

BLUE BOOK

JULY

MAGAZINE

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A NOVEL of **The MOON GODS** by EDGAR JEPSON
AMAZING ADVENTURE and SIDNEY GOWING

Harold Titus, Seven Anderton, S. Andrew Wood,
Beatrice Grimshaw, Clarence Herbert New and many others
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Tarzan for President

A CITIZEN who had grown desperate with the multiplicity of schemes to end the depression, and who was well wearied with political pettifoggery and propaganda, recently wrote a letter to a New York newspaper. The desperate citizen had a brilliant and simple suggestion which the newspapers liked well enough to pass on to its readers.

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Unfortunately we cannot, in this difficult world, have many of the things we want. We cannot, for example, have Tarzan for President. We can, however, have him for a job that is individually more important to us: we can have him for a friend in need, and for a needed refuge and solace from humdrum things, we can go on safari with him in his own primitive and refreshing world.

Next month this champion adventurer in all the realm of fiction comes back to you in a new novel—"Tarzan and the Leopard Men." With him comes his familiar spirit the little monkey Nkima riding through utmost peril on his shoulder; with him too come Numa the lion and Sabor the lioness and all the rest of that goodly jungle company we have known and loved so well. With him also come many new and interesting people, friends and enemies alike. You may count upon renewing a true and tried fiction delight when you turn to the next issue of the Blue Book Magazine.

TARZAN will have good company: an absorbing mystery novelette by Henry C. Rowland entitled "Murder on the Eastern Shore," as well as many specially attractive stories by such writers as Clarence Herbert New, Warren H. Miller, Henry La Cossitt, Arthur K. Akers, Edgar Jepson and the like.

—*The Editor.*

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The BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE

JULY, 1932

Vol. 55, No. 3

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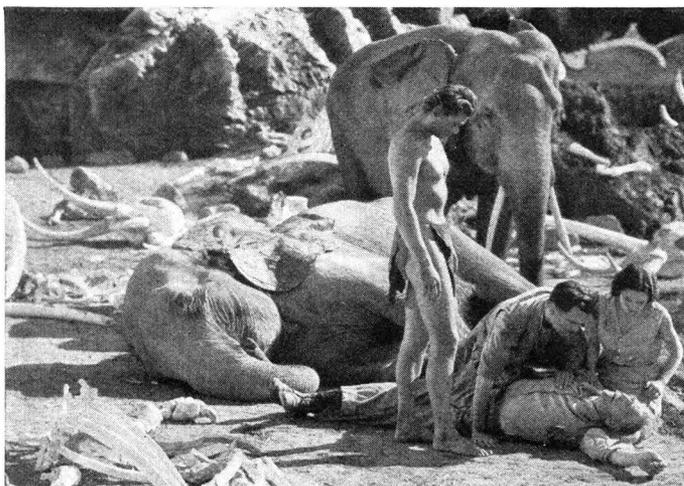
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Johnny Weissmuller in a scene from "Tarzan the Ape Man."

TARZAN

Next month the world's premier fiction adventurer comes back to us in a brand-new story of strange and splendid exploits in the jungle. Be sure to read "Tarzan and the Leopard Men"—

In Our Next Issue

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William B. Warner, President and Treasurer

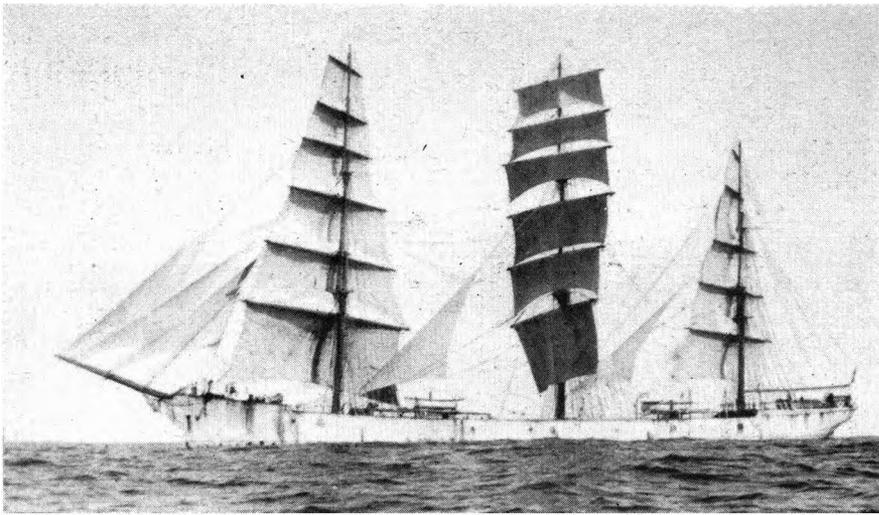
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Man Overboard!

*A real experience during
a voyage around Cape Horn.*

By A. J. VILLIERS

IN the score-odd big square-rigged sailing ships that still roam the seas, battling off Cape Horn on the annual grain race from Australia, there is a heavy mortality. The ships are all old, and they are manned by boys of from fifteen to eighteen years. Sometimes there are accidents aloft, or falls; but the majority of the casualties are boys lost overboard. The heavy seas, breaking over the deep-laden ship as if she were a half-tide rock, sweeping along the length of her, knock the boys down, sweep them into the scuppers, and so, sadly often, over the side and into the sea.

When that happens, it is the end of them. The big sailing ship, running heavily before a strong wind, cannot be stopped. It is too dangerous to bring her into the wind; and even if this was done, it would be impossible to find the boy again. Ten or twelve times a year this happens. Sometimes the boys are swept overboard from the main deck, sometimes from the bowsprit, sometimes from the wheel. The barque *Killoran*, running for Cape Horn in 1931, was pooped three times, had her wheel smashed three times, her charthouse washed away, her spanker-boom carried away, and two helmsmen drowned. The year before, she lost two boys and both her lifeboats over the side in a North Atlantic gale. The four-masted barque *Pommern*, running for Cape Horn, lost her youthful carpenter over the side just three days after the *Killoran* lost her boys, almost in the same place.

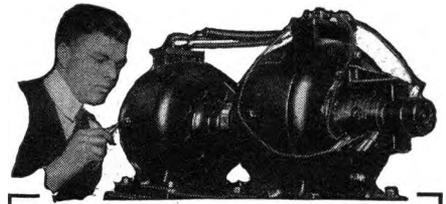


A. J. Villiers

The four-masted *Ponape* lost two boys from the main braces; the four-master *Archibald Russell* had two swept from the bowsprit where they were making fast the inner jib. One minute they were struggling there, fighting the sail. The next minute the ship put her bows under one, green; and when they came up again, dripping wet, there were no boys there. They died without a sound; no one saw them go. The ship ran on. . . .

The ordinary thing to do, in these ships today when such accidents happen, is that all hands are hurriedly summoned aft and they decide in open conclave, with the youngest apprentice speaking with the same right as the sailmaker or the oldest A.B., whether there is a chance to save the one gone overboard. In storm there is no chance. The ship runs on, and they hope the lost one has quickly drowned. Being heavily clad in oilskins and sea-boots, with thick Cape Horn gear beneath, this probably happened. The old-time salt had an aversion to learning to swim for just this very reason; if he went overboard, he wanted to be quickly drowned.

And yet, when boys go overboard, they are not always drowned. In good weather they can be got back again, with luck. Sometimes the sea itself rolls them back again after they have been swept outboard, and authenticated instances of this are many. But on the Cape Horn run, if they go overboard, they die.



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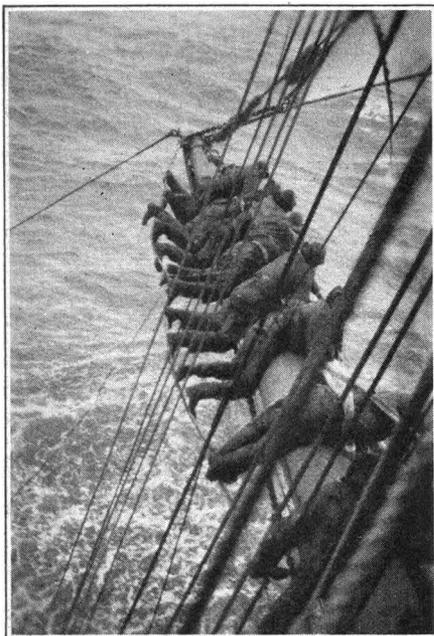
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All, save one! I was once in a full-rigged ship where a boy went over the side in a heavy sea, and we got him back. But it was a miracle, if ever there was one.

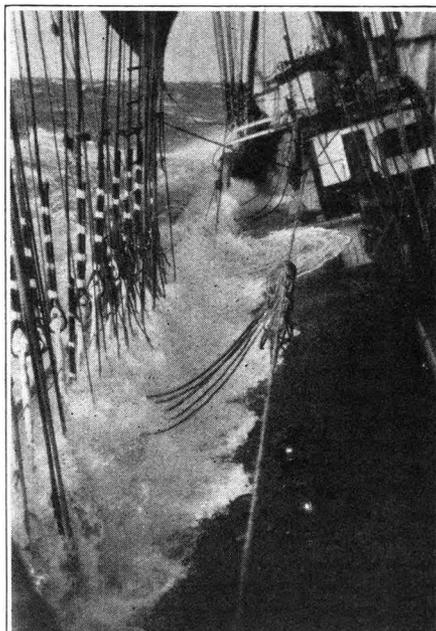
It was in the Finnish full-rigged ship *Grace Harwar*, two years ago. We were bound from Wallaroo to Falmouth for orders, with three thousand tons of Australian grain. It had been a long, hard run to Cape Horn, in winter-time, with sleet and snow and constant easterly gales. The ship was dirty and ran sluggishly. The winds were unkind; and six weeks out, we were still fifteen hundred miles from Cape Horn. We had a small crew of thirteen boys. I was the oldest of the six able seamen at the time—I was twenty-five. There were only two others over twenty-one. The average age of all hands was

about nineteen. All the ships have crews like that now.

It was a real tough voyage. We had already lost one boy, killed aloft in an accident in the rigging on the thirty-eighth day out. He was doing his work up there on a black night of storm, when a yard above him carried away and fell on him, killing him instantly. We buried him from the poop next day, and went sadly on. He was twenty, an only son. It was a hundred days after that before his people could be told that he was dead. We had no radio, and we called at no ports, nor spoke steamers. . . .

Fighting her way through the huge seas, with her small crew driven almost to breakdown, yet always ready for the call for all hands that came nightly—making sail, taking it in again when the wind freshened and hauled further ahead, working constantly around the decks where the green seas often came up to our necks and we could only hang to the life-lines for our lives—we battled on. Then, on the sixth day after the boy was killed, the ship sprang a leak.

The carpenter found it, making his daily



Photographs taken aboard the *Grace Harwar* on Mr. Villiers' voyage around the Horn.

soundings. This was serious news. The *Grace Harwar* was a steel ship, forty years old. If the leak was serious, it was the end of us. We were then fifteen hundred miles from the nearest land, in the stormiest and loneliest part of the whole ocean. We had lifeboats, of course—two of them. But there were no falls rove in the davits, and the boats were lashed down securely to the skids so that the seas could not sweep them away.

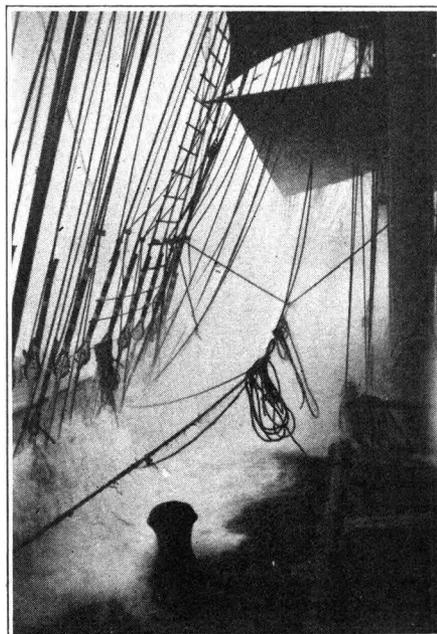
When we heard about the leak, we did not even bother to cast the lashings from the boats. If the ship sank, her life-boats would not save us.

We manned the pumps by the main fife-rail, and pumped steadily while the seas swept round us and the gale roared in the rigging. For twelve hours we pumped, all hands. Then the soundings showed she was making no more water. There had been seventeen inches; we got it down to fourteen. It was not so serious, then. The ship was not going to sink. We kept the level pretty constantly at fourteen inches.

It was cold, bitter work at those pumps. Yet we were cheered to know that the leak was no worse, at any rate, and looked forward now to getting it fully under control. We had to be very careful for the breaking seas, of course. The ship was rolling both rails under as she ran, but most of the water she scooped up was not dangerously heavy. We leaped up on the fife-rail out of the way, or sprang monkey-like, up the crojack braces coming down to the pins there. We did not leap out of the way of the seas to avoid getting wet, as we were all thoroughly wet through then, and had been so for the past three weeks. But we did not want to go over the side.

When the sea knocks you down, it does not take you straight overboard; it half-drowns you, knocks you senseless, hits your head upon the steel bulwarks or on the steel bits. Then you are helpless, and you roll outboard with the ship's rolling. . . .

This was exactly what happened. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon of the day after the discovery of the leak. The port watch was pumping there, keeping the water down, when suddenly a great



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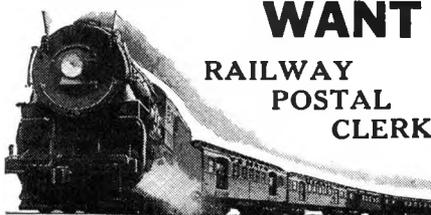
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green sea rose to windward and crashed down on the decks. The boys leaped for the fire-rail and the braces, all save one reaching points of safety. But one did not; the sea caught him and swept him from his grip on a brace-end as if it had been a piece of cotton. Over the deck he was swept, helpless, rolling over and over in the water. He brought up smash against the bulwarks on the lee side, and lay unconscious for an instant in the scuppers. Then down—*down!*—went the lee side, right under water for the length of the ship. . . . Nothing could save him. He was gone—clean outboard, into the South Pacific ocean.

Great God! Were we to lose another life? . . . The ship ran on; the wind screamed exultantly; the sea licked its cold chops around the coamings of the hatches. . . .

The ship was running heavily then. It was late afternoon, swiftly merging into night. The boy could not swim. He was thickly clad in his oilskins and sea-boots, with three pairs of trousers underneath, and two coats. It was dangerous to bring the ship into the wind. There were no falls rove in the davits, to swing a lifeboat out. What could we do? It looked as if there was to be another empty bunk for the duration of the voyage.

BUT we did bring the ship into the wind, and we did get a lifeboat out.

The captain was on the poop at the time, and he and the helmsman there saw the boy go. Quickly he threw a life-preserver over the side. They watched the boy, conscious now, grasp the log-line towing astern, but this merely pulled his head under with the momentum of the ship, and if he had stayed there, he would have been quickly drowned. . . . He let go the log-line; they saw him grasp the life-preserver. Then he was lost to sight.

"Down helm!" roared the captain, springing to the wheel to help the boy there, spinning the wet spokes. Down, down they spun the wheel; into the wind the ship slowly turned, masts creaking ominously, all her standing rigging crying a protest over it; the wet sails slatted back against the masts, threatening to take them out of her. No matter; it was a chance we had to take. Maybe she would stand it; we had not, thank God, had much sail on her. . . .

Without being summoned, all hands were aft.

Without being told, they were working feverishly on the starboard lifeboat, cutting the lashings away with axes, reeving off falls with a new coil of manila from the sailmaker's loft. Within three minutes we had that boat swung out over the sea, ready to lower into the water when there came a chance. The ship rolled heavily, with the boat now far above the water, now falling down until the greasy tops of the great seas licked its planking. The mate went in, taking charge. There was no call for volunteers to go. All knew it was a desperate chance; but everyone would go.

The captain quietly named the boys who were to go: Frenchman, Sjöberg from Helsingfors, Blomqvist the sailmaker, Hägert the ex-apprentice from the little barque *Favell*, Holmberg and I—six of us. We got into the boat. The others stood by on deck (*Please turn to page 14*)

Stories of Real Experience

IT has been said that there is material for a novel in every person's life. Whether this is true or not, we do believe that in the lives of most of us some experience has occurred sufficiently exciting to merit description in print. With this idea in mind we shall be pleased to receive and to print true stories of real experience, running from one thousand to four thousand words each. For each of the five best of these received each month we will pay, according to our appraisal of its length and strength, \$50 or more. We hope in this way to present to our readers an even more attractive department, and to reward a little more fairly those readers who contribute their real experiences to us. The other conditions of our offer remain as before. To recapitulate:

In theme the stories may deal with adventure, mystery, sport, humor,—especially humor!—war or business. Sex is barred. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Real Experience Editor, the Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. Preferably but not necessarily they should be typewritten, and should be accompanied by a stamped and self-addressed envelope for use in case the story is unavailable. A pen name may be used if desired, but in all cases the writer's real name and permanent address should accompany the manuscript. Be sure to write your name and correct address in the upper left-hand corner of the first page of your story, and keep a copy as insurance against loss of the original; for while we handle manuscripts with great care, we cannot accept responsibility for their return. As this is a monthly contest, from one to two months may elapse before you receive a report on your story.

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Why don't you write?

The Wall of Fire

A wholly unusual and deeply impressive story.

By JOHN M. KIRKLAND

Illustrated by A. E. Briggs

IT was St. Louis and it was summer; and although it was afternoon, Bennett's day was just beginning. His wife had followed him into the hallway outside their rooms. He took her into his arms.

"Good-by, Anne."

Her hand trailed off his sleeve.

"Hurry home," she said. "I'll be wanting you. There's cold chicken and things. I'll have supper ready."

He kissed her. She had a curious, crooked little smile that expressed her hope.

"If it's quiet, they might be letting you come home early."

He considered. "Maybe. Yes, they might if nothing happens."

But something did happen.

At eight o'clock Bennett sat at his typewriter in the local room of the St. Louis *Telegram* with a sheaf of useless notes scattered in front of him, writing steadily.

At six o'clock Doldge had been murdered—Stephen Doldge!

The police were holding a woman at headquarters, questioning her. But that was only a formality. She had confessed readily enough on the scene to detectives.

Bennett had studied her carefully when he rushed from headquarters with the police in answer to the call from her apartment. A calm, unemotional woman, with no hint of a furious passion such as would have interested Doldge. She wasn't even pretty. But then, she was no longer young.

She received them with apathetic hospitality, as if they were tiresome guests and she was weary of the necessity of entertainment, and she showed them the body with a casualness which drained the blood from their faces.

She had found the poisoning simple, she said. A tablet in his cocktail, and at the first gulp, his heart fluttered and he toppled forward as dead as a dead fish. They asked her what she did then, and she said she laughed a little.

Bennett regarded the man's wide, fearful stare as he lay there on the rug, and it seemed to him rather silly that this should be Doldge. Doldge couldn't die like that. He was the city's richest man; he was the boss of St. Louis politics. He ruled. He was King Canute commanding the waves, and the waves he commanded respected his orders. He was strong and he was evil. Doldge couldn't die like that.

But he had died like that. His evil had caught up with him. He and the story the white-faced woman made of him was the best news-copy that could be written in St. Louis.

Jordan, the city editor, glowed as Bennett turned over his yarn. He pawed through the pages, passing them over to Burrowes, who sat at the head of the copy-desk.

"Just wait till the city claps eyes on this one. The world would have to come to an end to take the headlines away from this story in this town."

Bennett nodded.

"It's worth an extra."

"The nine-o'clock edition will catch it quick enough. You better grab yourself a bite to eat and hurry back. We might have something for a new lead."

Bennett telephoned Anne. He told her something of the story. But that wasn't the purpose of his call.

"If we clean up on this early, Jordan may let me get away," he said. "Maybe by midnight."

"Oh, I hope so."

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing much. Just waiting for you." A pause from her, somewhat embarrassed. Then, quickly, irrelevantly, to cover that embarrassment: "The radio won't work."

He laughed. "Oh, my dear, you're so apparent."

"Don't you dare laugh at me. I say the radio won't work."

"Good. The better opportunity to think more about me."

"Oh, I couldn't do that." Her voice trembled. "Please hurry home. I have such a strange feeling."

"It'll be all right. It's rather how you must expect to feel at a time like this."

"It isn't that. It's—oh, I don't know—but do come quickly when you can. I'm missing you so."

"I'll do my best," he said, and told her good-by, and put down the telephone. As he passed Jordan's desk on his way to supper, he heard the radio editor saying:

"Funny, the radio isn't working. Stations all seem dead. The best I can get is a blur."

Jordan glanced up, interested.

"Some atmospheric disturbance, likely."

"Yes."

"Call up somebody and find out. It's worth a story."

Bennett went on to supper. When he got back, he heard Burrowes complaining to Jordan that he was in a hell of a fix. Cable communication with Europe had been cut off. The Associated Press carried a story that the interruption of service probably was due to disturbance at the bottom of the sea, although seismographs had not recorded any earth-tremors.

"That's strange," said Jordan. "Radio reception's shot, too."

"Oh, well, that gives us more room for your Doldge story. Whoop it up!"

"You'll get plenty."

Jordan called to Bennett. He wanted a completely new story on Doldge for the second edition, based on developments brought in by reporters detailed at headquarters to

catch any late angles: The woman's history—twenty years with Doldge; her discovery of a casual infidelity which prompted the act.

Bennett did a careful, workmanlike job. It was around eleven-thirty when he turned in his copy. Jordan glanced at it and nodded.

"Good work. You might as well pull out," he said. "This will hold them. Good night."

"Good night," said Bennett.

His way led past Holland and Meisenberg, night rewrite men. Meisenberg spat into a wastebasket.

"Lucky stiff, to be going home at a white man's hour!"

In the corridor, just outside the editorial room, Bennett waited for the elevator. It did not come. He was eight floors up, too far to walk. Impatiently he pressed the button again.

The door to the Associated Press wire room, across the corridor from the elevator-shaft, opened, and a man hurried out, followed by the clatter of half a dozen telegraph keys. It was Foster, the Associated Press correspondent. Bennett turned to look at him.

Foster was lank and indolent. He did not usually hurry. He was hurrying now. He carried in his hand a sheet of yellow flimsy.

"What's up, Foster?"

The man did not answer. Bennett sensed that he couldn't answer. He waved the yellow sheet at Bennett, and was gone into the editorial room.

The elevator finally was coming. Bennett heard the click of the clutch and saw the cables start to move. He hesitated, considering. There was news in Foster's flimsy—important news. He wanted to know what it was, but if he went back into the editorial room, he might be pressed into work again. There might be a local angle to the story.

His mind picked up a picture of Anne as she would be waiting for him. She would be a little drowsy, her hair would be tousled from weary fingers holding up her head as she nodded, but she would smile her funny crooked smile as she looked at him adoringly. . . . The elevator door swung open. "Going down?"

"No," said Bennett.

"Then what's the idea of disturbing a man at his supper?"

Bennett did not hear. He opened the door and stepped into the editorial room.

He faced a tableau: Foster, Jordan, Burrowes, Holland, Meisenberg, the copy-readers, grouped at the city desk, staring, unseeing, at the piece of yellow flimsy that fluttered in Foster's fingers. Bennett moved to the desk.

"What is it, Harry?"

Jordan looked at him vacantly, then by a physical effort jerked himself to consciousness. He took the paper from Foster's rigid hand and handed it to Bennett. The others mechanically shifted their gaze to the reporter as he read the Associated Press bulletin:

New York, N. Y., Sept. 27 (AP)—An unbroken wall of fire, fully a mile high, rose out of the sea tonight and is sweeping toward the city at great speed.

Bennett looked up. All their eyes met his. They hadn't been able to say anything, but somehow they expected words from him.

"Hell," he said. "There goes the play on the Doldge murder."

Foster's copy-boy came running through the door, another sheet of flimsy in his hand.

"Chicago bulletins all wires are down in the East!" he cried. "This came through a few seconds before."

Foster took the flimsy. His face became gray as fog as he read swiftly:

Newark, N. J., Sept. 27 (AP)—The entire city of New York has been engulfed by the wall of fire which appeared on the horizon of the sea at twelve-thirty o'clock this morning.

All lives are believed lost and the city is demolished.

The line of fire apparently is unbroken from north to south and is proceeding westward at the speed of about two hundred miles an hour.

Because of the magnitude and the unaccountable cause of the blaze, it is believed that it signals the end of the world.

This city is in turmoil. In an instant more it will be destroyed.

This is the final thirty, boys.

As Foster finished reading, Burrowes took the sheet, glanced through it and automatically his pencil crossed out the last sentence as an editorial comment.

Burrowes not only was head of the copy-desk. He was night editor. In an emergency, with the managing editor away, he was boss. Jordan looked at him.

"Well, Lon?"

Burrowes dropped the flimsy on his own desk.

"We get out a paper."

"Extra?"

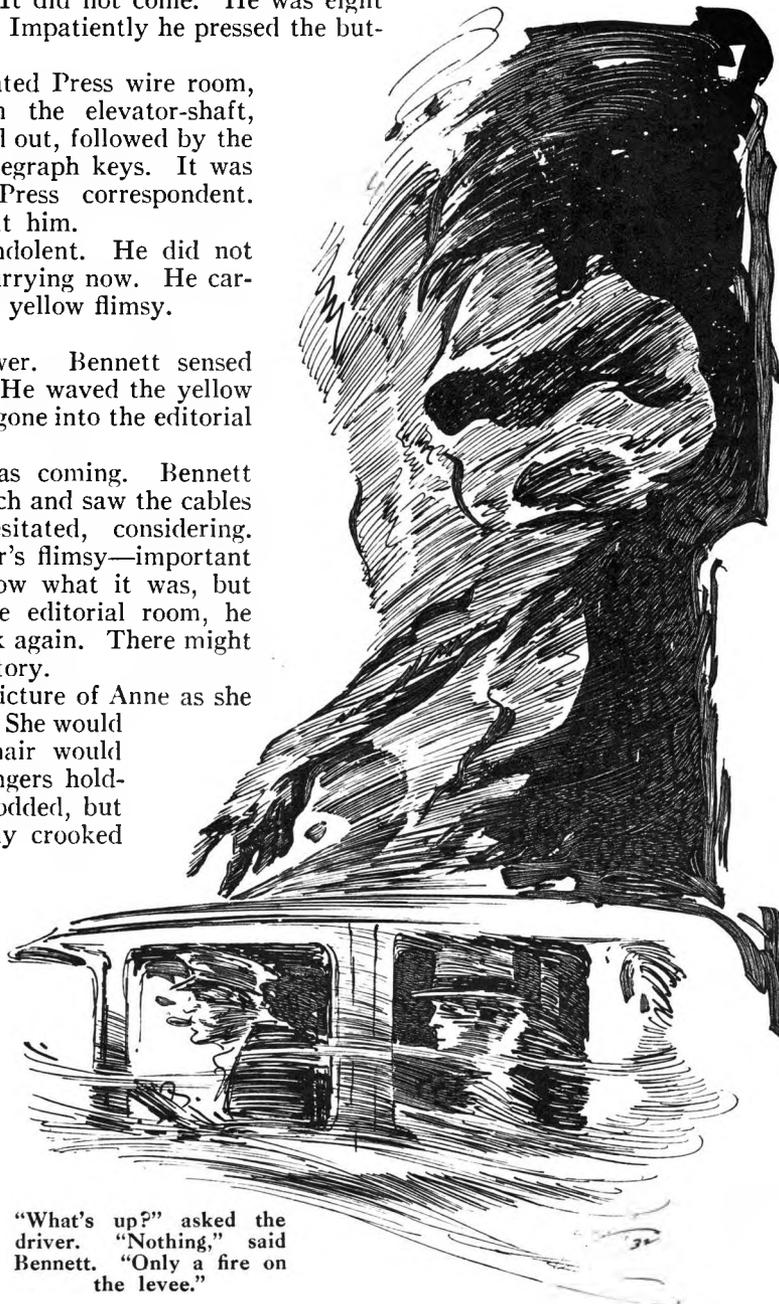
"Sure. Somebody try to locate the old man on the telephone and tell

him." He turned to Foster. "Do you think the wire will carry anything more from the East?"

"Hard to say. Chicago probably will have a general lead in a minute or two."

"All right." He spoke to the others. "Well, let's get going. There's plenty for local angles, Jordan; better hop to it."

He sat down at his desk, began pasting the flimsy on pulp copy-paper. The copy-readers moved slowly to their



"What's up?" asked the driver. "Nothing," said Bennett. "Only a fire on the levee."



Jordan handed the paper to Bennett. The reporter read: "A wall of fire, a mile high, rose out of the sea and is sweeping toward the city."

chairs. The reporters stood looking at Jordan. The gray had gone from their faces. It was unlikely that one of them believed the doom applied to himself, and if he did, habit was strong. They were to get out a paper. That was the order. Death was a vague thing. This was an immediate job. It was, moreover, a duty.

They didn't think out these things. They acted instinctively. They were neither brave nor cowardly. News was an impersonal thing. They never, or seldom, made it. They only retailed it. Here was the biggest news of all. This was no time to discard procedure. They were prepared to go on with the task until a usual "Good night!" released them from their duties. Then they might think about it; then they might become sick with fear, or dulled with dread; they might take this complete destruction to include themselves and each in his own way face oblivion. But now—

Jordan's voice cracked an order.

"Holland, get in touch with Higgs at headquarters and tell him to call the mayor, and the police and fire commissioners. I want to know if there's anything they think they can do to fight the fire. When you get Higgs started, phone Archbishop Dunne, Reverend Waters of the First Baptist Church and Rabbi Weinstock, and find out what they have to say.

"Meisenberg, go back in the morgue and dig up a copy of the Bible. You'll find something in the last part of it—Revelations, I believe—on the end of the world. Get what you need out of there, then copy off a few paragraphs about Noah's Ark and the end of the world the first time by water. Combine what you find, and if it's any good, we'll put it on Page One and give you a by-line.

"Bennett, I want you to write a story saying that the only hope that anyone has been saved in the places the fire has reached, is that some may have been in airplanes and flown eastward over the blaze. Wait a minute. Before you do that, knock out a box saying this newspaper advises those who can get into airplanes to do so and fly east over the fire and trust to finding a landing-place in the burned-over area. Say it's their only hope, for the fire seems to burn on water as well as land, and that even if they make the Pacific, it won't do them any good."

Burrowes turned to Jordan.

"We can't wait for all that. I'm going to shoot with what I've got now."

"Sure," said Jordan, "but you'll want to replate if you get a Chicago lead, and we'll be ready then."

Foster still stood at the city desk. It wasn't his business to interfere with the *Telegram's* staff, but he had a suggestion.

"If I were you, Lon," he said to Burrowes, "I'd wait for Chicago. Something may have happened to check the fire, and there's no use driving people crazy until you have to."

Burrowes considered. "All right." Then to Jordan: "Step on your stuff, Harry, and maybe we can make it all."

Meisenberg returned on the run from the morgue.

"Can you beat it, Jordan!" he cried. "There isn't a copy of the Bible back there."

"The old man's got one in his office downstairs. Get the night watchman to give you a key and go get it."

Meisenberg ran for the elevator.

Holland came out of a telephone booth, dripping perspiration.

"I got your preachers, Harry," he said.

"Anything worth while?"

"They all said the same thing: 'It's the will of God.'"

"That helps. What else?"

"A little from each. None of them had any tip-off on it."

"All right. Write what you've got."

FOSTER'S boy came in with several more sheets of flimsy. The Associated Press man glanced at them. "Here's your Chicago lead, Lon," he said. Burrowes took the copy and read:

Chicago, Sept. 27 (AP)—The end of the world is here. A wall of fire, extending from the farthest points north and south, is sweeping west at the rate of two hundred miles an hour, demolishing everything in its path.

First seen when it appeared on the Atlantic ocean horizon, the blaze soon reached the coast-line. New York City, its millions of inhabitants and billions of dollars

in property, is wiped from the face of the earth. Philadelphia, Boston, Portland, Baltimore, all the coast cities, are no more; and within an hour of sending this dispatch, Pittsburgh, Cleveland and other East Central cities apparently will be destroyed.

Meager dispatches reached the Chicago office of the Associated Press from several of the doomed cities before the fire destroyed all communication.

Portland, Maine, was first to report the approaching destruction. The fragmentary sentence, "A mountain of fire rose out of the Atlantic Ocean this morning and is—" came over the wire from there at a little after eleven P. M. central standard time. Because of its incompleteness this dispatch was not relayed immediately, but was held up in the hope further information would clarify the mystifying phrase.

