you are no doubt familiar with the classic phrase of the great clown Garabimaldi (I fear I came a cropper over the name), *'I can make other people laugh, but I cannot laugh myself!'* So, madame, it is with me. I can dispense matrimony from this office with a lavish hand—I can even control (to a limited extent, and for a limited time) the marriages and matrimonial affairs of others—but my own matrimonial affair I cannot control, for she is uncontrollable."

I bowed even lower.

"Madame," I said, not without a careful, rather touching tremor of the voice, "your proposal falls upon the wounded spirit of a man who dares not in business hours wear his heart upon his sleeve; like the gentle dew from above, your generous pity and compassion bathes in the Lethean waters of Love, as in an anodyne —nay, a very nepenthe—"

"Yes, yes, I understand," she said briskly. "You may forget it, Mr. Fleury. It was the merest passing inquiry, and the matter is devoid of the slightest importance. Let us proceed with business. What available clients have you?"

I TOOK my heart off my sleeve, put it in my pocket, so to speak, Louise, and we proceeded to business.

I ventured to inquire as to the lady's means. She responded with a list of investments—mining stock, mostly, which convinced me that even if they were *all* untamable "wildcats" the mere paper on which her share certificates were printed was worth a considerable sum to any

paper-maker for re-pulping—and in my mind's eye I married her at once to Captain M'Gryde.

You see, in some respects, he answered rather uncannily well to specifications. True, he was not tall. Indeed he was one of the squat, oblate ones. Nor was he distinguished—except for the astonishing liberality of his feet. But, on the other hand, I have seldom met a man who struggled along with less popularity—his nickname, which was "Blight" M'Gryde, conveys that to you—and he had shoals of the kind of friends who would cheerfully lead him over the cliff if he were blind, but none of the other kind.

He was poor, and always would be in any place where he could spend money on himself. And I did not doubt that he would willingly insure his life. If the policy lapsed because a rich wife failed to keep it paid up, Captain M'Gryde was not the kind of man to worry himself into chronic insomnia on that account.

Yes, I saw it with a thrill. They were made for each other—and both for me! I proceeded to describe the police captain.

Mrs. Colone was immensely interested. She even went so far as to say that if her unalterable decision that her husband should be insured for at least a hundred thousand dollars pressed too hardly upon the Captain's resources, she would be prepared occasionally to pay his premiums for him—if he were otherwise tractable.

I arranged, then, as to the extent of my own personal rake-off—er—fees, you understand, Louise, and, leaving her for a moment, went to fetch the Captain. I did not use the telephone, though there was one on my desk. I told Mrs. Colone—and she agreed—that to my mind the introduction of machinery into such delicate matters was apt to render the negotiations sordid, if not positively base. Besides, there was the question of my rake-off, small though it would be (if any at all) from M'Gryde. Of this I did not speak.

Hastily driving from his presence a minor malefactor who had been explaining an infringement of the by-laws relating to the peddling of monkey-nuts, and thrusting the explanation into his pocket without troubling to count it, M'Gryde came with me to my office.

I need not say that by the time I had recited half the list of the lady's investments and her other charms, he was willing to swallow all her very reasonable stipulations whole, and even to ask for more to show his good faith.

The thing went with a swing from the start. M'Gryde, perhaps more accustomed to a certain severity of look than was I,—though, as a matrimonial agent, I, too, did not lack experience of the glassy gaze, nay, the crystalline stare of some of my less happy endings—appeared to notice nothing but a gentle and tender beauty upon the countenance of the gracious Eleanora, and, neither being inclined to display a niggling fastidiousness, the preliminaries were speedily settled.

Both parties scrupulously carried out their obligations—I achieved a very sweet little rake-off on the first premium of the large life-insurance policy—and a few days later the marriage took place, very quietly, at the request of the bride.

Owing to a sudden rather important arrest, M'Gryde was not able to leave the town at once for his honeymoon trip.

IN the evening following the marriage I worked late at my office thinking out the particulars of a new and rather promising type of heiress I had been building up in my mind for some time past, and writing a new and brilliant advertisement offering her. I remember to this day the glowing though hopelessly unmoral thrill of joy sent coursing through my mind by the reflection that she would stand at least a two-dollar photograph fee.

I completed my work and, locking up the office, strolled down to the newspaper office with the advertisement.

The last edition was published just as I arrived—and I admit to you, Louise, that my vertebræ changed gear and froze in the reverse when my eyes fell on the "star" story of that last edition. I wont harrow your gentle heart, Louise, with the details. Let it suffice to say that the rag had devoted half its entire space to a detailed account, not of the police captain's wedding—but of his bride.

I had guessed her to be distinguished—and she was—notorious, in fact.

She was the famous Belle Tone—the only woman on earth who had been twice tried for her life on the capital charge of murdering her husband—the motive in each case being the heavy life-insurance of the husband.

The first trial—on account of the first husband—had taken place in Scotland. The verdict had been "not proven." The

second trial had been in Paris, and four juries had disagreed. Her first husband had been a Scotch inspector of police, her second husband had been a lieutenant of the French police. Both had been insured for a sum equivalent to about one hundred thousand dollars, and both had died very suddenly.

The deciding factor which had saved her was the allegation that shortly prior to the fate of both husbands, a mysterious person, a man of "pronounced Oriental appearance," had inquired the way to the house of the lady; but this person had never been discovered.

The newspaper reporter claimed to have recognized her by the scar on her cheek.

You can well believe, Louise, that I devoured the extraordinary news. Suddenly, as I stood at the door reading avidly, the paper was snatched from my hand and I looked up with a start.

It was M'Gryde, from the police office almost opposite, and it was evident that he had read the news.

He glared at me, blue-black with either passion or fear, I never quite knew which. He opened his mouth, but whatever he was about to say was never spoken. For at that moment a passer-by stopped.

"Pardon me," he said, in a curious lisping voice. "I should be grateful if one of you gentlemen could direct me to the house of Mrs. M'Gryde."

M'Gryde gasped, staring. Then without a word he turned and dashed, comet-like, across the street toward his office.

Not till he disappeared inside did I look at the passer-by.

"Go right along, and ask again," I said; and simultaneously I left him and went out of the matrimonial agency business for good.

There was an eastbound train just pulling out, when a second and a half later I reached the railway-station.

I connected with that train, thus beginning my non-stop run to New York, *en route* for England. Why, do you ask, Louise?

Well, heart of mine, the person who had wished to be told the way to Mrs. M'Gryde's was a person of most extraordinarily pronounced Oriental appearance, and his arrival conveyed to me what the cry of the banshee is said to convey to those who hear it.

M'Gryde, dearest? I have never seen him since; but, long after, I learned that he, too, tried for the train which bore me away.

He missed it by half a second, but a second later he was aboard a fast freight which was heading westwards, and which he did not leave until he was on the other side of the Rocky Mountains! He, too, was a man of quick decisions.

THE CAPTAIN glanced at the clock, finished his port, and rose.

"Ah, Lester, what a romantic career you have had!" sighed Louise, gazing up at him admiringly.

"Yes, my heart, very romantic, and crowned at the end of it with that priceless boon, a perfect wife, with a disposition of pure gold. That is the bright, particular star which illumines the profound gloom which, owing to my affliction, would otherwise enshroud the sunset, so to speak, of my life!"

He sighed.

"Ah, well, I suppose the boys will take it as unkind if I do not look in on them at the club for a half-hour. Go to bed, dear heart, and rest. I would not rob you of one instant's necessary slumber."

He kissed her affectionately, then drew out a little loose silver and looked at it with an air of chagrined discovery.

"By Jove, Louise, I am short—very short! Heaven forgive me, but *have* you a fiver handy, darling?"

Mrs. Cormorant almost ran to her desk.

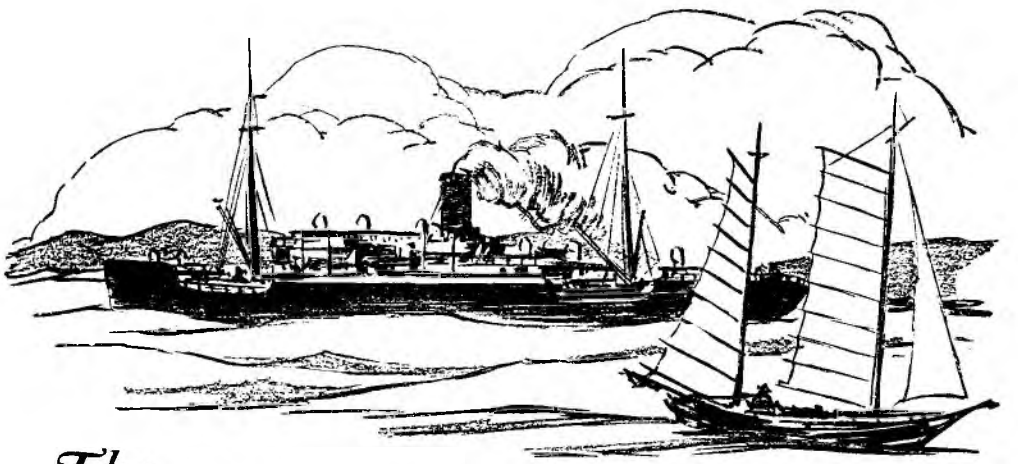
"Nobody shall ever say that *I* am like that Mrs. Sopley-Smyth," she declared.

"Not in *my* hearing!" said the Captain fiercely, putting the fiver in his pocket. He kissed her again, lighted her candle, and gallantly escorting her to the foot of the stairs, bade her a tender "*au revoir.*"

"A good little soul!" he mused as he let himself out. "She must always be kept happy. Probably the only person in the world who believes in me, God bless her! Yes, she has faith in her husband—poor wretch that I am," he continued, smiling cheerfully, as he felt for his cigar-case. "And that is the great essential to all wifely happiness, devil a doubt of it: Faith in one's husband—and plenty of ready money to back faith up! Yes, indeed!"

And, striking a match, the Captain sauntered comfortably clubward.

"A Man of Ambition," another diverting adventure of this frank rapscallion, will appear in the next, the February, issue.



The Rescue of Percy

By
CULPEPER ZANDTT

Illustrated by Joe Sabo

He was being mothered to death when Dr. Galt arranged to have him shanghaied—and the subsequent events are interesting indeed.

GALT was a wonderful dancer, considering his thirty-eight years—a man whose recent exploits had made him popular both in Government and business circles; and he naturally was among the first to receive a card for the Governor's Ball.

He and Lady Helen Carawyn were sitting near a window between dances when they heard low but argumentative voices on the balcony outside. When the Doctor would have raised his tone a little by way of warning that there were others within hearing, Her Ladyship placed a finger upon her lips and then laid a cautioning hand upon his knee—whispering:

"You should hear this, I fancy—as a bit of character-study."

On the balcony a voice which he presently recognized as that of Lady Garning, wife of General Sir Hector Garning, Bart., appeared to be questioning recent activities of her son, a young fellow of attractive appearance who played very fair polo, and took himself quite seriously.

"Percy, I noticed you dancing twice with a pretty but rather common-looking girl—and this is only the beginning of the evening. She seems to have made quite an impression upon you? What?"

"Aw—well, d'ye see—nice little thing. Knows how to dance an' talk a bit. Nobody's fool! Rather rippin', y'know."

"Er—who is she? Nobody we know—I'm quite sure of that."

"Why—no. Only came out a week ago—on the C. P. R. to Hongkong, an' then down by P. & O."

"One of those rather forward Colonials, I suppose?"

"Fancy not. California—if I understood what little she said upon that point."

"Oh! Then she'll probably have no money—I believe it's only the eastern Americans who have such immense fortunes."

"Well—one doesn't awsk Americans if they're the rich or the poor sort upon first acquaintance, y'know. Dare say Boggs might rally round a bit an' ascertain—if I dropped the hint."

"Have you met her before?"

"Oh—aye. After the polo—said she'd been watchin' my game, when we were introduced. Liked it because she rides, herself. Rode with her next mornin'. No form, y'know—been accustomed to those rotten cow-person saddles. But her beastie was by way of bein' an ugly brute, an' didn't manage to get her off—though she was ridin' with stirrups the length of her leg. No end plucky, y'know."

"Well, but—Percy—do you fancy it's quite fair to the girl—quite the—er—sporting thing to do—showing her so much attention? Suppose she gets notions in her head, fancies you really mean it? You were scarcely thinking of marrying her?"

"Oh, Lud! You're always takin' me for a boy, Mater! Little chap who doesn't know his way about! Cawn't a chap enjoy a gel's society an' good looks without her fancyin' she hears the Lohengrin March? Of course—if I did care about marryin' I fancy there'd be no interference. I came of age three years ago."

"Oh—to be sure, Percy dear! You're a man, now, and must do as you please—though, to me, you'll always be Mother's darling boy, you know. However, though the General makes you a very decent allowance, and I do what I can with what I have, naturally we'd not feel called upon to support a penniless girl if you married one, even though she might be almost presentable in other ways. In fact—I'm not sure that it wouldn't make you a bit more careful if you kept that contingency always in mind when you're with some young person who attracts you. Do I make myself clear, dear?"

"H-m-m—possibly you're right, Mater. It's—it's rippin' of you to be always watchin' out for me, don't you know."

AS the music started again, Galt and Lady Helen whirled out upon the floor—presently coming to anchor again in a corner where it was safe to discuss what they'd heard.

"I saw who they were as they came in from the balcony—and it was Marjorie Adams that boy was dancing with. I knew Buck Adams when he first came out and put all his money into a California orange grove—the girl would have been eight or ten at the time, I suppose, but she remembered me when we met, out here—called me 'Uncle Doctor,' as she used to do—and we had a jolly gabfest over old days. Don't know how much Buck has got by this time, but Marjie's his only heir, and she says they're cultivating a thousand acres this year. What I do know is that anything she says goes, with Buck—and he's taught her to look out for herself any old place in the world. That girl is a prize—for some man! What the devil is the matter with Lady Garning, anyhow! What does she think she's going to do with that cub of hers?"

"Make a gentleman of him."

"Well, she's going at it the wrong way—with methods that never made a gentleman yet, since the human race began, and never will! Funny! I've met the General a number of times—and liked him. No high-hat that I could discover, anywhere. Must have ability or he couldn't hold the position he does with the Straits Government. And yet—according to what she said to the pup—his father is making him a handsome allowance to loaf around playing polo and not do a single stroke of honest work! I can't quite understand that—with such a man!"

"That's just the reaction I expected, Doctor, when I wanted you to hear that conversation. I fancy you and the General would find many subjects of common interest when you know each other better. That boy has just enough decent qualities, way down underneath the useless veneer with which his mother is plastering him, to make his father think a lot of the cub—and he gets so exasperated at the silly life his mother insists upon his leading that sometimes I almost fear the General will have apoplexy. He'd cut off Percy's allowance in a minute if it were not for the argument he'd get at home—it would be simply intolerable! Doubtless other men have been in the same position."

"Millions of 'em! And if they had the moral courage to wind up their family complications when matters got that far, we'd have a much better rising generation than we have today. What intrigued me in that conversation upon the balcony was the Borgian cleverness of the mother. Keep your eye on Marjorie Adams during the rest of the evening—I'll make a bet with you that the pup will do exactly what his mother suggested!"

The Doctor had other dances with Lady Helen, during which they compared observations. Then he had one of the final tangos with Marjorie—after which they went out on one of the balconies to cool off.

"Having a nice time, Marjie?"

"Well—I am—and I'm not, Uncle Doctor. There are folks in this world who get my goat. I don't know whether you've noticed that Garning boy I've been playing round with, have you?"

"Oh, yes—any boy you play with interests me, because you generally avoid the mavericks. But when I saw you with Percy, I kinda wondered if you were keeping your eye on the ball."

"That name of his is one of the few things he couldn't help—they wished that on him when he was a helpless baby. A lot of other things, he could help—and when he shows up such a helpless fool in not even seeing any good reason why he should—I—well—I want to *whack* him! Near as I can figure, it's mostly that silly fool of a mother!"

"What's the Percy pup been doing now?"

"Oh—nothing but what you might expect, considering the way he was raised. You see, I did take him for a gentleman—at first. His dogs and his polo-ponies love him—if such animals can't tell a yellow quitter when they smell him, it's the first case I ever heard of! One of the other players doesn't care enough for Percy to stand around and look at him, hypnotized—not so you'd notice it—but admitted to me that once he was chivvied into giving his word upon anything, he didn't break it. So I've been sort of—what you'd professionally call probing, I suppose—trying to get at the real man underneath, if there is such a thing. He—he *is* kinda good-looking, don't you think? Hm? Well, anyhow, he was going to dance half the evening with me—because our steps match pretty well and I guess because he wanted to. Of course I wouldn't have given him more than five or six dances, or let him take me in to supper—because I'm rather in the enemy's camp, out here, and I'd rather not start anything. But when he dropped me after the first two—and after supper just stopped for a breathless minute to say that his mother had promised he would dance with the daughters of several friends—and—and ride with them tomorrow, so he'd have to postpone our date indefinitely—well, I sort of sneaked up to the nearest mirror to see if smallpox was beginning to show on me!"

"H-m-m—what do you feel that I ought to do about it, Marjie?"

"Oh—I just want to snuggle up against one of my own folks, I reckon. It isn't that I really meant to grab Mother's darling and fetch him home to work in one of our orchards—he wouldn't be worth his keep as he is now. But it did rather make me sore to have Her Ladyship sneak in a cold deck on me the way she did! I saw her lugging him out on one of the balconies—and I've imagination enough to just about repeat that little conversation. If she had any notion of what Dad's got salted away in his safe-deposit box, aside from the fruit-orchards, I'll bet she'd have had a hunch to think it over a bit longer before telling Percy how careful he must be about low entanglements—but she wouldn't believe it if anyone told her. . . . . Say, Uncle Doctor! You've got to help me out on that point—no fooling! If anybody comes gumshoeing around to get any dope on my circumstances, I want you to assure 'em that Dad just about manages to pay the interest on the mortgages, and hasn't had a new suit of clothes in three years. Will you?"

"That goes. I'll tell 'em."

WHETHER Lady Helen dropped a hint to the General or not, Galt never knew, though he had some suspicion of it. Possibly Sir Hector, knowing the Doctor's reputation for managing to do a number of seriously important things which nobody else seemed able to handle, had some idea that this quietly efficient alien among them might make a suggestion that would solve his problem. At all events, meeting Galt on Cavenagh Bridge next morning, he suggested their having a chat upon one of the upper verandas of the Singapore Club, overlooking the steamers at anchor in the Roads and the junks packed along the sea-wall. When they were comfortably stretched in deck-chairs outside the windows of the Doctor's room, and his China boy had served them with Virginia mint-juleps—the General seemed to have some difficulty in getting down to his object.

"Er—well—it's like this, d'ye see, Doctor. One is told that you're not practicin' at present, but that you're exceedingly courteous about droppin' a hint or so when you run across a chap who seems to be in a bad way. Now there's nothin' the matter with me, personally. On the contr'ry—quite remarkably fit, for my age, I fancy. But I've a lad comin' up— Er—possibly you may have noticed him—what?"

"I've seen him riding about with my adopted niece, Miss Adams of California—saw them dancing at the ball, last night."

"Your—your niece? My word! D'ye mean that rather clever girl who rides even the ugliest brutes—with stirrups much too long—and they can't seem to get her off? Fancy! I—I like that girl, Doctor! Seems—well—wholesome—in spite of her savin' what she thinks when possibly it might be more tactful to—er—generalize a bit."

"There's a radiogram from the Rajah of Soeltoenak. Ever hear of him?"

"Marjorie is an alien, like myself—among strangers who are apt to be over-critical in such cases. And there's a limit to even tact. Sometimes a little plain-speaking clears the air. Marjorie is sound all through, and a first-class sport—the sort of girl who wouldn't mind starting life with a man in one room and doing her own work. But if the man didn't get busy and hustle until they could afford a new car every year—well—she'd make him. We're not related. Her father and I were friends when he first came out from Virginia to California—as I did. From the time she was in short skirts and pig-tails, she has called me 'Uncle.' But—I'm saying too much about her. You were speaking of your son? He seems to be in good health?"

"Physically, I fancy the lad's fit enough. Mentally—he can't appreciate the fact that the world owes nobody a life of ease an' luxury unless he works for it—something which you Americans appear to under-stand from the cradle. You have a so-called leisure class, to be sure. But it's by way of bein' a sort of excrescence upon your national life, d'ye see—by no means a basic part, as it is with us. Frankly, Doctor, I'm apprehensive concernin' the lad. An' really—he's good blood in him. Underneath all the loafin' about, living the life of a useless parasite, I can't believe there isn't the makin' of a man in the chap—if he had but the chance. What?"

"If he but had the chance, General! And that's something he'll never get unless he's removed for some time from Her Ladyship's apron-strings! His predicament is a common one—brought about by what we professional men call the insanity of mothers. It's but natural instinct for a mother to protect her young at any cost to herself—every bird and every species of animal has it. But the human animal falls down where the other creatures have a heap more sense. Watch almost any kind of a bird you can mention. Invariably, when the young ones are old enough to fly, you'll see the mother push them out of the nest—encourage them when they tumble, coax them, teach them—and then let 'em shift for themselves. Take a cat and her kittens—once a kitten is weaned, will she let it come back again with the others for more of her milk? She will not! She'll spit and hiss at that kitten until the poor little thing goes off by itself to make its way in the world, if it can—to die if it can't. But the old cat's instinct is right—every time! Let that kitten come back and loaf against her nice warm fur until fully grown, and he'll be a sucker all his life. The only remedy I see for your boy is to get him away from his mother—by stratagem, by force—doesn't

matter what way. Then shove him overboard without a cent of allowance and see what happens. If there's any red-blooded manhood in him, he'll swim. If he's a yellow quitter, he'll go under—and it's better for all concerned if he does."

"Oh—you're quite right! No bally question about it! But—how to manage? Could you—er—suggest anything?"

GALT was silent for a moment or two—then stepped in through the open window, which Ling Foh had unlocked when they came up on the veranda. Presently, he returned with a letter which he handed to the General.

"There's a radiogram which came yesterday from His Highness, the Rajah of Soeltoenak. Ever hear of him?"

"Oh—to be sure. But—rather vaguely. One of the states in the interior of Borneo—not? Dutch resident—who has very little to say, I fancy. Not so easily accessible—what?"

"At this time of year a boat drawing less than fourteen feet can get over the bar of the Sesajap, at high tide, for possibly three months, and go up for more than a hundred miles, if she doesn't ground on snags or rocks—I don't think the river has been charted. At the head of navigation there's a little *kampong* where the Rajah's light-draft river-boats, and those of a neighboring sultan, bring down cargo for the deep-water craft—or load incoming supplies from them. When I was last in His Highness' little town, rather far in the interior, we stamped out pretty much all of the sickness and impressed the natives with some ideas of sanitation. But he's had a few cases of cholera, lately, and jungle-fever—both from drinking impure water. He's rather set upon having me pay him another visit and then stay on, if I will, as his business manager. (I put through a couple of deals for him which didn't please my Dutch friends overmuch but which netted the Rajah half a million in the three years after I left.) Fact is—I'd almost decided this morning that I would go. The Rajah is an Oxford man who took a post-graduate course in engineering at Cornell, has a luxurious palace up there in the jungle, with modern conveniences—electric light, modern plumbing, radio station, and a few very comfortable bungalows for white visitors who stay any length of time.

"Now—what struck me as we were talking, was this: I'll have to charter a small steamer to get up into the Rajah's State—and there happens to be an old three-thousand-ton cargo-boat lying out there in the Roads that will answer my purpose very well. Of course, His Highness reimburses me for all expenses and pays me very well beside. But if I took over the responsibility of looking after your boy also, I would only do it on a contingent fee. There is some risk—a slight one, I think, and no more than I take myself—of his getting cholera or fever, and dying out there. But—say he pulls through as we anticipate? The only way to get him started upon any such trip would be to have him shanghaied aboard my boat—by Malays whom I can easily hire. He'll have a bit of rough going at the start—we can't say how he'll take it. He may prove unmanageable up there in the Rajah's state—may run away—get lost in the jungle. But if ever he gets back here anything like a two-fisted man—well, that'll be time enough to go into the matter of a fee."

ADMITTING that Lady Garning was inexcusably ruthless when influenced by her prejudices, like all of her type, she had the redeeming quality of being thorough. Not content with having poisoned her son's mind against Miss Adams, she didn't let the matter rest there as a better-natured woman might have done. Instead, she dropped frequent hints to the effect that the girl might be an adventuress for all they knew—traveling with merely two acquaintances from the states who knew very little of her antecedents.

Of course, with Galt's backing and knowledge of everything concerning her, Marjorie could have turned the tables upon the woman quite easily in a very short time, but when she began to sense a lack of cordiality among those she met, it rankled. Knowing her position to be unassailable both socially and financially, she began to wonder whether it was worth while to bother about overcoming an undercurrent of prejudice for which she more than suspected Lady Garning might be responsible. And while in that mood she happened to run across the Doctor's faithful China boy, Ling Foh, who—knowing how much his Tuan Hakim thought of the girl, would gladly have done anything she asked of him. He said that his master

had just gone off in a launch to a little cargo-boat lying out in the Roads—by her size and type pretty old, as steamers go, but cleanly painted and evidently well-found. The Tuan Hakim was about to go upon a little journey—upon this boat which he had just chartered—he pointed her out to Miss Adams. Somewhere in the Archipelago, he thought—possibly for an absence of several months, possibly not more than two. Ling Foh had the impression, vaguely, that there might be sickness which the Tuan was going to cure.

Marjorie did some quick thinking for a moment or two. If there were really an epidemic where he was going, she knew that Galt would not consent to her accompanying him—but she'd had some nursing experience and wasn't in the least apprehensive about any sort of sickness. This trip of the Doctor's seemed to just fit in with her mood of the moment—offering an opportunity for her quietly dropping out of the Government circle at Singapore without leaving a trace. Explaining to Ling Foh the only reason his master could object to her going along, she said he would have to assist in getting her aboard with her luggage immediately after dark—also arrange with the captain to have a room put in order for a guest of the Doctor's who would keep out of sight until they were at sea. The Chink knew from observation how much his master thought of the girl—and that, while he might be quite angry at first, he would afterward accept the situation without seriously blaming him. So, after considering the proposition all round, he agreed. Which brings us—by a somewhat devious course, you may say—to the personal adventures of Percy Garning, thereafter.

UPON the fourth evening after the Governor's Ball a young subaltern who greatly admired Sir Hector carried out a suggestion of his—made in the strictest confidence and supposed to be an experiment of the General's to find out what his son's reactions would be in a rougher environment than anything he had previously known—as Sir Hector assumed from inquiries he had made. The Lieutenant proposed that Percy should accompany him and two other young fellows to some of the sailors' dance-halls in the neighborhood of Keppel Harbor—taking in the lurid nightlife of that suburb. It was an adventure which quite appealed to Garning, as his father had supposed it might—and also to the others who welcomed anything more exciting than life around the Tanglin Club. At midnight they were getting some kick from hard liquor, not of the best quality—had been dancing with the coarse but good-looking girls to be found in such places—had narrowly avoided fights with sailors and beachcombers who nursed a general antipathy for "toffs" of any sort, and were sampling a sixth or eighth round of drinks—none of the four being clear as to just where they were—or who.

Afterward—three of them got no further than that round of drinks in their explanation of what had happened. Presumably somebody must have called rickshaws, packed them aboard, and told the *wallahs* where they were to be taken. At least, the boys at the Tanglin Club said that was the way they had arrived there about two in the morning, and the impression given by the *wallahs* who pulled them. But of Percy Garning there was no trace. And when his companions went back next afternoon, to look for him, they couldn't be sure which dance-hall they'd been in at the wind-up. No inquiries produced any definite admission that they'd been seen in the dance-halls after ten o'clock. It was possible that all four might have been given knock-out drops, but they didn't think so—considering their sensations after the drinks they'd had, the effect seemed amply accounted for. Percy had simply dropped out. They finally went to the General and reported this—giving him all they could remember and what little information they'd been able to get—expecting to be held more or less accountable for his son.

But much to their relief, the fine old chap didn't take this view at all. He said that Percy was no infant, had been a year or two at Oxford, though sent down from there—and was supposed to take care of himself. He said appearances rather indicated that his son might have been shanghaied—in which case he'd probably find some way to communicate with them sooner or later, and that nothing could be done until then.

With Lady Garning, however, they didn't get off so easily. The rumor of Percy's disappearance began racing through the city when his companions returned from the harbor dance-halls without finding him—in a few hours everybody was discussing it, and Her Ladyship promptly

sent for the three. They told her exactly what they had told the General, but she took the ground that they were all older than Percy and directly responsible for him—which didn't happen to be within a mile of the truth, as they tactfully attempted to point out. After directly charging them with being accountable for his death if anything had happened to him, she took them with her to the Governor and demanded that he at once use all the forces at his disposal in combing the city for her boy—communicating with all outbound vessels for news of him. His Excellency was courteous, pointing out that he had already discussed the matter with Sir Hector, both agreeing that the young fellow probably had been carried aboard some ship and would communicate with them when he got an opportunity. But she berated him for lukewarmness—and finally for incapacity—which of course terminated the conversation.

BY the next afternoon, it became generally known that Miss Adams also had disappeared in fully as mysterious a way. She and her luggage had left the Raffles in two rickshaws pulled by strange *wallahs* whom none of the others seemed to know—her explanation being, when checking out, that she was leaving Singapore with rather indefinite plans, within the hour. As her name didn't appear on any of the passenger-lists, it was assumed that she must have booked under a fictitious one. Presently everybody began to couple the two disappearances, and a laugh went all over the city. Nobody worried much about Percy after that—even his mother accepted the supposition of what she considered a horrible *mésalliance* with a common adventuress, and immediately began arranging for her return home to England. This entirely suited the General, who welcomed the prospective rest from constant bickering and nervous strain. . . . .

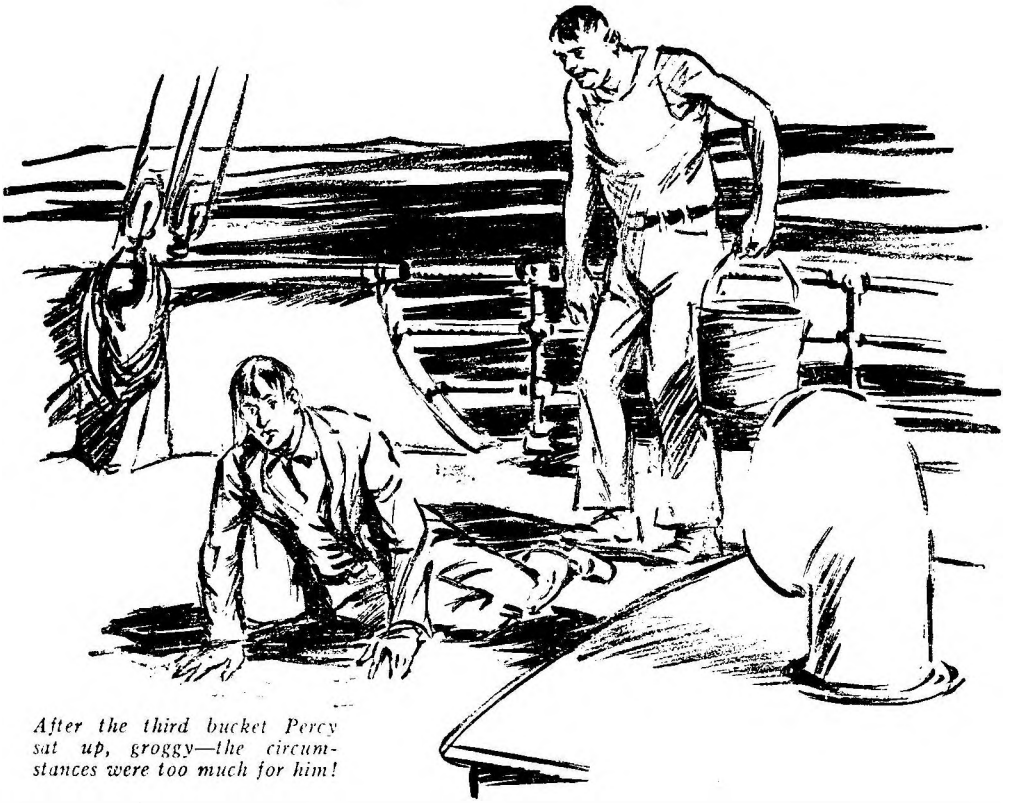
Percy, meanwhile, had wakened next morning with a headache—in a strange and not overclean bunk—on some sort of boat which was rolling enough to be either pretty small or of unusually light draught. Investigation of these amazing facts, he thought, would keep until he felt a good deal better—and was painfully turning over for another snooze when a rough voice startled him into a little more wakefulness.

"Ere now, matey! Tumble out o' that an' lend a hand in the galley, will ye! Course, ye comes aboard a bit barmy—fair stewed, h'I'd s'y, by the look o' ye—but ye carn't h'expec' other blokes to be doin' o' yer work—not wotsomever! Tumble h'out—or h'I'll be droppin' a bucket over tha side an' slushin' ye!"

Percy turned over on his elbow, facing his tormentor—the blaze of light through an open port hurting his eyes and making him blink. He made no move to get out of the bunk—looked at the other man rather contemptuously, asked if he would send for his man Boggs at once. Which produced a flow of picturesque repartee followed by the laying hold of his leg and yanking him out upon the deck with a pretty heavy thump. When he belligerently staggered to his feet, a smashing blow knocked him out into the gangway, and he was confusingly booted to the fo'c'stle-companion—up it—sprawling out into the for'ard well-deck. This time he was fairly seeing red with rage but his head had cleared sufficiently to make him unconsciously assume a boxing position and ward off the first two or three blows which followed. He even landed one on the second mate's jaw which sent that bucko mariner into the scuppers, but when he was on his feet again, his face wore a dangerous grin.

"So ye c'n box a bit, felley-me-lad? No 'arm done an' no 'fense taken, d'ye see! But we'll just be goin' inter it a bit. Best watch h'out now, h'I'm thinkin'!"

As the second mate took no more chances, the argument didn't last over five minutes—Percy going down for the count at the end of that time. Then his antagonist dropped a bucket over the side, hauled it up full of crystal sea-water, and slushed it over the prostrate figure. After the third bucket, Percy sat up—groggy but appreciating the fact that for the present circumstances were too much for him. When he was led, staggering, to the galley door—in greasy dungarees which in some amazing way had replaced the expensive suit he had worn the night before, he made no further objection to seating himself upon a bench and commencing to peel a basketful of potatoes, with gruff comment from the cook that he was to cut out all of the eyes as well as the skin. The only reason he didn't find himself in the stokehold, shoveling coal in a temperature of 120° F., was a brief talk that morning between the charterer and the master of the ship—after Galt had made a



After the third bucket Percy sat up, groggy—the circumstances were too much for him!

visit to the fo'c'stle to look at the sleeping man in one of the bunks.

"My China boy told me, Hawkins, that a young fellow had been shanghaied aboard of us last night and that, being rather short-handed, owing to our leaving before you could get a full crew, you kept him. Ling Foh examined his face pretty closely—was fairly positive that he belongs to a pretty good family in Singapore—father on the Governor's staff; so I went forward just now to have a look-see, myself. There's no question about it! He's the son of General Sir Hector Garning—whom I know very well. Were it not for one consideration, I'd put in at Sarawak or Sandakan on our way around, and set him ashore—because if they really wanted to be nasty, the law is on their side when it comes to knowingly proceeding with a shanghaied man when there was opportunity for putting him ashore before sailing. But in this particular case I happen to know that the General thinks the boy has been drifting into bad habits—loafing about on an allowance instead of going to work at something—and probably wont object very much to his roughing it for a little while, as long as it isn't *too* rough. Now—what were you going to put the young fellow at, this morning?"

"Why—the Black Gang, I suppose, sir. That's where we usually break in a stowaway or a shanghai."

"Pretty hot down there—in these latitudes. Remember, the boy is soft—doing nothing but polo—golf—dancing all night—swilling brandy-pegs. All of which have probably started more or less functional trouble with his heart. So if you put him to exerting himself beyond his strength in a temperature over a hundred and twenty, he may pass out—then we'd be in bad."

"My word, sir—I'd not thought of that! Faith—you're quite right! Takes a medico like yourself to consider those points. Very good! How about peelin' spuds in the galley, now? The cook an' his assistant aren't what one might consider genteel in their language an' manners—not the least what I'd fancy the lad has been used to—an' they may start after him with a carving-knife upon occasion—just in a playful way, as it were—but there'll be no real harm in 'em, I fancy, unless he starts talkin' religion with 'em—which isn't likely, I'd say. One of 'em's South County Irish an' the other is Scots Presbyterian. Er—you'll have seen the young lady this morning, I suppose, sir?"

"Young lady! What the devil do you mean, Hawkins? *What* young lady?"

"Why—your niece, sir, so I understood! Ling Foh fetched her aboard of us early

in the evening—after tellin' me to have the best stateroom cleaned up an' put in top shape for her. Said she'd be stickin' in her room until we were at sea this morning—for reasons which you'd quite well understand."

"Do you mean to tell me, Hawkins, that Miss Adams is actually on this boat? She knew damned well that I wouldn't have her aboard, this trip, if she asked me! By thunder, you can't beat some women when they get started—can you? Now we will have to put in at Sandakan—unless she talks me out of it before we pass Balabac Strait. No use blaming Ling Foh—he knows how much I think of the girl, and she could twist him around her fingers! Ordinarily, I'd be glad to have her along—but there's cholera up in Soeltoenak, and there's jungle-fever, and mebbe a bit of bubonic as well. No place for a white woman! Humph! Nice kettle of fish—not? Oh, well—I never was strong on worrying over things I can't help. What *is* to be, generally *will* be. You gave her the for'ard cabin on the starboard side, I suppose? I'll go up and have her out."

AFTER the first dozen potatoes, Percy's technique began to improve. He had the sense of coördination between brain and hands which enabled him to play very decent golf, make temporary repairs to bridle or saddle or get his car going again when it stalled on the road. Which is a most excellent quality in any man—though a good many seem to pride themselves upon being without it. As he worked, he was doing a good deal of serious thinking, entirely unconscious of the grinning way the cook and his assistant were keeping tab on him. A tentative exploration of his pockets had shown that he had a dollar and a half in Straits currency—no sign of a handkerchief, collar, necktie—though the somewhat smudged underwear appeared to be his own. A glance in a cheap mirror on the galley-bulkhead had shown that he needed a shave—would need one increasingly as the time passed. But he had no razor. His impression of the few other men he'd seen of the crew made the idea of borrowing a razor repugnant to him. The Scotch assistant-cook appeared to be much cleaner, but he had the impression that a Scot didn't lend—anything. The idea uppermost in his mind was seeing the master of the boat and asking to have a radio sent to Singapore—but he supposed his chances would be much better with a clean face. So presently he asked the cook if he might borrow his razor after the potatoes were done. Flaherty spun about with a look of amazement.

"Me rayzor, is ut! An' whose t'roat wur ye thinkin' o' cuttin' wit' ut—ye spalpane?"

"None but my own—an' I'd not do that unless I were stewed. There'll be something I wish to ask the Captain of this steamer, d'ye see—an' he may listen a bit more willingly if my face is clean. How soon do you fancy I can see him?"

"Whin he makes 'is roun' of inspiction, tomorry marnin'. An' what for do ye be wishin' ter spake wit' 'im, bhoy?"

"Why—if he'll be good enough to send my father a radio for me, he'll get whatever he wishes to charge for my passage to any civilized port, d'ye see."

"An' if yer daddy happen is dead o' heart-throuble—or run oover be an automo-ble—what'll ye be doin' then ter pay th' ould mon f'r 'is radio? Or mebbe your guvnor's aloive an' still has 'is bit in tha bank? Mebbe *not!* How's tha ould mon ter know as he'll be payin' money out o' 'is pocket for radios? How's he ter know ye aint lyin'—havin' 'im on, just fer ter git outa worrkin' your way? Tell me thot! An' wot good'll ut be doin' ye whin we're not bound for anny civilized poort?"

"Why—where *are* we goin'?"

"Oop wan av thim rivers in wan o' tha Dootch Islan's—fur as we kin go—'n thin lay there, broilin' an' sizzlin' till tha charterer'll be goin' furder oop—stayin' mebbe f'r moonths—an' cooms back ag'in. Th' p'int's loike this, felley: Instid o' figgerin' how can ye git your guvnor ter do somethin' for ye—an' waitin' an' waitin' till you're fair sick for wurrd from 'im—ye'd betther be botherin' your head aboot what kin ye do f'r yersilf—ter kape goin' in the wurrld—an' kape tha breath av loife in ye! Thim praties you're peelin' is scullion's wurrk—thirty Sthraits dollars tha moonth—an' chow. If ut's tha best ye can do, ye'll not have enough, come payin'-off toime, ter git ye back to Singapore!"

"But deuce take it, man—I'm tellin' you my guvnor'll send me plenty of money—the minute he gets my radio!"

"Will he so? Are ye sure? Did he niver tell ye, mebbe, ye wor spindin' too

mooch—an' not 'arnin' enough? Mightn't he be thinkin' this a chanc't for ye to foind out could ye pay your own way, at a pinch?"

"Hmph! If he felt that way, my mother would send the money—without any questions!"

"Aye—she would so—happen she had it—if ye'd take ut off her! But would ye? Would ye ask a woman to put oop her umbrelly fur ye so's ye'd not git wet—or go hoongry—instid o' seein' mebbe could ye manage a shillin' or two av yure own? Wot?"

She glanced down in surprise at the disreputable figure, then turned to her deck-chair.

FOR the first time, the boy commenced to see his life as the world saw it. He began to wonder if, possibly, the captain might not refuse to advance money for a radiogram, after all. The more he thought it over the more it seemed that, in the same position, he might himself refuse—with no guarantee whatever that the shanghaied youngster had a father who could send him money. And this left him—where? A shiver of apprehension crept down his spine at the thought that he was really "on his own"—out here on deep-water, with no help in sight save what he might manage to do for himself. And then—when he had finished the potatoes and stepped out upon the well-deck for a breath of air, and was feeling pretty low—he happened to glance up toward the boat-deck of the midship-house where the few staterooms and mess-saloon were located. A girl stood looking down as if she had just that moment stepped to the rail.

"Marjorie! O-o-o-o—Marjorie!"

She glanced down in mild surprise at the disreputable figure in dungarees—looked him in the face, blankly, then turned and sauntered back to her deck-chair under the awning.

The young fellow was desperate enough by this time to have fought like a madman had anybody tried to stop him. Racing through the enclosed gangway to the after well, he ran up the ladder to the mess-saloon-deck and then up another one to the boat-deck—coming suddenly upon a man and a girl in tropic "whites," lounging in their deck-chairs as they talked. Two persons out of a cloudless sky who knew him—knew his father for a man of sufficient wealth to send him whatever he needed! People whom he himself knew beyond all question! The reaction was so great that he had difficulty in keeping from actually blubbering.

"Doctor Galt! *Marjorie!* Oh, thank God I've friends on board this tub! You know me—don't you? Percy Garning—Sir Hector's son? For God's sake, don't say you can't place me, Doctor! And you can't have forgotten me, Marjorie!"

Although it was really her first knowledge that the young fellow was on the same boat with her, the girl couldn't have played up better for the Doctor's purpose had they rehearsed the game together.

"I did know a Percy Garning in Singapore, but I thought him rather a cad the last time we met—not really worth bothering with. And even at that, I must say you don't look so much like him—though a bath might sharpen the resemblance some!"

"But deuce take it, what can a chap do when even the Irish cook wont lend me a razor, an' there'll be no baths in the fo'c'stle! From the time the second mate kicked me on deck this morning, I've been peelin' potatoes! Have had nothing to eat! I say, Doctor! I'm really in a serious hole, don't you know! Not a soul will believe me when I tell 'em who I am—an' that my father will send me passage-money by radio the moment he gets a message from me!"

"H-m-m—suppose I have some doubts about it myself? Let's consider your case from the outside and see how it looks. I think if you were shaved and dressed in decent clothes, you'd be near enough like what I saw of Sir Hector's son to practically settle the question of identity. As corroborative evidence, you certainly are talking like the unlicked cub he's generally supposed to be."

"What do you mean, Doctor? I—I don't understand that!"

"You're presuming to come up here from the fo'c'stle, without permission, to annoy the charterer of this boat with a demand that he loan you the price of a radio message to your father in order that you may be helped by some one else out of a predicament which you couldn't have gotten into except by your own folly. You haven't said one word about doing anything to help yourself out of it! Had you come to me with a reasonable proposition to do any sort of work I might consider worth paying for, I'd have had an entirely different opinion of you. They've set you to work in the galley, have they? Scullion's job? Well—as long as this boat is under charter to me, I'll agree that you'll not be abused unless you ask for it—that you'll get plenty of fairly wholesome chow to eat, and that, if you care to sign on as one of the crew, you'll draw thirty-five dollars a month—possibly a little more than that when you can do work that is worth it.

"For the present, I'll not send any message to your father, nor will I permit the master of this steamer to send one. Frankly, Garning,—if you really are Garning,—I doubt whether your father is worrying as much as you seem to think, though your mother may. Her troubles don't concern me so much, either—she'll know you're alive until she hears to the contrary. A woman's instinct is pretty reliable when it comes to what is happening to her children. I'll send down to you a spare razor and brush—that's a reasonable requirement. Another point—you will not come above the main-deck to annoy my niece, Miss Adams, or speak to her unless she permits it. If you disobey this order just once, you'll go in irons—in the brig! Now—see how good a scullion you can make of yourself!"

THE young fellow bowed, and turned away in silence—completely stunned—all the ideas concerning his world and his position in it tumbling about his ears in ruins. As he silently and sadly disappeared, Marjorie began to weaken a little.

"That was—kind of severe, don't you think, Uncle Doctor? The poor kid came up here to us like a shipwrecked man who has sighted a tropic island—like a stray dog who hoped friendly hands were going to pet him a little. And you—crushed him!"

"He needed just that sort of a jolt—and it wont be fatal. I sometimes give more pain than anesthetics will altogether deaden, in order to save life. Really—I'm beginning to have some hope for that boy. Hawkins says he did peel a whole bushel of spuds without argument, when he saw he was up against it, and succeeded in avoiding a row with those two scrappers in the galley. His worry over a dirty face is another good point—as long as a fellow has that much self-respect, you can do something with it. We'll let things run along for a few days and then see what he's doing. Ever since I went for'ard this morning and recognized him, sleeping off his drunk, I've meant to help him as soon as he will help himself. So

don't worry. Just sit in and play the game with me—for the boy's own good."

PERCY'S sensations, as he went below, were those of a young fellow who has met with an outrageous catastrophe. But presently he was amazed to find himself more hungry than worrying about his situation. The effects of the previous night's excesses had worn off through hard unaccustomed work and the chance for his digestive organs to rest up a little. To his amazement, Percy found himself rather philosophizing that his situation could have been worse—with an old-time bucko shipmaster, and a charterer who was not a gentleman. In a fit of dead cold introspection, he suddenly realized that whether he really suffered or not before he finally earned enough to get back home, depended entirely upon himself. If he accepted the situation,—did the work given him to do, like any other seaman, for'ard,—there was practically no question as to his winning back home in a few months at the outside, and probably none the worse for his experience. Then —like a streak of lightning, came the most fundamental truth he had yet absorbed: The more valuable he made himself, the sooner he would be free to go and come as he pleased—anywhere in the world. It was the most amazingly comforting thought he'd ever had—and he stretched himself luxuriously. He was a perfectly healthy young animal who simply couldn't feel despondent on a full belly, with healthily aching muscles and the sort of sleep which was absolute unconsciousness from the moment he dropped into his bunk.

Next day, he noticed that the draught of the galley-range wasn't working properly—fixed it before the cook spotted the trouble or had to send for one of the engineers. Which put him in the good graces of Flaherty and M'Nicol. Having frequently steered the yachts of acquaintances in the Straits, he asked the mate if he might stand a trick in the wheelhouse. Dunning was skeptical about it. Keeping a three-thousand-ton cargo-boat on a compass-course in a somewhat lumpy sea requires more brains than a green hand is supposed to possess. But the young fellow seemed confident—so the mate let him take the wheel a few minutes to see how he handled it. At first the powerful kick of the big rollers kept Percy experimenting until he learned how to allow for them by heading slightly to windward of the course—after that, he did fully as well as the average deck-hand who hasn't yet learned all the things a quartermaster is supposed to know, and stood his regular trick at the wheel every day. Before passing Balabac Strait at the northeastern corner of Borneo, the Doctor and Marjorie decided they might take a chance with the boy. She had spoken to him two or three times but, rather to her surprise, he played fair and made no attempt to presume upon it. Beckoning to him as he was coming down from the bridge, the Doctor motioned to a chair.

"Sit down, Garning—and let's go into this case of yours. I want to compliment you upon the way you've accepted the situation—made the best of it. You're much the better for the experience. Now —I'll sketch what's ahead of me up in the interior of Borneo."

He briefly but clearly outlined the conditions in Soeltoenak—the personality of the Rajah and his desire that Galt should remain with him for some time as business manager. "The first job, naturally, will be to clean up the sanitary conditions and blot out whatever disease there may be. The Rajah himself is pretty good on preventive measures, but I may find a lot of cholera in spite of that—and other infectious things. His Malays will require careful handling—without loss of temper—for they're just potentially dangerous children, after all. If you were to get interested either in the sanitary end or the business side, you've enough basic education to relieve me of some detail—which means that, if you proved any good at all in that line, you'd be worth to the Rajah, on my recommendation, every penny of thirty pounds a month—possibly forty.

"Your living expenses shouldn't amount to more than five or six pounds a month at the outside, because you'd be fed and lodged by His Highness. So, even if you remained there but six months, you should have a nest-egg of your own earnings amounting to considerably more than a hundred and fifty pounds. In Straits money, that would be approximately fifteen hundred dollars—and you've some idea how far that would go in Singapore. If you found an equally good berth in that city,—and you might be the Rajah's

agent if he liked you,—it would mean an independent position, financially and socially. Just think it over until tomorrow morning, and then tell me which you'd really prefer doing: Going up to Soeltoenak with me—doing whatever I set you at, without objection or argument—or borrowing from me the price of your passage back to Singapore if I'd consider lending it—which is by no means certain?"

It was on the tip of the young fellow's tongue to ask if Marjorie Adams were going to accompany the Doctor, but he had just barely sense enough to avoid it. His tendency always had been to make snap decisions when he would better have given them more thought—but it was to his credit that, once made, he stuck to them.

"If I wait until morning, sir, we may all go to the bottom an' I'd lose the anticipation of all the odd things you may set me at. Sounds rawther int'restin', you know—all that! So why not permit me to accept your proposition now, to accompany you—an' have done with it? I've learned one thing aboard this hooker, at all events—your judgment upon anything of the sort would be a lot better than mine. If you'll have me along, I'll try deuced hard to please you! I'll play the game, d'ye see!"

DURING the next three months, at the end of which Galt and Marjorie returned to Singapore, there were times when Percy was almost discouraged enough to throw up his job and go back. After the first couple of weeks, he had been drawing forty pounds a month—which His Highness and the Doctor considered below what he was worth—but it seemed to him that he never would really comprehend the obliquities of the Malay mind or know what their reactions would be when he wanted to get certain results. Also, he felt that he never would speak or understand the language as Galt did. Then—some complication would come up in which he became so thoroughly absorbed as to forget Singapore and his former cronies entirely. The same underlying quality which made animals like him at their first sniff was, unknown to him, making him warm friends among the brown race.

He had his dose of fever from overtaxing himself before it was stamped out, but Marjorie took most excellent care of him until he was convalescent—then told him that it didn't necessarily mean that she would devote herself to him permanently. After nine months of honest and successful effort, he went down to Singapore as the Rajah's accredited business agent, with Galt's advice to fall back upon if needed—about the time his mother came out again from England. Their first meeting wasn't in the least what she had anticipated. She took him rather tearfully in her arms.

"My boy! Mother's precious, darling boy! Oh, if you only knew how Mother has pictured your sufferings—the outrages inflicted upon you—until she nearly went out of her head! It has aged you, dear—terribly! You look old and—and worn, by what you've been through!"

"Hmph! Galt an' the other medicos tell me I never was so fit in my life! So you needn't waste any sympathy on that score! Older? Of course I'm older. One doesn't stick nine months in the interior of Borneo—accomplishin' what I've put through out there—without gaining something in poise an' experience!"

"Oh, Percy! I scarcely know you! And—that abandoned creature who ran away with you? You divorced her, of course—as soon as it could be decently done? Or perhaps you weren't forced into marrying her after all?"

"I fancy I don't quite know who you're talking about, Mater! An'—er—might be as well to consider what you're saying."

"Oh, I know what I'm saying—perfectly! That Marjorie Adams disappeared the same night you did, without leaving a trace! The whole city was laughing over the scandal! It was that which forced me to leave for home!"

"Stop! Marjorie Adams left here with her uncle, Doctor Galt—neither of 'em knowin' I'd been shanghaied aboard the same boat! An' if she hadn't nursed me through jungle-fever like the toppin' sport she is, after you'd made me treat her like dirt—well, I'd not be here at this moment! Ask anybody in Singapore what they think of her! Ask the Guvnor—he's daffy over her! An' she'll not marry me until I'm makin' a good fifteen hundred pounds a year on my own! That may be in the fall, if I manage the Rajah's outside affairs to his satisfaction—with the investm'nts I've made. You see—Marjorie wants to be loved for herself alone—she wants to be quite sure I'm not after her beastly money!"

An amusing little comedy wherein typical cowboy characteristics shine forth resplendent at a rodeo.

The Lucky-Piece

By RULAND V. E. WALTNER

EVERY outfit has its share of lucky-pieces, but the Double B had never known one like Dumb-bell Dan's until, long and somber, he rode in among us one morning, astride the meanest strawberry roan that had been foaled in the last ten years.

He showed it to us before he had been with us an hour, a ring made from a silver horseshoe nail and carried in a tobacco-sack hanging from his lowest vest button.

Though each of us believed in the power of his own lucky-piece, we had no faith in any other man's; to us there was nothing particularly awe-inspiring about the ring.

"What you carry it there for? It'd be safer on your finger where it wouldn't be slopping in your coffee-cup." Freddy grinned at the dark brown stains that ran halfway up the sack.

Dumb-bell shook his long head seriously. "I want it where I can see it all the time. I'd sure be blowed up without it."

"Where'd you get that idea?" Prack, our grouch and skeptic, snorted his disgust, which was a constantly growing cantankerous quality of his. Night after night he lectured us about our ignorance and superstition—and night after night made no impression on us at all.

"Listen, boy," declaimed Dumb-bell as he swung the roan close to Prack. "You see this horse 'tween my knees? Not a man of you can ride him. I couldn't either, wasn't for this piece. Since I got it, I can ride anything."

"My riding ability," grunted Prack, "is in my laigs, not in any little gunny-sack!"

Dumb-bell shrugged. " 'Sall right, partner; but long's I got this, aint no man in the State can outride me."

His fingers rose to the bag and reverently caressed the silver ring.

"Tell you what," said our clever Freddy, "since you're so all-fired lucky, why don't you enter the Tri-State Rodeo?"

We grinned broadly, and Pap Peters snickered in his sleeve; but Dumb-bell was

touched. "Now, that's right nice of you," he drawled, his eyes moist and grateful, "to push a new feller like this! I'd consider it a honor."

"I'll say," breathed Freddy. "I'd consider it a honor myself, if they didn't have Hammered Brass saved up for the winning heroes. Know Hammered Brass?" he demanded as Dumb-bell showed no sign of weakening. "Hammered Brass's killed two fellows, and no one who's rode him ever walked the same again."

" 'Sall right," said Dumb-bell simply. "I've rode worser horses than Hammered Brass since I got my ring."

Prack threw back his head. "Yes, you have! Either you rode 'em before you got that thing or you never rode 'em at all."

"You're wrong," Dumb-bell insisted patiently. "I never rode nothing spectac'lar until I got this ring; since then, I've rode Billy Whiskers, Old Hickory, and Devil Dillon. I guess they're the match of Hammered Brass, anytime."

The bunch was silent. No one wanted to call him a liar without the proof—but Prack clung to his idea. He had earned his name—short for practical—and he lived up to it now.

"If you rode those horses, Dumb-bell, it was 'cause you had it in you to ride 'em, not 'cause of that bit of silver," he insisted.

Getting to a bunch of shy yearlings finished the debate just then; but it did not finish the matter of the Tri-State Rodeo.

WE saw Dumb-bell ride—and that boy *could* ride! We urged him to enter; and modestly he condescended. The great day approached; the Double B wild with enthusiasm. We had confidence in Dumb-bell, and all but Prack could overlook his constant reminders of the powers of his lucky-piece. Prack was impatient; he seethed inwardly and declaimed outwardly at the folly of superstition, but there was no one to listen. If Dumb-bell's silver ring made him feel more the champion, we were satisfied.

The day before the opening, we went in a body to the station, as rollicking, high-stepping a bunch of punchers as ever rode a box-car to a rodeo—that is, all but Prack. He was going only part way. The big boss had bought a fine bull down Little Brother way and had picked Prack to escort His Majesty to the Double B; and we did nothing to make Prack's luck any easier to bear.

During all the down trip we razzed him, until he left us at Foster Junction. It was: "Poor old Prack!" "Oh, he's all right. He's lucky to get out of this fizzle." "What do you mean, fizzle?" "Why, Prack knows Dumb-bell's lucky-piece aint no good—don't you, Prack?"

Prack grew sulky under the constant teasing. "I got faith in Dumb-bell," he broke out at last, "but lucky-pieces aint got nothing to do with it. Sometime, I'm going to take the day off and show you how plumb foolish you are."

That was about six o'clock in the evening. Prack left us about ten-thirty, but the boys were dozing by then. We were not used to riding box-cars—our specialty was horses; the bare boards rubbed and battered us tired.

The next moment of note was five o'clock in the morning when Dumb-bell woke us with a groan that rolled as heavy as thunder through the car.

The boys sat straight up, broad awake. Dumb-bell was pawing over the boarding around him, his long face red with rage and his eyes hazy with a fright that was almost panic.

"What's the matter?" said Freddy as he rolled away from the boot thrust against his ribs. "I aint aiming to let anyone kick me around."

"Some one,"—Dumb-bell's voice was ominous and quiet, but his lips were trembling,—"some one's been fooling with my lucky-piece. It aint here!"

Our eyes darted to his flapping vest. There was the button, there was an inch of string; but the sack that held the ring was gone.

"It's Prack!" said Freddy softly. "The lop-eared old professor's going to teach us something, one way or another."

Dumb-bell sank to the floor, his trembling lips writhing back from his teeth; the rest of us sat stunned over the possibilities that peeped at us through his frightened face.

"I'll kill him!" he muttered; "making a monkey of me! I can't ride Hammered Brass without my ring."

"You got to," we chorused. "Aint you entered for the Double B? And aint all our money on you?"

"I can't," he mumbled. "You just don't know how I can't."

We looked at one another. It was plain that he could not. He could not have sat a plow-horse.

"Then," said Freddy, "I'll drop off here and follow our friend, Prack, and I'll get the ring, 'fore it comes time for Dumb-bell to ride. You see to him, boys."

With those words, he rolled out of the car. How he was going to find Prack we did not know, but we set about filling his orders. There was nothing else to do.

DUMB-BELL was "shot to pieces." It was a long, lank, protesting cowboy whom we took to the grounds the first day. By main force we got him on the back of the tired pony which fell to his lot in the initial round.

The Double B boys hovered about him as near as rules permitted, their eyes boring in on him worse than the muzzles of an equal number of guns. Day by day, we dragged him through the events, swearing at him, coaxing him, promising him that Freddy would return with the ring before the round with Hammered Brass; but our assurances were met with only a dazed look of abject appeal.

When Freddy loped up to the grounds half an hour before the final event, it was a ragged-nerved bunch of cow-punchers that he met as he hailed the crowd from the Double B.

"Got it?" we shouted.

For answer, he held it aloft for our eyes to feast on—the brown stained tobacco-sack, its corner heavy with the lucky-piece. Wildly we cheered him. From his chair where he sat slumped in numb fright, our entry staggered forward.

Freddy shook his head. "It's all right, Dumb-bell; but I'll wait until the last minute to tie this on your manly bosom. It was too hard to get to risk you losing it again. But you can feel it, if you want."

He smiled ingratiatingly, and Dumb-bell wet his flaccid lips.

"All right, Freddy. You keep it, till the last minute, and then tie it on tight. I wouldn't no more ride Hammered Brass without my ring than I'd start to climb Pike's Peak without no clothes on. I'd sooner freeze, any day, than ride Hammered Brass without the proper fixings."

His hand went longingly to the little stained bag and Freddy let him touch it. Tenderly his knotty finger slipped over the sack and lingered on the trinket. A deep breath struck through him, his eyes brightened and his shoulders squared.

"I can do it—I can and I will! You boys been mighty all-fired good to me. 'Sall." He sighed deeply and turned his back on us.

"Where'd you find Prack?" one of the boys whispered cautiously, his eyes on Dumb-bell.

"He was feeding the boss' big red bull," answered Freddy grimly; "and I'll bet that old he-cow dies of indigestion."

Moodily, he went over and leaned beside Dumb-bell on the low fence that separated them from the careening riders.

There were but three entries in the last great outlaw horse event. Arizona Kid had already taken his fall; Curly Gannon, the Big Bar entry, was up, and as we watched, the brass-colored beast shot four feet into the air and plunged down, lurching sideways as he struck and crashing to the earth on his gleaming side, sending Curly sliding through the dust on his shoulder. In an instant, Hammered Brass was on his feet, and squealing, his wicked eyes rolling, he rushed toward the prostrate man; but riders swooped down between them and Curly was carried off to the doctor.

"Gee, Dumb-bell," groaned Freddy, "maybe you'd better not try it."

" 'Sall right," said Dumb-bell. "You hook me up with my old faithful, and I'll tame that devil for you."

HE was smiling now—all traces of fear were gone: his long face was radiant, his pale eyes confident.

"The horse aint made that can beat my combination," he remarked.

Dumb-bell got his call. With shaking fingers, Freddy fastened the sack to his button, wrapping it around and around; and now it was his face that was pale as Dumb-bell swung himself into the rocking saddle of the glinting outlaw.