However, nothing more was heard until the direct wire from New York carried a complete paragraph, revealing the approach of the fire there. A few seconds later another paragraph came through from Newark, N. J., telling of the destruction of New York and definitely determining that the phenomena signaled the end of the world.

Newspapers here are getting out extra editions telling of the approaching cataclysm, and grave fear is felt that riots will follow.

The dispatch concluded with the word "More," indicating additional news would follow as it reached Chicago headquarters of the Associated Press for relaying to other cities on the circuit.

BURROWES tossed the story across the desk to one of his copy-readers.

"Send that along in short takes, Jim," he said. "Slug it 'World.' Send up a kill on the 'Doldge' eight-column banner, and write one for this story. Same size—ninety-six point Gothic bold." He turned to another copy-reader. "Farnham, you knock 'Doldge' down to a regular number twenty-four. Put a fourteen on 'Farmer' and hold 'Justice' to the same."

Farnham was white about the lips. He stood up.

"I don't like doing this, Lon," he said. "But I've got a couple of kids at home. You don't get much chance to see them when you work nights. I'd like to have a couple of hours."

Burrowes looked up, nodded his head.

"Yeh, I know. That's all right. Good night."

"Good night," said Farnham and went away. There were three copy-readers left.

"Anybody else?" asked Burrowes.

His eyes went from one to the other of them. Here a drawn, haunted face met his glance; there an ironically smiling one; the other dulled and vacant, each after the heart of him.

Before Farnham spoke, Burrowes had taken his men's restraint, their sticking to the job, as something to be expected. In fact, it is doubtful if it ever came into his mind that they were doing the unusual. Certainly it had not entered into their consciousnesses. They themselves had not considered their places as human beings in this debacle; mechanically they had prepared to follow routine without thought of heroism.

But Farnham's action served to strip the impersonal from the scene. This thing was going to include them too. Fate was not going to set up a press-box on the outer edges of cataclysm and issue passes. They were to be players in this cosmic game, marchers in this last parade. They realized this now. That is why this face suddenly showed drawn and haunted, and this one ironically smiling and the other dulled and vacant, each after the heart of him. It took courage now to sit there at the half-moon copy-desk and wait and work.

Burrowes saw the change and understood. He waited.

"Anybody else?" he repeated.

None moved. A flash of admiration for them swept through Burrowes. Without further word he gave them more work. Their heads bent over paper, and their pencils raced.

Burrowes looked at their lowered heads and thought:

"If they had gone, they would have been like everyone else will be when the end comes—dying like rats in a flaming barn, twisting themselves with remorse for tiny sins, or cursing the destiny that condemns them to this kind of death. But here's opportunity for gesture—magnificent gesture. There's a laugh in this—a splendid, ironic laugh.

"Tell the world that it is dying, and keep telling the world that it is dying, until you too are dead. Edition after edition as the end comes closer. The world always has demanded news; you've given your lives to assembling it. All right, then, let them have their news; let them have it until it chokes them with its ghastliness and conclusion."

Jordan interrupted his thoughts.

"I got the old man on the phone. He says hold the paper until he gets down here. He's on his way."

Burrowes sat back stunned.

"Is he crazy? Did you tell him what it was?"

"Sure. He said he'd hurry. He wants to be in on this, I guess, and there's no other morning paper to beat us to the street."

Burrowes shrugged. "All right. He's the boss."

"That gives me more time for my stuff," Jordan said.

"Yes, but you'll have to hurry."

Jordan turned away and crossed over to Bennett.

"How you coming, Bennett?"

Bennett jerked the copy-paper from his typewriter.

"Just finished," he said. "Here you are."

Jordan took the copy, then spoke to Holland, whose desk was next to Bennett's.

"How about you, Holland?"

The man was writing hard. Without looking up he said: "In a minute."

"Hear from Higgs at headquarters?"

"Sure. The mayor says everything will be done to fight the fire. All equipment's been ordered to the river front. The police have been detailed to check rioting."

"All right. Hurry up."

Meisenberg popped through the hall door.

"I searched the old man's office, Harry, but there's no Bible there."

"Too bad. I wanted that."

"I know where there's one up the street—at Jennie's place."

"You'll be too late. Let me go."

Jordan went back to Burrowes with Bennett's copy.

"We're about cleaned up on local angles unless there's something else you think ought to go."

"No. With Holland's stories we'll have all we can set. We'll have the paper ready to shoot when the old man comes. The wire will be carrying plenty more."

THE wire carried much more. Fifteen minutes passed—twenty. Then the flood. Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Erie, Chicago, from all sources, the news flowed in. Burrowes fumed as he sent dispatch after dispatch to the composing-room.

"We ought to have been on the street a half-hour ago!" he cried. "Where's the old man?"

Bennett, finished his tasks, found a place at Burrowes' shoulder and read the dispatches as they came to the copy desk. They all told the same story: Newspapers had put out extra editions. Cities had been awakened from their slumber. Terror ruled.

Cincinnati was at the mercy of pillagers; the streets were actually littered with bodies of persons who could not face the end and had committed suicide. In another hour it would be all over there. In Indianapolis, persons driven insane by the impending cataclysm had set fire to the city and were hurling themselves by the hundreds into pyres of their own making. Churches were crowded by those who had the strength of faith to make their peace, but madness possessed many. Louisville was filled with surging mobs bent on a last-minute realization of desires.

ONE by one the cities reported. From no source was there hope. Astronomical observatories said their instruments and observations had given them no warning of the catastrophe, and declined to advance an explanation until receiving further information. There was precious little expectation that such would be forthcoming. This thing had not happened according to the rules of science. It appeared that the earth suddenly had opened up some place in mid-Atlantic from the force of a terrific explosion within itself, and sent this mile-high blaze of fire eating its way through the crust of the world.

Apparently, too, the earth was falling out of its orbit, rushing frantically through space, destroying the ether balance and accounting for muted radios and silenced wireless.

Direct communication between the United States and Europe had been cut off for hours, and now came mystified word from the Far East that that quarter of the globe had lost telegraph and cable contact with England and the Continent. London too, then, and Paris and other cities of the eastern edges of the Atlantic, had met their doom. It meant that the fire was spreading east and west from that belching seam down the middle of the earth, and that it would converge somewhere in the Pacific, its circle of destruction completed, its end accomplished.

Bennett moved away from Burrowes' shoulder and crossed to the window. "This, then," he thought, "is the finish!" He looked at the sky, and it twinkled with stars; he looked at the city below, and it rested in sleep, refreshing itself for the tomorrow which would never come. It seemed funny; it was unbelievable. "This is idiocy," he thought; "this is nightmare." He shook his head to awaken himself, and glanced back inside the room.

He was awake enough. The tense concentration of the men hunched over the half-moon copy-desk; Holland's flying fingers at a typewriter; the slap of the pneumatic tube as copy was sent hurtling to the composing-room on the floor above, proved that. He was awake and he must die, he and—and Anne.

Anne. Surely, God, not Anne!

Something went clear out of him. His head whirled. His eyes closed, and he steadied himself against the window-ledge to keep from falling. Then, as his faintness vanished, he continued to hold tight to keep from madness. He suddenly wanted to scream and shout; he wanted to laugh and sing and bellow. He wanted everything and all things and nothing. He wanted to curl on the floor in a corner and cry like a baby. And he wanted terribly, terribly to sleep.

A telephone ringing in a near-by booth cut through the mists that clouded over his will. Slowly he saw clear again. He heard Jordan bark at him:

"Answer that, Bennett, will you."

He moved to the booth, took down the receiver.

It was Higgs at police headquarters. Bennett listened, then leaned out of the booth and called Jordan.

"It's Higgs," he said. "Wants to know if there's anything more for him."

"Tell him to stick there until he gets a good-night. There'll be plenty to do."

Bennett relayed the message. He heard a curse at the other end of the wire, and then the connection cut off. He hung up the receiver, sat there without moving.

He must call Anne. He must call Anne and tell her this thing was going to happen. She must be prepared. He thought of her getting up from where she would be sitting, reading; he saw her cross to the telephone and pick up the receiver and sweep the hair back from her forehead and then say, "hello." He saw her eyes as they would change from the gladness of greeting him to horror at what he said. They would not change at once.

She would say, "What?" in an easy, laughing voice; and then she would say, "What?" in a voice in which the laugh was dying, and then she would say, "*Paul, come to me—come to me!*" so that he would cry out and become mad again. He would go to her, and they would cling together, waiting for the end. There would be four hours—no, less than four now—in which to grovel and lose grace and love in terror and blind fear. Or, even worse, there would be nothing. They would be only dull, leaden things, and her graciousness would die and she would suffer, and there would be no crooked little smile on her lips, nor phrases from which the Irish would not leave.

He had picked up the telephone. Now he put it down.

Anne must not know. Somehow, some way, she must not know. She must be asleep; she must be unconscious of it; she must be at peace in her heart when the end came upon them.

He stood up and left the booth, and crossed to the copy-desk where he again stood at Burrowes' shoulder. But this time he did not read the dispatches as they came to the desk. He only stood there, and that's where he was standing when the Old Man came in.

The Old Man was not an old man. He was only called that because it was easy to say and easy to think, and there was a certain amount of affection held for him. He was Joe McAuliffe, and a very loud silk shirt clung moistly to his body, and a cigar showed ragged between his teeth. He reminded you of a bulldog, and give him a piece of news to bite on and choke and shake, and he was very like a bulldog. Here was news to suit him, and you could see him set himself for the charge.

"All right," he said. "What's all this?"

BURROWES told him. He told him of the New York bulletin, the Chicago general lead, the stories from Cleveland and Cincinnati and the other lost cities.

"What have you done?"

"Everything's in type. We're giving it all we've got. The front page will look like this." Burrowes sketched a lay-out of the front page make-up as he had planned it. McAuliffe nodded.

"Good. Any proofs?"

Burrowes showed him the proofs that had come down from the composing-room. McAuliffe glanced through them, whistled.

"This is something, isn't it?"

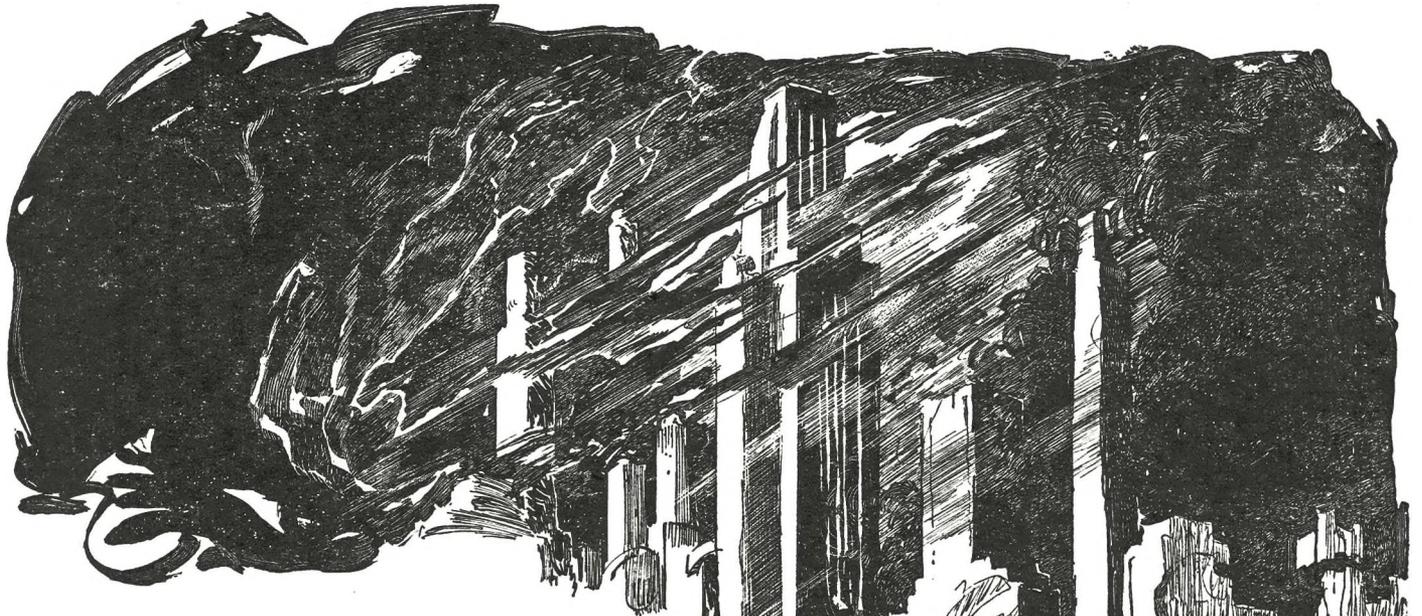
"We're ready to go when you say the word."

"What about you, Jordan? Local angles?"

Jordan told him about the statements of the minister, the rabbi and the priests; he told him about the official orders of the mayor to assemble all fire-fighting apparatus at the river. McAuliffe threw away his cigar in disgust.

"The fool!" he said. "What does he think this is, something like the stockyards burning?"

"He probably doesn't understand," Jordan answered. "He probably can't understand. It's difficult enough, even reading these." He indicated the proofs of the stories



that lay on the desk in front of McAuliffe, and McAuliffe nodded slowly.

"What about the police?"

"They've called out the reserves and stationed them in congested sections to check rioting."

"That makes some sense. There'll be the devil to pay when the boys start yelling this extra on the streets." McAuliffe stood up, pulled his wet shirt free, where it stuck to his sides. "Well, might as well let her go."

Bennett stepped forward. He was deathly pale now.

"Just a minute, Chief. Are you sure you're right about this?"

McAuliffe looked at him. They all looked at him. The big man frowned.

"What are you talking about?"

Bennett hesitated. He wanted to be clear now. It was so important that he be clear. He was talking for Anne—he suddenly realized he was talking for many other Annes, although the others really didn't matter very much to him.

"Well," said Joe McAuliffe, "what are you talking about?"

"This—this extra," Bennett said, "this letting people know."

"What the hell! Why shouldn't they know?"

"It'll be awful. Everyone will go crazy, just the way they have every place else they've found out. They'll have hours before them to face it. God knows what will happen!" Bennett was stumbling for words.

McAuliffe was impatient.

"What could happen worse than what *will* happen?"

"Everything. Dying in fear. Knowing you're going to die. Trapped. That's not how I'd like to die."

McAuliffe said nothing. For almost the first time, the human in the man and the editor in him met in conflict. It gave Bennett a moment to go on.

"We're the only morning paper here, and only a few will know if we keep quiet," he urged. But McAuliffe shook himself and spoke gruffly.



Suddenly the fullness of it all burst upon him. He fell to his knees beside her. "Oh, my dear!" he cried.

"It's our job to give 'em the news. What happens afterward isn't our business."

"But it *is* our business. Look here. Read that." He handed McAuliffe a proof of the story from Indianapolis. "I've read it."

"Why should that happen here? What possible end will it serve to have people killing themselves, committing every crime, dying like animals in a trap?"

"They'll know it anyway before the end."

"No—not all of them. And if they do, it'll be for a shorter time. They'll not have so long to lose themselves."

"This is a newspaper."

Burrowes leaned toward them. His eyes were bright. "That's what I say, Chief," he said. "Give it to 'em!"

Bennett turned. "You're wrong, Lon. God, don't you see how wrong?"

"You haven't been in this business very long, have you?" "Long enough. That's got nothing to do with it."

"I've sat at desks like this for twenty years. I'm not giving up this story."

Bennett turned back to McAuliffe.

"You can see it, can't you, Chief? Look! Those streets out there are quiet. There are a million people asleep. Why do we have to wake them up for news like this—why do we have to send them into a hell—crazy?"

"We know it. We're not crazy."

"That isn't the same. We're detached. We never think of ourselves as part of anything. We're not even conscious this thing is going to hit us. We can't be. Our minds won't entertain it. It's news that comes from New York—from other places. It's got a local angle, that's all. Well, I'm thinking of it now. I'm thinking of it not for myself, but for some one I love. I don't want her to be told she's going to die. I don't want to see her terror and her fear and her madness. I want her to go easily and sweetly, just as she's lived. Can't you understand?"

Burrowes' eyes burned.

"How about us—these men here?" His arm waved to include the group at the copy-desk. "One of them walked out. That made us think. But we stuck because we had a job to do. Maybe they knew that our only salvation was holding on here. Where do we fit into this?"

"We're only a few. We're better equipped."

"Equipped better for what—to die? What kind of a life have you led?"

"Not very good. But here's our chance to wipe out a lot. Have you thought of that?"

Burrowes looked toward McAuliffe.

"It's up to you, Chief."

McAuliffe slowly shook his head. "I know what you mean, Bennett," he said. "I know how you feel. But we can't do much. The radio—"

"The radio's been dead for hours."

"All right. But telephone- and telegraph-wires are still working where the fire hasn't reached, and news like this has its own magic way of spreading. Half an hour from now, they'll all know." His hand swept to include the sleeping city. "They'll know, whether we print a paper or not and that's our job. See?"

Bennett nodded. "It's your paper."

"It's a newspaper." McAuliffe turned to Burrowes. "Let her go, Lon."

Burrowes spoke to the composing-room through the direct telephone. "All right. Let her go, Abby."

FOR an instant there was dead silence as each man sank into his own thoughts. Burrowes shook himself. He spoke to McAuliffe.

"All right to give good night, boss?"

"Why not? We're all washed up."

Burrowes grinned. "You said it." He faced his men. "All right, you fellows. Good night."

The three copy-readers stood up, started to file out, a little lost. It was rather more as if they were losing their jobs than anything else.

"And so long!" Burrowes added.

"So long, Lon!" they said.

Bennett, Holland and Meisenberg looked at Jordan, who nodded. "I guess that goes for you guys too," he said. "Good night."

"Good night, Harry."

"Oh, Holland, you might telephone Higgs his good night at headquarters."

Holland went to the telephone. Bennett and Meisenberg said good night to Burrowes and McAuliffe and went out. There could be no leavetaking, such as there would have been if one had been quitting the paper, or going on vacation. They were dulled, somehow. There was no

feeling, no imminence of separation, only a strange emptiness. McAuliffe and Burrowes and Jordan were left.

"Well," Burrowes said, "I'm thirsty. How about a drink?"

"Suits me," said McAuliffe. "Joe's still open. Coming, Jordan?"

"Sure—why not?"

They slipped into their coats. Burrowes let his hand trail along the top of the copy-desk as he went out.

"So long," he said softly, under his breath.

BENNETT took a taxicab home. He sat within himself as the car sped along. The streets, he thought, were strangely quiet. They weren't really. It was just the way he thought.

The driver pulled up at a crossing to allow a roaring group of fire-wagons to thunder past.

"That's about the tenth company I've come across tonight," he said. "You're from the *Telegram*. What's up?"

"Nothing," said Bennett. "Only a fire on the levee." "Must be a big one to pull all these uptown babies down here."

"Yes, it is."

At his door Bennett handed the man a ten-dollar bill, all he had.

"You're out all night, aren't you?"

The man nodded. "Until six in the morning."

"You can keep the change from that if you'll go out and get blind drunk."

"Well, that's not hard to take."

"Make it a promise?"

"It's made."

"Okay. Good night."

The man saluted. Bennett went inside, walked up the two flights to his apartment. He noticed that the hand holding the key to the door shook as he took it from his pocket and he paused a moment to collect himself. He thought his face must be very white and he bent over, holding his breath, until he felt the blood flushing his cheeks. Then he fitted the key into the lock and opened the door.

Anne was not in the living-room. He found her in the kitchen where he had thought she'd be, and she was reading a book at the table with her head propped up by her hands. Her hair was a little tousled, her eyes drooped with sleepiness. She looked up, saw him in the doorway, and was in his arms before he could speak.

"Oh, I thought you'd never come!" she said.

He held her very close.

"You shouldn't have waited up."

"I couldn't go to bed tonight without you here." She started helping him off with his coat. "You'll be tired. Should I make tea?"

"No. Some beer will be just right."

"It's fine." She smiled her crooked, shy smile. "I cheated. I had a bottle."

He laughed, crossed to the table, and sat down. His legs were strangely weak. He looked at the book she had been reading. It was Hudson's "Green Mansions."

"Like this?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. Think to be wearing dresses made of spiders' webs."

"Did somebody do that?"

"Yes, *Rima*, the girl. She lived alone in the green forest. She was afraid of all men. It was very beautiful."

She put the chicken sandwiches and beer in front of him and sat down opposite. He watched her.

"You're a lovely, lonely spirit," he said. "You should live alone in a forest and wear dresses of spiders' webs and be queen of all things beautiful and sweet."

"Oh, yes. But not alone. Not without you. What would I be doing without you?"

He looked over the edge of a sandwich, smiled at her.

"Then what happened to *Rima*?"

She half filled a glass and watched it foam to the top before she said, slowly and softly as if she were a long way off: "*Rima* died."

"Oh." His voice was an echo of hers, and their eyes suddenly raised and met. He had to hold fiercely to himself, for there was a depth of fear in her glance which caused him to shrink back. She leaned across the table. "Oh, Paul, I'm afraid tonight. Terribly afraid."

He stood up quickly and came around the table to her.

"There now," he said. "Don't tremble so. Nothing's going to happen."

"I know. But all day it's been like that, as if— Paul, you and I aren't ever going to die, are we?"

She spoke desperately, her words a challenge to the intuitive sense of doom which seized her. His hand smoothed the hair back from her forehead.

"No, dear. We aren't going to die. Some day we'll have to move on some place, but that's all."

"I couldn't die now. It wouldn't be fair—now that we have so much to live for." She put his hand against her body. "It's our baby, Paul."

He thought: "This, too, will never come to pass." But he said: "Cutting up an awful fuss for such a little thing, isn't it?"

"We'll be proud of him. He's a strong one."

He laughed. "Why is it Irish girls always want their babies to be boys?"

"Never you mind now. This is a boy, I'm telling you."

AS suddenly as her fear had descended upon her, it left her, and he talked on swiftly so that she would not revert to it. "Did you see the doctor today?"

She smiled.

"I'm fine. I guess I'm the kind that thrives on it."

"Did he say how long?"

"About six weeks."

"That would be—"

"July eighteenth."

"Well! Almost my birthday."

"I told the doctor I'd like it put off a week on account of that, but he only laughed. I don't think it was much to ask."

He smiled and kissed her and turned away. The minutes were speeding. In an hour, in less than that, word of earth's end would come to all. The quiet of their neighboring streets would be shattered with awful sounds as each tortured mind met death in its own way. Then Anne would know. There could be no stopping her knowing. Even in sleep she would be awakened, and awake she would catch the first faint despairing cry.

Should he, then, tell her now and try to comfort her, pretending death was easy if it came to them together? Would she be strong enough for that? Would she forgive him his silence if he didn't? Or would it, as his first impulse had prompted him, still be better to hide it from her to the last, stealing from the vanishing moments a precious few for love, holding the laugh in her eyes until it no longer could be held and the smile on her lips until terror drove it forth?

Her eyes noticed his paleness.

"Are you all right, dear?" she asked anxiously.

He avoided her glance.

"Fine. My eyes are a little tired, that's all."

"You work too hard." She paused as he drained his glass, then went on: "You were so late coming home after you telephoned. Was there some late news held you up?"

He wet his dry lips with his tongue. "No—no. Only Doldge. They wanted to be sure everything was covered."

"That was terrible about Doldge, wasn't it?"

"I guess he had it coming to him."

"But what a horrible way to die."

"It didn't have to be. She hated him. The poison she used was like fire. She could have used morphine if she wanted to. There was enough in the house—"

HE paused, and his face suddenly went white. He stared at her, and held hard to the table with hands that did not seem to belong to him. She rose swiftly.

"Paul, you're sick!"

He stood up, turned his back to her and walked across the room to the enameled sink. He twisted the faucet and spoke impatiently, so she would not question him further.

"It's my eyes, I tell you."

"Let me do something. There's boracic acid."

"Cold water will do just as well. I'll have them looked at tomorrow. Now suppose you get to bed. It's long past your hour."

"Oh, I couldn't sleep now."

"Nevertheless, get to bed. You're under doctor's orders."

"Won't you come now?"

"I want to finish my sandwich first."

She left the room, and he went back to the table and sat down.

Was this, then, the answer?

His eyes stared into space, his brain revolved in torment. Death already was a phantom shadow hovering outside the door, but could he take it by the hand and lead it inside? That woman had killed Doldge in hate. Could he kill in love? At no matter what gracious gain, did he have the right to do that?

He got up and went to the back door which opened off the kitchen onto a small porch forming part of the fire-escape. Across the alley loomed the back of other apartment-houses, striped gray in a strangely orange moonlight. It was deathly quiet, the only movement the slow swing of a piece of tattered awning which moved from the force of a dry, lifeless breeze that to Bennett's mind seemed to carry the smell of things dead and dying. It was as if he were being breathed upon from the lungs of a decaying corpse.

Suddenly, from one of the apartments across the way, the stillness was cut by the subdued ring of a telephone. In one room lights were turned on. A second passed, then more lights, until the whole apartment was ablaze. The telephone, Bennett realized, must have carried warning. He knew then McAuliffe had been right. News like this spread regardless of means to suppress it. Cries of newsboys shouting their extras would only serve to complete knowledge of the impending doom. He watched, and in a moment the apartment on the same floor, opposite the first, lighted up. Word was spreading.

He heard a woman's smothered scream and saw a rear window jerked frantically shut by a man whose face he could not see, but whose body was outlined against the light behind him. For a moment more he stood watching and listening, and then, as from a distance, he heard another cry, a thin, despairing, awful cry, which choked off suddenly in the throat—and left him trembling.

That cry resolved him.

He straightened up, looked for a moment into the face of the strangely orange moon and went inside. Passing through the kitchen he turned off the lights. In the hallway he took the telephone-receiver from the hook. Anne heard him from the bedroom and called:

"What was that cry I heard?"

"Why—nothing. I didn't hear anything."

"Oh! Are you coming to bed?"

"In a moment, dear."

She was awake. That meant he would have to work swiftly. He went into the bathroom.

On a shelf of the medicine cabinet, in a small bottle, he found half of what he wanted. On another shelf, in a square pasteboard box, he found the other half.

The bottle held half-grain tablets of morphine; the box held capsules of a harmless sleeping-powder.

He emptied two of the capsules of the powder and filled each of them with four of the small tablets. Four grains in all, a lethal dose.

He allowed himself no introspection, no thought. He steeled himself to move swiftly and surely. He knew he would not be able to go through with it if he stopped to consider. Anne—her love, her trust—the child that was to have come—these things would stay his hand if he listened to the still small voice of hope that would not die in his heart.

Only once did he hesitate. That was to ask himself whether he should take four grains of the drug himself and join Anne in the slumber from which there would be no awakening. Side by side he could lie with her, and then, when the end came—an end of fire and burning and horror and suffering—he would be at peace, too, in a death-sleep, easy and gracious and without pain.

But this temptation he put away. He would wait, holding her, loving her, conscious to the end, reaping from death the last second of that which had been the most beautiful in life.

He filled a glass with water, took the two capsules, turned out the light and went into the bedroom. The lamp on the table beside the bed threw a soft, dull light over her face. She smiled up at him.

"You were so long. What were you doing?"

"Nothing much. Getting your sleeping-powders."

"Oh, I don't want them tonight. I want to lie awake and talk to you. Tell me all about today."

"None of that, now. You've got to sleep."

He came slowly around the bed with the capsules and the water. In the rosy light from the lamp his gray face

showed flushed and clear. He held one hand against the other to steady it, but the glass shook and water spilled on the coverlet.

"Clumsy!" she laughed. "Give me that."

Suddenly he lost all courage. He wanted to take back the glass, but his nerveless hands would not move. She reached up and took it from him.

"Now the powders," she said.

He could only look at her. He no longer had strength to act. His eyes were coals of fire burning into his head. With all his strength he wanted to cry out. But he could do nothing except watch with mad fascination as she took the capsules from his opened palm. His tongue held to the back of his teeth. She looked up at him amusedly.

"You needn't be so grim about it," she said. "I'll take them."

She reached up and took the capsules from his opened palm. With a grimace of distaste she put the capsules into her mouth and washed them down with the water.

"There. Satisfied?"

He nodded, found strength somehow to take the glass from her and put it down on the lamp table. He looked at her. For a moment he had the feeling he was looking at some one he had never before seen. He was curiously dispassionate. Then, suddenly, the fullness of it all burst upon him. He fell to his knees beside her.

"Oh, my dear!" he cried.

"Paul, Paul! I love you so."

He held her, then, and talked to her, until finally she was still in his arms. And when at last the streets outside filled with a milling, maddened, doomed multitude he still held her, while she slept her lasting sleep, unafraid, unknowing, a smile on her lips.

The end found him that way, his arms around her, his body close to hers. The fire that consumed him in its swift embrace took its toll of awful terror from his soul. But she never knew. . . .

(You of the spirit world who read this each has your own story of that last day of Earth. Some of you may have a memory of something bravely done, of some suffering shared. Let this story of two people who loved each other be part of that legend.)

Man Overboard!

(Continued from page 5)

waiting a chance to let go the falls. We waited until a big sea lifted the boat from underneath as the ship rolled heavily to leeward.

"Now!" yelled the mate.

We cast the blocks off from the patent hooks, and found ourselves riding in the sea. How curious the ship looked from the tiny boat! One instant the great red sweep of her hull rose into view as she rolled the other way, with moss and barnacles thickly covering her; then as we slipped astern, she rolled the other way, and in a confused instant every detail of those decks was brought home to us. . . . Then she was gone. We had slipped astern, falling into the troughs. We could not see the ship within a few seconds of leaving her, except when we were thrown high upon the boiling crest of a snarling graybeard; when in the troughs, we could see only boiling foam.

The spume and the spray filled the air. It was strange to be so close to the water. We pulled at the oars, steadily, this way and that. We had no idea which way to go—where the boy was.

The mate, splendid figure of a Viking, stood on the stern-sheets, balancing himself perfectly there to the boat's wild motion, staring this way and that. The horizon was bounded by the turgid sea.

Water came into the boat heavily. It leaked a bit. We baled steadily, with two boys. God help us if we had had to take to the boats! There was no water in the breakers.

We tried to follow the ship's wake back, but a sailing ship even running heavily leaves little wake. That was hopeless. We remembered that we had been running before the wind, and headed back into it: but its direction changed. We remembered that albatrosses circled over a body in the water, and sometimes attacked

it. We saw some albatrosses, and steered for them; they came and circled over us.

It was raining heavily then, and the boat was laboring. Up the sides of the big seas we rode, toiling at the oars, then over the crests and down the other side. We could not see the boy.

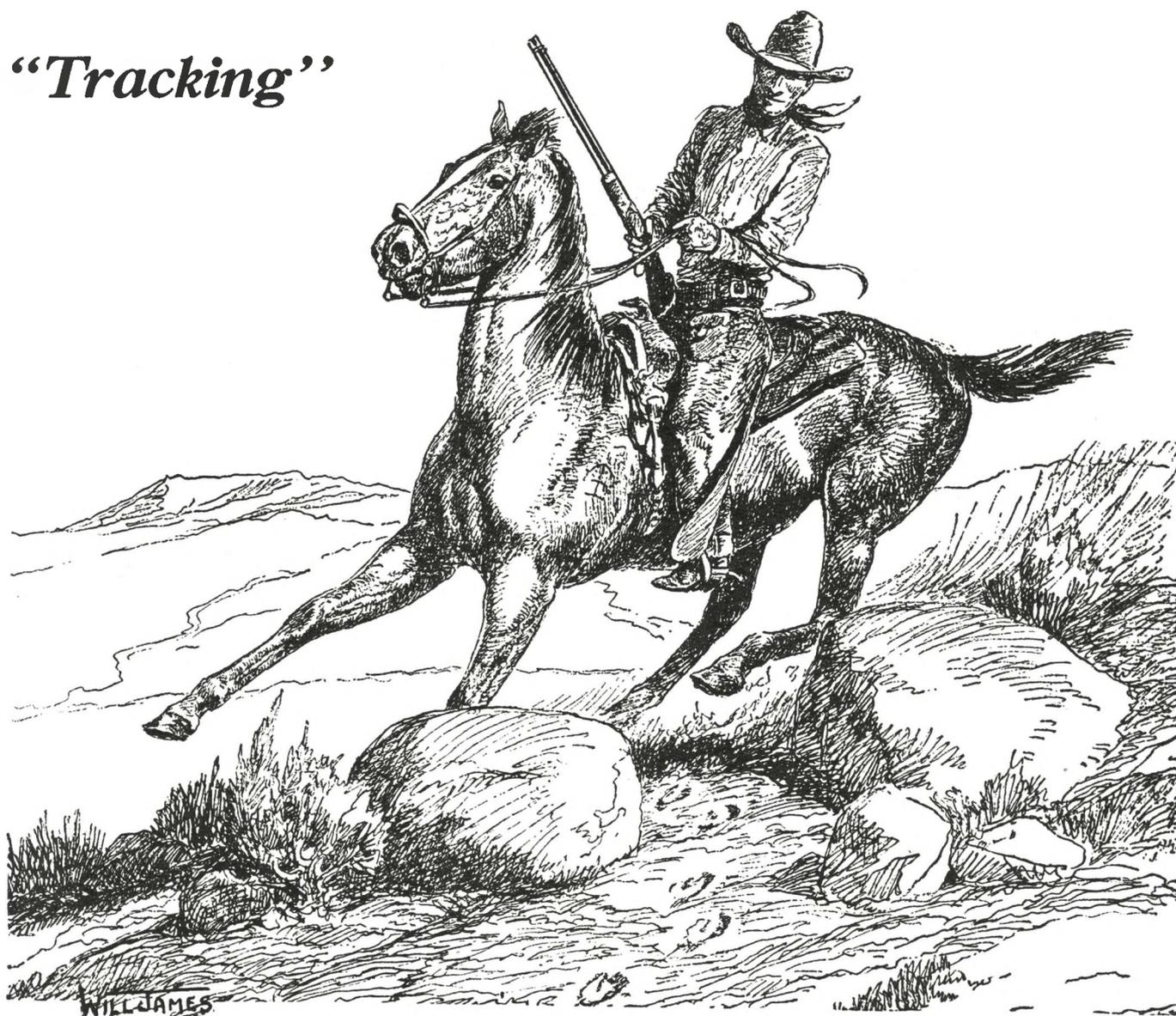
This way and that we pulled, the mate straining there, the boys all pulling; no word was spoken. The mate gave no orders. He had a long steering oar that he used to guide the boat down the slippery troughs; he was hatless and coatless in the rain. A grand figure of a man he was, standing there, unflustered, unhurried, apparently unperturbed. Calmly he surveyed the waters, seeking the boy who had gone; well he knew, too, that six other lives were in his keeping. . . . We saw some fog coming down. We could not see the ship. We saw no sign of the boy. We guessed he might be dead of exposure by then. It was bitter cold.

We were on the point of giving up, and going back to look for the ship, when all of a sudden, we saw him! Not three seas away! We had been going in his direction all the time! We rushed down upon him, took him carefully in over the stern-sheets. He was unconscious. Frenchman threw his coat around him, and sat there in the boat in his underpants and singlet. It had been our watch below and there had been no time to put on clothes.

We laid the boy in the bottom of the boat with the coat around him, and pulled back in the general direction of the ship. They had been watching us from high aloft on the vessel, and she quickly sailed down to us and picked us up.

The boy was at his work again within a week. But he was very thoughtful for the rest of the voyage.

“Tracking”



The Cowboy Today

By WILL JAMES

TALK about tracking, and trailing—I knowed fellers that could near track a snake on bare rock-bed or a squirrel through the branches of a clump of willows. About the best tracker I ever seen was an Indian cowboy from the lava country of Idaho.

There's as much of a knack to tracking as there is to roping. I tracked a bull one time that broke out of a pasture. The trail was two days old when I picked it up. I kept that bull's tracks after he'd went through and mixed in with many herds and other bulls on his rambling. His tracks was the same as any other bull, I had no lead to go by as to where he was headed, and I caught up with him in one day, twenty-five miles away. I don't think I'd call that bad tracking.

Another time, I was tracking down in the southern country. There'd been a heavy rain, and the cattle all hit for the "basins." I let 'em stay there till I thought the basins (or tanks) dried up and the stock was choking

on mud. Then me and another rider rode down to get them cattle. The other rider was a Northern hand, and so was I, but I'd been south quite a bit, and where tracks are plainer to see than they are up North, in the tall grass. . . .

Well, I seen some stock tracks go down a deep wash, and when I seen the gravel shake off their feet on the lava rock, I knowed where they was headed, where the water would gather and where the feed would be thicker.

I told him to come on. He said I was off the trail. Sure I was off the trail, but I got the direction good, and by saving ten miles or more, I got ahead of the leaders and turned 'em back off the mud-holes, where many might of got the "antractcs" and died.

Some old-timers can follow a dim and crooked track while riding at a high lope. A feller would even think that sometimes they can even tell the color of a critter by the track it makes.

Fish and Finance

"Boy," says Frogface to his shrimp-sized partner, "every time I looks at you, I thinks about change for a nickel."
Bitterness ensues—and a joyous comedy.

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

"WHUT'S done put de pe'manent wave in *my* backbone, is carryin' on all de brain-work around here for de both of us!" quarreled Mr. "Frogface" Reeves, of color, as he scowled at his shrimp-sized associate in business across a liberal platter of fried channel-cat. Mr. Reeves was large, loud, prominent as to eyes, mouth, and garb, and with but little time, his manner indicated, to fool away on small-time boys like this Marmaduke Brown.

"Whut brain-work?" Marmaduke mumbled derisively above the cornbread and "black-strap" molasses that were a mere junior partner's portion. "Thought us wuz gwine in de fish business: aint need no brains to sell fish."

Mr. Reeves blasted him with a look. "Aint keer whut kind of business it is," he snorted. "Somebody got to do de head-work and de financin'—dat's me. And somebody got to sweep out de place and wait on de trade—dat's you."

Marmaduke kept on making a noise like a boy eating cornbread.

"Jest de financin' now," continued Frogface peevishly, "takes up all a man's time, when he got *you* for a partner. Bankers looks at you, and den starts hollerin' for mo' collateral on de loan right off. Class is somep'n whut you aint got."

"How come bankers?" Marmaduke came up for air. "Thought us wuz gwine start a fish-sellin' business. Dat mean us jest cotch fish and sell 'em, aint it?"

Disgust swept the darkened countenance of Mr. Reeves.

"Nigger, dey aint never no *size* to yo' notions!" he exploded. "Cotch fish? Boy, when I goes into nothin', I goes into it in a big way. Makes a splash whut *is* a splash. Why, us cain't cotch all de fish it takes to start a business *my* size!"

"Cain't, eh?"

"So us got to buy 'em. And dat takes cap'tal. Also a 'frigerator, store, telephone, cash-register, and loan at de bank—"

Marmaduke half-swallowed his knife by mistake. "How come 'loan at de bank'?" he made himself further obnoxious. "Let old bank git mixed up in yo' business, and befo' long aint be no business—jest be de bank."

"Borrers from de bank to buy de fish and fixtures wid, I says," Frogface ignored idiocy. "Besides dat, whoever hear of a business nowadays whut aint owe money at de bank?"

Marmaduke's eyes rolled uneasily. He didn't know the answer to that one either; but he could see trouble ahead. "Whar at us gwine git no loan?" he further betrayed his one-track mind.

"From de Afro-'Merican Bank and Buryin' Society. Dat's de big cullud bank on Broad Street. Name on de



Illustrated by
Everett Lowry

window, says, 'Poleon Boomer, President.' I aint mess wid no small boys round de bank, neither. Does business wid de pres'dent."

"I aint know nobody in dar," muttered Marmaduke uneasily again. When Frogface got big ideas and the bit in his teeth this way, it was time for a junior partner to take protective measures against a lot of personal bag-holding in the near future.

"Course you aint," replied Mr. Reeves loftily. "Dat one de mainmost reasons I can git de money dar—dey aint know you got nothin' to do wid dis business, wid all dem small notions of yourn. Why, old 'Poleon Boomer aint even know me—yit. He jest know *about* me: how good I is."

Marmaduke subsided into a mumble. There was dynamite in this situation, if something were not done soon along deflation lines. Let Frogface get to running wild among the words

and writing-ink around a bank, and he was liable to come out with the firm of Reeves, Reeves and Brown, Dealers in Fish, owing the institution the next five-years' dividends on a ninety-day note. Frogface was *both* of the Reeves in the firm name—this being his idea of letting the public know the relative importance of its two members. And that even a banker could say "no" to Frogface, once he was in full tongue after a loan, was improbable in the worried eyes of Marmaduke.

"Make haste and pay de check now," instructed Frogface through his last mouthful. "Us got to dust about and git de fish business gwine."

"Sho is take a heap of fish, to carry mo' stock dan you eats!" Marmaduke eyed the check lugubriously. "Eighty cents—and us aint got but two dollars in de capital-stock kitty now."

"Cain't do business eatin' steaks off a sardine," retorted Mr. Reeves expansively. "Wait twel I comes out dat bank, though! Whale-chops'll be de size of my dish, den! Year mo', and us'll have a chain of fish-sto'es, all spraddled out across town, and plenty of money den. Git yo' mind off of small-change!"

"You tryin' to make too much noise for de size of your whistle," demurred Mr. Brown sulkily. "Why cain't us start in small, and work up? Git us a fish, and sell it; den buy two mo' fish, and sell dem; den maybe buy half a dozen, and a tub of ice. Aint need to borrer so much and owe so much dataway."

"A fish! A fish!" scorned Frogface. Nothing was more boring than a small-bore partner with no vision, this way! "Boy, every time I looks at you, I thinks about change for a nickel. Dat 'xactly whut you looks like. You go into a bank borrerin' money, and dey slips you one dem little barrel-banks to save yo' pennies in, 'stead of makin' you de loan. You got to *impress* dem bankin' boys, I tells you. Dey measures you wid yo' own yard-

stick. But dey sends out for surveyors' chains when dey sees *me* comin'!"

"You better let me go 'long wid you—help hold you down when you starts borrorin'."

"Done told you stay 'way when I starts financin'. You mess up ever'thing wid dem mousetrap-sized notions of yourn. Yo' pants all patch' too—aint no class to you."

"Whut dis Boomer boy look like?" Marmaduke was trying to build up a new idea in his head, now that the old ones weren't working.

"Big heavy-set boy, wid a vest on in de summertime. Diamond on he finger, and another one in he necktie."

"Done look him over good, aint you?"

"Aint look at him a-tall yit! Aint need to; dem big-money boys all alike—looks like me—classy. Aint no shrimps like you *in* de bankin' business; dem boys eats reg'lar!"

"Hmph! Thought you knowed him, way you wuz braggin' about. Now you says you aint never even seen him—"

"Not yit, I means. But he done *heard* about how good I is. Ever'body done dat. Me and him be shootin' craps together before Sunday. I works fast."

"Aint it so!" Marmaduke was thinking of the size of the note Frogface would sign—for Marmaduke, possibly, to pay. Old Frogface was the sort who charmed a banker right down off his limb; which was exactly what made it so important that he be headed off somehow now.

"When us gwine see de Boomer boy—me and you?" he resumed the dangerous subject.

"Us'? You aint gwine, I tells you! Whut you want do, mess up de deal? Old banker wouldn't lend you a nickel wid a gold dollar for de collateral! And *I* is jest waitin' for some white folks to leave town, so I can go to de bank."

"Whut white folks got to do wid it?"

"Dey owns de car whut I's gwine drive up to de bank in. Big se-dan. But Germicide Hill whut chauffeur for 'em cain't git dey car to loan to me twel dey gone, day after to-morrer, he say. You got to impress dem bankers; show 'em you's a big-money bozo. Car help do it."

Marmaduke's despair was adulterated with admiration. You had to hand it to Frogface after all, for the size of his notions. Yet this fish business was liable to get into a jam—and a couple of fish men into the jail-house—if this kept up. Not to speak of the other alternative of some banking boy coming out of the impending loud-mouthed huddle with Frogface with a five-fourths interest in the fish firm of Reeves, Reeves and Brown.

"Frawgface, you lemme go 'long wid you to dat bank!" There were near-tears in the Marmadukian voice as he

contemplated possibilities. "You liable to git to over-hollerin' yo'self in dar, and mess us all up. Start small, and work up—dat de way *I* say do business."

"Start small, and *shrivel* up, dat whut you means!" Frogface frowned on him impatiently. "You 'tend to de sweepin'-out; lemme 'tend to de financin'. I jest hears whar at I can borror a de'by hat, too—brown one. Stand hitched while I swellifies myse'f wid clo'es!"

Marmaduke stood hitched—with his intellect traveling in circles. A boy couldn't rely on anybody—not even a 1931 banker—to say no to the persuasive Frogface, which meant that the balloon of their business was liable to end shortly in a big loud bust—with Marmaduke holding the string, and just eating Mondays and Fridays.

"More dat Frawgface listen to hisself, de louder he git," mourned Marmaduke as the hours passed without results while he strove to think up a way to head off Frogface in his oversized outlook on finance.

Indeed, it was nearing midnight when the solution came—one springing from the general principle that a ham sandwich just before a meal-time can wreck an appetite without starving the diner. Whatever Frogface did there-

after, the future of the firm was secure—provided the junior partner pulling the scheme showed an upright face and some small evidence that he knew his business and was not above its details—showed this in the right place, that is.

Marmaduke's grin grew as he checked and re-checked his scheme, until finally he fell asleep, calm in the consciousness of an anchor to windward; in his ears was the imagined melody of his own voice, chanting through clamoring streets.

The following morning, Marmaduke crept into the firm's headquarters by the back entrance and very late. An impatient and quarrelsome senior partner sternly awaited him. Indeed, nothing about him seemed to suit Mr. Reeves. Not even the fish in Marmaduke's pants pocket, nor the hour of his arrival.

"One de firstest principles 'bout good business," Frogface lectured his assistant loudly, "is gittin' down to work on time. Dat's one thing de help about a place is *got* to do. And not gwine about smellin' like a dock while you's doin' it, neither. Whut dat fish doin' in yo' pocket, nohow?"

Marmaduke dragged forth his fish and looked at it enigmatically.

"Dat my business-card," he countered cockily—far too cockily, Mr. Reeves felt. "Shows I's in de fish business," continued Mr. Brown. "—Understands fish—"



Nothing about Marmaduke seemed to suit Mr. Reeves—not even the fish in Marmaduke's pants pocket.

"*Gwine* be in de fish business, you means," corrected Frogface meaningly. "After *I* fixes up de financin' for you. Right now, it means you's in de street—on yo' ear—is you go around classy folks wid a dead fish on you. Why, s'pose *I* wuz to go into de bank to see Mist' Boomer, wid a fish on me, like you—how much money you think he'd loan me?"

"*Too much*," muttered Marmaduke, with something new in his note that Frogface didn't like. It was time this Marmaduke boy got squelched down to his right size again. So—

"Look out de winder, down dar," he instructed importantly.

Marmaduke looked—and gasped. Things were speeding up! He had just been in time to—

"Dey left town sooner'n Germicide 'spected," Mr. Reeves deigned to explain. "Dat how comes I aint got to wait twel tomorrer to go to de bank. In dese clothes, too."

Marmaduke gaped again. Dressed like this, not even Marmaduke's strategy was likely to make any difference: Frogface would be irresistible! Starting with his bright blue coat decorated with diagonally set pockets; his awning-striped gray trousers, borrowed from a friend's pressing-club; the previously mentioned brown derby; and a vest that even a banker—or a circus-barber—might well envy.

"So you's bound and 'tarmined to make a fool out yo'se'f, is you? Better lemme go 'long wid you to dat bank, befo' you—" Marmaduke gasped at straws before he was swept under in the torrent of Frogface's scorn.

"Peddle dem fish, boy!" he whirled on the unlucky junior partner. "And don't try to git my mind down whar yourn is! It's all geared up to finance dem fish-stores, and here you comes shufflin' round late, in dem patched britches, wid a fish in yo' pocket, and wants *me* to take *you* to see de big bankin' boy! Stand back, boy, while I banks! And leave de brain-work around here to dem whut's *got* brains!"

Then down the steps, and out to the white folks' car, flounced the irritated Mr. Reeves in all his finery. Marmaduke stood looking after him oddly, Frogface was later to recall.

"Gwawn! Beller yo' way right on *in* to de bank, den!" the flattened Mr. Brown hurled feebly after the departing Big Breeze. "I can wait—*now!*"

But Mr. Reeves was too busy attending to muttering of his own to hear.

"Soon as I gits de financin' fixed," his soliloquy ran, "I is gwine incawp'rate and git shet of dat little Ma'm'duck mess and dem louse-sized notions of his'n!"

MR. REEVES steered grandly and noisily off of Darktown's main street, and swung the big sedan into an unpaved short-cut.

He lowered the window glass at his side, and sniffed the spring air. A season of April showers had swept the thoroughfare recently, leaving numerous mud-puddles in it. Through these he threaded his way carefully but hurriedly. He had to keep the car clean, for purposes of impressing Napoleon Boomer, the big loan-and-collateral man. But it was a chance too good to miss for him to impress also a lodge sister, by driving past her home in this car and this garb.

Frogface swelled happily at the tribute his passage drew from open-mouthed compatriots along the curbs. Grati-fied, he turned his head to see who was looking at him—and precipitated mishap.

On the opposite side of the car, awaiting Frogface's grandiose passage before crossing, was an unimportant-

looking little darky in a snuff-colored suit, and carrying an umbrella—one who was just too late in seeing the coming conjunction of the car of Mr. Reeves and the street's major mud-hole. For a delivery-truck was already cutting off the little colored man's retreat in the rear. Looking magnificently elsewhere, on his way to impress a banker, Frogface drove headlong and hard into the puddle.

Showers of muddy water sheeted forth. From socks to collar the little darky took it as the liner takes the wave. Dark and dripping ruin embraced him, with red wrath not far behind as he took in the attitude and identity of his besplasher. Then, like a mud-plastered wildcat, he was on the running-board of Mr. Reeves' big car, demanding that the startled Frogface come out and be killed.

Frogface came, with a grievance of his own: His borrowed car was all messed up! Besides, he didn't like this new little runt's language. Personalities and accusations streaming through it put a fighting aspect on both the splattered-up boy and the situation.

"Look here, half-po'tion," he rumbled angrily as he emerged like a bee-stung grizzly, "is you want to keep out de mud, keep out de street when yo' betters is passin' by! And 'nother thing—boys yo' sawed-off size says jest about half whut *you* is done said to me, and den dey is lilies on dey vest whut aint grow dar! You git me?"

THE outraged little pedestrian's answer was a smack that started at ground-level and shot upward to Frogface's nose. Then, umbrella and all, he boarded him, to the accompaniment of battle-howls that would have chilled the heart of a gorilla. The assailed Mr. Reeves, startled at the fury of the onslaught, staggered, slipped, and went down—in his own mud-puddle.

"Splash *me*, is you! Mess up *my* clothes, is you!" screamed the berserk and umbrellaed one, fairly beside himself as he leaped up and down upon the prostrate and partially submerged form of Frogface, while his umbrella rose and fell right lustily.

At length, like a walrus from the sea, arose Mr. Reeves from his puddle beside the borrowed car. Locust-like, the no-longer-bright blue coat was split from stem to stern. Water poured muddily from the pockets of the also-borrowed breeches, while the derby hat bore flattened resemblance to a tin can that has been run over by a truck. The ire of Mr. Reeves was up, and the battle was on.

A gallery gathered, as over and over in the muddy street rolled the battlers, in a whirling combination of wrestling, boxing, and mayhem, with both contestants soon unrecognizable beneath their own personal blood and mud. Rules, rounds, and referees went by the board. It was a fight to a finish, a finish forecast at last by muffled screechings of, "*Leggo my neck! Unchew my ear!*" from the snuff-suited little gladiator at the bottom of the muddy two-man pile.

"Bite my laig one mo' time, runt, and I *swallows* your ear!" growled the puffing Frogface. "Mess wid me again, and I—"

But across this threat there rang the old spoil-sport cry of, "Here come de cops!" Mr. Reeves arose hastily, slid into the seat of the sedan, and was gone—in the nick of time, and unmistakably victor over the also-departing snuff-suited boy.

Triumphant though troubled, the mud-plastered Frogface drove from the scene of carnage. True, he had won a victory and taught his assailant a lesson—but at a bitter cost in clothes and car-washing. He couldn't impress any banker *now!*

And there was always Marmaduke hanging around the edges of his superior's business with his shrimp-sized notions of fitness, finance, and fish.

From a strategic position atop his smashed roll-top desk, Mr. Boomer dared his would-be big borrower to come forth again.



Halting the mud-splattered car before the pool-room, Frogface emerged unhappily and began an upward climb to the room he shared with Marmaduke, hoping for the best in the way of the latter's absence.

But Marmaduke proved disgustingly present—and loathsome curious.

"Dawg-gone, boy!" he emitted high-keyed cacklings of laughter on sight. "Whut run over you, nohow—de road-roller?"

"I wins a argument, dat's all!" snapped Mr. Reeves, beginning to divest himself of the now two-piece bright blue coat. "Wid a shrimp jest about yo' size!"

"Uh-huh! Win about one *mo'* argument, and you comes in here in a trash-can, too, wid yo' clothes in yo' vest-pocket! Good thing I done fix—"

"Boy," Mr. Reeves straightened himself impressively in his underwear, "all I craves from you is yo' mouth shet, and lots of it! I got my hands full doin' all de thinkin' and financin' around here, widout havin' to listen to yo' tonsils takin' de air all de time. Git on out and wash dat car now, while I's puttin' on some *mo'* clothes. Showin' dat runtified boy whar at he git off done make me late to de bank now—"

"It's a sign you better stay 'way from dat bank, whut I says," interjected Marmaduke significantly. "I done al-ready—"

"Shet up! Wuzn't for me headin' de business, us wouldn't be able go *around* no banks, I tells you!" stormed Mr. Reeves. "For a boy whut's still pickin' up nickels in de street, you sho is got a heap to say about banks. Keepin' you out de banks is de only way to keep us in funds. You got to impress a banker, and whar would a fish-totin' ape like you git off at doin' dat? Why, s'pose you'd been in a bank like you wuz in here dis mawnin'—wid a fish in your pocket! Git on out and wash dat car befo' I busts you one jest from thinkin' about you!"

An accompanying motion toward the ironware water-pitcher on the washstand spoke to Marmaduke in all languages. You could push a big-mouth boy like Frogface just so far: after that he took to throwing things. And it was all his own look-out now—Marmaduke had tried to stop him—

Barely had the sweating little junior partner with his new look of secretly biding his time given the final swipe to the borrowed sedan, when Frogface reappeared, bankward-bound. And again it was for Marmaduke to gasp—to concede reluctantly that Frogface's second-best was still far louder than many a boy's best! He still looked like the same old Frogface, even though his suit now was a street-map effect in brown and orange, his vest a poorly stifled shriek of green, and his hat of the late Weber-and-Fields school of architecture.

"Open de door!" he barked. "Late now about gwine to see de bank about de financin'. I build up de fish business yit, in spite of you and yo' two-bit ways."

This time Mr. Reeves drove without detours. There wasn't any time left for them before he had to start in impressing a banker, in the person of the far-famed Napoleon Boomer. Teaching that snuff-suited boy his lesson, and what went with it, took up more time than training a bird dog, Frogface complained to himself, as he sped through the streets.

IN front of the dingy, brick-front building occupied by the Afro-American Bank and Burying Society, Frogface found parking space. Slamming his car door loudly as he descended to the sidewalk, he gave a tilt to his hat, a flick to his yellow shoes, and entered the financial institution of his selection.

"Whar at de head-man—Mist' Boomer—around here?" he questioned a supercilious-looking, saddle-colored youth behind the dull bars of a window labeled *Teller*.

The youth yawned widely.

"Mist' Boomer busy. He jest now git back to de bank, and got a gent'man in dar-wid him. He see you next, I 'spects, is you keer to wait."

"Keer to wait? I's *gwine* to wait!" Frogface was ruffled. "You tell him Mist' Reeves—Mist' *Walter* Reeves, come to see him on pu'pose." Wasn't any use in letting these bank boys underestimate him!

Ten minutes later the door lettered *Napoleon Boomer, Pres.* opened to let out a scared-looking country ducky, holding his hat in both hands. Frogface swelled preliminarily. He would show them how to handle bankers, in

a minute now! Already the teller had gone in to announce him. Pity even for Marmaduke swept Frogface. Feel sorry for him—that was the way to think of a small-time boy with a fish in his pocket, like Marmaduke!

"Jest step right in now, Mist'er—Mist' Reed," beckoned the teller.

Setting his sights at the proper distance above the floor to meet the eyes of a big banker at his desk, Mr. Reeves inflated his chest, cradled his hat on one statesmanlike forearm, and thrust the presidential door boldly open. After he fixed up his loan with the president, he would have the teller rebuked for mixing up the name of a big new customer!

Then he was facing Mr. Boomer, the banker, seated at a table just opposite the door.

But the story-books were all wrong! This banker wasn't big, running to beef and diamonds, at all. Rather, he—Mr. Reeves' astounded eyes became crossed. His chest caved hollowly, while his mouth began motions without words.

For the powerful Napoleon Boomer who was to extend him limitless credit was—the little snuff-suited darky with whom he had just wiped up a muddy street!

Recognition was no less swift on Mr. Boomer's part. His manner also changed instantly—to that of one who had work to do, and was eager to be about it! Starting with a surprised squawk, he went from his chair to table-top in one leap.

"You? You! YOU!" screamed the Napoleon of finance as he launched himself at the Napoleon of fish, in joyous resumption of unfinished business.

The time required to wrack a bank is variously estimated at from two weeks to two years, dependent upon the venality of the banker and the vigilance of the bank-

examiners. But this case was different; a new record was set up. In twenty-three minutes after the entrance of Mr. Frogface Reeves into the sanctum of Mr. Boomer the wrecking of the institution—physically speaking—was practically completed.

MR. REEVES, goggle-eyed and panting beneath the broken-legged remnants of what had been a table, still wore about his collarless neck the emptied frame of a portrait of the bank's founder and president, Napoleon Boomer. From time to time he spat out fragments of the portrait itself. From a strategic position atop his smashed roll-top desk, Mr. Boomer, for his part, glared balefully past a nose resembling a shopworn tomato, and dared his would-be big borrower to come forth again.

About them lay scattered and shattered furniture. An entire panel of one side of the presidential private lair was kicked out; enough broken glass lay under foot to make the floor seem the site of a recent head-on collision between two aquariums. Here and there through new-made apertures, frightened faces of the staff peered in upon this new phase of private banking.

Evidently, shuddered Frogface to himself, as he shrank anew from the ferocity still blazing in the presidential eyes, it made a big difference where a race was run or a battle fought. For this Boomer boy, while no mud-horse, sure was hell on his home track! No wonder that last patron had come out holding his hat! Frogface was coming out—if he got out—holding not only his hat, but his head, shins, and three ribs.

And thinking of coming out brought on the thought of Marmaduke once more—Marmaduke, the brainless, the classless—Marmaduke who thought *he* could do something around a bank or the fish business! And who, moreover, was just the sort of boy that never would be able to see this present episode in the right light—who would remember only the pomp, pants, and circumstances in which his senior partner had set forth to borrow—and compare it crushingly with the ignoble return that was now looming larger and larger upon Frogface's personal horizon.

Indeed, at the thought a groan not attributable wholly to his wounds and contusions, but having to do also with the spirit, escaped Mr. Reeves—a groan unfortunately misunderstood by Mr. Boomer, who took it as the clang of the gong for starting another round. But flesh and blood could stand no more. With the strangled squall of a hysterical tomcat with tonsilitis, Frogface Reeves left the bank. That he took with him half of its plate-glass front and—for the first seven blocks—its president, were simply details of the transaction.

Nor did he have time to stop and bother with Germicide Hill's white-folks' car. *That* stayed and accumulated traffic-tickets for overtime parking, while Mr. Reeves, of Reeves, Reeves and Brown, accumulated distance in the direction of his headquarters.

FOUR times, after pursuit had slackened and died away, did the ragged and wretched Mr. Reeves still circle his home block. For, with all the millions of people there were in the world, it was going to be his fate to have to meet Marmaduke first when he at last mounted his home steps—Marmaduke, who understood neither class, finance, nor why banking should be so hard on a boy's clothes. Marmaduke, a fish-peddler at heart, born to small things and a worm's-eye view of big business propositions. Making him the last person in all the world before whom an ex-Big Noise cared to come garbed in the habiliments of failure.

Marmaduke would remember everything, and he would



The sudden strut of Marmaduke revealed that not only worms but tables had turned during Mr. Reeves' recent harrowing hours.

ask questions—starting with that most unanswerable of all: "Where is de money?"

Groans rent Mr. Reeves as he thought of the confessions he must make. He needed a brave front, and there was none in stock. The firm was without fish, financing, or future. All it had was a mess of empty echoes, set off by himself, and returning hollowly now to taunt and tame him.

With all the speed and sparkle of a slow-motion movie of a stopped clock, Mr. Reeves at length set leaden feet upon the steps to the room that he shared with Marmaduke Brown.

Yet there he found unexpected respite; grace before the beginning of ignominious explanations of how and why he had belied all his boastings. Marmaduke was not there—which gave a boy time to get himself together, to reassemble his faculties and rebuild his front. It even gave him time to begin to feel sorry for Marmaduke once more, with his ignorance of banks and business. Marmaduke, who but for Frogface would never even have risen to his former eminence as janitor in the embryo fish business, his name tacked generously on at the far end of the multiple repetition of Mr. Reeves' own name in the firm's sign.

Just then it was—at the peak of his newest pity for the unfortunate Marmaduke—that there came drifting in through the open window sudden new and amazing sounds. Unprecedented, incredible minglings of voice and bell. As the puzzling disturbance grew steadily nearer, a vaguely familiar aroma brought sense of smell to the aid of hearing.

Ding-ding! Ding-ding! "Fish! Fraish-cotch' fish! Swell cat-fish!" arose the clangor and wordy clamor from below.

Frogface, half-dressed, thrust his bruised but incredulous head and shoulders heavily through the open window for a downward look—and nearly fell out in his astonishment. There on the sidewalk below him, proudly trundling a gayly painted push-cart, hung with bells and filled with fish, shuffled *Marmaduke*—Marmaduke who hadn't a dime, who couldn't have financed the first lump of ice for the fish-firm of Reeves, Reeves, and—

THEN another prominent feature of the fish-cart below caught the startled eye of Frogface, and finished knocking him for an anguished goal. *Here* was the bitterest blow yet—the new sign on the push-cart!

Gurgling sounds emitted by Mr. Reeves, as of one drowning in mid-air, found a dead spot in the public outcries of Mr. Brown, and drew his attention and curiosity sharply upward. Whereupon, with a disappointing slamming on of his cart's tarpaulin in the very faces of three close-following alley-cats, Marmaduke's feet grew eager upon the stairs.

Frogface braced himself for the coming questions, then saw the strategy of beating Marmaduke to them. Therefore Mr. Brown's opening: "Who dat runnin' you ragged down de street de bank's on, a while ago?" was met with:

"*Now* you done mess up ever'thing again! Jest as I is fixin' up de financin' of big chain of fish-stores wid de bankin' boy, Mist' Boomer, you has to bust out wid a push-cart! Whut you think Mist' Boomer think, wid me talkin' big business in he office, and you come along hollerin' 'Fish!' on a *push-cart* outside?"

But Marmaduke seemed different. Changed, confident, no longer subdued and submerged, somehow, but rather with the bearing of one who is sole proprietor not only of a fish-cart but of a sturdy ace in the hole as well.

"Done knows whut *one* banker think," he returned



"Splash me, is you! Mess up my clothes, is you!" screamed the berserk one, while his umbrella rose and fell lustily.

cockily. "I finds dat out early dis mawnin'—jest befo' I comes up here wid dat fish in my pocket. . . . You wouldn't let me tell you nothin'—you so busy hollerin' whut you gwine do. But while you is still bellerin' around over town about whut you *gwine* do, I is already done done it!"

"Done done whut, Small-change?"

"Done borrered de money."

"*You* done borrered de money?"

"Yeah. And buys dis here fish-cart wid it, so *I* is all set up in de fish business, jest right size—"

"*You* is all set up?" Mr. Reeves repeated the singular pronoun in perplexity. Coupled up with the disturbing new sign—"Whar at you git de idea of dat new sign on de push-cart, nohow?" he branched off into his newest grievance. "—Jest *Marm'duke Brown, Fish*, 'stead of Reeves, Reeves, and Brown, like it used be."

"Aw—*dat*?" And the sudden strut of Marmaduke revealed that not only worms but tables had turned during Mr. Reeves' recent harrowing hours. "Well, dat aint my idea—it's de banker's idea; de one whut I borrsers de money from, when I goes to him wid dat fish in my pocket—"

A sudden awful thought seized Frogface, shone questioningly in his anguished eyes. Marmaduke read it aright—and answered it.