"He's got the advantage," whispered one of our boys as Hammered Brass flung himself wholeheartedly into his antics. "Hammered Brass's kinda tired. Two's had him already."

"Tired, hell!" stormed Freddy. "He's brass, unbreakable brass—and I was a fool to tie that thing on Dumb-bell. I'd rather he didn't ride. I'd a lot rather."

Freddy, our clever one, was in no way a coward himself. If Dumb-bell had not proved himself the better rider of the two, it would have been Freddy who would have represented the Double B; and had it been he who rode Hammered Brass this lengthening afternoon, he would have ridden with

a smile and a devil-may-care light in his eyes—but he was afraid for Dumb-bell!

Hammered Brass had rocketed around three times, he had gone through the gamut of his wiles, some of them old as horseflesh, some of them new as Hammered Brass himself. He was treacherously unexpected. Sure-footed as a goat, his legs were muscled with steel springs and his barrel was made to stand any shock. We of the Double B were tense as any of the greenest onlookers; indeed we were more afraid, for we knew the strain he was undergoing as well as the penalty of failure; but our entry, our own old Dumb-bell, was sitting the brassy demon as safely as he would have sat his own ugly strawberry roan. Yes, Hammered Brass tried all his tactics, all the tricks that had unseated other riders; but at last it was over and the records stood two thrown and one rode—and that one was Dumb-bell.

IT was a great day, a greater hour when he stood before us, sweating and glowing and wholly happy in our praise.

"Hold on, boys," he murmured, his fingers stealing to the tobacco-sack that still hung about the button of his vest. "You ought to thank the real winner of this event."

Behind us, Freddy sighed, our clever Freddy. It was as if he were only now coming from the trance that had held him.

Dumb-bell's long fingers loosened the sack, pulled the mouth wide, and dropped the trinket into the brown palm of his hand. We stared. There it lay—not the silver horseshoe nail bent to form a ring, but a smooth new nail from some blacksmith shop!

"Shoot, Dumb-bell," murmured Freddy; "I deserve it! When I got there, that fathead of a Prack saw me and knew what I was after—and he fed your lucky-piece, sack and all, to the boss' new bull. Course I couldn't bring it back, so I got me another sack and fixed it up—and I'm dog-gone 'shamed of myself."

But Dan, the Dumb-bell, did not shoot. He did not do anything, not even take the hundred-dollar purse they were offering him. He merely stared at the bit of iron that lay in his hand. Slowly the color ebbed from his face; his hands shook, his eyes grew hazy, and he sat down weakly before us, literally scared to death at having conquered Hammered Brass without his lucky-piece!

UP and OVER

By

PERCY S. WOOD

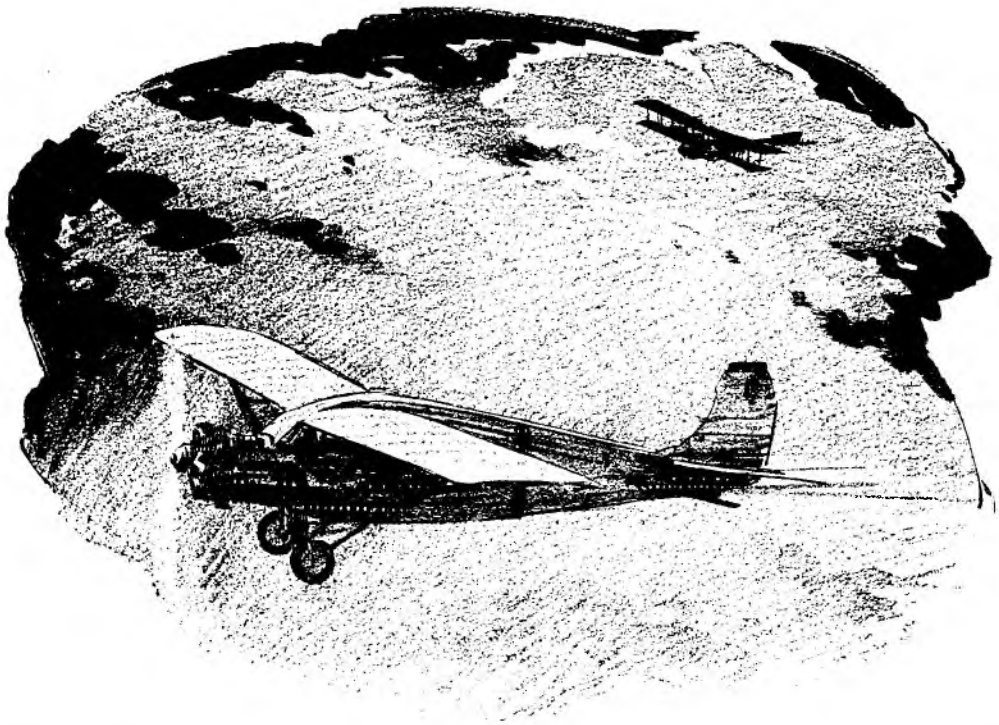
The exciting adventure of an air-mail pilot, attacked because of his valuable cargo, by sky banditti high among the clouds.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

CLIFTON of the air mail took one long last drag from his cigarette, flipped it neatly into the darkness, and hitched his seat parachute into place, before climbing lumberingly into the cockpit of the droning Douglas. Mechanics buckled straps on the mail compartment forward and inspected wires, struts and ailerons with quick last-minute touches and jerks.

The pilot seated himself comfortably, snapped the catch of his life-belt across his middle, and slowly pulled the throttle toward him. With a snort the motor roared out in staccato clamor, then settled to an all-consuming throb. The plane trembled like a leashed thoroughbred, and its tail wavered slightly off the ground, sinking back as Clifton eased the gas lever forward again and let the twelve cylinders idle. "All set?" a mechanic yelled up at him from the side. He nodded, waved his arm, and two men pulled the wedge-like chocks from in front of the wheels.

He waggled the stick a second, watching the responsive ailerons on the wing-tips, then moved the throttle toward him, and the heavy plane waddled forward. He ruddered left slightly, and the iron tail skid bit into the cinder pathway, twisting the ship around to face the darkened pathway of the landing strip. Then daylight seemed to break suddenly upon the



whole length of the field as the great flood-lights threw it into startling brightness. Behind, the long hangars and the skeleton structures of the light towers were etched in bold relief.

The goggled figure in the cockpit flung an arm upward in farewell, pulled the throttle farther toward him, and the great bird fled down the cinders, to float easily into the air and zoom upward as it gathered speed. The motor sang sweetly, and Clifton moved the aluminum stick from side to side again and noted how perfectly the plane responded. Looked like a good trip to Omaha, he thought, as the lights of Maywood field and Chicago faded into the distance.

HE studied the framed map before him a second, lined the ship's nose on the compass needle flickering in its tiny circle of light on the instrument board, and increased the speed a notch. "The ol' beetle's working like a charm," he muttered, "and she'd better be this trip!" Clifton was carrying a valuable load.

In front, securely fastened in the trunk-like space reserved for the mail, was a small sack which contained the registered first-class shipment. It was wedged in between three larger striped sacks, but the combined value of their contents could not approximate that of the small bag. Within its sealed mouth were packets of crisp currency to the exact amount of one hundred ten thousand dollars, more than Clifton or any other pilot on his run had ever had as cargo before. It was bound for a bank near Omaha, and despite the rather more dependable transportation the railway express offered, a message had reached the field that evening that the money must come through. So Clifton had personally stowed it away after an armed bank truck from downtown had brought it out. Around his bulky flying suit, the pilot wore a web belt with a heavy service automatic in an open holster hanging from it.

The Douglas soared on and approached Forrest Flying-field on the edge of the western suburbs. A glow came suddenly from below, and peering over the side Clifton saw the field had its flood-lights on and that a ship was taxiing for position on the runway. He was too high at four thousand feet to make out much about it, but its bulk as it crawled over the ground signified it to be larger than standard size. He wondered who in creation was taking off this time of night and where they were going. Some commercial outfit, probably, heading for Detroit or Minneapolis, he decided idly.

It was a gloriously clear night for flying. The stars were out, and wisps of

clouds scurried across the heavens, and sometimes all but enveloped the plane as it rose to keep clear of a perverse air-current. "Piloting tonight isn't much of a job," Clifton thought as he slowly eased the stick to right or left, moved the foot rudder-bar, and occasionally cut the throttle for an air pocket. The August night was exhilaratingly cool, and he thought some of stunting the plane into a few steep banks just for the fun of it, as he often did—but refrained when he remembered the valuable cargo he was carrying.

No, he'd better stick to straight flying and get to Iowa City, the first stop, as fast as he could, refuel there and skip on to Omaha. No time for funny business tonight.

He kept steadily on, glancing at the tachometer occasionally to note the number of engine revolutions per minute, and adjusting his throttle to average the 1,460 turns which meant his speed kept close to the prescribed hundred miles per hour the service maintained. The motor sang on with its mechanical whir, not unlike a huge sewing-machine to his accustomed ear.

For more than two hours he flew, sometimes locking the stick with its aluminum thumb-screw for a mile or so while he rested his arms on the side of the cockpit. At three-mile intervals the tiny flicker lights whisked by below him, and every twenty-five miles he was greeted by the revolving beam of a ground beacon. Lighted farmhouses, in their friendly twinkling, seemed almost companionable. Clifton relaxed comfortably and thought of other things than flying.

TIME passed swiftly; almost before he was expecting it the silver thread of the Mississippi gleamed up at him from the distant horizon. He glanced overside to locate a flicker light he knew should be close by. None showed. He looked to right and left, but the lights of a village were all that met his eyes.

Puzzled, he twisted in his seat to find the last one he had passed behind. There it shone, far back, and almost directly above it sailed the green and red lights of another plane. Relieved to know he was not off course, the pilot pondered on the identity of the ship. Who could be following the same path as he this night? "'Nother guy going to Omaha too," he thought, and almost dismissed the subject. But he wondered what had happened to the flicker on the banks of the river. First time he had known one to fail in the eight months he had had the run.

Ten minutes passed, and the mail pilot turned again. The other plane was closer now, much closer, so that he could distinguish the outline of its wings. It was hardly a quarter mile in his rear and flying on the same level. Well, likely the other guy wanted company and was hitting it up. Funny, though—must be a pretty fast ship; he was turning a hundred himself.

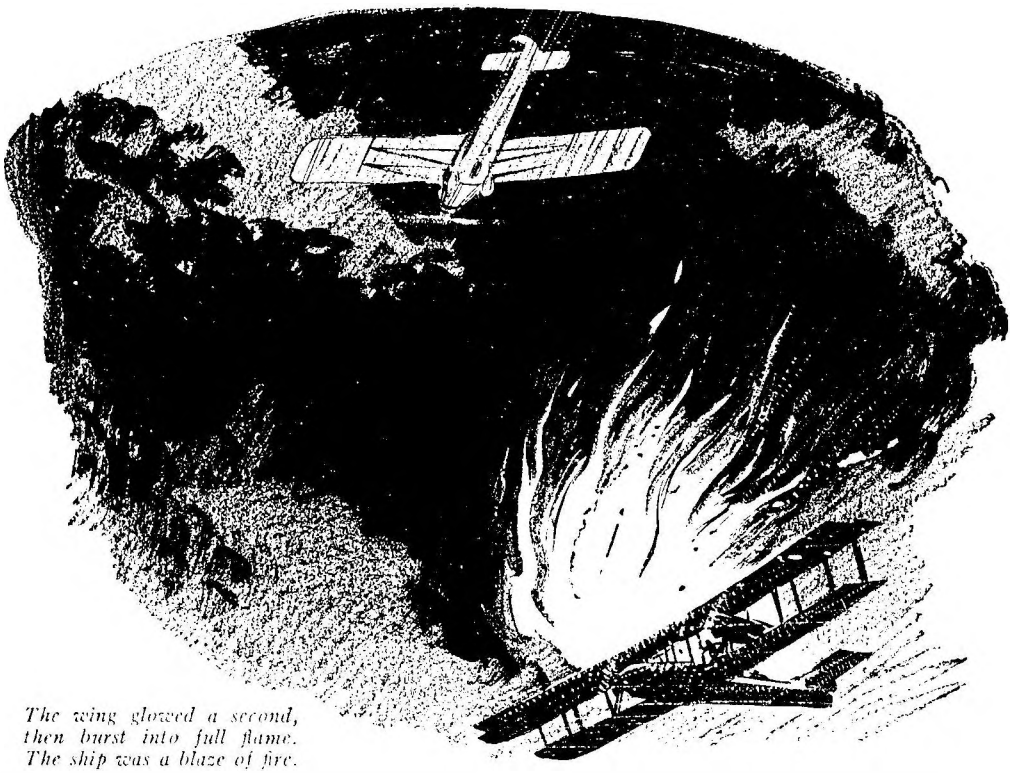
Without sensing why he did it, Clifton pulled the throttle toward him as far as it would go, and the "ol' beetle" responded and took new hold with its thrashing propeller. He felt the hair raise on the back of his neck a little, and feeling ashamed of himself for doing it, he flipped the revolver holster around until it hung directly in front of him. Then he grinned. "What a fine old maid I am tonight," he said aloud, but his voice was drowned by the increased roar of the motor.

On he flew, the mail plane pushed to its utmost in speed while the pilot thought comfortingly that he would catch the giant revolving light of the Iowa City field in a half-hour or so.

While he tried to get the idea out of his mind, Clifton could not but feel apprehensive when he saw from the corner of his eye that the other plane was edging along beside him, maintaining a distance of about one hundred fifty yards. He looked at it closely, raising his goggles to see more clearly, and noted that it was a large ship, a Dubois special, with two cockpits, in the first of which he could distinguish two blurred heads, while a pilot drove from the rear. The twin motors were placed high above, just under the upper wings. Indistinctly he saw a strange apparatus protruding from the front cockpit. It looked much like the bombing planes used in the war, Clifton thought, and wondered where anybody got a ship like that in this territory.

He waved his arm in friendly greeting as the big plane swerved even closer. There was no answering wave, but the mail pilot saw a man in front move forward and fumble with the strange apparatus. Clifton was puzzled, but his doubt was soon dispelled by a series of quick and unmistakable actions.

Even as he gazed at his neighbor in the



The wing glowed a second, then burst into full flame. The ship was a blaze of fire.

skies, the figure at the apparatus swung it a little, and a sharp crackle of gun-fire snapped out above the roar of the motors.

A STREAMER of fire shot out and crossed the path of the mail plane. "Machine-gun!" Clifton gasped, "and they're using tracer bullets. What in the name of hell?" Before his astonished eyes the figure at the gun swung it again, and another stream of fire spat out, this time crossing behind Clifton's tail. Instinctively he pushed the stick forward; the nose of his plane dropped and shot down with terrific speed, throttle full on.

But as he dropped, the Dubois dropped with him, and another flare of bullets skimmed over his upper wings. Clifton pulled the stick back, and banked up and to the right at a dizzy angle. He turned his head and saw the other ship twisting its nose also, and the chase over the heavens began. It was too one-sided to last long, however. The mail pilot drew his automatic and fired the clip rapidly at his pursuers, but the turning and twisting figures in the cockpit offered too treacherous a target, and he knew his shots went wide. In reply the machine-gun rattled out, and he saw tracer bullets tearing through the wing not eight feet from him.

"Oh, hell," he swore; "nothing to do but go down and try to land close to a village or farmhouse." And he started for the ground in a long slow descent. As he glided down, he flipped the clip from his pistol and shoved another in from the pouch on his belt. He'd make a last stand on the ground, anyway.

He glanced at the altimeter and peered over the side at the swiftly approaching blur of earth.

THE Dubois kept to his right and slightly above. Its machine-gun was still now, and the silence was broken only by the whistle of air against the wires and the bursts of sound from the motors as the pilots stabilized their descent.

When his altimeter showed one thousand feet, Clifton kicked the right flare pedal, and a glow of light showed up from beneath the ship, to widen and blaze as the can of magnesium dropped quickly and flooded the landscape with its brightness. They were floating over a cornfield, but an apparently level pasture showed up a hundred yards ahead. No houses or signs of life were visible.

The flare landed on the edge of the field and burned out. Clifton circled the meadow and prepared for a bumpy landing. He'd have to set her down pretty

easily to avoid a somersault on the rolling rises of the pasture, he thought mechanically, but his heart beat thuddingly as he speculated on what would happen when both ships had come to a standstill. He wondered how long he could protect that little mail pouch, and of how the aërial thugs had gotten wind of the shipment.

His pursuers were circling the field too, but the heavier ship was almost in front of him now as its superior weight carried it along faster. Clifton leveled his plane off a bit further to stay its descent, and watched the Dubois come closer to the earth. Its pilot kicked out a flare, and the mail-carrier knew that for a moment all eyes in the other ship were turned to earth to scrutinize landing-facilities. A wild thought crept into his mind. There was a second or two when he was unwatched. He'd run for it! It was his only chance—and recklessly he took it.

His left hand grasped the throttle and pulled it as far back as possible with just the right timing to prevent a clogging of the gas lead. As the idling motor roared out in full voice, he jammed the stick toward him, and the Douglas shot upward and zoomed high into the heavens. The pilot had a second quick thought, and with a flirt of his hand snapped off the riding lights. From below came the excited chatter of the machine-gun, but the tracer bullets were wide, and Clifton knew he was safe for the time being. They could not locate him.

He set his plane on a straight westerly course and urged it to every possible mile of speed it could do. He looked for flicker lights, but none were visible. Long minutes passed. He turned to seek the Dubois, and saw its lights moving below in a wide circle. But as he watched, it seemed to hesitate a second, then climbed upward toward him, and suddenly its lights too were extinguished. "Oh, Lord," he moaned, "they've cut their motor for a second and heard me up here." Then he thought again, "Well, I'm all right—no lights; they can't find me, even if they can hear me."

HE flew on without sign of the other ship for five minutes while he cursed the dragging hands of the clock reflected by the instrument-board light. Suddenly, when he had almost come to breathe, the insane chatter of the gun began again.

Bullets, like tiny balls of fire, ripped through the wings almost in reach of his hand. Then, in a flash, Clifton knew how he had been discovered. The small light above the compass, which he had left on, had betrayed him. It was the only visible part of his ship to his pursuers, and the closeness of their fire indicated they were aiming at the tiny crescent of light.

More shots came, and Clifton felt a sharp stab of pain in his left shoulder. His flying suit was ripped slightly above the spot where his arm joined his body. Again his heart sank, not from the pain, but with the knowledge that it was useless to evade them longer. He'd be killed if he did. Better go down and let them pilfer the mails. No use to use his pistol again; they could down him in a second with that snarling mechanism, and he realized the only thing which kept him alive now was the other's knowledge that his plane would likely explode and burn the money when it struck the ground if its pilot was slumped lifeless over the stick.

WEAK and trembling, Clifton eased the stick forward, cut the throttle, and once again the Douglas veered for earth in its long easy glide. But the men in the Dubois took no chances on their prey escaping this time. They kept a bare fifty feet above him, and let loose bursts of shot every few seconds to show him they were waiting to shoot straight at his first false move.

Starting his downward path at somewhat above five thousand feet, Clifton had time to think a second before he was low enough to kick out the last flare, but there seemed no way out of it. If he tried to bank up and get away again, his pursuers would have an excellent opportunity to pour a ribbon of fire straight into his cockpit. If he didn't use the second flare when he was low enough to warrant it, they'd know something was wrong and warn him again with that hideously snapping gun.

But even as he felt for the flare pedal with his left foot, the great idea came to Clifton in a flash. It was his only chance. If it worked, he could dispose of his enemies for good and all. If it didn't—well, the Government would bury him with all honors. He'd chance it.

With his heart beating like a trip-hammer, but with steady and quick hands, the mail pilot yanked the throttle hard over and pulled the stick tightly toward him, still keeping his foot lightly on the flare pedal.

The mail plane shot upward, motor roaring its protest, but carrying Clifton up, up—then over in a back loop, the famous barrel roll. The wind tore at his helmet, and his body strained at the safety belt, but he kept the aluminum rod hugged to him, then suddenly shot it forward. The plane lurched level; and peering over the side, Clifton saw he had climbed a full hundred feet, turned an almost impossible loop, and that in much less time than it takes to chronicle it, he had gone above the big Dubois and was now directly over it.

THE other plane was quick too. Its nose reared upward, and the machine-gun spat again, but at this moment, Clifton's left foot clamped down on the flare pedal. He saw, in the wild second before he sideslipped down, the glare of the can igniting, and watched it fall straight toward the fuselage beneath it. Even as he watched, it struck the fabric of the machine's upper wing, rolled, then fell toward the earth as the wildly pitching plane shot upward in an attempt to follow him. But that instant touch was enough, and the shellac-covered wing glowed a second, then burst into full flame, which, fanned by the rush of the wind, spread over the surface and traveled toward the wildly gesticulating figures in the cockpits.

Clifton did not see all this. The instant the flare struck its mark, he slid down like a plummet in a sideslip, then righted his ship and banked away to the north to avoid any stray shots.

Climbing high, he turned to look. The heavens were flaming. The Dubois was a blaze of fire now, and the mail pilot saw three figures leap over its side; in the light of the falling ship, he could see their parachutes bulge open and sink slowly toward the earth.

The blazing plane dropped like a stone and crashed into a field with a great rocketing of fire. Then, trembling in every limb, Clifton pointed his plane westward again and urged it on.

BLACK spots danced before his eyes, and the pain in his shoulder became almost unendurable, but he kept steadily on, and in a few minutes saw the circling beam of the Iowa City field in the distance. But he was weak, very weak, and it was hard to see. The beam of light danced all over the sky, and the ground seemed to rock to and fro.

Yet in less than five minutes he circled the field which even with its bright floodlights was blurred and indistinct. He nosed down trying to rouse enough to gauge the right spot to touch his wheels. His left arm was useless, to move it positive torture, and his sight was failing. But he dropped, cutting the throttle with a jerk of his right hand; then as the ground loomed up, he dragged the stick back. There was a jarring crash, and the world went black. . . . .

He came to, trying to grasp his stick, but his hand closed on a human arm instead and a voice from somewhere said: "Lie still, Clif, you're all right, guy. Wait'll the doc gets through." He opened his eyes and stared at a circle of faces. There was Jimmy, the field manager; Ted Blanton the relief pilot in flying suit; and several mechanics he knew. A tight-lipped man was wrapping a bandage around his shoulder.

"What happened?" Clifton gasped.

Jimmy grinned broadly. "Not much, Clif," he said. "You were about to pass out when you landed, and you set down kinda hard. Washed out the landing gear and knocked your head a pretty whack. But take it easy—we'll tell you all about it when your old knob clears up a bit."

The pilot sank back; then as the fumes of ammonia from somewhere brought him to, he opened his eyes again and said hesitantly: "I had a scrap with three guys in a big wagon up the line. Know anything about them?"

Jimmy's face lighted up like the proverbial full moon and he almost shouted: "Do we know anything about 'em? Man, they'll be here in about ten minutes! Couple of farmers heard all the shooting, grabbed their shotguns, and got those guys when they were trying to get untangled from their 'chutes. They herded them into a fliv, called us up and told us all about it. Clif, how in blazes did you dare do it?"

"Do what?" the other asked faintly.

"Why, stunt that old crate you had. You must've been nuts to try it. Those things aint built to do barrels!"

"Hell," Clifton chuckled feebly, "had to save that dough! Is it all right?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, boy, and Ted here'll be on to Omaha with it just as soon as he's sure you're all right. Go back to sleep, Clif. We'll tell you all about it in the morning."

Instead of shots, bombs of tear-gas were smashed, rendering them helpless.

Free Lances in Diplomacy

By

CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

In this dramatic story of underground intrigue in European politics, Mr. New again forcefully demonstrates his "inside" knowledge—and his exceptional skill as a writer.

Illustrated by Ben Cohen

MARY BARSTIDE stepped to the kitchen doorway and glanced at the supper-table in the cozy living-room, to see if she had forgotten anything. Her husband was slumped in a big arm-chair by the window, reading one of the radical newspapers, a radio-set and some books on socialism on a table at his left.

Mary vaguely remembered that in the first weeks of their marriage she had been accustomed to rumple his hair occasionally as she passed and repassed in preparing their meal—but this playfulness had presently worn itself out. When one has worked in a city shop from half after eight to five in the afternoon, physical weariness is frequently one's strongest emotion. They could have lived comfortably enough on what John Barstide earned, but that would have been violating his socialistic principles, which demanded that each individual should work for whatever might be received or enjoyed.

As she went slowly back into the kitchen, Mary was thinking over the casual way she had drifted into marriage—wondering, indeed, why she had done it. . . . .

She had met Barstide at a ball of the Employees' Benefit Association in one of the neighborhood halls. He seemed well-liked by her acquaintances among the girls —was good-looking, in a heavy-featured way, and had rather more education than the average, speaking better English than most of them, and French and German equally well. It had been taken for granted that he was a Londoner like most of the crowd, but he told Mary at their second meeting that his mother had married a Belgian and he had been born in Antwerp.

At the time of their meeting, he was employed in a city machine-shop as a first-class mechanic, but soon chucked that for

a job which paid better wages—she only vaguely understood just what sort of work he was doing. In fact, she gave little thought to it. When he suggested that each of them would make and save more if they were married, it seemed to her a practical and most attractive idea. She was a healthy young woman of twenty-five, and admitted to herself that she wanted a home of her own. If he had any reasons in reserve, she didn't suspect them at the time of her marriage.

But John Barstide, as he called himself in London, knew very well the value of a wife and a home which were typically British—sufficiently so to make somewhat ridiculous any suspicion as to his real nationality. He even would have put up with a child or two just to emphasize his pose as a commonplace Briton living in a commonplace way among other Britons. When there was no longer a need for such a wife or home, he would leave them without a second thought—but it was some time before Mary suspected this.

So far, she was contented enough, on the whole. They had a joint savings account in one of the neighborhood banks upon which either could draw at any time, and the account was growing satisfactorily. When he got ready to move elsewhere he would withdraw the entire amount and take it with him, but of this cold-blooded intention Mary was quite unaware. Their married life was now an affair of convenience —a business arrangement which apparently ran well enough, all things considered, though there was no bond of mutual interests to hold them firmly together.

ON this night, when her appetizing little meal was on the table, they sat down to eat in silence. He was still reading his newspaper, while she sat thinking upon various matters which didn't include him. Although he would have raved at such a statement, had she even thought of making it, she really had much the better education, having gone through the Board Schools and, to some extent, kept up a line of reading afterward. Presently, he remarked:

"Expectin' anybody in, this evening?"

"Why, not specially. Were you expecting anybody yourself, tonight?"

"An old pal of mine said he might drop around. If he comes, we'll be talkin' o' trade matters—another berth, belike."

"Will you be chucking it again? They're talking at the shop of a hard summer coming—with some of the hands laid off—"

"Aye, I've heard that, too—but this pal o' mine, he says the comp'ny he's with'll be takin' on instead o' layin' off. There'll be a vacancy at better coin than I've had from anyone yet—an importin' house, dealin' exclusively in their own foreign products, d'ye see—distributin' 'em all through the United Kingdom."

"If he comes, you'll not be wanting me about, I suppose? Fancy I could do with an hour or more of the cinema, this evening—I'm tired enough to enjoy it. When the dishes are done, I'll just go out and leave you the place to yourself. —There's a ring at the bell now! If it's your pal, I'll close this door to the kitchen and be on my way in a few minutes."

THE man who came in had the same general appearance of being an Englishman as had Barstide, though there was an occasional trace of foreign accent in his speech. He looked keenly about the apartment.

"Seems to me you do yourself very well in this place, Ivan!" he remarked. "Your wife was pointed out to me the other day when I was trying to locate this apartment building. Typical Londoner—wholly respectable. You're hobnobbing with her friends and the neighbors, of course?"

"Oh, naturally! We have some of them in once or twice a week for cards or dancing, even if the rooms are a bit small. They admire my radio-set in their simple way—think a man who built so good a one, himself, must be a topper of a mechanic and electrician. And that explains in a plausible way the bonus I'm supposed to be getting. Good man, you see! H-m-m —the Company's about ready to start the campaign of underground activity, is it?"

"Yes—the connections in other parts of the 'U.K.' are all established, now, and working smoothly. For the last eighteen months, 'Arnikoff Exportations, Limited,' in Cannon Street, has been a distributing outlet for almost every sort of commodity made in Siberia, Central Asia and the various provinces of Russia. Their salesmen are well known in all the importing houses of leading cities; the warehouse in Cannon Street is stocked to the ceiling with goods and an increasing number of shipments are coming in direct to the consumer—where the banking end of the trade is accommodating people of the Balkan

States and Central Europe as well as Russians. The concern is making money in a strictly legitimate way. Meanwhile, you men who were planted over here some years ago have been entrenching yourselves in typical British neighborhoods—many of you married to Englishwomen—so your national and social status is practically unassailable. And now—"

"Know what they're going to put me at?"

"Being an exceptional mechanic and electrician, you're to have charge of the new broadcasting plant. They've now reached a point where something of the sort within a few miles of London is necessary, and have purchased for a merely nominal price an old manufacturing works in Buckinghamshire. The machinery is rusted, probably beyond repair—but the plant has a three-hundred-foot chimney in very good condition, and it was thought you might be able to do something with that."

Barstide chuckled.

"I shall enjoy myself with that chimney—it's so perfectly obvious! Of course the Company will put in a lot of men and women—manufacturing various articles—a reasonable amount of smoke coming out of the top of the chimney? Eh?"

"They've not gone as far as deciding what they'll do with the works. The radio equipment is the more immediate necessity—for giving instructions to scattered agents when use of the mails or Government wires would be far too risky. But your suggestion is an excellent one—English operatives, making some English commodity! The broadcasting plant would be thoroughly concealed, of course."

AFTER the caller left, a number of schemes ran through Barstide's head. He was fully conversant with the general plans of the organization behind him, and in his dealings with Mary he was often conscious of a curious detachment as if he were standing off at one side and regarding her—their home and dual relations—as something ephemeral, something rather in the light of a joke upon her when the time came for him to move on. Now this train of thought suggested a consideration of their present relations. He thought he knew her well enough to be sure that there was little risk of her leaving him through the feeling of incompatibility—though the severing of all marital responsibility at once would have been a relief to him. Yet it would undo the careful work of three years spent in establishing himself in just that impregnable position of solid British respectability. No—if anything, it might even be advisable to reawaken her former affection for him, and it occurred to him now that perhaps a display of jealousy might help this along.

He was leaning out of the window at the moment, looking down at the almost deserted street and the occasional couples who passed. Presently, he saw a woman who looked like Mary coming along from the corner of Maida Vale. As she approached the entrance to the building, a high-powered touring-car came silently through the street and stopped at the curb, and a tall man of soldierly appearance got out and spoke to her.

From Mary's casual response, Barstide was certain that the man was a stranger—but he seemed to be asking a few civil questions which she hesitatingly answered. Then as he bowed and stepped back into his car, she went up to it, apparently to give him some final directions—and turned into her own building as the car disappeared. Barstide had seen the whole occurrence and knew there had been no car in sight until after she was halfway down the street, but it struck him as excellent opportunity for showing a bit of jealousy. When she came in, he was behind the door—bolting it as she stepped into the room.

"Why—what in the world is the matter, John! Have you been drinking?" she asked.

He made no reply, but coming slowly toward her like a cat stalking its prey, he shot out one big hand which closed about her white throat and bent her backwards over the table. The grip began to suffocate her as he muttered:

"Who was he—where had you been with him? I came to the window just as you got out of that car—caught you dead! No use lying to me!"

"I was not in that car, you fool!" she gasped. "I was coming down from Maida Vale—alone! Just as I was turning in our doorway, the car stopped at the curb—a gentleman got out—asked if I could tell him whether John Barstide lived here—an expert mechanic and electrician! Said he had a commercial proposition to make him—would come some other evening about eight, now that he was sure of the right building—fancied it was too late to ring,

now! Then he thanked me and started away. I asked if he would give me his name, but he didn't seem to understand—just lifted his hat, and the chauffeur drove on! If you didn't see all that for yourself it was only because you didn't look out of the window soon enough!"

He slowly withdrew his hand from her throat, straightened up, and mopped a sleeve across his forehead.

"Who was he?" he muttered. "Where had you been with him? No use lying to me!"

"Was that really the way of it, lass? Aye? Ye had me crazy for a bit! See, now! I've a good bit on my mind, of late—a chance, mayhap, of makin' a big stake for us both. So I've shifted from one berth to another—each time for more coin—an' I'm shiftin' again, come Saturday. There's been little time to go about with ye—mayhap I've been a bit unpleasant about the flat from bein' full up with other matters. But ye're *mine,* lass—I'll keep ye or I'll kill ye! Now come to bed an' we'll say no more about this."

DURING the remainder of the week, he fetched in a box of sweets and a Cheshire puss for her. These unusual attentions she accepted with a mixture of pleasure and inward distrust. On Saturday he went to the warehouse of his new employers in the city, and on Sunday afternoon he took one of the suburban trains for a small town in Buckinghamshire where, he told her, he would be installing machinery for a week or ten days—possibly longer. As he had been sent away a number of times previously upon such employment, this was quite in the ordinary run of his work and she packed his hold-all for him as she had done many times before—but when she was alone that evening, she began recalling everything which had happened since that night when she had wondered for a second or two if he really were going to strangle her.

Mary Barstide was a girl who didn't believe everything from surface appearances. Her education and her subsequent reading had developed in her a more analytical turn of mind.

She knew the supposed John Barstide as most women know the man they live with—far better than such men know their wives. She knew that, aside from some reason in the background which she couldn't comprehend, he would not have cared a rap how many men she went out with, except as it gave him an excuse to drop her altogether. This being the case, what could have been his object in apparently trying to get back upon some basis of mutual affection such as she had deceived herself into presuming when they were first married?

Eliminating one possibility after another, she finally decided that she and their social

position in the neighborhood must in some way be necessary to him—for a while, at least. If then, he could deliberately stage an exhibition of jealousy and hint at underlying fondness for her, merely to insure himself against any immediate break in their relations, he must be cold-blooded enough to leave her altogether when he was ready for such action. The more Mary thought over this, the more her sense of insecurity deepened.

She had become fairly well acquainted with the manager of the bank where their money was deposited, and was conscious that he maintained a distant attitude toward her husband, as if she were considered the more reliable depositor of the two. In fact, the manager had once said to her that he thought two separate accounts would be a more satisfactory arrangement for them than a joint one—but Barstide had objected to this and the matter had been dropped. It now occurred to Mary, however, that if she couldn't trust her husband entirely, the manager must have been quite right. She had on deposit with her own savings, including a legacy from an aunt in Canada, something over eight hundred pounds—which, of course, Barstide could draw with his own money at any time he chose, under the present arrangement.

After reflecting for a day or two, she went to the bank and asked the manager's advice—on the ground of being able to will her own money as she chose if she died first—then proceeded to open a new account in which she deposited all of her own money, the understanding being that her husband was to get no information whatever about the transaction beyond the fact that she had withdrawn her own deposits from the joint account.

MEANWHILE Barstide was inspecting the old factory in Buckinghamshire. The big chimney had an inside diameter of fifteen feet at the bottom and twenty at the top, a total height of three hundred feet, and rose from a brick building containing a battery of twelve horizontal boilers. Flues from the fireboxes of these boilers ran into the chimney at a height of twenty-two feet above the ground level. On the outside of the chimney, a badly rusted iron ladder ran up to the top, being supported by iron hooks and straps driven in between the bricks. Barstide's first act was to condemn this ladder as unsafe, and substitute one which, though appearing lighter, was actually much stronger, being made of copper-bronze which could not rust or corrode, and treated with acid to give the outside a weathered appearance. The foot of this ladder was sunk to a concrete block four feet underground, and earth filled in around it—but the portion beneath the surface was thickly coated with layer after layer of asphaltic cement with ground cork between them and, in an insulated tube sunk through the concrete, was a heavy copper feed-wire leading down to a concrete chamber twenty feet below the surface of the ground. From this chamber—in which were dynamos, storage batteries, a twenty-kilowatt transmission equipment and a twelve-valve receiving-set—a concealed telephone-cable ran to the general switchboard of the works. This was connected with the wire-system of the general post office by a private leased wire connecting with the offices of Arnikoff Exportations, Ltd., in London. It is possible, of course, for the Postmaster-General to plug in on wires leased to private individuals if ordered to do so by the Government—but without such authority, it is a punishable offense. So unless suspicion has been aroused, there is little or no risk of any outsider hearing what is talked over such wires.

There was no communication between the underground transmission room and other buildings of the Buckinghamshire works. Barstide had been shrewd enough to tunnel underground from it to a cottage which the Company had purchased outside of the village. When all the equipment had been taken in through this cottage in small parcels, five men gathered around an eight-valve receiving-set in an upper room of the big Cannon Street warehouse while two others locked themselves in a soundproofed smaller one on another floor.

As Barstide's voice came clearly over the leased wire from Bucks, one of the five touched a button actuating a buzzer in the soundproofed room—and a man began speaking into a microphone in an ordinary tone of voice. Instantly the three-foot cone on the wall over the receiving-set on the top floor began reproducing the words, very much amplified. The transmission was a bit fuzzy at times and seemed to pick up considerable interference, somewhere—but when they mentioned this over the phone, Barstide said he could easily smooth that out later, his

immediate object being to assure them and himself that his antenna would actually work as well as he expected.

Another Muscovite, who was in the underground room with Barstide, handling the dynamo, looked at him in amazement.

"Had you asked me, Ivan, I would have considered it impossible to broadcast understandable speech from a ladder up the side of a brick chimney—but there's no getting by the fact that you're doing it!"

"Hmph! I'll make that ladder play the flute and piano for you if they'll get the instruments in that Cannon Street room! Now—what we have to keep in mind is that we must not use this plant for broadcasting unless when some message is being sent out to those of us whom it's not safe to reach in any other way. The post office will suspect after a bit that there is an unknown broadcasting station somewhere in this direction—but they'll never find it! Chances are it'll be some time before anyone is sure our stuff isn't coming from some station of the British Broadcasting Company."

SHORTLY after this the President of France, accompanied by some of his Cabinet ministers, arrived in London upon a visit, upon the surface merely a social one to various dignitaries, but which had another unsuspected purpose in the line of conferences upon international affairs, particularly in relation to the underground activities of a certain radical organization. Even after repeated warnings that its attempts to undermine other governments among their own people must stop if diplomatic relations were to be maintained, this organization had failed to relax its destructive activities for a single moment, and now the situation was getting beyond a point where it could be tolerated.

Naturally, the French executive was a guest at Windsor during his stay, as also were his ministers—but in their case there were frequent conferences with British statesmen on certain country estates.

Upon one such evening, they were guests of Lord Marastoun at his hereditary place in Dorset, not far from Weymouth, and conferring with them were the British Foreign Secretary and two of the parliamentary leaders. During the evening, they had blocked out a general understanding of their joint course in regard to this radical organization—to be carried out immediately if a final warning were unheeded. None of this, of course, had been put down on paper in definite terms, but when a working agreement was reached, memoranda were drawn up in cipher covering the understanding. One copy was retained by the French ministers and the other copy handed to a King's messenger, who was present, with instructions to reach Downing Street with it in a fast motorcar as quickly as possible and deposit it in the Foreign Office vaults. Both the messenger and his secret-service chauffeur were armed—their car was a twelve-cylinder one with a bullet-proof landaulet body—and being "on His Majesty's service" had right of way if stopped anywhere by the police, though there was nothing in its appearance to indicate a Government machine.

Among Lord Marastoun's other guests —the usual week-end house-party who knew nothing of the diplomatic conferences in a remote wing of the big manor-house—was a handsome grass-widow who had a weakness for fads of one sort or another. This year she was displaying a socialistic tendency, going in for Russian music and art to the exclusion of all others. As people of that slant are generally accepted at face value, she was never taken seriously—her fad of the moment being referred to as "Lady Mab's latest hobby."

When the ministers disappeared with Lord Marastoun during the course of the evening, it was assumed that they were merely having a quiet card game somewhere, for higher stakes than were considered good form in the drawing-room.

Lady Mab was probably the only one outside of her hostess who really knew what was taking place in that remote wing of the old manor-house—and, through gossip picked up by her chauffeur among those in the servants' hall, the probable time when Sir Frederick Lanstow would leave that night for London, with his man.

Slipping out through a side hall leading to a small *porte-cochère*, shortly after their host had disappeared with the ministers—who had slipped away from the drawing-room one by one, at different times—she stepped into her own car and had her chauffeur run her down to the post office in the nearest village, where she telephoned an apparently commonplace message to her London house:

"I'm feeling wretchedly this evening,

and may decide to return at once instead of staying until Monday. If I am not feeling better within an hour, I will leave shortly after eleven in my car, with messenger. In fact, I fancy you're safe to expect that I'll leave about that time and look for me around two or three in the morning."

This message was received by a recently employed housekeeper in the town house, and the gist of it repeated over the phone to three men in another part of London—who immediately proceeded to broadcast a certain announcement over a microphone connected with an unknown station in Buckinghamshire, on half a dozen different wave-lengths. Within fifteen minutes, various radio-listeners scattered all over the United Kingdom picked up this announcement, which they naturally supposed referred to something they'd missed while listening to another station:

"For the benefit of those of our audience who may have missed the opening synopsis of our tabloid play, 'Lady Gwendolyn's Night of Adventure,' we repeat that Sir Francis Bascombe had left His Lordship's house in Dorset about eleven-fifteen in his own car and was waiting at a crossroad on the London turnpike —a deserted spot where it was unlikely that anyone else would happen along—in the hope of meeting Lady Gwen's car when it appeared and persuading her to elope with him. He had provided himself with a marriage license and other documents which he thought might influence her. The story then proceeded from the moment her car was approaching this crossroad rendezvous. The rest of the play you have just heard—broadcasted from Station Two-Em-rksgzvtchitzp—now signing off for the evening."

AS tabloid plays were a common feature on broadcast programs—especially those picked up from the United States—this announcement had nothing about it sufficiently out of the ordinary to attract attention, and most of the radio listeners never gave it another thought as they tuned to other stations. There were, however, five listeners who read some other meaning between the lines and took down memoranda of certain sentences in the announcement. Barstide was one of these. He was not where his wife supposed him to be—at the works in Bucks, where he'd told her his job was almost finished—but at a cottage in the suburbs of Weymouth, where he had fetched a small but powerful receiving-set with his other luggage, and had been tuning it over a number of wave-lengths since he had gone to his room after dinner, as he had done during the previous three nights.

When the announcement was thoroughly fixed in his mind and one or two points jotted down, he left the cottage and walked alone to a garage on the edge of the town where a chauffeur was sitting in a high-powered car, reading an evening paper. Barstide entered the car and instructed the man to drive through the town to a garage on the north side—where they found a second car and three men. These followed them out of town as far as a deserted stretch of road where they could run alongside for a conference.

"Did you get that announcement on your radio set, Mikhail?"

"Aye, but it might have been plainer. Who the devil is 'Lady Gwen'? We were not told—"

"Nobody, you fool! She was put in to make the announcement like all the others of tabloid plays. We all know those ministers are not at Windsor, tonight—know they're probably at one of six different country-places in the U. K., and that some of our men are stationed near each with radio-sets. This tip came from Lady Mab, at Lord Marastoun's place six miles from here—the announcement proves it, because Sir Frederick Lanstow was seen near there this afternoon in what may have been his own car, but was probably an F. O. one. We know he's a King's messenger—the man who'd be sent for to convey any sort of state documents back to Downing Street. According to that broadcast announcement, he'll be leaving with whatever agreement those ministers initialed about eleven-fifteen tonight—two hours from now. We're all quite familiar with those crossroads mentioned. You, Mikhail, will wait there, and saw through one of those telegraph-poles so that you can drop it squarely across the road. It's soft iron—you have three metal saws with you—shouldn't take over an hour, with all three working. I'll drive along and wait near Lord Marastoun's place—following after Lanstow when he starts. When you see my headlights flash up into the air and down again, twice, drop that pole across the road, but don't do it unless I signal. Then you

Instantly the cone began reproducing the words, very much amplified.

can get to work with your gas-bombs, and I'll come up behind with more."

Sir Frederick Lanstow was fully aware of his responsibility when he left Marastoun Manor with the cipher documents, but supposed that his danger, if any, would come from pursuit. He didn't see how it was possible for anyone to have known his destination that afternoon or the time when he would be leaving to go back. The powerful headlights of his car lighted up the road ahead for a sufficient distance to reveal the obstruction and prevent his chauffeur from smashing the car upon it, but instead of the shots he expected and knew would not penetrate either sides or windows, three bombs of tear-gas were smashed against the ventilators, filling the confined space, from which neither of them could escape, with their powerful fumes.

In two minutes, both were helpless—blinded and choking. Then one of the doors was battered open—the two men were dragged out and searched. When nothing was found upon either, the cushions were ripped from the seats and the interior of the car searched until the secret receptacle was discovered, after which, they were left to recover from the gas in their own good time and proceed wherever they wished in the car which, otherwise, hadn't been damaged in the least.

When Lanstow and his chauffeur turned in their reports at Downing Street and the car had been officially examined, the incident was apparently closed. No word of it leaked into the newspapers—no reference was made even in Government circles, outside of one or two grave conferences. The truth was that the Government had received a severe jolt. Evidently, there were radical spies among those whom they had supposed entirely trustworthy. Secretly, the Cabinet was seriously disturbed over the affair—and had any decision been lacking for an absolute breaking of diplomatic relations with the radical State, this would have settled it.

BARSTIDE was one of five men who had spotted the broadcast announcement for something which didn't appear on its surface. Three other "reds" in different localities had understood the message it really conveyed.

The fifth man who had heard it was dismissing it from his mind when something in the sound of the name "Sir Francis Bascombe" appeared vaguely familiar. While he was thinking this over, he also recalled the words "His Lordship's house in Dorset"—and it presently flashed through his mind that Lord Marastoun's place was in Dorset—that two English and two French Cabinet ministers were staying with him that night—also, Sir Frederick Lanstow, the King's messenger. Sir Frederick Lanstow—or *Sir Francis Bascombe?* Lanstow would be leaving for London about eleven—by midnight, anyhow.

The more this man thought over these points, the more convinced he became

that the broadcast announcement had been really a message of instruction which might have a very serious meaning in relation to the King's messenger and what he would be carrying. This fifth man happened to be Earl Trevor of Dyvnaint, listening for a few minutes—with Countess Nan, and their steadfast friends, Earl Lammerford and Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan—to a powerful receiving-set in the big Jacobean library of his Park Lane mansion.

To be certain that he hadn't imagined things which were not in the broadcast, the Earl wrote it down word for word as he remembered it and then read it to the rest of them. As all four had cultivated memory and observation to a very abnormal degree, they checked over his memorandum and presently agreed that it was exactly what each of them had heard, to the best of their recollection and belief. Trevor then mentioned the fact, which all of them knew, of the ministers being in Dorset that evening, and repeated his snap-inferences from some of the sentences.

As they had only been listening to the radio subconsciously, as so many of us do when our minds are on something else, they hadn't been struck by anything unusual about it until he showed them the inference which might be read between the lines—but all of them became impressed with more or less apprehension when he had done so.

After a few moments' discussion, he reached for one of the telephones on the long table and asked the post-office exchange to "put him on" to Marastoun manor in Dorset. The operator said that all the long distance lines were in use then, and requests filed for an hour or two in advance—which brought a request that the manager of the exchange would talk with Earl Trevor of Dyvnaint, at once. It was a peremptory request with an edge to the tone which meant business, but the girl was unable to locate the manager for a good twenty minutes, when he returned from his dinner. He recognized Trevor's voice, however, and asked what he wished.

"It may be a very serious matter, Jarndyce! I wish to get in communication with Lord Marastoun in Dorset just as quickly as you can give me connection with his manor-house near Weymouth! Understand?"

"Perfectly, your Lordship—but I fear that, with the requests filed ahead of yours, it will be a matter of two or three hours at least. We have to use a large part of our available force for five hours each day in handling the trans-Atlantic telephoning—and for the present, that puts us behind for the rest of the day."

"But, deuce take it, man—this is on His Majesty's service!"

"What assurance can your Lordship give me of that? We have very strict orders that no connection is to be made with Marastoun manor this evening—"

The manager was so clearly afraid of making any exception to his orders that, in a moment or two, His Lordship hung up the receiver in disgust—and stood by the table a moment considering the matter. Then, picking up another phone, he spoke to Sabub Ali in the garage at the back of the grounds, on the next street. The car was around at the Park Lane curb five minutes later. Pausing only for topcoat and a brace of pistols, Trevor ran out to it. At twenty-five minutes after eleven, the car ran through the lodge-gates of Marastoun manor. Four minutes later, His Lordship met the Earl in the big hall.

"I say, Marastoun—pardon my lack of ceremony, but has Sir Frederick left yet for London?"

"My word! Aye! Left a moment or so after eleven—expected to reach Downing Street by one!"

"Well—he'll not do it in that time, if ever he does anything at all again! I tried my damndest to get you on the wire at nine-fifteen—but that chap in the post office wouldn't exceed his orders! Nothing to do but drive down as quickly as I could! I picked up a radio broadcast which appeared to give the time for his leaving here and arrange for ambushing him somewhere along the road! If he's stickin' to the turnpike I may overhaul him if I go back at once, or be of some assistance if he's been able to put up a fight. But, frankly—I fear I'm too late!"

SIR FREDERICK and his chauffeur were just beginning to recover from the effects of the tear-gas when Trevor came up and saw for himself exactly what had happened. This of course was sufficient to completely exonerate the King's messenger, but it didn't lessen the gravity of the fact that unknown parties now had the cipher memorandum of agreement in

their possession and, presumably, would send it out of the country at the earliest possible moment. The recently perfected F. O. cipher has not yet been successfully decoded, to the best of the Government's knowledge—but given ample time for studying it, no cipher is absolutely safe.

Trevor was back in Park Lane again by two in the morning—finding the others

He struck Barstide a terrific blow which stretched the brute upon the floor.

waiting for him to turn up with whatever information he might have obtained—and before getting a few hours' sleep, they went over the affair to find some clue which looked promising in an effort to recover the missing document. With all the exceedingly capable men in the Foreign Office, they had had far more experience in such matters and were more likely to get results in a minimum space of time. His Lordship started the discussion by mentioning one obvious fact and a recent occurrence which might or might not bear upon it.

"First place—that announcement came from some private and unlicensed broadcasting plant," he remarked. "From the loudness of the signals on our set here, it was probably within twenty miles of this house. If any of us were putting up a broadcasting plant calculated to reach listeners in all parts of the United Kingdom, there's no question as to where we'd locate it—upon higher ground in one of the shires west of the city, in order to avoid the mass of interference in the city itself. And while one can't be certain that another four persons would consider that in the same way, it's fair to assume that their radio-engineer would. So that we'd best look first for this station in Bucks or the neighboring counties. Aside from that, there's another incident which may have some bearing upon this affair.

"Two or three weeks ago, I saw a chap on the sidewalk in Cannon Street whom I was certain couldn't be anyone but the Ivan Tchigorsky who tried to have Abdool and me killed a couple of years ago when we were entertained one evening as guests in the Kremlin. A woman helped us to get out after we'd shot a pistol out of her hand before she could practice on us.

"This Tchigorsky was about thirty-three or four, I'd say—had large features—ears of peculiar shape—rather diffic'lt to mistake for anyone else, once you'd studied the beggar a bit. We'd a chance to see him tinkering with a plane-motor outside of Moscow—knew him to be a good mechanic an' electrician. Apparently, he'd just stepped out the door of a large foreign distributing house where he might or might not have been employed—seemed to be a Russian comp'ny, at all

events. He took a bus going west—I had Sabub follow the bus, sometimes ahead, sometimes behind—saw the beggar change to another, and followed that one up Maida Vale until he got out and turned down a side street where he went into a four-story apartment building. Presently, I had Sabub go into the entry and look for the name Tchigorsky on the post-boxes—but he couldn't find it—which of course proved nothing except that the chap was there under another name."

"Were you lucky enough to see him again anywhere, George?" asked Countess Nan.

"Faith, I made a point of it! Went there next day in diff'rent clothes—man about town—eye for women—that sort, you know. Chatted with a butcher on the corner who appeared to be a bird of the same type—keen on the women. While we were talking, Tchigorsky came along on the opposite sidewalk with a good-lookin' girl of possibly twenty-eight or so. I asked the butcher if that was 'Mrs. Carbury.' He winked at me in a knowing way and gave up a bit more than I'd expected to get. She was Mrs. Mary Barstide—living with her husband in the apartment building down the street—husband a jealous sort of brute. I asked if this John Barstide, as he called himself, was a foreigner—but the butcher laughed at that. Some talk about his bein' born in Belgium, but of English parents who were only visiting there. Socialist—and maybe a good bit more 'red' than that—but minded his own business and paid his bills—"

"Butcher supposed you were after the wife, of course?" Lammerford chuckled.

"Oh—absolutely! An' thought a few quid might come his way if he could help me along as a go-between. I had Sabub drive me through that street once or twice afterward with some idea of actually callin' on the beggar, who I was positive wouldn't recall me at all. Saw his wife come down the street about eleven, one evening—alone. Got out of the car when she reached her building and asked if John Barstide lived there—an expert mechanic an' electrician? Said I might be able to offer a berth at very good pay if he satisfied me as to his ability, and would call some evening about eight, to see him. The woman seemed int'rested—asked if I knew of any berth that she might fill which offered better pay than the co-operative shops. I said I was int'rested in several commercial houses—would keep her in mind.

"Now the point is, I've paved the way to go there and have a talk with Tchigorsky if he's at home—possibly pump more out of him than he realizes. He'll not try any rough play because it's obvious that he's building up an excellent alibi as a *bona-fide* Englishman of family, for some reason behind all that, and his play just now is solid respectability. I'll make inquiries through the banks until I locate the one where they have an account—the manager will be able to give me points on both. If the woman is at home alone, I fancy I can hypnotize her into giving me a lot of information—decidedly valuable, if Tchigorsky is working with the other Russian crowd, here. Somehow I can't get rid of a hunch that this supposed John Barstide may have had something to do with that broadcasted tip that Sir Frederick was leaving for London with the State document. I'll go there tonight and see what I can pick up. Meanwhile—I wish that Lammy and Abdool would see what they can find out concerning Arnikoff Exportations, Limited, in Cannon Street. And I'd suggest seeing the commissioner of buildings to pick up just what was done to that warehouse when the comp'ny took it over, less than two years ago."

AS none of them had anything better to suggest, His Lordship went to the apartment building that evening, dressed in clothing of a different cut and pattern from that he usually wore, and with slightly swollen face-muscles which so changed his appearance that nobody could have recognized him as the same man—in spite of which, however, he retained his atmosphere of unmistakable class and breeding.

Mary Barstide opened the door when he had climbed to her floor and rung the bell—taking no chance of a rebuff at the speaking-tube in the entry below. She said her husband was employed on a job out of town and wouldn't be at home for several days but, impelled by something pleasant and attractive in the visitor's gray eyes, she asked if it were anything he could talk over with her—and invited him in.

"Mrs. Barstide—as I told you the other evening, I'm in position to offer your hus-

band what is probably a better berth than the one he now has, provided I am satisfied that he is sufficiently expert for the work and is an Englishman. A friend of mine in the Foreign Office says he knows where Mr. Barstide was employed two months ago, and is positive that he isn't English—which would be almost prohibitive in my case."

"He was born in Antwerp, but his mother was English."

"Do you know that, yourself—or is it merely what he has told you?"

"Hmph! I'm beginning to think I know very little about John Barstide, though we've been married nearly three years. He tries to bluff me into thinking him a very jealous man—but I fancy he'd not care a hoot if I left him—unless it got him into the news-sheets. He can't abide anything like that!"

"May I ask whom he is working for, just now?"

"A big importing house in Cannon Street—Arnikoff, Exportations."

"Why—that's a Russian concern—distributing Russian products throughout the United Kingdom! If they're paying your husband unusually well, mightn't it be that he's really a Russian, himself?"

"If a Russian can speak as good English as John—it might be. I don't say that he's *not*. . . . . He was here for breakfast this morning, when I wasn't to expect him for another week at least. The job was overhauling some manufacturing works in Buckinghamshire—putting up some sort of an electric plant, I think. But he was sent down to Weymouth three days ago from there up to London, last night. When he'd had his bite and coffee, he started back to Bucks."

"Er—before I employ anyone, I naturally make some inquiries about him—everyone does that, you know. So I had a chat with the manager of your bank. He was rather frank about your husband—didn't like him. Said he knew absolutely nothing about the man that wasn't perfectly straight and respectable—but bank people are pretty good readers of character, you know, and there was something about Mr. Barstide that he didn't quite trust. Of course I'm merely telling you what he said to me. He fancied, however, it wouldn't surprise him if Barstide drew out every penny of your joint account and disappeared with it."

"I was beginning to be afraid of just that, myself—and I really couldn't afford to lose it. So I put all of my own money in a separate account, just yesterday."

"Well, on general principles, I fancy you were quite right in that—it's a deal safer, at all events. Now, speaking of yourself—just what are you doing, at present?"

"Assistant manager of a millinery department in one of the shops. I'm said to have rather good taste in hats—I know I could buy good salable stock in Paris if ever I got the chance to go over, but I'll not get it as long as Madame Julie keeps her health!"

"Suppose your husband got into some political difficulty and you unexpectedly were thrown on your own? Could you manage, do you think?"

"I'd have to—wouldn't I? Perhaps I'd be tempted to put my savings in a little shop of my own."

"Too much risk of losing out—the big shops get all the best trade. But if ever you are in such a position, go to one of my friends—I'll give you a letter—an' he'll back you sufficiently to open a really first-class place in the West End—I'll furnish the money through him. Rather not appear in the matter myself, you know—chiefly on your account—might cause unpleasant talk. If you've notepaper here, I'll write the note now."

JUST at this moment they heard a key stealthily inserted in the lock of the hall door, which slowly and silently opened to admit a dim figure. The man closed and bolted it behind him—then came slowly into the living-room. They saw it was Barstide; his face was pasty yellow and his sunken eyes burned with a look that was fairly murderous. Paying no attention to the visitor coolly surveying him from an armchair at the other side of the table, he suddenly grasped his wife by the throat and shook her.

"Where is it—what did ye do wi' the money? I needed it—for something that came up sudden-like—a job in the States! I'll be wantin' passage-money' an' livin'-expenses over there! I go to th' bank an' all I find is a lousy ninety quid! Where is it, curse ye! Hand it over before I stop yer breath altogether!"

The visitor thought this had gone about far enough—thought, too, that he now had pretty nearly all the threads of the previous night's occurrence. He picked up

hat and stick and gloves, and apparently started for the door. But as he was passing behind Barstide, he struck him a terrific blow under the ear which stretched the brute unconscious on the floor.

THEN Trevor carried the half-choked girl over to the sofa and went out into her kitchen to rummage for clothesline, which he presently located and used to fasten Barstide's elbows behind his back after tying his ankles securely. While the girl was still too dazed to notice what he was doing, he went through the fellow's pockets—felt through the linings of his coat, waistcoat and trousers—took off his shoes and examined them carefully before putting them back on his feet.

"The man certainly tried to kill you," he said to Mary, "unquestionably he'll try it again if he's at liberty, and it's not because he cares a rap for you, either! He's been meaning all along to take your savings and disappear when he got ready—your balking him made the bounder crazy! Either he'll get the money or kill you—make no mistake about that! So we'd best have him locked up until you move where he'll not think of looking." And when Barstide began to show signs of returning consciousness, the visitor sent Mary out for a bobby.

Trevor accompanied the man to the police station to prefer a charge of murderous assault upon Mary for her money—and whispered in the Inspector's ear:

"On His Majesty's service. This is a Foreign Office case, Inspector—if you'll permit me to use your telephone, I'll have the F. O. confirm it in a few minutes."

Through the use of certain keywords which the Inspector didn't catch, the officer on duty in Downing Street understood perfectly who must be at the other end of the wire and called the Inspector to the phone—instructing him to hold the arrested man securely until the F. O. could send for him in the morning.

From the station, Trevor went back to the apartment building and arranged for Mary to move next morning to a much better neighborhood in the West End where the "red" would never think of looking for her later on, when he came out of Dartmoor prison.

LAMMERFORD and Sir Abdool, as possible wholesale purchasers, had been shown goods upon every floor and in two cellars of the Cannon Street warehouse where they noticed solid concrete walls which made them much smaller than the floors above. The building commissioner had shown them plans of the building alterations, with two large safety-vaults under the rear warerooms which had no connection with the banking part of the business. Their conclusion was that very nearly all the secret correspondence and documents of the radical organization in England must be stored in those safety-vaults.

At all events, they had obtained enough evidence—with what Trevor had taken from the lining of Barstide's waistcoat—to order a raid on the building. For certain reasons, it was considered better to give this the appearance of a police job rather than one connected with international politics. So the raid was ordered to be made ostensibly by Scotland Yard.

Without warning, four vans filled with police drew up at the Cannon Street building next morning some hours before it was opened for business—a number of the police going around through other warehouses to prevent anyone getting away from the rear.

WHEN officers of the company and employees appeared, they were placed under temporary arrest, and the ransacking of the building proceeded. It was necessary to cut the steel doors of the safety-vaults with acetylene torches, but the discovery of several tons of incriminating documents rewarded them when they finally got in.

One employee, found in the counting-room, was touching a match to a document which he had just taken from one of the big ledgers that had been locked in an ordinary office safe—but Trevor, who had been directing the search, snatched it from his hand before any damage was done. He recognized the F. O. cipher and knew it must be the memorandum of agreement taken from Sir Frederick Lanstow on that lonely turnpike in Dorset.

A week later, the Premier announced in Parliament that a vote would be taken upon severing all diplomatic relations with the radical State responsible for these violations of international good faith—and the intrepid Free Lance was commended highly for his invaluable services, by a secret vote of thanks from officials of the Foreign Office.

La Belle Marquise

"Grab her mitts, Alice," I said; and I made a thorough job of that gag.

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

Paris—the Legion convention—and swift action to defeat a daring criminal: one of the most stirring stories even the author of "The Pirate of Algiers" ever wrote.

I HALTED my taxi across the street from Hollock's apartment, paid the driver, dodged through the line of vehicles ascending the hill, and was clear. Then the first bullet struck my hat and jerked it over my eyes.

The Rue de Maubeuge was fairly clear of down-bound traffic at the noon hour. I was expecting nothing, heard no shot—and yet I realized instantly what had happened. I made a quick leap forward, and it saved my life. The second bullet ripped my collar, just under my ear. Some one was shooting from behind and above, and I stopped to ask no questions about it. I broke all records, and dodged safely into Hollock's entry.

In two minutes I was up the stairs and in his apartment. Alice Vincent was ahead of me; she and Hollock stared at my unceremonious entry.

"Get busy, Holly!" I panted. "Upper window across the street—rifle with silencer—must be Tellier himself—"

I held a finger to my ripped collar. Hollock was out of his chair and at the telephone without a word more. Obviously, he had made all arrangements at the *mairie* of the quarter, for he merely gave his name and sketched what had happened. Then he hung up and turned.

"Tellier was probably located over there, waiting to get me," he said quietly. "He saw you—and let loose. They'll not find him; he'll be out of Paris in half an hour."

Alice said nothing, but sat staring at me, with horror in her eyes. I told her she'd better play safe and marry me at once, instead of waiting the six months she had exacted; but she did not rise to the lure. Even in Paris, where anything happens, bullets aren't common.

HOLLY gave me a cigarette and settled back in his chair, calmly enough. Seeing another chap missed by a bullet was nothing to worry an ace and general daredevil like Hollock. He held a French aviation commission, about all the medals that could be raked in, and the confidence of several governments. He passed a hand over his slightly bald front and grinned at me.

"Much obliged for springing the trap, Buddy Barnes!" he said. "We'd better keep away from the windows and leave

it to the gendarmes. Lunch will be up in a minute—I've taught that corner restaurant to broil lobsters, American style. D'you know, Buddy, this has relieved me a whole lot!"

"It ought to," I said sharply. "A new hat—and look at the holes in it! And then look at my coat-collar!"

"Any *stoppeuse* at any corner can fix that, and I'll buy you a new hat," said Hollock carelessly. "But this shows Tellier hasn't any idea that we know something of his plans for Saturday night, and the Marquise de Grammont. Savvy? Otherwise, he'd never have fixed up this little ambuscade. He's hated me since we mixed it up during the war, but you're the one who got me on his trail the other day—Alice assisting -and when he got a good crack at you he couldn't pass it up! So it blew the whole works for him, and now he'll stay out of Paris for a while—and use his puppets and crooks to milk the Legionaries he can catch. Which will help us a lot."

Alice turned her gaze to him. "Thanks for the us," she said quietly.

"I mean me and Buddy," said Hollock. She smiled.

"No. *Us*. I'm in this, and I mean to stay in. You're protecting the American Legion—"

Her tone was eloquent, and I glanced uncomfortably at Holly. He shrugged, frowningly. It was no game for a girl like Alice Vincent—fresh from home, knowing only school French, and engaged to be married in six months to Buddy Barnes, unless she changed her mind.

"Protection for the Legion in convention assembled!" I broke in ironically. "That sounds fine, that does! Alice Vincent, art student, Jim Barnes, lawyer, and Commandant Chauncey Levinfort Hollock, general utility man of the French aviation service—engaged in protecting the tender and unsophisticated boys of the American Legion! I'd like to hear the laugh that line would get from some of those boys!"

"Well, it's true!" snapped Alice, getting rather red. "You know it is, too—you needn't try to make fun of it, either!"

IT was true, and that was why I didn't want her in the business. Largely by accident, Alice and I had put Hollock on the trail of the man he most wanted—one Jean Emile Tellier, former army officer and now a champion crook with plans all laid to soak as many of the American Legion convention as he could reach for their money—and worse. Much worse, in fact. All Paris marveled at the magnificent way the Legion men behaved themselves in the face of all manner of moral temptations; yet there are a few weak sisters or idle spendthrifts in every crowd. Tellier was after them, and he had them all spotted, too.

Hollock was after Tellier, and I was with him—and now Alice proclaimed herself in it too, in a tone of voice which showed us argument was silly. Hollock was, I felt sure, one of the men assigned by the government to watch over its large flock of guests, for France was taking no chances. Official figures showed three hundred thousand foreigners, all criminals, reds or potential criminals, on French soil—and she meant to protect the Legion so far as she could against all such. And against her own criminals as well.

We had caught Tellier red-handed and had missed him by a hair; he was a remarkable man, and knew his danger now. He did not know, however, that we had secured a slant at his plans and victims and associates—enough to give us a working basis. And he was mixed in everything from straight robbery to dope and white slavery. It was no girl's game.

"If you want in, stay in," said Holly, looking quietly at Alice. "You can help a lot. But you risk a hundred times as much as we do, remember!"

"I stay in," she said, simply. "Remember on your own part that I'm twenty-two years old, have a brain and hands, and can look at the seamy side of life without a shiver. That's the epitome of modern education—for the younger generation."

We both broke into a laugh, and just then a waiter came with luncheon, and we went into the dining-room as soon as he was ready to serve. Holly had done things up handsomely, with a 1906 Vouvray that would make your head bubble like its own greenish-yellow depths.

Before the waiter, we kept off the business for which we had assembled. Midway of the meal, Holly was summoned to the telephone. He spoke briefly, and returned with a shake of his head.

"The bird was gone, but they got his gun and found his nest and pinched a

Exactly the thing I wanted—a pair of real pistols. They came high, but I did not argue over the price.

couple of hopheads—poor devils!" he said. "He probably knows now that they've got his description and photos; he's beating it out of Paris, perhaps out of France. No one knows better than he just how efficient this frog police system can be. Well, here's luck to our marquise!"

"And a new lid for me," I added.

When the waiter had departed, the three of us settled down to discussion. It was Friday, and for two days we had been probing for light on the secret activities of Tellier and his precious confederates.

We knew that a certain Marquise de Grammont was giving a tea or reception for a number of the Legion convention on Saturday, at her Passy home. We knew there was no such person or title; the historic name had been borrowed, the title invented. Our first brush with Tellier had yielded five names, four American, and that of a certain Gabrielle at an address in Rue de l'Assomption—a street dividing Passy from Auteuil. That this Gabrielle was the false Marquise de Grammont, was fairly certain.

"Gabrielle Fontaine," said Hollock, "is a minor lyric artiste who lives between Paris and Nice, and who works anyone worth working. This covers her case, briefly—the details are not appetizing. The house in question is a very fine one; it's been rented for three months, unfurnished, to a man who answers the description of Tellier. This rental cost him fifteen thousand francs; another five thousand for expenses, say, and we have an expenditure of twenty thousand. For what? One evening's work. How does he expect to make a killing of size in one evening?"

"We don't know it's for only one evening," I objected.

"Neither Tellier nor Gabrielle could keep up such a bluff in Paris," said Holly. "This is a quick, bold play for big stakes. Have either of you learned anything about the four American names?"

I shook my head. "Larned, who gave him the other three names and who seems to be one of his men, remains a mystery. He isn't a delegate to the convention, anyhow. I couldn't get any track of Wilberforce or of Humphry, but I may learn something later from the convention headquarters. Severance is a delegate from a Michigan post. He's stopping at the Continental, therefore has money."

"He has," put in Alice. We turned to her.

"You know him?" asked Hollock.

"We're from the same town, near Detroit." Alice smiled, enjoying our surprise. "Of course I know Frank Severance!" she added. "He has more money than sense, or had; he inherited the one without the other. Since the war he's done little but spend money—it means nothing to him."

"Just the sort Tellier would pick on," commented Hollock. "Question is, whether this party is being staged for his sole benefit or whether others are in on it?"

"Deduce," I said, with a shrug. "A man of that stamp would have friends of the same type. Personally, I'm not interested in saving fools from the result of their folly—if he's bringing other birds into Tellier's net, I'd let 'em go! But we're out to fight Tellier, so—"

"Exactly," and Holly grinned, his gray eyes twinkling at me. "Nothing on with the convention until its formal opening next week, is there? Then our man is probably enjoying life, with all the trimmings. Buddy, you're deputed to go around and see if you can warn him off the Marquise de Grammont and her staged party."

I LOOKED at my watch and settled back.

"All right. Alice and I will saunter around there at tea-time. Are we going to that party, if it's pulled off?"

"You bet we are," said Hollock. "We'll manage it easily enough, for I've the lay of the house in my head. Tellier has probably warned his crowd against us, but hasn't had any chance to point us out; a change of names ought to protect us."

"What about more bullets from windows?" asked Alice anxiously. Holly grinned again.

"No danger. Tellier himself was the only one with nerve and hatred enough to pull that sort of stuff! He's gone, and it wont be repeated. He had to make a desperate play to get rid of me or Buddy, since we knew him and were blocking his game. He lost, and you can gamble he's outside of Paris and still going, right now—he'll direct operations from a safe distance. Well, that wont help him! We'll get things cleaned up here, and go after him."

"About the warning—no good being explicit?" I asked.

"Not a bit. Size up your man and use your head. Suppose we meet for lunch tomorrow at that brasserie in the Rue Jean Jacques Rousseau, behind the Louvre, and report progress."

So agreed, we parted, Alice going with me. We walked, having plenty of time, and Alice enjoyed window-shopping in the many antique shops of the quarter. I was keeping my eye open for a weapon-shop—the French run to all variety of fancy firearms and other things, and I wanted a pistol badly. My eyes were open to what we were now up against.

I had known, naturally, that it was a question of hotel rats, white slavers, and dope handlers, to put the case baldly, but had not previously appreciated their readiness to hit back—and to hit first if they could. When it came to this, Jim Barnes meant to be on the spot himself. So, when I saw exactly the thing I wanted in the window of an antique shop, we went in and Alice looked on wonderingly while I bought it.

Not a pistol, but a pair of them—real pistols, beautiful old silver-mounted weapons. Each was barely three inches long. They were in a case, complete with some caps, loaders and bullet-mold and powder-flask. They came high, but I did not argue over the price.

"And will you please tell me why?" demanded Alice, when we were walking on toward the Continental. "I'd think those things more dangerous to the man who shot them, than to—"

"Maybe," I admitted. "But if you notice, they take a bullet the size of a 30-30, and are only good for short distances, and would go into a waistcoat pocket. No sense lugging around an automatic! If I need one bullet, I need it bad and quick—and I'll wager these little toys will do the business beautifully. Anyhow, they suit me."

Alice had to be content with that.

WE reached our destination a bit ahead of tea-time, and lucky we did. We had no sooner come into the big rectangular lounge facing the court, than up jumped a man ahead of us and came at Alice with beaming face and hand extended.

"Alice Vincent—of all people! How are you? What you doing here?"

"Looking for tea—how are you, Frank? Mr. Severance, Mr. Pendleton."

Severance gave me a hearty grip and then turned to Alice again. I sized him up easily—he was the back-slapping type, vain as a peacock, fairly good looking, expensively dressed, and was probably very popular at home. He had a loud voice, which he used, and he evidently liked to shine.

"Come along and meet a friend of mine," he said warmly. "Old French nobility—ah, here we are! Marquise de Grammont, let me present Miss Vincent, from my old home town—and Mr. Pendleton."

I hoped nobody would recognize me as Buddy Barnes—that voice of his carried.

We joined them, and Severance ordered tea. The fake marquise was a smooth article, no doubt of that; she was good-looking in a cattish French way, was dressed to kill, and spoke English with a pronounced "z" accent, more like an Italian than a Frenchwoman. She almost ignored me, and devoted herself to Alice.

"Convention? Sure!" Severance leaned back, took a cigarette from a jeweled case, and looked the lord of creation. "We're showing 'em how we do things, what? Seen the wreath we brought over for the Unknown Soldier's tomb? It's a peach—nothing like it ever seen over here!"

"You were here during the war?" I asked.

"Me? No such luck," he said, and deflated a little. "Training camp. Listen, I'm to be the guest of honor at some doings tomorrow at the Marquise's chateau—you and Miss Vincent look in, will you? Here's a couple of cards—"

HE handed me two ornately embossed cards, decorated with a huge coat of arms, for the tea. I wondered how the man could be so taken in, with talk of a chateau in Paris, and this horrible lack of all taste—but just then the Marquise seconded the invitation.

"You mus' come!" she said, using her eyes, and then took Alice's hand. "Will you help me serve ze tea, if you please? It will be *so* kind, my dear! So many people are out of town for ze holidays, and my *famille*, zey spik ze Anglais so poor—"

I had a good slant on this, too. The faker! She would not dare drag in any resident American women, who would all know there was no Marquise de Grammont; but with Alice to assist, she could make a grand impression on Severance and his friends. It was a lovely game.

I pocketed the cards and winked at Alice, and she assented very sweetly. Then she said something to the Marquise which I didn't catch, but which had swift results. Next thing I knew, Severance was giving his attention to Alice, and the Marquise was using all her eyes on me. And, man, how she could use them! How she could talk of the nobility she knew! How she could act! With all I knew about her, and the plenty I could guess, she half fooled me into thinking she might be all right after all. We were old friends in five minutes, and intimate in ten. When she hinted that she might show me around a bit, I took her right up on it—if she wanted to play me for a sucker, she could!

So we all had a grand time. Alice agreed to show up and help the Marquise next day, and I said I might bring a friend with me, and everything was lovely. Severance was tickled to show off his friends among the nobility; you can gamble he lost no opportunities, either!

"What did you say to the painted lady that made her so keen for me?" I asked Alice, when we were on our way elsewhere. She squeezed my hand under her arm, and laughed delightedly.

"I told her you had been divorced three times and still had five million dollars in the bank—and that I hoped to marry you. At least, I didn't have to tell her this last. She saw it. And now she's on your trail. What you going to do about it, Buddy?"

"Whew!" I said. "That whole gang will be on my trail now! Good for you—I bet we'll have some fun tomorrow afternoon and evening!"

We had a good deal more than any of us bargained for.

We arranged with Holly that he and I were to go to the tea as mere guests, under the names of Pendleton and Howard. Alice would go on her own, and be there when we arrived—and find out whatever she could about the outfit.

"There's one risk, of course," said Holly thoughtfully, as we talked it over at luncheon Saturday. "Tellier's gang may be wise to us, and the Marquise may be setting a trap."

"Possible but not likely," I said, "to judge from the way she fell for the stuff Alice told her about me. I think she's on the level. When does the show start tonight?"

"At six," said Alice. "Or a little after."

"Then we'll have to dress. I'd sure like to know what they aim to pull off in two hours' time! Will you come around for me, Holly?"

He nodded. Alice and I went off to see a film that would never be shown in America, and we had an enjoyable time.

Hollock showed up promptly at five-forty. I was waiting in the lobby, and came out to his taxi. I had spent some little time finding out how to work those baby pistols of mine, and now had one in each pocket of my smoking jacket, capped and ready; but did not mention the fact to Holly. He had his straight-handled ebony stick.

"That'll give you no help," I said. "You'll have to turn it in with your hat."

"I'll know where it is," he grunted. "No more news?"

"None. You?"

He shook his head, and we rode out along the quay in silence, until we turned off at the Grenelle bridge for the Rue de l'Assomption. Five minutes later, we had arrived.

The house was a massive square building of stone, set behind a high iron fence among gardens. Across the narrow street were the tall brick wall and large grounds of a private school; on either side were other residences in extensive grounds, and the lots were so deep that trees hid the buildings in the rear.

"Now we'll find," said Holly, as we were admitted by the gate porter and walked on toward the house, "why our friends rented an unfurnished place—"

"Because they wanted to furnish it," I laughed. He nodded gravely.

"Exactly; for their own ends. Also, why they picked such a situation. Anything could happen in that house, from a yell to a gunshot, and it wouldn't be heard in the street unless some one were listening."

"Oh!" I said. "You'll have some one there listening?"

He only grinned at me.

WE were among the first to arrive, which was what we wanted. Our cards had to be shown, then a liveried servant took us upstairs. We had a glimpse of vast glittering rooms, gay with flowers and brocaded hangings, and caught the strains of an orchestra.

"For a one-night stand," muttered Holly in my ear, "it's well staged!"

When we came down, I was impressed, despite my knowledge, by the gaudy trap. How many of the crowd were in the secret, it was impossible to say—perhaps only a few of them knew anything definite. It was a well-dressed assemblage, and some of the women were magnificently gowned. We stood for a moment, gazing around, then Holly touched my arm.

"See that woman with the diamond necklace? A real countess, but a dope-fiend. The man under that chandelier, with the distinguished whiskers, is Baron Gatz—expelled from the Legion of Honor last year for things not talked about. Watch your step, Buddy! Come on."

We made our way to the Marquise and Alice, who were surrounded by a little throng.

Alice was in beaded white, the Marquise in bright flaming scarlet—an apt choice of colors, I thought. I presented my friend Howard as a business associate and left him to keep the rouged and painted lady entertained while I greeted Alice. "Any news?" I asked.

"Suspicion only—the room behind the winter garden. Not sure—"

Almost at once, I found myself taken in hand by the Marquise, who evidently meant to play me for all I was worth before Severance arrived. She did it, too, and if I met her halfway it was her own fault. This, too, let Hollock efface himself—he was too well known to take chances under an assumed name. I met all the nobility, real and assumed, on the place and then slid the Marquise out of the throng and off to the winter garden for a quiet chat.

She was a swift worker, and I played up to her in good shape. The winter garden was a semi-circular room under glass, filled with exotic plants. It was flung open to the warm summer evening, and a door went out of it to one side. I wanted to have a look at what was behind that door, but kept my desire to myself. Since she had money in mind, I talked carelessly of large sums, and presently she asked if I ever gambled.

"Never," I said, "unless I get a good chance—"

JUST then we were interrupted by a thin, pallid man with some sort of borrowed title, who appeared and made the lady a sign. I knew Severance had arrived, by the suave manner in which the Marquise disengaged herself. I took her back to the crowd, then lost myself and slipped into the winter garden again and went to that door. It was unlocked, and one quick glance was enough. I went back and circulated in the precious gang. Severance and two other men had arrived, both of his own type, and after meeting them I drifted around and found Hollock in a corner by himself.

"Any luck?" he asked.

I nodded. "Gambling lay-out in the back room. Looked like roulette. I thought it was illegal in France?"

He only shrugged, his gray eyes roving about the place.

"More in it than mere gambling, Buddy—somewhere! May be anything from plain robbery to the badger game. Most of this gang are here merely to form a background; probably half a dozen in all will be on the inside. Spotted any of 'em?"

I pointed out the thin, pallid man who had summoned the Marquise. Holly smiled. "His real name's Frontin. Former croupier at Monte Carlo, and a bad egg. Hm! And Baron Gatz! I fancy this affair will be pulled off without the Marquise. She'll try to keep you out of it, Buddy—they're after Severance and his pals tonight, savvy? They'll pluck you another time."

We separated, and I soon found the Marquise keeping me and Severance both on her string. He was loud-voiced and aggressive and sure of himself as ever. We all moved into a huge dining-room, where a gorgeous supper was served, with plenty of wine and liquor. I noticed that Baron Gatz made quite a hit with Severance, and stuck close to us. Severance had too much to drink, and presently leaned over to the Marquise.

"Zey have all forgot' me," said the Marquise. "S'all we go away and have ze little chat togezzer, yes? Upstairs?"

"When does that little game start, Marquise?"

"Whenever you like," and she laughed trillingly. "You want to play, eh? Come, we'll all go in. Tell your friends—but nobody else. It is not for all ze world, zis game!" She looked up at me, and pressed my hand. "You like it, ze roulette? Zen you shall come, and your friend too—"

I saw Hollock talking with Alice Vincent, a startled look on his face. She had discovered something, then! No time to talk, though; a gentle dispersal was accomplished, most of the crowd remaining and a few drifting off to the room behind the winter garden. The Marquise kept me and Severance with her. Alice did not come.

Yet she had somehow dropped on the secret—I saw it by the look in Holly's eye, by the quick grin he flashed me, by his signal to go slow and wait. He knew now what was coming. At least, he thought he did. None of us guessed the dark and bitter work ahead.

THIS gambling-room held two roulette tables, and was of fair size. Two of the long windows were open, giving upon the garden. Severance and his two friends made the room loud with boisterous talk. I was there, Holly, Baron Gatz, Frontin and half a dozen others, two of them women. One of these women, amid much laughter, got behind one of the tables as croupier, while Frontin was assigned to the other by the Marquise. There were no chips, all playing being with money. The Marquise, frankly the house, furnished each croupier with a bale of hundred-franc notes and another of thousands. Then, amid keen excitement, the ball was opened.

Almost at once, I found the Marquise on my arm.

"You do not play, M'sieur Pendleton?" she asked. I shook my head.

"Not yet—wait a bit. I've forgotten roulette, and must have another drink or so to get warmed up."

She laughed, and squeezed my arm. Severance and his two friends were at Frontin's table. Forgetful of all else, each of them holding a sheaf of notes, they were laying down bets.

"Zey have all forgot' me," said the Marquise, and gave me a sidelong glance. "S'all we go away and have ze little chat togezzer, yes? Upstairs?"

"She'll try to keep you out of it, Buddy!" The prophetic words of Hollock drifted back to me, and catching his eye, I got one ironic look. I assented to the lady's question eagerly.

"You mean it? I'd like nothing better! Come on—can't we slip upstairs without going through the whole crowd?"

She nodded. "I'll show you!"

And she did. We slipped quietly upstairs by a back way.

NOW, I could guess whatever was going to be pulled off down there in that back room, would come before long; otherwise, she'd not have tried to get me out of it. Also, she may have wanted a good alibi. So I knew exactly what I meant to do, guessing that no more of the upstairs had been furnished for the occasion than was absolutely necessary.

However, the thing was sprung on me, for in the upstairs hall we ran into Alice—and I don't know which of us was the more astonished. She was carrying her velvet cloak, and I knew Hollock must have told her to get out and away at once.

"You are not leaving?" exclaimed the Marquise, with a nasty intonation.

I had two handkerchiefs, fortunately; I jerked them out, rolled up one in a ball, drew the other over it, and had an excellent gag. I was just behind the Marquise.

"Grab her mitts, Alice," I said. By the time this slang phrase percolated to the painted lady's brain, she was too late.

I whipped the improvised gag over her head and drew it around and knotted it under her slicked hair; Alice had her by both slim wrists. Fortunately, I made a merciless, thorough job of that gag. How the cat fought! Not until I reached down, caught her ankles, and dumped her over on the floor did we really get her under control. Even then she wriggled about like a snake, until I yanked up my trouser-legs and got my garters off.

A garter makes an excellent thing to tie up wrists or ankles with, if handled right. In two minutes we had the Marquise bound and gagged, helpless. I straightened up and looked at Alice, who was panting, starry-eyed, flushed.

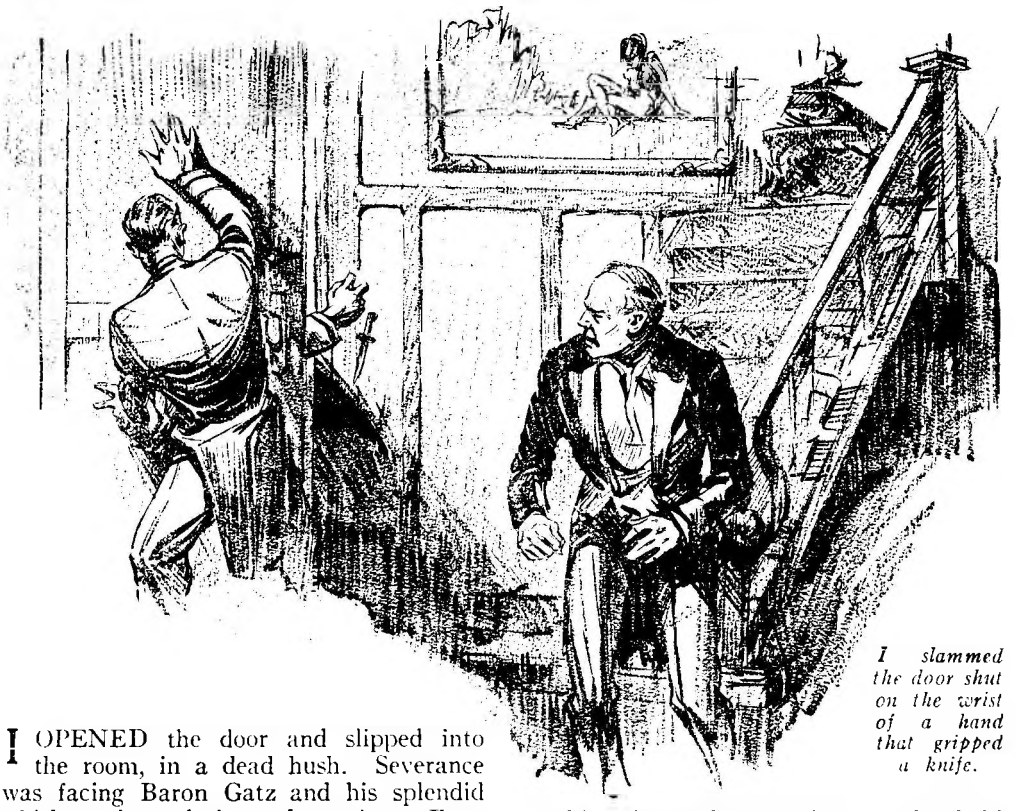
"Get out, quick!" I said.

She nodded and disappeared.

All this time we were in the upper hall, and not a soul was in sight. On our right were the rooms, open and lighted, used to receive the hats and cloaks of the visitors. All the doors on the other side were closed. I stepped to the first, found it open, and went into a bare, musty, closed room. Slipping back, I picked up the Marquise.

"Be a good girl, now, Gabrielle, and you wont get hurt," I said. She stiffened in my arms at this use of her real name, her eyes staring wildly at me. I carried her into the room, put her down on the floor, came out and closed the door. Then I went back to the roulette room, as I had come, but faster.

And I was barely in time—for the tragedy, as I thought then. In reality, for the prelude of what was to be the real drama.



I slammed the door shut on the wrist of a hand that gripped a knife.

I OPENED the door and slipped into the room, in a dead hush. Severance was facing Baron Gatz and his splendid whiskers, in a furious altercation. Even as I softly shut the door, Gatz lightly struck Severance across the face with his white gloves. In reply, Severance hit him a heavy crack on the chin—not knowing he was merely being fixed for a duel. The baron went over backward, rolled, and lay with his head under the roulette table.

There was instant confusion. Frontin, with suspicious presence of mind—I saw Hollock smiling to himself—leaned over the recumbent baron, then pulled him out. His face was more ghastly than ever as he rose.

"Dead!" he croaked. "Struck his head —where is Docteur Benet?"

The confusion died into stricken silence. The doctor, most opportunely among the guests, shoved forward and leaned over the baron. After a moment he, too, rose. "Dead," he said, and threw out his hands helplessly.

The scheme was evident enough now. Severance and his two friends, their piles of banknotes forgotten, stood staring. They were sobered and horrified.

I came quietly to Hollock's side.

"Wait," he said in my ear. "Wait. Alice saw the gendarmes ready. Let 'em spring it."

Frontin stepped out. Now he was speaking in perfect English, as he held up a hand.

"Ladies, please retire!" he said. "And breathe not a word of this. We must protect our American guests. Remember, it was an accident—everyone else, kindly remain as you are!"

The two or three women slipped out of the room. There remained Severance, his two pals, and half a dozen men. Hollock pulled me back by a window, where the low lights above the tables left us unobserved. All were watching Severance, who had lost his confident air and was staring around, gulping.

It was well staged. The women who had departed gave the signal, of course. A door opened, and two gendarmes stepped into the room.

"Keep your places, gentlemen," said one of them—in English. I glanced at Hollock, but he shook his head, and quietly stepped out the open window to the balcony above the garden. I was with him at once, unseen, and we watched out the drama. What was now said, was spoken in English—for the benefit of Severance and his friends, naturally. They were far too excited, too utterly appalled, to be conscious of the incongruity.

"What is this?" said one of the gendarmes. "Roulette? This is against the

law—ah! A man hurt—why, it is Baron Gatz! Quick, comrade!"

For a third time, a man knelt above the baron's whiskers, and rose with the one reiterated word: "Dead!"

Out came pistols, and with them, notebooks. The gendarmes looked at Severance. "You did this, monsieur? You are under arrest—"

Poor Severance, all this while, had said not a word, but his face grew whiter and whiter. "An accident—didn't mean to do it—" he blurted desperately.

"Monsieur," broke in the gendarme, "you are engaged here in roulette, against the law of France. You have killed a man. These witnesses will tell their story; the fact remains, a man is dead! Further, no ordinary man, but one prominent, well-born, noble—Baron Gatz! Let there be no talk of accidents. The newspapers will not believe such a tale."

Sweat began to streak the face of Severance. Frontin had his cue, however, and now came forward, giving his assumed name—the Vicomte something or other.

"Not so fast, I beg of you!" he said to the gendarmes. "We, all of us, saw what took place; an altercation, Baron Gatz slapped this gentleman's face, and Mr. Severance hit him. He fell, struck his head—and you see the result—"

"Worse and worse!" snapped the gendarme. "Then you admit he was killed as the result of a blow? Who is this murderer—a foreigner?"

"He is one of the American Legion, a friend of France!" cried Frontin dramatically. "We cannot allow this accident to be called a murder! Our friend, our guest—here, monsieur, let me speak with you in private."

He took the gendarme to one side, whispered. The gendarme threw up his arms.

"Impossible!" he cried out loudly. "To hush this up—impossible! It would mean the loss of my position—and consider my comrade yonder! Besides, a man of the quality of Baron Gatz—no, no! Do not mention such a thing—"

"But there are ways!" said Frontin hastily. "You know it could be done—"

Severance stepped toward them.

"I—let me speak a word," he said huskily. "It was an accident, yes—I didn't mean to do it—if there's any way it can be kept quiet, I'll pay well—"

"Impossible, monsieur," said the gendarme sternly.

I TOUCHED Hollock's arm and looked at him, but he shook his head and stepped farther back. The farce went on—it was sheer farce, for the moment, and everybody except Severance and his friends enjoyed themselves. To cut a long matter short, a sum was agreed upon and it was no small sum; we could not catch the amount, but could see Severance and his two friends making up the money and it seemed to clean them out of American and French notes. He passed it to Frontin, who drew them aside, toward our window.

"Slip out and go now, quickly," said Frontin. "Leave me to settle with these gendarmes. We'll arrange everything. We must keep it out of the papers if possible—"

Then the gendarmes intervened. They had changed their minds; they could not sell their honor! Severance yanked out a folded book of bankers' checks.

"One thousand dollars more—yes or no?" he demanded, breathing heavily.

Then he was signing the checks and turning them over. Frontin had not expected this, I could see, and was delighted. He winked at the gendarmes, and into their hands put the big pile of bills.

"I'll see these gentlemen out, and then come back to arrange with you," he said, and jerked his head at Severance. He wanted to get rid of the three dupes at once, before anything could go wrong. He did it very neatly, too—got them out, and went with them.

As soon as the door closed, Baron Gatz got up and grinned, and everybody shook hands. Besides the two imitation gendarmes, there were the baron, with the doctor, and four others. Eight in all, as I figured up afterward.

"All right, Buddy," said Hollock, and we walked in on the party.

"SUPPOSE we speak French for a change, monsieurs," said Hollock, with calm assurance.

His command of the language is fluent; but he had previously denied all knowledge of it. The gang stared at us, unspeakably startled by this fact, and by our appearance. Holly smiled at them and lighted a cigarette—so they could see the police whistle in his fingers. In fact, he had all the air of a high-class French police official, and in his buttonhole had mysteriously appeared his Legion of Honor rosette. They did not miss it, either.

"So you belong to the prefecture of this arrondissement?" he said to the two fake gendarmes. "The inspector, I believe, is waiting outside. He'll be most interested to meet you, gentlemen. And you, my dear Baron, with your load of wealth."

The money had all gravitated to Baron Gatz, together with that left on the tables.

"Sacred name of a black dog!" gasped somebody. "He is of the police! Not an American!"

"What charming discernment!" said Holly genially. "Our little Frontin gave the game away, yes. He's very useful to us, this Frontin. Not very wise of Tellier to trust him, eh? But Gabrielle is caught, and you, gentlemen, are caught also."

The use of those names fairly stunned them all. Not one of them doubted that Holly was actually from the prefecture. The baron trembled in his shoes as Holly held out a hand to him.

"Come, the money! Thank you. And now, those pistols—"

The baron mechanically handed over the wad of bills, which Hollock stuffed into his pockets. The gendarmes, however, drew back, scowling.

"Did that dog of a Frontin blow the game?" one of them demanded.

"He did, naturally," said Holly.

Up to then, they were all completely cowed, and given another three minutes, we would have won the whole pot hands down. A police official in France commands a peculiar respect and fear, even from criminals, which is not given to agents or even gendarmes; for behind him is the deadly weight of the law. And French law is not like American law—it is justice, swift and sure and deadly in the extreme. It is even more deadly than British justice, for it is bound in red tape which is pitiless and terrible.

So, left alone, none of these eight men would have resisted the two of us, for their passions were paralyzed. But, at this instant, the door opened and Frontin stepped into the room without seeing us.

I think he never did see us. It was as though a flame leaped through the group of men who thought he had betrayed them all. A low growl broke from them; two of them whirled, caught him, dragged him down, and I saw the flash of a knife. Frontin flung them off and came to his feet, blood on his shirt-front—then one of the gendarmes shot him between the eyes.

The other gendarme flung himself on Hollock, brandishing his pistol, and the crowd came for us. The spell was broken.

THAT second gendarme was too melodramatic for his own good, because as he leveled his pistol, my deadly little toy spurted fire into him and he went down. The other pistol caught in my pocket, and the gang were all over us in an instant.

For a moment or two it was a grand and glorious free-for-all. Fortunately, evening dress does not lend itself to hidden weapons. Two or three of the crowd had knives, but got little chance to use them; I remember sending home a straight right to the chin of Baron Gatz, but his beautiful whiskers were like a padded protector, and it only bounced him across the room. Another came in his place, steel blade darting at me; we were back to back now, Holly and I, as they crowded us, rammed us, surrounded and tore at us, bore us back by sheer weight.

Only two movie heroes can beat down seven men with any ease. When a mad rush sent us reeling against the wall, I gripped at the door there and flung it open—it was the door leading upstairs, the way the Marquise had shown me. Hollock fell through it, and I came after him, then slammed the door shut—on the wrist of a hand that gripped a knife. The knife fell, I opened the door slightly, and slammed it again as the hand vanished. A rush of bodies sent it quivering.

"Up!" I panted, catching Holly to his feet. Somebody had reached him under the belt; he was groaning and gasping for breath. "Blasted police—too slow—"

The stairs were dark—a door at the top, French fashion, was closed. We were halfway up when the door at the bottom smashed open and figures came leaping. There was a shot, and the bullet whined and thudded between us. They had recollected the pistols of the fake gendarmes.

I had one shot left, and used it. In vain! At the same instant, the door above us opened, I heard the Marquise shrieking something, saw her and several men behind her coming down at us. She had slipped the gag, or had been discovered—and we were caught past escape.

Again the pistol roared below us. A frightful scream broke from the woman above, and she pitched forward, falling headlong down the stairs—the bullet, meant for us, had hit her. She struck me

and Holly together, swept us off our feet, and the three of us plunged slap into the mounting men behind us. Something knocked the wind out of me, and as I went to sleep I heard the shrill vibration of a police whistle. . . . .

I never saw a more terrible change in a man than in Severance, when Hollock and I walked into his hotel room, unannounced, the next morning. He leaped up, staring at us, eyes bloodshot, face unshaven and haggard. He had not slept that night.

"You—ah, you were there!" he bleated. "You know about it?"

Hollock opened the package in his hand and spread out the money on the table.

"There's your money, Severance," he said. "Divide it among the three of you as it was given. And you'd better go back to America."

Severance stared from us to the money.

"What d'you mean?" he stammered. "How'd you get this? The baron—"

"The baron's in jail," said Holly. "It was all a faked scheme to make you pay up, you poor fool! Well, you've paid for it—"

"Faked? Impossible!" cried Severance. "The Marquise—"

"There is no marquise," said Holly sternly. "She was a cheap actress and worse, playing the part. Poor creature!"

Severance fumbled at the money, then drew back his hand sharply.

"Blood on it!" he exclaimed.

"Yes—her blood," said Holly, not sparing him a jot. "She's dead. She's paid, and I guess you've paid a bit too. It was all a trap for fools. You and your pals were the fools."

Severance dropped into a chair, as comprehension beat in on his brain.

"And you—you—what did you have to do with it?" he faltered. "Americans—"

"Americans, yes—that's why. You wouldn't understand."

But the man did understand, and a shiver took him. Then he reached out, with a better gesture than I had thought was in him.

"Take it," he said, shoving the money at us. "Take it. See that she—that she's buried properly—"

We left him sitting there with his head in his hands.

"Three Black Sheep" is the title of the next incident in this stirring series. In the forthcoming February issue.

The Box L Mystery

By ROBERT

The Story So Far:

MORE tenderfoot cattle barons and more younger sons of British lords were to be seen about the metropolis of the Wyoming cow-country than in any other town of its size in the world. Not so Bullhide, the unlovely little cow-town where one left the railroad if he journeyed to the Box L or the Double Bar ranches. And when Win Kenneth in his so-English clothes stepped off the train there, he attracted no little attention—and ridicule.

And this was quite as he had planned, for he had been employed by Jadwin K. Rowan, absentee owner of the Box L, to ferret out the cause of his heavy losses, particularly of his unaccountably small calf crops. And Ken, as his friends elsewhere knew him, thought he could best accomplish his task by posing as a ten-

Ken saw the vaquero's black eyes widen with sudden perception of the man in his sister's cabin.

The scent of powder-smoke is keen in your nostrils as you read the stirring climax in this spirited novel of the Wyoming cattle-country.

Illustrated by William Molt

AMES BENNET

derfoot English friend of Rowan's, come to Wyoming on a hunting trip, and naïvely eager to see the famed wild West of America. Hence the letter of introduction from Rowan to his resident manager Clate Cheever, which Ken presented; and hence that individual's grudging but unsuspicious welcome.

Ken's tenderfoot masquerade, however, promptly got him into variegated trouble. Alamo Gove, the hard-boiled foreman of the Double Bar, undertook to show off before his employer, Belle Forsythe, by "hazing" Ken, and came off a very second best in the encounter—an episode which apparently won Ken no favor in Belle Forsythe's eyes. And the Double Bar, Ken realized, was part of his problem, for the girl's father had the year before been killed in an encounter with as yet unidentified cattle rustlers; the man Gove seemed to stand high in her regard for the part he had played in that battle. Cheever also, it was clear, aspired to her favor.

Under pretext of hunting, Ken rode far about the country seeking evidence in this matter of cattle rustling. On one journey into the hills he was turned back by the bullets of two concealed riflemen. On another occasion he came upon a man skinning a newly slaughtered steer, but it proved to be only a poverty-stricken "nester" named Jake, who had committed the theft to feed his starving family. Pitying the man, Ken took the responsibility on his own shoulders and thus saved Jake from the swift reprisal of Gove and the cowboy Lanky (part owner of the Bar Y, a smaller outfit), who came upon the scene a little later.

Afterward, however, Gove and Lanky were determined to lynch Jake, and this time it was Belle who spirited him out of camp at night. But it was Ken who

was accused, and he narrowly escaped with his life from the angry cattle-men.

Pursuing his investigations, Ken now contrived to make his way to the mountain headquarters of the Bar Y. And there he found a young Spanish woman and her baby, guarded by her brother Pedro. And Doña Soledad informed him that she was the wife of Alamo Gove—of Gove, the apparently accepted suitor of Belle Forsythe! (*The story continues in detail:*)

FOR a moment Ken sat stunned, unable to believe his own ears. Gove—husband of this Spanish girl! Alamo Gove, foreman of the Double Bar, favored suitor of Belle Forsythe!

Impossible! No matter how much a scoundrel, no man in the cow country would dare take the risk of courting an honest girl when he already had a wife. There must be some mistake. Perhaps he had taken this Spanish girl in Mexico by some ceremony not legal in the United States.

And yet—Ken's mulling thoughts suddenly flashed back to that first day on the road out from Bullhide. He saw again the sudden graying of Gove's face under its tan. That had happened when, in the spat over his bullet-flicking of the diamond pin into Cheever's neck, the big foreman of the Box L had growled about Gove's getting "hitched up."

The meaning of that threatening protest was no longer obscure. By "hitched up," Cheever had meant "married" and whether or not he knew of this Spanish girl, or was thinking only of Gove's desire to marry Belle, the ghastly grayness of Gove's face must have been due to fear that his relation to the Spanish girl would be disclosed.

Still, even so, it was possible she was not his legal wife. That was a question of vital importance. Ken had lost his own chance to win Belle Forsythe; but no matter about that. What counted was that she probably had now accepted Gove. If the Texan was the utter scoundrel this Spanish girl's account made him out, Belle must be saved from him, whatever the cost.

Ken had no wish to hurt the beautiful young señora's feelings. He spoke with diplomatic tact.

"So Señor Gove is your husband, Doña Soledad! I have had the honor of meeting Don Alamo more than once. You say he married you in Sonora. Is it the priest, or a civic official, who officiates at weddings in Mexico?"

"But our marriage was not in Sonora, Señor," explained the girl. "I had come with Pedro, my brother, to visit our aunt in Arizona. There I met Don Alamo. When we were wed, the padre required him to bring a paper from the civil officials —what you call a leeceenza."

"License—marriage license?"

"The paper was so called, señor."

Ken clenched his fist. *"Poder de Dios,* señora! That cinches it!"

"Yes, señor. That good padre told me the leeceenza cinches the marriage — it binds the wife and husband fast together by civil law, even as the ceremony of the church makes the marriage a sacrament."

"Yet Don Alamo took you back to Sonora and left you there?"

"For many sad months, señor. Then Señor L'Anque sent word by a *vaquero* that my husband was here in this far land. Pedro brought me to him."

TO Ken the restrained grief in the Spanish girl's tone bore out the truth of her quietly spoken statements. He believed every word of what she had said. Yet others might require still added proofs. He paused to consider how he could go about finding out if this neglected wife of Gove's had a marriage certificate. The inquiry must be made in a tactful way.

He was still groping for the right words when he noticed Doña Soledad turn to glance expectantly towards the door. At the same time he heard the faint tread of hoofs, muffled by the dust. The girl smiled.

"It must be my brother returning from night-guard duty, señor. He will be pleased to welcome our guest."

This seemed to Ken by no means certain. He shifted on his seat so that if necessary he could draw his belt-holstered six-shooter with his left hand.

The wait was short. On account of the thick, soft pad of dust in the clearing, neither he nor Doña Soledad had heard the hoof-beats until they were close to the cabin. Hardly had Ken made ready to draw, when a short figure, topped by a Mexican hat, swung in at the doorway.

As had been the case with Ken, the *vaquero's* eyes were momentarily blinded by the sudden change from the bright

sunlight outside into the dimness of the cabin. While he still blinked, another man suddenly stepped over the log threshold—a tall, slim man with a big nose.

Ken threw his gun and leveled it alongside his left thigh. Two were not bad odds, but there might be a whole bunch more of gunmen outside. He saw the *vaquero's* black eyes widen with sudden perception of the man in his sister's cabin. The flip of the six-shooter must have caught his wary glance.

Before the fellow could reach for his own gun, Ken spoke with cool quietness: "Make no wrong moves, *amigos*. I have you covered. No, you needn't stick 'em up. All I want is a peaceful powwow."

The word *"amigos"*—"friends"—had sweetened Ken's threat that he held the drop on his men. The offer of a peace talk settled the matter for Lanky. He spoke to his hesitating *vaquero* in Spanish:

"It is that Box L. guest, Pedro. We'll hear what he has to say."

Pedro's oval Spanish face had gone dead white. He replied hotly: "Wait, señor. This gringo has intruded upon my sister when she was alone. If he has insulted her, he shall pay with his blood!"

"No!" cried Doña Soledad. "Do no harm to the guest, my brother. His manner has been most honorable."

AT once the threatener became the gracious host. He bowed to Ken as suavely as if he did not see the muzzle of the six-shooter.

"Welcome, señor," he greeted in broken English.

"Mil gracias—a thousand thanks," Ken replied in Spanish. "To accept the kind hospitality of the señor is an honor and pleasure."

"Great snakes!" put in Lanky. "Savvy Mex, do you? Say, Mister, I own up you got me guessing. First you go an' bluff me an' Alamo out of roping that measly nester; then you nose in on me an' Clate's calf-deal, tattle to Miss Belle an' shoot up Alamo."

"He asked for it."

"Sure. That's Alamo all over—goes off at half-cock. If he was here, he'd shuck it, an' get drilled again. It's you I can't size up. Idee of you beating Alamo on the draw! You aint no greenhorn dude!"

"Well, perhaps I'm not as green as I look," admitted Ken.

"You bet you aint—by a damn' sight! On'y, if 'taint greenness, it's fool gall an' nerve you horning in here after you—after what you done to Alamo. You sure aint no tenderfoot. Who the hell are you, anyhow?"

"I am, as you know, the guest of the Box L."

Lanky grinned. "Jest wait an' see what Clate Cheever says 'bout that."

"I'm afraid I can't wait. I have urgent business elsewhere," Ken replied. He deliberately holstered his gun. "Listen, cowboy. I'm not thinking now about any calf or cow-deal's. I sized you up as a whole lot whiter than Gove, even before I came here and learned this lady is Gove's wife."

THIS time Lanky did not grin. "Learned that, huh? An' you savvy Mex—sounds sort of like you might be one them nosey detectives from Cheyenne."

"Wrong guess, boy. I'm not even a deputy sheriff. Came here on my own to hunt for big game. Just now, though, I think I've struck the trail of a skunk. Does Gove admit that this lady is his legal wife?"

"Uh—mebbeso he's got reasons to keep it under his hat."

"But she claims he married her in Arizona. You know it's so."

"I aint saying, one way nor t'other."

Ken nodded. "That means you've promised Gove not to tell. Perhaps, though, you can say whether Cheever believes them married, or that he thinks Gove is merely living with her."

The big-nosed cowman quit his dodging. "Oh, hell, I aint paid to lie for Alamo! If you want to know so bad, Clate figgers she's jest Al's lulu-gal."

Ken raised his hand courteously to the smiling but warily watchful *vaquero,* and spoke to him in his own language.

"Pardon an intimate question, Don Pedro. It is for the benefit of the señora that I venture to intrude upon family matters. May I ask if you saw the padre marry your sister to Don Alamo, using the permit of the Arizona civil officials?"

"Si, señor. What is it?"

"God knows," replied Ken, and he turned again to Lanky. "That's enough for me, cowboy. You've said you'd not lie for Gove. I figure also you're too white to stand by and let him marry Miss Forsythe, when he's legally married to Doña Soledad."

The barbed appeal failed to hook in Lanky's tough hide. He grinned with seeming indifference.

"Alamo aint no such plumb fool, Mister. He'd jest as lief take any gal as drill a guy he didn't cotton to. But he's too slick to monkey with dynamite. He wont hitch up with Miss Belle 'less he's shucked off Soledad first. He was all set to do it when her an' Pete showed up."

"When was that?"

"A little less'n a year ago. Reckon Miss Belle's been some 'sprised he didn't follow up his drive to round her in. She'd 'a' stood an' let him put his rope on her, on account her feeling grateful for what he claimed he done after her dad got shot."

"'Claimed'?" questioned Ken. "Didn't he do it?"

"Ask Clate. He was there or thereabouts. Me, I was—" Lanky hesitated a fraction of a second, then finished: "I was out of sight of what they both—done."

KEN noted the breaks. But his mind was centered upon the urgent need to safeguard Belle Forsythe.

Gove had already shown more than once how hot-headed and reckless he could be. Might not Belle's tender concern over his injury fire his desire for her, beyond control? Might he not lose his head, disregard the danger from his relations to Soledad, and clutch at the easy chance to win and marry Belle?

In any event, Belle should and must be warned of the danger to herself without delay. The play must be made.

Ken put it straight to the waiting cow-man: "Will you join me in taking his wife and her brother to the Double Bar?"

"Not by a jugful, I wont. I aint aching to commit suicide."

"How about an invitation from me, backed by my gun?"

"Why, if you want to call off this powwow, jest say the word. I'd sooner shoot it out with you, right here, than with Alamo's whole bunch."

"Then suppose I alone escort the lady and her brother?"

"Nothing doing, Mister. I give my promise to keep her here, an' here she stays. Do we bust loose on that?"

"Don't forget I could have dropped you both before you saw me," Ken reminded him.

"Well, it was your own choosing, this powwow."

"Yes, because of Miss Forsythe and because of this lady. Unlike you, I believe Gove really is a fool. I've already lost out with Miss Forsythe. My crack at him killed me with her. But I'm going to tell her about his wife. Side me past your boundary guards."

Lanky put out a crafty feeler: "S'pose I let you slip out same way you sneaked in?"

"I don't want to wait till nightfall," Ken dodged the throw. "It's a deal easier to work around your waddies in the dark than to get past them in broad daylight. Come on, man. All I'm asking is the chance to warn a lady against that skunk—or rattlesnake—you know best which name fits him. There's nothing in it for me. She'll think I'm lying, and he'll sick his gang on me."

"Sure," agreed Lanky, "an' he'll turn his wolf loose on me too."

Ken had about reached his limit. No matter if there were a dozen Bar Y men within hearing of pistol shots, he must break this deadlock and be on his way to warn Belle.

"Side me off your range, on my promise to forget I've seen you here," he offered. "It's either that, or we shuck it right now. Take your choice."

LANKY held out his big rawboned hand. "Put it there, feller. You got sand, an' I figger you're square. Mebbe I'm some sore at Alamo my ownself—way he's treated Soledad."

"Then why not help me take her to him and call for a show-down?"

"I done told you whyfor. I aint aching like you to commit suicide. You was a gosh-awful *bobo* not to finish your man when he give you the chance. You're a worser idjit to run back an' shove your neck in his noose. All the same, long's you're asking for it, you get your chance."

"Thanks," said Ken, and he gripped the offered hand. Whether or not a rustler, the tall cow-man was not a liar.

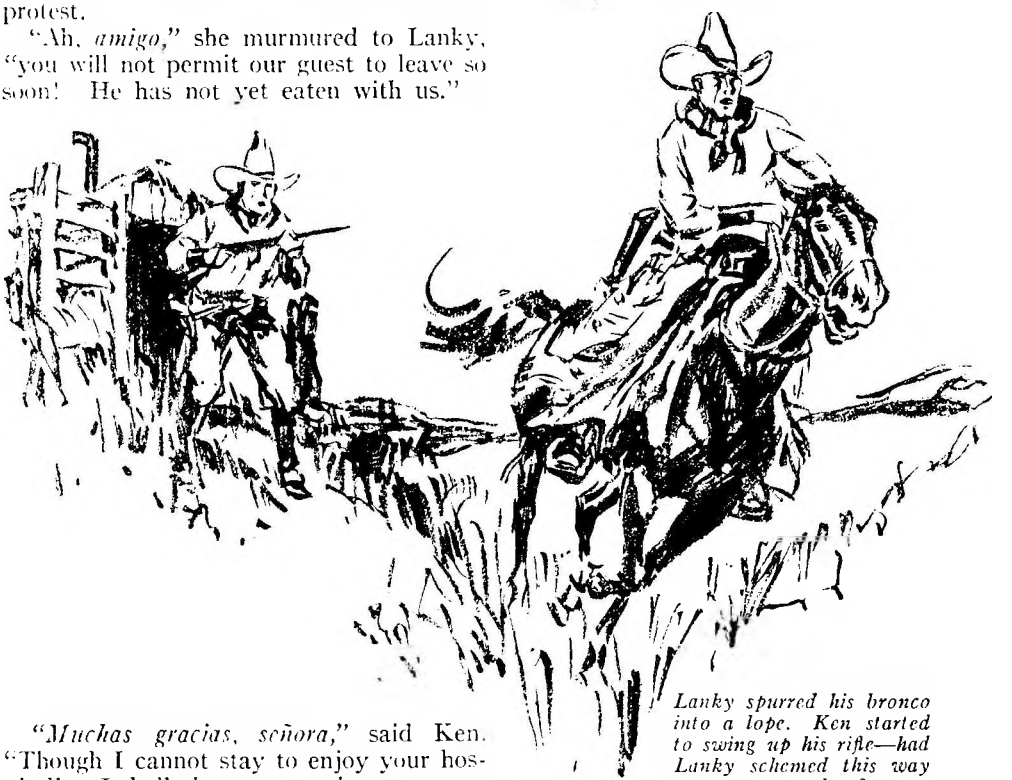
Pedro Gonzales had listened to the rapid talk with a puzzled look that showed he understood little English. The handshaking was easier to *sabe*. After Lanky, Pedro offered Ken his slender hand.

His boss spoke an order in his own tongue: "Ride ahead, Pedro, and pull Gotch-Ear back from the cañon head to the pass. We'll slip past him while he is shifting his station. You will forget the visit of this guest. *Sabe?*"

"*Si, señor,*" replied the Spaniard.

He bowed to Ken and left the cabin. His sister had nursed her baby to sleep and was placing it in the rough crib under the little shrine. She evidently had understood even less of the talk than had her brother. But Lanky's order brought her running forward, with hands out-thrust in protest.

"Ah, *amigo,*" she murmured to Lanky, "you will not permit our guest to leave so soon! He has not yet eaten with us."



Lanky spurred his bronco into a lope. Ken started to swing up his rifle—had Lanky schemed this way to get clear?

"*Muchas gracias, señora,*" said Ken. "Though I cannot stay to enjoy your hospitality, I shall always remember your gracious kindness. *Adios.*"

"*Vaya Vd. con Dios, señor!*"

Ken bowed himself from the cabin. Lanky followed, to eye him with a quizzical grin.

"Good thing she don't savvy English," he said. "Mean as Alamo's treated her, mebbe she wouldn't 'a' told you to 'go with God,' if she'd knowed you winged her hubby an' was figgering on bucking him ag'in."

"Not him but his crooked game," corrected Ken. "It's too bad if she still loves him. In that case, I'll give him his chance to come for her and make his get-away, if he'll take oath to treat her white."

Lanky stared. "Looks sort of like you're set on biting off a mighty big chaw. I aint saying how big a fool I figger you. Jest the same, you're one nervy cuss."

"You're another," replied Ken, and he added the far greater compliment of starting off in front of the man he believed to be in direct command of the rustler gang.

Lanky turned to his horse, which stood waiting at the corner of the cabin. As he caught up the trailing reins, he called:

"Hold on. If you come afoot, I'll go snare you a bronc."

"No need, Lanky. My roan is just across the creek."

"I'll go fetch him. We got to move fast."

With the words, Lanky jumped his bronco and spurred him into a lope toward the corner of the corral. Ken started to swing up his rifle. Pedro the *vaquero* was already out of sight, safe from the intruder upon this guarded range. The lope of Lanky's horse soon would take the cow-man also out of sight, behind the bushes at the end of the corral.

Once under cover, the Bar Y leader had only to capture the roan in order to cripple the movements of his uninvited visitor. There were no other horses within reach. A man afoot would have a hard time to escape from the meadows with horsemen on his trail.

Was it not probable that the big-nosed rustler had schemed this whole play in the cabin? Too wary to risk a gun-fight with the nervy fool who had beaten Alamo Gove to the draw, had not Lanky schemed this way to get Pedro and himself clear?

If afraid to attack the visitor single-handed, he need only wait for Pedro to fetch the whole gang. Along with his openly spoken order to the *vaquero,* he might have given a signal, either to call in the gunmen punchers, or to have one or more lie in wait to dry-gulch the visitor.

All this flashed through Ken's mind while the loping bronco angled across the clearing to the outer corner of the corral. A few more jumps would put his rider behind the screen of bordering undergrowth. Ken clapped the butt of his rifle to his shoulder.

But as he sighted along the rifle-barrel at Lanky's long, slim back, another thought stiffened the finger that was crooking on the trigger. Even if the man was half coward, he need only have pulled his gun and fired when his visitor started to walk off ahead of him.

The rifle butt dropped from Ken's shoulder. He lowered the hammer as the bronco swished his rider out of sight in the bushes. He would bet on his judgment in sizing up men. Lanky had not shot him from behind; nor had he flinched, there in the cabin, when he found himself facing the visitor's gun. He was neither a coward nor a sneak.

Gove would have shot his enemy in the back. Lanky had proved himself to be not that kind of bad-man. And yet, was it not possible he had passed up the chance in order to lure the visitor away from the cabin before making his kill?

The Spanish señora was young and beautiful. Even if Lanky felt towards her no more than the usual respect and admiration of a Westerner for a good-looking "honest" woman, he might well want to spare her the fright and horror of a killing. Besides, the fewer witnesses to a murder, the better for the killer.

CHAPTER XVII

SPURRED to action by the needless risk he had taken, Ken sprinted aslant to the nearest feed-shed on the cabin side of the corral. No bullet came whizzing out of the bushes to stop his dash.

Another dash brought him the shelter of the long, low bunk-house. From the far end of that building he made a final sprint that took him in among the trees at the opposite side of the corral from where Lanky had disappeared.

With his revolver drawn, he started to skirt around the corral through the bushes and trees. Ahead he heard the crash of branches snapping before the rush of a heavy animal. But the noise soon began to lessen. Lanky had angled off towards the creek.

Mindful of an ambush, Ken wormed his way cautiously on around the corral. He came to where the horse had turned off through the thicker scrub along the rill bank. No sign there that Lanky had slipped out of his saddle to lie in wait. Instead, Ken heard a fast-nearing crash of branches from the direction of the creek. He stepped back off the trail, behind a thick alder bush. His wait was short. Lanky came riding back at a lope, one hand holding his own reins, the other gripped behind him on the reins of the roan's bridle.

Ken holstered his revolver and stepped clear of the bush. Lanky halted the horses and stared at the visitor, his eyes narrowing with suspicion.

"What you trailing me for?" he demanded. "Told you to wait at the cabin."

"I thought best to get under cover," explained Ken. "Suppose one of your waddies had turned up? He might have cracked down on me first, and asked questions afterward. Besides, you gave me to understand that the sooner we get started the better."

"That's no lie. Hop your cayuse. We head t'other way from what you come."

With the word, the tall cow-man dropped the lead-reins and started to lope back around the corral. He did not even glance over his shoulder to watch Ken mount and follow. Ken felt both cheap and gratified. The fellow had no more thought of treachery from the visitor than he had schemed treachery against him. He was the kind of gun-fighter who would give warning and shoot only from the front.

As they rode past the smaller cabin, Doña Soledad waved her slender hand and graciously wished the guest a good journey. That double-cinched what Ken already had in mind. The girl was innocent, and he was after bigger game than Gove. If the Texan would agree to give

up Belle Forsythe, he should have his chance to take his wife and child and skip the country.

INSTEAD of leaving the clearing by way of the upper screen of aspens, where Pedro had ridden up the meadow trail to the pass, Lanky followed the rill. This course led across, between the open expanses of grazing land, all the way amidst the belt of trees to where the rill flowed from a ravine in the mountain-side.

Here Lanky turned out of the thickets to lope along the slope above the meadows. Pines and spruce trees screened him and Ken from sight, all the way to the head of the lush green pasture. Near the pass Lanky swerved farther away from the open ground, and led up the mountain saddle parallel with the trail.

Once over the summit, he turned into a blind trail that slanted down through the dense growth of lodgepole pines, off to the right of the main trail. Following his guide's example, Ken kept the roan away from dry branches that might snap, and off stones that would clink or rattle under the iron-shod hoofs of the horses.

Less than a third of the way down to the box cañon Lanky halted beside a ledge of rocks and signed for silence. A crested bluejay was squawking its harsh alarm close ahead. As the bird flitted away, Ken heard a clatter of hoofs.

A hoarse voice cursed the jay for not flying down-trail to give warnings that would be useful. The click of hoofs on stone came still nearer. Then, not fifteen feet away, on the other side of the ledge of rocks, the mellow voice of Pedro Gonzales flowed out over the mountain-side in a lilting Spanish love-song.

The song must have trilled loud in the ears of his trail-mate. It would have covered any chance snap of twig or ring of horse's hoof on the hidden trail. Lanky nodded and made a sweeping gesture for Ken to ride on down the mountain.

"Jest keep to this here ol' trail—fair going. Best not cut into the big trail till you round the split rock at the head of the cañon. If I figgered same's you figger 'bout Alamo, I'd wish you luck. As 'tis, best I can do is warn you not to come back on the Bar Y range. You'll be shot on sight. S'long."

"No doubt Gove will do his best to get me first," Ken replied. "S'long, ol' timer! You're a square shooter. Here's hoping you'll soon get rid of your crook pards who're stacking the cards on you."

Honor among thieves is a scarce article. Treachery between partners in crime can often be counted upon in a pinch. The sudden upjerk of Lanky's chin and the narrowing of his eyes told that the random shot had hit somewhere.

The cow-man must already have had cause to doubt the loyalty of one or more of his associates. However, he asked no questions, and Ken rode off down through the lodgepoles, satisfied to let his well-meant yet barbed wish rankle in the man's secretive mind.

The ride down to the cañon head was not hard, and at the split rock mentioned by Lanky, it brought Ken to where the main trail dipped into the cañon.

Once down out of the cliff-walled gorge, Ken felt fairly certain he had cleared all the Bar Y gang. None the less, he was on a beaten trail. As he neared the road, he swept the ground in all directions with searching glances.

Down to the left, where the road ran into the gap of the ridge that bounded the Box L range, he glimpsed what looked like a hat-crown. A sagebush partly screened it. He could not see the thing clearly. It might have been a rock; it did not move. Just as well, though, to make tracks for the Double Bar. The sooner he told Belle Forsythe about Doña Soledad, the better.

As he swerved the roan to hit up the road, he bent forward to spur the horse into a gallop. At the same moment something crashed against the back of his head.

Through a million fiery stars he saw his hat flop down under his eyes. He was pitching head-first after it. The ground jumped up to hit him—then came sudden darkness.

WHEN the black cloud lifted, the first vague thought that groped its way out of his stunned mind linked treachery and Lanky. His legs were sprawled crosswise. His body lay in the side of the road where the wash from the cañon had deepened the wide rut worn through the sod by hoofs and wagon-wheels.

Between the grass-stalks in the middle of the road one of his dazed eyes made out a crouched figure dodging from sagebush to sagebush. It was a man—beyond doubt the man who had dry-gulched him. The assassin held his rifle half raised; he advanced rapidly yet warily.