"Yeah, I borrsers it from '*Poleon Boomer*. Gits a little to keep you from gittin' a lot. Befo' you splashes him. But even den he had done heard about you—"

Even in his agony Frogface started to re-swell: Everybody knew about him! Until—

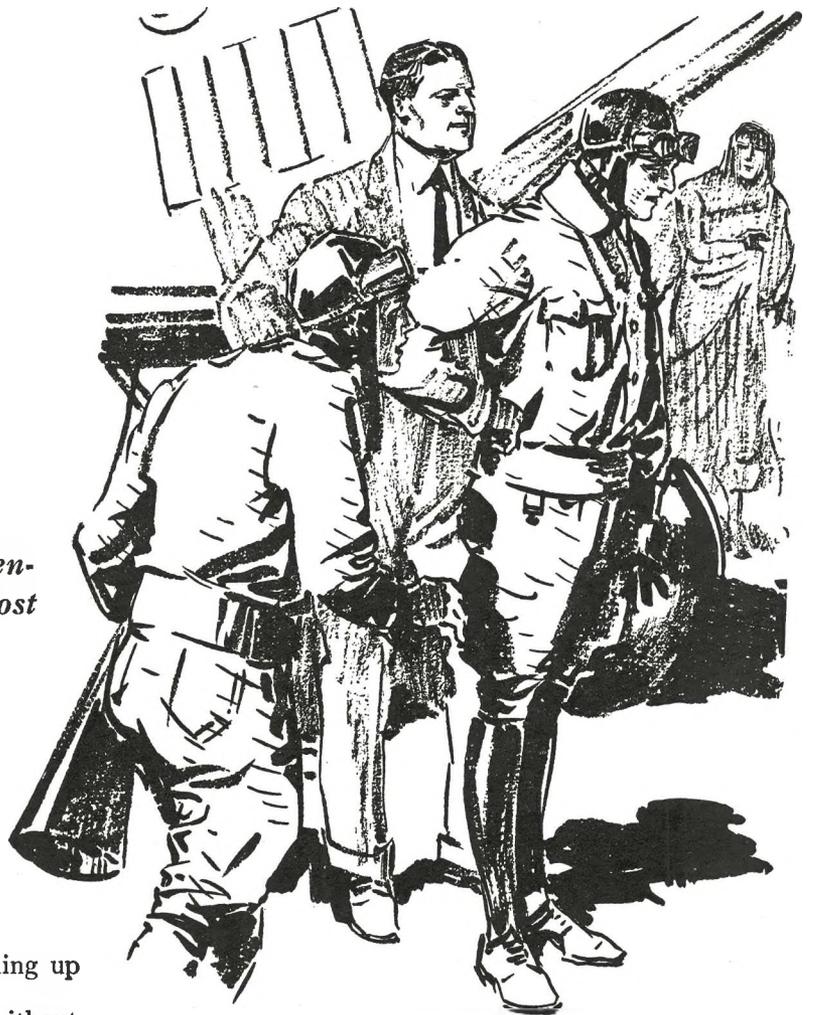
"—And say whut make me git dat new sign: dat he aint lend *me* no money twel I signs a paper dat *you* aint gwine have nothin' more to do wid de business!"

The Moon Gods

An amazing and highly diverting adventure via airplane to a lost land and a lost civilization.

By EDGAR JEPSON
and SIDNEY GOWING

Illustrated by Frank Hoban



"WHO is Carthage?" said Billy Elsom, looking up from the radiogram.

Captain Nicholas Dering looked at him without surprise and said: "Carthage was an ancient African city—nearly smashed the Romans. But who is Benjamin J. Budge?"

"You don't know who Benjamin J. Budge is?" cried Billy in incredulous accents. "Why, he's Baby-carriage Budge, the baby-carriage king. Sells a baby-carriage every twenty-seven seconds, day and night. You see his ads in all the big newspapers—always a whole page. Why, the sun never sets on Budge's baby-carriages! The ads say so."

"Damned cheek, his cabling me orders as if I were a taxi-driver," said Captain Dering, frowning.

"Why, what's the matter with the cable?" said Billy in great surprise; and smoothing out the radiogram, he read aloud:

"Meet Carmania fly me to lost Carthage city mountains Sahara your own terms Benj. J. Budge."

"Damned cheek," said Captain Dering again.

"Oh, come: don't go getting up-stage with a baby-carriage king," said Billy in a tone of reproachful protest. "There's money in Benjy—lashin's of it! And what's the good of having beaten the Atlantic record by three hours and fourteen minutes if you don't make a bit—several good, large bits—out of it? Here's one of them, dashing at you. Why, you ought to make enough out of Benjy and this stunt, to build yourself the bus of a lifetime—a bus of your own—and knock all the world's records endways."

Dering looked at him thoughtfully. "Oh, well, if you think there's a bus like that in it, I may as well go and talk to him," he said more amicably. "What about terms? What'll I ask?"

The famous Anglo-American aviator knew that Billy,

besides being able to do anything and everything that could be done with an airplane engine, had the makings of a manager in him—that it was his dream to run Dering as the world's champion flyer.

"It's hard to say without knowing something about the stunt. How big is the Sahara?" said Billy.

"Plenty big," averred Dering; then he went on: "I tell you what—how would you like to take the business side on and make all the arrangements, not forgetting your own work and risk and overtime?"

"Fine business!" said Billy. "I'll do my damndest. When does the *Carmania* arrive?"

He wiped his hands on a piece of waste, for they were going over the engine of the machine in which Dering had flown from the United States to England—breaking the trans-Atlantic record—three days before, pulled a newspaper from an inside pocket, and ran his finger down the shipping list.

"Holy Moses!" he cried. "It's past nine—and we've got to be at Southampton at ten-thirty! That's when the *Carmania* arrives. Forty-two miles away and across country, at that. There's no time to change. Come on!"

THEY reached Southampton docks in Dering's car at twenty-two minutes past ten. Nicholas jumped out, for they had thought it best that he should have a preliminary talk with Benjamin Budge and learn exactly what the stunt was and how long it was likely to take; then, when Dering was fully informed, he'd pass on the distances, time, and other details of the expedition to Billy and refer the millionaire to him for terms.

Billy drove off to the garage of the Southwestern Hotel, while Nicholas made his way to the wharf to which the



"Hail, great Gods of the Moon, most holy ones! Rhodopis, Queen of Megara, welcomes you to her city and invites you to her palace."

Carmania would be moored. Here he learned that the mooring would not be done in much less than half an hour. He sat down on a seat in one of those dingy sheds, which in every large port give the newcomer to England such an unfortunate and depressing first impression of the majesty and grandeur of that country and suggest to him that he is making his entry into it through something in the nature of a coal-hole.

It was a cold morning; the forty-mile drive through a country swathed in folds of chilly mist had not been warming; there was no coat under Nicholas' overalls, and he sat with his tall slim figure huddled together, the end of the admirably chiseled nose which he had inherited from his Virginia mother, an aristocratic blue. Miss Sadie Zoupoulos, a New York debutante of the previous spring, who had come to meet her mother, was standing twenty yards away with the three friends who had come with her. This picture touched her warm heart: a dock laborer out of a job, she thought. She kept looking away from the *Carmania*, now edging gingerly toward the wharf, to Nicholas' fine face and somber eyes fixed unwinkingly on the approaching ship. Should she? Work, not alms, was what that young man wanted—she was sure of it; yet— Then as the *Carmania* settled against the wharf with a last shiver and the gangways clanked, compassion swept hesitation aside. Sadie fumbled in her bag, took out a coin, and slipping unobtrusively over, pressed it into Nicholas' hand.

He looked up with a start, caught a glimpse of dark, compassionate eyes in a charming face of delicate olive tint and saw the Russian-sable coat of the girl disappear in the crowd that surged forward to the steamer.

Blankly he looked down at the coin in his hand. It was silver and of the size of a florin; on its face was stamped an elephant. He turned it over: on the obverse was a lotus flower. Sadie collected elephants—elephants of jade and ivory and crystal, elephants of gold and silver

and bronze, elephants of teak and boxwood and ebony, elephants of every material in which elephants are carved. This was one of her favorite elephants, the most easily carried, and a mascot. She had pressed into Nicholas' hand a Carthaginian shekel of the days of Hamilcar, the Suffete of the Sea!

"An omen, by thunder!" said Nicholas. "I take the stunt on!" And he slipped the coin into his waistcoat pocket. "But I shall have to give it back to her," was his second thought as his quick eye ran over the crowd for the man he was to meet.

One of the steamer stewards was standing a few feet from the foot of the gangway.

"I want Mr. Benjamin J. Budge," Nicholas said to him. "He cabled me to meet the ship."

"Yes sir. What name, sir?" said the steward.

"Captain Dering."

"Not Captain Nicholas Dering?" said the steward.

"Yes," said Nicholas, who wished to get to Benjamin J. Budge without delay.

The name ran in a mutter through the groups of passengers and the friends welcoming them; it came to the ears of Sadie Zoupoulos, who had just finished kissing her mother. She turned to see the object of her charity, much taller than she had thought, now that he was on his feet, following the proud steward.

"Nicholas Dering! Good heavens—and I've just given him a two-shilling piece!" she said in a strangled voice.

"Whatever for?" said her mother.

"I thought he was a dock laborer out of work!" said Sadie. Then a thought came to her; she added: "But wait!"

She brought a handful of coins from her bag; her gaze ran hastily over them.

"No—no! I've—I've given him the Carthaginian elephant!" she gasped.

"Well, that's better," said her mother.

"It isn't! It isn't! He'll think that I recognized him—that it's a *gage d'amour!*"

CHAPTER II

THE proud steward led Nicholas down the wharf and stopped in front of a tall, big-headed, round-faced man of perhaps forty-five, who was giving final instructions to a man of forty and to two young women, his secretaries.

The big man turned to Nicholas, held out a hand, and said genially with a rich Midwestern accent: "Very pleased to meet you, Captain Dering."

"How do you do?" said Nicholas. "Just got your cable."

With keen, quick glances the two men looked each other over—and liked one another.

"Come along to the hotel. I've cleared everything up so we can confer at once," said Benjamin J. Budge, waving his secretaries toward the London train.

Nicholas fell into step beside the millionaire—who, though Nicholas stood five feet ten in his socks, topped him by a head—and they walked along the wharf. They presented a contrast indeed—the millionaire admirably dressed and valeted, Nicholas in his overalls, their faces in even greater contrast than their clothes.

"Afraid you mightn't make the steamer. Gave you short notice," said Budge. "You only broke the record three days ago, and I only made up my mind at eight-thirty this morning, that you were the man to help me. Of course I had your address. Cabled my London agent for it yesterday."

"There was plenty of time to get here. I was only forty miles away when I got your cable," said Nicholas.

They said no more till they came into the dining-room of a handsome suite at the hotel, where Summerthwaite, Budge's competent valet, was seeing to it that the breakfast for which he had cabled was entirely satisfactory.

"I always save my appetite for an English breakfast when I land," said Budge. "You'll join me? A meal quickens a deal."

The breakfast at the airdrome had been early and simple; Nicholas was hungry; so he said: "Thanks—if I may join you as I am. I hadn't time to get into a coat."

Budge nodded. "A coat for Captain Dering," he said to Summerthwaite, who looked at Dering's shoulders, and brought a coat of his master's. It hung on Nicholas rather loosely; but thanks to his broad shoulders, it hung well.

They sat down at the table; Budge started on his porridge and his proposition. As he talked, his heavy face became alive with enthusiasm; his eyes glowed; he seemed to fill the room with a vigorous, abounding vitality, a dominating personality.

"See here, Captain Dering, I'll begin at the beginning.

It's my way," began Budge in the rich, flexible voice which was his chief, perhaps his only obvious charm. "Though I live in Chicago now, I come from Carthage, in the province of Saskatchewan, Canada. I was an orphan before I was seven years old, and so busy rustling around for food and clothes and education that I didn't know there was any other Carthage till I was past twenty and working my way through Winnipeg University. But Carthage being my home town, when I learned about that old African Carthage, it kind of stuck in my mind; and at college and after I read everything I could lay my hands on about it, and about Tyre and Sidon and the Phœnicians. I guess you can say it was my hobby. Maybe you've a hobby of your own?"

"Japanese sword-guards," Nicholas admitted.

"Then you know how it is with a hobby; it kind of drives you sometimes," said the millionaire.

"When I made good, and came to Europe for the first time, I took the first holiday I'd had since I was old enough to do chores—and I spent a fortnight rooting about the site of Carthage and studying it. I know that site, Captain Dering; believe me. What a site for a business city, as the world was then!"

He paused to picture with his mind's eye the lay-

out of the ancient world and its trade routes.

Then he went on: "Now here's where our stunt comes in. There was one thing that had always puzzled me about Carthage. When those dogged Romans sacked the city and massacred the Carthaginians or made slaves of them, what became of the Zaimph?" He leaned forward and repeated with impressive emphasis: "Captain Dering, what became of the Zaimph?"

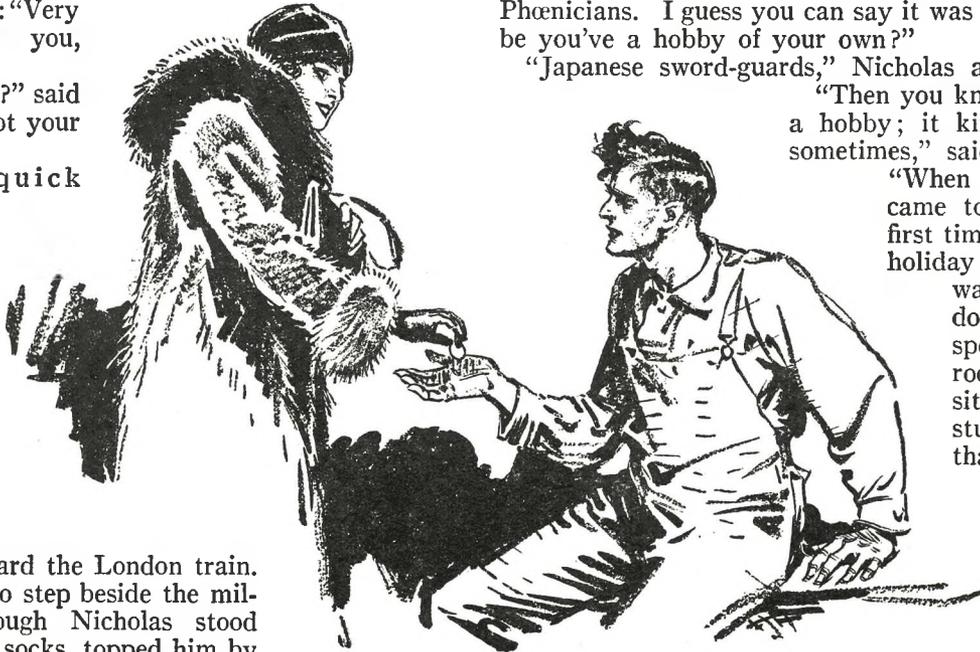
"The Zaimph?" said Dering, at a loss.

"The Zaimph—the world-famous veil of the Goddess Tanit—the mascot of Carthage, which gave the city its luck! The Romans didn't get it, or we should have heard about it. Where *did* it go to?"

Dering could not tell him.

"Well, sir, the thought I've given to that problem! But at last I got it; the Grand Council of Carthage must have contained the brainiest men of the time, or it wouldn't have been the city of big business it was—the biggest business city of the ancient world. Do you think there were any flies on the Grand Council of Carthage? No sir! It knew the Romans had them in a cleft stick, and it was odds on their not winning out—and before the city was entirely surrounded, they sent the Zaimph away!"

He leaned back with an air of triumph; then he went on: "They'd send it away secretly, of course; but they'd send it away properly, with priests and priestesses and temple slaves, and money and maybe a heap of the temple jewels, and a guard that could fight off any tribes of the nomads—four or five thousand men perhaps, aided by a couple of cohorts of the Sacred Legion—getting them out of the city in driblets at night. That's how they'd



Sadie fumbled in her bag, took out a coin, and pressed it into Nicholas' hand.

do it: I could see that. It was just horse sense. But where was the record?"

He paused to bedew his sole with anchovy sauce, then went on: "Now that I knew how it happened, the record didn't take so much finding. Professor Zimmern found in a manuscript of the time of Cleopatra's father—in the Cairo museum it is—how seven thousand Carthaginians, with elephants, marched off westward before the Romans invested the city."

Again he paused triumphant, while Summerthwaite set grilled chops before them; then he went on: "When you know *where* to look, you're not long looking. I sent out three travelers who know the country, and learned that all about the hinterland of northwest Africa, the tribes believe that there's a secret city five hundred or maybe seven hundred miles southeast of the Atlas Mountains, in another mountain range—Zeb Ageru, it's called. But nobody has ever seen it, for it's inaccessible. I want to get at it and see it; I want to see all the splendor and glory of a real ancient city, and the kind of life folks lived in it, and I want to know the lines on which big business has developed there. There's no saying but what I might get hold of a new stunt or two. Besides, where that city is, there is the Zaimph—and I've always had a hankering for the Zaimph."

"What for?" said Nicholas.

"Well, I guess it's up to me to do something for the home town—and if I get the Zaimph from Carthage, Africa, it goes to Carthage, Saskatchewan! It would just boost that town sky-high. There's always a lot of people in North America hankering after a new religion."

"But would they worship the Moon?" said Nicholas doubtfully.

"I'd build a temple like the one in Carthage, Africa, and put it up to them. But it wouldn't be the moon exactly they'd worship; it would be Tanit—the Female Principle. There's an opening for a really refined new religion if it's properly organized." He stopped short, and his eyes which had grown dreamy, grew bright and glowed again; he went on: "But that's dreaming. What I want is the lost Carthage, and I want it now. Will you fly me there?"

"Rather!" said Nicholas, and his eyes were also shining. "It sounds like a bully stunt."

"Good!" said Budge with a sigh of satisfaction. "Give me the map-case, Summerthwaite, and then order a special to London at twelve-fifteen."

SUMMERTHWAITHE cleared a space on the table beside him, and set the map-case on it. Nicholas moved to Budge's side. The two men lighted cigars; then, having received Nicholas' word of honor that he would not breathe a word of the secret city or its site to another living soul, Budge took a large-scale map of northwest Africa from the case and spread it on the table.

"Here are the mountains," he said, laying his finger on a range well down in the Sahara. "At least they're here or hereabouts. This middle Sahara has never been explored well enough to be mapped properly. But I guess you won't miss them."

"No, I sha'n't miss them," said Nicholas. "How far do they stretch?"

"They seem of considerable extent; but there's no saying exactly."

"Well, it looks as if we shall have to make Gibraltar our headquarters, then make a fuel dump at the foot of these mountains, and explore them from it," said Nicholas.

"That's the idea," said Budge approvingly.

They discussed details: a twenty-passenger machine—the requisite fuel for its journey up and for the dump—Budge, Nicholas and his mechanic—Billy, of course. Also ma-

chine-guns, rifles, automatics and plenty of ammunition—food supplies—half a ton of freight, Budge's freight in cases. They settled those details roughly.

"Then there's the matter of language," said Budge, frowning thoughtfully. "I guess we'll have to take an interpreter, though I don't want to. Those Carthaginians will probably talk a Semitic language like Arabic, or Aramaic, or Hebrew. I've got more than a smattering of Arabic—I learned it on purpose—but it won't be enough."

"I can patter Arabic, all right," said Dering. "It was the first language I learned after English. We all did at home, for my father was an Arabic scholar—he had been an explorer, and it was his fad. Came in useful too, for when I was with Lawrence in Arabia the last year of the War, I put in some useful scouting and was *liaison* officer with Feisal's army. Billy can patter Arabic a bit too; he was there."

"That's fine!" said Budge in a tone of satisfaction. "We can cut out the interpreter—one less to know about the secret city." He paused and added: "And now what about terms?"

NICHOLAS said Budge must settle terms with his manager, William Elsom, and sent for Billy, who came. Budge broached the subject of terms; and Billy, having learned the particulars of the expedition, asked how long it would last. When he heard that Budge wanted Nicholas for at least three weeks, and that he might want him for six, he said at once that there was nothing doing—in three weeks Nicholas would lose most of the interest he had aroused by breaking the Atlantic record, and in six weeks he would be forgotten.

"How much is it worth?" said Budge.

"Four thousand pounds," said Billy boldly, though ready to make it less.

"Twenty thousand dollars," said Budge. "O. K.!"

Billy, having expected a refusal and a wrangle, was taken aback—but he did not show it; at once he went on to the matter of risk, and grew eloquent: flying in the air above a mountain chain was the most dangerous of all flying feats, and if you crashed on a mountain, it was the last crash you crashed. Budge offered to insure Dering's life for fifty thousand dollars. But that did not please Billy: what was the good of risking your life and coming out safe and getting nothing for it? Nicholas should be paid for the extra risk of mountains! Also the extra strain on his nerves must be taken into account.

Budge grinned and said: "And what next, Mr. Elsom?"

Billy came to the matter of the value of the services of so important a flyer and of the immensely greater chance they gave Budge himself of surviving the Ageru Mountains; the value of Budge's life must be considered, and the saving in nerve-strain to him of knowing he was in the hands of such an expert as Nicholas.

"Cut it out! Cut it out right here!" Budge laughed. "I reckoned it might cost me twenty-five thousand extra to get Captain Dering, but if you spill two or three more mouthfuls of your business-talk, it'll set me back five millions! Forty thousand dollars for Captain Dering and you to fly me to Carthage, Africa, and back, and that's my limit!"

"And ex'es," snapped Billy.

Benj. J. Budge banged the table and laughed again. "And ex'es—if Captain Dering makes out the account!" he said. "And see here, Mr. Elsom: when this stunt is over, I'll give you a job as a salesman in the baby-carriage business."

"I couldn't leave Nick," said Billy quickly but with decision.

"You think it over," said Budge, rising. "Well, gentle-

men, forty thousand dollars it is, and out of the baby-carriage advertising account it comes. Believe me, this stunt is going to boost Benj. J. Budge's Baby-carriages some—and if I get away with the Zaimph, Carthage, Sask., is going to be proud!"

CHAPTER III

ELOUL the eunuch, High Priest of Tanit, Goddess of the Moon, was the first to see the dragon.

From the flat roof of the temple of Tanit that rose high above the awakening city, he saw it coming through the rosy air over the dark shoulder of a mountain in the west, just under the orb of the setting moon, already pale in the light of the sun which was warming to gold the edges of the towering peaks of Zeb Agash, the guardian of the east.

A soldier on the tower on the city wall beneath him, leaning on his spear with the stillness of a statue, saw the dragon and awoke to sudden life. He banged down the butt of his spear on a flagstone and shouted, and Eloul saw the guards come swarming up onto the top of the tower and flock to the western parapet.

A shrill cry below brought Eloul's eyes down to the temple of Aphrodite that faced the temple of Tanit on the other side of the great square, and he saw a little figure dash into it. Some acolyte of the temple had seen the dragon.

Eloul looked at it again. It was nearer, coming swiftly, and it was roaring as it came.

The great gong on the tower below him boomed, and on tower after tower all along the walls, the sentinels sprang to the gongs and beat them till the air above the city was one deep reverberation. For ten seconds the hum of the waking city was hushed; then it rose higher and higher on an ever-shriller note. Not for over a hundred years had the gongs boomed the alarm, and the women were crying out.

Eloul looked round the city; the houses seemed to be erupting excited dwellers in them onto the flat roofs; the men of the Sacred Legion were streaming out of the long barracks on the right and left of the temple of Tanit; on the opposite side of the square the Greek hoplites were streaming out of similar barracks on either side of the temple of Aphrodite; along the walls the soldiers were pouring out of the towers and lining the ramparts; the Queen's guards were streaming out into the courtyard of the royal palace on his right; the eunuch priests of Tanit were thronging through every door onto the roof beside him; already the lighter-footed priestesses were crowding round Pyrrha the High Priestess, on the roof of the temple of Aphrodite.

Eloul's eyes had swept round the city quickly; they paused while, even at such a moment, he scowled at the High Priestess of the warm Goddess of the Earth—the rival, with a firmer hold on the hearts of men, of his colder Goddess of the Skies. Hatred of the Goddess of Love was a strong feeling in his jealous heart. "Curse her and her Greeks!" he muttered.

Then the dragon was on them, rushing over the city.

In a palpitating curiosity the crowds were dumb. What would the dragon do? Its throbbing roar filled earth and sky. It seemed to Eloul that it came straight at him; he shrank down as it rose, cleared the top of the temple by fifty feet, and passed beyond the city wall. A great gasp of relief, an undertone of the throbbing roar, burst from the bosoms of the tense crowds. It was going away.

But it did not go; it turned to the left and flew along the southern quarter; the roofs emptied as it approached.

Eloul looked down into the square. The Sacred Legion was forming a square before the temple of Tanit; the hoplites had already formed a square before the temple of Aphrodite. A group of men were coming along the left-hand side of the square. He saw that they were the white-robed archons of the Greeks, on their way to the Hall of the Grand Council. That was where he should be: those cursed Greeks would make capital out of this! And the dragon had come from the Moon; he had seen it come. But wait! It was the servant of Tanit! She had sent it to punish the backsliders who neglected her worship!

"The dragon comes from Tanit! Tell the people!" he shouted to his jabbering priests, and rushed to the staircase and down it.

The priests scuttled after him to do his bidding.

As he came out of the temple, he looked for the dragon. It was making a circuit over the city and now roaring over the western quarters. The roofs beneath it were empty; only the roof of the temple of Aphrodite was not empty. Pyrrha was standing in the middle of it, watching the dragon. Even at that distance he could see that she was fearless, that her attitude to the dreadful minister of Tanit, roaring toward her, was a quiet curiosity.

Curse the girl! Tens of thousands of eyes had seen him, the High Priest of Tanit, cower before the onset of the monster; tens of thousands of eyes had seen the High Priestess of Aphrodite wholly without fear! Would it swoop down to destroy her?

But the dragon passed over her head, circling north.

Iddibal, the bulky Suffete of the Sea,—a sea he had never seen,—came shuffling down the steps of his palace with his guard about him. He called to Eloul, who waited for him:

"This is dreadful!"

"Dreadful? Why?" said the eunuch scornfully, seizing the chance: he knew that if he could get an idea into Iddibal's thick head, it would be a while before another could enter it, and he would have him as a dogged supporter. "The dragon is the servant of Tanit."

"The servant of Tanit?" said Iddibal in a booming voice, knitting his brow perplexedly.

"Yes. I saw it fly from the Moon," said Eloul stoutly.

"From the moon!" boomed Iddibal.

BEHIND them the priests of Tanit were already running up the streets that led to the great square, crying in shrill voices up to the people on the roofs: "The dragon comes from Tanit!"

The words were caught up, and ran from roof to roof over the whole city.

Eloul and Iddibal mounted the steps of the Hall of the Grand Council and joined the group of Greek archons and Canaanite councilors standing there, watching, with grave or terrified faces, the dragon which had completed the circuit of the city and was coming toward them, and muttering to one another in uneasy or fearful accents, ready to dash through the open door of the hall. Only Sophron, the chief archon, was neither grave nor fearful; his powerful and serene face was set in an expression of quiet interest as his keen blue eyes studied the monster. He was the first man Eloul looked at, for he was a man Eloul hated—the chief obstacle to the exaltation of Tanit and her High Priest; and he was also the father of the girl Pyrrha.

As Eloul joined the group he cried out in his shrill voice: "The dragon comes from Tanit! It is Tanit's servant—her messenger. I saw it fly down from the Moon."

"Down from the Moon," boomed Iddibal; the idea had got into his head, and Iddibal's solidity had great weight with the rich—among them the idea would prevail.

There was a chorus of pleased acceptance of the statement from the Canaanite councilors; the archons looked doubtful and distrustful. Even in this hour of common peril the age-old rivalry with the Canaanites was in the forefront of their minds and they were on their guard.

Sophron said in a musing tone: "It is a dragon. It is the servant of Tanit. It flew down from the Moon."

He appeared to be addressing the main tower of the royal palace on the opposite side of the square, and there was no challenge in his tone.

But Eloul took the words as a challenge; he cried angrily: "If it isn't a dragon, what is it?"

"What is it?" said Iddibal.

"But here comes the Queen," said Sophron.

The gates of the palace were thrown back, and the golden litter of Queen Rhodopis came swinging out on the shoulders of sixteen big negroes. They came at a swift trot across the square, the guards—in gold helmets and breastplates, over orange tunics that fell to the tops of their gold greaves—running beside it, a hundred strong. The edge of the sun's orb came over the shoulder of Zeb Agash and set them gleaming; the towers of the royal palace, covered with plates of polished bronze, gleamed and shone; the whole city, with its tall houses and palaces of yellow marble, glowed golden.

The litter came to a stop on the left of the group; the hundred guards came to a stop in two columns, on the steps and at the bottom of them, and each man smote his shield of gilded bronze with the pommel of his sword. It made a splendid clash.

"What does this mean?" said Queen Rhodopis imperiously.

When anything unusual happened, Queen Rhodopis always said, "What does this mean?" imperiously—and this time, as always, she looked at Sophron.

Sophron was looking at the main tower of the royal palace with the amiable expression of a man to whom nothing was of any concern. But though the main tower appeared to hold his whole attention, he had observed that, though the dragon had been circling over them but a few minutes, Queen Rhodopis had found time to dress. Queen Rhodopis always found time to dress: she was wearing the royal insignia in which she came to the meetings of the grand council and every detail was exactly in its place.

Eloul broke in: "The dragon comes from Tanit. It is her servant. It flew down from the Moon."

"From the Moon," boomed Iddibal happily.

"The Moon is very high up," said Sophron calmly; he was the only person wholly cool in this hour of peril.

Queen Rhodopis looked from Eloul to Sophron, and her magnificent black eyes sparkled angrily.

"And what are you going to do about it?" she said in a tone that demanded an answer at once; and again she looked at Sophron.

Sophron's eyes turned and met those of the Queen steadily: "Eloul is the High Priest of Tanit, the Great Goddess of the Moon. Plainly it is his business. He will know what to do," he said in a matter-of-fact tone.

Queen Rhodopis, the archons, and the Canaanites, looked at Eloul. Plainly, Eloul did not know what to do.

The dragon was high above their heads. They looked up at it; nearly every man told himself that it could not devour all of them. Most of them hoped that it would devour some particular person or persons; Eloul desired that it should devour Sophron and the Queen and the High Priestess of Aphrodite, as a start.

The dragon came to the end of its roaring circuit over the center of the city, turned, and from above the temple of Tanit came down in a spiral swoop into the great square, glided swiftly along it, and came to a stop facing the temple of Aph-

rodite, from the roof of which the High Priestess was watching it, her hands on the parapet, her lips wreathed with the pleased smile of an excited child.

The city stared at it in a dead silence, most impressive after the throbbing roar. Then a tall figure in white rose in the dragon's head; in his hand was a shining cylinder.

"I hope I didn't bruise your arms when I lifted you into the fuselage," said Nicholas.

"The chariot of the gods," said Sophron softly.

The figure raised the cylinder to his lips and cried in Arabic, in a voice that rang far over the hushed city: "*We come in peace!*"

The hush broke. Far away among the house-tops a voice cried: "The Moon Gods!" The cry was taken up; it rose higher and higher till the whole city roared with its hundred thousand voices: "The Moon Gods! The Moon Gods!"

CHAPTER IV

NICHOLAS lowered the megaphone and looked up at the roof of the temple of Aphrodite. The woman in the violet robe, who had not bolted down into the temple when the airplane was approaching, was still there, bending over the parapet, looking down at him. She was a long way off, but his eyes were uncommonly keen, and he saw that she was a girl. She turned and walked across the roof and disappeared.

"Darned plucky girl—and walks well," he said to himself as he moved the machine-gun on its swivel to bear on the right half of the square of hoplites; Billy was taking the left.

"At the moment they think we're gods from the moon, and let's hope they go on thinking it," he said. "The troops in front of me seem very good stuff."

"Anyhow, better keep them guessing," said Billy.

"If we can," Nicholas agreed.

Benj. J. Budge heaved the deep sigh of satisfaction of a man who finds the dream of years assume reality before his eyes.

Then he said slowly, in a tone of hushed ecstasy: "Say, boys, this lost Carthage is a crackerjack of a city! Heaps finer than I expected, and it's sure in a state of perfect preservation."





Nicholas and Pyrrha were growing more friendly with each course; Queen Rhodopis missed none of their absorption.

"It's larger, but it looks Syrian to me," said Nicholas distrustfully.

"I hope to goodness it doesn't *smell* Syrian!" said Billy.

They sat silent, looking about them curiously, absorbing the beauty and magnificence of the city and waiting for something to happen. Nothing seemed in a hurry to happen. The shouting on the housetops was dying down into a vast murmur of discussion and speculation concerning this strange event. The plane had come to a standstill twenty yards inside the agora of the Greeks, as the half of the square nearest the temple of Aphrodite was called; it was therefore a matter for the Greeks to handle. Had it stopped twenty yards farther back, it would have been in the Canaanite sphere, and for the Canaanites to handle. Therefore the strategi looked to the archons for instructions.

But the archons were busy in the discussion with Eloul, which had grown lively and promised to become acrimonious. Now the shouting from the roofs of, "The Moon Gods! The Moon Gods!" gave Eloul his clue, and with no less promptitude he claimed the Moon Gods.

"The Moon Gods are the children of Tanit, and they will come to the temple of Tanit," he said shrilly in a tone of authority.

"To the temple of Tanit," boomed Iddibal.

There came a murmur of eager assent from the Canaanite councilors, and three more of them, along with Adherbal, the Suffete of the Land, came bustling up the steps and completed their number.

"But the Moon Gods have come to the agora of the Greeks. Therefore they will lodge in the temple of Aphrodite," said the archon Cleisthenes firmly.

Queen Rhodopis listened to the dispute quietly. As long as the two sections of her subjects were at loggerheads she was content. To keep them at loggerheads had been the policy of the Barcæ, the family to which she and her royal ancestors belonged, for generation after generation: they had divided and ruled.

There came a lull in the dispute, and at once her clear voice rose above it, saying in imperious accents: "The Moon Gods will lodge at the palace."

The other nine archons looked at Sophron for a lead, but the Canaanites again burst into a clamor of protest.

"But the Moon Gods are the children of Tanit! And her temple is their proper lodging!" cried Eloul shrilly.

"Their proper lodging," boomed Iddibal.

"Enough!" said Queen Rhodopis imperiously. "They shall lodge in the palace! It is my will."

"It is the Queen's will," said Sophron, throwing the weight of the Greeks into the balance on her side.

She shot a glance of smiling gratitude at him and saw that he was looking at the chariot of the gods. Her eyes turned to it, and the smile froze on her face. They had been too busy disputing to observe that something was happening. Out of the gate of the temple of Aphrodite came the violet-robed Pyrrha, and behind her a column of the priestesses of the goddess—all young and beautiful and smiling, in robes of many soft shades of blue and red and green and orange. The column came down the steps; one of the strategi shouted an order; the square of hoplites opened and let it through; it marched directly to the plane. When Queen Rhodopis looked toward it, Pyrrha was only about ten yards away from it.

The queen's eyes opened wide; the flame of anger in them, kindled by Eloul's opposition, rose higher, and she said in a strangled voice: "There's that chit again!"

Eloul turned and looked, and a fresh spasm of fury twisted his face.

"To the Moon Gods!" the Queen snapped to her negroes, and they trotted down the steps and across the square, her guards round them. . . .

"Girls—and girls—and girls! What a beauty chorus!" cried Billy in a tone of ecstasy as the column of priestesses of Aphrodite came through the hoplites and toward the plane. "Lord, what a stunner that one in the violet robe is!"

Nicholas, to his great astonishment, recognized her lovely face: it was the face of the girl who had given him the Carthaginian shekel on the wharf at Southampton!

But no—it was the face, still not the face. No powder had ever clouded the bloom of that clear and wonderful skin; the dark eyes were the laughing eyes of a child, not of a girl of the world; the lips were fuller and of a more enticing curve than the lips of the girl in the sable coat; a mass of dark and silken hair framed the lovely face—but the hair of the giver of the shekel had been cut short.

TWENTY feet from the plane Pyrrha halted and gazed with awed eyes from one to another of the three white figures in the strange chariot. Her gaze came to rest on the face of Nicholas; it was to him that she said in a delightful voice and in a language akin to Arabic, which he could easily follow: "Hail, divine ones from the sky! The High Priestess of Aphrodite bids you welcome to Megara and would know your will."

Nicholas translated, for Budge's Arabic was but meager. Now that they had landed, it was up to Budge to take matters over.

"Tell her we have come from our thrones in the moon to size up our faithful believers in Megara, and see their great city, and meet their business-men," said Budge.

"I don't think I'll try to trick her," said Nicholas firmly; then to Pyrrha he said in Arabic: "We have come from the air to see your great city and confer with your chief citizens."

"And will you graciously accept the hospitality of the goddess and lodge in her temple, divine one?" said Pyrrha.

Nicholas translated, but before they could accept, the litter of Queen Rhodopis stopped abruptly twenty feet on the right of the plane, with the splendid clash of sword-pommels against the shields of her hundred guards, and she slipped out of it gracefully to the ground.

Making a deep obeisance, she rose upright, and addressing herself to Nicholas, said: "Hail, great Gods of the Moon, most holy ones! Rhodopis, Queen of Megara, welcomes you to her city and invites you to her palace."

She had caught Pyrrha's last words and perceived she had arrived in the very nick of time.

But before Nicholas could translate, Eloul thrust forward with Iddibal on his heels, and cried: "Hail, Gods of the Moon, kin of the most mighty Goddess Tanit! Eloul, her High Priest, welcomes you and invites you to your home, the temple of the Moon Goddess!"

There was a pause while Nicholas translated the invitations.

"Me for the Royal Palace!" said Budge.

"Me for the temple of Aphrodite!" said Billy.

"No; we must keep together," said Nicholas sharply. "And of course Budge chooses." He looked at Pyrrha with regretful eyes, then turned to the Queen and said: "We accept your hospitality, great Queen."

Queen Rhodopis smiled on him, and it flashed on him how great a contrast she presented to Pyrrha, with her pale oval face, her aquiline nose, her imperious lips, set in a curve a little cruel, and scarlet against her pallor.

"The Queen is honored and grateful," she said, and smiled alluringly at Nicholas.

Eloul stepped back, grinding his teeth, and looked wildly round him. The Canaanite crowd, restrained by no cordons, had poured into the farther half of the square and was lined up fifty deep along the other side of the paved way, the path of the Barcæ, which ran from the gates of the royal palace to the steps of the Hall of the Grand Council, dividing the square into the agora of the Greeks and the agora of the Canaanites.

A brilliant idea flashed on the crafty eunuch: he might yet get his way. He yelled: "They are carrying the Moon Gods away! Wheel their chariot to the temple of Tanit! Rescue your gods!"

"Rescue your gods!" bellowed Iddibal.

The crowd surged forward, and fifty-four active and excited small boys arrived first.

"Here's trouble," said Sophron to Queen Rhodopis quietly. He picked her up, fairly pitched her into her litter, and ran for the hoplites.

Then came the roaring rush of the crowd. It swept back the litter, the negroes, the guards, the councilors, and the priestesses of Aphrodite. A hundred willing hands gripped the stout steel rail that ran round the plane, and it would have started on the instant for the temple of Tanit, had not the pressure of the crowd held it where it was.

An eddy of the crowd, surging round the plane, had caught Pyrrha and thrust her back; it was crushing her against it. Her eyes rose to Nicholas in frightened appeal.

He rose, caught up a heavy spanner, brought it down with successive blows on the heads of the butcher, the grocer, and the money-lender, who were crushing her against the side of the plane, and as their sagging bodies eased the pressure, he caught her arms, heaved her up and over the side of the cockpit and set her down beside him.

Then he stooped; a switch clicked; a happy idea of Budge's came into effect, and the steel rail round the plane became alive.

On the instant a horrible howling rose high above the shouting of the triumphant crowd, as fifty sturdy citizens strove to loosen the grip of a hundred hands on the live rail, and at least two hundred more in contact with them howled as loud. The howling was so appalling that it hushed the crowd.

The howling became articulate. "The chariot burns! The chariot burns!" they howled, and the crowd gave back all round the plane.

Nicholas switched off the current; the hands loosed their grip on the rail that had been alive; two hundred and fifty eager citizens, still howling, dashed from the plane, shoving, kicking, butting, clawing, biting, bent madly on getting from the center of the crowd to its outer edge.

Nicholas picked up the megaphone and raised it and shouted: "Silence! Be still!"

He turned to Budge and said: "Now, then—the stogie stunt!"

Benj. J. Budge stood up on his seat, huge, majestic.

There came a shrill yell from the middle of the crowd. Iddibal, the Suffete of the Sea, had bitten a toe of a Canaanite who was standing on his head.

Unmoved, Benj. J. Budge drew out a cylindrical object which appeared to be tobacco; he bit the end off it and stuck it in his mouth with majestic slowness. The crowd stared at him with all its eyes; even the voices of the women were hushed. He raised his gold lighter and applied it to the end of the cylinder, puffed out half-a-dozen small puffs, then drew in long and deeply and breathed out through his lips and nostrils a grand cloud of brown smoke. An indescribably evil odor filled the air about the plane.

"Oo-er-r-r!" said the crowd, and instantly large sections of it fell on their knees.

FROM the top of the steps of the Temple of Aphrodite, Sophron had been watching for the right moment. It had now come.

"Charge!" he shouted.

With a cheer the hoplites swung forward in a wedge-shaped phalanx at the heart of the crowd, pounding with their shields, striking with the flat of their swords, kicking with the iron toe-caps of their sandals, crying savagely:

"Out of the agora! Out of the agora!"

The crowd knew that the hoplites were not merely conscientious but enthusiastic in their methods of clearing their agora, and it left with a rush. But it did not go alone; it took the Sacred Legion with it.

Nicholas, sitting with his thumb on the switch of the rail that became alive, saw the hoplites get the crowd on the run; then he turned to Pyrrha and said in anxious accents: "I hope I didn't bruise your arms badly when I lifted you into the fuselage."

"It is nothing," said Pyrrha, smiling at him. "I might have been hurt far worse if you had not lifted me out of the crowd. I am very grateful—but for you I should have been killed."

"Oh, no; it wouldn't have been as bad as that," Nicholas protested. "But you might have come out of it with a broken arm."

"I should certainly have been killed," she said with profound conviction. "You saved my life."

Billy turned from enjoying the enthusiasm of the hoplites and seeing Nicholas engaged in conversation, rose quickly.

"Hang it! That's always the way!" said Billy in a bitterly aggrieved tone. "Everybody knows you're an insensible hog who doesn't give a tinker's curse for women—and yet if a pretty girl turns up, she spots you as the squire of dames at once and glues herself to you."

"That will be enough from you," said Nicholas coldly.

Then the anxious face of Sophron appeared above the side of the cockpit; at the sight of Pyrrha relief swept away the anxiety.

"You are safe!" he exclaimed in a grateful tone. "I could not find you or get word of you, and I feared those cursed Canaanites had trodden you under foot or kidnaped you."

"This—this divine one saved me. He lifted me out of the crowd that was crushing me against the chariot. His strength is more than mortal," said Pyrrha.

Sophron looked keenly at Nicholas and then at Billy and Budge. "I understand," he said. "Yes—the strength of a hero." He spoke in Greek, which Nicholas could not understand.

IN the agora, emptied of the crowd, the Queen's guard had re-formed round her litter. Eloul, bumped, jostled, stamped on, his white robe crumpled and dirty, half its red fringe torn from the border and hanging loose, was no longer capable of any display of fury, though his heart was a caldron of seething rage. For all the twenty years he had been the High Priest of Tanit no one had dared jostle him. With his mind in a turmoil, he dragged himself on bruised and aching feet toward the agora.

He had gone about fifty yards when a recumbent figure, a few yards ahead of him, groaning and cursing, sat up. Scowling, he swerved to avoid it, then recognized the pig-like and now lopsided face of Iddibal, the stanch and true. He stopped and helped him to his feet. Eloul's bruises were few and trifling compared with those of his stout supporter: the crowd had run over Iddibal as it came, and it had run over him as it went. Together they staggered along toward the temple of Tanit.

The litter of Queen Rhodopis came swinging up to the plane; she saw Pyrrha sitting at her ease in it with the austere young Moon God whom she herself had thought so attractive.

It was with an effort that Queen Rhodopis smoothed her frowning brow as she said, addressing Nicholas: "My disgraceful subjects who interrupted us and disturbed your peace and tried to impose their will on you, divine ones, shall be punished severely."

"About seventy thousand shekels the fines to us will amount to," broke in Sophron cheerfully. "Seven thousand Canaanites in our agora, and not one of them showed his permit—called in by Eloul and that blockhead Iddibal. The rich will be furious when they have to pay."

"They shall pay as much and more for the insult to me and my divine guests. But that can wait," said Rhodopis grimly. She turned to Nicholas and added: "I will await you in the palace, divine ones!" Then she bent toward the chief of her litter-bearers and gave the order: "To the palace."

The litter swung off; Pyrrha rose.

"We shall doubtless meet at the palace," she said, smiling at Nicholas. He and Sophron helped her down from the machine, and she walked with Sophron to the temple of Aphrodite, where they parted at the gates.

As she entered, Pyrrha laughed softly and said under her breath: "Gods—gods?"

She gave a little skip,—hardly in keeping with the dignity of the High Priestess of a great goddess,—then walked sedately into the chief shrine.

CHAPTER V

WISPS of steam rose on air fragrant with unguents, twisted among the pillars and hung in a cloud under the high roof of the Bath of the Rich at the back of the temple of Tanit. In an alcove on the right, withdrawn from the throng of stout and noisy men taking their baths or discussing business and the great events of the morning, two slaves were massaging the bruised limbs of Iddibal, Suffete of the Sea; another was anointing his skinned ear with an soothing ointment; another was massaging the bruised feet of Eloul; and yet another was massaging Adherbal, Suffete of the Land. The three dignitaries were looking uncommonly sour, but Iddibal's face, thanks to the hot bath he had just taken, was rather less lopsided, and hot baths had lessened the aches of the other two.

Eloul drank a long draft from the tall gold cup of red wine in his skinny hand and said in bitter accents: "The Moon Gods were tricked. They had no time to learn where they ought to lodge. They must come to the temple of Tanit."

Iddibal merely nodded; his face was too stiff for conversation. He emptied his cup and held it out to be refilled by a slave who stood by with the flagon.

"It might have been worse," said Adherbal. "The Moon Gods might have gone to the temple of Aphrodite."

"That cursed girl nearly got them," said Eloul, frowning. "But the people have seen the Moon Gods; they have seen their chariot burn those who touched it; they saw the big one breathe from his nostrils fire and the smoke of a strange incense. They will turn to Tanit again and know that there is only one goddess. They have grown careless of her, and neglectful; thousands have left her worship for the easier worship of Aphrodite. Yes; the coming of the Moon Gods will turn them again to the worship of Tanit. The Canaanites will once more be a united people. For generations there has been no such chance of destroying those cursed Greeks and their goddess, and making Megara once more wholly Canaanite and the city of Tanit."

"The Greeks are strong," said Adherbal doubtfully. "Moreover, Rhodopis and the Barcæ will support them."

"The Canaanites are three to one, and they will be fired by the most zealous enthusiasm; the temple and the rich can feed their enthusiasm with promises and money; for after all it's a matter of money; money makes men fight to the death," said Eloul, and his eyes flamed. "But be-

fore anything can be done, the Moon Gods must be in the temple. Only if they are in the temple and demanding, as her children, that Tanit be glorified, can we inflame our people."

"Rhodopis will never let them come, and Sophron and the archons will back her up," Adherbal demurred.

"It will be for the Moon Gods to decide. When they understand, they will come. Should they understand, yet not come, they must be brought," said Eloul firmly.

They fell to discussing details, with no fear that the slaves who were ministering to them would carry word of their plot to Queen Rhodopis or the archons, for in the Bath of the Rich the slaves were deaf and dumb. Then they went to their homes, where they found messengers from Queen Rhodopis bringing invitations to a banquet at the palace in honor of the Moon Gods. . . .

When Queen Rhodopis and Pyrrha had left, Budge and Nicholas and Billy held a council. They had come safely to Megara, as the lost Carthage seemed to be called, but it was clear from the behavior of Eloul and the crowd that it was a city in which they would need to go carefully. Budge was eager to go at once to the palace and plunge into the life of the ancients, but Nicholas was concerned with the safety of the plane and with moving it to a spot from which he could take off promptly, should they have to fly in a hurry.

He spoke of this, and went on: "Now, that temple in front of us seems to me a friendly kind of place—"

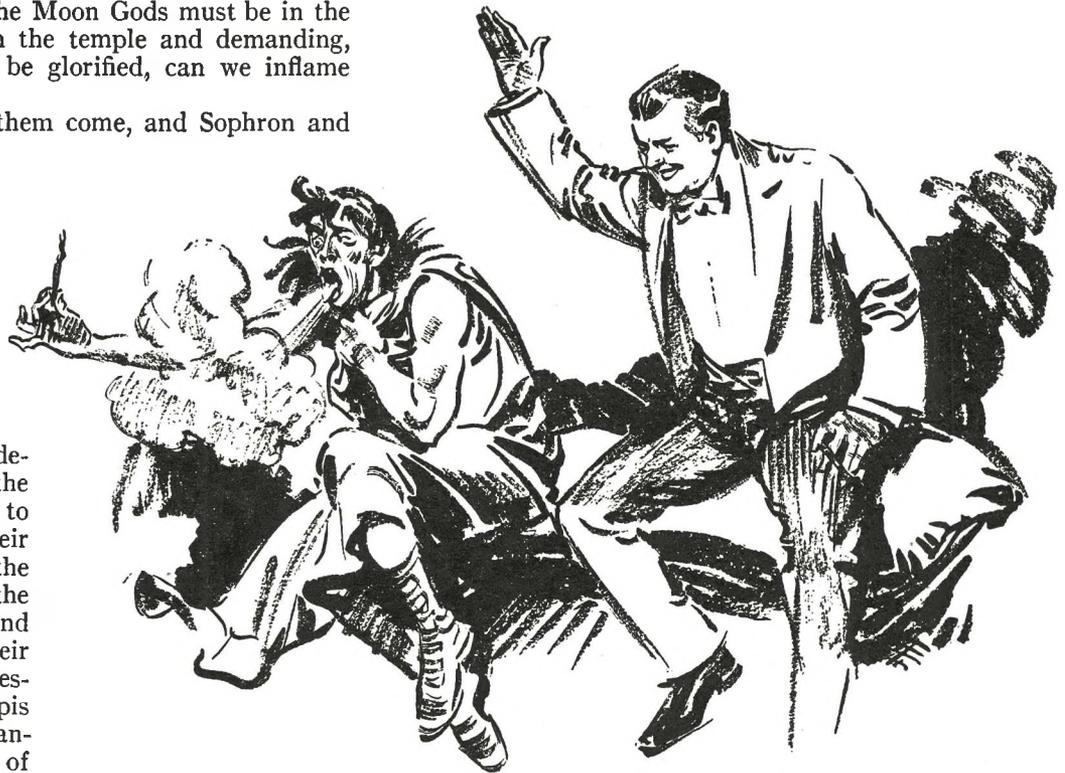
"You mean the young lady who came out of it seemed friendly to you," said Billy in accents still aggrieved.

"And the nearer we are to it, the better," Nicholas went on without heeding him. "Also, if I have the length of the square to take off in, I can be sure of clearing the houses with plenty to spare. I wonder if I can get the troops to help me."

He slipped down from the plane and told the nearest stasiarch what he wanted. The stasiarch proved almost obsequious in his readiness to help these gods from the moon, and offered the services of his company of hoplites. They towed the plane to within thirty yards of the gates of the temple of Aphrodite, and there brought it round. Then Nicholas said he was ready to plunge into ancient life; but Billy suggested that it would be wise to have breakfast while they were near honest eggs and bacon.

"You boys seem to think that we're going to meal with some piking pasha or one-horse bey," said Budge scornfully. "These ancients don't live like Turks and Armenians, believe me! And say, boys, I've got a little present for you, since they may still eat with their fingers."

He took from a bulging jacket pocket two flat red morocco cases, which upon being opened were found each to contain a knife, a fork and a spoon. They thanked him, slipped the cases into outside pockets, and small automatics into their hip pockets, packed their suitcases, washed again and were ready. Outside the plane as well as inside there were switches to the live rail; Nicholas switched the current on and left the plane untouchable, though this was



Eloul began to cough uncontrollably; Budge patted his back with an earnestness that nearly jarred his teeth loose.

hardly necessary, for a company of hoplites was guarding it, keeping at a proper distance the curious Greeks who were admitted in parties through cordons at the ends of the streets to view the chariot of the gods.

The travelers handed their suitcases and Billy's banjo to the waiting slaves, and followed by a guard of hoplites, started for the palace.

"These folks puzzle me," said Budge, waving toward this guard the little attaché-case he was carrying. "I know from their armor and weapons that they're Greek hoplites. But they're mostly fair—at least they're mixed fair and darkish; but the Greeks I know are all dark and undersized."

"The ancient Greeks were a tall, fair race who came down from the north; but in two thousand years the Mediterranean race has slowly swamped them," said Nicholas. "These are the pure old strain, and they have been living in a bracing climate. This plateau must be at least six thousand feet above sea-level."

The gates of the palace were opened wide at their approach; and they walked into the courtyard between two lines of rather confused guards, some of whom saluted by striking their shields with the pommels of their swords, while the remainder made deep obeisances.

The palace, two hundred feet long, four stories high, with two square towers rising on either side of a larger and taller tower above the central doorway, was built of the yellow marble of which the houses of the city were built, which gave it in the blazing sunshine its appearance of a golden city.

They paused to look up at the façade, and Budge said rather sadly: "No glass in the windows. I thought they might have got *that* far in two thousand years!"

"It doesn't look Syrian, and it doesn't smell Syrian," Billy rejoiced.

The major-domo of the palace, wearing a pink robe and attended by four slaves in gray, led them up the great marble staircase to large and lofty rooms on the first floor, in which were broad couches piled with silk cushions,

stuffed with down, and silk coverlets. Frescoes of gay hunting scenes covered the walls. Beyond their rooms was a bathroom paved with marble, with two large baths four feet deep let into the floor. In this room slaves with ewers of hot water, scrapers, and phials of fragrant oils, were waiting to bathe and anoint them.

They were ready enough for hot baths, but the thought of being bathed—and scraped and oiled—awoke in Budge the liveliest abhorrence.

He turned to the slaves and waved them away with both hands, while saying loudly—to be the better understood: “Begone and draw the curtains! We wash ourselves! Begone!”

The slaves went hurriedly, and Nicholas said: “It’s just as well—if we’re to go on being Moon Gods. I’ve got a couple of scars from Turkish bayonets that wouldn’t look well—for I suppose Moon Gods would be expected to be invulnerable.”

They bathed, put on the silk bathrobes laid ready for them, and went into the room Nicholas had chosen for himself. The slaves returned, one with a flagon of red wine, hot and sweetened with honey, and another with a basket of sweet cakes.

The slave with the cakes offered the basket to them and said: “The feast is at noonday, divine ones.”

IT was only a few minutes past ten, and since they had been up for hours, having left the fuel dump at four in the morning, that they might have the whole day before them to seek the secret city, Budge now suggested that an hour’s sleep would make them more fit to cope with any trouble that might crop up. So they slept till half-past eleven.

Then Nicholas said: “I’ve no liking for glad rags in the morning, but since the natives are in full dress, I think we ought to make an effort to make a good impression. Besides, we’ve decided to be Moon Gods as long as we can, and something in the way of more striking togs than this drill will be more in keeping with the part. What about evening dress?”

“If you say so, son,” said Budge with no enthusiasm. “Soup and fish it is.”

Accordingly they put on their tropical evening dress—white piqué jackets, white silk shirts, wing collars and white ties, red cummerbunds, black trousers and dancing pumps—thrusting their knife-and-fork cases into their cummerbunds and their small automatics into their hip pockets.

Budge surveyed the effect with approving eyes. “It sure does make us more imposing,” he said in a tone of grave satisfaction.

The major-domo and his attendant slaves came and conducted them, with Budge still carrying his little attaché-case, downstairs to the door of the great hall, and waved them to go in. As they crossed the threshold, a blare of trumpets hailed their entry. There was a brilliant gathering at the lower end of the hall—Queen Rhodopis in royal scarlet, her ladies and the priestesses of Tanit and Aphrodite in robes of many colors, the Queen’s councilors in purple, the two Suffetes and the Canaanite members of the Grand Council in orange, Sophron and the other archons in white Dorian tunics with broad gold hems, gold girdles, and gold sandals, and a score of the Queen’s guards in golden armor in the background. All bowed low and cried: “Hail to the Moon Gods! Hail to the Moon Gods!”

Budge and Nicholas and Billy bowed; the Queen stepped forward to welcome them; the marshals of the feast led them to the upper end of the hall, where seats were ranged about a low T-shaped table. The Queen took her place

at the middle of the cross of the T; the marshals of the feast respectfully waved the three Moon Gods to her right, allowing them to settle their order of precedence. Nicholas pushed Budge to the seat beside the Queen, and Billy to the next. He was rewarded for his modesty; the violet-robed Pyrrha sank down beside him. Eloul was beyond Budge, to the left of the Queen; next to him was Sophron, then Iddibal, then Adherbal. On the left of the stem of the T were councilors of the Queen and the other nine archons; on the right more of her councilors and the other eight Canaanite members of the Grand Council. All the leading men of Megara were present, since they were also the chief men of the Council of the Rich. Beside them were the ladies of the Queen—all members, like her councilors, of the great House of the Barcæ, the priestesses of Aphrodite, and the priestesses of Tanit.

Queen Rhodopis looked round the table and saw that Nicholas was placed next to Pyrrha. She frowned—a foolish oversight! But she had not time to give the matter thought, for Budge began to talk to her in his rich and flexible voice. Budge had many questions to ask. He meant to have answers to them, and when Benj. J. Budge wanted an answer to a question he had it.

The feast began with nectarines, chilled in snow from Mount Agash. Olives, stuffed with spices or horseradish or forcemeat followed, then a delicious, red vegetable soup, then savory omelets made with truffles and strange piquant herbs, then cock’s-combs and the tongues of flamingoes stewed in wine, then peacocks, capons, ducks, small antelopes,—roasted whole and tender and succulent,—suckling pigs stewed with other strange herbs, young wild boars,—fattened on chestnuts and stuffed with them,—haunches of venison and sirloins of beef; then cream cakes set with pistachio nuts, almond cakes, cakes baked of a purée of dates in a syrup of nectarines, cakes flavored with the juices of peaches, of persimmons and of melons—indeed a new world of sweets; then cheese made from goat’s milk, antelope milk and cream, then nectarines, peaches, pine-apples, melons, plums and small mountain strawberries with clotted cream, of a delightful flavor.

With the courses they drank wines made from grapes that had enjoyed two thousand years of untroubled culture,—white wines, amber-colored and red,—wines delicate and dry, fruity and rich.

THERE was a great moment when roast peacock was served, and the Moon Gods took out their knives and forks to cut it up. A murmur ran round the table, and the Queen and Pyrrha and the Greeks watched their delicate manner of eating with admiration and envy.

“What fine instruments!” said Queen Rhodopis.

Budge caught the note of envy in her voice. He reached for his attaché-case, took from it two red morocco cases, opened one, and handed it to her.

“If Your Majesty will accept them,” he said with a bow. The other he passed to Nicholas, saying: “For the High Priestess of Aphrodite.”

They took them, thanking him with delighted eyes, and imitating the Moon Gods, were presently using the strange implements as if they had been accustomed to them from childhood.

Nicholas and Pyrrha were growing more friendly with each course, and the courses came with an ordered slowness which gave those feasting leisure to enjoy each. She had as many questions to ask Nicholas as Budge had to ask the Queen, but she was restrained by the respect due to a Moon God. High Priestess of Aphrodite and daughter of Sophron,—the most powerful and one of the wealthiest of the Greeks,—she had had many suitors, young and brave and gay, middle-aged and brilliant and fascinating,

but none of them had awakened her interest as had this stranger.

Queen Rhodopis missed none of their growing absorption in one another; for all that Budge's questions kept her busy, she saw Nicholas' face warmed with animation; she saw the charm of Pyrrha's smile. The imperious Queen knew more about love at first sight than most women, for she had often been smitten with it herself. Though she smiled at Budge, her face grew dark, and her nostrils now and then twitched in a growing anger.

The feast went on; delicious dish followed delicious dish, wine followed wine. The Greeks ate delicately and drank with moderation; the Canaanites were hearty trenchermen and gluttonous; they were hard drinkers. The talk rose high; the tall roof echoed and reechoed with laughter, the mellow rippling laughter of the Greeks, the strident mirth of the Canaanites. With the sweets came musicians and singers, dancers and tumblers and conjurers. The throbbing, heady music of the East, with its shrilling pipes and monotonous drumming was followed by the clear, sweet music of Greek lyres in delightful melodies; graceful Greek dancing girls followed posturing and whirling Canaanites; the tumblers and the conjurers filled the intervals between the dances.

The dessert had been on the table half an hour, and even the most gluttonous of the Canaanites were no longer at work when Queen Rhodopis rose and left the hall with Pyrrha, and the court ladies followed. The men, and the priestesses of Tanit and Aphrodite, remained; the slaves filled their cups again with old wine; the laughter rose on a wilder note.

Eloul rose, walked down the hall, and sat down by the side of Simætha, High Priestess of Tanit, and of all her priestesses the most beautiful — a languorous creature in whose dark eyes gleamed fire, whose voluptuous body moved with the graceful smoothness of a snake. Eloul spoke to her in a low voice. She twisted round to hear him; they talked in whispers with their eyes on Budge, while the fire in Simætha's eyes flickered up, and she smiled a subtle smile.

Sophon moved to the side of Budge and answered more questions. Billy, who though thrown upon his own resources, had been very happy with the delicious strange foods and wines, had been exchanging looks and amiable smiles with Arisbe, a pretty priestess of Aphrodite.

Nicholas had learned from Pyrrha that the Queen and her ladies were betaking themselves to the gardens of the palace; he left the banquet-hall and went briskly upstairs to reconnoiter. The Queen and her ladies were moving toward a pavilion on the left; he could not see Pyrrha. Then among the trees on the left he saw a patch of violet. He hurried down the stairs and into the garden, and keeping out of sight of the pavilion took his way through the trees to the left. He had not gone fifty yards when he came through a belt of shrubs to find Pyrrha sitting on a bank on the farther side of a shaded lawn.

She looked up with a startled air as he came out of the trees; then she smiled.

"You have had enough of the feast so soon?" she asked in some surprise.

"No. But I had not had enough of you," said Nicholas frankly. He sat down beside her and took out his cigarette-case

"May I smoke?" he said.

She did not understand, and he explained by signs. Eagerly she gave him leave, and with awed eyes watched him light a cigarette and begin to smoke it.

"I suppose it is only for men—not for girls?" she said wistfully.

In three minutes, after a little coughing, she was herself smoking, proudly — and they took up the thread of their talk where the Queen's leaving the feast had broken it.

Nicholas had taken her hand in his, when there came a gleam of bright color among the trees on the other side of the lawn, and Queen Rhodopis came quickly across it.

Pyrrha glanced at her and said innocently: "What can have annoyed the Queen?"

"What does this mean?" said Queen Rhodopis imperiously.



In two minutes the twins were in the Budge De Luxe, and she was wheeling it along, fairly bursting with pride.

CHAPTER VI

BUDGE gazed about him with an air of immense satisfaction: here he was, a simple American citizen of the Twentieth Century, in the very heart of the life of the ancients, feasting in the Car-

thaginian manner, the honored guest in a superb palace of a queen! He drew a brown cylinder from the pocket of his jacket and placed the end of it between his lips. An awed murmur rang along the table. With an air of ineffable beatitude he lit the stogie.

But presently it was not enough for him to enjoy that felicity alone; it must be shared by others. He took from his pocket another stogie and offered it to Eloul.

The crafty but unfortunate eunuch, amazed and delighted at being picked out for this signal favor by the head Moon God, took the gift with fingers that trembled a little, and imitating the gracious donor, put it in his mouth. With the air of a man introducing a fellow-creature to a new and exquisite pleasure, Budge applied the flame of his lighter to its tip. Again imitating the gracious donor, Eloul breathed in deeply. Then he began to cough uncontrollably.

Budge gazed at his contorted face and starting eyes with astonishment and commiseration, then patted his back with a kindly earnestness that nearly jarred his teeth loose. Presently Eloul ceased coughing; he held out the stogie

and gazed at it with dread and horror. There came an urge from the depths of his being to throw the beastly thing away. But he could not show himself unworthy of that signal honor! He continued doggedly. . . .

Simætha rose, walked the length of the table with her smooth, snakelike gait, sat down beside Budge, smiled at him, and said: "You are more noble and marvelous, divine one, than I had ever dreamed a god could be."

Budge began to speak of his aims in life and business, and his ideals, with an eloquence that astonished him. He realized that she was one of those women who bring out all that is best in a man. . . .

Eloul would have watched the progress of their friendship with gloating satisfaction, had he been able to give his close attention to it. But the component parts of the feast had now begun an internecine war inside him. This perforce diverted his mind from his scheme.