No doubt of it—he was coming up to make sure of his kill. A few more steps would bring him near enough to see into the rut. It would also be within long pistol range.

Ken's left arm lay close to his belt. He twisted his wrist to feel for the revolver. The holster was empty. His fall had jolted the gun out of its scabbard. If he should turn or raise his right arm to draw the other gun from under his armpit, the movement would be seen over the edge of the road rut.

He must chance waiting until the murderer came within closer range. Even then the odds would be all too heavy.

Ken lay perfectly motionless. But all his skill and strength were set upon a hair-trigger, ready to flash into action. With the one eye that was high enough to see through the grassy screen of the mid-road sod he watched his hunter with a gaze no longer dazed.

The skulker had now come to where, even while crouched, he could see the upper edge of Ken's body. He stopped suddenly to peer warily along the road in the direction of the Double Bar. His head tilted sideways as if he were listening.

No less suddenly, he straightened up from his crouch to stare over the sagebush toward Ken. His rifle butt was at his shoulder, though the barrel did not at once swing up.

Above the barrel Ken saw a face that showed neither Lanky's big nose, nor the handsome swarthy features of Alamo Gove. It was a big face, as hard as red granite—Cheever!

Of all men, the foreman-manager of the Box L was the one Ken had least expected to see behind that rifle. Blank surprise held him motionless. That moment of inaction lost him his slim chance of reaching the gun under his armpit. Cheever was swinging up the rifle.

Ken tensed for the shock of the bullet. He knew his body was now enough exposed to the killer to offer a vital mark. No man of Cheever's type could fail to aim straight with a rifle at such close range.

Cheever's head bent sideways—his right eye peered along the rifle-barrel. Ken lay rigid, waiting for the smoke to spurt from the round dot of the muzzle. Unless killed instantly, he might be able to draw and shoot back while Cheever's eye was hazed by that puff of black powder smoke.

At the very instant that the killer's finger must have been crooking against the trigger, his bent head jerked around to peer up the road. Down he dodged. His big body slued around with the massive nimbleness of a startled grizzly. Still downbent behind breast-high sagebrush, he ran toward the gap far faster than he had come.

In his amazement, Ken jerked himself to a sitting position. No doubt about it—Cheever was running away at top speed. Hasty glances from side to side failed to locate the missing six-shooter. A twist around showed it lying in the bottom of the rut.

Ken snatched the gun up out of the dust and twisted back to fire. Fast as the killer was running, he had not yet got beyond pistol range, and there were six shots in the long-barreled revolver.

Yet second thought froze Ken's trigger-finger, even as another sort of interruption had frozen Cheever's. He wanted to get the big foreman, but he did not wish to get him with lead. Dead men tell no tales.

INSTEAD of firing, Ken lowered his revolver to take in the situation.

Cheever was already out of the play. Having dropped his man, the Box L foreman had sneaked forward to make

The cook halted the team; Belle leveled the six-shooter. Ken did not stir. "Go ahead and shoot," he said. "I'd rather get it from you than from that skunk back there."

doubly sure of his kill. But at the last moment he had heard or seen some one coming down the road. Craft, not fear, had sent him running. He was no coward. But he did not wish to be caught red-handed in a murder.

Even so, he most certainly would have fired that intended second shot, before taking to his heels, if Ken had not lain as still as a dead man. That had convinced Cheever he had no need to risk discovery by firing again.

A throb of pain sent Ken's fingers to the welt on the back of his head. The rifle bullet had pierced the rear of his hat band at an angle, so that it had bruised and grazed his scalp and clipped off a lock of hair. If he had not happened to make that sudden lucky bend forward to spur the roan, the shot would have struck square between his shoulders. As it was, the bullet had come so near to a total miss that its grazing blow had merely dazed and overbalanced him. He could remember falling, so he had not been stunned until he hit the ground.

But that was now past history. Whoever or whatever had sent Cheever off in such a hurry must be coming near. In all probability, it was one or more of the Double Bar riders. Another prospect of gun-play!

The roan stood a few paces away, placidly cropping the roadside grass. His bridle reins had slipped down over his lowered head to trail on the ground. That as good as tied him. He could be caught without difficulty.

In squirming around, Ken had already found he could use both arms and legs. His fall had broken no bones. He sprang up to run forward and place himself beside the roan. His rifle was leveled across the saddle when a single horseman galloped up over a hump in the road, within easy range.

The rider started to jerk his horse to a halt. But at Ken's shouted command, he threw up his right hand and rode forward. No other riders came galloping up behind him. A nearer look showed Ken who it was he had gathered in.

"Howdy, stable boss," he greeted. "Weren't looking for me, were you?"

"Huh—*you!*" the man shouted in his astonished alarm. "You hit out for Bullhide."

"So the dodge really worked," Ken rallied him. "Fooled Gove, too, did it?"

"Sure. Four his best trailers come in an' says you an' Jake was streaking it for the

rails. That's why Alamo hurries his trip to town with Miss Belle. Reckoned he might still catch you."

"Miss Forsythe! He's going to Bullhide with her?"

"Not going, Mister. They done went yeste'day."

"What for?"

The stable boss hesitated. "Why—uh—I dunno's— Hol' on! Don't shoot—don't shoot, Mister! I'll tell. Him an' Miss Belle didn't make no secret of it, nohow. Miss Belle allowed she'd take him in for a doc to patch up his arm, an' they'd get hitched, same time."

Somehow Ken managed to dam back the rage that surged up within him like a flood of liquid fire. He spoke very quietly, in a voice that he hardly recognized as his own:

"Married, you say? Did Gove allow he'd go through with it?"

"Did he! Say, Mister, they aint no buckaroo 'twixt here an' hell wouldn't come a-running for Miss Belle to put her rope on him, not if it cost him his ears."

Ken delayed to ask one more question. "You're taking the—the marriage news —to Cheever?"

"Gosh a'mighty, no! It'll make Clate sore 'nough, without him being taunted. No, I was jest going to tell Lanky."

"All right. You're welcome to keep going; and tell him also you met me here, right after I had a spill from my jumpy roan, while on my way to the Double Bar. Fell so hard it knocked me out. How about another feed of oats at the ranch?"

The stable boss nodded. "Sure, Mister. I tol' you Alamo aint there. Go an' get it, all you want."

RIGHT arm still upraised, the man rode past Ken and up the Bar Y trail. Ken swung into his saddle, to start off at a fox-trot towards the Double Bar. Beyond the first hump in the road he put the roan into a gallop. The stable boss was working under Gove. He might turn back to try his rifle on the man who had let him pass.

But no bullets came pinging after the roan, and Ken's frequent backward glances showed no sign of pursuit. The stable boss probably believed he had fooled the guest of the Box L into trapping himself at the Double Bar headquarters.

Ken pulled the pace down to a lope and stroked the roan's high withers. "Easy, easy, old boy. We've got a long trail to travel—a long trail, and maybe at the end of it—hell."

Down in the second trough of the great land swells he swerved off the road and headed for Bullhide. Though he did not know the way, he could calculate the general direction. He veered somewhat to the south of where he thought the town lay. As he expected, this slant at last angled him into what was undoubtedly the road from the Double Bar to Bullhide.

By now the day was far spent. During the long miles his hot rage against Gove had chilled into still more deadly cold wrath. The nearness of the sagging sun to the western mountains fired him to renewed heat. He spurred the roan into a run.

There was enough thoroughbred blood in the horse to have kept him racing until he dropped dead in his tracks. Mile after mile rolled back behind his swiftly spurring hoofs. The sun set. He raced on through the cooling twilight. Aflame with the fury of his fear that he would be too late, Ken kept the over-willing horse at top speed. Dusk began to shadow the vast expanse of the high plains. The roan was lathered white with sweat from the killing pace, but Ken's ears were deaf to the gallant beast's wheezing for breath.

Suddenly, with an outburst of frightened squawks, a flock of ducks squattered up from close beside the road. The harsh racket broke the spell of Ken's dread for Belle and his anger against Gove. His sideward-jerked glance caught a glimmer of the dying light upon water. He was rushing past a pond or slough.

Common sense told him to stop. There might not be another water-hole along the road, all the way in to Bullhide. Besides, no horse could keep on at this mad pace. And it was already too late to stop the wedding—unless Belle had delayed it for a day.

That was a blessed possibility—more, it was a probability. Between Gove's wound and the need of rest from the long ride to town, the girl would be apt to wait over a day. Then, too, she would want a minister for the ceremony. One would have to be wired for to come by train.

Even as Ken pulled the roan to a halt, hope blossomed up out of his black dread. He swung down to strip off his saddle. When the tired horse had rolled, Ken started in to give him a thorough rubbing

down. He did not stop the grooming until after dusk had gloomed into night. Then at last he permitted the roan to drink. He picketed him over at the far side of the water-hole and gave him what was left of the bag of oats.

Having done his best by his horse, he ate the few scraps left from the lunch put up by the woman cook of the Double Bar. No use reaching Bullhide before daylight. He bedded down near the reedy edge of the slough, timing himself to waken at midnight.

WHEN he roused up from his blankets, the position of the quarter moon in the star-gemmed blue-black sky showed him he had overslept. Yet why should he rush? Girls did not choose dawn for their wedding hour. He could make town soon after sunup. That would be soon enough—unless he was already too late!

So he saddled the roan and started on along his push to the rails. Faint as was the moon glow, it gave his horse light enough to follow at a lope the dust-gray streak of the road. That was a gait he could hold for many hours at a stretch.

The horse was still swinging steadily along, when, in the red dawn, Ken made out the branch road that ran north to the Box L. Not many more miles now to Bullhide. Struck by a sudden thought, he pulled the roan down to a walk.

If the girl had put off the wedding until this morning, why hurry? It might even be better to get there right after the ceremony, rather than before. The marriage would give Gove no hold upon Belle. On the contrary, it would open the doors of the penitentiary to him.

Of course that would humiliate Belle. But would it not do her good? Along with her commendable pride, high spirit and loyalty, she had shown herself willful and arbitrary—given to snap judgments. She needed humbling to bring out her finer traits.

Aside from turning her against Gove, the move would give the lone player in the game another card. That card might make all the difference between success and deadly failure. Easy enough to noose and hog-tie the Texan, one way or another. But there was Cheever to be reckoned with.

The Southern wolf had tried to bite, and had, instead, been bitten. Not so the Northern grizzly. He had struck a death-blow that had missed its mark only by sheer luck. He had proved himself a cold-blooded treacherous killer. The only alternative to shooting him on sight was to lure him into a trap. This would require craft—*and a bait for the trap.*

HE was still scheming when his absently staring gaze came above the top of a small rise in the road. Beyond the rise stretched the dreary flat of Bullhide. But Ken did not look across at the shacks of the little cow-town. His eyes had focused upon the wagon that was coming up the other side of the rise.

The horses were the team that had been driven by Jake's wife. Two women sat upon the wagon seat, but neither one was Mrs. Jake. The bigger woman looked like Belle's blowsy cook, and yes, Belle herself held the reins.

Ken's surprise mellowed into a smile. The stable boss had lied to trap him. Gove had not left the Double Bar. Belle alone had come to town—she and her cook. She was taking back supplies with the Diamond J team and wagon, which she had bought from Jake's wife, along with the iron.

There, behind the wagon, were the saddle-horses ridden to town by herself and the cook. They were swinging out of the road into full view, and with them the circle horse that he, Ken, had bought from her for Jake. Still another horse—one with a rider who was wrangling the little remuda up alongside the wagon. All too easy to recognize that rider. His right arm lay across his breast in a sling.

At the same moment that Gove swerved his bronco back behind the high chuck-box at the rear of the wagon, Belle passed the reins to her cook and lifted a cartridge belt that lay between her and the woman. Ken guessed that the belt and the six-shooter that she drew from the holster on the belt belonged to Gove.

CHAPTER XVIII

KEN rode quietly forward, heedless of the slow but steady lift of the big six-shooter in the slender hand of the girl. He kept his gaze shifting from side to side of the chuck-box. Unless he was greatly mistaken, Gove, like himself, packed a second gun.

As the roan's head lapped the head of

the off horse in the team, Belle spoke with a sharpness that meant business:

"Stop!"

The cook halted the team. At the same time Ken reined the roan to a stand. Belle leveled the six-shooter.

"I've got you covered. Throw up your hands."

Ken did not stir a finger; nor did he turn his gaze away from the chuck-box.

"You saw me make no move when you pulled your gun," he said. "Go ahead and shoot. I'd rather get it from you than from that skulking skunk back there."

"He's unarmed and disabled."

"Excuse me, Miss Forsythe. A rattlesnake with a broken back and one fang knocked out can still strike to kill."

The girl flushed. The muzzle of the six-shooter dropped, only to jerk up again.

"That will do from you," she said. "Dude or detective, whichever you are, no miserable sneak is going to call my husband vile names!"

For the first time Ken shortened the focus of his gaze from the chuck-box to the wrathful girl.

"Husband?" he half whispered. "Since when?"

"None of your business," she snapped.

But Ken continued to stare into the flashing blue eyes. Let Gove shoot, like the scoundrel he was. The only thing that now mattered was how the Texan had treated this loyally trustful over-grateful girl.

After several seconds of hard straining between their wills, Ken saw her eyes widen, either with curiosity or doubt. Perhaps she felt the fast-mounting dread and rage that he sought to hide behind his stony stare.

"What's it to you?" she demanded. "Al wanted to go to Cheyenne yesterday. But my riding clothes— The minister came by this morning's train."

Ken almost gasped his relief: "Thank— God!"

Her eyes widened still more. "Locoed! Might have guessed it days ago. —Al, come 'longside. I'll keep him covered."

Gove rode forward to her end of the wagon seat. His black eyes stared at Ken with wary watchfulness, but his mouth was crooked in a derisive sneer.

"You done drug in slow, feller," he mocked. " 'Taint too late, though, to hand me your 'gratulations."

Ken gave it him straight between the eyes: "Congratulate you? What over—this lady, or your wife at the Bar Y?"

BELLE'S hand dropped with the gun into her lap. She was a split second too late, however, to glimpse the "caught" look that flickered across Gove's face. The Texan's black eyes were already glittering. They went red.

"You liar!" he yelled.

His left hand dropped the bridle-reins—only to thrust upwards, instead of completing its in-jerk toward the sling of the wounded arm. His gaze froze on the fanner's gun, which had flipped out in Ken's hand.

Ken spoke to Belle: "Keep your gun down, Miss Forsythe, else I'll drill him. Otherwise he's safe, long as he keeps his hand up."

The girl stared at him with deepened perplexity. " 'Miss Forsythe'? I told you we're married! You're crazy as a loon."

"Would you call it a marriage?" asked Ken. "How about his Spanish wife?"

Before that trigger-thumbed fanner's gun Gove was not ready to yell "Liar!" But he turned to Belle with passionate heat.

" 'Taint true—taint true a-tall, honey! He's got it all twisted. You done said it—he's locoed, plumb locoed! You know 'bout that greaser woman Lanky's got up to the Bar Y. Claims she's a sort of sister to his Mex *vaquero*."

"Oh, *that* woman!" said Belle. "But it was the stable boss told me about her. You never said a word."

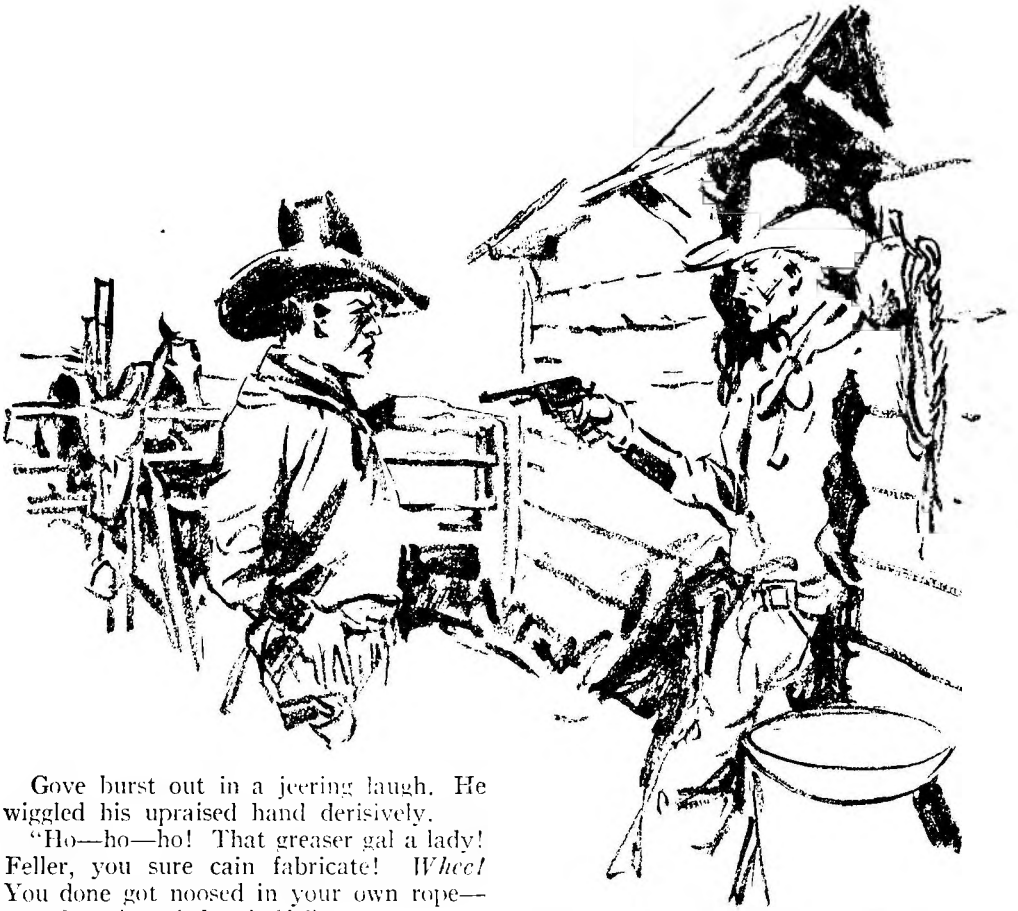
"Sure not—think I'd be telling you about a critter like her? Yet this locoed *bobo* hears 'bout her from that lying rustler Jake, an' comes running to slander me. He's sore 'cause he tried to cut me out with you, an' got left holding the sack."

THIS last was only too true. But Ken covered the bitterness of it with a smile.

"Let's forget me, Miss Forsythe. I'm not apt to bother you again. As for slandering this coyote, that's impossible. I knew nothing about Doña Soledad until I met her and learned from her own lips that she's his wife."

"Met her—you?" demanded Belle. "Where?"

"Up in the mountains, at the hidden ranch of the Bar Y. She's a lady—a well-bred Spanish lady."



Lanky stepped over the door-sill. "Looks sort of like I got the drop, this time!"

Gove burst out in a jeering laugh. He wiggled his upraised hand derisively.

"Ho—ho—ho! That greaser gal a lady! Feller, you sure cain fabricate! *Whee!* You done got noosed in your own rope—you done hog-tied yo'self!"

"How?" put in Belle.

"Why, you aint forgot, honey, I sent a boy to tell Lanky 'bout this *bobo* nosing into that Box L calf branding, then shooting me 'cause I called it a mare's nest. After that, d'you reckon Lanky would let the locoed loon come round his headquarters?"

"Of course not."

"Sure. That ropes this *bobo*. Next twist of the rope hog-ties him. He says he got his lie straight from the greaser gal. Happens I—uh—Lanky tol' me 'at she don't savvy American lingo. This here crazy hawse cain't talk Mex."

"Quien sabe? Sabe Dios," Ken countered with the Mexican saying. "Miss Forsythe, if you're the one here who does not savvy Mex, that means, 'Who knows? God knows.' It happens I too know—which is why I thanked God when I learned you had only just gone through with that illegal ceremony with this already-married skunk."

But Gove had unlimited effrontery and no scruples. Also he was in too desperate a pinch to let even Ken's gun silence him. On the contrary, he used it to strengthen his hold upon Belle's prejudice in his favor.

"He's got the drop on me, honey. You got my gun, an' anyhow I'm disabled. That gives him his chance to lie 'bout me. I cain't fight him. All the same, you wont believe him, honey. You don't forget what I done for your pappy!"

"Of course, Al. Against your word, I wouldn't believe him on oath. Enough for me if you say the woman is not your wife."

"Sure, sure, honey. But how 'bout this scandalizer hisself? You know I suspicioned he aint the tenderfoot he made hisself out to be. He aint no greenhorn dude—not by a little bit, he aint! Sneaks in on our range, acting that lie. Yet you seen yourself, honey, how he can throw an' thumb his fanner's gun like a reg'lar killer!"

"Not quite like a killer," put in Ken. "Luckily for you, I could shoot well enough to make you throw down, without having to put my bullet where it would have done the most good."

"Aw, rats! I knowed then you aimed to kill me, on'y your thumb slipped. Now you'll shoot me down defenseless. You cain't stand hearing me show you up for the sneaking rustler you are."

KEN smiled his contempt of this puerile charge. Even Belle looked incredulous. But Gove did not falter.

"That's what I says—rustler. Them rustlers what killed Dad Forsythe sneaked in on the Box L same way as you, on'y they didn't lie 'bout being dudes an' not savvying Mex."

"Yes," murmured Belle. "It's true! Masquerading in that silly way—hiding his knowledge of Spanish!"

Before Ken could reply, Gove burst out again, still more jeeringly: "Sure, honey—Spanish—that's the hog-tie we got on him—Spanish! First he tried to make you believe that calf deal was rustling. Then he goes an' cooks up this wife lie with that greaser woman. She an' him—by Godfrey, I got it! I bet you she's his *own* lulu-gal!"

This time Ken laughed aloud. The laugh broke off short before the look in Belle's eyes.

"That's enough!" she cried. "Go ahead—shoot my husband, and be hanged for murder—or get out of our way!"

For a long moment Ken sat staring, paralyzed with amazement. Then he reined his horse sideways and lifted his big bullet-ventilated hat.

"*Adios*, Mrs. Gove. Permit me to wish you joy of the noble husband whom you share with the Señora Soledad Gove y Gonzales. I shall take back with me to Cheyenne the unforgettable memory of your loveliness and your utter lack of the intelligence I had credited you with."

Belle caught the reins out of the big hands of her gaping woman cook. A slap of the heavy leather ribbons on the backs of the horses set the team to straining hard at their tugs. The loaded wagon creaked forward.

Gove started his bronco at the same time. He hugged close beside the front wheel of the wagon. Ken eyed him with contempt. He had put up his gun. Yet the Texan was crowding as near to Belle as he could—hiding behind a woman's skirts.

None the less, Ken did not fail to keep careful watch of his enemy: Gove was not at all a coward; only his courage was of the Indian type that believes in striking when there is least risk of a return blow. This would always be his method except when anger stung him to rashness.

For this reason Ken never for an instant turned his gaze aside from the mocking black eyes of the Texan. Yet at the same time he took in every slightest change in the face of the girl on the wagon-seat. Hers was not a poker-face.

First it had shown surprise, then wonder. That had almost reached bewilderment when anger flashed from her blue eyes and flooded her cheeks with scarlet. Every turn of the wagon-wheel brought her, as well as Gove, closer to where Ken sat motionless on the roan, hardly three paces off the road.

His look of contempt passed by Gove, to meet the girl's scornful anger. Regardless of the Texan's gloating sneer, he watched how the flame of wrathful indignation in Belle's eyes slowly clouded over. The hot scarlet in her cheeks began to fade.

With a sudden jerk she tore her gaze away from his and bent to snatch Jake's home-made wagon-whip from its socket. One slash of the rawhide lash was enough to jump the team into a violent lunge. The wagon rolled past Ken, over the crest of the rise.

Gove spurred his bronco to keep beside the front wheel. As he got beyond the roan, he turned in his saddle to stare back. The sneer had left his dark face. The look in his eyes showed that he expected Ken to shoot him in the back.

Ken did not move. He no longer saw Gove. His lips remained set in their contemptuous smile. But his gaze was now focused upon the back of the whip-swinging girl. The plunging team broke into a run.

Still Ken sat motionless, gazing after the girl on the seat of the loud-banging wagon. Could it be altogether anger that was so driving her and the team, or was she seeking to run away from something?

The possibility of this last brought a glimmer into the blackness of Ken's thoughts. But the faint hope flickered out almost as soon as it came. No matter what had put her to flight, she was, none the less, going off with Gove.

IRRESISTIBLE impulse sent Ken's hand reaching for the butt of his rifle. Gove had already got beyond pistol-shot, but he was still within easy rifle-range. One

well-aimed bullet would save the headstrong girl from the consequences of her willful refusal to believe the truth.

The rifle jerked out of its boot and swung up. None too soon, hard reason blocked the impulse to kill. The girl had chosen. Regardless of his warning, she was going ahead, her eyes open. Very well, if she wanted a man like Gove that badly, let her have him.

All the bitterness of Ken's defeat and loss welled up like a flood of gall to drown his last flicker of pity for her. She was not an honest girl. She had proved herself such a woman as Gove was a man. Otherwise, even disbelieving what she had heard with regard to Doña Soledad, she would at least have waited to find out all about the Spanish woman. Instead she had scoffed at the man who had warned her—had gone off with Alamo Gove.

The rifle slammed back into its sheath. The spurred roan sprinted down the slope towards Bullhide. But below the rise, out of sight of the fugitive Double Bar outfit, Ken slowed his horse to a walk.

What now was the use of hurry? What use anything?

He would pull out—go back to Cheyenne and on east. Or he might cross to the Pacific—take ship for Japan, for South America, Australia. Anywhere to get away from sight and memory of this range and the hateful people on it.

Yet they were not all hateful. How about that luckless Spanish girl? Easy to see how ruthlessly her scoundrel of a husband would disown and slander her. And there was her baby, absolutely innocent of all wrong and absolutely helpless. The brother might try to stand up for their rights. But he was a stranger in a strange land, able to speak only a little English. What could he do against such a murderous pair as Gove and Cheever?

The last self-put question brought Ken's mulling thoughts up short with a jerk, like a bronco at the snubbing post. It recalled what he had schemed before meeting the Double Bar outfit. His contempt for Gove had already begun to seethe into hot anger. Now all his scorn turned upon himself.

Quitter—four-flusher! What else was he if he pulled out of the game and let those scoundrels cash in on their crooked play? What matter that Belle had spurned him, scoffed at his warning, and fluttered off with Gove like a spooked foolhen? Was he going to be a cry-baby and run away from her bad-boy friends, just because she had cracked his feelings?

Ken clenched his teeth till the lean muscles ridged high along his jaws. No! He was not a quitter. Belle had taken all the fun out of the game, but he would stick in it. He would play the limit.

CHAPTER XIX

AT Bullhide Ken rode direct to the livery corral and showed a five-dollar gold-piece to the corral boss.

"I am taking the Box L mail to Cheever," he said. "There is also this interesting news of Miss Forsythe's wedding. I cannot stay over. Give my horse a good feed and a better cuffing down."

The corral boss promptly started to unsaddle the roan; a half-eagle was not often earned so easily. Ken walked briskly along the dusty street, past the saloons, to the store.

He returned with a moderately sized new hat on his head, and a small bag of food and mail in his hand. Everyone he had met had stared at him, a few of the men in none too friendly a manner. But at the store, as well as at the corral, he had mentioned his haste to get back to the Box L. If any of the men knew what had happened out on the ranges north and west of town, all seemed satisfied to leave the handling of the Box L guest to the foreman of the Box L.

The roan had been curried and rubbed to satiny sleekness, and was lipping the last oats left in a peck measure. Ken saddled up with extra carefulness, paid the corral boss, and started north at a walk. Only a greenhorn would rush a newly fed and watered horse. It was no time to founder one's mount. The forenoon was already well along, and the roan had sixty miles to cover.

Some distance out of town Ken at last allowed the eager horse to ease into a lope. After that it was only a matter of swinging along, hour after hour, at the same trail-eating pace, with only an occasional walk or trot up rising ground. The single stop was a short halt for a sip of water at the slough where Ken had camped overnight with Cheever.

At dusk the steadily loping roan neared the Box L headquarters. Ken turned off the road, slanted across to Box-elder Creek, and worked up through the groves to the

ranch. He saw a lantern moving from the bunk-house to the stable. Its bobbing, up-and-down motion told that it was being carried by the crippled barn boss.

AS Ken led the roan into the stable, he saw the man mending a broken stirrup-leather. He spoke to him with cheerful friendliness: "Howdy, pard. How's my steer-hide rug coming along?"

The cripple jerked up his hand in a cautioning sign, even before his staring eyes made out Ken's shadowed face.

"Sh! You back here? Must 'a' went plumb loco! Should ought 'a' knowed he got word what you done, horning in on that calf-branding an' winging Alamo. He headed for the Double Bar right off! Way he come home, I sort of figgered he done got you. Lucky you didn't meet up with him. Hit out for the rails now, quick's you can. He'll skin you 'live."

"The boys?" asked Ken. "You still think they're all on the square?"

"All 'cept that there south-range bunch, like I tol' you. On'y you best get out *pronto*. Lemme saddle a fresh bronc for you. Clate don't need no backing when he rips loose."

"*Bueno*, boy. The harder he rips, the better. Listen." In a few words Ken told about Doña Soledad and Gove's marriage to Belle Forsythe. He met the gaping stare of the barn boss with a nod. "Pass that on to the boys. I'll go see how Cheever takes it."

"Uh! You—you'd dast—gosh a'mighty, Mister, you got the sand. But when it comes to the savvy—gosh!"

"Wait and see."

"Well, if you're dead set on suicide, it's your fun'ral. On'y don't hurry your obs'quies by letting him get behind you."

Ken stepped out into the night. The kitchen of the ranch-house was dark, but a light shone from the little slide window of the mess-room. Through the dirty glass Ken saw his three trunks wide open beside the table.

Cheever had sprung the locks and was sorting over all the dude layout of the Box L's guest. It looked as if he felt certain the owner would never come back to claim them.

For a moment Ken hesitated. He now had need of all his nerve. To face that killer would be as dangerous as to walk up on a coiled rattlesake with only a short stick to fend off the death-stroke. Yet there was a chance that he might turn the stroke against another than himself.

Forcing his tight-set lips into a supercilious smile, he quietly opened the mess-room door. As he stepped in and closed the door behind him, he spoke in his most condescending, lordly tone: "Oh, I say, Cheever, it's topping of you to unpack my luggage for me—simply topping."

The big foreman's nerve could not have been put to a more severe test. He was caught pilfering the property of the man he believed he had murdered. The shock of the surprise must have hit him like the kick of a bronco. Yet he did not jump or even jerk up his head. With cool deliberation, he lifted his gaze from the till of the biggest trunk. Between their narrowed lids his lightish eyes glittered frostily in the otherwise expressionless face.

"Big job hunting out your home address," he grunted. "Got word one the Double Bar riders drilled you for winging Alamo."

"Oh, do you really think that was it?" wondered Ken. "I was riding along, and all of a sudden I found myself lying in the road. I had been stunned, you know. I thought it due to the fall off my horse. Yet the bruise on the back of my head might have been made by a bullet. From what you say, it was well I recovered my senses in time to guard against the Double Bar cowboy who came riding up."

"Mighty lucky for you," muttered Cheever.

"But not so fortunate for that fellow Gove," Ken went on with his careful play. "He must be what you call a bad-man. Remember that Mexican named Pedro who rode for the Bar Y?"

"Yes, Lanky's greaser *vaquero*. What of him?"

"His sister and Gove—"

"Let it ride," Cheever interrupted. "You needn't be so finicky. Can't tell me dudes don't have their lulu-gals, same's punchers. As for Alamo and that greaser woman, I know all about 'em I care to know."

Ken let drive his first shot: "Do you know she is Gove's legal wife?"

"Her—his wife? Bah! You can't string me. If she was that, he wouldn't have the nerve to horn in 'twixt me and Miss Belle."

BITTERNESS flooded over the barrier of Ken's restraint. "It's the truth—that scoundrel! Ask Lanky."

Cheever's poker-face betrayed a slight

trace of satisfaction. "Here's hoping it's no lie. It'd give me a clear road with Miss Belle. She's throwed you already."

"Yes, and Gove's left *you* holding the bag," thrust back Ken.

"Me? As how?"

"That Double Bar rider told me Gove and Miss Forsythe had gone to town to get married."

"You swallowed that lie whole?"

"Go ask at Bullhide if it's a lie," challenged Ken. "I got there too late for the ceremony. But it would have made no difference. She refused to believe me. Went back to her ranch with that bigamous skunk!"

The face of the big foreman became still more blank. Even the icy glitter of his eyes seemed to blink out. He spoke in a tone as emotionless as his face:

"Either Alamo and Lanky are liars about that greaser woman, or you're one. They were side-kicks in Arizona—"

"Where Doña Soledad claims that Gove married her," put in Ken. "There's a baby. His first one died in Mexico."

"What of it? Greaser brats," grunted Cheever. "It's her. First move is to make sure if he married her legal. I'll get it out of Lanky if I have to wring his neck."

"When do we start?" asked Ken.

Cheever stared at him between narrowed lids. "Say, you aint any tenderfoot—nor tender nothing. Who ever heard of a dude doing sixty mile at one stretch, and asking for more? Nor I aint forgetting the way you beat Alamo to the draw."

"Oh, that!" Ken smiled as conceitedly as he could. "Gove calls it an accident. *I* think it was splendid shooting. As for this little jog from town, I've been riding round-up and on my hunts ever since my arrival from Cheyenne. Perhaps you are not unaware that back East we ride in fox-hunts and race in steeple-chases. We take ditches, fences and all hazards, mounted on the flat saddles from which you and your cow-herders would fall off at the first jump."

Terrified for her child, Doña Soledad flung herself over to snatch the baby from its crib.

The big man's eyes closed to thin slits. "So you're asking for it, are you? Well, then, it's up to you. Tail on behind if you like."

Ken feigned sudden apprehension. "But Gove! You'll protect me from him and his cow-drivers?"

"Sure," replied Cheever, without a trace of change in his poker-face. "If there's any shooting, I'll do it."

The play on Ken's part was to take this sinister equivocation as a positive assurance of safety. "By Jove, that's topping of you, my man. With you as bodyguard, I need have no fear of Gove."

Cheever scowled at the mess of clothes and other articles he had pulled from the trunks. "C'mon, then. The barn boss'll repack your layout."

He stepped past Ken, turning his broad back to him with no sign of hesitancy. This seemed proof of his belief that Ken

did not suspect his part in the attempted assassination. But Ken, as he followed him out into the darkness, kept his thumb on the hammer of his fanner's gun.

CHAPTER XX

THE knowledge that Ken had gained of Cheever's character told him the killer would prefer to make no attack until alone with his intended victim. Unless the crippled barn boss had lied or was greatly mistaken, the punchers at the Box L headquarters did not belong to the gang. That was reason for believing that Cheever would not do his murdering near the ranch.

None the less, Ken followed his leader to the stable so closely that even in the starlight he could watch the big man's every movement. At the stable door Ken hung back in the darkness while Cheever stepped into the circle of lantern light where the barn boss was saddling a vicious blindfolded stallion.

The cripple had heard his foreman coming. He got in first word: "Reckon the dude guessed right, Mr. Cheever. He 'lowed him an' you'd be hitting out *pronto* to 'gratulate Alamo."

"Did, uh?" growled Cheever. "Well, rope him a bronc'. Hop to it. The roan here is apt to give out, way he's been jumped all over the range."

The barn boss barely dodged a sideward lunge of the blindfolded stallion that would have crushed him against the side-rails of the stall. He cursed the beast, and replied: "I got Mr. Ken's saddle on a bronc' a'ready. Had to have a hawse to wrangle in this here damn' stud of yourn."

Regardless of the striking fore-hoofs, Cheever caught hold of the reins close to the Spanish ring bit, jerked off the blindfold, and wrangled the plunging stallion from the stable.

A jerk of the cripple's head signed Ken toward the door into the corral. He found his fresh horse tied outside the corral gate at the rear of the stable. The bronco was rather small but well broken. He started off without even a crow-hop.

Ken rode around to where the upraised lantern of the crippled barn man showed Cheever topping the wild bucks of the stallion. At sight of Ken, the foreman drove in his spurs and sent the stallion plunging up the valley. Ken followed close behind.

A mile or so up-creek the round-up road to the Double Bar climbed out of the valley and wound away southwest across country. Up on the rolling ground Cheever set the pace at a lope. The starlight was clear, and he knew every foot of the road. The lope slowed down to a walk only at the crossings of coulees and gullies.

For several hours, so far as Ken could see, Cheever gave no heed whatever to him. The foreman never once turned his head to look back, much less twisted his body around into a position from which he could have aimed a shot.

After miles of pounding along through the darkness, at the heels of the stallion, Ken gradually eased out of his tense expectancy of a sudden attack. The conviction grew upon him that Cheever would wait until they were near the Bar Y or Double Bar range, where the murder, if discovered, could be blamed upon other members of the gang.

Yet this belief did not relax Ken's constant watch on Cheever's movements. When at last the moon rose, he gave it thankful welcome. Though waning from quarter towards crescent, its beams gave him a far clearer view of Cheever than had the starlight.

At the same time the increased light put an end to the seeming indifference of the foreman. Without looking back, he shoved out his hand and motioned for Ken to forge up alongside him.

Almost certain that the time had come, Ken rode forward to the off side of the stallion. One could shoot quicker to the left than make the twist of body or wrist necessary in aiming to the right.

But Cheever made no move to throw his gun. He turned his head barely enough to eye Ken with a sidelong glance. All that he shot was a curt question: "Can you find the Double Bar?"

"Why—I suppose so."

"Sure you can. Just keep on along the road. You can't lose it now. If you want to, you're free to go in and give Alamo what's coming to him for what he done."

Ken pretended to misunderstand this license to kill. "You mean, send him to the penitentiary? But I am not a judge or sheriff."

Cheever growled his contempt of the boob greenhorn. "Bah! You aint got the savvy of a jackass, nor the nerve of a cottontail."

"You forget yourself, my man," Ken

rebuked. "I know that Mr. Rowan does not approve of such language from his men."

But instead of stinging Cheever into action, the galling reprimand only won a deepening of his contempt. "You white-livered cur! If you dassn't tackle a gun-fighter when he's got a busted wing, you can wait for me at the fork of the Bar Y trail."

"But you?" asked Ken. "Why are *you* afraid to come with me and punish Gove?"

"Afraid—hell! Think I'm going to risk losing Miss Belle on the say of a nosey sneak like you? I'm heading for the Bar Y, past that basin where you spied on my men branding the calves I sold to Lanky. Tag along after me if you aint scared Lanky'll shoot you up for lying 'bout Alamo and his woman."

"Thanks, no," Ken declined the invitation. "I have ridden far enough the last two days, without going all around that way to get to the Double Bar."

CHEEVER spurred his stallion and galloped off to the right of the road on a westward slant. The moment he disappeared over the first rise, Ken turned sharp to the left. He sprinted his bronco well away from the road, angled up the slope, and took the last few feet of the ridge afoot.

He peered over the top. Along the far side of the ridge, a little way beyond the road, he made out the stallion. Cheever was standing behind his horse, with his rifle pointed to where the road crossed over the ridge. He had swerved back toward the road as soon as hidden behind the rise.

Chuckling at the duped killer, Ken ran back to jump on his bronco and race off under cover of the ridge. If Cheever came up the slope to look for him, he must have decided that the runaway was out of reach. At any rate, he neither fired nor pursued.

Ken already had his plans laid. Once beyond sight and rifle-range of Cheever, he angled across the road and headed for the mountains. Though the bronco was far from as good a horse as the roan, shortly before daybreak Ken reached the spring in the gulch where he had met Jake.

Having slacked his own and the bronco's thirst, Ken rode on up-gulch to the lower slide. In the first glimmer of dawn he put the bronco to the climb. But the moment the beast felt the loose stones slithering under his hoofs, he swerved sharply and clattered back to solid ground.

When Ken sought to spur the horse up again, he balked like a stubborn mule. Either he had been hurt on a slide, or else he was plains-bred and afraid of such climbing. Ken realized that so timid a horse never could make the upper slide, even if punished into taking the lower one.

He hobbled the frightened animal, cached his saddle and bridle in the scrub, and set off afoot up the mountain, carrying his rifle. Fast climbing brought him to the head of the upper slide just at sunrise.

Unhindered by a horse, he went down the west cleft at a jumping run. That gain offset the greater speed a horse would have made in circling to the foot of the meadows. Dewdrops still glistened on shaded bushes when Ken emerged from the pines into the belt of aspens.

The need of caution soon checked his gait to a walk. By the time he reached the creek he had fully recovered from the hard climb and long run. He waded the stream and glided through the underbrush to the corral. His first glance between the rails showed him a pair of saddled broncos over near the bunk-house. This time Doña Soledad was not alone at the ranch.

KEN skirted around the corral to the left. From the far corner he was able to cross the clearing to the blind side of the bunk-house. From within the building came the sound of voices speaking Spanish. Ken stepped around to the front side and called out in the same tongue: *"Buenos dias, amigos."*

A big nose thrust out past the door jamb, almost instantly followed by a six-shooter. Lanky stepped over the door sill, his gun leveled at Ken's belt.

"Huh—looks sort of like *I* got the drop this time. You locoed detective! I done give you fair warning you'd be shot on sight if you—"

"Gove's married Belle," Ken cut in.

The gun-muzzle lowered a trifle. "What you giving us? I aint no such a sucker."

"Didn't the Double Bar stable boss tell you that's what they went to town for? I got there too late, and Belle wouldn't believe about Doña Soledad. You're the señora's best friend. You'll side me against the scoundrel who's done this thing to her and Belle."

Lanky did not budge. "That's your say. The stable boss on'y brought me a order from Alamo to run off Pete an' Soledad—to make 'em *vamose* back to Sonora."

"Isn't that proof enough?" Ken demanded. "Gove lacked the nerve to marry Belle until he thought himself rid of his wife. He felt sure you'd do the dirty work for him. He knows how you feel towards Doña Soledad—believed you'd be glad to run off with her."

THIS shot hit the nail on the head. Lanky jammed his gun into its holster and held out his hand. "Shake on it, feller! Little Soledad's honest, and she's Cath'lic, to boot. She can't marry ag'in till she's a widow. I tol' Alamo's man to tell him she'd stay right here till he came to fetch her to the Double Bar."

"He's come home with Belle to hear that!" cried Ken. "It'll drive him wild."

"Sure," agreed Lanky. "Like's not he'll turn his wolf loose ag'in' me. He's mighty apt to come a-shooting."

Ken stepped forward to grip the offered hand. "Here's forgetting your share in those calf deals, Lanky. You're a white man! Now, about getting Gove, we first need positive proof of his marriage to Doña Soledad. Has she her wedding certificate?"

A word from Lanky brought Pedro Gonzales from the shadowed interior of the bunk-house. He was lowering the shotgun whose muzzle Ken had seen thrust out beside the door jamb.

The young Spaniard led the way to his sister's cabin. She was nursing her baby, just inside the open doorway. Her friendly smile at Lanky froze as she caught sight of Ken. But before she could shrink back out of view, the tall cow-man spoke in Spanish.

"The señor is now a friend, Soledad. He comes to help us. The padre gave you a paper to keep when you were married. Where is it?"

With a gracious invitation for her friend and the guest to enter, the young mother hastened to the little shrine in the corner. She laid her baby in its crib, murmured an "Ave Maria," and reverently drew the picture out of its shrine. From behind it she took a folded paper.

"The Holy Mother keeps safe for me the writing that tells of my wedding sacrament," she said.

Pedro had followed her to join in the prayer. He passed the paper to Lanky, who opened it, nodded, and handed it on to Ken. "Reckon that's proof 'nough, with me an' Pete ready to swear we seen 'em hitched up."

But Ken was taking no chances. To convict Gove, the proofs must convince Belle. A flaw in the marriage certificate might give Gove a loophole to wiggle clear. With careful deliberation, Ken read entirely through the certificate.

Every space in the printed form had been filled in by the priest so clearly that not a single written letter could be mistaken. The name of the bridegroom was given as "Alfred Alamo Gove." Ken's lips tightened in a smile of bitter satisfaction as he folded the certificate and signed Doña Soledad to replace it in its hiding-place.

"Well?" asked Lanky. "Cough up. Do we wait for him to draw first, or do we beat him to it?"

"That depends," replied Ken. "Will the Double Bar men back him?"

"Long as Miss Belle backs him, they all will. If she rounded ag'in' him, I dunno's he could count on more'n one or two."

"Then none of them are in on this calf business?"

Lanky considered the question and answered discreetly: "That's no lie. Aint been much mavericking ag'in' the Double Bar. All they get is a small bonus from the Bar Y to keep their lip sewed up. 'Taint none their biz, the Bar Y buying from another outfit."

"All right," said Ken. "Now about the Bar Y men. Will they back you or him—or Cheever?"

Lanky side-stepped. "Clate? What's he got to do with this deal? It's between us an' Alamo."

"No. I told him about Alamo marrying Belle. I took a shortcut here; but he'll be along *pronto* to get this proof about Doña Soledad."

"Wow!" yelled Lanky. "We got a royal flush! Clate'll be dead set on laying Alamo out, so's he can get Miss Belle an' her iron hisself. With him siding us, it'll be a walk-over."

"For Cheever," qualified Ken. "Once he's in the Double Bar saddle, d'you think he'll stop at taking over Gove's interest in the Bar Y? I'm betting you ten to one, he'll hog your share too."

Ken waved his flag of truce as he stepped out. "A woman! Scatter that fire!" the girl cried.

"He can't!" Lanky's glance flicked towards a soapbox cupboard in the corner opposite Doña Soledad's shrine. "Not by a damn' sight, he can't. It's been writ down ever since Miss Belle fired me an' I come to take full charge here. He can't go back on his own writing."

"What if he should come now with the crew he used in the round-up?"

"No chance a-tall. Them fellers is trailing a herd of yearlings down into Utah."

"How about your other men? Can you count on them against him and Gove, if it comes to a show-down?"

"We-ll—four-five the boys got a grouch. Claim Alamo skinned 'em at poker—stacked the cards on 'em; an' Clate's bunch rubbed their fur the wrong way."

"Send Pedro for them," suggested Ken. "Wont hurt us any to have other backing than Cheever when we reach the Double Bar."

Lanky jerked his thumb at the puzzled but intently listening *vaquero*. *"Pronto—pronto!* Go fetch them *hombres* at the upper camp."

At the first *"pronto"* Pedro had jumped to the door. He sprang over the log sill to run toward the saddled broncos in the corral. And then—Ken heard the crack of rifles. Pedro spun around toward the doorway and pitched down on his face.

Before the body of the shot *vaquero* had hit the ground, bullets thudded against every wall of the cabin. A pair of the deadly messengers pinged in through the doorway at different angles.

Lanky seized Doña Soledad and threw her flat upon the dirt floor. Terrified for her child, she flung herself over to snatch the baby from its crib. Lanky jumped for the shotgun.

Ken was already poking a hole with his rifle muzzle through the chip-and-mud chinking of the wall logs at one side of the door. He shook the dirt from the rifle bore, and peered out through his peephole.

"All of them skulking under cover, this side," he said. "Pass me a hogging-string. I can noose Pedro's arm and pull him in."

"Leave him lay," replied Lanky. "If he aint done for a'ready, they'll riddle him minute he's moved."

One of the shot *vaquero's* hands twitched. Ken caught a hair rope from a peg on the wall.

"Poke a hole over the bunk and rip loose," he ordered. "Hop to it! The boy isn't dead."

With the blow of an ax butt Lanky stove another hole between the logs. He sighted the shotgun at a spot below one of the smoke patches in the brush, and blazed away with both barrels. A mo-

ment later bullets from his revolver began to stream at other smoke patches.

In the midst of this counter-firing Ken whipped the noose of the hair rope through the doorway and heaved back on the taut line. Rifle bullets spouted dust over Pedro's high-heeled boots as Ken dragged his limp body in over the log threshold. Other bullets sent splinters flying up from the sill. But Ken had rolled the *vaquero* clear of the doorway. He slipped the rope from the wrist it had noosed, and made a quick examination.

"One through his thigh—missed the artery," he called out to Lanky. "Another in the chest—no, glanced on the rib—plowed round and out. But this one through his head—he can't possibly—Hold on! Not through; only grooved the bone. Me for those big hats! Makes 'em shoot high."

LANKY had already reloaded the shotgun and shifted over to stare out through the first peephole. Bullets were not only thudding into the logs of every wall, but now and then one smashed through the chinking, splattering chips and dried mud. Lanky crouched low on the opposite side of the wounded man from Ken.

"Sho," he grunted. "They got him bad 'nough so's he can't help. Looks kind of squally for us. They's eight or ten of 'em, if they's one."

"Think they'll rush us?" asked Ken.

"Uh-uh, not 'less Alamo leads 'em—an' he aint built thataway. He'll keep 'em pecking till dark, hoping to get in lucky shots to disable us or lay us out cold."

"But they'll hardly wait all that time over one man. Knowing they hit Pedro, they'll figure you're alone."

"Nope. They seen Pete hauled in while some un was slinging lead at 'em. They savvy Soledad couldn't 'a' done neither. They know better'n to rush. If they aint got us 'fore dark, they'll sneak up back with brush—burn us out. We're sure in one hell of a fix. Wouldn't care so much if 'twasn't for Soledad an' the kid."

Ken glanced across at the huddled form of the young mother.

"They're his wife and baby! He can't be such a devil. Anyway, the other men—he must have lied to them. If they knew she and the child were in here, they'd call on us to send both out."

"Sure," agreed Lanky.

"Then we'll show a white flag, and have her take the baby to where they'll be safe."

"Like Pete was!"

"Good Lord, no, Lanky! He couldn't shoot a woman—his own wife!"

"Couldn't he? Aint you savvied it's jest because she *is* his wife? Why d'you s'pose he shot down her brother without warning, if he figgered on'y on getting her back to Sonora?"

CHAPTER XXI

THE frightful truth that Ken had found too horrible to believe glared from Lanky's eyes. It pierced through the fog of Ken's doubt.

"God! Of course—the only way to square himself with Belle! Kill and burn all—wife, child, witnesses—all the evidence!"

Pedro uttered a faint moan. Lanky rolled across the floor, and darted back with a pail of water. He took out a little in the tin dipper to wet Pedro's gray-white face.

"Lucky the bucket's fresh filled," he said. "We're apt to get mighty dry 'fore night—and then a sight more dry when they set us afire."

Ken had pulled a blanket from the bunk. He ripped it into strips to bandage the wound through the *vaquero's* thigh. As he tied the knot, he caught a sound different from the reports of the rifles and the thud of bullets against the walls. It was a sharp, snappy, crackling noise.

He ran to poke a hole through the rear wall of the cabin. The sound of snapping wood at once became unmistakable. Ken put his eye to the opening of the new peephole and saw a maze of branches—the tip ends of brush that had been piled against the back of the cabin. At the outer side of the heap the dry twigs were crackling in a blaze of up-leaping flames.

Through the smoke Ken glimpsed a puncher staggering forward with a huge bundle of brush on his back. He dropped the incendiary with a pistol bullet through the leg. Yells of alarm told him that other fuel-packers were running back to the cover of the trees.

But he had driven them off too late. The aspen logs of the cabin were old and dry. The brush already stacked against the back wall would soon set them afire.

He went back to Lanky, who was dripping water down the throat of the half revived *vaquero.*

"Don't you hear the fire?" he asked.

"Fire? Hell!" The lank rustler stood up, regardless of in-glancing bullets.

"Looks sort of like Alamo's in a bigger hurry'n I figgered. We might 'a' made a run for it if he'd waited till dark. Now we aint got no show a-tall. Wish I'd left Pete be. 'Twont be no fun roasting alive."

KEN caught at a straw. "If Gove's in a hurry, anything to delay things—anything whatever!"

"Yeh," replied Lanky, with grim humor. "Le's walk round with the bucket an' splash out the fire."

"But—"

"Nope, pard. 'Taint no use figgering. Here's where me an' you cash in our chips. On'y—on'y I aint going to let Soledad an' the baby roast. It's bad as Injins."

As Lanky spoke, he drew his six-shooter and turned to where the young mother, with her baby at her breast, lay huddled on the floor, paralyzed with terror. He spoke to her in Spanish:

"*Querida*—beloved! I can call you that now, Soledad. You have been an honest wife to him, and I stood by the treacherous beast. Yet here he has shot Pedro, and he seeks to burn you alive—you and his child. I am going to save you from that fate. You come from Apache country—you know that bullets are more merciful than fire."

Doña Soledad had been staring dazedly at her friend, too stupefied by dread to comprehend his meaning. But the upswing of the revolver made it all too plain to her.

"*Santissima!*" she cried. "Wait—wait, *amigo!*"

She struggled to her knees and held the baby out to the little shrine of the Madonna and Child.

The lowered gun started again to swing up. Ken struck it aside.

"Hold on!" he shouted. "You said it—bullets better than fire. We'll all make a break for the trees, you and I ahead to draw their shots. When they see she's a woman, perhaps even Gove—it's just possible he thinks she's gone from here."

"Not by a little bit. He'll drill her, minute she steps out the door. If he don't, he's plumb busted—loses Miss Belle an' her iron—the whole shooting-match."

"Still, we'll have to try the play. It's better than burning, and there's the bare chance that— Wait, I've got it."

From the wall Ken caught down Pedro's big gayly colored *serape.* He wrapped it around his body like a woman's dress, with the lower edge touching the ground. He tossed off his hat to drape Doña Soledad's scarlet Spanish shawl over his head and shoulders like a *mantilla.*

Lanky's scorn exploded. "Huh! Woman's layout—figger that'll help your getaway?"

"Not if what you say about Gove is true, Lanky. But if I draw his fire, those Double Bar boys will jump him for shooting a woman. You give them time to turn on him, then send Doña Soledad with another white flag."

As Ken spoke, he took up the whitest cloth in sight and stepped to the doorway. He raised his foot to cross the sill. . . . . From all around the clearing came an outburst of protesting shouts. No less suddenly, the racket of the rifle shots broke off.

FROM the left side of the clearing a rider galloped around to the wide space in front of the cabin. The rider's right hand was lifted overhead, palm forward, in the old Indian sign for peace talk; the girlish head below the upraised hand was crowned with a thick coil of gold-glinting hair.

Ken waved his flag of truce as he stepped from the doorway. The girl cried out in horrified amazement and wheeled her horse around to scream at the hidden attackers: "A woman! a woman! Scatter that fire! Beat it out!"

From over near the bunk-house came back the warning shout of Gove: "Watch out, Belle! It's one o' them rustlers."

Possibly the foreman had seen through the disguise. More probably he merely wanted an excuse to shoot his wife. Ken leaped back into the cabin, not a split second too soon to miss the rifle-bullet.

Belle spurred her horse straight for the doorway. Ken flung off the shawl and *serape,* calling to Lanky: "*Pronto*—Soledad and the baby—forward where she can see them."

When it came to action, Lanky proved himself no slouch. He caught the mother and child up off the floor and had them at the doorway when Belle sprang down before it. Her blue eyes widened with be-

wilderment as she stared into the terrified black eyes of the young mother.

"Oh, a baby! But another woman—so much shorter—no shawl—not this dress—"

Lanky gripped Ken's arm and pulled him from beside the door into full view.

"Here's t'other woman, ma'am. The nervy cuss slung on them girl duds to draw Alamo's fire. Done it for Soledad here. Reckoned the boys wouldn't stand for Alamo killing more'n one woman."

Belle's mouth had gone as round as her eyes. She gasped at Ken:

"You—you here! Al said a gang of rustlers—but you and— Why, Al claimed that Lanky had run off with the woman—that rustlers had jumped the Bar Y. Thank God, I followed when I heard he'd gone to wipe out the gang! Yet this talk about his killing women—it's not true—it can't be true!"

KEN did not stop to argue the point. Behind him he heard the swish and thud of branches on the rear wall, beating out the fire. He had no doubt that the cabin would be saved from burning. But past Belle's head he saw a big rider burst out of the thickets on a staggering bronco stallion.

The last play of the desperate game had come. With Cheever sitting in, the final cards must be dealt swiftly, and no fumbling. It was like handling dynamite. The slightest blunder would mean defeat and death.

Through the haze of the smoke that had seeped in at cracks of the chinking, he sprang across the room to lift Doña Soledad's little shrine from its shelf. He reached the door with it as Cheever leaped over the head of his down-pitching stallion.

The big man swung forward toward Belle, his whitish eyes staring through the doorway at the woman beside Lanky.

"Howdy, Miss Belle," he sang out. "What's doing here? You best leave. 'Taint fitting for you to stay. That's Alamo's greaser woman."

Ken stepped out beside Belle. "You've put it too crudely, Cheever. This Spanish lady is, as I told you, the legal wife of Alfred Alamo Gove."

"That's a black lie!" shouted Gove from the corner of the cabin. "You can't prove it, you sneak."

His disabled right arm was still in its sling. But as he advanced, his left hand dropped on the butt of his gun, which had been holstered at the left side. Belle was between him and Ken. He angled out from the front of the cabin to get a clear view of his enemy. The sight of Lanky, striding over the threshold, brought him to a sudden halt. The Bar Y man placed himself beside Ken, no less ready to draw than was the Texan.

NOT for a moment had Ken turned his eyes away from Cheever. Well enough to take a chance with Gove. But Cheever was a far more deadly proposition. The whitish eyes that had been staring back at him out of the blank poker-face glinted bleakly.

"How 'bout it, dude? Sounds like Alamo's called you for a show-down."

"The second Mrs. Gove has refused to take my word against her husband's," replied Ken. Without turning, he held the shrine back towards Doña Soledad, and spoke to her in Spanish: "Be pleased, señora, to show the señora Americana what the Holy Mother guards for you."

Wondering, yet gracious, Doña Soledad reached out to draw the paper from behind the picture and offer it to Belle.

Gove was not in a position to see the movement. Nor did he see Belle open the certificate. She stood with her back to him. But Cheever shifted his gaze from Ken to watch the girl's face.

Though Ken did not look, he pictured to himself the dismay of the reader. He listened for a cry of distress. There was not even a moan. Yet Cheever's eyes glared.

"Spill it, girl," he growled.

Belle replied in a voice choked with indignation: "He—it's true! Her marriage certificate—his real wife!"

"No!" shouted Gove. "It's a fake—a damned—"

The desperate protest broke off short as Cheever jerked about to face him. Whether the Texan drew, Ken could not tell. Cheever, however, threw his gun and fired with the swiftness of a striking snake. There was only the one shot.

The killer holstered his gun and stepped toward Belle, who stood rigid, staring back over her shoulder as if turned to stone.

"It's all right now, girl," he said. "I've rid you of the skunk. You're mine now. And one wife is all I want."

Before either Ken or Belle could speak, Lanky cut in, hoarse with anger:

"Hol' on, Clate. 'Sall right you drilling

Alamo for what he done. On'y you don't get Miss Belle. I wont stand for you roping her, *when 'twas you shot down her pa from cover!"*

Three shots roared out so close together that their reports sounded like one. Cheever reeled back, his right shoulder shattered. As his gun fell in the dust, Ken lowered his own gun to glance down at Lanky.

The tall rustler had fallen with the back of his head against the doorsill log. There was a hole in his shirt, high up on his left breast, just below the collarbone.

Ken looked back at Cheever. The killer was still on his feet but was beginning to sway. A fast-spreading spot showed on the front of his shirt below the heart.

"So Lanky also hit you," said Ken. "Sorry he didn't miss. I planned to keep you for a jury trial and legal hanging."

Cheever checked his swaying.

"You're in luck, busting my shoulder, else I'd 'a' got you too, along with Lanky and Alamo. Who the hell are you? Fanner—yet played us all for suckers—greenhorn dude. . . . . Aint met a fanner since I killed One-shot Jad."

"So you own up to that murder!" replied Ken. "My hunch was right. You were the Cheesy Kid."

AGAIN Cheever managed to stop the swaying of his big body. "Huh? How'd you know 'bout it?"

"Sheriff Jadwin Kenneth was my uncle—One-shot Jad. As a bad-man tamer he ranked with Patch-pocket Masterson and Pat Garrett. But you shot him from behind. One of the things that brought me to this range was your name. There was the shade of a possibility that the real name of the Cheesy Kid might be Cheever."

The dying killer clenched his left fist. "Curse you and your horning-in! Built up a herd—my rope on the girl—all set to be a big owner; then you—you—"

A spasm of mortal pain distorted the furious red face. Callous, unrepentant of his crimes, the man pitched down into the dust.

Ken stepped forward to make sure the fall had not been a sham move to bring the killer's left hand within reach of the dropped six-shooter. One close look was enough. With a regret that held no tinge of pity, he saw that Lanky's bullet had done its work. Cheever was beyond reach of the hangman's rope.

FOUR or five Double Bar punchers came bunching out from each front corner of the cabin. They advanced slowly upon Ken, waiting only for a sign from Belle to attack him.

The girl still stood rigid, overcome with the horror of that sudden deadly gun-fight. Ken gave the men a friendly sign to close in.

"The war is over, boys. I'm backing Miss Belle. Cheever shot Gove and Lanky; but Lanky—"

"You plugged Cheever too," broke in the Double Bar stable boss. "An' you set 'em all three ag'in' one 'nother. They was close-hitched pards 'fore you horned in."

"You mean, before Cheever learned that this Spanish lady was Gove's legal wife. That started the fireworks. Some of you must have heard Lanky tell that Cheever was the killer who murdered Miss Belle's father."

"That's a lie. Alamo an' Clate both tol' us it was them rustlers killed Dad Forsythe."

Doña Soledad had managed to revive Lanky by the same means that he had used to revive her brother. He gasped out in a wheezy but distinct voice:

"Nope, boys. Dad s'picioned the rustling—got nosey. Clate's gang pulled off faked fight—an' Alamo—steered Dad—place Clate got him. Alamo—drunk—spilled it to me."

The grim disclosure broke the spell that had benumbed Belle. Before the shock of her full realization, all her pride and willfulness crumbled. Tears of grief and shame flooded her eyes. She thrust out her arms towards Ken.

"I—I believed them—trusted them! Oh, can't you understand? Thinking he'd done—what he claimed—for my father!"

Ken acted quickly to save the stricken girl from a complete breakdown. He caught up Doña Soledad's wailing baby from inside the doorway and forced it into Belle's unwilling arms.

"Hold her child," he ordered, "while she helps me lift Lanky in beside her brother."

"Her brother?" murmured Belle. "That *vaquero?"*

"Yes. Gove shot him down without warning."

BELLE cast a last glance at the body of the Texan, shuddered, and shrank into the cabin past the threshold-pillowed head of Lanky.

Ken paused to give an order to the punchers: "Get those *mucrtos* away *pronto —muy pronto!* Bury them where the ladies wont see."

"Hu-wait!" wheezed Lanky. "Belts—money."

The men stripped off the cartridge belts of Gove and Cheever. The full-length hollow in each belt bulged with bank notes. Ken offered Gove's to Doña Soledad.

"Here, señora," he said, "is your husband's money."

She spurned the belt aside as if it had been a snake. "*Santissima!* I touch not the gold of a traitor! He sought to kill Pedro, my brother; he sought to burn his own child! Because of his attack, my good friend Señor L'Anque lies here dying!"

"Not dying, Doña Soledad. No gringo *vaquero* will allow himself to die from a clean wound so high up in the chest. You will care for your good friend until he is strong and well. He is a *caballero* both true and honorable toward women."

"*Si, señor,* most honorable!"

"Therefore he will guard and care for you and the child. But the treasure in this belt is not accursed. It is the rightful property of yourself. You must accept it, if only for the child's sake."

"The señor is kind and wise. I yield to his advice. Now let us carry my friend into the *jacal* before the sun heightens the fever of his wound."

BETWEEN them they lifted Lanky in beside Pedro, who lay muttering in partial delirium. Doña Soledad fetched a pot of carbolic salve to dress the wounds of both men.

Ken hung Gove's belt on the wall and buckled Cheever's about his waist. As he started across the room to replace the shrine of the Madonna and Child, he saw Belle crooning to the baby. She had already soothed it to sleep and was bending over to place it in the crib.

The sight brought him up short. Such tenderness was the very last thing he would have expected from the arrogant, hard-riding lady boss of the Double Bar. Yet here she was playing nurse to a child of what most Westerners regarded as a lower race—and she was handling the baby with the gentleness of a young mother.

The baby started to waken and cry. Belle bent lower to croon it back to sleep. Ken tiptoed past them and placed the shrine on its shelf. As he stepped clear, his eye fell upon the box cupboard in the opposite corner.

Remembrance of Lanky's sideward flickering glance sent him over to the cupboard. On the top shelf were pens, ink, papers, tally-books and a small, thin ledger. The letters and figures in the ledger were of the same handwriting as the reports that Cheever had sent to Cheyenne.

The moment Ken saw what accounts were in the ledger he forgot everything else. He did not look up until he heard the murmur of Belle's voice at his elbow:

"Excuse me, Mr. Kenneth. I must tell you how I—"

He thrust the ledger toward her.

"Look! It's all there. Everything's down in black and white—every calf, cow and steer—when rustled and when sold. Cheever certainly had system in his stealing. No wonder the Box L suffered such poor calf-crops."

"Oh, then he really was the head of the gang! But how about my cattle—and Al?"

"He held a quarter interest. Cheever's was three-quarters. The men owned no share in the business, but drew double pay. There's a note that Lanky owns a fourth, yet no profits are credited to him. Nor are there any statements of Double Bar stealings. Probably both Gove and Cheever counted upon gathering in all your herd, along with you and your iron."

Tears of humiliation glistened in Belle's eyes. "Yes, yes, of course—after they had murdered my father! Easy enough for them to deceive me!"

Ken looked coolly past her toward Doña Soledad and the wounded men.

"I am thinking about that mistreated wife and her brother and of the whitest rustler I ever met. The three of them shall together hold a quarter share in the Bar Y. The rest belongs to the owner of the Box L."

Belle's eyes widened. "But—but if the Bar Y herd has all been rustled from the Box L—and Lanky was one of the gang?"

"What of it? Shouldn't wonder if J. K. Rowan makes him foreman. I've sized up the fellow as a cow-man right, and a square shooter. What's more, he'll soon be a family man, if appearances don't deceive."

"Oh, I hope so, Mr. Kenneth, if he's what you think. Anything to help that poor woman forget the scoundrel who deceived us all and—"

The girl cut short her denunciation of Gove to turn her scorn upon herself.

"But who am I to talk? Frightful as were those murders, I am more to be despised. You'll be leaving now. You, of course, want nothing to do with a girl who married another woman's husband."

"I did not say I intended to leave," replied Ken.

"All the worse for me! Yet I deserve it—the way I jeered at you, there on the Bullhide road, when you told me the truth about him. That is my punishment. It would be your revenge on me—only I know you're too big to want revenge, even if you are a gunman detective."

THIS was too much for any resentment, no matter how deep. The blue eyes were blurred with tears. Before they could see the sudden move, Ken had her in his arms. She gasped and struggled to free herself. He held her fast.

"Be still," he ordered. "You know you can't get away. I've got you now—for keeps!"

"Then you really forgive me, Ken!"

He smiled. "Don't be a silly. The girl I love is going to be my wife."

Two round arms crept up to clasp his neck. . . . . After several moments Belle turned her eyes toward Doña Soledad, down-bent over the wounded men.

"About her, Ken—you were right. She looks a lady. I don't want her to hate me for marrying her husband."

"No chance. See the way she's looking at Lanky."

"Yes, but I want her to know the whole truth. I speak no Spanish. Tell her for me that I was her husband's wife—only in name."

Ken caught the girl's head between his hands. "Belle! Then you really did believe my warning?"

"I told him he'd have to disprove it. That's why he turned his wolf loose. He made up that lie about the greaser woman running off with Lanky, and about another gang of rustlers raiding the Bar Y. He started out with this bunch of boys during the night. Kelly slipped away from them and rode back to tell me."

"And you came a-running to spoil the game."

Belle shuddered. "I was almost too late. Even if you'd beaten him to the draw, the boys might have shot you. You ought to know that nobody out on the range loves detectives—except me, maybe."

The exception brought about several more moments of silence. Then Ken himself did a bit of talking.

"While we're telling things, you might tell yourself that an investigator is not necessarily a detective. J. K. Rowan made inquiries about conditions on this range before he bought the Box L. He could have discharged Cheever by letter, and replaced him with a man he could rely on. But he didn't believe in firing a foreman without investigation, even though the outfit was losing calves so heavily."

"That speaks well for his fairness," said Belle. "Only, the idea of his letting you come in that loony tenderfoot layout to investigate for him and take such deadly risks! I'd just like to tell him what I think of him!"

"You'll soon have the chance. But it was my own idea. The dude disguise was what gave me success in my hunt to run down those calf-rustling killers."

"You certainly looked and acted the part, Ken. It had us all fooled, there at first."

"Easy acting," explained Ken. "My uncle, Jad Kenneth, taught me how to fan a gun. But my father wanted no more gunman sheriffs in the family. He was a church-going cowman. When he died, his will provided that his brand should be sold and the money held in trust till I was graduated from an Eastern college. After that I was to be free to choose my calling."

"You chose to come back to the range!"

Ken smiled. "Yes, I came back hunting for trouble—and here I am with both arms full!"

Again a pause. "By the way, Miss Forsythe, there's just another bit of information due you. The front names of J. K. Rowan are Jadwin Kenneth, and your married name is going to be Rowan."

"What? Why—why, you spoke of the new owner of the Box L as a friend of yours!"

Ken looked vastly surprised. "Haven't I proved a mighty good friend to myself? Rowan the dude has won for Rowan of the Box L the lady boss of the Double Bar."

The lady boss of the Double Bar made no denial of the assertion.

THE END.

Poirot's cordon was a reality; even as we emerged, three men fell upon us.

The Crag in the Dolomites

By AGATHA CHRISTIE

This, the final episode in Detective Poirot's battle against a sinister band of criminals, is perhaps the most engrossing of the whole series.

Illustrated by William Molt

FROM our quiet retreat in the Ardennes, we watched the progress of affairs in the great world. We were plentifully supplied with newspapers, and every day Poirot received a bulky envelope evidently containing some kind of report. He never showed these reports to me, but I could usually tell from his manner whether their contents had been satisfactory or otherwise. He never wavered in his belief that our present plan was the only one likely to be crowned by success.

"As a minor point, Hastings," he remarked one day, "I was in continual fear of your death lying at my door. And that rendered me nervous—like a cat upon the jumps, as you say. But now I am well satisfied. Even if they discover that the Captain Hastings who landed in South America is an impostor—and I do not think they will discover it, as they are not likely to send an agent out there who knows you personally—they will only believe that you are trying to circumvent them in some clever manner of your own, and will pay no serious attention to discovering your whereabouts. Of the one vital fact, my supposed death, they are thoroughly convinced. They will go ahead and mature their plans."

"And then?" I asked eagerly.

"And then, *mon ami,* the grand resurrection of Hercule Poirot! At the eleventh hour I reappear, throw all into confusion, and achieve the supreme victory in my own unique manner!"

I realized that Poirot's vanity was of the case-hardened variety which could withstand all attacks. I reminded him that once or twice, the honors of the game had lain with our adversaries. But I might have known that it was impossible

to diminish Hercule Poirot's enthusiasm for his own methods.

"See you, Hastings, it is like the little trick that you play with the cards; you have seen it, without doubt? You take the four knaves, you divide them, one on top of the pack, one underneath and so on—you cut and you shuffle, and there they are all together again! That is my object. So far I have been contending, now against one of the Four, now against another. But let me get them all together, like the four knaves in the pack of cards, and then, with one *coup,* I destroy them all!"

"And how do you propose to get them all together?" I asked.

"By awaiting the supreme moment. By lying *perdu* until they are ready to strike."

"That may mean a long wait," I grumbled.

"Always impatient, the good Hastings! But no, it will not be so long. The one man they were afraid of—myself—is out of the way. I give them two or three months at most."

HIS speaking of some one being got out of the way reminded me of Ingles and his tragic death, and I remembered that I had never told Poirot about the dying Chinaman in St. Giles hospital.

He listened with keen attention to my story.

"Ingles' servant, eh? And the few words he uttered were in Italian? Curious!"

"That's why I suspected it might have been a plan on the part of the Four."

"Your reasoning is at fault, Hastings. Employ the little gray cells. If your enemies wished to deceive you, they would assuredly have seen to it that the Chinaman spoke in intelligible pidgin English. No, the message was genuine. Tell me again all that you heard."

"First of all he made a reference to Handel's 'Largo,' and then he said something that sounded like '*carrozza*'—that's a carriage, isn't it?"

"Nothing else?"

"Well, just at the end he murmured something like 'Cara' somebody or other—some woman's name: *Zia,* I think. But I don't suppose that that had any bearing on the rest of it."

"You would not suppose so, Hastings! But Cara Zia is very important, very important indeed!"

"I don't see—"

"My dear friend, you *never* see—and anyway the English know no geography."

"Geography?" I cried. "What has geography got to do with it?"

"I daresay M. Thomas Cook would be more to the point."

As usual, Poirot refused to say anything more—a most irritating trick of his. But I noticed that his manner became extremely cheerful, as though he had scored some point or other.

The days went on, pleasant, if a trifle monotonous. There were plenty of books in the villa, and delightful rambles all around, but I chafed sometimes at the forced inactivity of our life, and marveled at Poirot's state of placid content. Nothing occurred to ruffle our quiet existence, and it was not until the end of June, though well within the limit that Poirot had given them, that we had our news of the Four.

A CAR drove up to the villa early one morning, such an unusual event in that peaceful spot that I hurried down to satisfy my curiosity. I found Poirot talking to a pleasant-faced young fellow of about my own age.

He introduced me, adding:

"This is Captain Harvey, Hastings, one of the most famous members of your Intelligence Service."

"Not famous at all, I'm afraid," said the young man, laughing pleasantly.

"Not famous except to those in the know, I should have said. Most of Captain Harvey's friends and acquaintances consider him an amiable but brainless young man—devoted only to the trot of the fox or whatever the dance is called."

We both laughed.

"Well, well, to business," said Poirot. "You are of opinion the time has come, then?"

"We are sure of it, sir. China was isolated politically yesterday. What is going on out there, nobody knows. No news of any kind, wireless or otherwise, has come through—just a complete break—and silence!"

"Li Chang Yen has shown his hand. And the others?"

"Abe Ryland arrived in England a week ago, and left for the Continent yesterday."

"And Madame Olivier?"

"Madame Olivier left Paris last night."

"For Italy?"

"For Italy, sir. As far as we can judge, they are both making for the resort you indicated—though how you knew that—"

"Ah, that is not the cap with the feather for *me*—that was the work of Hastings here! He conceals his intelligence, you comprehend, but it is profound for all that."

Harvey looked at me with due appreciation, and I felt rather uncomfortable.

"All is in train, then," said Poirot. He was pale now, and completely serious. "The time has come. The arrangements are all made?"

"Everything you ordered has been carried out. The Governments of Italy, France and England are behind you, and are all working harmoniously together."

"It is, in fact, a new *Entente*," observed Poirot dryly. "I am glad that Desjardeaux is convinced at last. *Eh bien*, then, we will start—or rather, *I* will start. You, Hastings, will remain here—yes, I pray of you! In verity, my friend, I am serious."

I believed him, but it was not likely that I should consent to being left behind in that fashion. Our argument was short but decisive.

It was not until we were in the train, speeding towards Paris that he admitted that he was secretly glad of my decision.

"For you have a part to play, Hastings. An important part! Without you, I might well fail. Nevertheless, I felt that it was my duty to urge you to remain behind."

"There is danger, then?"

"*Mon ami*, where the Four are, there is always danger!"

ON arrival in Paris, we drove across to the *Gare de l'Est*, and Poirot at last announced our destination. We were bound for Bolzano and the Italian Tyrol.

During Harvey's absence from our carriage, I took the opportunity of asking Poirot why he had said that the discovery of the rendezvous was my work.

"Because it was, my friend. How Ingles managed to get hold of the information I do not know, but he did, and he sent his servant to us primed with the information. We are bound, *mon ami*, for Karersee, the new Italian name for which is Lago di Carezza. You see now where your 'Cara Zia' comes in and also your '*carrozza*' and '*Largo*'—the 'Handel' was supplied by your own imagination. Possibly some reference to the information coming from the 'hand' of Mr. Ingles started the train of association."

"Karersee?" I queried. "I never heard of it."

"I always tell you that the English know no geography. But as a matter of fact it is a well-known and very beautiful summer resort, four thousand feet up, in the heart of the Dolomites."

"And it is in this out-of-the-way spot that the Four have their rendezvous?"

"Say, rather, their headquarters. The signal has been given, and it is their intention to disappear from the world and issue orders from their mountain fastness. I have made inquiries—a lot of quarrying of stone and mineral deposits is done there, and the Company, apparently a small Italian firm, is in reality controlled by Abe Ryland. I am prepared to swear that a vast subterranean dwelling has been hollowed out in the very heart of the mountain, secret and inaccessible. From there the leaders of the organization will issue by wireless orders to their followers, who are numbered by thousands in every country. And from that crag in the Dolomites the dictators of the world will emerge. That is to say—they would emerge were it not for Hercule Poirot."

"Do you seriously believe all this, Poirot? What about the armies and general machinery of civilization?"

"What about it in Russia, Hastings? This will be Russia on an infinitely larger scale—and with this additional menace—that Madame Olivier's experiments have proceeded farther than she has ever given out. I believe that she has, to a certain extent, succeeded in liberating atomic energy and harnessing it to her purpose. Her experiments with the nitrogen of the air have been very remarkable, and she has also experimented in the concentration of wireless energy, so that a beam of great intensity can be focused upon some given spot. Exactly *how* far she has progressed, nobody knows, but it is certain that it is much farther than has ever been given out. She is a genius, that woman! Add to her genius the power of Ryland's almost unlimited wealth, and with the brain of Li Chang Yen—the finest criminal brain ever known—to direct and plan—*eh bien*, it will not be, as you say, all jam for civilization."

His words made me very thoughtful. Although Poirot was given at times to

"It was not my fault—the gentleman half sprang from his chair!"

exaggeration of language, he was not really an alarmist. For the first time, I realized what a desperate struggle it was upon which we were engaged.

Harvey soon rejoined us and no more was said upon the subject.

WE arrived at Bolzano about midday. From there the journey on was by motor. Several big blue motorcars were waiting in the central square of the town, and the three of us got into one of them. Notwithstanding the heat of the day, Poirot was muffled to the eyes in great-coat and scarf. His eyes and the tips of his ears were all that could be seen of him.

I did not know whether this was due to precaution—or merely his exaggerated fear of catching a chill. The motor journey took a couple of hours. It was a wonderful drive. For the first part of the way we wound in and out of huge cliffs, with a trickling waterfall on one hand. Then we emerged into a fertile valley which continued for some miles, and then, still winding steadily upwards, the bare rocky peaks began to show, with dense, clustering pine woods at their base. The whole place was wild and lovely. Finally there was a series of abrupt curves with the road running through the pine woods on either side; then we came suddenly upon a big hotel and found that we had arrived.

Our rooms had been reserved for us, and under Harvey's guidance we went straight up to them. They looked out over the rocky peaks and the long slopes of pine woods leading up to them. Poirot made a gesture towards them.

"It is there?" he asked in a low voice.

"Yes," replied Harvey. "There is a place called the 'Felsenlabyrinth'—all big boulders piled about in a most fantastic way; a path winds through them. The quarrying is to the right of that, but we think that the entrance is probably in the Felsenlabyrinth."

Poirot nodded.

"Come, *mon ami,*" he said to me. "Let us go down and sit upon the terrace and enjoy the sunlight."

"You think that wise?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

The sunlight was marvelous—in fact the glare was almost too great for me. We had some creamy coffee instead of tea, then went upstairs and unpacked our few belongings. Poirot was in the

most unapproachable mood, lost in a kind of reverie. Once or twice he shook his head and sighed.

I HAD been rather intrigued by a man who had got out of our train at Bolzano, and had been met by a private car. He was a small man, about the size of Poirot, and the thing about him that had attracted my attention was that he was almost as much muffled up as Poirot had been. More so, indeed, for in addition to the greatcoat and muffler, he was wearing huge blue spectacles. I was convinced that here we had an emissary of the Four. Poirot did not seem greatly impressed by my idea, but when, upon leaning out of my bedroom window, I reported that the man in question was strolling about in the vicinity of the hotel, he admitted reluctantly that there might be something in it.

I urged my friend not to go down to dinner, but he insisted on doing so. We entered the dining-room rather late, and were shown to a table by the window. As we sat down, our attention was attracted by an exclamation and a crash of falling china. A dish of *haricot verts* had been upset over a man who was sitting at the table next to ours.

The head waiter came up and was vociferous in apologies.

Presently, when the offending waiter was serving us with our soup, Poirot spoke to him.

"An unfortunate accident, that. But it was not your fault."

"Monsieur saw that? No, indeed it was not my fault! The gentleman half sprang up from his chair—I thought he was going to have an attack of some kind. I could not save the catastrophe."

I saw Poirot's eyes shining with the green light I knew so well, and as the waiter departed he said in a low voice:

"You see, Hastings, the effect of Hercule Poirot—alive and in the flesh?"

"You think—"

I had not time to continue. I felt Poirot's hand on my knee, as he whispered excitedly:

"Look, Hastings, look! *His trick with the bread!* Number Four!"

SURE enough, the man at the next table to ours, his face unusually pale, was dabbing a small piece of bread mechanically about the table.

This little trick, of which he himself was quite unaware, was our only means of identifying Number Four. Indeed, I would have sworn readily enough that the man sitting there was a complete stranger to me, one whom I had never seen before.

"He has recognized you," I murmured. "You should not have come down."

"My excellent Hastings, I have feigned death for three months for this one purpose!"

"To startle Number Four?"

"To startle him at a moment when he must act quickly or not at all. And we have this great advantage—he does not know that we recognize him. He thinks that he is safe in his new disguise. How I bless Flossie Monro for telling us of that little habit of his with the bread!"

"What will happen now?" I asked.

"What *can* happen? He recognizes the only man he fears, miraculously resurrected from the dead, at the very minute when the plans of the Four hang in the balance. Madame Olivier and Abe Ryland lunched here today, I find, and it is thought that they went on to Cortina. We alone are aware that they have secretly retired to their prepared hiding-place. *How much do we know?* That is what Number Four is asking himself at this minute! He dare take no risks. I must be suppressed at all costs. *Eh bien,* let him try to suppress Hercule Poirot! I shall be ready for him."

As he finished speaking, the man at the next table got up and went out.

"He has gone to make his little arrangements," said Poirot placidly. "Shall we have our coffee on the terrace, my friend? It would be pleasanter, I think. I will just go up and get a coat."

I went out on the terrace rather disturbed in mind. Poirot's assurances did not quite content me. However, so long as we were on our guard, nothing could happen to us. I resolved to keep thoroughly on the alert.

It was quite five minutes before Poirot rejoined me. With his usual precaution against cold, he was muffled to the ears. Seating himself, he sipped his coffee.

"Only in England is the coffee so atrocious," he remarked. "On the Continent, they understand how important it is for the digestion that it should be properly made."

As he finished speaking, the man from the next table suddenly appeared on the terrace. Without any hesitation, he came over and drew up a third chair to our table.

"You do not mind my joining you, I hope," he said in English.

"Not at all, monsieur," said Poirot.

I felt vaguely uneasy. It is true that we were on the terrace of the hotel with people all round us, but nevertheless I was not satisfied; I sensed the presence of danger.

Meanwhile Number Four chatted away in a perfectly natural manner. It seemed impossible to believe that he was anything but a *bona-fide* tourist. He described excursions and motor trips and posed as quite an authority on the neighborhood.

He took a pipe from his pocket and began to light it. Poirot drew out his case of tiny cigarettes. As he placed one between his lips, the stranger leaned forward with a match.

"Let me give you a light," he offered.

As he spoke, without the least warning all the lights went out. There was a chink of glass and something pungent under my nose, suffocating me.

I COULD not have been unconscious more than a minute. I came to myself while being hustled along between two men. They had me under each arm, supporting my weight, and there was a gag in my mouth. It was pitch-dark, but I gathered that we were not outside, but passing through the hotel. All round I could hear people shouting and demanding in every known language what had happened to the lights. My captors swung me down a short flight of stairs. We passed along a basement passage, then through a door and out into the open again through a glass door at the back of the hotel. In another moment we had gained the shelter of the pine trees. I had caught a glimpse of another figure in a similar plight to myself, and realized that Poirot too, was a victim of this bold *coup*.

I was being hustled along between two men, a gag in my mouth.

By sheer audacity, Number Four had won the day. He had employed, I gathered, an instant anæsthetic—probably ethyl chloride—breaking two small bulbs of it under our noses. Then in the confusion of the darkness his accomplices, who had probably been guests sitting at the next table, had thrust gags in our mouths and hurried us away, taking us through the hotel to baffle pursuit.

I cannot describe the hour that followed. We were hurried through the woods at a breakneck pace, going uphill the whole time. At last we emerged in the open, on the mountainside, and I saw just in front of us an extraordinary conglomeration of fantastic rocks and boulders.

This must be the "Felsenlabyrinth" of which Harvey had spoken. Soon we were

winding in and out of its recesses. The place was like a maze devised by some evil genie.

Suddenly we stopped; an enormous rock barred our path. One of the men stooped and seemed to push on something; then without a sound the huge mass of rock turned on itself, disclosing a small tunnel-like opening leading into the mountainside.

Into this we were hurried. For some distance the tunnel was narrow; presently it widened, and before long we came out into a wide rocky chamber lighted by electricity. There the gags were removed. At a sign from Number Four who stood facing us with mocking triumph in his face, we were searched and every article removed from our pockets, including Poirot's little automatic pistol.

A pang smote me as it was tossed down on the table. We were defeated—hopelessly defeated and out-numbered. It was the end.

"Welcome to the headquarters of the great Four, M. Hercule Poirot!" said Number Four in a mocking tone. "To meet you again is an unexpected pleasure. But was it worth while returning from the grave, only for this?"

Poirot did not reply. I dared not look at him.

"Come this way," continued Number Four. "Your arrival will be somewhat of a surprise to my colleagues."

He indicated a narrow doorway in the wall. We passed through and found ourselves in another chamber. At the very end of it was a table behind which four chairs were placed. The end chair was empty, but was draped with a mandarin's cape. On the second, smoking a cigar, sat Mr. Abe Ryland. Leaning back on the third chair, with her burning eyes and her nun's face, was Madame Olivier.

Number Four calmly took his seat on the fourth chair.

WE were in the presence of the Four. Never before had I felt so fully the reality and the presence of Li Chang Yen as I did now when confronting his empty seat. Though far away in China, he yet controlled and directed this malign organization.

Madame Olivier gave a faint cry on seeing us. Ryland, more self-controlled, only shifted his cigar and raised his grizzled eyebrows.

"Mr. Hercule Poirot," said Ryland slowly, "this is a pleasant surprise! You put it over on us, all right. We thought you were good and buried—but no matter, the game is up now!"

There was a ring as of steel in his voice. Madame Olivier said nothing, but her eyes burned and I disliked the slow way she smiled.

"Madame, and messieurs, I wish you good-evening," said Poirot quietly.

Something unexpected, something I had not been prepared to hear in his voice made me look at him. He seemed quite composed. Yet there was something about his whole appearance that was different.

"You have not your cigarette-case this time, Monsieur Poirot," said Madame Olivier in her slow, measured voice.

"My cigarette-case? Ah, no, madame!"

For the moment it seemed as though he did not understand the significance of her allusion.

"You fool!" said Number Four. "To pit yourself against us—*us!* I warned you in Paris!"

"True," said Poirot. "True."

I was puzzled. There was something about Poirot that I did not understand at all.

Then there was a stir of draperies behind us, and the Countess Vera Rossakoff came in.

"Ah!" said Number Four. "Our valued and trusted lieutenant! An old friend of yours is here, my dear lady."

The Countess whirled round with her usual vehemence of movement.

"God in Heaven!" she cried. "It is the little man! Ah, but he has the nine lives of a cat! Oh, little man, little man! Why did you mix yourself up in this?"

"Madame," said Poirot, with a bow, "like the great Napoleon, I am on the side of the big battalions."

As he spoke, I saw a sudden suspicion flash into her eyes, and at the same moment I knew that truth which subconsciously I had already sensed.

The man beside me was not Hercule Poirot!

He was very like him, extraordinarily like him: There was the same egg-shaped head, the same strutting figure, delicately plump. But the voice was different, and the eyes instead of being green were dark, and surely the mustaches—those famous mustaches—

My reflections were cut short as the Countess stepped forward, her voice ringing with excitement.

"You have been deceived! That man is not Hercule Poirot!"

Number Four uttered an incredulous exclamation, but the Countess leaned forward and snatched at Poirot's mustaches. They came off in her hand, and then indeed the truth was plain; for this man's upper lip was disfigured by a small scar which completely altered the expression of the face.

"Welcome to the headquarters of the great Four, M. Hercule Poirot!" said Number Four in a mocking tone.

"Not Hercule Poirot!" muttered Number Four. "But who then can he be?"

"I know!" I cried suddenly, and then stopped, afraid I had ruined everything.

But the man I shall still refer to as Poirot turned to me encouragingly. "Say it if you will—it makes no matter now. The trick has succeeded."

"This is Achille Poirot," I said slowly, "Hercule Poirot's twin brother."

"Impossible!" said Ryland sharply, but plainly he was shaken.

"Hercule's plan has succeeded to a marvel," said Achille placidly.

Number Four leaped forward, his voice harsh and menacing. "Succeeded, has it?" he snarled. "Do you realize that before many minutes have passed you will be dead—*dead?*"

"Yes," said Achille Poirot gravely. "I realize that. It is you who do not realize that a man may be willing to purchase success by his life. There were men who laid down their lives for their country in the war. I am prepared to lay down my life in the same way for the world."

It struck me just then that I, although perfectly willing to lay down my life, might have been consulted in the matter. Then I remembered how Poirot had urged me to stay behind.

"And in what way will your laying down your life benefit the world?" asked Ryland sardonically.

"I see that you do not perceive the true inwardness of Hercule's plan. To begin with, your place of retreat was known some months ago, and practically all the visitors, hotel assistants and others are detectives or secret-service men. A cordon has been drawn round the mountain. You may have more than one means of egress, but even so you cannot escape. Poirot himself is directing the operations outside. Tonight, before I came down to the terrace in my brother's place, my boots were smeared with a preparation of aniseed, and hounds are following the trail. It will lead them infallibly to the rock in the Felsenlabyrinth where the entrance is situated. You see, do what you will to us, the net is drawn tightly round you. You cannot escape."

Madame Olivier laughed suddenly.

"You are wrong. There is one way we can escape, and, like Samson of old, de-

stroy our enemies at the same time. What do you say, my friends?"

Ryland was staring at Achille Poirot.

"Suppose he's lying," he said hoarsely.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"In an hour it will be dawn. Then you can see for yourself the truth of my words. Already they should have traced me to the entrance in the Felsenlabyrinth."

Even as he spoke, there was a far-off reverberation, and a man ran in shouting incoherently. Ryland sprang up and went out. Madame Olivier moved to the end of the room and opened a door that I had not noticed. Inside I caught a glimpse of a perfectly equipped laboratory which reminded me of the one in Paris. Number Four also sprang up and left the room for a minute. He returned with Poirot's revolver, which he handed to the Countess.

"There is no danger of their escaping," he said grimly, "but still you had better have this."

Then he went out again.

THE COUNTESS came over to us and surveyed my companion attentively for some time. Suddenly she laughed.

"You are very clever, M. Achille Poirot," she said mockingly.

"Madame, let us talk business. It is fortunate that they have left us alone together. What is your price?"

"I do not understand. What price?"

"You can aid us to escape. You know the secret way out of this retreat. I ask you, what is your price?"

She laughed again.

"More than *you* could pay, little man! Why, all the money in the world would not buy me!"

"Madame, I did not speak of money. I am a man of intelligence. Nevertheless, this is a true fact—*everyone has his price!* In exchange for life and liberty, I offer you your heart's desire."

The Countess suddenly dropped her jesting manner.

"Fool! My 'heart's desire'! Can you give me revenge upon my enemies? Can you give me back youth and beauty and a gay heart? Can you bring the dead to life again?" she demanded bitterly.

Achille Poirot was watching her very curiously.

"Which of the three, madame? Make your choice."

She laughed sardonically.

"You will sell me the elixir of life, perhaps? Come, I will make a bargain with you. Once, I had a child. . . . . Find my child for me—and you shall go free."

"Madame, I agree. It is a bargain. Your child shall be restored to you. On the faith of—on the faith of Hercule Poirot himself!"

"My dear M. Poirot, I am afraid I laid a little trap for you. It is very kind of you to promise to find my child for me—but, you see, I happen to know that you would not succeed."

"Madame, I swear to you by the Holy Angels, that *I will bring the dead to life!*"

She stared at him as though fascinated.

"You do not believe me. I will prove my words. Get my pocket-book which they took from me."

She went out of the room, and returned with it in her hand. Throughout all, she retained her grip on the revolver. I felt that Achille Poirot's chances of bluffing her were very slight. The Countess Rossakoff was no fool.

"Open it, madame. The flap on the left-hand side. That is right. Now take out that photograph and look at it."

Wonderingly, she took out what seemed to be a small snapshot. No sooner had she looked at it, than she uttered a cry and swayed as though about to fall. Then she almost flew at my companion.

"Where? Where? You shall tell me!"

"Remember your bargain, madame."

"Yes, yes, I will trust you. Quick—before they come back!"

Catching him by the hand, she drew him quickly and silently out of the room. I followed. From the outer room, she led us into the tunnel by which we had first entered. A short way along this forked, and she turned off to the right. Again and again the passage divided, but she led us on, never faltering or seeming to doubt her way, and with increasing speed.

"If only we are in time!" she panted. "We must be out in the open before the explosion occurs!"

Still we hurried on. I understood that this tunnel led right through the mountain and we should emerge on the other side, facing a different valley. Sweat streaming down my face, I raced on.

And then, far away, I saw a gleam of daylight. Nearer and nearer I saw the green of shrubbery. Forcing the shrubs aside, we pushed our way through. . . . . We were in the open again, with the faint light of dawn making everything rosy!

POIROT'S cordon was a reality. Even as we emerged, three men fell upon us, but released us again with a cry of astonishment.

"Quick," cried my companion. "Quick—there is no time to lose!"

But he was not destined to finish. The earth shook and trembled under our feet, there was a terrific roar, and the whole mountain seemed to dissolve. We were flung headlong through the air. . . . .

I came to myself at last, in a strange bed and a strange room. Some one was sitting by the window. He turned.

It was Achille Poirot—or, stay, was it?

The well-known ironical voice dispelled any doubts I might have had.

"But yes, my friend, it is I. Brother Achille has gone home again—to the land of myths. It was I all the time—it is not only Number Four who can act a part! Belladonna in the eyes, the sacrifice of my mustaches, and a real scar, the inflicting of which caused me much pain two months ago—but I could not risk a fake beneath the eagle eyes of Number Four. And then the final touch—your own belief that there was such a person as Achille Poirot! It was invaluable, the assistance you rendered me; half the success of the *coup* is due to you! The whole crux of the affair was to make them believe that Hercule Poirot was still at large directing operations. Otherwise, everything was true."

"But why not really send a substitute?"

"And let you go into danger without me by your side? You have a pretty idea of me there! Besides, I always had a hope of finding a way out through the Countess."

"How on earth did you manage to convince her? It seemed a very thin story."

"The Countess has a great deal more perspicacity than you have, my dear Hastings. She was taken in at first by my disguise, but she soon saw through it. When she said: 'You are very clever, M. Achille Poirot!' I knew that she had guessed the truth. It was then or never to play my trump card."

"All that rigmarole about bringing the dead to life—"

"Exactly—but then, you see, I had the child all along."

"What?"

"But yes! You know my motto: 'Be prepared!' As soon as I found that the Countess Rossakoff was mixed up with the infernal Four, I had every possible inquiry made as to her antecedents. I learned that she had had a child who was reported to have been killed, and I also found that there were discrepancies in the story which led me to wonder whether it might not after all be alive. In the end, I succeeded in tracing the boy, and by paying out a big sum, I obtained possession of the child's person. The poor little fellow was nearly dead of starvation. I placed him in a safe place, with kindly people, and took a snapshot of him in his new surroundings. And so, when the time came I had my little *coup de theatre* all ready!"

"You are wonderful, Poirot, absolutely wonderful!"

"Oh, I was glad to do it, too. For I have always admired the Countess. I should have been sorry if she had perished in the explosion."

"And what of—of the Four?"

"All the bodies have now been recovered. That of Number Four was quite unrecognizable—the head blown to pieces. I wish—I rather wish it had not been so. I should like to have been *sure*—but no more of that! Look at this."

HE handed me a newspaper in which a paragraph was marked. It reported the death by suicide of Li Chang Yen, who had engineered the recent revolution which failed so disastrously.

"My great opponent," said Poirot gravely. "It was fated that he and I should never meet in the flesh. When he received the news of the disaster here, he took the simplest way out. A great brain, my friend, a great brain. But I wish I had seen the face of the man who was Number Four. Supposing that, after all—But surely I romance. . . . . He is dead. Yes, *mon ami*, together we have faced and routed that accursed Four, and now you will return to your charming wife, and I—I shall retire. The great case of my life is over. Anything else will seem tame after this. No, I shall retire, and possibly I shall grow vegetable marrows. I might even marry and range myself!"

He laughed heartily at the idea, but still with a touch of embarrassment. I hoped— Small men always admire big, flamboyant women—

"Marry and range myself," he said, again, musingly. "Who knows?"

THE END.

The ball shot past him, struck his foot and caromed off into the hands of the shortstop.

Brother Bill

By HUGH FULLERTON

The dean of sports-story writers, author of "Touching Second," "Tales of the Turf" and many others, here narrates a romance of the diamond with his customary skill.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

JACK CLANCY was not handsome; he was not a polished nor even an entertaining conversationalist; but he could hit, and in baseball that counts for more than any degree ever conferred. Jack admitted he could hit, although on all other counts he was the most modest of players.

His conversation on the ball-field was usually limited to: "That one looked good!" "Keep your eyes peeled—you're seein' 'em crooked today!" and, "Come on, old boy—something on every one today." These remarks were for and to umpires and the pitcher who was endeavoring to keep the Raccoons up in the pennant race. "What you beefing about? That one was right in the heart of the plate," and, "Gwan, you big stiff, or I'll bust you one on the jaw!" he reserved for the benefit of opposing players who might be inclined to argue as to whether or not the umpire behind the plate was correct in his decisions.

His line of repartee was distinctly limited, but he was a good catcher, and he could hit; and a catcher who can make base hits, especially at critical points of a game, is a person of importance on and off the ball-field. When he belongs to a team which is fighting for a championship, he becomes a national figure.

Clancy had a gnarled and twisted set of fingers; his feet were marred by spike wounds, and his legs looked like a map of the devastated regions as a result of blocking runners who essayed to reach

the home plate by means of feet-first slides. During a game he was belligerent, yielding to none, admitting the superiority of none. But off the field he suffered from inferiority. He was sensitively conscious of his lack of early education and of social graces, and he sought to cover his sensitiveness by resorting to rudeness and to a shallow pretense of indifference as to what anyone thought of him or his manners. Although he was popular with the crowds because of his faithfulness and the earnestness with which he fought to win games, risking injury to guard the precious finish line of the runners with his body, he was a solitary fellow, with few friends. He refused to room with other players, kept to himself much of the time, refused to join in the festivities, save on rare occasions, and snarled at the reporters who traveled with the team, regarding them as his natural enemies.

Early in his career as a major-league player, a young reporter had written a story insinuating broadly that Clancy could not read or write, and this had embittered him against all the men who served as historians of the sport. The report was untrue. He could read and write. He read the newspapers slowly and carefully, and usually, after completing his perusal of the sporting pages, he would fold the newspaper and say:

"Some one ought to bust thatdamreporter on the jaw."

He always said "thatdamreporter" as if it were one word.

THERE was one person to whom he wanted to talk and to whom he never could speak excepting in gulps and gurgles. That was Margaret Cohalon, the daughter of Dick Cohalon, manager of the Raccoons. When she smiled at him, or spoke to him, he choked and muttered incoherencies, and even when she came near him in a hotel or on a train when the team was traveling, he would flush a dull red under his sunburn and swallow his Adam's apple in lieu of conversation. The peculiar thing about the situation was that she appeared to like him and to try to be friendly with him. The other fellows, knowing Jack's bashfulness, never lost an opportunity to lure him into the immediate vicinity of the girl in order to watch his sufferings; and she, knowing this, after a time, came to avoid him in order to spare his feelings.

Dumb as he was when Marge Cohalon was near, there was one subject upon which he could and would talk; volubly, enthusiastically and with a certain eloquence. That subject was his Brother Bill. If anyone happened to mention some young ball-player who was showing promise, Jack's weather-worn, rather serious face would light with sudden enthusiasm and he would say:

"Talk about young pitchers! Say, you ought to see that kid brother of mine! Can he pitch? Say, it's just *zip*, *zip*, *zip* across their old gazoozalems and to the bench! That kid is going to make some pitcher! He's almost ripe for the big show. He knows more about pitching now than a lot of these fellows that are drawing down big dough for getting sore arms every time they know Ty or Tris is going to hit against them. When that boy gets ripe, he'll hop that old onion over the skillet so fast no one aint ever even going to get a foul off him."

He would talk half the night about Brother Bill if he could get anyone who would listen, and it was really because of my willingness to listen that Jack and I finally became friends. We reached Boston one morning when the hotels were crowded because of a convention, and after breakfast the secretary of the club, who was standing with Marge Cohalon in the lobby, called me and said:

"The hotel is crowded and we have to double up. Do you mind if I put you in a room with Jack?"

"Why pick on me?" I asked.

"I wish you would," said Marge Cohalon.

"Of course, if you ask it, I will. But he's likely to bust me on the jaw."

She shook her head.

"Jack is a fine fellow, when you get to know him," she said.

"I notice you and he are chummy," I said sarcastically, surprised at her championing of the big catcher. "It's all right with me, if Jack doesn't object."

"Thank you," she said in low tones as the secretary summoned Jack and explained the situation.

"'Sall right with me," he said, eying me suspiciously. "I aint afraid. None of themdamreporters has me scared."

IN spite of misgivings I found him a pleasant and entertaining room-mate after the first reserve wore off. The first

night we roomed together I was writing when he came up to go to bed.

"I'll be through in a minute, Jack," I said. "I wont keep you awake."

"Don't mind me. I aint sleepy yet."

I continued writing, and after a time some question of technical baseball arose in my mind. I asked him to explain why a play is made in one way by one team and in another way by others. He sat up in bed and commenced to talk, growing more and more interested as he explained. To my surprise, I discovered that he had given a great deal of thought to the plays and to the timing of plays, that he had studied the psychology of the sport and the strategy of his position, and not only understood how to make a play, but when to make it and against which individuals to attempt it.

Before we realized it, we were chatting and arguing, discussing players of past and present and their peculiarities, and it was nearly midnight before we tumbled into bed. I was almost asleep when Jack lifted himself on one elbow and said, across the darkness:

"Say, I aint sore they put us together. I never knew before that any of youdamreporters knew anything."

"Everyone has to learn a little to hold his job," I said, laughing. "My system is to ask the players and try to remember. I was going to ask how the kid brother is coming along, but was afraid you were asleep."

"Him?" he exclaimed, sitting up wide awake. "Great! Why, he's only eighteen now, and you ought to see that curve! It breaks like a shot, I'm telling you, like a shot—and he knows how to use it. And his slow! Say, it stops twice comin' up to the plate and starts again. That kid is goin' to set this old league afire."

"When is he going to be ready for the big show?" I asked drowsily.

"Soon as he gets through college."

"Is he in college?" I asked, surprised.

"Sure thing he's in college. He's in—" He named my old school.

"Maybe you think no one can go to college that belongs to me?" he added resentfully. "Youdamreporters aint got no monopoly on colleges. That kid aint goin' to grow up and be a rough-neck like me. He's goin' to be educated; and say, you ought to see that curve!"

"Is he working his way through college?"

"Him? What for should he be workin' his way through college? Aint I makin' good dough? That kid is goin' to have everything any of the rest of them guys has. He's goin' through college right. And that slow of his—say, it's just like Matty's old fader! You can count the stitches on the ball all the way up, and just as you start to swing it stops and dodges the bat—"

He was still sitting up in bed giving graphic descriptions of the pitching skill of his brother when I fell asleep. I liked Jack more after we became accustomed to each other and asked the secretary to let us room together while the team was traveling.

"You're a glut' for punishment," he said. "I'd as soon room with a wet dog."

THE fellows joked me a great deal about my room-mate, but he was a never-failing fund of information about baseball, a keen analyst of the game and of opposing players, and when we were alone in the room, he came to talk freely and entertainingly, telling yarns of the games of preceding years and furnishing me with many insights into the mysteries of the sport.

He frequently borrowed books from me, read them laboriously, asking questions and showing keen interest, and it was amazing how he rejected some and clung to others. His taste was fine, and his choice of reading instinctively for the best.

"I never had much chance to go to school," he told me one night. "My old man died when I was a kid and I had to work in the cotton mill. Then my mother married again. He was no good, and when she died, I had the kid on my hands. I broke into baseball when I was seventeen and have been managin' to stick around ever since."

Late in the season of the first year after Jack and I became friends I happened to be talking with Marge Cohalon one day.

"Poor old Jack—" I started to say.

"Old?" she interrupted sharply, "Jack is thirty-one. You reporters speak of a player as if he is a hundred years old just because he has been in the business a few years."

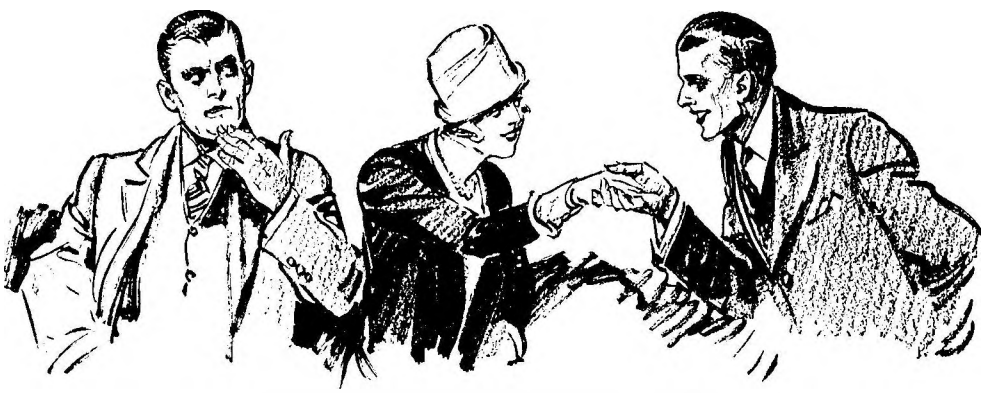
"Oh, ho!" I teased. "I never suspected Jack was a ladies' man!"

"Now you're trying to be mean," she

answered. "I've been wanting to thank you for being nice to Jack and for rooming with him, and you spoil it by making fun of him. He thinks a whole lot of you more than he lets on."

"Yes, I've observed his liking. He threatened to punch me on the jaw this morning for criticising his way of shaving."

"He doesn't mean it. Jack is one of the finest men in the world, but sometimes I'd like to shake him. He always takes the worst of it."



"I hope you'll like it with the team," said Marge. "I will from now on," he replied meaningly.

She spoke in a joking manner, but there was earnestness behind it. I was surprised, but it was not until the next year that I had any idea the girl might be seriously interested in the big, homely catcher.

Her father usually took Marge on one long trip and several of the shorter ones each season, and when she was with the team, she was the center of attraction, being the only unmarried woman to travel with the Raccoons.

Marge was a big, nice-looking girl, not extremely pretty, but with fine dark eyes and hair and a pleasant smile and manner. She was voted a good fellow by the players, who adored her and regarded her as the mascot of the team. All the players, excepting Jack, called her Marge; and Jack, on the rare occasions on which he spoke of her at all, always called her "she," as if there was no other woman in the world.

WE began to hear about Jack's brother Bill from others during the boy's junior year at college. Jack had talked so much about him that scouts for major league clubs were watching him. He was pitching for the 'varsity team but was not ranked as the first pitcher on the squad.

"That don't mean nothin'," Jack assured me. "Them young fellows always give the rich boy the best of it. If it wasn't for that other pitcher's dad being a millionaire, Bill would be pitching all the big games and winnin' them. You ought to see his slow ball now: it looks like it is goin' to start back at him before it gets up to the plate."

Half a dozen scouts watched the games. Brother Bill pitched, however, and their reports did not bear out Jack's claims.

Everyone felt a little sorry for Jack. They gave him credit for believing the boy was a great pitcher, and they made their reports as favorable as was possible.

"Poor old Jack!" said Mike, the scout of the Raccoons, to me after he had watched the boy pitch. "The kid aint got a thing but a fair curve, and he hasn't much speed, and his slow ball is telegraphed every time he uses it; and yet Jack thinks he is going to be a world-beater."

"What sort of boy is he, Mike?" I asked.

"Swelled," said Mike. "Them collegers have made a hero of him and spoiled him. He thinks he's too good for professional ball."

No one, of course, cared to tell Jack that the boy was not a great pitcher. Mike, straining his conscience, wrote to Dick Cohalon that the boy showed prom-

ise and might develop. Dick gave the letter to Jack, who went around among the players and reporters showing it and saying:

"What did I tell you? Didn't I say the kid was a comer? Look what old Mike says; the best judge of ball-players in the world! He says the kid is the most promising youngster he ever saw."

Mike had not said that, but as Jack read the letter, coloring it with his enthusiasm, it sounded as if Mike had claimed the boy was another Rusie. Jack became almost friendly with the reporters, especially with one who printed a picture of Bill in his college uniform and wrote that the boy probably would be a great star if he should decide to play baseball professionally.

THE spring Bill graduated, Jack was all enthusiasm. The boy had developed into a fair college pitcher; he had good control, and thanks to Jack's experience and teaching, he knew more about pitching than the majority of college pitchers. He had won his games and become a hero at the old school, and on the strength of his college reputation and Mike's optimistic report, Dick Cohalon signed the boy to pitch for the Raccoons, with orders to report immediately after commencement.

"Nothin' to this pennant race now!" Jack said to me when he learned his brother had signed the contract. "The kid will be just what we need to help out old Lefty and Brains. He ought to win more than sixty per cent of his games and get better before fall. Say, wont it be great when the megaphone guy gets out there during the World Series and says: 'Batteries for this game, Clancy and Clancy for the Raccoons?'"

"Are you going up to see the kid graduate, Jack?" I asked, not having the heart to say anything that might spoil his dream.

"I'd like to, if Dick don't need me," he admitted.

"Better take a few days off," I suggested. "It will do you good, and Dick wont need you. Run up with me, go to the Prom, see the kid pitch his last college game and stay for commencement. It is worth seeing."

"Me, at one of them rah-rah dances? How do you get that way?" he said, laughing with a false note. "I'd be a fine-lookin' guy in one of the waiter suits among them collegers."

"It will set off your manly figure and show some of their athletes up," I insisted idly. "I'll bet all those slim flappers will be begging for a dance with the great Clancy."

"Tryin' to kid some one, eh?" he said. "I'll bust you on the jaw."

IN spite of that I saw he was not displeased with the idea, and about a week before commencement, I came into the room one evening and found him hastily striving to conceal a new dress suit—his first—and pretended not to have seen it.

I knew, too, that Dick Cohalon had told him he could take a week off and rejoin the team when it reached New York. My plan was to spend three days at the reunion at the old college, and I promised Jack I would hunt him up and show him the town.

The day I was to leave the team, I was sitting in the hotel lobby when Marge Cohalon came and sat with me, looking worried.

"Going back to commencement at your college?" she asked.

"Yes, Jack and I are going back to visit our dear old Alma Mater," I replied lightly.

"I'm worried," she said, "I wish Dad hadn't signed Jack's brother. Will you see him?"

"I'll see him. But why worry?"

'I don't think the boy can pitch well enough to last with this team. I've talked with Mike about him."

"Well, they come and go," I remarked carelessly.

"I don't mind about the boy, but it will break Jack's heart. Can't you talk with the boy and hint to him he ought to go into some other business?"

"I can; but why not let nature take its course?"

"I don't want Jack to be hurt."

Her earnestness and the realization that she cared for the big catcher impressed me.

"It would be a hard blow to Jack if the kid turns out not to be the right sort," I admitted. "I'll try to suggest to him that a college education ought not be wasted on baseball and that he ought to try selling life-insurance, or bonds or driving a truck."

"You're never in earnest," she charged, and added inconsistently: "But I know you'll try to help Jack."

"Or you," I retorted.

"Possibly it is the same thing," she said, and turned away flushing at the confession. When she had gone, I sat and whistled, wondering that the girl who could have had her choice of almost any of the men in baseball, seemed to have chosen the big, shy, ignorant fellow; and after puzzling over the ways of women and thinking the situation over I said to myself:

"Not so foolish! Not so bad! Jack is worth half a dozen of some of them."

I WENT up to Commencement, and in the riot of Class Day forgot the boy, remembering him shortly before the march to the game was to start and went to hunt for him and Jack. I found the boy, but not Jack.

Brother Bill was, I saw, in striking contrast to the old catcher. He was a handsome, athletic-looking youth with a smiling face and a veneer of unconvincing politeness. College had affected him externally and had not penetrated deeply. He had all the mannerisms of the college athletic hero except the fictional modesty. He was condescending to me at first, but when he discovered that some of the fellows knew me and had read my writings, he began exerting himself to be pleasant to me.

"Where is Jack? Up in the stands?" I inquired.

"Jack didn't come up," he said evasively. "He doesn't care for this sort of thing."

"I thought he was coming. We agreed to see each other, and he seemed to be looking forward to it. He bought himself evening clothes."

"Jack in dress clothes—that's funny," he said. "He must have changed his mind. You see—well—Jack wouldn't fit in very well with our crowd."

His manner, rather than his words, told me the truth. I realized he was ashamed to have his college associates meet the man who had toiled and sacrificed for his sake, and who had made an idol of him.

"Do your plan to make baseball your business?" I inquired, to change the subject. "It seems to me a fellow with a college education ought to use it for something else."

"Oh, I'll pick up some easy money that way for a year or two while looking around," he said condescendingly. "It's rather a comedown, but lots of the fellows do it."

"Do you think you can make good?" I asked, irritated by his self-satisfaction.

"Naturally. A fellow with brains and education ought to be able to beat men of the type of intelligence he will pitch against."

"If you stick your fast one down the groove you'll find it doesn't take brains to hit it against a fence," I retorted rather savagely.

I was a little sick when I left him—sick that old Jack should have sacrificed himself all those years to produce a half-baked snob! I watched him in the game and realized that he was just an ordinary pitcher with very faint promise of developing into anything better.

"WHY didn't you come to Commencement?" I asked Jack when I rejoined the team in New York. "I saw Bill and had a talk with him."

"Dick needed me," he said, keeping his eyes from meeting mine. "He told me I could go, but I knew he hated to do it, and we sure needed those games."

I was certain then that his brother had not invited Jack to attend the Commencement exercises, and I knew he had been disappointed and hurt.

"Bill was telling all the fellows on the team what a great catcher you are, and how he wished you could have been up to see the game," I lied, seeing how deeply he was hurt.

"Ain't that like the kid?" he asked, brightening quickly. "He always is braggin' about me. I wish I'd gone up, but at that we might have lost that second game at Philly if I hadn't been there to crash that old apple in the pinch. What sort of a game did the kid pitch?"

I considered this an opportunity to give him the straight facts.

"Not so good. He needs a lot of stuff. He doesn't hold up the runners—takes a wind-up with men on bases. He doesn't cover his curve at all. I could see it from the stands before he pitched."

"Aw, the kid knows that stuff," said Jack defensively. "It's so easy for him to beat them college guys that he gets careless. I'll have to tell him not to pull that stuff when he gets into the big show."

THE boy joined the Raccoons the following week, and because of Jack, all the players gave him a warm greeting and tried to help him.

The contrast between the brothers could not fail to attract attention. Jack was the same careless, rough-looking fellow on and off the field. The boy came with a wardrobe trunk, and his uniform always was clean and pressed.

"I'm off him," Artie the shortstop told me the day after Bill joined the team. "Too educated for me."

"That's just his manner, Artie," I said, although knowing he was right in his judgment. "He tries to be a good fellow."

"Yeah, but it's hard work, and I don't want to overwork nobody."

One by one the players began to drift away from him and hold aloof. The news that he had demanded a room by himself did not help his popularity, and after a week or two on the road, he consented to room with Jack and I was left alone.

Marge Cohalon was not with the team when the boy joined it and it was several weeks later that she returned to "her boys" after a vacation abroad. She looked prettier than she ever had, and the Raccoons swarmed around her, shaking hands, flattering her boisterously and threatening to kiss her. The team had been in a slump, and with shouts of delight they declared their mascot had returned. I had spoken to her and walked away when I saw Jack hovering over in a corner of the lounge, trying to summon up courage to go and greet her. Just then Bill came swaggering from the dining-room and sauntered across to join us.

"Who is the queen of the May the boys are swarming around?" he asked, looking across the lobby toward Marge.

"Don't make no raw cracks about that girl," said Jack shortly.

"Oh! Excuse me. I didn't know she was yours. Nice-looker, Jack. I approve your choice. Who is she?"

"That," I said, "is Miss Margaret Cohalon—to you."

I said it in as ugly a tone as possible, because his look and his words nettled me.

"So? She seems to be the sweetheart of the league."

"If you wasn't my brother, I'd bust you on the jaw," said Jack.

"What's the matter with you fellows?" asked the boy, "I haven't said anything derogatory to the lady."

"Well—don't," said Jack.

"You act as if you were in love with her." The boy laughed at the thought, and Jack, gulping convulsively, turned red. "Introduce me, wont you?" added Bill.

There was no chance to reply, for Marge Cohalon came toward us with outstretched hand. She shook hands first with Jack, and waited an instant, as if expecting him to speak, and when he only gurgled incoherently, she turned to Bill.

"You're Jack's brother, I know," she said, shaking hands. "I hope you'll like it with the team."

"I certainly will from now on," he replied meaningly.

"I haven't seen the papers coming across the ocean," she said. "Have you worked yet?"

"Haven't had much chance. I finished up a couple of games, but haven't started one as yet."

"He sure looked good in there," said Jack, conquering his embarrassment to praise his brother. "He mixed 'em up and had good control. It wasn't his fault they got those runs."

"I hope you'll be as good as Jack says you are," the girl said, smiling at Jack's enthusiasm. "We've been hearing of you for years."

"Nice girl," commented Bill when she left us. "I'll try to keep her from getting lonely."

"Aw—she don't play no favorites," said Jack.

Brother Bill made good his promise. He monopolized Marge as much as he could, and his attentions didn't serve to increase his popularity with the other fellows.

DURING the long stay on the home grounds in July and August we did not see so much of Marge Cohalon, as we were scattered in all parts of the city. I saw her in the stands frequently, and sometimes found an opportunity to speak with her.

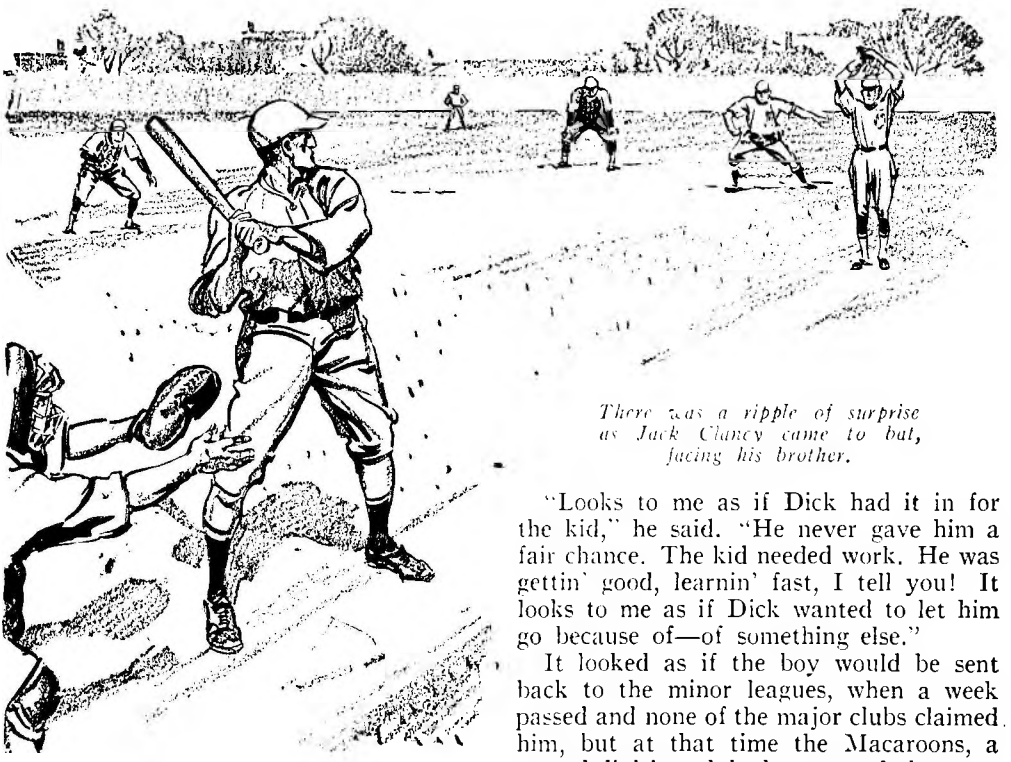
She pouted and playfully pretended to scold.

"I've lost all my admirers," she told me one day. "None of the boys come to see me, and I scarcely know what the gossip of the team is."

"None of them?" I asked.

"Oh, well," she said, obviously annoyed, "I see some of them occasionally."

"Possibly the boys figure that three is a crowd."



There was a ripple of surprise as Jack Clancy came to bat, facing his brother.

"You know better than that," she answered half-indignantly. "You know I am only trying to keep that boy out of mischief. He needs some one to encourage him."

"Do you see Jack often?"

"No-o-o. Oh, I don't understand it. I'm trying to help his brother, and Jack seems to think—"

"Wouldn't it be natural for him to think you prefer his handsome, accomplished and polished brother to himself?"

"I don't think Jack cares at all—"

"If he doesn't, he has an odd way of showing it. He sits around as grouchy as if some one had broken his best bat."

The girl did not accompany the team on the August trip, although she had planned to go, and the day before the team left home, Dick Cohalon asked waivers on Bill Clancy. The two incidents may not have had any connection. Some of us suspected that Dick was not well pleased that his daughter should be with the new pitcher so much of the time, and some of the players jumped to the conclusion that Marge had changed her mind about making the trip with the team because the boy was not to be with it. Jack, for the first time in his life, seemed inclined to blame the management.

"Looks to me as if Dick had it in for the kid," he said. "He never gave him a fair chance. The kid needed work. He was gettin' good, learnin' fast, I tell you! It looks to me as if Dick wanted to let him go because of—of something else."

It looked as if the boy would be sent back to the minor leagues, when a week passed and none of the major clubs claimed him, but at that time the Macaroons, a second-division club, but one of the most feared, were crippled. Several of their pitchers had been injured and to tide over the emergency, they refused to waive claim and secured Bill Clancy.

"I knew it," said Jack disgustedly in the room that night. "We turn loose the most promising young pitcher in the league and that bunch grabs him. Like as not they'll use him and beat us out of that old pennant."

"I'm hoping they use him against us," I said. "He'll be duck soup for the Raccoons."

It was a studied insult, because duck soup is a baseball term meaning the easiest possible.

"Duck soup? I've a notion to bust you on the jaw! You don't think the kid can pitch?"

"Not yet, if ever," I said. "If he would work hard and be really interested, and cut out the foolishness, he might become a good man."

"You're all against the kid," he replied sulkily. "I think you're all sore because she is stuck on him."

"Really think Marge cares for him, Jack?" I asked seriously.

"Sure thing. How could she help it? Aint they been together every chance since he joined the team?"

"Yes—but I never saw her hunting for him. I had an idea she was trying to help him because she likes you."

"Me? Huh? Kiddin' some one? Fat chance!"