THE conversation of Billy, though less egotistic than that of Budge, had grown hardly less fluent; his halting Arabic was—under spur of the need to make it clear to his charming companion Arisbe that she was his soul's affinity—becoming a passable Megarian. But a restlessness invaded him, the urge to be up and doing and join the dance. Plainly, the musicians did not know the modern fox-trot, or they would have played one.

Fired with a noble resolve to extend the boundaries of knowledge, he hurried up to his room and came back with his banjo. The dancers, though so admirably dressed for exercise, were now resting. Billy went to the musicians. Greeks and Canaanites, united by the bond of a common art, they were talking and drinking together in the friendliest fashion. When Billy made it clear to them that he wished to teach them a new melody, they showed themselves greatly flattered by a Moon God's condescension. There was a hush, broken by the strains of the banjo as Billy began a "hot" tune.

The musicians listened with all their ears and with a growing excitement. It was their first introduction to syncopation. The leader of the lyrists was the first to take it up on his lyre; then the leader of the drums came in with verve. In five minutes both the two orchestras were in full and excited swing, and already the drummers were jerking about and making hideous faces.

Billy went back to Arisbe, took her to the empty floor at the foot of the table and showed her the steps of the fox-trot. That simple measure presented no difficulty to a dancer trained in dances of the festivals of Aphrodite. Then, to her astonishment, he seized her in his arms, they moved rhythmically out onto the floor, and in three minutes she was dancing the fox-trot to perfection.

The feasters, to whom ballroom dancing was wholly strange, watched them, spellbound.

Then Simætha said in excited accents to Budge: "Can you do that?"

"Dance the fox-trot? Yes," said Budge.

"Then come along!" said Simætha.

Iddibal rose, sore as he still was, and followed them, jiggling curiously in time to the music as he went. He seized a priestess of Tanit, and plunged onto the dancing-floor; pell-mell, Greeks and Canaanites, archons and councilors, priestesses of Aphrodite and priestesses of Tanit hurried onto the floor and circled round it, the Greeks smoothly, the Canaanites jiggling and swaying and pump-handling in a splendid abandon.

Only Eloul was not with them. A sudden need for the wide-open spaces had come upon him; he was lying on his face in a turfy dell in the middle of the gardens, clutching a tuft of grass and striving with all his might to prevent the world from going round.

"WHAT does this mean?" repeated Queen Rhodopis imperiously.

Politely but reluctantly Nicholas loosed Pyrrha's hand and rose. Rather at a loss, he gazed at the Queen. Pyrrha rose languidly, gazing coolly at her, raised the cigarette to her lips and breathed out a little cloud of smoke. Then she held up the cigarette and said: "This is soothing and invigorating. The Moon Gods use the smoke of it to restore their vigor when they are weary. Neek—this Moon God is called *Neek*—gave it to me."

Queen Rhodopis did not like her manner nor her tone.

She said coldly: "I do not know what you Greek girls of today are coming to. You must have something new every minute of your lives; it is all you think about. I am quite certain the Moon God would not have given you one of these strange things and shown you how to breathe in the smoke from it, unless you asked him for it. Unmaidenly, is what I call it. But you Greek girls do not know what maidenliness is!"

Pyrrha seemed unabashed, for she laughed softly and said in careless accents: "There is maidenliness and maidenliness, Great Queen."

There must have been a sting to the apparently simple statement, for the eyes of the Queen flashed, and her nostrils dilated. But she had played the part of a queen for too many years to lose entirely her self-control; and Pyrrha was not only the High Priestess of Aphrodite, she was also Sophron's daughter.

"You're the most impudent hussy in Megara!" she said.

Nicholas interposed quickly: "Will you not smoke a cigarette, Great Queen?"

Queen Rhodopis sat down on the bank and looked at him with a dazzling smile as he put the flame of his lighter to the end of her cigarette.

AS they talked, the sound of the throbbing music of the Orient had been coming faintly to their ears; then it had died away. Of a sudden there came the sound of another music—the strains of a modern fox-trot.

A question died on the lips of Queen Rhodopis; her nostrils dilated and her eyes sparkled; she said imperiously: "What is this?"

The thrilling strains seemed to have abated somewhat the austerity of Nicholas, for his eyes were also shining as he replied: "It's the tune of a fox-trot—a dance."

"A new dance!" said Pyrrha. "Let's go and look at it." She rose lightly to her feet.

Queen Rhodopis rose readily enough, and they walked toward the palace, not by the path by which they had come to the lawn but by a shorter path to the left of it, and had gone some fifty yards when they came into a turfy dell. In the middle of it, prone on its face, lay a white-robed figure, shaken by a convulsive shuddering.

They stopped short, and Queen Rhodopis said: "Why, it's Eloul!"

"It is Eloul. What an astonishing attitude for a High Priest of Tanit to lie in! I wonder what he thinks he's doing," said Pyrrha.

"What does this mean?" said Queen Rhodopis to Eloul imperiously.

Eloul raised a distorted sea-green face.

"Curse the Great God Budge!" he said violently, then buried his face in the grass again and shuddered.

Queen Rhodopis and Pyrrha cried out in horror at the blasphemy, and looked to Nicholas to smite him with some appalling punishment.

Nicholas only smiled; that strange pallor had assured him that the crafty but unfortunate eunuch was merely suffering from the effect of near-tobacco on a digestion quite unaccustomed to nicotine.

"It's nothing to worry about—he's only been smoking one of Budge's stogies. He'll be better in a couple of hours—or at any rate sometime tomorrow," he said in reassuring accents.

Eloul shuddered and uttered a deep groan.

"Come along!" said Nicholas hastily. "He will be better alone."

They walked on briskly and came to the palace. As they came near it the pattering of many feet mingled with the music, moving in time to it. They looked through a window into the hall and saw everyone in it dancing.

Iddibal came jiggling by, his face set in an iron determination. Not a word passed his lips; this was no time for conversation. Budge came, wearing a stern and purposeful air and striding mightily, with Simætha looking up into his eyes and murmuring her admiration of his strength and vigor. Billy and Arisbe swung by swiftly, laughing; then came Sophron gliding slowly and smoothly with the beautiful Ipsithilla.

A dozen ladies-in-waiting, flocking to the window, separated Pyrrha and Nicholas from the Queen.

"Would you like to dance it?" he said.

Pyrrha smiled and nodded; he picked her up, swung her over the window-sill and set her on her feet on the floor of the hall. He slipped over the sill himself, took her in his arms, and they moved out on to the floor.

The eyes of Queen Rhodopis flashed; she said in a hushed voice: "The—the brazen hussy! She asked him!"

CHAPTER VII

ON the morning after the feast the court barber came to shave the Moon Gods. Budge examined his shaving outfit with interest; the razor was large, and since it was of iron, its edge not as sharp as it might be. There was no soap to soften the skin, only unguents. But there was pumice-stone. So that was how the Megarians shaved—a long and painful business and poor results! He bade the barber sit down. Then he called for hot water, took from his suitcase his own shaving-kit, lathered, and shaved himself with his safety-razor.

The court barber was amazed by the brevity of the process and the excellence of the result; and before ten o'clock his report was the talk of all the hair-dressing circles and baths in Megara.

Shaved, Budge went to the bathroom, shooed out the slaves and took his bath. He had just taken it when Billy came in, wearing a gloomy air.

Budge asked him if Nicholas was awake. Billy said bitterly that Nicholas was quite awake—had indeed awakened *him* at least two hours earlier to tell him that the gardens of the Temple of Aphrodite were delightful in the early morning. Billy added even more bitterly that Nicholas always had had a head of iron.

They dressed, and then Nicholas came. He admitted, in a guarded fashion, that the gardens of the temple of Aphrodite had been nice in the early morning.

Slaves were laying a table in Nicholas' room, which looked out over the garden, and they breakfasted on quails baked in a rich pastry, roasted capon, and a suckling pig stuffed with olives and green peppers. They drank with it a light and delicate wine.

Then came one of the Queen's chamberlains to ask what they would like to do till she was at leisure after the morning's audience. Budge said they would like to explore the city. The chamberlain said he would make arrangements for them to do so.

Presently they went down into the courtyard to find that the chamberlain had made arrangements for them to ex-

plore the city in style. Three litters, each carried by fourteen sturdy negroes, awaited them; two hundred of the Queen's guards and a band of trumpeters were their escort; twenty slaves, dressed in gray tunics and wearing on their heads conical gray caps, like all the slaves in the city, were also awaiting them. The gates of the palace were thrown open; the trumpeters marched out with a great blare of trumpets; then came a hundred of the Queen's guards, next the three litters with twenty-five of the Queen's guards marching on either side of them, then the twenty slaves. Fifty of the Queen's guards brought up the rear.

First the procession moved to the plane, of the safety of which Nicholas had assured himself first thing in the morning. There it halted, and Budge went aboard. First he handed down a de-luxe model of his baby-carriage, then a dozen twenty-eight-by-fourteen-inch placards on stiff cardboard. He came down and hung them from the necks of a dozen of the slaves. On each was printed a baby-carriage slogan in Arabic such as: "*Why Be Afraid of Twins? The Budge De Luxe Holds Two.*" Or: "*Sell the Litter, Buy a Budge De Luxe and Raise a Family.*" He arranged these slaves in a file, at the end of which came a slave wheeling the Budge De Luxe itself.

He returned to his litter, and Billy photographed the procession from different points, always keeping Budge the central figure, for the sake of the business and of Carthage. As he finished taking them, Sophron approached briskly and after greeting them talked with the officer in command of the Queen's guards. Then he shouted an order to the officer in command of four companies of hoplites who had poured out of their quarters, and those four companies marched up and added themselves to the procession.

Then Sophron came to Nicholas' side and said: "I have given orders that the litters and guards keep to the main street of the Canaanite city, where there is room to fight."

"It's like that, is it?" said Nicholas cheerfully.

"I do not think it likely that anything will happen today. But it is well for you to be on your guard. On no account enter the temple of Tanit!" Sophron warned.

THE Greek agora was empty, except for two or three hundred Greeks who had come into it to see the Moon Gods; but in the agora of the Canaanites it was market-day. On both sides of it were rows of stalls, and a picturesque crowd was buying its food for the week.

As the procession entered the agora, the crowd came flocking from the stalls, to the edges of the broad, clear space in the middle of the agora to see the Moon Gods pass, and as the procession passed they fell on their knees.

Budge was beaming; thanks to his advertisement of the Budge De Luxe, he felt that he was combining business with pleasure. In the middle of the agora his keen business sense showed him what he wanted, a tall negress carrying lusty twins. He stopped the procession, clambered out of his litter, and beckoned to her. Thrust forward by the crowd, she came hesitatingly; but in two minutes the twins were in the Budge De Luxe, and she was wheeling it along, fairly bursting with pride and wearing an air of grandeur seldom attained by a human being.

Sophron, standing with Pyrrha and Cleisthenes, on the roof of the temple of Aphrodite, watching the march of the procession, frowned and said sharply: "I don't like the way the Canaanites sing that Hymn to Tanit; they don't sing it like that at the festivals—not with half the fervor. I hope they're not going to work themselves up into one of their religious frenzies and give trouble. That scoundrel Eloul is going to make the most of the coming of the Moon Gods and his priests are already at work, stirring up the worshipers of Tanit."

"I wonder whether he will make another effort to get the Moon Gods into his temple, now that they're in the eastern quarter," said Pyrrha anxiously.

"I have given instructions," said Sophron.

The hymn came to an end; the procession took its way along the broad thoroughfare. For more than a mile and a half the procession moved between big houses and beautiful gardens; then came the open country, a plain running ten miles to the spurs of the mountain. From the number of slaves at work in the fields, it seemed to be intensively cultivated.

They had come back to within half a mile of the city wall when there came, flying from the right, fifty feet from the ground, a dove pursued by a hawk. Over the road in front of Budge's litter, the hawk swooped. In what seemed one movement Budge drew his automatic and fired. The hawk jerked upward; its feathers flew, and it dropped dead among the crowd.

"A fine shot!" cried Nicholas in warm admiration.

"I was a cowboy once," said Budge. "It's a trick."

In an hour it was all over the city that the big Moon God had pointed his finger at a swooping hawk, that fire had flashed from the finger, and the bird had fallen dead.

The procession came through the eastern gate to the temple of Tanit to find that the steps of it had been cleared of the crowd. On the bottom step stood Simætha and on those above a hundred priestesses of the goddess were ranged in a half-circle.

As the litters were passing before Simætha she came forward through the line of guards beside them, and the procession stopped. She stepped to the side of Budge's litter and smiled at him, a ravishing smile.

"Will not the Moon Gods honor their servants and the holy goddess, by paying a visit to her shrine?" she said.

Budge smiled at her, a warm, expansive smile and was on the point of accepting her invitation, when Nicholas intervened, saying in English that the temple of Tanit was the last place they should enter.

Budge was protesting, when the commander of the Queen's guards came bustling up and cried: "The Queen waits! The Queen waits!"

Simætha frowned and said sharply: "It is for the Moon God to decide!"

"And the answer is 'No!'" said Nicholas to Budge.

Budge looked back at her wistfully and cried, "Some other day!" And as he was borne away, he said to Nicholas gloomily: "It was a shame to disappoint the girl!"

Eloul, watching hopefully inside the doors of the temple, ground his teeth and cursed.

FOR the rest of the day they rested. They took their midday meal with Queen Rhodopis, who had been busy all morning with affairs of state. After this they went with her and her ladies to a pavilion in the palace gardens. At least Budge and Billy went, though sometime between the end of the meal and their going, Nicholas disappeared. The Queen entertained them with music and dancers and conversation. Budge contrived to ask many questions and learned that Megara enjoyed three forms of government: the northern quarter was a monarchy, in which a King or Queen of the House of the Barcæ ruled as autocrat; the eastern and southern quarters were an oligarchy, with a Grand Council and a Council of the Rich in the manner of ancient Carthage; the western quarter was a democracy after the model of that of ancient Athens. About the business activities of the leading citizens Rhodopis knew little.

Nicholas was also well entertained, though not with music and dancers; he sat with Pyrrha in a shady nook in the garden of the temple of Aphrodite. . . .

Next morning they went in their litters through the

Greek quarter of the city and into the country beyond it under the guidance of Sophron, who rode in Nicholas' litter. The houses of the wealthy Greeks were not as fine as those of the wealthy Canaanites, and their gardens were not as large. But the people who lined the roads to see them pass were a finer people, and Sophron told them that every male citizen was trained as a soldier from boyhood.

"We can always fight three times our number of Canaanites," he went on in a confident tone. "Indeed, we have done it seven times in the last two hundred years. We have kept apart from them; we do not marry them; and they have always coveted, and still covet, our land and slaves and wealth. Therefore we have to be soldiers. Fortunately the House of the Barcæ has always been too wise to combine with them against us, fearing what would happen to it later."

HE went on to tell of the founding and growth of the city. Budge's tale of the seven thousand who had left Carthage with the Zaimph was true. But the seven thousand had been not only a guard of the Zaimph and its priests; among them had been a score of the rich, and members of the House of the Barcæ with their families and slaves, a number of poorer Carthaginians, two cohorts of the Sacred Legion, and three companies of Athenian hoplites, mercenaries, and their women and children and slaves. Out of those elements the city had been formed and grown to its present size.

They had been moving straight across country toward the western mountains and had come about eight miles from the city when he announced: "And now we come to the end of the world—the Megarian world."

Their bearers stopped and set down the litters; they stepped out of them, and he led them along a narrow path for a hundred yards and stopped on the verge of a precipice. For miles on either side of them an unbroken cliff fell sheer to a sandy plain from twelve to fifteen hundred feet below; and the plain, a treeless waste, except for small oases at the foot of the cliff, ran empty and desolate to the foot of the western mountains thirty miles away.

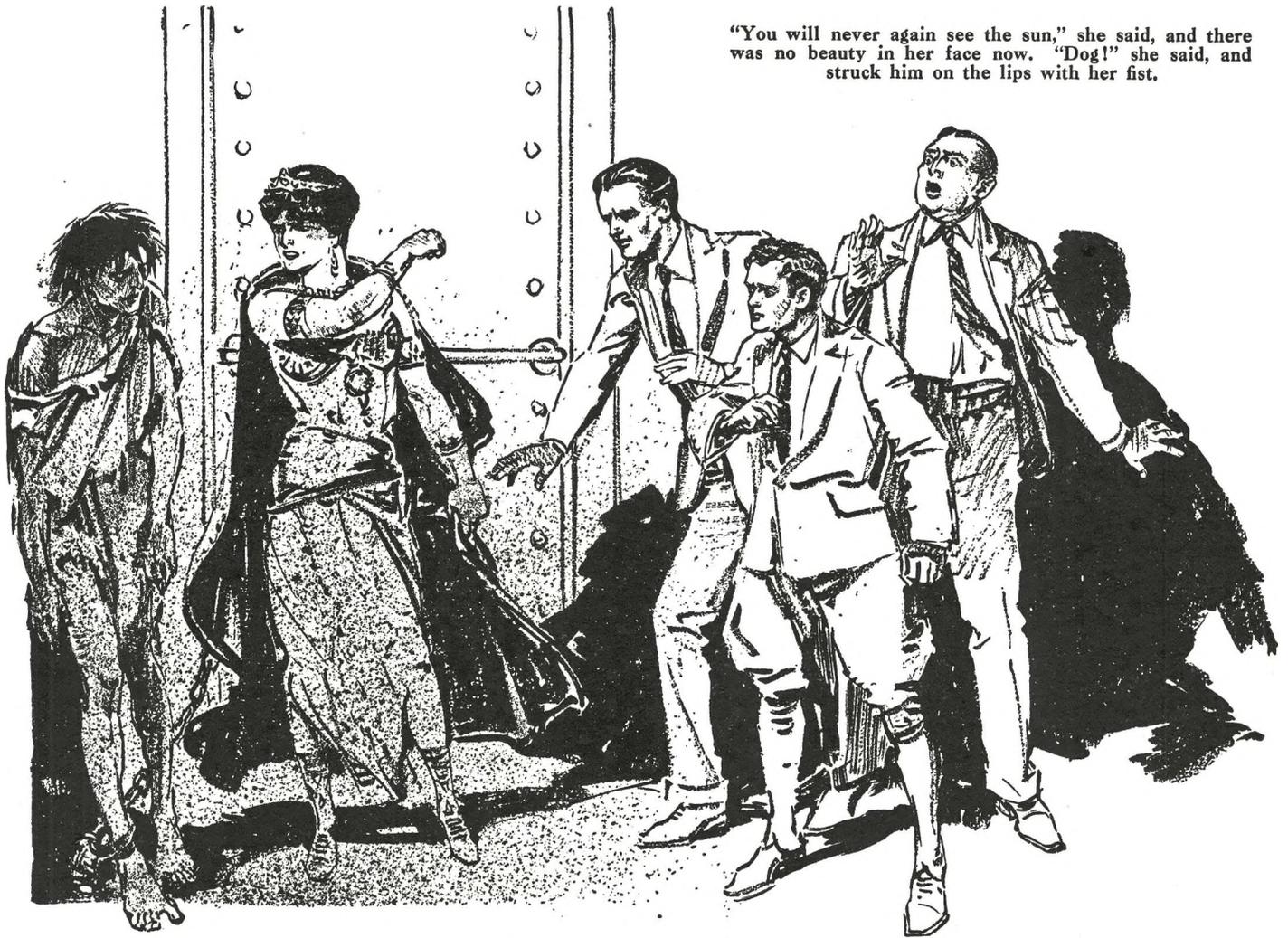
Every mile or two an underground river burst out of the side of the cliff and fell in a splendid cascade through the rainbows in its spray into the basin it had hollowed out, covered the plain for half a mile round it with a rich growth of vegetation, then vanished in the sands.

They gazed down and across the plain. Nicholas asked: "But how did the founders of the city scale this cliff?"

"They did not scale it," said Sophron. "Their scouts, so the legend goes, found caves that ran up one after another from its bottom to its top,—the bed of an underground river that had been diverted from its course, they thought,—and explored the plateau. Their leaders decided that it was the stronghold they were seeking, a stronghold the Romans could never seize. Leaving their elephants, they brought their families up through the caves and built the city. Later a convulsion of the earth filled in the caves, so that this is the end of Megara."

THAT afternoon Queen Rhodopis did not take her visitors to the pavilion in the garden; instead, she showed them the palace. She led them through thirty lofty rooms, adorned with frescoes—battle-scenes, hunting-scenes, processions. All of them recorded deeds of her ancestors, the kings and queens of Megara and the great men of the House of the Barcæ. On the walls hung weapons with which they had fought—spears with jeweled shafts, swords with jeweled hilts and sheaths, maces and battle-axes.

They had seen most of the palace, and Budge was losing interest in the kings and queens, when Rhodopis said that she would now show them her treasury. Budge brightened.



"You will never again see the sun," she said, and there was no beauty in her face now. "Dog!" she said, and struck him on the lips with her fist.

"Now we shall see the currency," he said cheerfully.

They followed the Queen into the gardens, and in a far corner they came to a square and squat and solid building along each of the four sides of which paced a sentinel. They went into it; its vestibule was a guardroom, and a score of the Queen's guards sprang to attention as they entered. At the back of it was a short passage, and at the end of that an iron door. An iron bar two inches thick and standing out three inches from the door was locked into the door-posts; a ring to which was welded a heavy iron chain ran along the bar, and at the end of the chain, fettered by his right ankle, was a man.

His hollow, sunken eyes gazed dully out from under a tangled mat of hair with an ineffable weariness; his beard was a tangled mat; his clothes hung in rags over his emaciated limbs. He rose sluggishly and leaned against the left wall to make room for a guard to unlock the right-hand end of the bar, while he gazed at Nicholas with a weariness and longing that were truly heartrending.

As she turned the key, Rhodopis laughed softly and said in grating accents: "The sun is shining, Micipsa, and the spring wind is blowing through the forests where we hunted the boar that spring."

The man drew himself up, and a gleam shone in his dull eye.

"But you will never again see the sun, and the spring wind will never blow through your hair," she went on in cruel accents. "Do you sleep well on this stone?" She stamped her foot on the paved floor. "Do you ever think of the soft couches in the chamber of the leopards, and the moonlight falling through the window, and how the air

came in cool and fragrant with the scent of roses? You will never see a rose again."

There was no beauty in her face now; it was distorted into a mask of brutality.

Micipsa said nothing, but his dull eyes were smoldering fires of hate.

"Dog!" she said, and stepping forward, struck him on the lips with her clenched fist.

The guard had drawn back the bar and unlocked the door and thrown it open. He stepped sharply between Micipsa and the Queen to guard her.

But she turned to Nicholas. There was a warning, almost threatening note in her even, indifferent tone as she said: "Micipsa was brave and gallant and handsome. In all Megara there was no young man so brave and handsome; he pleased me; I made him Captain of my Guard and heaped favors upon him. But his heart wandered. You see him now."

Micipsa and Nicholas looked at one another as she swept through the doorway into the treasure-house. He thought that Micipsa seemed about his own age.

"Damned tough luck!" murmured Billy.

Nicholas said nothing, but he was frowning as they followed the Queen, preceded by two guards carrying torches, into a square room along the middle of which ran a narrow pavement between two iron bins, the tops of which were level with her waist. With one of the keys which hung from her girdele she unlocked the iron lid of a bin. Two guards raised it, and the light fell on a dully shining mass of gold coins which rose level with the top of the bin, twenty feet long and ten feet broad.

"Good God! That's currency!" said Budge in a hushed voice.

"The coffers are seven cubits deep," said the Queen proudly.

At a sign from the Queen the guards shut down the lid. She locked it, patted the iron bin opposite and said: "Full."

"Boys! You don't realize what you've seen. Millions and millions and millions!" said Budge in excited accents.

"What I realize is that they aren't mine," said Nicholas.

Rhodopis looked at him with disappointed eyes: he seemed wholly unmoved by her wealth, uninterested in it.

In the second room were two bins of the same size, and on the left-hand bin were heaped, almost to the ceiling, bags about eighteen inches long and a foot broad, all full. Rhodopis unlocked the lid of the right-hand bin and raised it: the bin was full to the brim of gold dust. And in the third room there were circular iron coffers, filled with magnificent rubies and sapphires.

Rhodopis stepped to a small shelf at the end of the room and unlocked an iron coffer about eight inches square.

"But here is the great treasure of Megara. The Barcæ were a thousand years collecting them—every one in the city," she said proudly, and drew out four ropes of pearls of no great size, dull and discolored. "I only wear them at the great festival of Tanit."

Budge stepped forward, opened his attaché-case, and took out a rope of a hundred shining pearls as large as marbles; with a splendid air he slipped it over the Queen's head and let it fall round her neck.

"Five-and-ten's best," he murmured, chuckling. "Ten for the pearls and ten for the clasp! Do I get away with it?"

Rhodopis uttered a cry of amazed delight. She fingered the pearls, staring at them; she took off the rope and held it out, gloating over it. Then she slipped it on again, stepped to one of the coffers, dipped her two hands into it, made them into a cup, brought it out full of rubies, and held them out to Budge.

He made a motion to take them, then stopped short and with a splendid air, said: "The Moon Gods do not take gifts for gifts."

She gazed at him with awed admiration. "Truly you are the Great God Budge!"

She turned to Nicholas and with an alluring smile said: "But you, divine one, will you take a gift from me?"

"A gift?" said Nicholas, looking at her thoughtfully.

"Take what you will," she said with a gesture.

Nicholas looked round the room at the tall coffers; then he said slowly: "I will take Micipsa, Great Queen."

"Micipsa!" she cried in a startled voice. "But how can I give you Micipsa? I have said that he shall never again see the sun!"

Nicholas shrugged his shoulders. "It is a trifle," he said coldly. "I had a whim that your favorite should be my slave."

"Oh!" cried Rhodopis; she flushed, and her eyes shone. "That was your whim? I did not understand. He is yours."

"Thank you, Great Queen," said Nicholas, and he smiled his rare, charming smile.

Rhodopis stared at him, and blinked, and the flush deepened in her cheeks.

MOVING like a woman in a dream, she locked the coffers slowly, and went through the doorway. Budge followed on her heels; Nicholas and Billy followed them; one of the guards locked the door.

They came through the third door into the passage to the vestibule.

Rhodopis called to a guard to bring the key of the fetter. Then she turned to Micipsa, waved her hand toward Nicholas, and said harshly: "I have given you to the Moon God Neek, dog! You are his slave."

Micipsa stared at her as if he could not understand, then turned dazed eyes on Nicholas. Rhodopis passed on. The others followed her; Nicholas remained by Micipsa, who leaned nervelessly against the wall, gazing at him with dull, incredulous eyes. The guard came and unlocked the fetter. Micipsa took an uncertain step forward, and staggered; Nicholas gripped his arm and steadied him and guided his halting steps down the passage through the vestibule into the sunlight.

CHAPTER VIII

IN the palace the Moon Gods and their gracious hostesses were dancing and making merry.

But there was little laughter—and that mocking or sinister—in the gathering in the chamber on the second tier of the temple of Tanit. Fourteen of the leading Canaanites were lying round the room, each on his pile of cushions, listening to Eloul setting forth his plan for the destruction of the Greeks and how much it would cost them. The Big Three were there: the elephantine Sanballat, who owned most of the silk industry and controlled all of it; Gisco, with his oily gurgle, who owned the workshops in which the arms and armor of the Canaanite army were made; and the wrinkled Geddenem, the great provision merchant, who had made his millions by cornering now this food and now that. The two Suffetes were there as well as the other eight Canaanite members of the grand council, all fat men, heavy-jowled, and with greedy eyes.

All of them already knew the gist of what Eloul was saying, and had talked it over with one another. When he came to the end of his plan, Sanballat heaved up his enormous bulk and turned his enormous face toward the eunuch as he said: "The first thing to do is to hold the Moon Gods in the temple and use them to fan the people's enthusiasm to a flame and get them solid. That is plain. But on your own showing we shall only be three to one against the Greeks—and we've been three to one before, and been smashed." Then his eyes wandered over their faces again. "But—there are the Children of Moloch."

"Arm the blacks?" cried Eloul on a shrill note, and there came murmurs of astonishment and protest from three or four others.

"This is a business proposition," said Sanballat firmly.

"But who will disarm them when we are victorious?" said Eloul.

"There need be none, or very few, to disarm," said Sanballat; he paused and bent forward and added earnestly; "Look you! Schebar can madden the blacks and set them on the Greeks. They fight like the beasts of the forest when they are mad. Of course in the end the Greeks will beat them and kill thousands of them; but the blacks will kill hundreds of the Greeks, and it will be a terrible and exhausting fight. Eloul's mob will do the same as the blacks. Then at the right moment—just when the Greeks win—our legions, fresh and complete, come in. They come on the blacks or what is left of them, from behind; the blacks think they're friends, and half of them are stabbed or cut down before they know what is happening. Then the legions fall on the tired Greeks and finish them off. That's business."

Eloul himself nodded approval; then he frowned. "It is good—it is excellent; but it brings Schebar in, and that means a different division of the spoils—a third to Moloch and a third to Tanit and a third to you."

The rich looked at one another, and most of them grinned. Then the fat Gisco burst into a gurgling laugh and said: "Come, come, Eloul—you seem to think we're fools! We put up the money. It's half to us, a quarter to Tanit, and a quarter to Moloch."

Eloul sat up slowly and his gaze ran round the circle: "I'll agree to that," he said quietly. "But it only applies to the Greeks and their wealth. Of the Treasure of the Barcæ you take half and Tanit takes half. Schebar doesn't come into that—it comes later, and we can destroy the Barcæ without any help from him. Those are my terms. Take it or leave it."

"Leave it!" boomed Iddibal happily.

"No, no; don't be so hasty, Iddibal!" gurgled fat Gisco. "If we treat you fairly about the wealth of the Greeks, Eloul, you ought to treat us fairly about the Treasure of the Barcæ. A third to Tanit would be fairer."

"Take it or leave it," said Eloul.

"Leave it!" boomed Iddibal.

"No, no, Iddibal!" said Sanballat; then he added sadly: "We'll take it, Eloul. Send for Schebar."

Eloul went to the door and told one of the priests who were keeping it to tell Schebar that Sanballat desired his presence at the temple on important business, and to bring him; then he went back to his cushions.

"You put the proposition to Schebar," he said to Sanballat. "If I open my mouth, he'll have nothing to do with it. You know what he is. And whatever you do, do not let him dream that Moloch is going to lose seven or eight thousand of his accursed children. He is always mad about keeping up the number of his dirty flock."

"I will not," agreed Sanballat.

"Wine!" shouted Iddibal, gesturing to the slaves.

The three deaf mutes from the Bath of the Rich, who were waiting in the corner, came forward with flagons and filled the cups.

Adherbal sat up, raised his cup, and cried: "Here's to Megara—a Canaanite city for the Canaanites!"

They drank the toast with enthusiasm and turned again to their talk of details.

The door opened, and there entered a tall, gaunt, fierce-looking, brown-faced man with staring red-rimmed eyes, wearing a red mantle drawn tightly round him—Schebar the High Priest of Moloch. He looked round on them with hostile eyes and asked: "What do you sons of backsliders and apostates want with me?"

At the moment Schebar was a man to be humored, and Sanballat unfolded the plot to him slowly and patiently. Patience was needed, for Schebar kept raising objections to detail after detail.

WHEN Sanballat ended, Schebar reflected for a while, then said: "Moloch will aid you, but his share of the spoils shall be one-third."

A bitter wrangle followed, for he was stubborn—even more stubborn than Eloul; but, proven hagglers, in the end they wore him down, and he agreed that Moloch's share should be a quarter. At once they got to the matter of arming the negroes.

Schebar said: "I want four thousand spears, four thousand battle-axes, and eight thousand bucklers."

They looked at fat Gisco, the owner of the armament workshops. Gisco's eyes glistened; it was a large order, but here was the opportunity of selling thousands of weapons that had been stored in his warehouses for years.

"You shall have them," he said.

"Good. I want them early on the morning of the festival of Moloch, for that is the day propitious for the destruction of the accursed Greeks," said Schebar. "And

there is one thing more I must have. I must have the High Priestess of Aphrodite."

"The High Priestess—" boomed Iddibal; he stopped short, then boomed yet more loudly: "But I want the High Priestess of Aphrodite!"

"You cannot have her. She will be an acceptable sacrifice to Moloch, and to Moloch she shall be sacrificed," said Schebar stubbornly.

"I will have her," said Iddibal no less stubbornly.

"Then you get no help from the children of Moloch," said Schebar.

Here was a deadlock.

"Come, come, Iddibal, you don't want to make a fuss about a trifle like this; you would not wreck a splendid business proposition for such a trifle as a girl, and a Greek girl at that. You're a reasonable man," said Sanballat in honeyed accents.

"Reasonable man!" boomed Iddibal. "I *am* a reasonable man! There won't be a more valuable slave in Megara. Let Schebar sacrifice another priestess of Aphrodite—a dozen of them."

ELOUL and Sanballat had been whispering together, and now Sanballat intervened. He proposed that since neither Moloch nor Iddibal could get Pyrhha till the Greeks had been crushed, the matter should stand over until then.

Iddibal accepted the suggestion. But Schebar sneered. "Trust you sons of backsliders and apostates?" he almost howled. "If I did that, I should be the biggest fool in Megara!"

"There'll be no difficulty about it," said fat Gisco with an oily gurgle, "if you two toss for the girl."

"Yes, yes! That's it! Toss for the girl!" said a dozen voices in a tone of relief.

Schebar hesitated; then he said, still scowling: "We'll toss."

"Tesseræ! Tesseræ!" cried several voices happily, and three or four of them fumbled in their pouches for dice.

"I have my own tesseræ," said Schebar coldly, and he took them from his pouch, pulled out a cushion and sat down, facing Iddibal. "Throw," said Schebar.

Iddibal drained his wine-cup, dropped the dice into it, shook it, dropped them onto the floor—two fives and a four.

"A good throw," murmured one of the onlookers.

Schebar smiled a superior, irritating smile, took the cup from Iddibal, dropped his dice into it, rolled them onto the floor—three sixes.

There was a murmur of applause; the fact that the throw had doomed a young girl to a horrible death seemed to have no weight with them.

"He's done it again! He always does it—always! How does he do it?" cried Eloul to Sanballat exasperatedly.

A smile of understanding flitted across the brutish face, and Sanballat said: "Among the Children of Moloch dicing is not wholly a game of skill."

Iddibal cursed; he boomed that he never did have any luck at the game; then he boomed: "I shall come to the sacrifice."

"You will not. You are not a member of the Church of Moloch," said Schebar coldly, and he rose.

"Then I'll become a member of the Church of Moloch! I've never seen a woman burn," boomed Iddibal.

Schebar walked to the door; then he looked round the gathering with a triumphant air, and said to Iddibal: "I will make preparations to receive you into the Church of Moloch tomorrow." And with a supercilious whisk of his red mantle, he went out.

"Hour after hour, the parrot never ceased its clamor—that terrible screaming. And the voices of dead men shouted across the noises of the flying ship."



The Ship

By ALBERT
RICHARD
WETJEN

well traveled. But we know they do. And we know too that it's hard to sink a vessel without something floating clear—a boat, lifebuoys, hatches, oars and what-not. Of course the sea's big and it's not hard to believe that searching vessels can overlook such small things. You've

only a visibility of from ten to fifteen miles on the clearest of days from a ship's deck, and hatches and lifebuoys and even bodies are level with the water, easily hidden behind the swells.

"Yet even at that it seems curious that nothing comes to light. Take the *Waratah* now. You'll remember her—a modern liner of over fifteen thousand tons, newly built and on her second voyage. Carrying over two hundred souls, what with passengers and crew, and running on a regular route, down the coast from Durban to Capetown in South Africa. Of course she carried no wireless. That was before the day it became compulsory for liners to carry it, and it hadn't come into general use.

"But there she was, on a thickly traveled run. Soon after leaving Durban she speaks to the freighter *Clan McIntyre*, drops her astern and then proceeds to disappear. Of course there was a heavy gale reported soon after and it seems reasonable to suppose she foundered. But a new ship, remember—absolutely vanished! They sent out searching vessels, of course, when she was reported overdue. For months Government and private craft patrolled the coast waters. One vessel searched for over ninety days and covered close to twenty thousand miles of sea, and there was even a vessel sent to follow the normal current-drift far to the south. But nothing was ever found. Not a body, not a hatch, not a plank!

"Then there was that American transport the *Cyclops* that dropped out of sight—and she *did* have wireless. Then only this year there was that Danish training-ship the *Kobenhaven*, clearing from Buenos Aires for Australia. Been overdue for months and nothing found; must have gone down—and she's taken the flower of Danish youth with her, sons of the best families. My personal opinion is that she got too far southerly, into the Antarctic ice, struck a berg and crumpled. You know.

"But that isn't really what I started out to tell you. You can set up some sort of reasonable explanation for ships that just vanish. It's the other vessels that make the real mystery—the ships that don't drop out of sight, but turn up like a lot of wandering ghosts, sound above and below but without a soul on board. In '23 or '24, I

BECAUSE this is a true story, there is no ending. . . . It was early in the night and very hot, the sticky tropical darkness pressing all about us, seeming to muffle the lights of the city ashore and rendering to a soft velvet the waters of the harbor as they rippled through the anchor chains and along the hull of the little coffee freighter that had brought me to Santos, Brazil. I had been sitting with Captain Massey and old Billings under the awning of the after-deck, drinking long, cold gin *tonicas* and talking of the sea in general and of ships that had vanished into its mysterious immensity. Old Billings never romanced, let it be said. He was a dignified man, red of face and with silvery hair, in his eightieth year and at that time the Lloyds surveyor and agent at Santos. He had followed the sea for some forty years before leaving it to take his present position, and so he spoke as a sailor.

"It's not so hard perhaps to account for the foundering of most ships," he said. "They get into bad weather and have their hatches burst in; or they're built or loaded top-heavy, and capsize. That's all in the run of the game. What isn't so easy to explain is how they can sometimes drop out of sight without leaving a trace, especially in these days of wireless and with the regular sea-lanes all

of Silence

The strange story of the barkentine Robert Sutter, found uninjured in mid-ocean, with only a parrot left aboard to tell the story of disaster.

Illustrated by George Avison

forget which, there was a schooner picked up off Diamond Shoals, to the north. Sails set, boats in place, no unreasonable amount of water below. But never a sign of her men. . . . *Why?* Foundering doesn't cover that—for there's the ship!

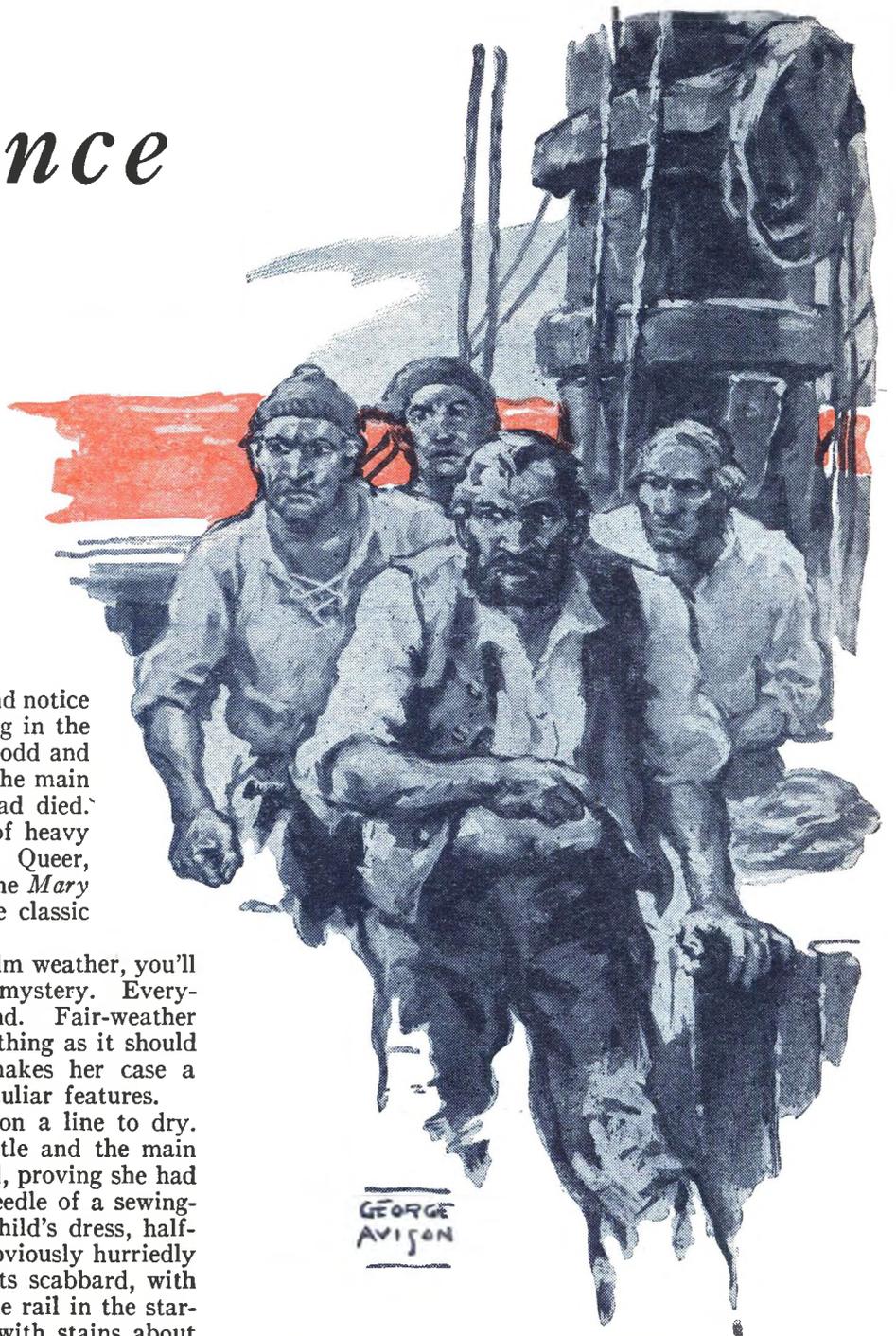
"Somewhere in the records too you'll find notice of a Japanese steamer discovered drifting in the South Atlantic. Carried a crew of forty-odd and all they found were eight dead men on the main deck, and nothing to show how they had died. Boats all in place there too. No sign of heavy weather. No sign of fire or disease. . . . Queer, isn't it? And then of course there was the *Mary Celeste* in the '70's; I suppose she's the classic of what I am trying to say.

"They found her in mid-Atlantic in calm weather, you'll remember, with all the usual signs of mystery. Everything in order. Hull and spars sound. Fair-weather sails set; not a lifeboat missing. Everything as it should be, except she had no crew. What makes her case a classic are the number of altogether peculiar features.

"There were the men's clothes hung on a line to dry. Breakfast, half eaten, was on the fo'c'stle and the main cabin tables; and the food was still good, proving she had not long been abandoned. Under the needle of a sewing-machine in the Captain's room was a child's dress, half-finished, where the Captain's wife had obviously hurriedly left it. Then they found a cutlass in its scabbard, with stains like blood on the blade, and on the rail in the starboard bow they found a deep new cut with stains about it also. Cut into the bow itself, a little above the water-line, were two deep grooves, gouged out each side, as it were, and quite fresh. Most curious of all, the only thing missing on board was the chronometer. But again—why? . . . Why?

"Where had everyone gone? There was no sign of mutiny or of a raid, shall we say, by pirates. How had the men left the ship—and why had they left it, obviously in haste, in the middle of breakfast? We don't know. There have been a lot of theories put forward, but for one reason or another they can be discounted. If it were only the *Mary Celeste* we might let the matter go, just write it off. But there are all those other ships, not only those that drop out of sight, without trace, but those that are found, abandoned for no earthly reason. New cases still turn up too, once every decade or so—and there you are.

"I think I'm a hard-headed man. I've had a lot of experience one way and the other. I don't take much



stock in ghosts and I believe everything has a reasonable explanation if we could locate what it is. And yet sometimes—well, I don't know. The sea is pretty big and we haven't learned much about it and what's in it. Remember the land only covers one-fifth, or is it a quarter, of the earth's surface—and we haven't fully explored the land yet. As for the sea, we have only gone down a few hundred feet—a few hundred feet in five miles of depth, remember. Ships stick to narrow and clearly defined lanes as a rule. There are tremendous areas where I suppose vessels only wander once in fifty years, or perhaps never go into at all and never have been.

"Is it something in the sea that comes out and loots these abandoned ships of their men? I know and you know that there are queer things in the sea. There're the giant squids on which the sperm whales feed; I've heard they sometimes are a hundred feet from the tip of one arm to the other. Then there's the sea-serpent. Yes, I know landsmen laugh at us for believing in that. But why shouldn't

we believe in it? It's been known from ancient times. It's been seen more than once, even if we acknowledge that a length of kelp, a barnacle-covered log or a school of porpoises in line might often have been mistaken for it. But how can you argue away the report of the *Daedalus*?

"Here is a British warship, certainly in command of a reliable man, certainly officered by some few gentlemen whose integrity cannot be questioned. They sight a long snakelike animal, observe it for some time and are even able to sketch it. The scientists and public may laugh, but you can't argue away the testimony of a whole ship's crew. Nor is it only the crew of the *Daedalus* you have to figure on. Captain Hope of another British war vessel, the *Fly*, saw a large animal with the body of a crocodile, a long neck and four paddlelike arms, in the Gulf of California. A Lieutenant Hayne, in command of the yacht *Osborne*, sighted something as queer, but I forget where. There are two other men who filed a joint report also, and they were members of the Zoölogical Society cruising in a yacht off the coast of Brazil. They saw a creature with a neck seven or eight feet long alone and as thick around as a man's body. I say you can't laugh away all this, and you can read the full accounts yourself if you doubt me. I've gone into the matter pretty thoroughly because—well, you'll understand in a minute.

"I don't say, mind, that any sort of animal such as the giant squid or the sea-serpent can account for these mysterious and deserted ships, nor for the actual complete disappearances. I don't know. No one knows, and we can only wonder. I do hear that some scientists have recently suggested the survival in deep waters of some of those gigantic animals that occupied the world in ancient times, before man came. It doesn't seem unreasonable to me.

"But we'll let that pass. What I wanted to tell you when I started out was of an experience that came to me. I shall never forget it. No man could. It was one of those nightmarish things that remain with a man all his life, and I suppose everyone goes through something as ghastly at least once before he dies, if he follows the sea. . . . Yes, I'll take another drink!

"It all happened a long time ago. I was just a young third mate then, around twenty, serving my first voyage as an officer on the bark *Doyon* out of Sydney for Callao. We had good sailing weather, as I remember, and we were coming up to the South American coast after a couple of weeks out, when we sighted just such a ship as I have been talking of.

"I don't want to exaggerate or to imagine things after all these years, but I'll swear there was something eerie about her from the moment we first saw her. It was early in the morning, as I recall, and I had just come up from breakfast to take over from the mate—a decent sort of chap named Mathews, tall and well-built, not many years older than I was myself but very highly strung, as I afterwards discovered.

"That's a queer-looking packet ahead of us," he remarked when I joined him on the poop. He had been staring through the glasses and now he handed them to me. 'Looks like she's not under control,' he said. I stared through the glasses myself and saw a small barkentine some distance ahead of us and apparently crossing our bow. She was under plain sail but her after-booms were jarring crazily and it was obvious that she was yawing all over the sea. I could discover no sign of life on her decks, nor could I locate anyone at her wheel and I suggested to Mathews that he'd better call the skipper.



"I've sent for him," he observed and so we both continued to inspect the strange ship until the skipper came on deck. The morning was very calm, with a gentle wind from the south. There was no sea, just a long oily swell almost a bottle-green in color, and the sky was a clear blue dotted with a few clouds on the weather horizon. It was warm, too, but I remember I felt uneasy and a little chilled, just as if I had a presentiment of what was to come. The skipper came on the poop rubbing his eyes, for he always slept late, and he took the glasses from the mate with considerable impatience.

"What is it now?" he said bad-temperedly, and he stared through the glasses for some time. Then he said, 'By George, it looks like she's abandoned!' and I knew from the sound of his voice he was feeling pleased, thinking of the salvage.

"Well, to cut a long story short, we hove the *Doyon* to and the skipper sent the mate and myself away in our longboat, together with four of the men. We came up under the barkentine's counter and read her name, painted in white letters, '*Robert Sutter*—SAN FRANCISCO,' and it didn't need a second look to tell she was abandoned all right. One of the men got aboard over her midship rail when she rolled down, and he threw us a line so the rest of us could swing up. We left two men in the boat and proceeded to inspect our prize, telling the two men who had boarded with us to look over the fo'c'stle while Mathews and myself went aft.

"It is a curious thing—but I swear I had gooseflesh all over from the first moment I put foot on the *Robert Sutter's* main deck. There was something so lonely about her, so—how shall I say?—*uncanny!* You could feel by the swing of her she was not water-logged. There was no sign of fire that a first casual inspection brought to light, and she was clean and had evidently been newly painted. Every rope and line was in place and her two boats were secure in their chocks on top of the galley house. We searched her from stem to stern and found no hint of life, save that in a large iron cage, suspended from a hook outside the galley 'midships, there was a parrot.

"The bird seemed in a bad way. It was crouched down on the bottom of the cage, lying half on its side and sort of pulsing all over, its eyes glazed and half closed. From the look of it—it was all but bald—it was a very old bird and it made no move when we approached it. 'It needs some water,' said Mathews, a fact which was obvious, and after we had brought it water, which it eagerly dragged itself up to, we went on with our search.

"Near the break of the poop, on the starboard side, we discovered what must have once been a cat. The creature had been smashed flat—as flat as a pancake, I tell you! It was just a thin sheet of black fur and dried flesh, literally sticking to the planking. But there was nothing to show how it had been killed, and at the time we did not pause to ask ourselves about it. We had to complete our search-

ing and get back to the *Doyon* to make our report, you understand.

"Well, in the scuppers right opposite the port galley door we found a revolver, a bright nickel affair somewhat rusted and with every shell fired. And that was all, except that over the whole vessel there hovered a curious sort of smell, dried-up, if you know what I mean, like the stale, weedy, fishy smell you get from mud-flats when the tide runs out. But even that we didn't particularly notice at the time.

"Anyway, that was all, as I said. The ship's cargo was

cut lumber, which we ascertained by lifting the hatches, and when we sounded the well we found only the usual amount of bilge water which every healthy wooden ship will take through her seams. It was all very mysterious, though, and if you can picture us staggering about the swaying deck with the spars jarring above us, the canvas thundering and slatting, the wheel and rudder creaking, every block and line making its own individual noise, and not a soul to be found, you can understand how we felt. Mathews was getting the jumps even before we were through with the inspection and I noticed he wiped the sweat from his face repeatedly.

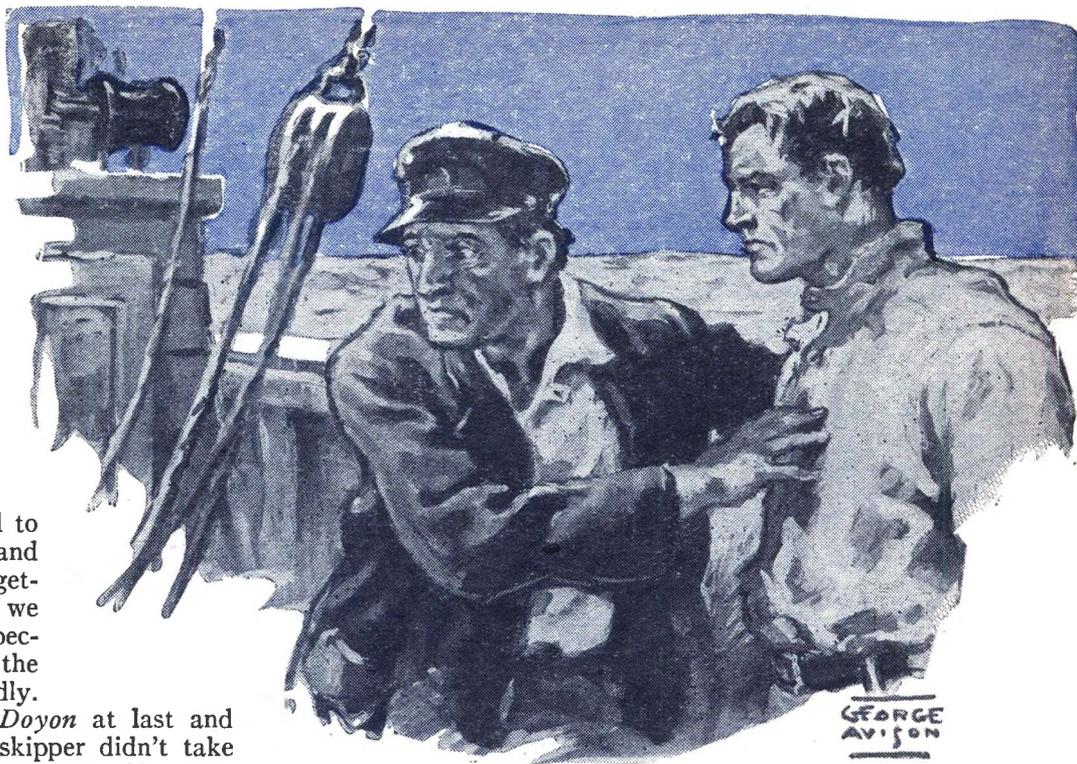
"We went back to the *Doyon* at last and made our report, and the skipper didn't take much stock in what we had to say. 'She must have had a third boat,' he observed carelessly. 'They probably thought she was foundering or something and just left her. I've known whole crews to panic before. You say there's no sign of disease, and no bodies? Well, there's nothing to be afraid of, then!' He did admit it was queer that we had found her hull sound and that none of her navigation instruments appeared to be missing. Even in a panic the master and the officers of a vessel are not liable to forget their working-tools. And then in the log-book we'd discovered and brought back there was no hint of anything amiss. It was written up to within four days previously and reported only fair weather. I remember I pointed out to the skipper that no crew would be likely to abandon a vessel and leave the log-book and ship's papers behind, but he brushed all that aside. He was a man almost completely without imagination, and all he could think of was salvage.

"I'll give you six men," he said to Mathews, 'and you can take the third mate along with you. Bring her to Callao and we can go into the whole matter there with the port officials.'

"Mathews wasn't a bit pleased with the prospect, though most mates would have jumped at the opportunity of making themselves a nest-egg and enjoying a first command, even if it would be only for a short time. 'I don't like the idea at all, sir,' he said. 'There's something queer about the whole business!'

"The skipper waved all that away. 'Nonsense!' he said. 'You ought to thank your stars for the chance!' But then, you see, he hadn't been on board the *Robert Sutter*, and we had to admit—now we were back on the *Doyon*, surrounded by the curious crew—that our feelings did seem rather silly. So the long and short of it was we picked out six men, or rather the skipper appointed the six most useless we had on board, and we pulled back to the deserted barkentine, four other men coming with us in the longboat to take it back. The *Doyon* squared away on her course again and I can remember that Mathews and I stood on the *Robert Sutter's* poop and watched her with something of the feeling of being deserted to our fate.

"There wasn't any use of our worrying about that,



"'Good heavens!' said Mathews. 'What—who was that?'"

however. There we were with a perfectly sound and well-built ship, amply found with water and provisions, rolling at will on a bottle-green sea and with a fair wind blowing for Callao. Mathews pulled himself together and we got the vessel on a course, set watches, wound up the run-down chronometers, setting them from a spare one we had brought from the *Doyon*, and so prepared to make port.

"It was somewhat uncanny to clear out two of the cabins below ready for our occupancy, for the gear of the previous inhabitants was scattered about, and in the room I chose, which had been the mate's, there was even the imprint of his head still on the pillow and a half-whittled plug of chewing-tobacco tossed on the blankets, together with an open clasp-knife. I shook off my feelings, however, before very long. I was young, healthy, usually in good spirits and it was not long before I was whistling to myself. Mathews came and stood in the doorway while I was fixing my bunk and his face was very serious, more serious than I had ever seen it. I think I have said he was a highly strung man.

"I don't see how the devil you can whistle!" he burst out irritably. 'Good God, man, doesn't it bother you? The crew—fourteen men, according to the articles—all gone!'

"I stopped whistling and looked at him. 'It is queer,' I agreed. 'But it doesn't do us any good to worry about it.'

"Mathews shivered and looked over his shoulder. 'But where did they go?' he said, his voice dropping. 'Where and why? It's all right for the skipper to talk of a third boat, but this ship carried no third boat. I've been over her again. There isn't a sign of one.' He went away and I could hear him muttering to himself as he straightened up the room that had been the Captain's.

"A fine sort of business, wasn't it? Yet we could have probably carried on all right and accepted things as we found them, if it hadn't been for Mathews and—something else. When I went on deck I found Mathews star-

ing down at the splotch of black fur and dried flesh that must have once been a cat.

"'You can figure it out,' he told me in a strained voice. 'That poor little devil was running away from something and then it was killed. Think how fast it must have been, whatever it was killed it. You know how a frightened cat can run.'

"'What makes you think it was frightened?' I asked him. But he only shook his head. Since that time I have seen a python smash flat a running dog with a blow of its snout—and that was quick work. Yet a dog isn't as agile as a cat. You see what I mean? And that python's snout only caught the dog in the small of the back. . . . This, that was stuck to the deck, was *all* flattened, head, body and tail, and all about it there was a faint but perceptible depression in the hard teak planking, a sort of circle about four feet across.

"'Then there's this gun,' said Mathews later on, coming back to the subject. He held in his hand the nickel-plated revolver we had found in the scuppers. 'Every shot fired. What at? Why?'

"I tried to talk him out of his somber mood, but each time I did so he would only shake his head and ask further questions—until I swear he had the whole crew of us completely jumpy when we might easily have forgotten the matter, or at least relegated it to the back of our minds. . . . Until, of course, the next thing occurred.

THIS was late that same afternoon, or rather close to evening. The men had gone for'ard, all except the helmsman, of course, and Mathews and I were pacing up and down the poop waiting for the seaman we had delegated as cook, to serve supper. The day was still fair, the sea calm and smooth. We were under full sail and making about six knots before a freshening wind which was coming up with the approach of nightfall. And then, all of a sudden, there came the most terrible scream and quite distinctly some one shouted, '*My God, Collins!*'

"I can't describe the electrifying effect of the thing. That scream sent all our spines cold, froze the very blood in our veins. And that voice! There was everything in it that told of utter terror. More than that, it was a strange voice—it belonged to no one of the men we had with us.

"Mathews and I had stopped pacing the poop and were riveted to the planking. 'Good heavens!' said Mathews in a strained voice at last. 'What—who was that?'

"Before I could even venture a reply there came a whole series of screams, splitting our very ear-drums. And then we heard another voice, a different voice from the first: '*It's coming aft! It's coming aft!*' And if ever there was sheer, pitiful and desperate horror in any man's tones there was in these. The crew had come running up from the fo'c'stle. The cook had come out his galley and was standing open-mouthed, looking dazedly around, one hand clutching his apron and the other holding a cleaver.

"Mathews let out an oath and dropped down the poop companion to the main deck. He was badly shaken, and he ran 'midships toward the men. I was close behind him too!

"'Who the hell's making that racket?' he shouted hysterically. 'Who was it?'

"No one answered him. The men had stopped and were looking uneasily about. Again came those awful screams, ringing all over the ship, and the strange voice thick and hoarse with utter fear: '*It's coming aft! It's coming aft!*'

"Mathews stopped short and stared about him. 'My God!' he whispered to me. 'Am I going mad?' And then we both saw the men were pointing at something and after

a moment the cook exclaimed in a relieved voice, 'Why, it's only the parrot, sir!'

"I can remember the vast flood of relief that came over me. I stopped shaking and let out a big sigh, and I could see that Mathews visibly relaxed. 'I'd forgotten the parrot,' he said with a queer laugh, and he walked round to the forepart of the galley where the bird's cage hung. The men gathered about too and some of them laughed, though there was nothing of mirth in the sound and not much of reassurance. Mathews looked into the cage and I peered over his shoulder. Since we had given the bird some water that morning it had apparently recovered, for now it was sitting on its swing perch—but sort of crouched down. And I tell you it acted like no parrot I have ever seen, before or since.

"Every one of its tattered remaining feathers was erect. Its eyes were fixed and staring and did not blink. It shivered the whole length of its body at regular intervals and did not move when Mathews shoved a tentative finger through the bars and spoke to it in a soothing voice. Even as we watched it the bird crouched lower, opened its beak and gave vent to one of those horrible screams. And this time it was the sound of a man in awful pain, wave on wave, abruptly cut off. There was an aching silence for a second and then the parrot croaked distinctly, with a queer tremulous catch in its voice: '*You can't shoot it! You can't shoot a thing like that!*' And the voice was again strange, the third we had heard, distinct in *timbre* and pitch. The voices of three separate men!

"I can remember that for at least a minute there was a tense and frozen silence. I could hear my heart thumping and the cold sweat was running down my throat. Mathews had pulled his finger back from the cage as if it burned him and he was the first to speak. 'I never thought of it,' he said, his words flat and strangely without expression. 'I never thought of it, but it's simple enough. . . . He knows what it's all about! He knows what happened. He *saw!*' He spoke like a man half asleep, staring wide-eyed and ashen-faced at the crouching, shivering parrot. The men began to stir uneasily and one or two of them looked hastily over their shoulders.

"I nudged Mathews in the back. 'Pull yourself together,' I whispered. 'We can't have the men getting all jumpy.'

"But you couldn't get him away. You couldn't get the men away either; they all seemed riveted to the spot, watching that poor devil of a parrot. It mumbled to itself nearly all the time. Then it would chatter out some words we could not understand—not English words. Nor did it always use the same language. Mathews had a little command of Spanish and swore the bird often talked in that tongue. I am certain I caught German words and once or twice certain phrases in Polynesian which I'd picked up while on a trading-schooner through the Islands.

YOU understand that the parrot was certainly old, incredibly old, I would say. It was almost featherless; it must have had many masters in its time. You know they say those birds live for a century or longer. And God knows where this bird had been and what it had seen. The things it muttered must have come from its ancient memory of many masters of many nationalities. And between its mutters it would let out those awful screams, exquisitely different screams—the screams of different men in agony and terror. And immediately after each scream it would choke out some phrase, not always in English, as I've said, but in other languages too.

"I don't know if a bird can go insane, but if one can that parrot was very close to it. There was only one thing we could deduce from its actions. It had been frightened

almost out of its life, and the screams it gave and the words it shouted had been hammered into its head by some awful happening. The words it muttered half-mechanically were from long ago; the words it shouted were of recent memorizing. It was horrifying. It seemed trying to tell us something. From behind its fixed, unwinking eyes there seemed to hover a shadow; I even felt there was an uncanny flicker of pleading. It wanted to make us understand that it had seen something no living thing had seen before, something so monstrous and ghastly it had penetrated at once and indelibly even into its own cynical and calloused brain.

"How long we all remained about that cage, silent and shuddering, I do not know. But it was the night chill coming into the wind that roused us, that and the smell of the supper burning on the galley stove. We had all insensibly crowded together, as if each man feared to stand alone. The man at the wheel began to shout, his voice frightened. He wanted to know what was the matter and he wanted to be relieved. I told one of the other men to go aft and he went, but only with the greatest reluctance, his hand on the haft of his sheath-knife and his head continually turning to glance over his shoulder or at the darkening sea. And still at irregular intervals that crazy parrot let out its blood-curdling screams and shouted blindly at us: *'It's coming aft. It's coming aft!'* or that desperate, *'My God, Collins!'* or that flat, despairing, *'You can't shoot it. You can't shoot a thing like that!'*

"I shook Mathews finally and told him we ought to be getting back to the poop. We hadn't eaten yet, and it was getting dark. 'Eaten?' he said, literally staggering as he went aft with me. 'Eaten? How can you talk of eating?' He stumbled up on the poop and leaned against the main cabin skylight, mopping his wet forehead. 'What was it that came aft?' he whispered hard, shivered and tried to straighten himself. 'The mate of this ship was named Collins, according to the articles we found,' he said. 'And only the Captain would be likely to call him Collins. So it was the Captain who called out, "*My God, Collins!*"' And what was it that came aft?"

"'You're acting like a damned fool!' I told him bluntly, though I was all but unnerved myself. You would have been too, to hear those terrible screams ringing through the ship every minute or so, and those strange voices of vanished men repeating those terror-stricken words! But I still had enough sense to face the fact it was only a parrot talking and that we had to get the *Robert Sutter* into port. I got Mathews below at last and we had a stiff drink together, after which we ate some canned beef and



"What was it that caused the Captain to empty a revolver at Something you could not shoot?"

sea biscuit, the supper that had been preparing in the galley being hopelessly ruined. We knew for certain now there had been no third boat!

"Well, that night we faced another complication, for none of the men would remain for'ard, but insisted on bringing their mattresses aft and crouching down by the break of the poop. The helmsman refused to be left alone and we had to let two men steer through the dark hours. Neither Mathews nor myself could sleep, with those screams ringing out, and we paced the night away together. It was uncanny to be on deck. We all had the feeling that at any moment something would loom up out of the sea and come toward us.