"Say, Jack," I said. "Not changing the subject, but did you ever read the story of John Alden and Priscilla?"

"Priscilla who?"

"Never mind her name. I'll get it for you. You ought to read it."

WHEN I gave it to him the following day, he merely glanced at it.

"Poetry, huh? I can read that stuff, but I don't get it half the time."

But when I came to the room that evening he was reading it.

"What do you think of that big sap?" he said. "Him boosting the other guy's game all the time and not even suspectin'! That girl was all right. It was smart the way she wised him up at last, wasn't it? He must have felt like a bonehead."

"He was," I agreed, sighing because he was so dense.

"Say, it's just a story-book story, aint it? Did they get married all right?"

"It is founded on history. Boston is full of people who wouldn't have been there if Priscilla hadn't told him to speak for himself."

"I hope none of them is in that left-field bleacher crowd," he commented.

Three or four days later I met Marge in the grandstand. The team had made a quick jump home to play one game and were leaving immediately afterward.

"How are the boys?" she asked.

"All missing you. We hoped you would make the trip with us."

"I thought it would be better not to go," she confessed frankly.

"Some of the boys got strange ideas. How is Jack standing the release of his brother?"

"He crabs about it, but in his heart he knows the boy was not ready for the big league, even if he never will admit it."

"I'm sorry for Jack," she said simply.

"By the way, I made Jack read the story of John Alden and Priscilla last week."

The girl started, colored quickly, laughed a little nervously, said, "You brute!" and fled.

She passed me after the game, hesitated as if to speak, then with a quick smile, passed on. I guessed that she wanted to hear what Jack's reaction to the story had been and dared not ask.

Possibly she never would have found out if Brother Bill had not come swaggering back with the Macaroons when they came to play the final series with the Raccoons late in September. We who were forced to keep abreast the gossip of the league knew that the boy, freed from the restraining influence of Jack, had fallen in with the sporty element in the Macaroons and that he was not making any progress. Jack's faith in him, however, remained unshaken.

"Aint it the tough luck?" he said mournfully. "Here we are, needin' every game, and along comes my own brother and beats us."

"Cheer up, Jack; he hasn't beaten us yet."

"Yeah, but he will. The kid knows our batters, and we'll be lucky to get a run off him."

AFTER having made a hard fight, the Macaroons had broken late in August and dropped out of the pennant race, leaving the Raccoons to fight it out with the Wildcats and the Pelicans. Our pitching staff, worn by the hard race, was commencing to show the results of the strain, and the double-headers were piled up on the schedule. The young pitchers were unreliable, and Dick Cohalon, fearing to take a chance of losing even one game, was putting the burden of the work on three veterans, with old Lefty bearing the heaviest part of it.

The teams divided honors the first day of the series, each winning and losing, and in the second day's game old Pie-eye, the oldest pitcher of the Macaroons, found a good game left in his worn-out arm and beat the Raccoons, leaving the three leading teams practically tied, with fewer than a dozen games to play. Another defeat at the hands of the Macaroons, and the chances of the Raccoons winning the pennant would not be worth much, with ten more games to play and those against the three strongest clubs in the circuit.

"Aint it tough?" Jack wailed to me. "My own brother! I told Dick he was foolish to let him go."

"We'll lick him," I said confidently.

"Not a chance—not a chance!"

The final game of that series was regarded as the decisive one of the year for the Raccoons, and while it meant little to

"Why don't you speak for yourself, John?" she said. He seized her arm. "Marge!" said he tensely. "Do you mean—"

their opponents, the Macaroons were fighting with the spirit of iconoclasm which always possesses beaten teams—or men. Shortly before the teams took the field for practice that day, Brother Bill came parading down one of the center aisles, and with him was a girl, pretty after her own style, bedecked with flashy finery and obviously dressed to attract attention. He led her to a seat in one of the boxes, lifted his hat and swaggered down onto the field to dress for the game. Thousands of persons saw the entrance, which seemed staged solely for effect.

Glancing across to where the women of the Raccoon club were seated, I watched the craning of necks and the quick-whispered comments among the wives and sweethearts of the players. There were glances toward where Marge Cohalon sat; and she, after the first glance, seemed the only person in that section of the stands not watching the girl.

Jack Clancy was on the field in uniform, as usual one of the first to start warming up for the game. He straightened, dropped a bat and stared. Then his face registered a kind of dull comprehension, and his jaw set with determination.

In the interest of the game, which promised to be the climax of the season, the incident was forgotten by most of us, but as play progressed, I glanced occasionally toward the girl, realizing the whispers and gossip that would go through the club and that some would try to be sorry for Marge Cohalon.

I HAVE seen many games, but few like that one. The Raccoons started hitting the ball from the first, hard, consistently, but with no results in the form of runs. Line drives went straight into the hands of infielders. Balls that seemed to be going safe bounded eccentrically straight at the fielders. After each time at bat the Raccoon hitters came back to their bench, hurled their bats on the ground and swore disgustedly.

"Horseshoes! I never seen anything like it!" wailed Artie.

"He aint got a thing! Not a thing," said Banty. "The ball lays right up in the groove, and the harder I hit it, the straighter it goes at some one."

"Aint got a thing, huh?" demanded Jack, rising to defend his kid brother. "That kid is pitching, understand me, pitching!"

Lefty was working with every ounce of strength and every bit of cunning which he had. Up to the seventh inning the Macaroons had made but two hits off his delivery, one of those an accident; yet they

had scored one run. That run came in the third inning, and was the result of an error and a hit down the foul line, an ordinary one-base hit; but the ball, striking the stands at an eccentric angle, caromed past Schlitz and went as a three-base hit. The Raccoons had hit the ball hard enough to score a dozen runs and had none, while that one run scored by their opponents seemed to get larger and larger. Resenting the luck, the Raccoons became over-anxious, commenced trying too hard and failing time after time until the eighth inning, when the first runner reached first base, and their hopes revived.

"C'mon fellows! Here's where we get him," yelled Artie, coaching at first base.

At that instant "Big City" drove a hard-bounding ball past second base. It seemed impossible that any infielder could stop the ball, but Lawrence, second baseman of the Macaroons, made a despairing attempt. He failed to reach the ball with his hands, but as it shot past him, it struck his foot, bounded against his arm and caromed off into the hands of the shortstop standing on second base; and a quick throw to first completed a double play on what had seemed a certain base hit. Every man on the Raccoon bench was raving and cursing the luck, which appeared to doom them to defeat.

The ninth inning started with the one run of the game seeming to insure victory for the Macaroons and a crushing blow to the pennant hopes of the Raccoons. The first batter was retired on a hard line drive which for an instant, seemed to be going to safe territory, and the Raccoons hurled bats and swore some more. Harry, swinging hard at the first ball, pushed the next one pitched toward third base for a perfect bunt and beat the ball to first base. Crocky hit the first ball pitched to him fiercely, drove a two-base hit to left field, and, with runners on second and third bases, it looked as if the fortunes of the game had changed at last.

The Macaroons were striving desperately to steady Brother Bill. Two of the older pitchers were warming up as rapidly as possible, hoping to be ready in time to save the wavering youngster. Jake, the heaviest hitter of the Raccoons, was coming to the plate, swinging four bats and determined to finish the game. He was over-anxious, and swinging hard at a slow ball, he drove a high fly to second base and retired to the bench.

THERE was a murmur of surprise and a ripple of cheers as Jack Clancy came to bat, facing his brother. On the Raccoon bench there was an excited dispute.

"Put in a pinch hitter, Dick," Artie said excitedly. "Don't let Jack hit against the kid; you know how he—"

"You hinting that Jack is crooked?" demanded Dick. "Think he wont try because the kid is his brother?"

"No. But you know, Dick, how crazy he is about the brother—"

"Yeah. And I know Jack," said Dick grimly.

Jack's weathered face was a study in conflicting emotions as he stood at the plate. He allowed the first ball to pass without moving and looked back questioningly at the umpire, who called it a strike. The crowd yelled, and Jack, gripping his bat tighter, beat with it on the plate. The next was a ball, the next another ball; and as his brother pitched again, Jack swung his bat. There was a sharp crack of the bat; the shortstop made a frantic leap sidewise, and the ball flashed on to left field. Two runners sprinted across the plate; the crowd went into paroxysms of noise; and the ordinarily placid Raccoons, forgetful of their despair and doubts of a minute before, were yelling and throwing bats into the air in glee over the victory.

IN the lobby of the hotel that evening after the game, which proved to be the turning point of the season, the players were milling around, laughing and celebrating as if the pennant already was safe. Jack, in spite of the back-slappings and congratulations upon his pinch hit, was not happy.

He and I were sitting in a window-seat just off the lobby when Brother Bill came to the hotel. He spoke sulkily to several of the Raccoons who greeted him with ribald remarks about his luck, and when he came over to where Jack and I were sitting, Jack arose and put his great arm around the shoulders of the brother, with a touch of sentimentality unusual for him—at least unusual for him to reveal.

"Honest, Brother Bill," he said, "I'd have given my right arm to have you win that game—honest I would."

"Yes, I noticed it," said the boy sarcastically. "I noticed from the way you hit that one that you were trying hard to help me."

"But honest, Brother Bill, there wasn't a

damn' thing on that ball. It was right in the groove. I couldn't help busting it. Why didn't you put something on it?"

"I didn't try to put much on it. I figured you wouldn't bear down hard on your own brother."

Jack's face was a study of bewildered surprise and anger.

"You aint meanin' I ought to have struck out on purpose?" he asked slowly. "How do you get that way? I aint no crook!"

"It meant a lot to me," said the boy sulkily. "My girl was there—"

"Your girl? Your girl? That painted-up thing you came in with?" Jack's tone was mingled disbelief and indignation. "Your girl?" he repeated. "How about Mar—Miss Cohalon?"

"Oh, her? That's different. Marge is all right; but a girl to win me must have some pep and go to her."

BILL seemed unconscious of the tense emotion of his brother, whose big hands were opening and shutting, and who had gone white around the mouth.

"By God, don't you mention them two at the same time," he said. "You aint thinking of throwing her down?"

"There's no throw-down about it. Marge has no string on me. I never promised her anything."

"By God, Brother Bill, I wont stand for it," said Jack. "You can't get away with anything like that."

"It isn't my fault if she fell for me," said the boy complainingly. "Can't a fellow be friendly with a girl without having her think she owns him?"

"Not with her, you can't," said Jack. "You try throwing her down for that painted-up thing you brought to the game, and by God, brother or no brother, I'll bust you on the jaw! Marge is worth a hundred of that kind."

AT that instant I looked past Jack and saw Marge Cohalon just behind him. She had entered the alcove evidently to greet Bill and had overheard part of the talk. As she hesitated, undecided as to whether to flee or to speak, I strove to kick Jack on the shins to stop him.

"Thanks, Jack," said the girl, striving to appear casual. "I heard part of what you said. What was it about?"

Bill started, averted his eyes quickly, and I attempted to say something to relieve the situation as she looked inquiringly first at one, then at another of us. Big Jack choked a little and said with his usual bluntness when in a serious mood:

"I was telling Bill he couldn't get away with it."

"With what?" she asked, flushing a little.

"Tryin' to ditch you for that—that girl he had at the game," said Jack.

The girl stared an instant, seemed struggling to overcome her anger, and then suddenly burst into laughter. It was a minute before she could control her mirth, and during that time we three stood uneasily shifting our feet and embarrassedly waiting.

"I think I understand," she said, controlling her laughter. "You imagined that I cared for Bill, that he was planning to jilt me and you were going to force him to be faithful to me? Is that it?"

"Yes'm," said Jack, gulping.

"Thanks," she said. "But why don't you speak for yourself, John?"

"Huh?" said Jack, his jaw dropping and his eyes widening.

The girl flushed, laughed nervously and turned as if to flee.

"Huh?" he repeated. Suddenly he seized her arm and turned her face toward him. The girl, her sudden boldness gone, averted her eyes.

"Please, Jack," she said, half sobbing, "let me go. I didn't mean—"

"Marge," he said tensely. "Do you mean—"

SHE lifted her eyes to his and looked at him an instant without speaking. What he saw answered all the unspoken questions he wanted to ask.

"What a bonehead I am!" he said wonderingly. "I never suspected—"

His voice was throbbing with awe at what he thought a miracle, and suddenly, she was in his arms which closed around her and held her tightly.

"Beat it, you two," he ordered.

"Congratulations, John Alden Clancy," I managed to say.

He lifted his face and stared at me over her head.

"Say," he said accusingly, "you knowed this all the time! Why the hell didn't you wise me up? That was what you meant when you made me read that poem. I wish I hadn't been such a bonehead. But maybe it's just as well you didn't try to tell me. I'd have thought you was kidding and busted you on the jaw!"

HAMMER and TONGS

By

FORBES PARKHILL

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

Hard-rock men in action—there's a theme to test any writer and tempt any reader. We think you'll agree that this spirited novelette by the man who gave us "The Riddle of the Range-land" and "Nobody's Yes Man" is worth while indeed.

WHEN Ginger smacked big Hippo Strang alongside the jaw and knocked him off the quarter-finished dam into our baby reservoir, he started something!

For though the carrot-colored thatch Ginger hid beneath his narrow-brimmed engineer's hat branded him a good finisher, so too was Hippo, else he'd never have been junior partner of Starkey & Strang, contractors who'd built some of the West's greatest reclamation projects.

The instant I heard the sock that knocked Hippo for an unexpected bath, I grabbed up my tripod and started to hot-foot it for the battle-front, figuring the wiry little redhead might soon be in the way of needing reënforcements.

"Hi, you!" I heard Straw-boss Olaf shouting to his concrete gang. "Aint you seen super ban fall in water? Fish him out, you dom puddle-yumpers, or I ban heave you all in too, by goodness!"

The muckers dropped their shovels and leaped for the upstream face of the incompleted dam. But Ginger had beat 'em to it. The instant after he'd walloped the super, he was swinging out over the water, left foot in the snatch-block hook of Derrick Number Two, left hand grasping the cable, right hand giving the highball to lower away.

By the time I'd pushed through the gaping puddle-jumpers he was twisting his right hand in the coat-collar of the struggling Strang. A shout — a jerk — and a moment later the two were rising slowly toward the crest of the concrete.

The super, sputtering and dripping, was struggling in an attempt to get a grip on the hook, looking for all the world like a floundering trout that had guessed wrong in striking at an artificial fly.

The derrick boom swung over the dam. Ginger released his grip on Strang's collar. The super dropped in a heap on the rubble. But in an instant he was on his feet, facing Ginger as the little carrot-topped engineer slid down from the cable.

"Now," I told myself as I gripped the tripod tighter, "we're going to see a fight as is a *fight*. But if they gang up on him, they'll have the two of us to lick!"

But my hopes of seeing and maybe mixing in a beautiful scrap skidded and overturned on the dripping Strang's words. Instead of cordially inviting Ginger to step up and get his face busted in, he hesitated an instant, and then turned on the expectant gang of mud-slingers.

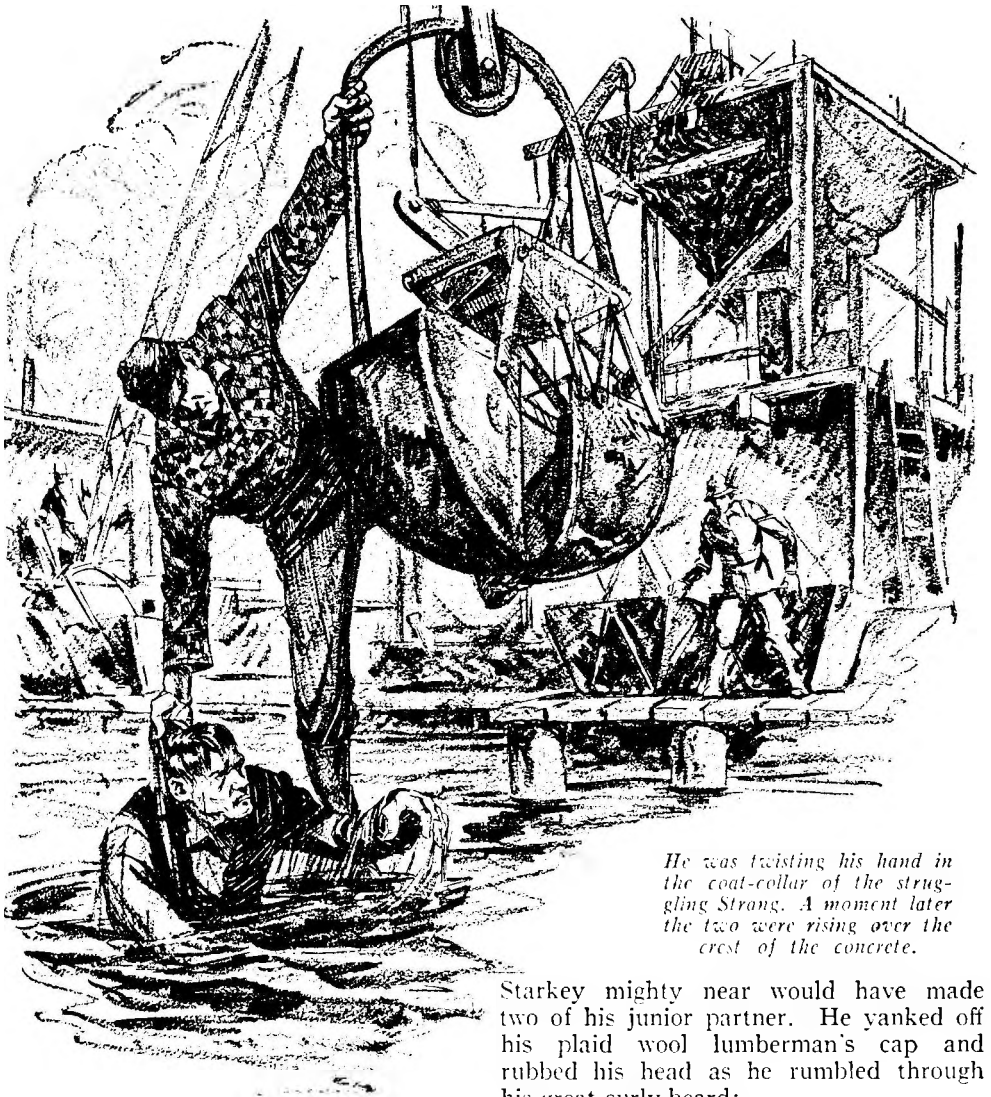
"Get back on the job!" he snapped. "Can't you see that mud's piling up so it'll never get spread?"

Olaf grabbed a shovel and shooed his gang back to work—or to such a semblance of work as you could expect from a crew expecting to see their big boss mix it with the engineer.

But the super turned and stuck out his hand.

"Ginger," he began, smiling wryly, like he'd bitten into a persimmon, "you've got an apology coming. But you must have got me wrong. I can see now how it might've sounded—well, kinda funny. But honest, I didn't mean it that way. I ought to have been more careful of what I was saying. Shake?"

Any shrimp the size of Ginger who'd wallop a giant like Hippo Strang must have had a pretty good reason. I was hoping he'd clout him again. That curly red



He was twisting his hand in the coat-collar of the struggling Strang. A moment later the two were rising over the crest of the concrete.

badge of courage he wore on his skull showed that, shrimp or not, he was willing to take any of 'em on, little or big, mucker or super.

But he reached forth his hand and shook.

"Yeah, Hippo," he agreed unsmilingly, "you should have been more careful of what you were saying—or maybe who you picked to say it to. I sure hope I got you wrong, because I'm not open to any such propositions. Now we understand each other, though, I guess we can forget it."

THAT was the moment Starkey chose to horn in. No one had seen him approach, though he lacked only a few yards of bulking as big as a house. Strang would have made two of Ginger, but Starkey mighty near would have made two of his junior partner. He yanked off his plaid wool lumberman's cap and rubbed his head as he rumbled through his great curly beard:

"Now, boys, what's all the fuss about? Don't you know it's bad for discipline to—"

"Ask Strang," Ginger interrupted curtly, turning his back on them and picking his way over to watch the concrete gang. Now the chance of seeing a fight had passed, the husky puddle-jumpers, like a pack of dogs with a pan of bones, were tearing into the pile of mud that had slid down the chute from the mixer.

And by turning, he missed the look Strang shot him—a look so malicious, so vindictive, that it sent the cold shivers chasing down my spine.

Not that he'd have cared a hang, for Ginger believed the bigger they come, the harder they crash. Hippo was big enough to have knocked Ginger galley-west, or farther, in a stand-up fight, whatever the

redhead thought of his own ability. But when he came back with a grin and an apology, and followed 'em up with an eyeful of hate like a dagger-thrust in the back, I knew he had something up his sleeve.

That's why I said Ginger started something when he cracked Hippo on the jaw. I never did find out what it was all about, for Ginger isn't the kind you can pump. But I can make a pretty good guess. And so could you, if Hippo'd slipped you a box of cigars, the way he'd done with me, and hinted that his boys had neglected to put the specified amount of cement in the concrete that day, and then asked you to overlook it.

I didn't hear whether Strang spilled the works to Starkey, because I tucked my tripod under my arm and beat it back to my own particular job of work. But I'll bet a month's pay against a slick dime that Starkey came pretty near learning what was what, because, clear up behind the construction shanty on the side of the gorge above the dam I could hear the rumbling voice of the senior partner as he handed Strang a sizzling cussing out.

Not that a lacing by Starkey necessarily meant much, because he was in the habit of cussing out anybody at any time that pleased him—that is, anybody but Ginger, and not excepting his own junior partner. Ginger was exempt because it hardly pays for a contractor to hand a verbal lambasting to the engineer whose approval is necessary to the acceptance of his work. It was Strang who was long on tact. Tact is the gift of gab that keeps your bread buttered on the right side. Both Starkey and Strang were well aware on which side their bread was buttered. Strang was the kind to try to wheedle or flatter or bribe you into spreading the butter extra thick. Starkey wouldn't trouble himself about such petty stuff, but if you didn't keep a peeled eye on him you were liable to find he'd swiped the whole butter-dish while you weren't looking.

Starkey and Strang were like the married couples you know who can't be happy unless they're quarreling. They seemed forever on the verge of blows, but between them they always managed to cop off a fat profit on every job they undertook—fatter, always, than had been contemplated by the party of the first part when the contract was let.

CYRUS turned the Euphrates from Babylon, and an empire fell and rose. But Ginger's job bade fair to make Cyrus' look like something the cat had dragged in. When it was finished, a brand-new empire would be born—a land of lusty towns, of green fields just beyond the backbone of the Rockies, where now was nothing but sagebrush barrens. Ginger was chief engineer in charge of building the Yore Cañon dam for the Vulcan Light & Power Company.

I guess old Cyrus had no soft snap. It was probably a real he-job he put across. But he didn't have to buck a couple of grafting contractors. Or if he did, he probably had a penalty clause in his contract so he could separate them from their heads if the job wasn't finished on time, or wasn't up to specifications. Besides, he had an army to back him up, which is a convenience Ginger lacked.

Ginger, now—he didn't have an army, but he did have a couple of cast-iron fists, a right forcible vocabulary, a jaw just the slightest bit undershot, and a brick-red head. And if I'd had to choose between 'em, I'd have let Cyrus keep his blamed army.

Doubtless Cyrus had his troubles too. But the old boy never had to worry about pouring concrete with the mercury trying to bust through the bottom of the thermometer, when the sand and the water had to be steam-heated, when the mud after it was poured had to be covered and coddled like a sleeping baby. Nor did he ever rave and cuss because a trainload of cement was stalled for a solid month in a mountain pass blocked by fifty feet of snow—or because a snowslide had swept away a huge chunk over which a fleet of trucks brought supplies from the railhead to the construction camp. At that, I figure the old gent must have done some tall Persian cussing off and on, because I never knew a man-size job that didn't need some fluent urging before it got done.

FLOODS? Well, maybe the Euphrates would go on an unexpected tear, now and then. I never knew a river that didn't. But for a real, honest-to-gosh flood, a roaring, ripping, tearing, smashing flood that sweeps everything before it, that sends a chill down your backbone, that throws the fear of Old Lady Nature into your soul, give me the old Grand River on a rampage in late May or early June!

That's just a taste of what Ginger was up against. You'll note it doesn't include accidents. Accidents happen on every job. But on the Yore Cañon project—boy, they crowded one another so fast it was positively uncanny!

Oh, I know what you'll say—that accidents don't happen; that they're caused, and caused usually by a bonehead play somewhere. Anyway, that's what the home office always thinks. And the engineer takes the fall, for he's the man on the job who's responsible. He's got to stand the gaff.

"But Ginger, he's a fool for luck, Colman," Gerald Whitley used to tell me after our little boss had pulled us out of some particularly sticky hole. Jerry and I made up Ginger's entire crew, and he staggered along manfully under title of "Inspector." Jerry was a likable kid, and barring the fact he lacked a chin you could notice, and wore balloon-tired specs, and liked to wear plus-four boy's pants, he was somewhat better than the run of the boys with a brand new sheepskin.

"Yes, but what kind of luck?" was my come-back. "We're eight days behind schedule, and it's a wonder we aren't a month behind, with all these accidents. When the boom of Number Four derrick swung around during the blizzard and swept that concrete mixer into the drink, I thought sure we were twenty-five per cent crippled until the pass was open and we could get us a new mixer. If Ginger hadn't dug up that rattletrap old mixer in Grubstake and patched it up—"

"Ginger's luck," grinned Jerry, sticking a tailor-made into his amber cigarette-holder.

"But things have been breaking against us too regular to lay it all to chance, Jerry." I puffed away on my blackened old garbage incinerator, laying down a counter-barrage against the smoke from his coffin nail. "You can always figure on a certain percent of accidents on a big job like this. But when they come in flocks, it's time to look a little bit out. Me, I'm keeping a weather eye on Messrs. Starkey and Strang."

"Strang's a snake," Jerry asserted dourly. "I crave the chance to hang the deadwood on him in one of his dirty deals. Man, if I ever get that baby dead to rights—"

Strang, I forgot to say, stood ace-high with Patricia, Jerry's sister, back in the land of luxury and limousines. And the idea of calling the super brother-in-law some day sort of stuck in Jerry's craw. Which may be the reason he singled Strang out of the partnership for his hymn of hate.

HUMAN nature! It's the berries. You think you've got it pegged for something with definite limits, something dependable, with a cause for every effect; a problem you can figure with a slide-rule, pick to pieces, reconstruct, and find a definite answer.

And then you get a job of work on some gigantic construction project like the Yore Cañon job, where human nature is reduced to its least common denominator, where you can study it in the raw, where the film of urban civilization is rubbed off. And *bam!* There go your old, cherished, carefully formed theories, rattling on the scrap-heap! And the more you see of it, the sooner you'll admit you know as much about human nature as a toad knows about trigonometry. Maybe less, if you're like me. But then, I'm pretty dumb, having dealt with transits and levels, theodolites, blueprints, and such things most of my life—things by which you can't measure and plot human nature.

Stand down there at the toe of the dam and look up to where the scurrying little figures are toiling beneath the gaunt skeletons of the derricks. Marvel, if you will, at the thousands of tons of concrete, of sand, of rubble, of steel that go into the making of this giant barrier against the forces of nature. Marvel at the number of acre feet of water in the mighty man-made lake the great arch will back up. Marvel at the thousands of horse-power the power-plant will develop, at the thousands of farms the reservoir will water, at the thousands of new homes it will create. Marvel at the millions of dollars the huge pile represents.

But by all means, don't stop there. How about the back-breaking toil that goes into that dam? How about the nerve, the stuff without which no great undertaking has ever been carried through to completion? As well try to make bricks without straw as try to build a dam without it! As well try to get along without the brains encased in that ginger-thatched skull up there in the tar-paper construction shanty!

A he job? You said it, buddy! None he-er! But don't ever get it into your nut that the Yore Cañon dam is a thing of concrete, rubble and steel alone. All *that* can be figured in sacks, in tons, in cubic yards. Do you know how many human lives such a he job costs? There, for instance, was Baerreson, who didn't jump quick enough when the rubble-laden clam-shell opened its jaws, and who was gathered up with shovels. And Moriarty, who failed to watch his step, who fell into the spillway tunnel and was found, minus the top of his skull, two miles downstream. Ludwig, the hard-rock man, who once too often warmed his frozen dynamite over a fire, and who simply vanished. Gonzales, who tripped over a cable and slid down the downstream face of the dam, and who lasted through four months of agony in a Denver hospital before he cashed in.

And not last, but most recent of all, on the very night after Ginger smacked the super off the dam into the water, was the mystifying murder of Strang himself.

CHAPTER II

BEFORE we go into the meager details of that murder, it will be necessary to take a slant at some of the characters who played leading or supporting parts in the swiftly moving drama upon which the curtain really rose that night Strang was slain.

Take Olaf, now. Nothing but a squarehead. Nothing but a straw boss. Dumb, you say. Maybe you'd say that after watching him scratch that great round blond block that rests between his immense shoulders while he chewed a stubby pencil and laboriously added a column of figures representing the day's empty cement sacks—a sum you could add in a moment.

But you wouldn't say it after seeing him leading his gang of roughneck puddle-jumpers, clumsy giants who can swing a shovel from daylight to dark, and have strength to spare for a fight in the bunkhouse after chow. Nor after feeling the mighty biceps of him, wondering at that great ham he calls a fist, hearing him cuss that gang of giants into line! Could *you* get the work Olaf gets out of that gang? Guess again, unless you're a born leader of men! Had Olaf left the old country just a little sooner, he might have been a contractor in his own right—and one whose spoken word you could tie to. Squarehead? Viking!

There wasn't an ounce of subtlety in Olaf. If he was for you, he was *for* you—till the concrete mixers had rattled their last rattle and the job was done. If he wasn't—well, like as not he'd give a gentle hint to that effect by working you over with a shovel. He could wield a shovel as his Norse forebears must have slung their battle-axes. And I'd as soon have been walloped with a battle-ax. His shovel could slice through a man's skull as neatly—but there was no indication Strang had been slain with a shovel. How could we tell, when his body vanished utterly, and there was no clew except the blood on the abutment behind the construction shanty?

Motive? Olaf admitted he hated Strang because the super had kicked one of Olaf's men. And manhandling the members of his gang was a privilege Olaf reserved for himself. You wouldn't have killed your boss over such an incident; nor would I; but Olaf—

And then too, Strang had ordered him to—but I'm getting ahead of the story.

By way of contrast, let's give Gerald Whitley the once-over. Jerry was a technical-school graduate, with a lot yet to learn. A nice kid, Jerry, but—well, the best way I can express it is to say his mamma must have been almighty good to him to have spoiled him so.

Now he was away from his mamma, out in the great big world, and forced to stand on his own hind-legs, he was sort of inclined to get on your nerves, now and then. Seems like he still expected to be coddled. A construction camp is a right good place to get such expectations knocked out of you. Already Jerry was getting his polish scratched up, and was developing a few rough edges, so I had hopes he'd turn out comparatively human before the job was done.

It's a dose that kills or cures, a job like that. At first I had a hunch it was going to break him, but now I was cherishing hopes it would make him. I hoped it would, 'cause Jerry was an awfully nice kid, in most ways. He'd give you the shirt off his back, if you needed it. His greatest weakness was—well, just weakness. One look at the spot where his chin should have been, and you had Jerry pegged. You'd never have to worry about

I was first on the spot after the murder—there was no clew except the blood on the rocky abutment.

turning in a third alarm because Jerry had set the world on fire.

I never doped it out why Ginger hired him. Ginger never talked about such things, and you couldn't pump him, but from a word or two Jerry let fall now and then, I judged they'd been schoolmates. Friendship never meant very much with Ginger on a big job like the Yore Cañon project when he had to deliver results. Friend or foe, they were all the same in his eyes if they could deliver in turn. Jerry, now friendship meant everything to him.

And *his* motive? Hadn't he bragged that he longed to get Strang dead to rights in one of his dirty deals? And it's a cinch he didn't crave to call the super brother-in-law some day.

NEXT we have Starkey. A tremendous hulk of a man. Bigger than Strang, bigger than Olaf. Folks liked to say he'd battered his way up from the obscurity of a laborer with his two great fists. But I don't believe that. Any time you figure Starkey as all beef and no brains, you've got another guess coming. Starkey knew his apples, else he'd never been the senior partner and dominating figure of *that* contracting combination.

For one thing, he had sense enough to realize his own shortcomings, which is a quality most lack. And from all accounts, he'd deliberately set out to acquire a partner who could make good these deficiencies. He'd lacked capital. Strang could provide moderate capital. He had a mind for the main chance. Strang was a bear for detail. He was a plunger, with a fine disregard for small savings. Strang was a penny-pincher supreme. Starkey was blunt in manner, direct in his thinking. Strang was tactful, shrewd. Starkey had difficulty in keeping a rein on his temper. Strang—well, you know how he acted after Ginger had whaled him off the dam.

Starkey possessed many of the qualities of a great man, a great leader. Strang had none of 'em. If Starkey'd had any sort of an ethical background, he might have—but then, there's no use milling over what might have been. His philosophy was summed up in phrase: "Anything goes, if you can get away with it." And this was his one point in common with Strang. It was the one weakness in a partnership where each supplied the deficiencies of the other. A grizzly and a weasel.

Starkey made little effort to conceal his contempt for the petty qualities of his partner. Strang, I think, hated Starkey because he realized that despite all his own tactfulness, all his insinuating, suave manner, Starkey was the better liked of the two.

Even though they were quarreling continually, they stuck together. Between them they had some mighty big projects to their credit, constructed well enough

to get by and to win them comfortable fortunes.

Seeing Starkey on the job, you'd never have sized him up as a rich man. His dress was little different from that of his bohunks, with his worn boots, shabby mackinaw and freak little plaid wool Scotch cap. Between jobs he was clean-shaven. But it was his custom to cease shaving on the day a contract was signed, and never touch a razor to his face until the job was done, be it three months or as many years.

I wish you could see him as I've seen him, standing on the highest section of the dam, legs braced against the wind, his great curly beard whipping about like a wind-torn thundercloud, bellowing profanity at some underling. And if he was worried, snatching off his plaid cap to rub his head vigorously.

Starkey's motive? Search me! I spent many an hour racking my brain for a motive, after that pistol-shot in the dark and the discovery of that mess of blood which was all that was left of Strang. I'd seen 'em quarrel so often, had my hopes of watching 'em actually tangle dashed so frequently, that I'd lost all confidence in their belligerent threats.

So far as I could see, Starkey had nothing to gain, and everything to lose, through his partner's death. Every penny of Strang's estate went to his kinsfolk. And Starkey lost a partner who had made up for his own deficiencies supremely well.

AND now we come to Ginger. Man, I wish you could know him! An ugly little devil, not much to look at with his carrot top, his freckles and his bull-terrier jaw.

A face that only a mother could love, you'd say—and I agree with you, if I didn't happen to know about Moyra, the little hasher with the chestnut bob, over at Grubstake, whose picture reposes in a silver frame in Ginger's battered suitcase.

Ginger looked about as big as a drink of water alongside Starkey or Olaf or Strang. Even Gerald had him topped by an inch. Little, but oh, my! And then some. Tiny, delicate-looking hands. But when they're balled up into fists, it's time to look a little bit out. The head of a compressed-air hammer is little, but oh, what a wallop it packs!

Ginger had a faculty for quietly doing the unexpected. Just because all other arch-type concrete dams in the world had been built thus and so, was no reason his should he. This Yore Cañon project was *his* baby. He was going to bring it up in the way he thought best, so it would be a credit to its daddy. And if the swivel-chair engineers down in Denver—or anyone else, for the matter of that—didn't like it, they could go jump in the lake!

No one else ever did Ginger's thinking for him. He'd had his periodical run-ins with the mahogany-desk boys down at the Vulcan headquarters, and it was never Ginger who'd come off second best. And every time *you'd* have a bright idea, you'd find he'd outthought you by about two laps.

You wouldn't think much of Ginger the first time you saw him. He never talked much with his mouth. He believed in saying it with concrete and steel. And that way was right convincing, if I do say it who's just admitted we were eight days behind schedule.

But if you'd worked alongside him as long as I had, if you'd spent weary days and nights trying to stand the pace he set, flopping into your bunk so dead tired you didn't care if you ever climbed out; if you'd watched him drive himself mercilessly until the hair at his temples turned gray and the worry-lines seamed his homely face; if you'd seen him spending his precious sleep hours watching as you tossed in your bunk with the flu; if you'd heard him lie to the dying bohunk whose wife had deserted him when the doctor had announced her man would be blind—then, brother, you'd agree with me that here was a man!

BUT they don't make 'em perfect. Ginger had his faults—faults that made you love him. For one thing, he was so darned square himself that he couldn't see the crookedness and the pettiness of the other fellow. And that, I think, was the real reason we were behind schedule, the reason I got the willies every time I studied the hydrographic charts, with their warning the flood period was appallingly near.

For another, he was a hog for responsibility. If Jerry or I pulled a boner,—oh, yes, the best of 'em do that now and then, even me.—it was Ginger who took the fall at the home office. He didn't know how to pass the buck. He was always fighting the powers that be in the Vulcan Corporation to allow him a free hand, and in return he insisted that he, and he alone.

should be held accountable for results. Believe me, when you're working under a baby like that, you'll bust a gallus before you'll make the same bull twice.

For a third, I always thought he was too much inclined to settle his difficulties with his own two fists. But I suppose that goes with red hair and an undershot jaw. I hold, now, that he showed poor judgment when he smacked Strang into the reservoir. But maybe that opinion's due to hindsight, because I know the grief that wallop fathered. Maybe if you or I had been in Ginger's boots, we'd have clouted Strang too. There are names that are fighting words, the world over. And there are men—*men*, I say—to whom an offer of a bribe is as great an insult. And I know darned well Strang was too astute to call Ginger out of his name.

So much for Ginger. His motive? I told you that in the first paragraph.

THERE you have the principal characters. Take 'em or leave 'em. Boo 'em or cheer 'em. None of 'em's all good, none all bad. I wish I could give you a dashing hero embodying all the virtues of a Lancelot. I wish we had a villain we could wither with righteous hate. But these folk are from real life, and in real life they don't make 'em that way.

Women? A construction camp's no place for a woman. And yet, somewhere in the background, there's always a woman behind every big job that's ever been accomplished. Women? By rights there's no place for a woman in this yarn. If I had my way, there'd be no woman's name in it, because once, years ago— But that has nothing to do with the story.

Yes, of course there's a woman in it. There's Moyra, the Grubstake hasher, whose picture Ginger packs around with him wherever he goes, in a silver frame. A girl with a lot of good, sound common sense, that, if she does serve 'em off the arm behind a lunch trough. And not only that; she's as sweet a little trick as ever you—but you'll have to form your own picture of her, so long as it's lovely and wholesome, including brown eyes and chestnut bob, because I'm no hand at describing she-folk.

And of course there's Jerry's sister Patricia,—he calls her Patsy for short,—but by rights she's just a voice from behind the scenes, for we never saw her at the Yore Cañon project.

And I come trailing along as a sort of postscript. I don't count. I've nothing to do with the yarn except to tell it. My title's chief inspector, but I'm also instrument man, draftsman, and general all-round right-hand man for Ginger.

And I was first on the spot after the murder, first to find the mess of blood on the rocky face of the abutment behind the construction shanty.

It was close to midnight when I heard the shot. We'd been working a night shift for more than a week, trying to catch up with that schedule. Ginger had left me in charge, saying he was going to deadhead it in to Grubstake on a cement truck for the evening to 'tend to a little business—business, I figured, that had to do with the little hasher with the chestnut bob.

For an hour I'd been chewing the rag with Strang himself in the tar-papered shanty. I'd left him there when I went down to make sure the night crew was fitting the copper expansion-joints properly.

I'd just started back when I heard the report. Sharp it came through the chilling night air, plainly audible above the singing of the wind through the derrick rigging, the creaking of the overhead tram, the chug of the compressor, the clanging of the concrete-mixers.

I didn't spot it as a pistol-shot, at first. Thought it might be backfire from one of the mixer motors, or maybe a rock high on the cliffs above us, splitting suddenly, as they often did on cold nights from the expansive force of water freezing after it had seeped into a crevice during the day. So I took my time, and it was five minutes later before I reached the shanty.

Strang was missing. I called him. No answer. Then I began to snoop around. Presently I found it—the splotch of blood on the abutment. Midway between the topmost mixer, idle at the time, and the deadman which anchored our end of the aërial tram. Even then it never occurred to me that murder had been done.

CHAPTER III

A MILLION or so years ago, the basin behind the Yore range was a vast inland sea. It had slopped over a shallow saddle in the mountain wall, giving birth to the great river that ever since has flowed a thousand miles down to the Pacific.

Age after age the water ate at the so'id

granite until, in the course of time, it had dug a course for itself more than a thousand feet deep, a giant spillway through a giant natural dam. Fed by the glaciers which cling to the Continental Divide, the river still flows, through the dry basin itself, through the giant spillway of the cañon, on through the sagebrush wastes beyond.

So the white man found it. He visioned the vast plain filled with cities and widespread farms where his children and his children's children might prosper and live content. All that was needed to make this dream come true was water. And in the stream was plenty of water rushing down to the sea, wasted.

The solution was simple. Rebuild Nature's dam, recreate the inland sea, and spread the water upon the land.

Simple? Sure, it was simple. Nothing to do but rebuild what it had taken Nature a million or so years to destroy. That was all Ginger's job amounted to. And he had two years in which to do it.

THE previous November had seen us starting on the diversion dam and the spillway tunnel. The diversion dam, a hundred yards upstream from the site of the main dam, was of rock and cribbing, forty feet high, and backing up a sizable pond itself.

From the top of this barrier a temporary steel flume spillway carried the water on a trestle overhead to a point below the damsite, thus left dry and free for work. Meanwhile, because underground work could be carried on as easily in winter as in summer, the hard-rock men had begun their spillway tunnel through the north abutment. Its lip was one hundred and eighty feet above the bed of the stream, and would be ten feet below the top of the finished dam.

Once the flume was in operation, the work of excavating for the base of the dam began. No pink-tea job, that, for it meant cutting through solid granite without the use of explosives, which might leave seams in the rock. And a single seam might later spell the destruction of the entire dam, once filled with water under such terrific pressure as the weight of our man-made sea would create. A study of hydrodynamics has taught me a wholesome respect for the power of little drops of water.

With the excavation completed, Ginger set broom crews at work, sweeping the dust and sand from the granite floor. And followed 'em up with the super-cleaners, the boys with the compressed-air hose, who blew out every last infinitesimal particle of dust and dirt, until the floor of that excavation was cleaner than the cleanest parlor floor that ever was! Never knew how infinitely much care was required in building a dam, did you?

Then along came a snowstorm—one thing we couldn't blame on Starkey and Strang—and all the cleaning had to be repeated. Which accounted for the first two days' delay.

The floor was smeared with a thin coat of stickum, to glue the concrete to the granite. And then the old concrete mixers tuned up for their two-year grind, the derricks began to creak, and the job was under way in earnest.

After that, the cacophony of the mixers never ceased. All the concrete in the world seemed to come slithering down the chutes for the mixing of the gigantic plum pudding calculated to give Old Lady Nature considerable discomfort to digest. The plums were granite cobble rocks, big as a man could lift. The seasoning was sand.

Section by section the great arch began to rise. Three diversion tunnels were left, for the time when the temporary flume could be used no longer, when the water must pass through the growing dam instead of overhead. Derricks were transferred from the floor of the gorge to the top of the dam itself.

Can you picture the forest of masts and booms atop the stepped sections, the network of ropes and cables and chutes, the aërial tram overhead? Can you hear the clanking and churning of the mixers, the plugging of the compressor, the rattle and clang of the clamshell, the rumble of falling rubble, the swish of the sliding mud, and above it all the roaring of old Olaf's bull voice as he urges his gang profanely to still greater effort? Can you see the little redhead, leaning against the wind as he bosses the job; here, there, everywhere, a dynamic little bundle of energy?

Presently every section but one was above the level of the steel flume, which now, instead of being overhead, passed through the dam itself. The contractors began pleading with Ginger to cut the diversion dam, to let the water in against the concrete. Their sand-pits and quarry were a thousand yards upstream, and it would be considerably cheaper to float the

sand and rubble to the job on barges than to truck it in.

So at length the cribbing was cut, and the water began to rise behind the concrete barrier. The flume was discarded; the gap through which it had passed was closed. Barges bore their burdens to the face of the dam, often through lanes in the ice, to be unloaded by the greedy clam-shell.

Winter lingers long in such altitudes. It was late April before the snow began to disappear from the south slopes of the mountains, before the ice ceased to form on the baby reservoir.

MAY saw the main range far to the east still blanketed in white. But the water in the reservoir began to rise, and Ginger began to spend more time with his hydrographic charts. Nothing alarming—yet. The diversion tunnels could almost take care of the excess. The surface of the water was still twenty feet below the lowest step in the dam.

Ginger believed in playing it safe. One section was always kept considerably lower than the others, in case of flood. A fool idea, you say? Why didn't he fill it in, to gain every last inch of height?

Simply because the green concrete of the upper sections couldn't withstand the enormous pressure of the reservoir at flood stage. Better to let the water pour through this spillway gap, carrying away the superstructure and a derrick or so, than to take the chance of it sweeping the entire top off the dam.

The night shift had been established just as soon as it appeared that winter had departed definitely. Thrice in the twenty-one years recorded on the Government hydrographic charts the river had reached the peak of its flood-stage as early as the last week in May. Which allowed us, at the time Strang was murdered, just five days before we reached the danger line. And with a night shift at work, considerable could be accomplished in five working days—and nights.

As it was, I didn't think we had much cause to worry. The little peaks on the charts showed we already were in shape to withstand any ordinary flood. Not since the chart of the ninth year before, had the flood-peak shot up to a point that spelled peril for us if repeated—and that had been in the middle of June. . . . .

It had been drizzling when I left Strang there in the construction shanty, up on the north abutment, overlooking the dam. Just a gentle drizzle—not enough to wash away the mess of blood, but enough to make the granite slippery, the footing uncertain.

My first thought was that Strang had skidded off the abutment. The walls of the gorge were not perpendicular, but were so steep that anyone who didn't watch his step might easily take a nasty slide once he went over the edge of the broad, flat shelf on which the shanty was built. Farther down the trail to the construction camp the gorge wall was straight up-and-down, so you could toss a pebble and see it strike the water two hundred feet straight below.

I called Strang's name again, and then bellowed to the night straw-boss that the super had fallen down the slope, and directed him to send a man to search the gorge below the dam.

And then I realized how silly my theory was. If Strang had gone over the edge, quite naturally there would have been no bloodstain on the shelf itself, behind the shanty and some twenty feet from the brink.

Unless—and this thought was born of the sudden remembrance of the sharp report—unless he had been hurled over! The possibility brought me up with a jolt. It was my first suspicion of foul play. If he had been shot during a desperate struggle behind the shanty, and his slayer had dragged his body to the edge of the shelf and had rolled it over—

I ran back to the spot where I had found the splotch of blood. I dropped to my knees, searching for marks which would tell me what had happened. But the floor of the shelf was either smooth rock, or coarse, disintegrated granite — nothing that would retain a footprint. I cast about in search of the weapon which I was sure, now, had been used to fire that single shot I at first had believed the backfire of a mixer motor. Nowhere within the dim radiance of the arc lamps above the dam was there any trace of a weapon. Nothing but that spreading bloodstain. I rose to my feet, half ashamed of the agitation which was causing my breath to come in short gasps.

STRANG murdered? Why, the thought was absurd! Who should murder the super? And why? He'd turn up presently, safe and sound, and I'd be the laughing-

stock of the camp for my fears! I told myself too much work was making my nerves jumpy. In an effort to quiet them I drew out my pipe and loaded it. But my fingers were shaking as I shielded the match from the drizzle with cupped hands.

Why, Strang undoubtedly had headed back down the trail to the construction camp after I'd left him, and probably was turning into his bunk, safe and sound, right now!

But I couldn't kid myself into accepting such an explanation. I was worried. How about the mess of blood back there behind the shanty? Nosebleed? Maybe. But how about the pistol shot? If the near-by mixer had been in operation, that would have accounted for it. But the nearest mixers now working were down on the dam itself. Surely I couldn't have mistaken the backfire from a motor down there for a pistol-shot up on the abutment!

I decided to play it safe. If it turned out something *had* happened to Strang, and I'd done nothing, I'd be pegged for a boob, besides having a load on my conscience. So I yelled down to the straw-boss to send me up a man.

"You go to Strang's shack," I told the fellow when, panting, he reached the shanty. "If he's there, tell him—tell him I was worried about him because he pulled out without telling me, and just wanted to be sure he was all right.

"If he isn't there, you rouse Starkey, and send him up here on the double-quick. And then go to Ginger's shack, and send him here too. If he isn't there, wait till he comes. Savvy?"

And then I sat down to reason things out. Had Strang met with an accident? I could picture no sort of an accident that would account for that blood, and the disappearance of Strang himself—or his body.

"All right, then, let's assume it's murder," I argued with myself. "Let's say some one was laying for him, and drilled him as he stepped outside the shanty and started back to camp. What would the murderer do after he'd shot him? What would *I* do if I were in his place? I know well enough that my first impulse would be to beat it away from there without wasting any time.

"But he must have had presence of mind enough to realize the importance of getting rid of the evidence of the crime. He knew the construction shanty had concealed the actual murder from the workmen on the dam below. Chances are he peered out and saw none of us had been attracted by the pistol shot. So then he cast about for some way to make it appear Strang had died an accidental death.

"The easiest way would be to heave the body over the edge and let it slide down to the bottom of the gorge. But if he'd done that, the searcher I sent out would have found the body by this time. Nope; I'll have to guess again.

"Let's see: I've got it! He lugged the body down the trail to the jumping-off place, and threw it over there. It would drop into the river, and if it's ever found, it will be miles below. And when, or if, it is found, it will be so battered that no one can ever say definitely that a bullet-wound caused death!"

Mentally slapping myself on the back, I started for the trail to the construction camp. But I hadn't take a dozen steps when I hesitated, turned, and hurried back to the shanty. Inside, I reached in the discarded starch-box under the drafting-table and drew forth the blunt blue automatic we kept there for just such emergencies—kept there at my suggestion, for Ginger had a horror of firearms, preferring to settle personal difficulties with his fists.

I thrust it into my pocket, and as hastily drew it forth again as another idea flashed through my brain. I examined it carefully, made sure it contained a full clip of cartridges, and sniffed of the barrel to make sure it had not been fired recently. No, it was a cinch *that* wasn't the weapon I'd heard.

THERE'S something mighty comfortable about the feeling of an automatic pistol in your pocket, especially when you're heading down the trail into the darkness in search of a murderer. I kept my fingers gripped about it, although I was reasonably sure the slayer was hitting the high places in an effort to get away from there.

When I reached the spot on the trail where the side of the gorge fell away perpendicularly to the rushing waters, I halted. Pistol in my right hand, with my left I played the beam of the electric torch which was part of my night-shift equipment on the trail and the brink. What I'd expected to find wasn't clear in my mind but I found nothing. No drops of blood, no telltale footprints.

"What's the big idea of scaring a fellow to death?"

As I stood there, racking my befuddled brain, my ears caught the sound of approaching footsteps. I snapped off the light and shrank back against the granite wall.

They were quick, nervous footsteps, as of some one in a hurry, who dared not proceed faster in the darkness over so perilous a trail. I could imagine him keeping one hand on the granite wall on the inside of the trail for guidance. I hoped he hadn't seen the glow of my torch around the shoulder of rock which had separated us when first I'd heard the sound of his approach.

And then the figure appeared, a mere deepening of the shadow, barely discernible. I leveled the pistol, at the same instant pressing the button of the torch.

It was Jerry Whitley. He halted, startled, uncertain. One hand reached beneath the tail of his sheep-lined coat. I thought he was bluffing, for I knew he'd never packed a gun.

"Oh, it's you, Jerry," I said, speaking for the first time, and shoved my pistol in my pocket. "I thought you were in your bunk, pounding your ear. Can't you find enough work up here on your own day shift, without coming back again at night?"

"What's the big idea of scaring a fellow to death?" he countered, without answering my question. I detected a distinct unsteadiness in his voice. He was breathing heavily. I think it was the only time I'd ever seen him without his balloon-tired specs. In the beam from the electric torch, his face seemed almost ashen.

CHAPTER IV

"WHERE'S Strang?" I shot at him suddenly. "Have you seen him down at the camp?"

"I should bother about Strang!" he retorted. "If he isn't up here on the job, he's probably down in his shack, figuring on how he can gyp us out of a few sacks of cement. Personally, I'm sorry Ginger ever fished him out of the lake, Colman. Say, what do you do when you can't sleep—"

"Strang's vanished," I cut in sharply as we started back toward the dam. "He—"

"Good!" Jerry exclaimed. His voice was steadier now. "If he'll only stay—"

"It's nothing to kid about, Jerry. The man may be—murdered."

He was silent while we strode perhaps a dozen paces. I wished I could have seen his face. At length he said, softly and yet with a peculiar grating note:

"And you—you thought I was the murderer!"

"We-ell, not exactly, but—"

"You knew I detested him, knew I lived in the hope he'd choke. And you're wondering what I'm doing here at this time of night, when I ought to be in my bunk, pounding my ear."

"Oh, things haven't come to that point yet, Jerry. I don't even know he's murdered. Maybe I'm making a fool of myself, going off half-cocked. All I know is that he vanished, and there's a pool of blood—"

"If you haven't suspected me, Colman, you're dumber than I thought. It's a cinch some one's going to suspect me. And here I am, with a first-class motive and no alibi. No one would ever believe—"

He broke off suddenly. We were almost back to the construction shanty when he blurted out shortly:

"Tell me what happened, Colman."

"I'll do better than that. I'll show you." And when we reached the spot behind the shanty, I pressed the button on the torch and showed him the mess of blood between the tram deadman and the top mixer.

"I left him in the shanty, Jerry. I heard a shot, but thought it was a mixer motor backfiring. When I came back, I found—this. That's all."

"Except that you found me up here, where I had no business to be at night," he added.

I HAD no time to reply, for Starkey showed up at that moment. He was wearing a slicker, but it was open in front, revealing his nightshirt inside the unbuttoned throat of his lumberjack shirt. His boots were not laced, but the leather thongs had been tied hastily about their tops. You probably know how much time anyone can waste lacing a pair of high, mountain boots.

It was the first time I'd ever seen him without his freak little plaid wool Scotch cap. He was wearing an old slouch felt hat, limp and glistening in the rain.

"Well, what's the difficulty?" he boomed in his deep, rumbling voice. "The man said you wanted me—in a hurry. Where's Strang?"

"Didn't he show up at your shack awhile ago?" I asked. Starkey and Strang bunked together in a tar-paper shanty, but took their meals, like the rest of us, in the company mess shack.

"Hadn't shown up, up to the time I left," Starkey rumbled. "What's the trouble?"

I told him, just as I'd told Jerry. I showed him the pool of blood, dissolving now in the rain.

"Humph!" he grunted. "I don't believe anything's happened to Strang. He's too ornery, he is. What have you done about it so far?"

He was inclined to treat the whole matter lightly. However, he bellowed down to the night straw-boss of the concrete crew, and pulled half the gang off the job and sent them down both banks of the stream with torches.

"Just to be on the safe side," he explained. "We can't spare the men, for the Lord knows we're far enough behind our schedule now. But when Strang turns up, I'll make him pay out of his own pocket whatever we'll lose by this wild-goose chase."

AFTER the search-party had gone, we went inside the construction shanty, where he had me go over everything in minute detail while he stood, feet wide apart before the stove, rubbing his huge head now and again with the palm of his hand as he shot questions at me. It was little enough I could tell him. Jerry, perched on the stool at the drafting table, said nothing until at length Starkey turned on him and boomed:

"And what were *you* doing up here? I thought you were on the day shift."

Jerry stared at him evenly, and replied in a low, steady voice:

"I couldn't sleep. Everyone at camp was asleep, so I started up to the dam to chew the rag with Colman."

And then Ginger showed up, with the messenger I'd dispatched to camp. And I went over the whole thing again. Ginger was all slicked up, wearing a clean flannel shirt and new whipcord breeches. Which was good enough evidence for me that his business in Grubstake that evening had been with the little hasher with the chestnut bob. I could see the muscles of his lean jaw tightening as I repeated my story. Unlike Starkey, he expressed no opinion.

"Where's the gun that was in the construction shanty?" was his first question.

I drew it from my pocket and handed

it to him, explaining how it came to be in my possession. He removed the clip of cartridges, and examined the chamber. Then, without comment, he returned it to the starch-box under the drafting-table.

"What have you done to locate Strang?" he snapped.

I told him. He nodded, and turned to the table. He picked up one of the hydrographic charts and began studying it.

Starkey was teetering on heels and toes, watching him. He grinned through his curly beard, and remarked:

"Looks like Colman's sort of jumped at conclusions, doesn't it? Strang will get a big kick out of this when he turns up."

"Colman did just right," Ginger came back without looking up from the chart. I wished I knew whether he really meant it. But I knew he'd back me up before outsiders, no matter what I'd done. If he had any fault to find with the way I'd handled things, he'd tell me when no one else was present. It was a way he had—a way that put him in mighty solid with whoever worked under him.

Starkey's brows lifted. "Then you really think Strang was murdered?"

Ginger frowned as if he were annoyed. "What does it matter what I think? One man's guess is as good as another's until Strang—or his body—is found. The only logical thing for Colman to have done was what he did—assume Strang was murdered, and act accordingly." He went right on studying the chart.

"It don't seem to worry you much," Starkey hazarded.

"Why should it?" Ginger retorted, frowning. "Everything's been done that could have been done. I've got more important things to think about. If this rain keeps up—"

"Don't you think we'd better notify the authorities?"

Ginger rolled up the chart, snapped a rubber band about it, dropped it on the table, and tamped the tobacco in his pipe with his thumb.

"Nope," he responded. "Not unless the searchers find Strang's body. If they don't find him, and if he don't turn up by morning, then I'll phone the Sheriff."

STARKEY'S manner suddenly changed. It wasn't exactly antagonistic to the little redhead. But the contractor seemed to be asserting himself more than I'd ever seen him in the presence of the engineer.

"Listen, Ginger," he rumbled. "I want you to understand that I don't believe for a minute that Strang's been murdered. But if it turns out that he is, I want everyone to know I'll spend my last penny to bring his murderer to justice. You may have more important things to think about. But Strang was my partner. I'm ready to go the limit."

"If it's raining like this up on the headwaters, we aren't going to have much time to think about anything but the dam," Ginger remarked. Then he turned to me. "Colman, let's mosey down below and see how high the water's risen."

"Me, I'm going to stay here until I get some word of Strang," Starkey announced.

Jerry arose, wordlessly, and fell in behind us as we passed through the door.

"Why couldn't you sleep, Jerry?" Ginger asked quietly as we began to pick our way down the slope toward the first deck of the dam.

"The rain," Jerry answered. "I kept worrying. I was scared—scared something might happen to the dam. I kept picturing floodwaters ripping away the green concrete, sweeping away the whole—but that's foolish. I was just nervous, I guess. Couldn't keep away from the job when I thought I might be needed. Nobody'd believe that, of course."

"Of course not," Ginger agreed, to my surprise. "Now, Jerry, supposing you killed Strang—tangled with him back of the construction shanty, and shot him. What would be the next thing you'd do?"

I gasped. Did Ginger think Jerry had murdered the super? Was he trying to bluff a confession out of him?

Some thought akin to mine must have occurred to Jerry, which was only quite natural, in view of Ginger's blunt query. He swallowed once or twice, and then said, with an effort:

"I don't blame you for thinking I did it, Boss, but—"

"Don't be a damned fool," Ginger interrupted sharply. "I'm only asking you a—a hypothetical question."

"I—I'd try to get rid of the body, I think," Jerry replied, his voice tinged with suspicion.

"How?" Ginger demanded.

"Well, Boss, Colman figures the body was carried back down to trail, and heaved

into the stream at the jumping-off place, but—"

"But anyone carrying a body down the trail would be visible to the workmen on the dam, wouldn't he? At least so long as he was within range of the lamp in front of the construction shanty?"

Jerry nodded. I'd never thought of that.

"He could have rolled the body down the slope, to make it appear like an accident," Jerry went on, uncertainly.

"Not with a bullet-hole in the body to prove it was murder," said Ginger dryly. "Jerry, I'm asking you—what would *you* have done to get rid of the body?"

JERRY hesitated. I'll bet my paycheck he was mightily worried, wondering what Ginger was driving at.

"I—I think I'd—think I'd have taken the body—and dumped it into the chute leading from that concrete mixer," he finally blurted. "I—I could have kept the mixer between me and—and the workmen on the dam.

"It—the body, would have slid down to that empty section, where no one's at work. The mixer was idle. So I could have gotten away with it, that far.

"Then I could have sneaked down later, while attention was focused up at the scene of the killing, and could have got rid of the body. Shoved it into the reservoir, or into the stream below the dam."

Ginger grinned. I'd thought he'd acted pretty callous and hard-boiled when he'd told Starkey he had something more important to worry about than the murder of Strang. It wasn't like him, even though he'd hated Strang from his sneaking feet to his oily tongue.

"Good!" he commented. "I wondered if anyone else had thought of that. Then you figure we might find Strang's body in that empty section?"

"No-o," replied Jerry slowly. "If my theory's right, the body was disposed of, long before this."

"Suppose we take a look," Ginger suggested.

I PUT in my oar with the recommendation that perhaps it wouldn't be wise for all three of us to be seen heading straight for the section where we believed the body might lie, and that consequently two of us might better proceed to the section where the mud gang was at work while the third made the investigation. Ginger O. K.'d the suggestion, and appointed me to do the snooping.

You must understand that a concrete dam of the arch type is almost always built in sections. The width of the sections is governed by the distance between the copper expansion joints. Frequently, but not always, the sections rise one by one from the center of the dam in each direction toward the respective abutments, like steps of a stair. This permits a mixer and its crew to be at work on one section while the concrete of that particular step is setting, chuting the mud down to the next section below, where it is spread by the puddle-jumpers.

In the case of the Yore Cañon dam, the sections did not rise as steps in perfect echelon. One section near the center rose higher than those on either flank, and on the side nearest the construction shanty the surfaces of three sections were virtually on the same level. Wooden forms inclosed three sides of the section nearest the shanty, preparatory to filling it with concrete. It was into this section that the chute from the mixer on the abutment led.

Clear across the downstream face of the dam a permanent walk already had been constructed on a level with the valve-house. For convenience, nearly everyone used this walk in preference to climbing over the uneven sections of the dam. As the walk was some eight feet lower than the bottom of the section which was my goal, it would have been easily possible for a body to have lain beneath the chute for hours, unnoticed.

I confess my nerves were on edge as I lingered in the shadow, watching Ginger and Jerry proceed down the walk toward the valve-house. I climbed to the surface of the adjoining section, and strolled over to the upstream face, as if I were gauging the rise of the water. Here I was in plain view beneath the rays of an arc-lamp. Then I sauntered back into the shadow, and began to climb the corner of the section form. My heart was pounding wildly. I fully expected to find the body of Strang. I was wondering what I should do when I found it. Sound an alarm, or merely return and notify Ginger? I decided the latter course to be the better.

I squirmed over the edge of the form,

and dropped inside. Most of the section, inclosed on three sides by wooden forms and on the fourth by the side of the adjoining section, was brilliantly lighted by the arc-lamp. A strip along the inner wall, however, was in deep shadow. I remember speculating as to how anyone, if Jerry's theory were true, could remove a limp human body from the section to cast it either into the reservoir or into the stream below the dam. It would be a tough job to lift a human body over the edge of the wooden form, I decided, although Starkey or Olaf might accomplish it.

My first glance revealed nothing. I shot the beam of my torch into the shadow. And my eye fell upon—not a human form, but an automatic pistol!

Before I touched it, I made sure there was nothing else within the section inclosure. Then I picked it up and examined it. It had been fired once, and recently. With a shock I recognized it as the property of Ginger—Ginger, who believed in settling his differences with his fists, but who nevertheless had kept the pistol, unused until that night, in a drawer in our shanty at the construction camp!

CHAPTER V

GINGER'S dam was being built between the great pinnacles of granite which formed the gateway to Yore Cañon. Immediately above the dam the Cañon opened out abruptly, giving way to a broad mountain park which once had been the bed of the inland sea. A good portion of this basin would be covered by the waters of our reservoir when the dam was finished.

The timber which had blanketed most of the park had been burned over for the greater part of the reservoir area. However, it was up to Starkey and Strang, under the firm's contract, to clear the timber from the reservoir site. On that portion which had been swept by fire their crews had cut the charred boles and had burnt them. In the area which hadn't been swept by fire, they had established a one-horse logging camp and sawmill, the source of the lumber used in building the construction camp and the concrete forms for the dam. The contract called for the destruction by fire of all slashings and wastage from the mill, so the outlet tunnels would not become clogged by a mass of floating débris. The mouths of these tunnels through the dam were protected further by trash rack gratings constructed of steel rails. Despite every precaution, however, a certain amount of débris was inevitable, and it was inevitable also that this flotsam should collect at the mouths of the outlet tunnels.

With the flood season approaching, Ginger had seen to it that the trash rack gratings were kept free of débris, for with the outlet tunnels blocked, the results might be disastrous. This became an increasingly difficult task as the flood season neared, for the faster the water rose in the reservoir, the more débris floated down against the face of the dam.

Grubstake, our railhead and supply depot, was just over the hill from the farther end of the reservoir. Supplies were trucked from the town over a road which circled one side of the basin, skirting the high-water mark of the finished reservoir.

Below the dam the Cañon extended, sheer of walls and forbidding, some six or seven miles until, having sliced through the Yore range, it opened out again to form another park of vaster proportions than that which formed the reservoir basin. This park, which was to be watered by the reservoir, consisted of broad sagebrush flats. These flats were rapidly filling with homeseekers, awaiting the moment when the water would be turned upon their land.

But if the old river went on another rampage, if the dam failed to hold against the pressure of the water impounded behind it, then these folk would be plumb out of luck. Hundreds of homes would be swept away. Hundreds of lives would be lost if the dam failed and the impounded waters suddenly swept down the gorge and burst out upon the flats below. Lives and property wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel. So it wasn't any wonder Ginger's hair was getting streaked with gray. Enough responsibility was piled on his shoulders without shouldering the burden of the investigation of Strang's murder.

I wouldn't have blamed him if he'd been in earnest when he'd told Starkey he had more important things to worry about. After all, where was the urgency of solving the slaying, as weighed against the vital importance of guarding the lives of the sod-busters down there on the flats, with their patient womenfolk and dirty, happy kids? Nothing could bring the dead super back to life.

UP to the moment I discovered Ginger's automatic beneath the concrete chute, it had never entered my mind to suspect him of the killing. I was ashamed of the suspicion then, and tried my level best to banish it. But there was the pistol—Ginger's, beyond a doubt.

"Well," I told myself, "if Ginger wanted to croak the super, it's none of my lookout. I'll just heave it into the river, and keep my lip buttoned tight."

I drew back my arm to let it fly, and then another thought struck me. If Ginger had been the one who bumped the super off, why had he deliberately led Jerry into proclaiming the theory that had resulted in the discovery of the gat? If he were the murderer, wouldn't he be the last one to stir up a search that would reveal the weapon and fasten suspicion on himself?

No: there was something phony about it all. I figured the best thing to do would be to turn it over to Ginger himself. If he wanted to toss the automatic into the river, I'd be perfectly willing to keep my trap shut about it. Maybe you can't see it that way, but if you'd worked with the little redhead as long as I have, you'd stand ready to do more than that for him.

So I shinned back up over the concrete form with the gun in my pocket.

"What luck?" asked Ginger tersely. Jerry simply stared.

I motioned them into the seclusion of the valve-house. There I drew the weapon forth and held it out to him, without a word.

I thought he turned a shade paler under his freckles. He recognized it, all right; I could tell that by his expression. He took it, and examined it carefully.

"You found this—back there?" he asked. I nodded.

"And you saw nothing of the body?" I shook my head.

His next question took in both Jerry and me.

"You boys know that it's—it's mine?"

I shot Jerry a meaning look.

"We never saw it before, Boss. Did we, Jerry? Heave it into the river, Boss, and we'll forget we've ever seen it."

The shadow of a smile crinkled the corners of his eyes, but an instant later had vanished. For a long time he stood there, staring vacantly at the weapon.

"Thanks, boys," he acknowledged at length. "I—I rather think I'll take you up on that. For a while, anyway."

His acquiescence came as a shock to me. Subconsciously, I'd been prepared for a heated refusal. It seemed more in keeping with Ginger's character as I had come to know it, for him to reject such a proposal, although I hadn't thought it out that way and had made the offer in good faith. At the moment it seemed, somehow, a confession of guilt. Why should an innocent man strive to cover up?

I turned to Jerry. "Remember, we've never laid eyes on that gun. Understand?" Jerry nodded without speaking.

"But," Ginger went on, "I'm not going to chuck the gun into the river. I'm going to keep it. And when the time comes, I'll produce it. I wish you'd both look it over carefully, and be prepared to say whether it's in exactly the same condition when I *do* produce it, as it is now."

That's all he had to say. No explanation of how his automatic had come to be found at the bottom of the chute. No denial of the murder of Strang, although he must have known what Jerry and I were thinking. It was such damning evidence against him that he couldn't but know our suspicions had been aroused. And coming on its heels, his plea to us to keep it dark seemed the clinching evidence.

"Let's take a look at the water-gauge," Ginger suggested, as if the incident of the pistol were ended. He led the way out of the valve-house and up onto the floor of the lowest section—the section which would become a temporary spillway in case of a sizable flood. The level of the water in the reservoir was still a good eight feet below the floor of the section.

GINGER eyed the gauge as if it were the only thing that mattered—as if he'd never had a thought of the murder to trouble him.

"If she keeps rising at this rate," he speculated, fingers stroking his lean, freckled face nervously, "we'll have our work cut out for us within the next eighteen hours. Colman, I'll take over your shift for the rest of the night. You and Jerry had better go back to camp and load up on sleep. Unless I miss my guess, we're all going to be on duty after daybreak until further notice. And that may mean anything up to a week or more."

"But you've had no rest," I protested "You need the sleep more'n—"

"And I can't sleep anyway," Jerry chimed in at almost the same instant.

Ginger gave us one sour look, and turned his back on us. From which we knew his decision was final. You couldn't argue with the little cuss. When he made up his mind, that was all there was to it. It was raining pretty hard by this time. Chances were it was raining a darned sight harder up on the headwaters of the Grand, he asked me where I was going. I told him you'd sent me for the chief engineer too.

"So then I went over to your place, sir, and knocked. There wasn't any answer. So I set down on the steps to wait, like you said, sir. It wasn't five minutes before Ginger—before the chief engineer showed up, sir. He came up the road from Grub-

"Heard you done had some trouble up here," the Sheriff announced.

because it most always does. I knew there wasn't much to be done to prepare for a flood, other than to keep the trash-racks clear. Still, I hated like thunder to go back to camp with everything breaking all at once, so to speak. I craved to stay on the job, both on account of the rising water, and because I wanted to see what the night would bring forth concerning the murder of Strang. But orders were orders.

The night gang was just finishing its section as we passed, Jerry and I. I called aside the fellow I had sent to camp to summon Starkey and Ginger, and directed him to tell me just what had happened.

"Well, sir," he said, leaning back on the handle of his shovel, "I went first to the bosses' shack, and knocked. Mr. Starkey come to the door in his night-shirt. I ast for Mr. Strang, like you said, sir. He said Strang wasn't there. Then I told him you wanted to see him up at the dam right away. I started away, and stake way in an empty cement truck. So I gave him your message, sir, and that was all there was to it."

"And you came back to the dam with him? And you didn't see anybody else?"

"Nobody else, sir—except Olaf."

"Olaf! Where did you see him?"

"Down by the main bunkhouse, sir. He seemed to be in a hurry, sir, so I didn't stop him. He went into the bunkhouse, and that was the last I seen of him."

"Had he come from the direction of the dam, or from town?"

"That I couldn't say, sir. There are quite a few buildings there, and I didn't see him until he almost reached the door."

"Did he slam the door, going in?"

"Why, no, he didn't. A feller wouldn't wanta wake up the men in the bunkhouse, would he? He was quiet, like anybody would of been while a shift was sleeping."

"And you're sure you didn't see a soul besides those three?"

"Why, yes sir." The fellow nodded at Jerry. "I passed Mr. Whitley here on the trail to camp, just after I left the dam. I said 'Howdy,' and he just grunted, and we both went on. I didn't see anybody else, far's I remember."

I CUT my questioning short as I saw Ginger approaching. He called the night straw-boss, and I heard him give orders to start work on another section—the section in which I'd discovered his automatic.

The roar of the water rushing through the outlet tunnels seemed magnified as the mixer shut down and its crew prepared to switch to the one up by the construction shanty. A derrick creaked, and the aërial tram shrieked as we climbed down to the railed walk near the valve-house. The clam-shell clanged and clattered eerily as it dumped its last load of rock plums on the section just above the one I had searched for the body. Before I returned after daybreak, the remaining half of the crew, I knew, would have mixed another section of their concrete pudding. A man with imagination could never work on such a crew. No sooner was one section filled than another empty form was ready and waiting hungrily, another heap of cobble plums lay before the gang. Always, until the last form was laid almost two years hence, they were doomed to be one lap behind.

I had expected to find Starkey pacing up and down in the construction shanty, rubbing his head and perhaps emitting rumbling curses like a smoldering volcano. But we met him coming down the slope, his slicker snapped close around him, his high boots laced, now.

"Damn' if I can sit up there doing nothing," he announced as we met. "Waiting's the hardest job in the world. I'd have blown up and bust if I'd waited much longer. Got to get on the job. Wish I knew who could fill Strang's shoes. How's the water-gauge look?"

Starkey seemed too phlegmatic a type to become nervous easily.

"Rising fast," I told him. "No word from the searchers?"

He shook his head, and we went on. It was a dumb question to ask. If any of 'em had returned, we could have seen 'em from the dam.

"Well, Jerry," I began as we started down the trail, "what do you make of it?"

"Make of it? I've been too busy trying to think up a water-tight alibi to make much of anything of it."

"I mean about finding Ginger's automatic? It begins to look like he did it, doesn't it? It doesn't surprise me so much that Ginger croaked him. It was the way he did it that gets me. In the dark, like that—it isn't Ginger's style."

"I should worry about prevailing styles in murder, Colman. What I want is an out—an alibi."

"I don't see why you need an alibi now, Jerry. We know Ginger did it, and I s'pose he had a good enough reason. But that lets *you* out."

"Lets me out? It would, fair enough, if anyone knew about it beside you and me. But we've promised Ginger to keep our mouths shut. Can't you see the hole that leaves me in? What if some one puts it up to me, cold, and asks me to explain where I was at the time of the killing? Maybe I couldn't prove an alibi, but I could do better than that, if it weren't for that promise. I could show 'em who really *did* do it."

I'd been darned quick to promise Ginger we wouldn't cheep about the discovery of the automatic. If I'd thought at the time of the hole in which it left Jerry, I'd have thought twice before making such a pledge.

"Shucks, Jerry, Ginger isn't the kind to let anyone else take the fall for anything he's done. When the time comes—"

"That's all very well, Colman. I like Ginger, and all that. But this is murder. Somebody's liable to draw a hanging out of it. When a fellow feels the noose beginning to tighten about his neck, he's liable to forget about his friends.

"What if Ginger should chuck the automatic into the river? Where would that leave me? Nobody'd believe me if I told 'em about the pistol. They'd want it produced as proof, of course. D'you suppose any jury'd believe me if I said we turned the pistol over to Ginger himself?"

"You've got too good an imagination, Jerry. You're picturing things that never are going to happen."

"I'm looking ahead, that's all. If it came to a pinch, I don't think I could be blamed for not keeping—our promise."

It was decent of him to word it that way. It had been my promise, of course.

"Well, I guess you couldn't, Jerry. But I still have lots of faith in Ginger. He'll do what's right. If I were in your place, and it came to a pinch, I'd go to him and tell

him I was going to spill the beans about the pistol. I'll bet my last cent he'd back you up, and produce the gun, regardless of what it might mean to him."

"If you were in my place! That's exactly the trouble, Colman. You're looking at this dispassionately, from the standpoint of an outsider. If you were in my boots, you'd see things differently. As yet you don't know what it's like to be suspected. But don't you know, if the real killer isn't turned up mighty quick, *you're* going to be suspected too?

"You were the last person to see Strang alive. No one has anything but your story to depend on. Can you prove *you* didn't kill the super? Of course I don't believe you did, but—"

Up to that time it hadn't occurred to me that I might legitimately be suspected of the murder. Jerry's words brought it home to me, all of a heap. And believe me, it *did* change my viewpoint!

CHAPTER VI

DURING the remainder of the night I tossed about in my bunk, listening to the steady drum of the rain on the tar-paper roof. To tell the truth, I wasn't worrying much about the rain, or the danger to the dam. Jerry's words had given me something else to worry about —something a whole lot closer home.

After all, how could I prove I'd had nothing to do with the killing of Strang? The chances are that no one else had heard the shot, what with the racket that's always going on when work's in progress on the dam. How was I to prove I hadn't slain Strang, and taken my time about disposing of the body? I began to wish I hadn't made Ginger any such fool promise about that pistol. I began to see things as Jerry had seen them.

At daybreak I rolled over and looked at Jerry's bunk. He was sitting up, looking at me.

"So *you* didn't sleep, either," he ventured with a mirthless grin. "We'll be in fine shape for a day's work that may not end for a week."

Rolling out, I peered out the window.

"Pouring," I announced. "I'll bet the water in the reservoir is darn near up to the floor of the lowest section. Let's wrap ourselves around some grub and get back on the job."

Jerry shrugged, and fumbled in his breeches pocket for a cigarette. His fingers were trembling as he lighted it. Before we'd finished dressing, he stepped over to the table and opened the drawer in which Ginger'd always kept his automatic. He laughed shortly as he showed it to me. It was empty.

We climbed into our slickers and splashed through the mud to the mess shack. The searching party, soaked and bedraggled, had just blown in. They had followed the banks of the stream clear to the mouth of the gorge, and back, without finding a trace of Strang's body. They had reported to Gringer at the dam before coming back to camp, and brought word that the missing super hadn't turned up there during the night.

An atmosphere of tense excitement pervaded the mess-shack. By the time the day crews came to breakfast, an hour later, it would have spread through the entire camp.

I don't think Jerry and I exchanged a dozen words on our way back to the dam. From their looks, Ginger and Starkey had spent a tough night of it. I'd expected them to lay off when we arrived, at least long enough to go to camp for breakfast. But it seems they had sent word to have their meals sent to the dam until further notice. Each intended to stay on the job until the flood peril had passed.

As it was between shifts when we arrived, we found them both in the shanty. They confirmed the report that not the slightest additional clew to the disappearance of Strang had been gained. With the coming of daylight, searchers had combed the vicinity of the dam itself, with no more success than the ones who had followed the banks of the stream. Only a half-dozen men were still on the job, and they were all engaged in raking débris from the face of the dam.

The appearance of the dam had changed vastly since Jerry and I had departed. Derricks, mixers, planks, everything movable had been removed from the lower sections. There was nothing left to be swept away, or to lodge in the lowest section, which would become the emergency spillway if the water rose high enough. The section in which I had discovered Ginger's automatic had been filled with concrete to the top of the forms, since we had left.

The center section purposely had been built higher than those on either side, to serve as a bulwark for the valve-house in case of flood. On the near side of this section was the one designed to serve as an emergency spillway, so placed to carry floodwaters over the dam on the near side of the valve-house. Had the center section been left as a flood spillway, any great amount of water pouring through it would have swept away the valve-house, with its intricate and expensive machinery.

BEYOND this center section was another gap—not so low as the emergency spillway, but now that our last forms had been filled, the next lowest section in the concrete barrier. Beyond it the sections rose evenly, in steps to the farther abutment.

The water in the reservoir had risen to within a foot of the floor of the emergency spillway. This despite the fact the trash-racks were clear, and the water was spouting through the outlet tunnels. The rapid rise of the waters had brought with it considerable débris. Two of the workers were busy in the emergency spillway, dragging the sodden litter from the face of the dam and heaving it down the downstream side. The others were on a barge, which now was almost filled with the flotsam.

All this was visible through the rain from the door of the construction shanty. Ginger seemed to have forgotten the murder of Strang. Again he was poring over his hydrographic charts, although I could swear he'd memorized them a dozen times over. Their jagged mountains and valleys recorded the stream flow in second feet for years past. Knowing the exact capacity of the outlet tunnels, it was easy to compute our leeway—or lack of it.

"Already," Ginger announced grimly, "she's exceeded the highest mark ever charted. If it stopped raining this instant, she'd still go over the emergency spillway. If it keeps up much longer—"

He paused to knock the ashes out of his reeking little pipe, and to fill it up again immediately with tobacco he borrowed from me. There were blue hollows beneath his eyes, tense little worry-wrinkles at their corners.

I heard the crunching of feet outside, and a moment later, a peremptory rap on the door. Which was strange, for there was heap much work and darned little formality on any of Ginger's jobs, and the meanest puddle-jumper was always at liberty to enter without knocking.

"C'mon in!" Ginger rasped irritably. The door flew open, and I recognized the booted and slickered figure that stamped in as that of Sheriff McNamee, from Grubstake.

"Howdy," greeted Ginger, glancing up and then returning to the consideration of his charts. "Sit down, Sheriff."

The official glanced about from one to the other of us a little uncertainly. He was a raw-boned, lanky fellow with walrus mustaches.

"Heard you done had some trouble up here," he announced, shutting the door behind him and remaining standing. "Thought I'd take a look into it."

Ginger shot a glance over his shoulder. "Where'd you hear about it?" he asked.

"That's *my* business," answered McNamee curtly. "I'm here to ask questions, not answer 'em."

Ginger turned again to his charts.

"Listen here, Sheriff," he said without looking up. He was speaking very, very softly. And take it from me, when the little redhead begins talking like that, it's time to begin looking a little bit out. "It don't pay to get hard around here. Speak nice, and we're likely to tell you what you want to know. Get heavy, and you may be—er—disappointed."

"Is that so?" McNamee bristled. "A few more cracks like that, and you're liable to find yourself in jail, young fella. When they's murder been done, it pays everybody to talk up pert an' proper. If you try to cover up on me, the whole mess of you is likely to find yourselves behind the bars!"

Ginger made no answer. I could see the blue pipe-smoke curling leisurely over his shoulder, could see a stubby pencil tracing its way laboriously over a blueprint.

The Sheriff was prepared for a swift come-back. By ignoring him, Ginger took the wind completely out of his sails. He stood there, staring, waiting for a reply. His mouth began to open, bit by bit, and for the life of me I couldn't repress a grin. He must have sensed it, for he turned suddenly, caught me at it, and scowled.

"Well?" he boomed at length.

Ginger spoke again, still very softly.

"Tell us what you want, Sheriff. Tell it gently, and we'll do our best to fix you up."

The Sheriff snorted. "I want to know all about this murder case—everything."

"Tell him about it, Colman," Ginger directed, without turning. So I started in on my story again. Starkey rose, yawned, rubbed his head.

"If you don't want me for anything, Sheriff, I'll be going down to the dam," he announced. The Sheriff nodded. Starkey donned his slouch hat and pushed through the door. I went on with my story, which I'd almost learned by heart, while Ginger pored over his charts and Jerry just sat and stared. I took the Sheriff out and showed him just where I'd found the pool of blood—which, of course, the rain had washed away by this time. He took it all in, asking a question now and then, but expressing no opinion until we'd returned to the shanty.

"This is going to be easy," he announced, speaking to Ginger. "It's funny somebody didn't figure it out before—unless they were trying to cover up."

"Did you find the body, Sheriff?" Ginger asked softly, without looking up.

"No, but I doped out—"

"Seems to me you'll have a tough time trying to make out a murder case against anyone until first you've shown there's been a murder," Ginger ventured. Somehow the Sheriff seemed to rub his fur the wrong way. I couldn't see the reason for it, but the two seemed as cordial as a dog and a badger.

"Well, now, young fella, I reckon I know a heap more about this case than you think I do. I figure on nailing the murderer, first of all."

"Luck to you," said Ginger. "If you can do that, you're a better sheriff than I think you are."

The Sheriff opened his mouth for some hot retort, but seemed to think better of it, and took another tack.

"If we can find the gun, we can identify the killer."

"Wonderful!" Ginger exclaimed. He turned round, grinning.

"I aim to get that gun," the Sheriff announced with emphasis. "Now, I don't s'pose anybody figured that the killer might of tossed it into the chute leading from that concrete mixer down to the dam. I'm going down, and get it."

"You'll have a sweet time, Sheriff," grinned Ginger. "That particular section is under six feet of concrete."

The Sheriff reddened. "A nice way to cover up, I'll say! But it aint going to work. You'll have to tear it out. I aim to see what was at the bottom of that chute."

"If there'd been anything there, the mud gang would have found it. I'm 'fraid you'll have to take my word for it that they found nothing, Sheriff."

McNAMEE scowled. "I'd expected you'd stall. Y'see, I happen to have a straight tip that the gun went down the chute. And I have a straight tip as to whose it was!"

That must have been a shock to Ginger, but he never showed it, if it was. But he looked at me, and then at Jerry. I knew why. We were the only ones, except Ginger himself, who had seen the automatic after I'd found it beneath the chute. He was wondering which of us had broken his promise. It looked like one of us had been tattling.

Knowing *I* hadn't, I pinned it on Jerry. He was still sitting there, staring. But his face was white. I could see the muscles of his jaw tensing. But how he'd managed to do it, was beyond me. I'd been with him every instant from the time we'd left the dam until we'd returned. And I could swear he hadn't had an opportunity to speak to, or to send a message to anyone.

I knew Jerry wasn't particularly stiff in the backbone. Facing a charge of murder, I knew he was more than likely to buckle under the strain, and scramble to protect himself. But it sure had me guessing to dope out how he'd gotten word to the Sheriff.

Ginger was opening his lips to speak when the telephone jingled. He took up the instrument, pressed the receiver to his ear, and acknowledged the call.

Then his face suddenly went white. Absolutely bloodless. His freckles stood out with ghastly distinctness. His lips were blue. It was the first time I'd ever seen him like that. He gasped out one word, the name of the little Grubstake hasher with the chestnut bob: *"Moyra!"*

That was all. For maybe a minute he sat there silent, listening. And then, without a word, he hung up the receiver.

"Sheriff," he said gratingly, "there's some *real* work cut out for you, down on

the flats below the gorge. Two hours ago I told the phone operator to notify all those sod-busters to take their families and clear out, because there was one chance in a million that the dam would go out.

"Now—now she says the wires are down. Things are—are looking bad here. God alone knows how much the dam will stand. This is the worst flood in years. I—I think it's safe. But if it goes out, God help those folks down on the flats!

"Can't you manage to get word to 'em, Sheriff? I—I daren't send any of my men; I'll need every one of 'em here until the day crew shows up. I'll lend you a horse. You can reach the mouth of the gorge—"

The Sheriff interrupted with a harsh laugh.

"A pretty punk stall, fella. D'you think I'd fall for a yarn like that? It just proves my suspicions—"

"Listen, Sheriff," Ginger begged. "At that little place just outside the mouth of the gorge there's a homesteader's wife, who's giving birth to a baby. I know, because when they found the Grubstake doctor was gone for the night on another case, they phoned—phoned a friend of mine, a young lady. I was at her home when she was called. She—she volunteered to go—until the doctor could be located. There's no phone at the place, so even if the wires weren't down—"

The Sheriff laughed again—triumphantly.

"I reckon nothing could prove my suspicions any better than this attempt of yours to talk me into beatin' it. I'm not going to leave here until you tear out that concrete and produce that gun. And when I *do* leave, I'll take the murderer of Strang along with me!"

Ginger drew a long, deep breath. He reminded me of a fighter who's gone through a dozen rounds of terrific punishment without batting an eye, only at last to be rocked on his heels by a terrific near-knockout to the point of the jaw. At that moment I pitied him with all my heart. Maybe he was groggy, but he was a long way from the count, yet. I suppose I shouldn't admit it, but I didn't give a hoot whether he'd killed Strang just then. If it would have done any good, I might have taken a poke at the Sheriff on the redhead's behalf, because I didn't like his looks, anyway.

And then Ginger laughed—a hard, cackling little laugh without a trace of mirth.

"All right, Sheriff. I'll tear out the concrete. It will cost your county not only the total of the labor and materials, but the amount of the penalty of five hundred dollars a day which will be assessed against the contractor for every day we're behind the finishing day. And of course, we wont start until all danger from the flood has passed, which may be three days or three weeks. I'm not going to endanger the lives of those sod-busters merely—"

"Bunk!" grunted the Sheriff. "You'll start tearing out that concrete the minute your day crew shows up, or I'll know the reason why!"

Ginger shook his head. "Guess again, Sheriff. I'll do nothing of the sort. If you don't like it, you can—"

"I can slam you in the cooler, that's what I can do!" McNamee exclaimed. "And that's just what I'm going to do. You're under arrest!"

Ginger smiled wanly. "What for?" he asked.

"For the murder of this fella Strang—that's what for!"

CHAPTER VII

MAYBE you're wondering why Ginger didn't produce the automatic, tell about its discovery, and avoid all the fuss about tearing out the section of the dam. At the time I wondered too, but decided he figured he might as well fit a noose comfortably about his neck as place such damning evidence in the hands of the Sheriff.

When McNamee placed him under arrest, Ginger actually smiled as if he were greatly relieved. The Sheriff evidently had been expecting resistance, for he reached under his slicker for his gun. But the redhead merely turned to Jerry, and said:

"Well, it looks as if our friend the Sheriff is afraid of getting his feet wet. If he wont warn the homesteaders, I s'pose we must. Jerry, how'd you like to be the Paul Revere?"

Jerry leaped to his feet eagerly. "Fair enough, Boss." He started for the door.

"And Jerry," Ginger added as an afterthought, "when you get back, Colman will be in charge—if I'm not here."

Jerry nodded, and with a wave of his hand was gone. Ginger turned to me, but before he could speak, one of the workmen blew in, panting, and announced the water was running over the top of the emergency spillway.

"All right," snapped Ginger. "Beat it back and tell the boys to keep the trash-racks clear. Tell 'em I'll be down in a few minutes."

The big fellow whirled about, just as Ginger's fingers gripped the edge of the section.

"Well," broke in the Sheriff as the fellow slammed the door, "so you're going to be down in a few minutes, are you? Maybe I'll have something to say about that. I was sort of figuring on starting back to Grubstake right *pronto*. And when I go, you'll go too, see?"

To emphasize his words, his hand stole again to his holster.

Ginger shrugged, drew his hat more firmly on his head, and started for the door. I'd never seen the redhead quite so meek. I hated to see him go, not only on his account, but on mine, for I didn't relish shouldering all his responsibility at the very moment the load was becoming heaviest. If the dam should go out while I was in charge—

The Sheriff grinned with satisfaction as Ginger started to pass him—for all the world like a hungry cat which has just dragged a mouse from its hole. What happened next was so utterly unexpected and happened so swiftly that it left me gasping in amazement.

As he passed the Sheriff, Ginger whirled suddenly. Like a flash his fist shot out and caught McNamee a paralyzing blow on the muscles of his gun-arm.

The Sheriff let out a yelp of pain. But it was cut short almost instantly as a pile-driver sock connected with his jaw. His teeth clicked together with an audible snap. His head jerked backward. He staggered, and crashed against the stove. Then he slid to the floor in a limp heap.

I leaped forward to grab him. I didn't know whether he was out, or simply dazed, and I didn't want to give him a chance to get that gun into action.

But Ginger beat me to him.

"You keep out of this!" he cried to me as he snatched the revolver from the Sheriff's holster. "I can't afford to have *you* in jail too!"

He dragged the Sheriff away from the stove. I stood by, bewildered by the suddenness of the thing, taking it all in. McNamee was out for the count, all right. Ginger pocketed his revolver, and hurriedly began to search him. Presently he drew forth a pair of handcuffs, and the Sheriff's keys. Then he rolled him over alongside one of the two posts which supported the roof and shackled his wrists behind him, passing the chain around the post. Finally he lashed his feet together with McNamee's own belt, gagged him with his own bandanna, and arose with a little exclamation of satisfaction, as at a job well done.

"I hated to do it," he told me, without

even a smile. "But he wished it on himself. He ought to have known I couldn't leave the job—now. If he'd been halfway reasonable about it—"

He shrugged and turned to the door.

"What are you going to do with him, Boss?" I asked as we passed out into the rain, and he turned the key in the lock.

"Let him take me to jail as soon as the flood danger's past. I should worry, then. When you're in Dutch on a murder charge, you can't get in any Dutcher by walloping a sheriff on the jaw."

I FIGURED he must have something up his sleeve. It was plain to see he was pretty badly worried. But whether over the murder charge, the fate of the dam, or the peril to the little hasher with the chestnut bob at the homestead on the flats below the gorge, I could only guess. And I guessed it was one, or both, of the two latter causes.

We found Starkey directing the workmen at their task of clearing the débris from the face of the dam. A foot of water was pouring through the section which constituted the emergency spillway. I thought it had risen with unusual rapidity, for it seemed to me the rain had lightened considerably. Yet this didn't necessarily spell anything, for it might still be raining cats and dogs on the headwaters. And besides, it would take a couple of hours for the crest of the floodwaters to reach us.

In a way, the rapid rise of the water had simplified matters. Débris now would be carried through the temporary spillway more easily than it would be sucked beneath the surface to clog the outlet tunnels. It would be comparatively easy to keep the spillway section open, for most of the débris was small, consisting chiefly of unburned slashings.

The barge had been towed away from the face of the dam. We could see it beached, but still unloaded, some distance up the further bank of the reservoir, in the direction of the sand pits and quarry. The barges, you must understand, were towed, loaded, to the dam by means of a light cable attached to a steam winch, and were towed back to the sand-pits and quarry, empty, by a team of horses or a truck on the road which skirted the reservoir edge like a towpath.

"Is that barge moored safely?" Ginger asked anxiously of Starkey. "If the rising water should float it off—"

"Don't worry," Starkey advised him. "I saw to it myself. Everything's shipshape. Floods? Why, they don't make 'em big enough to shake this old pyramid!"

Now that the water was rushing through the emergency spillway section, the dam was divided by the flood into two parts. The spillway section was too wide to be bridged by a plank. The floodwaters cascading down from the emergency spillway effectually cut off passage along the valve-house walk, and threatened to tear away a twenty-foot section of the walk if the reservoir water-level became much higher. It was still possible to cross from one side of the dam to the other by means of the aërial tram, of course, but because only a few men could be transferred at a time, this was an awkward means of handling a crew of any size. The lowest derrick remaining in place could almost bridge the spillway, but only a foolhardy idiot would attempt a crossing by such perilous means.

So, when the day-crew showed up, Ginger, after talking it over with Starkey, set 'em to work on a high section close to the near abutment. It seemed strange that work should go on as usual in the face of the peril threatening the dam. And yet, why not? The men were safe. Even if the entire dam should go out, they were within leaping distance of the granite abutment. And because it was built in sections, it would go out in sections—if it should go out—and the chances were that only the center sections would be swept away, leaving the flanking sections intact, for they still were well above the high water level. Certainly there was no valid reason for laying the men off until the flood had subsided, and thus falling still further behind schedule.

"Where's the Sheriff?" I heard Starkey ask Ginger when the din of the concrete-mixer had joined with the roar of the flood waters pouring through the outlet tunnels and the emergency spillway channel.

"Up in the construction shanty, where it's good and dry," the little redhead answered, without even the flicker of a smile. "He's going to take me to jail as soon as I can spare the time."

"He's bluffing," Starkey asserted, his booming voice readily audible above the din. "He hasn't got anything on you, has he?"

"He thinks he has," grinned Ginger. "I think the rain's letting up a bit, don't you?"

The mixer crew was at work within a dozen yards of the construction shanty where the Sheriff lay gagged and shackled. But as soon as the mixer got started, I had no fear they'd hear any noise he could make, for all he could do was kick on the floor with his heels.

Olaf profanely herded his puddle-jumpers into the section immediately beneath the mixer. The big Swede knew his concrete, and he showed he didn't intend any of his muckers to waste time watching the flood waters pouring over the dam. I was mighty anxious to get a word or two with the straw-boss, because I thought he might be able to tell a thing or two about what had happened during the night. But my plans went kaflooey when Ginger ordered me to take charge of things on the far side of the dam. "Taking charge" meant simply crossing on the tram and sitting steady until something happened, so far as I could see at the moment.

THE water in the emergency spillway had risen considerably by the time I started up for my aërial crossing. As long as the spillway could handle the overflow, there was no cause to worry. But the level of the water in the reservoir was creeping slowly upward, and was dangerously close to the bottom of the second lowest section. Once it started pouring through this section at any considerable depth, the center section, which rose between it and the emergency spillway, would be in grave danger.

Unsupported on the flanks, facing alone the direct thrust of the water in the reservoir, with the rushing torrent pouring over the dam clutching at it from each side, it would be in no position to withstand any considerable assault, this center section which would be the key to the safety of the dam. For once it gave way, it not only would wreck the valve-house below, but would provide the aperture for the hungry waters which would rip the dam, section by section, from its base.

As I climbed into the rusty steel car of the tram and started on my creaking way across the gorge, I tried to picture what would happen if the flood waters should begin to pour through this second-lowest section. Its farther wall was formed of green concrete, the section which had been poured only the night before, at the time of the murder of Strang. I hoped that this green section would be the first to give way, easing the pressure on the center section by widening the sluice for the escaping cataract.

The tram had passed well over the middle of the dam when I suddenly became aware of a wild flurry of excitement below me. Workmen who had been engaged in keeping the emergency spillway clear of débris had dropped their poles and were scrambling madly for the near abutment. Above the roar of the waters I could catch snatches of Starkey's booming voice as he ordered them off the dam. Ginger was waving frantically to some one. I saw an answering wave from the engineer of the hoisting engine—saw the smoke begin to spurt from the stack in rapidly increasing frequency.

And then I came alive to what was happening. Thus far my attention had been so absorbed by the dam itself that I'd had eyes for nothing else. Now I saw the débris-laden barge slowly floating down upon the dam!

I groaned. For I knew what it meant. Unless the hoisting engine could absorb the slack in the barge cable and yank it away in time, the barge inevitably would block the spillway!

Something had gone wrong. Starkey had said he'd moored it securely. Yet somehow it had floated free. No one had noticed it through the driving drizzle until now. And it was bearing down upon the dam, drawn inexorably toward the emergency spillway by the current—a scant hundred feet away!

With the spillway blocked, we might as well kiss the dam good-by. It might withstand the pressure for fifteen or twenty minutes, maybe. But it didn't take an engineer to see the inevitable consequence. The green concrete of the higher sections would be certain to go. The center section, key to the safety of the dam, was almost sure to crack under the added pressure. And barring a miracle of speed on Jerry's part, the lives of a hundred unsuspecting homesteaders — men, women, children, Ginger's sweetheart—were due to be snuffed out.

I cried aloud in horror. And then I began to curse, to rave at my own helplessness. For I was stranded high in the air above the dam, wholly safe myself, but utterly unable to lend a hand in the emergency. For no one had time to bother with me. The tram had ceased to move the instant the engineer at the hoisting engine had received Ginger's highball.

I wondered if I was to be marooned there, to witness the destruction of the dam, like the holder of a box-seat at some great tragedy. If there's any one thing calculated to get a person's goat, it's to sit inactive and helpless, unable to lift a hand to prevent impending catastrophe.

The hoisting engine puffed and chugged, but the barge kept floating slowly down upon the spillway, revolving as it came. Understand, as the barges operated only over the comparatively small area between the dam and the quarry, the far end of the cable was always kept hooked to one of them. As one was returned from the dam empty, the cable was transferred to a loaded one.

Because the débris-laden barge had but recently been towed away from the dam, the cable should have been attached to it still. And yet suddenly the hoisting engine ceased its chugging, and I knew it must have reached the cable's end. Somehow the cable must have come loose from its fastenings. With all the barge's revolvings in the current, this was easily possible.

Among all those gathered at the side of the dam, it remained for Olaf, the squarehead, to rise to the emergency. I saw him grab the end of the cable. And I saw him —not heard him—shout at the hoisting engineer.

Slowly the drum unwound. And Olaf started up the slope to get on top of the dam. A dozen hands reached out to help him. Without their aid I doubt if he could have dragged the cable so far. But not a one of them had courage to follow him onto the dam. They were ready to help, all right—so long as their feet were planted on solid granite. I knew he must be lashing them with good round Scandinavian curses, for all I could hear nothing but the roar of the water.

It was a tough job to drag that cable across the stepped top of the dam. The further he went, the heavier the cable and the tougher the job became. But there never was a job too tough for Olaf, who was considerably tough himself, to tackle. I could see the fellow's great shoulder-muscles bulging as he braced himself and heaved backward, tugging at the cable, jerking it along by inches, finally.

The barge struck long before he reached the spillway. Ginger and Starkey, armed with poles, were awaiting it. It struck cornerwise on the center section. An instant later the current sucked it smack across the mouth of the emergency spillway. The efforts of Ginger and Starkey to fend it off were futile.

The spillway was blocked.

CHAPTER VIII

BOTH Ginger and Starkey leaped aboard the barge. They scrambled through the débris to its farther end. There they braced themselves, placed their poles against the center section, and strove to shove the barge free. But they might as well have tried to push the dam itself from its foundations. The pressure of the water held the barge against the face of the dam as if it were clamped in a vise.

And every moment the pressure was becoming greater as the water rose. With the spillway blocked, it rose so swiftly that within a minute it was flowing through the second lowest section. With this new outlet, it rose less swiftly, but kept rising steadily, nevertheless. I wondered how long the key section could stand the strain.

Seeing his efforts were futile, Ginger leaped back onto the dam, and started to the assistance of Olaf. The blond viking was tugging with mighty, muscle-straining jerks. I doubt if he ever could have made it alone. But I think he'd have stuck with it until the weight of the cable had dragged him off into the reservoir, because he didn't know the meaning of the word "quit."

Starkey, with all his beef, would have been worth two of the little redhead in such a tug-o'-war. I thought Ginger was calling to him, but I couldn't make sure. At any rate, Starkey remained on the barge. I thought the fellow'd blown his top, suddenly gone plumb cuckoo. For he was frantically heaving the débris back into the water. He attacked it savagely, kicking it off the barge, shoving it off with great sweeps of his pole.

"The idiot!" I groaned. "He must think that, by lightening the barge, he'll make it easier to dislodge! But if that stuff clogs the trash-racks—good night!"

Oddly enough, the débris seemed to remain clustered in great heaps as he shoved it overboard. Instead of floating on the surface, most of it seemed to disappear beneath the surface immediately. At which I groaned still again. I thought the suction from the outlet tunnels was drawing it down. This surmise was but partly true, as I found out presently.

Ginger and Olaf finally had succeeded in dragging the cable as far as the barge. While the squarehead braced himself, a living anchor, Ginger leaped aboard. For a moment he knelt, lashing the free end to the iron clevis in the deck of the barge. Then he leaped to his feet, waving his arm as a signal to the hoisting engineer to haul away. Olaf dropped the cable, which slapped down into the water. I could see the workers on the abutment leaping and waving their arms. They were free enough with their cheers, these birds who dared not set foot on the dam themselves.

Ginger turned to motion Starkey off the barge. But his gesture was arrested in mid-air. For an instant he stood, frozen. And no wonder!

Starkey had just shoved another heap of débris into the water. Unlike the others, it remained floating. He dropped his pole and stooped. I saw him gather up one of the rock plums which were used in the core of the dam, stagger to the side, and drop it with a splash.

Instantly the mass of débris sank. And then—then for the first time I realized why the other heaps of débris had sunk. Not because of the suction from the outlet tunnels, but because each had been weighted—weighted with a plum attached to it by wire or rope!

Deliberately, Starkey was striving to wreck the dam!

AT first I could hardly grasp it. Offhand, it seemed he had every reason to save the structure. And then I suddenly realized the shrewdness of his plan—a plan which could be devised and carried out only by such a one as Starkey, who played for big stakes, who possessed unquestioned nerve.

Under the contract the chief engineer, if he approved the work of the contractor as it was done, alone was responsible for any disaster such as was staring us in the face at that moment.

If Starkey had succeeded in blocking the outlet tunnels, if the dam went out, it would be Ginger alone who'd take the fall. Starkey's firm had been paid monthly as the work progressed, so he'd lose little, and he'd still have the contract for the dam, whenever it was rebuilt! His plot, if it succeeded, would increase his rake-off by half as much again. While if it failed, there was nothing to lose—nothing, that is, unless it were discovered!

And it had come within a hair's-breadth of remaining undiscovered. If that last plum hadn't caught on the barge; if Starkey hadn't been delayed just that one instant which permitted Ginger and me to see what was coming off, he'd have gotten clean away with it! No one would have dreamed of suspecting him, the contractor, of plotting to wreck his own dam!

And how shrewdly he'd planned it, how daringly he had carried it out! Strang, with his bent for petty graft, never could have fathered such a plot.

Who would have suspected that the barge had been left unmoored, to float away as the water rose? Who would have guessed that the débris had been weighted, to cause it to sink and clog the outlets? Few would have dared remain on the dam, seemingly fighting to save it, knowing the outlets were blocked. I say it took nerve to see it through—and yet not so much, when you come to size it up. Starkey could be reasonably sure the dam would last some minutes after both spillway and outlets were blocked—long enough, at least, to permit him to reach a place of safety. Still and all, a man like Strang never could have mustered the courage to pull off such a thing.

Starkey must have figured on escaping by making his way over the dam to the near abutment before things went to smash. But Ginger's eleventh-hour discovery of his knavery caused him to change his mind. Turning to motion him from the barge, only to find him heaving the last weighted bundle of débris, Ginger stood frozen in amazement for a moment. At that instant Starkey spun about, saw the little redhead watching him.

Ginger shouted something to him—something I failed to hear. Then he started for the contractor.

NOW the cable tautened. So great had the pressure of the rising water against the barge become that I doubted whether the cable would stand the strain of budging it. But the barge moved. With a little jerk, at first, scraping along the face of the dam. It caused Starkey to lose his balance and fall, and caused Ginger to stagger.

Starkey scrambled to his feet, turned, and leaped for the dam—leaped for the center section, which rose some five feet above the barge. He swarmed over the edge, just as Ginger flung himself forward, clutching at the contractor's leg.

Starkey's boot, wet and slippery, slid from the redhead's fingers. The big fellow leaped awkwardly to his feet and whirled about, just as Ginger's fingers gripped the edge of the section. Starkey stamped on the shrimp's fingers. If you've ever felt a hobnailed heel crush down on your hand, you wont blame Ginger for letting go.

He grabbed for the edge of the concrete again. This time Starkey kicked him full in the face. The redhead jerked his head sidewise, but he couldn't dodge the kick. The hobnails left his cheek looking as if it had been worked over by a harrow.

It looked to me as if Ginger was plumb out of luck. I couldn't figure why he wanted to climb onto that center section, anyway—unless to rescue Starkey. The barge had been slowly grinding along the face of the dam. An instant after Ginger's hobnail facial massage, the stern was drawn clear of the center section.

Starkey turned and dashed for the far side of the key section. And then he brought up short. He'd forgotten that by his own act in blocking the spillway he'd cut off his retreat. For the section beyond had become another spillway. Four feet of water was rushing through the gap with such terrific force that it shot far out into the air on the downstream side of the dam. Too swift, too deep to wade. And the new spillway was twenty-two feet wide—too wide to leap.

Starkey knew he was trapped—trapped unless he could leap back on the barge before it drew too far away.

As the stern of the barge was drawn clear of the edge of the center section, the pressure of the water swung the clumsy hulk around until its stern angled into the spillway. I feared the suddenness of the thing would snap Ginger into the water, but he managed to keep his footing.

Then, as the water began to find an outlet, it buoyed the barge's stern up. A moment saw it almost on a level with the floor of the center section. Ginger, the foolhardy little idiot, leaped onto the concrete. The next instant the barge began to move away.

Thirty seconds saw it clear of the spillway. Once more the water poured through the giant sluiceway. I knew that the reopening of this outlet presently would cause the water pouring through the other spillway to subside somewhat. I prayed that it would subside sufficiently to permit the two men to cross to safety.

And yet I knew that, with the outlet tunnels choked with débris, this was an impossibility. Whatever had been gained by the removal of the barge from the emergency spillway would be more than counterbalanced by the blocking of the outlet tunnels. Then and there I abandoned all hope that the dam might be saved. And as for the two men trapped on the center section—well, I steeled myself to see them swept away to a horrible death when the dam began to go.

GINGER turned for an instant, and shouted something at Olaf. The squarehead acknowledged it with a wave of the arm. The barge, now free of the grip of the current caused by the water pouring through the spillway, was floating free of the dam, and was being towed slowly toward the shore. Olaf started scrambling back toward the abutment, keeping pace with the progress of the barge.

The moment the barge was free of the spillway, the group gathered near the hoisting engine began to wave their arms again, and cheer—I knew they were cheering, though I could hear nothing because of the roar of the waters beneath me. Poor fools! They thought the freeing of the spillway had saved the dam. From where they stood they couldn't, of course, have seen Starkey dumping his weighted heaps of débris into the water over the trash racks. And, though they could see Ginger and Starkey were trapped, unable to escape in either direction, they doubtless believed them to be in no great peril, thinking it but a matter of waiting until the water subsided.

From my aërial box seat I could see that Starkey had done his diabolical work only too well. The amount of water spouting from the outlet tunnels had diminished to a considerable degree. The flow hadn't been shut off altogether, of course. I doubt if any amount of débris heaped about the trash-racks could have accomplished that.

There still remained a gleam of hope in my mind for the rescue of the trapped men. My tram, like a crane, was so designed that the carriage could be lowered. But this could be done only by the man at the throttle of the hoisting engine,

What mattered fair play to Starkey now? Ginger wilted, dropped sidewise to the concrete.

usually in response to signals from the passenger in the tram carriage itself. And so intent were the men on the abutment on watching the two men trapped on the dam, and on watching the progress of the barge, that no one saw the frantic waving of my arms. I screamed myself hoarse, though I knew there wasn't a chance in a million they could hear me.

But even though the tram carriage could be lowered, I still would be more or less up against it to effect a rescue. The tram cable, naturally, passed straight across the gorge. But the dam itself was in the form of an arc. Hence the tram didn't follow the dam for its entire breadth, but crossed it in two places, at points equidistant from the center and the walls of the gorge.

Consequently the tram carriage, when lowered, would not descend directly upon the center section where the two were trapped, but some yards behind it. I reasoned, however, that if I could set it a-swinging I could bring it within reach of the two.

But my whole plan was dependent upon attracting the attention of the hoisting engineer. Without him, I was helpless. I used up every cuss-word I ever knew as I swung up there. And when I'd worked my vocabulary dry, I happened to think that at least I could drag the tram back to the center without the aid of the engine-man. So I tugged at the cable and worked it back to a point above and behind the center section. And there I stayed, impotent to do anything but wave my arms.

Meanwhile, I'd had little opportunity to watch the two so hopelessly trapped on the center section of the dam. And when I did shoot them a glance, I could scarcely believe my eyes. Face to face with death, the two were staging the fiercest rough-and-tumble scrap I'd ever laid eyes on!

I ought to have known why Ginger had abandoned the barge and leaped upon the center section. Not through any altruistic hankering to save the life of the fellow he'd caught in the act of trying to wreck the dam. Rather, because Ginger's hair was red, and a redhead gets so damned mad when he's double-crossed that he can't think of anything except licking the tar out of the other guy!

Ginger's only thought when he followed Starkey off the barge was to whale the stuffing out of the big fellow, I'll bet my pay-check. I'll swear he never gave a thought to the danger. The little brick-top had more sense than anyone on that particular job—until he got good and boiling mad. And then he didn't have any more sense than a scrapping banty rooster. If I know Ginger, nothing would make him boil over quicker than the sight of Starkey sneaking weighted débris into the water in an attempt to wreck the dam.

And so, once off the barge, he hadn't

wasted any time, or words, either. He went right after the big fellow, hammer and tongs. Almost before Starkey had time to realize what was happening, Ginger had rushed in and let him have it alongside the jaw—a wallop fit to fell a truck-horse. But Starkey wasn't a truck-horse. Rather he was more like a ten-ton truck—and about as easy to upset. Ginger had smacked Strang off the dam with a single poke. But this guy Starkey—nothing less than a battering ram could have jarred him off his feet.

He came back like a flash with a pile-driver punch that would have knocked Ginger off the dam into kingdom come if it had ever landed. But the redhead sidestepped. And as the big fellow lunged forward, Ginger hauled off and pasted him again on the jaw.

I'd hate to be on the receiving end of such a wallop. But it never feazed the big fellow. I marveled that one so bulky could be so fast. Instantly he lashed out with his other fist, back-handed. No scientific blow, that. But when it connected with the side of Ginger's neck, the redhead went into a nose dive.

I thought the scrap was ended, then and there. I fully expected Starkey to shove my little boss off into the water.

Doubtless Starkey believed Ginger had been the only witness of his attempt to wreck the dam by clogging the outlet tunnels. I think he never dreamed that high above his head in the tram was another witness. And so, to his way of thinking, no one could hang the wrecking of the dam on him, with Ginger once pushed into the spillway falls and battered to death.

Not that it mattered a whoop in Hades to either of 'em how the fight came out, in case the dam went out in the next few minutes, for neither would be left to tell the tale. But Starkey was gambling for big stakes, and I think he still had some shred of hope that he might escape alive.

CHAPTER IX

I LIKE to compare that battle on the dam with some of the few prize-ring battles I've seen. I suppose that's because that key section of concrete was about the size and shape of the squared ring, and rose above the surrounding waters as if built on purpose for such a battle.

Yet in place of padded canvas it was floored with rough concrete, slippery in the rain. And in place of ropes—nothing. Nothing, that is, but death. For to be knocked from the edge of that arena meant death, swift and horrible. And instead of the roaring crowds, roaring waters—hungry waters, greedy waters.

I could picture Old Lady Nature chuckling and licking her chops as she watched. Chuckling at the futility of the battle; chuckling because she had "fixed" the fight so both should lose; chuckling because two fool humans still should fight, though their life spans now might be measured in minutes. And chuckling, maybe, at the terrible débâcle she had planned to teach such presumptuous little humans their place, to show them they couldn't restore in a few years what it had taken her a dozen centuries to destroy.

Starkey didn't have a chance to kick the fallen Ginger into the clutching waters. For Ginger bounced to his feet again as if he'd been made of rubber.

Back he came, boring in again, begging for more. He got it. Starkey's huge fist crashed into his face. Ginger's head snapped back. Starkey's foot shot upward, caught the redhead in the pit of the stomach. Rules? Who was to enforce rules in a fight like this? Fair play? What mattered fair play to Starkey, now?

Ginger doubled up, wilted, dropped sidewise to the concrete. The big fellow stepped forward, and kicked him in the face again. I could see his teeth bared in that black beard of his, in a grinning snarl of triumph. I'm telling you, if I'd had a gun at that moment, I'd have shot Starkey down without mercy.

The redhead was down, but far from out. Even as Starkey kicked, he flung out a hand. Not to protect himself, though he had the chance. But his fingers gripped Starkey's heel on the backward swing. He jerked. The big fellow crashed down like a load of rubble when the clamshell opens.

Instantly Ginger rolled over. Another instant, and he was atop the struggling giant, his fingers digging under the big fellow's curly beard, for a grip on his throat.

I shouted out hoarse, unheard words of encouragement. Now that Ginger seemed to have the upper hand, I suddenly remembered to resume my signaling to the

engineman. I caught sight of Olaf again, tugging at the cable detached from the moored barge. I cursed him for a thick-headed lout. If he wanted to heave them a line, why didn't he cut a section from the derrick rope, instead of lugging that heavy cable out on the dam again? Didn't he know it would be useless to fling it to them, because they had nothing to which it could be fastened?

And Ginger knew it, too. He kept dancing away, ducking, dodging. His game now seemed to be to whittle the big fellow down to his own size. He'd given up aiming for the face. Which was wise, because his reach couldn't compare with Starkey's. He kept chopping away with quick, short, sharp blows at the contractor's arms—arms that clutched and grabbed, that seemed a dozen times about

When I saw his grip begin to slip, I looked away. . . . . Starkey had played for big stakes—and lost.

Olaf halted, and took a turn of the cable about the derrick mast. Then he ran out beneath the boom, reached up, and hauled the link snatch-block down to the level of the concrete.

I had no more time to waste on Olaf. My gaze returned to the battle on the key section. Ginger's advantage lasted but an instant. Starkey bowed his back, heaved the mighty hulk of him upward, and toppled the redhead off.

Like a cat, Ginger landed on his feet. As Starkey scrambled up, the shrimp rushed again. I imagined I could hear, even above the roar of the flood, the double crack as his fists, one after the other, landed on the ugly mug of the big fellow.

Starkey swung at him. Ginger ducked. Before the big boy could recover, the redhead had socked home a couple of stiff ones to the ribs.

Starkey abandoned his swinging tactics. He rushed at the shrimp with open hands, like some great gorilla. Once he got those hands on the bantam, it would be good night! He could crack Ginger's back over his knee, like you or I'd snap a stick of firewood.

to close upon their prey. It was the first step in the whittling-down process. If he could keep it up long enough, those choppy blows inevitably would begin to have a paralyzing effect upon the muscles of Starkey's arms.

The question was, how long would it take? How long could Ginger successfully evade those clutching arms? Could he wear him down before the dam went out, and ended the battle forever?

MY eyes swept the water tearing past on each side of their concrete battleground. It was higher now, by a foot, than when the barge had been snaked away. The wonder was, how the key section had withstood the savage assault of the flood this long.

I saw Olaf standing on the edge of the spillway. In his hands was the cable. Spliced on its end was the iron snatch-block from the derrick. Leaning over the face of the dam, Olaf was swinging it back and forth, like a pendulum.

As I watched he gave it a final mighty heave, and loosed his hold. The block fell with a splash a few feet from the

dam, well beyond the center section. The squarehead stared a moment. Then he turned and gave the signal for the engineman to haul away.

At last I woke up to his game. And a shrewd one it was. No better grappling-hook could have been devised. Dragged across the trash-racks, the hook on the heavy snatch-block was almost sure to catch in some of the bundles of débris. Squarehead, did I say? A thousand pardons! A master strategist!

LITHE and wiry, Ginger had all of the advantage, so long as he could keep free of those gorilla arms. Starkey's very bulk forced him to guard his rushes, lest his momentum carry him over the edge to his death. But the redhead was battling two opponents, and the other one was Time. This wearing-down process was all very good, where minutes were not factors. And it could work two ways. Ginger himself had taken some terrific punishment. And from the looks of that crimson shirt, he must have lost a deal of blood.

The redhead kept giving ground, dancing away, chopping savagely at Starkey's arms. Now and then, usually when dodging one of the big fellow's rushes, he'd shoot in a couple of stiff jolts to his ribs. But as yet Starkey was showing scarcely a mark of the conflict.

Maybe the contractor finally began to realize the numbing effect of this battering of his arm muscles. Maybe he doped it out that if the fight continued much longer they'd both be swept away without even the chance to make an effort, however futile, to escape.

Anyway, I saw him shout out something, and caught a scrap of his booming voice over the thundering uproar of the flood. Ginger spat crimson and shook his head. Then he grinned; a horrible, bloodthirsty grin.

Starkey rushed again. The fierceness of his plunge showed he'd thrown caution to the winds. Ginger didn't dodge. But he did give ground. But when on the very brink and it seemed another backward step would surely carry him into the spillway, he suddenly dived forward at Starkey's shins.

It was a beautiful bit of strategy. And the big fellow came within a hair's breadth of tripping over him and taking a header into the racing, chocolate cataract. Desperately he flung his huge bulk sidewise, even as he half-somersaulted over the little carrot-top. He crashed down on one shoulder on the very edge of the concrete. One leg slipped over the brink. His boot touched the surface of the water, which was shooting through the spillway with the terrific velocity of a stream from a hydraulic placer gun. With a panicky, convulsive movement he jerked the leg back as if from the teeth of a buzz-saw. His great hands clutched frantically at the rough but slippery surface of the concrete.

The force of the impact had rolled Ginger over on his back on the very brink of the spillway. He floundered back to safety, and scrambled to his feet just as Starkey heaved himself up on one knee.

Just as the big fellow rose, Ginger rushed at him with all the fury of a terrier attacking a badger. Had he been anywhere near Starkey's weight, beyond doubt he would have toppled him backward. As it was, the big boy had all he could do to keep his feet. For maybe twenty seconds he took an unmerciful hammering on his bearded face.

Then he let fly with a lunging, sledge-hammer punch that knocked Ginger clean across the key section. His lips were drawn back again in a vicious snarl as he plunged forward to finish him off. Two of his teeth were missing, now. His great beard was matted with blood. He was limping decidedly.

AT that instant a new sound cut in upon the booming uproar of the racing water. It was a sharp, crackling, rending sound—a terribly significant sound, a sound that caused me to fling one arm across my eyes. To me it spelled the end of the dam. I wanted to shut out the horror of it all, to blind myself to the ghastly catastrophe.

It was followed instantly by a mighty crunching and rumbling. And then by a ripping, rending, crashing smash that left the very air a-tremble.

And that was all. It ceased even more suddenly than it had begun. Once more I could hear the monotonous roar of rushing waters. So I knew the whole dam had not gone out. I was positive it must have been the key center that had crumpled at last before the titanic onslaught of the flood waters. Yet for a moment I was afraid to look—afraid I should see

nothing but chocolate waters pouring over the spot where Ginger and Starkey had been battling.

But when at last I risked a fearful glance, I almost leaped from the tram carriage with elation. The key section was still intact!

The battle had ceased. Ginger and Starkey stood like statues, gazing across the farther spillway in awed amazement. From the corner of my eye I could see Olaf struggling to swing the derrick-boom out over the near spillway.

It was the section beyond the farther spillway that had given way—the green section that had been poured the night before, at the time of the murder. It had split diagonally along its entire length, and more than half of it had been swept away.

Just above the water line, I saw what had caused it to split in that particular place. Lapped by an occasional riffle, which washed it clean of the gray crust of cement, lay a huddled human body—the body of Strang! And clutched in the death grip of both hands was a freak little plaid wool Scotch cap—Starkey's!

No need longer to ask who'd slain Strang. Starkey, by his own shrewd act of hiding the body in the concrete, had defeated his plot to wreck the dam. For the yielding human body had been the weak spot which had caused the concrete to give way just where it did, opening a new gap and widening the farther spillway. Which in turn eased the pressure on the rest of the dam and, together with Olaf's heroic work in clearing the trash-racks and opening the outlet tunnels, was directly responsible for saving the dam from utter destruction.

GINGER was the first of the battlers to spring into action again. He rushed savagely at Starkey. The big fellow must have known the game was up. He glanced about like a trapped animal.

He spied the derrick-boom Olaf had swung over the near spillway. It reached only to the center of the sluice, through which the water still was pouring at a terrific rate. Olaf had cut the block away to use on his drag, so the tackle ropes now dangled loose.

Starkey dashed, limping, for the spillway's edge, and leaped into the air, clutching wildly for the dangling ropes. He figured, doubtless, that he could swing across to the far side and make good his escape before the others discovered the body in the concrete.

But that limp bespoke a strain of the leg muscles. Oh, yes, he succeeded in clutching the dangling ropes. But so low that his legs struck the water, which prevented his impetus from carrying him across the spillway. The current seized him and whipped him about like a chip.

Olaf leaped to swing the derrick boom around. But he was too late. Starkey's arm muscles, almost paralyzed by Ginger's terrific battering were not equal to the demand upon them, could not overcome the drag of the swift current on his legs. When I saw his grip begin to slip, I looked away. When I looked back, the derrick ropes were dangling free again above the water. Starkey had played for big stakes and had lost.

THERE'S no need to go into detail as to how I finally attracted the attention of the hoisting engineer, got him to lower my tram carriage, and snaked my bloody little boss off that key section—for it's all in the nature of an anticlimax.

Olaf it was who explained the incidents which led up to Starkey's murder of his partner.

"Starkey ban come to me and ask me to block trash-racks before flood come," he informed Ginger slowly. "He ban tell me it just a test to show how strong dam ban. I think he lying, so I ask Strang if it ban all right for me to go ahead. Strang, he get pretty damn' mad and hunt up Starkey and cuss him out.

"Starkey ban get pretty mad, too, and say he goin' ahead with it, anyway. He tell Strang he's chicken-livered scare baby, always standin' in way of Starkey doin' big things. He knows Strang don't like you after you knock'm off dam, so he offer to frame 'accident' to kill you, so's to get Strang in on deal. Strang ban git scareder'n ever, say it's too dangerous. Starkey tell him keep his damn' mouth shut then, so *he* can pull it off, or he shut it for him. That's all I ban hear, 'cause they walk away, still givin' each other hal."

"But," I interrupted, "what were you doing snooping around in the construction camp shortly after the murder, when you ought to have been pounding your ear?"

Olaf grinned. "I ban 'fraid they frame it to kill Ginger by 'accident,' like Starkey said. So I ban stay near little boss' shack

till he come back from town, to bust their damn' necks if they try. Little while 'fore Ginger come back, Starkey comes runnin', and goes into Ginger's shack. Pretty soon he comes out, and goes to his own shack."

"*That's* what had me puzzled!" Ginger burst out. "Now I'm ready to turn the gun over to the Sheriff. I knew some one stole it from my shack and planted it, but I didn't know when or how, and only suspected who.

"Starkey must have shot Strang with Starkey's own gun, probably in a fit of temper when Strang held out against his plan to wreck the dam. Then he threw his own gun into the river. He knew suspicion would fall on me because of my fight with Strang. So he beat it back to camp, got my pistol, and then hurried to his own shack and climbed into his nightshirt, so everyone'd think he'd been asleep. It wasn't until after he'd been summoned back to the scene of the killing that he dropped my pistol into the concrete chute. And to make sure it would be found, he sent word to the Sheriff. You remember, the Sheriff had had a tip that the gun was there."

There was one thing yet I couldn't get through my thick skull.

"But I don't savvy how he got the body into that concrete way out in the center of the dam, in the very section where the puddle-jumpers were at work. There must have been some one in with—"

Ginger laughed through still bleeding lips. "That's easy to figure—now. He loaded Strang's body into the carriage of the aërial tram—you remember, it was only a few feet away. It must have been there all during the first half-hour, while you were searching for it. When the night crew was shifted to the other section, he simply ran the tram out, dropped the body, and immediately covered it up.

"Now I think we'd better explain this all to the Sheriff, and turn him loose. I want to be sure he sees Strang's body with his own eyes. And he can have my pistol now—if he wants it." He drew the weapon from a hip pocket.

I gasped with astonishment. "You had that in your pocket all during the fight—and didn't use it?"

Ginger looked just the least bit silly.

"Why—why, Colman, I guess I'm so used to settling things with my fists that I never even thought about it!"

THE END.

Forty Miles from Water

By

Hubert Loomis Smith

Just the story of a boy fighting his way across the desert with his sick mother—but a terrific adventure none the less.

MY mother was left a widow when I was still a small boy, and knowing nothing of business, she soon lost most of her modest competence through unfortunate investments. To add to her troubles, I developed incipient tuberculosis when about fifteen years of age, and it became imperative that I be taken to some climate more dry than the foggy coast of central California. With this in view and knowing that only an outdoor life could defeat the dread disease, she bought a very light spring wagon, a little old scrub mustang, and a tent. Adding a dog to this equipment, we started out on what we later dubbed "the great trek," for it carried us over two thousand miles of Western roads before it ended.

Even at the start that mustang was thin as a rail and no amount of good feed could fatten him. He was born thin and he was an adept at giving out on the most inopportune occasions. Within a few days, however, we camped near a farmer who had a child's pony for which he had no use, and which he traded us for some trinkets of my mother's. This pony was scarcely above a tall man's waist in height, but she was sturdily built, round as a barrel, and so energetic that when hitched

beside the blue mustang she pulled most of the load.

July a year later found our odd outfit toiling along the old Gila Road in southern Arizona. My lung trouble was arrested—though I was not yet strong, by any means—but in our ignorance of desert conditions, we had waited a month too long before starting from Yuma for the cool mountains some two hundred and fifty miles away. This was thirty-one years ago, before the day of the automobile, and the roads were very different from what they are today.

It took us five days to go the first hundred miles, and by that time our puny ponies were so worn down by the heat and heavy sand that they could scarcely drag us along.

We were totally unused to a hot climate and, traveling at a snail's pace as we were, the heat was terrific beyond words to describe. On the cool veranda of one of the rare ranch-houses passed, I saw the mercury standing at one hundred twenty-two degrees. That was one hundred twenty-two degrees in the shade, but when we left behind that irrigated thread along the Gila, there was no more shade—just a white-hot furnace of rocks and sand, with no spot of refuge from the blazing, terrible desert sun. Its blistering rays shrank and warped the woodwork of our forlorn little wagon until the sideboards cracked open and every spoke rattled as we wabbled along. Our dog fell dead in his tracks—dying, our gallant friend, "with his boots on," for my mother had made him rag moccasins to protect his feet from the scorching sand, and as I looked back to the sun-cursed draw where his poor body lay amongst the rocks, the last thing I saw was those pitifully swathed feet.

FINALLY we struggled into Agua Caliente, a nook encompassed by blazing malpais (lava rock) hills, baked black by the sun and still further superheated by the many hot springs which give the spot its Spanish name, meaning "hot water." At that season of the year and situated as we were, the place was a terrestrial hell. It was midday and the temperature in the shade—had there been any shade—must have hovered between one hundred twenty-five and one hundred thirty degrees. But there was no vestige of shade, no refuge whatever from the pitiless yellow blaze.

I hung a sheet up in the leafless boughs of a four-foot mesquite bush, but the sand underneath literally blistered our feet through the soles of our shoes, and it was worse than in the wagon.

Suddenly my mother fell back as though struck by a sledge—a victim of sunstroke!

In an agony of fear, I ran two or three hundred yards to where some Arizonans were camping. Kind hands helped me carry my mother to the little canvas and brush shelter they had erected, and there we bathed her head in the relatively cool water from an Indian water-jar they had. Finally, she revived and before night was out of immediate danger.

I was in a dilemma. It was imperative that I get her to a cooler country, or, at least, into cooler surroundings, but we were still over one hundred and fifty miles from the mountains by the road we were traveling—the only real road, execrable as it was. Our ponies were nearly played out. Certainly the old blue mustang could never live through another day if we attempted to travel while the sun was high. But traveling by night, according to Arizona custom, meant shadeless camps through the day, and how could a woman just recovering from sunstroke endure two weeks more of such torture?

The good Arizona campers told me of a short-cut to the mountains across the sixty-mile width of the waterless Harquahala Desert and, desperate as the chance was—considering the condition of our horses—I determined to risk it. The short-cut was not really a road, they explained, but occasionally in the cool winter months a prospector or a freight-wagon would take that way to some prospect hole, or winter dry-washer's camp among the desert buttes, or in the waterless Eagle-tail Range to the northwest. My informants had themselves safely reached Agua Caliente by this short-cut some two weeks before—but I did not delude myself with the belief that the route would be equally free from danger for us, for they had two sturdily built desert wagons, with strong teams, while they themselves were brawny Arizona-born frontiersmen, inured to heat and hardship. Above all, they had been accustomed from childhood to travel on the desert, and could no more have been lost on it than so many Apache Indians.

Wheel-tracks, they said, would branch off the right track at a number of places, and getting lost would be the chief thing to guard against. That was precisely what I most feared, for I was a city-bred boy totally unused to finding my way by direction and landmark, and their minute description of buttes and flats and notches I was to aim for, or leave on this hand or the other, only created a hopeless confusion in my mind. However, they made a diagram on paper showing which way all the false tracks they could remember branched off. Praying that they had not forgotten a single turning, I decided to ignore landmarks and go by this map alone.

Our rig was too rickety and our horses too weak to carry the weight of a big water-barrel such as all the desert wagons carry, but I filled a small keg holding enough, I figured, to keep the horses alive for two nights and a day, if doled out with extreme care. I had to harden my heart to the thought of their sufferings, for the thirst engendered by the heat and dryness of the desert is beyond the comprehension of those who have not experienced it. Besides the keg for the horses, we had a gallon canteen for ourselves.

AS soon as the sun was low on the day following my mother's sunstroke, I got her into the wagon and we wound out to the north over the malpais bridge. Once out on the firm, gravelly mesa, we found the going much easier than in the heavy sand of the Gila road and when night came we had already gone ten or twelve miles—fast travel for our exhausted team.

Brilliant Arizona moonlight succeeded the light of day and until the moon sank, some time after midnight, I experienced no difficulty in following the wheel-tracks. After that I had to stop at frequent intervals and get down on my hands and knees with a lighted match to see if we were still on the trail. Sometimes I would find that we had strayed away from the tracks and I would have to range around in every direction, striking matches and bending to the ground before I could find them again.

Realizing the danger of passing one of the forks in the trail without knowing it if I did not inspect every foot as we went, I hooked the reins over the dash, and lighting a few inches of candle we happened to have, I walked ahead, leading the horses. Often I would find several sets of tracks fanning out in as many different directions; by aid of my flickering light and faint as the marks were on the hard gravel, it was impossible to be sure which were the freshest. On the desert, wagon-drivers constantly leave the track to cut corners, or each will pick an independent but more or less parallel course, so that for long stretches the tracks were constantly spreading out and converging again in the most confusing manner.

After an hour or so, we entered a region of gullies and all the tracks came together. The way was now easier to follow, but presently we came to a distinct fork, undoubtedly one of the four marked on the diagram. But was it the first fork, where we must turn to the left, or was it the second, where our prong bore to the right? Somewhere in that network behind us I might easily have passed the first branching unnoticed. But time was too precious to waste in indecision. I turned to the left.

After a few miles we came to another fork and I took the right hand turn. By this time the formation had changed so that the way showed whitish in the starlight and was so easy to follow that I resumed my seat in the wagon and we made better time. An hour before daylight we wound across a rocky saddle between two buttes looming gaunt and black on either side. Here the going became

bad. Up and down over great boulders our frail rig pounded and bumped, or slid with alarming creaks and rattles across side-tilted ledges. I knew that our flimsy little wagon with its loose spokes and split felloes could not stand much of that sort of going. Walking alongside I braced my shoulder against the side and tried to ease the wheels off the higher bumps, but careful as I could be in that confusing darkness, we crashed distressingly from time to time.

At last as day commenced to dawn, we emerged from the pass and found the tracks leading down a long rocky slope bristled with tree cactus and ocatilla to a vast desert plain ringed in every direction by buttes of bizarre shapes and uncanny colors. I was just congratulating myself on getting safely past the rocks, when the wagon suddenly careened to one side, and the sound of smashing wood and a heart-constricting *bump-bump* told me the worst had happened. I jumped out to find one rear wheel disintegrated. Half the spokes were snapped off near the hub, most of the felloes lay in small bits all around, while the metal tire, worn thin as a barrel hoop, was caved in and twisted up.

BY wonderful luck, we were but a few yards from a little clump of mingled *palo verde* and ironwood scrubs—the best camping-place I had seen for days. They were about fifteen feet in height and of sufficient spread so that I managed to get most of the wagon beneath them. Like all desert trees, they were practically devoid of leaves, but the ironwood had several large bunches of mistletoe which cast blotches of fair shade large enough to huddle under. Here, after we had washed down a breakfast of crackers with a can of raw tomatoes (the best antidote for the unquenchable thirst of the desert traveler), I spread a blanket for my mother and turned to the broken wheel.

The task of repairing it looked hopeless, yet repair it I must if we were ever to get out of that desert alive. Had my mother been well, we might have abandoned the wagon and ridden the ponies bareback, but in her condition of near-collapse she could never have endured a fraction of the thirty-five or forty miles which certainly lay between us and water.

My sole tools were an old hatchet, nicked and blunt, and a broken butcher-knife, but by a second bit of almost miraculous luck, I found a quantity of baling wire strewn about on the ground where some large freighting outfit had once camped and fed their teams.

The felloe of the wheel and the broken spokes were gone beyond recall, and the body boards were too flimsy and cracked to be of any use in building up a new wheel. It was impossible to cut material from the ironwood tree with my blunt hatchet, but I found the *palo verde* easier to work. I hacked off pieces of limb and with infinite labor dovetailed them together in an elaborate crisscross bridgework between the hub, the remaining spokes and the straightened tire, binding all together with the baling wire.

At last I had an almost solid structure which I hoped would not work apart. Finally, to prevent the wires passing around the tire from cutting on the rocks, I tore up a lot of our clothes and swathed the rim until it was nearly the size of an automobile casing.

All day long, as my mother lay moaning on the sand, I worked with desperate determination. All day long the desert buttes—dead-black buttes and blood-red ones—quivered around us in the furnace heat, and the mirage licked about their ever-changing shapes. I knew well that our situation was desperate. I had given the horses but two gallons of water apiece that morning, though either of them would have drained the keg several times over. Neither one would eat and their hollow flanks and hanging heads told me plainly that we must reach water before the heat of another day. Having stopped so early that morning, we were far behind our schedule and another breakdown might very likely come. Worse than all, the feeling was growing upon me that we had lost our way. Far to the north flickered a great crotched peak which I felt sure was one of those we were supposed to pass close, but the trail we were following bore off, wide of that mark, toward the northwest. Also the tracks looked dim and old.

About four in the afternoon, I finished the wheel and immediately started on our way, first giving the horses another scanty drink which left the keg nearly empty. Mercilessly I urged the poor beasts on and we made good progress before night fell. But more and more the tracks veered to the left of the direction I thought we should be taking. About midnight the old mustang refused to go further. I lit the

remaining bit of candle to see him better. His head was drooped nearly to the ground and he swayed with weakness. Looking at him, I almost despaired. But that mustang must have been made of tough stuff, for after I had given him and the other pony the few sups of water remaining in the keg, he was ready once more to go on. On toward water and life, I wondered—or had we a rendezvous with Death tomorrow at some abandoned camp in the lonely, sun-scorched Eagle-tails?

But more immediate trouble soon put all else from my mind. While lying under the ironwood, some unseen creature had bitten my mother on the hand. Whether it was some venomous insect, or a small "side-winder," I do not know, but by midnight her hand had swollen greatly and she was writhing in agony.

THE rest of that night was interminable. For ages and ages, it seemed to me, I urged those pitiful half-dead brutes to stumble on, while my mother cried out in delirium, and the starlight—or my tired eyes—played queer tricks with the spectral buttes ahead. Signal fires seemed to twinkle, then disappear, and a chorus of frogs croaked all about us—in a land that has known no frog since time began. I think my mind must have been wandering a little, for the heat and worry and strain had been over-much for a convalescent boy of sixteen. Also, our water was gone and the violent exertions of the last thirty hours had given me a burning thirst.

But after hours my mind became clearer and I awoke to the fact that we had somewhere left the faint tracks behind and had stumbled upon a well-defined trail. I hoped that the instinct of the thirst-crazed horses had brought them back into the right road, for they were making better time and their ears were pricked forward. Before us loomed a great, gaunt mountain, black as a catafalque, and with a ghostly white flat at its foot.

For ages more we toiled on, the mountain seeming forever to retreat before us; at last we drew close and I heard the murmur of running water. The horses broke into a lope, threatening to wreck the rickety wagon as it thumped and bumped over the dried alkali mud, but I scarcely tried to check them. A few moments more and the horses splashed into a barely discernible stream of liquid. Down went their heads, but just as they started to drink I remembered some mention of a stream of waste water from the cyanide plant at Harquahala. It was deadly poison!

Up to my ankles in cyanide slime, I struggled with the frantic beasts, yanking at their bits and pommeling their heads with my fists until I finally got them away from the treacherous liquid.

Another long mile—or was it ten?—up a cañon road and we rattled into the open space between the Harquahala Mill and some Company houses. In the midst of it, close under an electric light, was a watering-trough and for this the horses dashed without need of guidance. Almost as eagerly my mother and I drank, since for two nights and a day our water ration had been but a fraction of what we had craved and what little we had had was almost scalding.

The stars were paling in the east as I slipped the harness off the salt-caked team, spread a blanket on the ground for my mother, and threw myself down more dead than alive, for in truth the last three days had not been precisely the rest-cure prescribed for tuberculous patients.

AN hour later a paunchy, pompous little man in a snowy shirt and nicely pressed trousers, strode out of a near-by cottage and poked me with the toe of his boot.

"What do you mean," he blustered, "by lolling around in front of my house in this fashion? Do you think this place is a gypsy roost?" He was a mine official and, so they said, from the East, where they have a different way of looking at things. He must have come from an incalculable distance east, at that!

But a big-hearted Arizona giant in alkali-streaked overalls bundled us into a room of his sprawling, earth-roofed, stick-and-mud shack, and led our horses into the shade of his front veranda. Kind hands brought us coffee, while before night a neighboring blacksmith had made a new wheel. My mother was very ill from the bite on her hand, but by the second day the pain subsided and the effects of the sunstroke wore off sufficiently that it was safe for us to travel in the cool of the day.

Five days later, traveling from ranch to ranch by very easy stages and with everlessening heat as we gained altitude, we climbed the last ascent to the blessed Prescott plateau with its green meadows and pines and ice-cold springs—five days from Hell to Paradise!

Pants and Perplexity

By

B. M. Fielding

You will be rewarded for reading this passenger-steamer comedy by at least three hearty laughs.

IT was in April of 1924 that I received an urgent letter from my sister in Vancouver, begging me to come at once, as her husband had been taken seriously ill, and must undergo an operation immediately.

My eldest daughter had just finished school, and I felt confident I could leave her to keep house while I was away, so began to pack and make my plans accordingly. When my husband and daughter arrived home in the evening, they urged me strongly not to make the trip alone—I was unfamiliar with travel: so my husband argued—but I remained firm. Go at once and alone I must and would, and at last they had to give in, though unwillingly.

We decided that it would be the easiest and most comfortable journey if I took the night boat; so the following evening found me safely on board the *Island Princess*, waving a reassuring handkerchief until the anxious faces of my family were lost in the gathering dusk, and the twinkling lights of Seattle faded in the distance.

It was a perfect night and for a short while I stayed out on deck enjoying the soft breeze and motion of the boat as she made her way down the channel. To tell the truth, I was also trying to summon up courage sufficient to go into the brilliantly lighted saloon, find a steward, and get safely into my stateroom.

From childhood, I had always been extraordinarily nervous, and my husband in the kindness of his heart had rather pampered this weakness of mine.

Well, I reflected, it had to be done; so clutching my suitcase tightly, I started inside. As luck would have it I met a steward just as I was going in; I gave him my ticket, and followed him along the corridor to my stateroom.

"Have you many passengers tonight?" I asked, as he unlocked the door. "Well, not so many," he replied, "—but a pretty lively bunch, some of 'em! They've all turned in, though, so you wont hear anything of 'em, ma'am."

I sincerely hoped not, for one thing I do not like, is a "lively bunch"!

Slowly I prepared for bed, turned out the light, and lulled by the throb of the engines, was soon fast asleep.

SUDDENLY I awakened with a start. What was that? Some one trying my door—not cautiously, but with extreme

vigor! And then a voice, demanding entrance!

"Whoosh in my room? Open thish door ri' away!" Again the door-handle was shaken furiously.

"You aint goin' to open m'door? Awright, I'll jus' sit here, and sing an' sing, until you do!"

There was a thud and then a voice raised in a lugubrious ditty. Quaveringly it started, but gathered strength at the second line.

"An' when I'm dead, don't bury me a-a-a-ta-all,
Just pickle my bonesh in alcohol!"

In my stateroom I sat up in my berth, too terrified to move. Oh, why did not somebody come, and take him away? What had I better do? Why had I insisted upon coming alone?

Out in the corridor the voice, now filled with tears of self-pity, continued tremulously on its way: *"Put er bottle of booze at my head, an'—"*

The serenader got no further—there were sounds of a scuffle, and several voices all speaking at once. Evidently they were friends, urging the serenader to retire and rest; now his voice, faintly smothered, died away in the distance.

CAUTIOUSLY I withdrew my head from under the pillow, where, like a proverbial ostrich, I had gone for cover, and sat on the edge of my berth, cold shivers running up and down my spine. Long I sat there, trembling every time I heard a footstep outside.

Then out of the silence, another voice spoke.

"Are you awake, ma'am? Your steward speaking."

"Oh," I gasped, "are you there? Has he gone? Wont he come back?"

"He's gone, ma'am, an' he's not likely to come around again. You can sleep safe enough. I'll be working round this part, cleaning, for quite a time."

What blessed news—I felt like embracing that splendid steward! With a sigh of relief, I settled down once more—but not to sleep; do what I would, sleep would not come. At last I decided to dress, go out, and sit in the saloon, opening off the corridor; from there I would occasionally see my friendly steward, working with broom and duster.

Hastily I dressed, and taking a book which my thoughtful daughter had packed for me, made my way to the saloon, and settled myself in the largest and most comfortable chair I could find.

FOR some time I read peacefully, entirely reassured by occasional glimpses of the steward outside; then, fancying that I felt rather a draft on my shoulders, I prepared to fetch my cloak which I had left hanging on my cabin door.

As I walked down the corridor, looking idly at the numbers on the closed doors, I was assailed by a sudden fear: I had forgotten my number! And *where* was my key?

Frantically I searched in my purse, but with no luck—there was no key!

Then the thought occurred that if I saw it, I would remember my number; so looking slowly from side to side, I started, studying each number carefully, until I came to a door half open, and peering in, I saw the number "81" staring down at me.

Of course, that was it—Eighty-one! But had I left the door like that? Probably, as I had not locked it, a draft had blown it open.

Suddenly, a sad, weary voice near by, began to sing: *"An' when I'm dead—"*

That awful man was about again!

With a gasp of terror I reached behind the door, pulled down my cloak, and with it bundled in my arms fled back along the way I had come, never stopping until I fell, breathless, into my large chair. Panting, I looked wildly about, seeking some corner where I could hide if he came my way.

Gazing this way and that, my eyes came to rest on my lap—and at what I saw there, I sat as turned to stone. Slowly my mouth fell open, my breath coming in strangling gasps, and my horrified eyes opened still wider, as I drew myself away from that bundle.

And well might I stare; for instead of my soft gray cape with its feather trimming, which was as the apple of my eye to me, I had been clutching a pair of men's pants of a very light gray and yellowish plaid; the gaudy blue silk suspenders were still draped gracefully over my knees!

HOW long I sat and gazed, I do not know, but suddenly, like a flash, I realized that I was in possession of some-

one else's property—might even be arrested, accused of stealing!

Stealing those loathsome, hideous garments!

There was nothing else for it; I must try to hang them back in Number Eighty-one. And if that was not my cabin, then what number *could* be mine?

Glancing hastily about, to assure myself that there was no one to see me, I rolled those horrid pants into as small a bundle as possible; then, spying a newspaper left on a chair, I wrapped my parcel up neatly, and again sallied forth to Number Eighty-one.

Even my fears of the "lively" gentleman were forgotten, in this second and greater danger, which now hung over my head.

I arrived safely at my destination—only to find the door tightly shut. Evidently some passing steward had closed it.

I must take the dread parcel back to the saloon—I dare not leave it in the corridor!

Just as I re-entered the saloon, in the distance that well-known voice, began once more: *"An' when I'm dead—"*

I felt I could bear no more. It was like some terrible nightmare. Then up the corridor came the steward.

"That feller in Eighty-one is mighty noisy still—seems like they *can't* get him to sleep," he remarked.

I SAT speechless; so I had stolen that dreadful man's pants! I might have known. Of course a man like that *would* wear that loud sort of things!

Well, I had tried to put them back; now, I must hide them, and keep them hidden.

Just then the steward again appeared, carrying a key.

"I guess you dropped your key when you come out, lady," he said.

I felt that at last luck was coming my way; and how gratefully I grasped that precious key, and saw the magic number "18" on it! I felt my friendly steward had more than earned the dollar I pressed into his hand.

Now with the parcel once more under my arm, I set off to my cabin, put on my cloak, and returned with the parcel safely hidden beneath it.

For the remainder of the night I dozed in my comfortable saloon chair, the pants held firmly under my cloak.

About six-thirty A. M. a terrific din arose in the direction of Stateroom Eighty-one, and presently a disheveled creature in a flapping waterproof rushed madly past the door.

"Steward! Where's the steward?" he was shouting. "Some blasted devil's broke into my room, and stole my pants!"

I buried my crimsoning countenance in my book, and held my parcel even more closely to my palpitating heart.

Back came the man, a protesting steward in tow.

"You was that drunk, sir, likely you put your pants out the porthole; was your money in 'em?"

"Money? No, sir! I keeps my cash safe in my vest, see?" yelled the indignant de-trousered one.

I breathed again. It did not seem *quite* so bad now. "Well," I heard an authoritative voice say, "if you will leave your address, we will forward your clothes to you if we find them."

SLOWLY the boat drew into the pier at Vancouver; the gangway was secured, and the passengers, laden with their various bags and bundles, made their way ashore.

I found myself near the end of the line, having lingered behind the pushing crowd, to deposit a newspaper parcel in a large chair in the saloon, and to pat a cushion in place over it.

No one had seen me do it; now with a light heart I trotted down the gangway, when my eyes were caught by a figure a little way ahead of me, a figure clad in a flapping mackintosh, which at each step disclosed to view bright tan boots, purple silk socks, then a gap of bare leg, and a long expanse of underclothes.

Down went my heart again—suppose he caught cold, contracted pneumonia—died! It would be my fault; his death would be at my door!

Just then a friend jocosely hailed the figure from above.

"Oh, Pete! Halloo there, you Pete! Where do we go from here?"

Pete raised his head. "—To buy some pants!" he shouted; "some gol-durned fool has stole mine!"

Once more all seemed well with the world.

"That's all right, then," I murmured to myself; but I registered a mental vow that never again would I travel alone!

The Mud Rush

By

Ed Earl Repp

A strange business, diamond-mining in Africa —and a perilous one too, as this story well demonstrates.

CERTAIN events coupled with a desire for adventure in a land unknown to me was responsible for my being stranded in Capetown, South Africa. Those certain events might be related thus in tabloid form:

We had struck bad sailing weather shortly after we rounded the Cape of Good Hope. The four-masted barkentine on which I had signed as an able-bodied seaman, was wallowing like a water-soaked log, until even the skipper showed signs of worry. We were carrying a cargo of Australian rye bound for the Gold Coast, and on two occasions every available deck-hand was rushed down into the fore and aft holds to straighten out a shifting cargo.

With main topgallant sails torn to ribbons and flogging at the caps, and the mizzen rigging hanging in a tangle of hemp, spars and canvas, it was agreed by all aboard the bark that the *Josephine B.* was in an extremely dangerous situation, and threatened, moreover, by a typhoon that tore in the wake of the vessel as she foamed down wind in a terrific sea.

Both the port and starboard dories were smashed against the deck-house. The nearest thing to life-saving gear remaining on the packet were several watertight oil drums stowed away for future use in the forepeak.

A sudden lull in the storm and a break in the clouds of mist which hung low over the sea, brought a yell from the lookout, strapped in a barrel high up on the mainmast.

The *Josephine B.* suddenly wallowed into a trough. Cupped within walls of boiling green seas, the lookout's voice reached the deck.

"Land ho!" cried the man in the rigging. Then with a sudden bellow he roared out a warning. The two men handling the spinning wheel either did not hear the warning call, or a sea suddenly tore the wheel from their hands. The exact facts were never determined.

The barkentine heeled dizzily to port. A shudder ran from stem to stern. The crack and roar of smashing timbers sounded oddly above the screech of the wind through what rigging remained intact.

A wall of green water now sizzled at the stern as the bow bit deep on the jagged rocks which lay, uncharted at that time, off the Capetown shore. Another howling comber and the bark was awash with seething hell. The rye in the holds shifted to port until the port rail was dipping in

boiling brine. There was a hoarse scream from aloft as the mainmast snapped.

SEVERAL days later I came to my senses in a Capetown hospital. Except for a few broken ribs and a dislocated hip, I was pretty well off.

No one seemed to know how I managed to reach shore. A native, they said, discovered me hanging with a death-like grip on one of the oil drums, riding back and forth on the breakers as they rolled up the beach.

At any rate I was soon discharged from medical custody and found myself facing the necessity of obtaining immediate employment. I was told by the shipping commissioner that so far as he knew, there was not a single vessel due in port for another month. He informed me, however, that certain diamond mining interests up near Wesselton were on the lookout for white men to act as overseers in the mines. That was all the commissioner knew about it and that was all I needed. The next day I found myself at Wesselton inquiring about the nearest mining headquarters.

The trip to the Kimberleys was uneventful. My injured hip ached as the mule-drawn gig bounced dizzily over a hard-packed, rutted road, but the driver, a giant, lazy Batlapin native, slept with apparent comfort during almost the whole of the sickening ride.

AT the Kimberley headquarters, the agent politely informed me that their roster was quite well filled for the present and suggested that I apply at the "Consolidated" office several miles farther.

A rotund German in the Consolidated offices frowned as I admitted that I knew nothing whatever of diamonds or the mining industry, but told him plainly that for me it was either work or starve. A genial and hospitable sort of fellow, however, he finally consented to give me a try-out.

"You vill vork on der fourt' level of der Bultfontien shaft. Dat iss der bottom of der mine py red swamp; yah!" the kindly German informed me.

"What am I to do?"

"You vill take charge of a gang of Basuto muckers. Dey be bad niggers—Vatch dem or, py golly, dey steal your shirt! But dey know de vork. You vatch dem. Preak a neck or two ven you go down der shaft und dey'll respect you. You vill pe der overseer of der fourt' level."

Then he told me to locate the mine superintendent and report for work. Von Shader, the "supe," although gruff, was a nice enough fellow. He explained several important items on the routine of an overseer; the last white man they had on the fourth level, he related rather thoughtlessly, it seemed to me, had died in a mud-trap at the bottom.

I WAS to start work the next morning. During the idle period between early afternoon and supper-time, I loafed around the camp, and visited the stinking mud-swamps of the surrounding country. I could see the sun glittering on the Vaal river several miles distant. As little as I knew about mining, I readily understood the danger of the muck-filled swamps—death to the underground man who happens to be trapped in a tunnel by a side-wall mud-slip. And I was soon to face the actual danger.

Before the month was up I was wishing that death had overtaken me in the wreck of the *Josephine B.*

When this happened, I was squatted on a lump of blue shale, watching the Basuto laborers scraping at the tunnel wall. Above me I could hear the rattle of the dinghy cars as they carried the diamond-specked ore to the lift skips, perhaps a thousand feet to the main shaft.

I caught a burly Basuto in the act of swallowing a dirty stone, but before I could reach him the entire gang bolted, trampling me under their bare feet. The ground at that eight-hundred-foot level quivered as though shaken by an earthquake.

There was a sudden hiss like escaping steam and I knew the dreaded side-slip had ripped a hole in the diamond-bearing *breccia* and let into the tunnel a smothering, gripping wall of blue muck from the swamps.

I could hear the fear-inspiring approach of the wall of mud—sucking, groaning, sighing dismally—even above the hoarse cries of the natives and the bellows of overseers in the other tunnels.

"Mud rush! Mud rush! Mud rush!" they cried as they fled for safety.

"Hiya ruu! Hiya ruu!"

Pandemonium broke loose with all the fury of hell.

Except for the yells of alarm now dying

in the distance I seemed alone—alone to perish in that sucking muck which sloughed through the passageways in all directions. I dashed out of the circular cavern in which we had been mining.

My safety-lamp was burning brightly, as I turned a corner in the tunnel.

Not more than a hundred feet in front of me in the tunnel the wall of blue muck was creeping along toward the end of the shaft, ripping timbers as it came. In it a Basuto was being engulfed, singing the death-song of his tribe, even as the light from my lamp illumined the tunnel.

In but a few minutes that wall of mud would engulf me too, and squeeze, suck, twist and rip my body to death! I ran back to the circular chamber, offering prayers to my Maker for quick relief. My hand automatically went to the holstered pistol in my belt. But something told me to wait. I sat down again on the lump of blue shale. The wall of mud had reached the curve in the tunnel. I watched it wiggle and writhe. My brain cleared for an instant and I heard again the rattle of trucks on the upper level.

A CHANCE in a million offered itself; I snatched at it like a drowning man at a straw. Frenziedly grasping a pick, I hoisted myself to a shelf of shale and began digging like a demon at the roof of the chamber.

Shifting the pick desperately from one side to the other I worked like a madman. Cornered as I was, I forgot entirely the wall of death creeping to drag me to doom. When I shot a glance toward the tunnel, I realized that the end was near. The mud was crawling into the chamber, faster and faster, with the force of hundreds of tons in back of it.

"You can't make it, man! It'll be only a matter of a short minute and then—*pouff!* What is life anyhow?" It seemed I could hear these words above the sighing of that wall of living death.

But my inner being screamed aloud in crazed protests.

"No! God, no! It'll be worse than a thousand deaths to suck that mud into my lungs! I'll fight till it pushes me through the roof!"

A few of my gang had escaped and spread the news of my plight. There was a sudden rattle overhead and I heard the ring of a pneumatic drill chipping the top crust of quartzite in an effort to reach the lower level. It seemed directly above my head.

I must have ripped at least four feet of shale loose from the roof before the writhing mud reached my shoulders. Then my pick struck the hard quartzite and I knew that death must soon claim its prey, for the mud had reached my chin and I could no longer swing the pick.

Reaching up into the hole I grasped a small ledge and clung. A drill suddenly shot through from the top—then another. A hand slipped through and held me up. In a few brief seconds the men above had drilled the hole large enough for me to slip through and I was safe once again, for another chance at life.

FEW people wearing diamonds stop to think of the risks in their being brought to the surface. A few filthy stones in that tunnel may cost the lives of a half hundred men. . . . .

That particular side-slip or mud rush brought such a stream of protest from both the labor division and the wealthy mine owners that all work below the quartzite levels was abandoned until a more modern and safe method of mining was discovered.

The French Company, De Beers, Kimberley, Consolidated and other large-scale concerns in the swamp country humanely deserted the blue shale levels. Although it was said that the Shah, Koh-i-noor, Hope blue and other priceless gems were found in the blue shale, work on that level was abandoned.

But milady must have her gems in spite of the fact that death creeps malignantly even in the quartzite levels where workers still fear gas explosions, cave-ins and "fizzes," although few mud rushes have been reported in recent years.

ON the next vessel from Capetown, I secured passage, glad indeed that an unseen power had stayed my hand when it hovered dangerously over the butt of my pistol there in the bottom of the Bulfontien shaft.

But to the end of my life, I believe, I shall be able to hear those hoarse, terrified cries:

"Mud rush! *Hiya ruu! Hiya ruu!*"

And the sighing, sucking, deep-toned booming of unleashed oozing muck will remain forever in these ears of mine that heard it.

By
E. T. Brown

This mystery of training-camp life rings true and is of exceptional interest.

Trapped

"HEY, you! You're under arrest!" bawled a hardboiled M. P. sergeant at one of the large training-camps, about seven-thirty A. M., on one cold wintry morning in 1917. I was regimental sergeant-major of the 457th Infantry and on my way to regimental Headquarters. Being in a hurry, I had cut across the cantonment between the long rows of barracks instead of taking the usual path. Just as I emerged from behind a building, this gruff command greeted me, startling me almost out of my wits.

"What's eating you? Bad dreams last night?" I retorted.

"Cut the comedy," the M. P. advised, one hand moving toward his hip. "Step over here—I mean business!"

There was no doubt about his intentions, so I stepped.

"Get in that bath-house there," he ordered.

"Say!" I snapped. "Explain yourself! If you are doing this for a joke—"

"Who says I'm joking?" he interrupted. "Strict orders. Snap out of it! You'll have company in there, and wont be lonesome."

Bewilderedly, I stepped inside, and found I did have company. A dozen soldiers and non-coms were prisoners, with an armed guard at the door. We immediately began to advance dozens of reasons why we were innocent and should be released, but the guard turned a deaf ear to our pleas.

FINALLY, about nine o'clock, I saw approaching Major Jones, who commanded the first battalion, so I yelled at him and asked him to come over. He walked over to the window and recognized me at once.

"Say, Major, what's the meaning of this grand opera stunt?" I demanded.

"Can't say, Sergeant-major," he answered. "I wonder myself."

"Why the wholesale arrests?" I queried.

"Don't know," he replied laconically. "About seven o'clock I received strict orders to permit no man or officer to leave the barracks, except those on guard duty, and to arrest anyone found outside of quarters."

"Major," I pleaded, "my colonel is provost-marshal of the cantonment, and with this going on I should certainly be at Headquarters. I was due there almost two hours ago. Please let me go—you know who I am and that I am telling you the truth."

"Can't do it," he snapped. "Strict orders! But I'll call Colonel White and tell him you're here," he conceded, relenting a trifle.

The Major was a man of his word, for in less than ten minutes Colonel White

drove up in his car. I saw him sign a receipt for me and hand it to the Major, who thereupon ordered me released. Mystified, I walked out to the car and saluted mechanically.

"Get in," ordered the Colonel, and immediately the chauffeur drove away.

"What's the trouble, Colonel?" I asked as we drove up to Headquarters and stopped.

"Come into my office," he evaded, leading the way. As I passed the outer offices, I saw they were filled with officers and men rushing hither and thither and gesticulating wildly. We entered the office, the Colonel closed the door, dropped wearily into a chair, lit a cigarette, and motioned me to be seated. At last he spoke.

"Sergeant-major, you know there is a bank on the civilian concession zone over in the middle of the camp, don't you?" he queried.

"Yes, Colonel," I replied.

"Well," he continued, "last night some one entered that bank, murdered the four employees, and escaped with over two hundred thousand dollars in cash."

"Impossible!" I cried, astounded. "Guards are so thick over there you can hardly walk through them."

"True," he admitted. "Last night the guard was posted as usual. His tour was around the bank and two other buildings, and he swears that he did not see or hear anything unusual."

"Then arrest the guard," I suggested.

"We did," said the Colonel; "but his fingerprints do not tally with those on the bloody hatchet, so that lets him out."

"So there are fingerprints," I exclaimed. "The criminal can't get away!"

"Maybe so, maybe not," mused the Colonel. "Our fingerprint records at Headquarters are far from complete. Besides the crime was evidently committed before midnight and was not discovered until about six o'clock this morning, so the criminal has several hours the start of us. This morning the office of the guard became curious about the light burning in the bank, so he pried open a window to investigate. That was the first intimation or hint that anything was wrong."

"What has been done?" I asked.

"Quite a lot," the Colonel replied. "First, a strict quarantine was placed on the camp. Every man in the division is to have his fingerprints taken. And there is another clew that may or may not be of value. An officer's collar ornament—infantry—was found on the floor. So the fingerprints of the officers will be taken first. Also, there is a chance in a thousand that one of the victims will live. His skull was fractured, and he is not expected even to regain consciousness, as the loss of blood alone was enough to kill him. Should he live, the mystery will be speedily cleared up; otherwise—" And the Colonel shrugged his shoulders.

"What can we do now?" I asked.

"The military police are patrolling the borders of the cantonment, and each regimental commander is responsible for policing his own area. Our office is to supervise these activities, under the direction of the division commander. There is a copy of his orders. Well, let's get on the job and see that nothing is overlooked. To take the fingerprints of forty thousand men will take at least two days." And he sighed wearily.

THAT day I shall never forget. The mystery seemed but to deepen hourly, as clew after clew proved false. The quarantine was strictly enforced, and the greatest secrecy maintained. In general, the rank and file of the troops did not have the least idea of what was wrong, and the wildest rumors and conjectures imaginable were given full credence.

About four o'clock in the afternoon, word came from the base hospital that the wounded paying teller was regaining consciousness, and was expected to be able to talk soon. We waited breathlessly, every nerve tense with excitement. It seemed the irony of fate that the killer had allowed one of his victims to live, for on that slender thread hung the immediate solution of the dastardly crime. If this victim died without regaining consciousness, the slayer had more than an even break, it seemed to me.

In a few more minutes word came that the wounded man was definitely recovering, and was now able to mutter incoherently. A skillful trepanning of the fractured skull had been successful.

Suddenly the telephone rang imperatively. Hastily, I grabbed the receiver.

"Hello! Provost-marshal's office?" an excited voice yelled.

"Yes," I answered.

"Tell the provost-marshal to hurry

over to third Battalion Headquarters, 458th Infantry. Captain Marsh has just committed suicide!" And a click told that my informant hung up.

"Another mystery! Let's hurry," said the Colonel.

WE found the Captain dead. He had shot himself in the right temple and died instantly. A careful search of his person revealed no clew, and we proceeded to his quarters to continue our investigation. A hasty examination revealed nothing, so a more detailed, systematic search was began. Soon one of the detectives cried out and pointed to a seam in the mattress that had evidently been ripped open and then sewed up with coarse khaki thread. We quickly tore the mattress open, and what a sight met our eyes! Package after package of currency had been carefully concealed, and the packing had been so well done that no bulge in the mattress could be detected; nothing but the telltale seam. A hasty check of the recovered loot showed that only about half of it had been stored here, however.

We explored the dead man's belongings, his locker trunk, his bedding-roll, but found nothing. Suddenly one of the men noticed what appeared to be a smudge of blood on the wall, near the bottom of one of the windows. The barracks were of frame construction, and between the outer sheeting and the wall-board lining was an open space of about four inches. Quickly tearing away a section of the wall-board, we found another cache, which, upon examination, revealed not only the missing cash but also the bloody clothing the murderer had worn. And not only this—a fingerprint record card of the dead man was found here as well, which, we later discovered, had been stolen from the files at division headquarters.

We were at a loss to determine a motive for the crime. Captain Marsh was a veteran of the Spanish-American war, and his character and reputation had always been above reproach. The only peculiarity attributed to him by his associates was an occasional fit of despondency and taciturnity, though he was usually cheerful and friendly to everyone. He was very reticent concerning his private affairs, but it was understood that certain domestic difficulties, ending in a divorce, had figured in his immediate past; this was perhaps the cause of his moroseness.

ACCORDING to the story of the injured bank teller, who finally recovered, the clerks were having difficulty in balancing their books and were working overtime. A large consignment of currency had just been received in anticipation of pay-day for the troops, which was only a few days off.

About nine o'clock Captain Marsh knocked at the door and was admitted. He was fully dressed as if for field duty, and carried an automatic pistol. He stated that he was on guard duty as officer of the day, and merely wanted to thaw out a little before continuing his rounds, for it was a bitter, stormy night. Since he was well known to all of them, nothing was thought of this request, and he was invited to sit down by the stove and make himself comfortable.

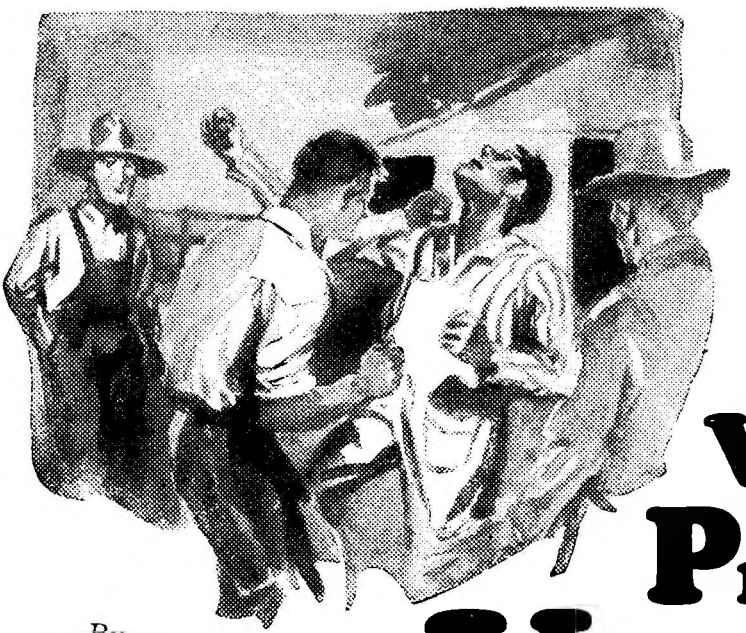
Suddenly the cry of "Hands up!" rang out, and the cashier, paying teller and clerks whirled about to find themselves gazing into the muzzle of an automatic. Drawing a barracks bag from beneath his field coat, the Captain ordered the cashier to fill it with all the currency in the bank, disdaining the silver and small change. After this was done, the victims were lined up with their faces to the wall, blindfolded and gagged, then struck down from behind with a heavy hatchet.

The paying teller, sensing what was happening and determined to sell his life as dearly as possible, tore the bandage from his eyes and grappled with his assailant. However, he was physically no match for the Captain, and was soon struck down and left for dead. That he recovered and lived to tell his story is little short of a miracle.

I HAVE been under shell-fire for weeks; have heard the whine of machine-gun bullets; have seen death in its most horrible forms—yet to me these experiences pale into insignificance when compared to the ghastly and incomprehensible crime narrated above.

Military censorship prevented any publicity at the time, yet hundreds of my comrades will recognize the story at once and vouch for its authenticity, though actual names have not been used.

My belief is that Captain Marsh was temporarily insane when the crime was committed. The truth will never be known, but it is more charitable to him to believe that such was the case.



The quaint tale of a fight and of a fighter who was determined on a return match.

What Price Vanity?

By

Robert Eldon Smith

ONE summer, while I was working at a large apple-ranch near White Salmon, Washington, I had a queer experience with human nature in the raw.

It was the "thinning season," and the usual nondescript crew was hard at work. Outside of a few neighboring ranchers and their families, the crew was made up of everything from Indians to ordinary hoboes. Help is usually scarce at this time, so the manager hires almost anybody who happens along.

From this mongrel mass there stood out a great big hulk of a man named Sven Johnson. He was a tough fellow, was Sven—strong as an ox and mighty proud of it—a logger by occupation, but working at this place in order to be near a girl named Martha.

Martha was the daughter of a German rancher who lived down the road a short way. I have reason to believe that she had once given Sven considerable encouragement, but now she wouldn't give him a tumble. Perhaps they had quarreled; at any rate she now went out of her way to snub him, thus making his life miserable.

The thinning season started before my school let out, so I was a late arrival at the ranch. As luck would have it, I was put to work with Sven. I tried to become friendly with him, but all my remarks were greeted with a stony silence.

DURING the first afternoon I had an unfortunate accident—I was trimming apples from the top of the tree when a hard gust of wind blew over my ladder, with me on it. I crashed into Sven, knocking him and his ladder over and landing on top of him. A series of Scandinavian cusswords reverberated through the orchard, and in all he acted so nasty about it that I immediately resolved to find a more congenial partner to work with.

I picked up my ladder and moved over to the next row of trees. By chance I stopped at the tree where Martha was working by herself. I asked her if she minded having me for a partner, and she replied it was O. K. with her. I know now that she did this for Sven's edification.

It wasn't long before she began telling me of her troubles with "that no-good Sven, who was always following her around." Several times I caught Sven glowering in my direction, during the course of the afternoon.

That evening a grizzled old rancher sidled up to me, and very frankly I was told that it wasn't advisable for anybody to work with Martha. Sven was "a hot-tempered fool and only last week he had laid a man out just for standin' around an' talkin' to her." Perhaps because I was new, Sven would overlook the accident and my working with her if I kept away from her in the future, however.

Somehow this made me sore. I stated very clearly my views on the matter and my opinion of that Sven Johnson.

The words were hardly out of my mouth when I felt iron fingers on my arm. Sven had come up behind me, unnoticed.

"That's good advice," he said, giving my arm a twist. "You keep 'way from Martha. She belong to me!"

"Leggo my arm!" I broke in, trying to wrench myself loose from his vise-like grip.

"You keep 'way or—"

"Leggo my arm!" I yelled again.

"Shut up!" snarled Sven, giving my arm another twist.

I WASTED no more time with words. With my one free arm, I hauled off and smacked him squarely on the nose with all my force. The grip on my arm abruptly loosened; and Sven staggered back, tripped over the tongue of a wagon which was parked there, and sat down violently. For a full minute, during which a large crowd collected, he just stared at me. A stream of blood commenced to trickle from his nose.

Suddenly he yelled something unintelligible, got up and came at me. Dodging his wild swing, I landed my left on his sore nose, and with my right I gave him a beautiful shiner. The crowd yelled in delight at this. Several times more he rushed me, but I had little trouble dodging him, and seemingly I could pepper him almost at will. He began to get groggy. Finally I put everything I had into an upper-cut which caught him on the point of the jaw. As he fell his head hit the hard ground with a sickening crunch. I don't know whether I knocked him out, or the impact with the ground, but at any rate he lay there unconscious.

The crowd immediately acclaimed me. My stock soared in their estimation. It was no doubt puzzling to them, that I, being noticeably smaller—though admittedly no weakling—should have been able to knock out a giant like Sven; but then they didn't know that I had been captain of the Varsity boxing team for two years.

Sven had been conscious scarcely five minutes when he began yelling for another fight. He put his challenge in such a manner that to refuse was to be branded a coward. It was finally agreed that there should be a fair, refereed fight on the next Saturday night.

Poor Sven certainly suffered in the next few days. To have a black eye and a swollen nose was bad enough, but what hurt him the worst was the fact that the thinners took a keen delight in recounting (and no doubt elaborating) the details of his downfall to interested outsiders. He worked in sullen silence with "you-wait-and-see" as his attitude.

ON the following Thursday night the barn caught on fire. It had quite a start before it was discovered, and our feeble efforts with the garden hose availed but little. Suddenly the foreman remembered that he had left kegs of blasting powder in the little storeroom in the loft.

Everyone knew that if the kegs exploded every building on the ranch would be burned to the ground, and likely as not, the surrounding uncleared acres also. The foreman, roundly berating himself for his carelessness, immediately offered fifty dollars to any man who would bring the kegs out. I accepted this offer, for after all fifty dollars was fifty dollars, and besides, as near as I could see, the flames weren't very close to the room as yet.

So, wetting my handkerchief and placing it over my face, I went into the barn and started climbing the ladder. As I neared the top, I found that my calculations were sadly lacking in accuracy. It would only be a matter of a few moments until the flames reached the room. Still I figured if I hurried, I could succeed. Flinging open the door, I rushed into the room. Grabbing one of the kegs, I hurried over to the window and yelled for those below to get something to catch the keg in. After what seemed ages, they got a tarpaulin and held it up as a fireman holds the life-net. I carefully dropped the keg into it.

As I went back for the second keg, I realized that the smoke was rapidly increasing and that the water on my handkerchief had almost evaporated. A feeling of weakness and nausea came over me.

It took every ounce of strength I could muster to carry that second keg to the window.

The smoke and heat had now become almost unbearable. There was a roaring sound in my head, and my lungs seemed almost bursting. Because of the extreme weakness coming over me, I decided that my only chance was to carry that last keg down the ladder with me.

It was all I could do to lift the keg, and as I staggered to the door, I tripped over something and fell flat. A haze seemed to be enveloping me. I tried to rise but my limbs refused to obey. I couldn't even crawl. A horrible death was beckoning its finger at me, and I was fully conscious of it. I suddenly felt an uncontrollable urge to yell and scream, but found I could only make a choking gasp.

My last thought in the nightmare that followed was a feeling of thankfulness that I would be unconscious when the keg exploded. Then all became black.

WHEN I opened my eyes I found myself lying in a white bed. I became aware of a burning sensation in my arm; I saw it was swathed in bandages. The door opened and in walked the foreman.

"Well," he began, suppressing a grin, "I aint supposed to excite you none, but I guess there aint no harm telling you Sven saved you."

"Sven!" I gasped. Incredible as it seemed, perhaps Sven had a human side to him after all!

"Yeah, Sven brought you and the powder out. When you didn't come out we thought sure you was a goner. Sven suddenly ups and starts in after you. We tried to hold him back, figgering you was gone and there was no use letting a man kill hisself. Sven hauls off and punches Jim Walters, who was holding him, in the beak and plunges into the smoke and disappears. Three minutes later he come staggering out with you over his shoulder, the keg under his arm, and the back part of his shirt blazing to beat hell. Your sleeve was on fire; that's how you got your burn. We dumped you and Sven into the flivver and brought you to the hospital. At first they thought you might not pull through after inhaling all that smoke, but the doc says you'll be all right in a few days. Say, you fellas sure pulled me out of a hole all right. We couldn't have got no insurance if that powder had 'a' exploded."

TWO days later I was allowed to get up. I immediately went over to Sven's room. The door was open and I saw that Martha was sitting by his bed holding his hand. Sven looked absurdly happy.

As I walked in Martha greeted me with a smile, but Sven's expression changed. His eyes flashed hostility, as I walked over to his bed and held out my hand.

"Sven," I began, feeling rather embarrassed, "I want to thank you, and to apologize for my freshness the other day. Of course our little argument is off. I'll be proud to have you for a friend. Wont you shake?"

"Hell, no!" bellowed Sven, so loudly that the nurse came running in with an ice-bag, expecting to find him delirious. "We may not fight next Saturday, but, by heaven, we will the one after!"

The nurse grabbed me by the arm and pushed me out of the room, saying it was positively against the hospital rules to excite a patient.

I walked slowly down the hospital steps, a great enlightenment dawning upon me. That darned ornery cuss had taken a chance of being blown to pieces in saving me—only that he could have the opportunity to avenge his injured pride! A queer thing, vanity!

To the man whose ship never quite comes in

"WHEN my ship comes in," you say—but your smile cannot hide the worry gnawing at your heart—

A fine sea-going vessel you had thought that ship of yours when you launched it on the business ocean—

Yet the days and months and years slip by—and though others see their ships ride triumphantly to harbor, still you scan the horizon anxiously for a ship that never quite makes port.

No one's *fault*, perhaps—but what a misfortune that so many business ships should founder on a hidden reef or a treacherous shoal, when the channels to Success are plainly charted *and a chart for every channel is available to every thinking man!*

How the Right "Chart" Increased E. T. Orcutt's Income 500%

Certainly *my* ship-of-fortune seems far off its course, said E. T. Orcutt, in effect, when as railroad clerk at $20 a week he enrolled with LaSalle for home-study training in Traffic Management.

Before he had completed the training, however, came an opportunity with Hitchings & Co., Elizabeth, N. J., one of the largest manufacturers of greenhouses in the world.

Training had set his "ship" on the right course.

Later, as sales manager, he kept on training with LaSalle—in Business Management.

Since taking his first course, his salary has increased more than 500 per cent.

Recently he has organized his own company, capitalized at $100,000, of which he is president.

How G. W. Clason Placed His "Ship" on the Right Course

No bands were playing when G. W. Clason launched his "ship" on the business ocean.

Clason had left school at 14, and at 19 his job was to take care of the horses in the barn of a laundry.

"Never mind," said G. W. Clason, *"I'll make my opportunity right where I am!"*

So he learned the laundry business, and at 28 was operating his own plant. When fire wiped his business out, he started again. Unable to finance properly—*through lack of business understanding*, as he testifies—he sold out and became superintendent of the Ideal Laundry Company, Spokane.

Right then he made up his mind to remedy his lack—and enrolled with LaSalle for training in Business Management.

Today, at 47, he is vice-president and a director of this successful company, and commands an income several times as large as when he started with LaSalle five years ago.

"I give all credit to my LaSalle training," writes Mr. Clason. "It has proved by far the most profitable investment I ever made."

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Without cost or obligation, the coupon will bring you a special 64-page booklet fully describing the opportunities in the business field that most appeals to you, and showing you how you can fit yourself to grasp them.

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- ☐ Modern Business Correspondence
- ☐ Credit and Collection Correspondence
- ☐ Telegraphy
- ☐ Banking and Finance
- ☐ Modern Foremanship
- ☐ Personnel Management
- ☐ Expert Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business English
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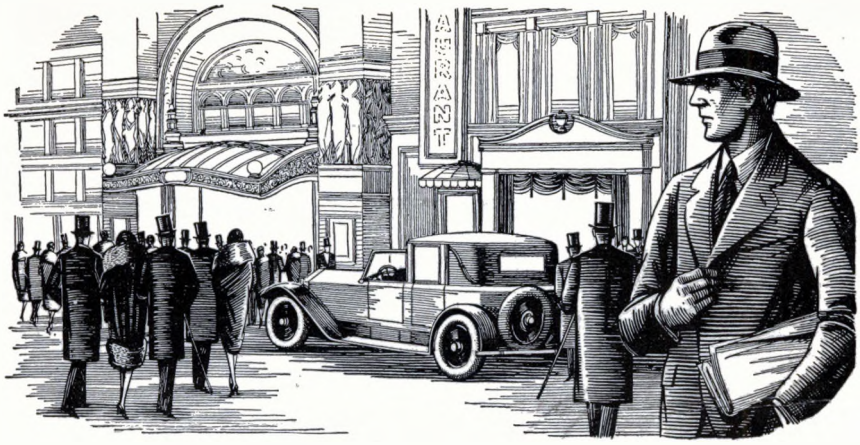

Always outside of things—that's where I was just twelve short months ago. I just didn't have the cash, that was all. No theatres, no parties, no good restaurants. No real enjoyment of life. I was just getting by, just existing. What a difference today! I drive my own car, have a good bank account, enjoy all the amusements I please.

I Couldn't Get the Good Things of Life

Then I Quit My Job and "Found" Myself!

HOW does a man go about making more money? If I asked myself that question once, I asked it a hundred times!

I know the answer now—you bet. I know the way good money is made, and I'm making it. Gone forever are the days of cheap shoes, cheap clothes, walking home to save carfare, pinching pennies to make my salary last from one pay-day to the next one. I own one of the finest Radio stores you ever saw, and I get almost all the Radio service and repair work in town. The other Radio dealers send their hard jobs to me, so you can see how I stand in my line.

But—it's just a year ago that I was a *poorly-paid clerk.* I was struggling along, on a starvation salary, until by accident my eyes were opened and I saw just what was the matter with me. Here's the story of just how it happened.

ONE of the big moments of my life had come. I had just popped the fatal question, and Louise said "Yes!"

Louise wanted to go in and tell her father about it right away, so we did. He sort of grunted when we told him the news, and asked Louise to leave us alone. And my heart began to sink as I looked at his face.

"So you and Louise have decided to get married," he said to me when we were alone. "Well, Bill, just listen to me. I've watched you often here at the house with Louise and I think you're a pretty good, upstanding young fellow. I knew your father and mother, and you've always had a good reputation here, too. But let me ask you just one question—how much money do you make?"

"Twenty-eight a week," I told him.

He didn't say a word—just wrote it down on a piece of paper.

"Have you any prospects of a better job or a good raise sometime soon?" he asked.

"No sir, I can't honestly say that I have," I admitted. "I'm looking for something better all the time, though."

"Looking, eh? How do you go about it?"

Well, that question stopped me.

How did I? I was willing to take a better job if I saw the chance all right, but I certainly had laid no plans to make such a job for myself. When he saw my confusion he grunted. "I thought so," he said, then he held up some figures he'd been scribbling at.

"I've just been figuring out your family budget, Bill, for a salary of twenty-eight a week. I've figured it several ways, so you can take your pick of the one you like best. Here's Budget No. 1. I figure you can afford a very small unfurnished apartment, make your payments on enough plain, inexpensive furniture to fix such an apartment up, pay your electricity, gas and water bills, buy just about one modest outfit of clothes for both of you once each year, and save three dollars a week for sickness, insurance and emergencies. But you can't eat. And you'll have to go without amusements until you can get a good substantial raise in salary."

I began to turn red as fire.

"That budget isn't so good after all," he said, glancing at me, "maybe Budget No. 2 will sound better—"

"That's enough, Mr. Sullivan," I said. "Have a heart. I can see things pretty clearly now, things I was kidding myself about before. Let me go home and think this over." And home I went, my mind in a whirl.

AT home I turned the problem over and over in my mind. I'd popped the question at Louise on impulse, without thinking it out. Everything Mr. Sullivan had said was gospel truth. I couldn't see anything to do, any way to turn. But I had to have more money.

I began to thumb the pages of a magazine which was lying on the table beside me. Suddenly an advertisement seemed almost to leap out at my eyes, an advertisement telling of big opportunities for trained men to succeed in the great new Radio field. With the advertisement was a coupon offering a big free book full of information. I sent the coupon in, and in a few days received a handsome 64-page book, printed in two colors, telling all about the opportunities in the Radio field and how a man can prepare quickly and easily at home to take advantage of these opportunities. I read the book carefully, and when I finished it I made my decision.

What's happened in the twelve months since that day seems almost like a dream to me now. For ten of those twelve months, I've had a Radio business of my own! At first, of course, I started it as a little proposition on the side, under the guidance of the National Radio Institute, the institution that gave me my Radio training. It wasn't long before I was getting so much to do in the Radio line that I quit my measly little clerical job, and devoted my full time to my Radio business.

Since that time I've gone right on up, always under the watchful guidance of my friends at the National Radio Institute. They would have given me just as much help, too, if I had wanted to follow some other line of Radio besides building my own retail business—such as broadcasting, manufacturing, experimenting, sea operating, or any one of the score of lines they prepare you for. And to think that until that day I sent for their eye-opening book, I'd been wailing "I never had a chance!"

NOW I'm making real money. Louise and I have been married six months, and there wasn't any kidding about budgets by Mr. Sullivan when we stepped off, either. I'll bet that today I make more money than the old boy himself.

Here's a real tip. You may not be as bad off as I was. But, think it over—are you satisfied? Are you making enough money, at work that you like? Would you sign a contract to stay where you are now for the next ten years, making the same money? If not, you'd better be doing something about it instead of drifting.

This new Radio game is a live-wire field of golden rewards. The work, in any of the 20 different lines of Radio, is fascinating, absorbing, well paid. The National Radio Institute—oldest and largest Radio home-study school in the world—will train you inexpensively in your own home to know Radio from A to Z and to increase your earnings in the Radio field.

Take another tip—No matter what your plans are, no matter how much or how little you know about Radio—clip the coupon below and look their free book over. It is filled with interesting facts, figures and photos, and the information it will give you is worth a few minutes of anybody's time. You will place yourself under no obligation—the book is free, and is gladly sent to anyone who wants to know about Radio. Just address J. E. Smith, President, National Radio Institute, Dept. 1-B1, Washington, D. C.

J. E. SMITH, President
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Dear Mr. Smith:

Please send me your 64-page free book, printed in two colors, giving all information about the opportunities in Radio and how I can learn quickly and easily at home to take advantage of them. I understand this request places me under no obligation, and that no salesmen will call on me.

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