"You'd have thought that parrot would have grown tired, or that its throat would have worn out. But it never ceased its clamor. Hour after hour there was that terrible screaming, exquisitely depicting everything that vanished crew must have suffered in that last hour or those last minutes. And between the screaming, the voices and words of dead men shouted across the noises of the flying ship! Can you wonder we all had the same terrors a child has in the dark, a darkness it peoples with dragons and burning-eyed bogies? I have always considered myself a moderately courageous man, but I tell you that on the *Robert Sutter* I really knew fear, the sort of utter fear that gets you by the throat and turns your stomach and knees to water.

"As for Mathews, he was half insane, and he kept going below for a drink until he finally brought the bottle on deck with him. 'We ought to kill the damned thing!' he kept saying over and over. 'We ought to kill it!' But no one would go 'midships and kill it. I would not have gone 'midships myself that night for all the money in the world. And by the time the dawn came the sheer panic of the night had subsided enough to give Mathews some element of reason. Perhaps it was the whisky he had consumed, but he certainly evidenced more control with the

coming of the tropical sun all red and gold along the horizon. And still, remember, that parrot was screaming and shouting, with never a let-up! I would never have thought any creature could survive such exhaustion as must have sapped its body.

"No, you're right, we can't kill the damned thing," Mathews agreed after we'd talked it over. "It's the only clue we have. We've got to turn it over to the authorities and let them see what they can make of it." He swore thickly to himself. "But I'll go mad if it doesn't stop!" He plugged up his ears with some oakum, but he did not seem able to shut out the noise. He looked exhausted, drained out by the light of dawn. I think we were all drained out and I gave the men a tot of whisky apiece and made them go for'ard.

WE tried every means to make that confounded parrot shut up. We covered its cage with a cloth, which only seemed to drive it into new frenzies; and we tried lowering it in the hold on top of the cargo, but that had an even worse effect. It would not eat but occasionally would dip its beak in water. And nearly all the time, pulsing and rising and falling, the ship was wracked with screaming and the voices of those dead men. Mathews went below, half drunk and with a false bravado at last, and with his ears still stuffed up he managed to fall asleep. With the coming of full morning and the continued repetition of that parrot's noise I recovered some of my nerve.

"I drew some comfort from the fact that we were fully a hundred miles from the spot where we had picked up the *Robert Sutter*, and whatever it was that had made her a crewless derelict, was far away. I went 'midships, shuddering, to listen to the bird with the same morbidness that draws you to the scene of a murderer's crime, and tried to count the different remarks it kept making. There were, as I have said, only three in English but there were several in frenzied Spanish and one of the seamen who had been on German vessels assured me there were at least a dozen words shouted in that tongue. I thought I caught snatches of French too, but I was not sure. I am speaking now only of those words obviously registered on the bird's memory in that time of recent horror.

"I got hold of a copy of the ship's original articles and discovered that to judge from the names she must have carried a mixed crew all right, as most vessels do. There had been a cook named José Alvarez, obviously Spanish. There had been two men with Teutonic names, and one with a French-sounding name. I judged the officers had been Americans and it seemed reasonable to suppose that each man, in the moment of stress, would have reverted to his native tongue.

"The more I thought of the matter, under the comforting bright sun of day, the more I began to see the possibilities, and to grow curious. Somewhere in all that jargon the mad parrot kept giving forth there must be a clue, must be some word that would tell what it was that had come aft. It was not unreasonable to suppose that while the men were running madly about the deck some one of them must have shouted out a word, a sentence or a fragment giving a hint as to its appearance. And if that were so such a sentence or fragment might have registered on the quivering parrot's brain to be eventually spewed forth. I thought to myself: 'If once we get that damned bird to Callao alive there'll be linguists to take down everything it's shouting out. Then we might know!'

"You see, it really was intriguing, apart from all the terror and horror those racking words and screams provided—coming, as it were, out of nothing. We were on the track of a genuine mystery. We might have in our grasp the clue that would account for those other ships

that had been found as we'd found the *Robert Sutter*. We might even be able to understand why ships had totally disappeared, without trace. We might catch a glimpse of Something that should have died in the youth of the world. The parrot knew! Why had those men vanished? What was it that had come on them out of the calm sea, sending them into stark convulsive terror, causing one of them, undoubtedly the Captain, to empty a nickel-plated revolver at Something which some one else had declared you could not shoot? The parrot knew—and it was trying to tell us.

"Mathews came on deck soon after noon, quite drunk, his whole body shaking and his eyes burning in his face. The parrot had not fallen silent at all, and it kept up its incredible screaming and shouting all through the day. I could hear Mathews grinding his teeth together as he paced up and down, his fingers twitching, and he kept saying to himself, 'If it would only shut up until we get to port! If it would only shut up!' But it didn't shut up and I began to find myself twitching and grinding my teeth too. I knew that Mathews would never stand the strain. Nor could he. . . . About three bells in the first dog-watch he stopped pacing and gave a terrific oath. 'I can't stand this!' he jerked out suddenly—and he took a running jump down the poop companion to the main deck and raced 'midships. '*It's coming aft. It's coming aft!*' screamed the parrot and then I saw Mathews rip one of the fire-axes from its metal holder on the bulkhead of the galley house. He disappeared round the house and there came the furious sound of metal on metal. The screaming rose continuously: '*It's coming aft! It's coming aft!*'—and then sudden new words, words in English we had not heard before, thick, choking, horribly sickening and despairing, '*Collins! Collins! It's got me!*' What else there was, was drowned out by the high-pitched hysterical swearing of Mathews and the vicious noise of the swung ax. And then there was silence—sudden, almost ominous—and Mathews staggered back into view, rocking as if hardly able to keep his feet, and backing right to the rail against which he leaned, breathing hard, the fire-ax limp in one shaking hand. 'Throw the damned thing overboard!' he said viciously and I saw one of the men go reluctantly forward, very slowly, to drag to the side a mangled iron cage in which, bloody and limp, was what was left of the parrot.

"We all watched in utter silence as the cage curved up in the air and fell into the sea. And it seemed as if with the splash there was something oppressive lifted from the ship. She seemed to pick up, grow more buoyant.

PROBABLY I was the only one on board the *Robert Sutter* who had even a faint tinge of regret, and that mine was perhaps morbid I must admit. But I could not help reflecting that we might have found some clue, a clue to the mysteries of the sea, if we could only have brought that parrot into Callao and before men who knew languages. But there you are. The bird was gone—and we took that barkentine into port without further mishap.

"I remember I told the story to the consul there, told him what I had wondered and hoped, and he laughed at me for a fool. Mathews did not even mention the matter. He was, I fancy, rather ashamed of it. He wanted to forget it. And so whatever it was that befell the *Robert Sutter* remains unknown to this day. I cannot even guess. I have given up trying to guess. . . . Nobody knows. But that parrot knew, and there are times when I wake up at night, in a cold sweat, and can hear its clamor, and see its crouching, palpitating body, and feel ringing in my ears those wild, mad words of men who had been dead for days, screaming while *It* came aft—and trying to shoot Something which could not be shot!"

Free Lances in Diplomacy

Based on recent events in the Orient, "An Asiatic Vendetta"
deals with their exciting consequences in London.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

Illustrated by A. E. Briggs

THE steady drizzle of the afternoon had stopped, having left enough moisture in the London air to blend with the fog which was drifting up-river from Greenwich and make it quite opaque in another hour or so. Sir Charles Tenterdon and the Marquess of Lyonesse had been in the Duchess of Lymeborough's box during the last act, and came out of the theater a little ahead of the others. When the Commissionaire called the number of Tenterdon's car there was no response—but the Marquess' number brought a stir halfway down the block, and a moment later his Afghan chauffeur pulled up at the awning. Leaning out, he said in a low tone:

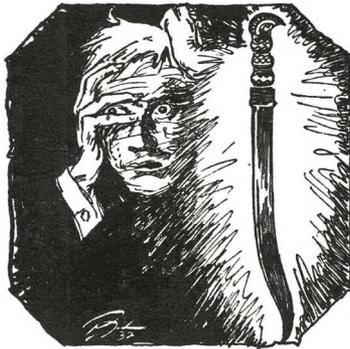
"Wilt thou be setting Sir Charles down anywhere, O Thakur? There was one who came to his chauffeur and said that Sir Charles would be walking around to his club, and that the car should be waiting for him there. His chauffeur obeyed the order. Yet—it be a long walk to the sahib's club with the fog coming down—and there be da-coits in this city of the Angresi, Thakur."

"My word, Achmet! . . . What is it you've stirred up this time, I wonder? Does look a bit fishy, y'know! —I say, Sir Charles! Jump in—let me run you out to Bucks, if that's where you were heading! Eh?"

"Why, I was about to suggest your havin' a spot of somethin' to eat with me at the club, d'ye see—I'm thinkin' of spendin' the night there. It's a bit late to drive out home. Can't understand that message to my chauffeur at all. Never sent it, of course! One or two other odd things been happenin' lately—it's been hinted to me that guarded inquiries are bein' made as to whether I have any financial int'rests in this or that bankin'-house—whether I would be likely to have influence in various directions. What do you fancy the game is?"

"Prob'ly some unknown interests tryin' to trace a connection between you and a recent financial deal which may have been disastrous for them. It's a rather diffic'lt matter really to turn up any such connection, because we intentionally make it as diffic'lt as possible—but suspicion has a way of croppin' up an' making trouble occasionally. I'd suggest, by the way, that you have it distinctly understood with your employees that they are to do exactly what you've instructed them to do, without the slightest deviation—unless they get a message in your own handwriting in which there is a certain code-word, understood between you. My people have had fake messages like this a dozen times at least—but they don't pay the slightest attention to them. —Drive around to the club, Achmet."

The clever Afghan—who had now been in London many years, and spoke the language well enough to pass as a Colonial when he so desired—knew the streets perfectly,



whether in fog or sunlight, and he was making rather surprising time by means of short-cuts where there was little traffic, when one of his rear wheels began to drag. Pulling up by the curb—which he could scarcely see as he looked down—he got out and went around to examine the tire.

"Slashed across with a sharp knife, sir," he reported. "I can change the shoe in ten minutes—or find one who drives a cab, for you—"

"If anyone has been following closely, he'll slash the new tire also, Achmet. Just stand by the car a few minutes, an' we'll see what happens. —My word! . . . Bounder must have been hangin' on behind!"

A vague, dark figure suddenly leaned in through one of the open windows. Holding a razor-edged knife as a fencer does a foil, he thrust it savagely against Sir Charles, who was sitting in that corner—but the point didn't penetrate more than a quarter-inch, because the assassin had miscalculated the length of his reach. Before he could lean farther in and repeat the blow, a powerful grip on his wrist caused him to drop the knife—then he was hauled bodily through the window onto the floor of the car, and steely fingers were digging into certain nerve-centers at the back of his neck, with the result that he was temporarily paralyzed. After this the Marquess went through his clothes, removing another knife and a short automatic of heavy caliber. Switching on the overhead lamp so that he got a good look at his prisoner, the Marquess saw that the fellow belonged to an Asiatic race who are proficient in the art of jujitsu. But his captor was an adept in the higher jujitsu, with a knowledge far beyond his own.

Meanwhile, there were sounds of scuffling behind the car, a growling curse in lurid Pushtu, and the sound of a heavy fall. The Marquess leaned out of the window.

"Need any help, Achmet?"

"Nay—O Thakur Bahadur! This one did think my father's son but slept on his feet, and he reached through the fog with his knife. He hath broken bones to pay for it, I think—and his sting be removed. The two came with us, hanging on behind. There be time to change the tire, now, if this *soor* can be placed inside with that other."

"Very good, Achmet—carry on! Then drive to the nearest police station. We'll not only give these scoundrels in charge, but we'll see that they're sent down for a fairly good stretch, at that. This sort of thing is dev'lish annoyin'!"

As they left the police station, Lyonesse noticed that the baronet seemed a trifle nervous. Presently he said:

"D'ye know, old chap, that was by way of bein' a rawther narrow escape—what? If the rotter's arms had been a

bit longer, that knife would have finished me—it came too suddenly to put up any sort of defense!”

The Marquess grinned.

“He was a good four inches shorter than I—yet his arms were fully the same length. Fancy you may lay your escape to the position of the rear seat in this car—it’s eight inches farther back from the windows than any others you’ll see. Notice, too, that the thumb-screw to raise an’ lower the glass is set into the leather upholstery at your elbow—works in a socket-gear when the doors are closed. After a couple of narrow escapes from parties who tried to get at me from the running-board, through a window, I had all my cars built this way—an’ it has several times prevented my bein’ put out of commission. On the rear seat one can’t be reached by a knife—an’ a pistol shoots a bit wide, owing to miscalculation. Incidentally, there’s a layer of laminated glass in the shell of the entire car; you can’t fire a heavy bullet through it. Now—h-m-m—this affair has got me figuring a bit! If some bunch of Orientals have been makin’ inquiries about your bankin’ affiliations, it looks as though they were convinced as to your being one of the syndicate behind the recent refusal to float a certain Governm’t loan under any conditions until they stop their attacks upon a neighborin’ Power. If they are convinced of that, they mean to keep at it until you and the other financiers concerned are wiped out permanently. It wouldn’t surprise me if Lucius Grootz of Hamburg may have been spilling a few hints which he is under pretty strong pledges not to spill. Lucius doesn’t play the game, if he sees any way of gaining a sneaking advantage; but we have to include him in a far-reaching agreem’t because he controls too much money to leave him out. Well, point’s this: If they’ve really started a vendetta against you an’ the rest of us, they’ll not stop with the first failure—they’ll just keep on with all the brains they’ve got, which are plenty. I’d say they’ll have managed to plant a couple of men—who may not even have the appearance of Asiatics—in the clubs we frequent, an’ in our town an’ country houses, if possible. So I fancy there’ll be nothing more important we can do tonight than just check up at the club—an’ telephone your wife, out in Bucks. You an’ I are both on the governing committee of the club—any strict orders we give will be carried out by the steward with no argum’t whatever.”

AS soon as they reached the club, they sent for the steward, and asked if he had taken on any new employees within the past few months.

“Why, yes, my Lord Marquess. We’ve taken on three new men within the last month. I spoke to one of our bank men who I knew was int’rested in a first-class employm’t-agency on the side—”

“Member—here?”

“Why, no, he’s not, sir. But he’s very well known in the city. And he mentioned to me these two Filipino boys who had been several years in the employ of the late Lord Camberley—grew up with him from mere lads whom he fetched from the East. They came around to see me—made a very good impression—so I took them on trial for a few months. I’m aware of the fact that our employees are supposed to be English as a rule—but the question never has been raised, and it’s diffic’lt to get men as good as these, trained for years in one of our best families—”

“You took the bank man’s word for that, eh?”

“Well, sir, Camberley was the last of his family—a bit of a recluse, but very strict about getting first-class service. His estate has been broken up and sold. But the bank man knew all about these two Filipinos.”

“What was the other man?”

“Continental, I fancy—speaks four languages fluently,

which I considered a recommendation for the berth, as our members frequently put up guests of other nationalities.”

“What screw are you paying ’em?”

“Forty shillings a week—and their tips.”

“Well, we’re not criticizing you, Burroughs—the question never has come up since either of us has been in the club. But there is a very good reason behind the implied restriction. A member of any club should feel that his life an’ person are just a bit more safe within the walls of his own club than anywhere else on earth—and nobody can guarantee that with any sort of a foreign employee; it’s diffic’lt enough, in fact, when the man is English for three generations. We want those three men, and any others whom we don’t personally know, to be out of this building within an hour with every scrap of their belongings. Have it distinctly understood that if they forget anything they can’t come back and get inside the doors of the club in any circumst’nces. Don’t mention either of our names in any way. Here are notes for two months’ advance-wages for each man—that removes all possible cause for complaint. Tomorrow I will send you three vouched-for Englishmen to take their places. And hereafter, any employee you take on must be recommended by two members of this particular club. Understood?”

“Er—Your Lordship wouldn’t perhaps be willing to examine these men and see what impression they make on you? They are really quite superior servants, sir.”

“I wouldn’t have them here beyond the hour if they were the best three men in the United Kingdom, Burroughs! And I’ve explained just why we can’t take chances with foreigners. See here, man! Half an hour ago Sir Charles was attacked by two of this same lot—as we suspect—an’ it was a rather near thing. I trust you’ll not fail to report in an hour that those fellows are out of the club permanently, Burroughs. . . . I fancy this question as to foreign employees will come up in other clubs very shortly. It’s one in which a fixed precedent should be adopted and adhered to—for obvious reasons.”

When the two went down to the grill and put in an order for supper, Sir Charles called his home in Buckinghamshire. His wife wasn’t quite sure, but thought she remembered hearing the butler speak of taking on a footman and an extra gardener, recently. She hadn’t seen them—but two of their older servants had left a couple of weeks before and she understood that the new ones had been very highly recommended. When he told her that they must be off the estate within an hour with all their belongings, she said that was simply absurd. But through long years of association with her husband she had learned that when his voice took on a certain edge—Sir Charles had certain moods which commanded unquestioning compliance with his wishes. So she hastily said she would call him up as soon as the men were off the estate.

THEN the supper they’d ordered was served in the grill-room. When they had partly finished, and there were not more than half a dozen members in the grill, somebody turned on a radio-set. The B. B. C. of course had signed off for the night with the strokes of Big Ben—but the Phillips Station at Eindhoven was giving bits of stop-press news in Dutch, French and English as a matter of courtesy to the radio-audience across the Channel. Among them, the Marquess and his companion caught this:

“A telephone message just received from London states that Lord Comynge, a well-known English financier, was stabbed on the street, in a thick fog, after leaving one of the clubs and at first was supposed to have been killed—but after being rushed to a private hospital in the West End was found to be still alive though in a very critical condition. His physician, Sir Mortimer Tracy, who was

summoned at once, thought there might be a slight chance for recovery if His Lordship is kept absolutely quiet for several days. No clue to the would-be assassin has been discovered by the police, as he disappeared in the fog before anyone could reach the Earl—and no motive has been suggested for the act, which probably was committed by some person with an unbalanced mind. Another bulletin will be broadcast during the night if there are further developments, as His Lordship is a well-known personage in the Netherlands."

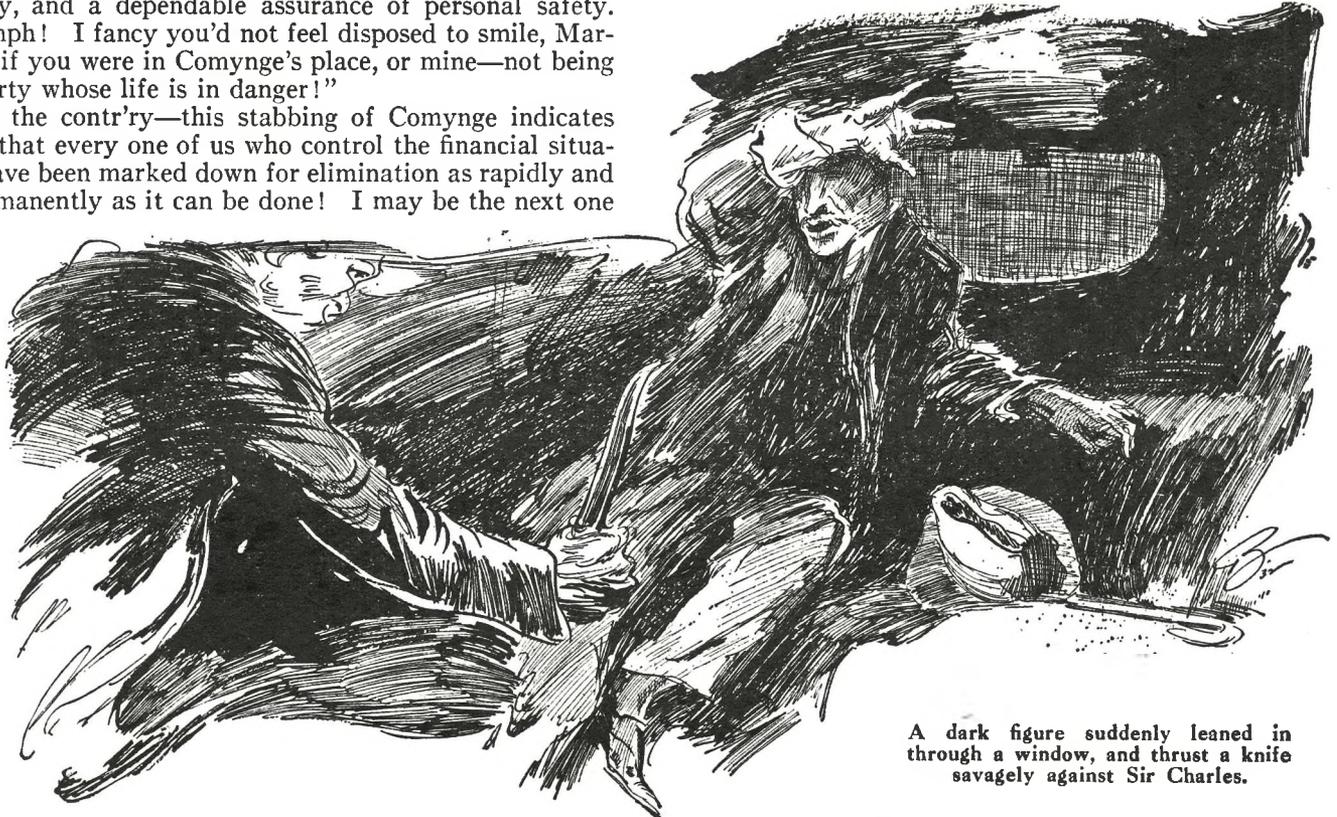
As the Dutch announcer's voice stopped, the two men looked at each other. The Marquess smiled grimly—but his companion was in no mood to see even a grimly humorous side to the situation. An Englishman grows up with a fixed belief in the permanency of law and order in his country, and a dependable assurance of personal safety.

"Hmph! I fancy you'd not feel disposed to smile, Marquess, if you were in Comynge's place, or mine—not being the party whose life is in danger!"

"On the contr'y—this stabbing of Comynge indicates to me that every one of us who control the financial situation have been marked down for elimination as rapidly and as permanently as it can be done! I may be the next one

a good deal safer if Gorthy were not there. Much to the fellow's amazement—he'd had no word of the two stabbings that evening—he found himself on the street with his suitcases and bundles before he knew just why. The P. C.'s on Park Lane—whose beat also took in the Marquess' famous Jacobean mansion and who would have obeyed his slightest hint as if it were an order from Scotland Yard—kept the fellow moving so rapidly and so far that he did not get within four blocks of either house again.

The last report from the hospital had been a little more favorable. An x-ray had shown that the knife had not penetrated any of the vital organs and that, if no infection appeared, it would be merely a question of recovering from the loss of blood. Telling the Honorable Gwendolyn that



A dark figure suddenly leaned in through a window, and thrust a knife savagely against Sir Charles.

—I am likely to be attacked at any moment in any day. But through a mistaken supposition of identity with some unknown chap on the political side, I've been up against this proposition for years—three or four of my friends, also. And so far we've managed to protect ourselves by outguessing the other side. I fancy we are likely to find that at least one new servant has been recently employed in Comynge's town house in Park Lane, a block below me. I suggest we get that danger to Comynge removed."

At the Park Lane house, they found that the Earl's son was at the hospital telephoning half-hourly reports of his father's condition to his two sisters, who were staying up to get them. As the Earl was a widower, his eldest daughter ran the house—and very capably. She said that she had employed a man the day before, after investigating his credentials. His name, Jon Gorthy, suggested a Hungarian from down near the Bulgarian border, where there is a good deal of Turkish and Arabic mixture—but when she described his size and appearance, there was little doubt as to his being an Oriental with a wide knowledge of languages. The Honorable Gwendolyn was disposed to postpone discharging the man until she had tested him further—but when she heard of the attack upon Sir Charles and the general plot which seemed to be indicated, it looked as though—if her father recovered—the house would be

they wished to see her father at the hospital before he returned home, the Marquess took Sir Charles to his own house for the night. He began to size up the situation:

"If we are right in our surmise that this is a vendetta against the financiers responsible for preventing loans to those Asiatic islanders until all of their forces are withdrawn from the mainland, I don't see how they can get all the names unless one of our syndicate blabs outright—which is exceedingly doubtful. Grootz would do it if he dared—but we control his actions in too many directions. Unless he had established sufficient cover for his various interests, he'd not risk betrayin' Lecouvrier of Paris or Minelli of Rome. The Asiatics will find out easily enough that Lucius is one of the syndicate—but the Sondermanns in Chile would explain to them that both he and they are helpless in the matter. So we need lose no sleep over the possibility of Grootz being killed. That leaves you, with Comynge, my son Salcombe, an' myself—as the only ones immediately in the spotlight for the attentions of these scoundrels. Well—playin' a game in which one's life is constantly at stake isn't altogether devoid of interest—it certainly keeps one from gettin' in a rut mentally or physically. And when the other crowd go to the bother an' expense of employing such a number of killers to wipe out three or four of us, it looks as if they mean business!

But up to this time their attempts can be passed off as a private feud—disclaimed altogether by their Govern'm't, in which all of us have some very pleasant acquaintances. So what we've now to consider is adequate means of protection for us four until their attempts can no longer be disguised as private feuds."

"Looks to me now, as though that'll take a bit of doing, Trevor!"

"H-m-m—have you a relative in the States who's never been in Europe, and not likely to come—who's known to your family by name, only?"

"Fancy not. —Wait a bit! . . . You'd not be pullin' my leg with a question like that. Aye—a second cousin—a rancher somewhere in Montana."

"Might there be a family resemblance? Got a picture?"

"Oh, bless my soul—no! Dare say there might be a faint resemblance—we Tenterdons are somewhat alike. Wife an' daughters have heard me mention the Montana chap's name—but dare say they've forgotten. Why?"

"Well—nobody can kill you if they can't find you, can they? Suppose your Montana cousin suddenly decides to come over here—puts up at the Ritz—likes London well enough to lease a small house out Chelsea way. Naturally, he calls upon you an' your family. You put him up at your club—"

"Aye—but there's not a beggar's chance of the chap's comin' over—or likin' our climate after he comes. What's the point?"

"Merely that he'd be constantly in evidence about London—visitin' your family in Bucks—frequently in your club—all that. An' while he's in evidence, you yourself are not—though you could even be seen once or twice together—fancy that could be managed. Begin to catch the point?"

"No—I'm dashed if I do!"

"Come upstairs to my private suite—I've a more extensive wardrobe than any of the actor-chaps—keep one in each of my homes."

WHEN they reached the Marquess' rooms, he rang for his valet—a quiet, self-effacing Devon man, and exceptionally competent in several different ways.

"Simmons, Sir Charles an' I are 'going native' for a bit. What would you suggest for him in the way of clothes?"

"Well, M'Lud—I've noticed that Sir Charles invariably wears, in town, a cutaway or frock-coat, some sort of stripe in the trousers, topper, spats and patent shoes, and gloves. In the country, he wears plus-fours or shootin' clothes, with a cap—but never a Trilby or any sort of soft felt hat at any time. So I would suggest a lounge-suit of Scotch-heather mixture—dark russet shoes—Fedora hat—gloves in pocket, not worn."

"Fancy that will hit the mark exactly—get out something of the sort to his measurem'ts, cut by an English tailor, in Chicago, if possible. And—er—we might check up on any little mannerisms we may both have noticed—an' see if we agree. What?"

"I've observed Sir Charles fingering his tie quite often, sir, when he's a bit upset about anything—and then smoothing down the back of his hair with the palm of his hand. If he's talking a lot to some person, absorbed in what he's saying, he'll occasionally give a peculiar shrug to his shoulders as if limbering up the muscles. Sometimes, when seated, he will be hitching up his trousers a bit. If anyone speaks just behind him, he'll turn his head quickly to see how close they are. And you'll notice, M'Lud, that Sir Charles parts his hair in the middle. I fancy if he were to part it well over on the left it would make a most amazin' change in his facial appearance."

"By Jove! That was a bit of inspiration, Simmons!

Anyone who knows you well, Tenterdon, will have noticed those other points he mentioned. So the first thing you've to keep in mind—an' constantly practice—is the absolute avoiding of each little mannerism. If you feel your hand goin' up to your tie or the back of your head, stop before it gets halfway up. Try shifting your position in a chair when you feel like stretching your shoulders. Avoid hitching up your trousers. Never turn your head at a voice just behind you—figure that you are slightly deaf—occasionally ask some one to repeat what he said. Now sit down here at my dressing-table while Simmons is getting out your clothes and I'll see what I can do in the way of altering your appearance. It will be surprisingly little—because the difference in clothes an' dropping the little habitual mannerisms are pretty effective disguises in themselves. Let's see— I fancy we'll first inject a single drop of this East Indian drug under the flesh in the center of your cheeks—it will produce a trifling swelling which lasts three days without renewing, but can be used repeatedly without injurious effects—or removed altogether by applications of hot towels with a bit of any good antiseptic. This will give your face an appearance of being noticeably fuller—broader. A thin line of dark brown color along the under edge of your upper eyelashes can't be seen even by close inspection—yet it makes the eyes look much deeper-set and of a shade lighter color. We could easily make the backs of your hands a bit more puffy, but there are no marks on them of any sort. We'll take an altogether diff'rent type of ring for your left hand an' put one on your right also. Eh? My word! . . . You're due to get a surprise in a few moments! Go into the other room an' let Simmons put that suit on you."

THE Baronet didn't get a glimpse of himself until his host led him before a large cheval-glass with wings that gave a front and back view. Then he thought he was looking at another person, and swung about to see who it was. In a moment or two, he said that his wife and daughters knew him better than anyone else in the world, but that he would wager a hundred pounds he could chat with them half an hour without their suspecting his identity. The idea of the masquerade was just beginning to penetrate—yet at first it seemed to him futile and impractical. How, for example, was he to attend to his many business interests, as another and totally unknown person? The Marquess laughed, assured him that it was much less difficult than it seemed, and began laying out tentative plans.

In the morning they went down to Croydon in one of the fast Trevor cars, took one of the Trevor planes from the triple-hangar just outside of the Customs lines, and went across to Cherbourg, where they purchased steamer-trunks and suitcases. During the day, two of the Atlantic liners stopped just long enough to drop passengers and mails—then came across the Channel to Southampton, taking the two masqueraders as passengers. It was a simple matter to have one of the room-stewards paste cabin-labels on their luggage, with the name of the boat on them—pasters of several different American hotels having been stuck on by the Marquess before coming aboard. Before rounding the Isle of Wight, they sent a wireless message for reservations to the Piccadilly Hotel—so that upon arrival in London they found three-room suites reserved for each of them.

Their suites were upon opposite sides of the hotel and there appeared to be no connection between the two men save that of steamer acquaintances who liked each other well enough to dine and take in a few shows together. They had ascertained from "Sparks" that none of the other passengers by that boat had booked rooms at the Piccadilly and knew that, while their faces would be familiar

to anyone on the saloon-list, there might not be any who noticed their coming aboard at Cherbourg.

The Marquess' next move was to return with Sir Charles to Park Lane, make a careful study of his appearance and his clothes—and then make himself up as a duplicate in every way. The result was a bit marvelous even to Simmons' critical eyes and those of Marchioness Nan, who had been called in to pass judgment. After this Sir Charles



was restored to his usual clothing and natural appearance. Then the pair were driven from Prince Abdool's house on Park Street, in the rear, to Tenterdon's club, where they dined, and where the supposed Richard Tenterdon—a wealthy Montana rancher—was introduced to a dozen of the other members, who found the American a deuced agreeable chap—also to Burroughs the club steward—and given a six-months' card as a non-resident guest likely to be coming and going to and from the Continent until his return to the States.

About ten, they left the club and were driven in the Marquess' high-powered car out to Sir Charles' estate in Buckinghamshire. Here the supposed American cousin proved to be a person of such irreproachable manners that he made a hit with the entire family and neighbors.

A week later—when the Baronet had succeeded by careful attention in eliminating his well-known mannerisms—he made up as the American, took the Marquess along as the American steamer-acquaintance whom he was impersonating, and paid a Saturday-afternoon call upon Lady Tenterdon in Bucks, both of them being urged to stay over the week-end. Both men in their own natural characters were of course intimately known by the family and their neighbors, but so perfectly did they carry out the impersonation that they were unsuspected. Their previous visit naturally made it more unlikely that they might be suspected, inasmuch as everyone they met took the supposed Richard Tenterdon for the same man they had seen and liked the week before.

The Marquess' next move was to have one of his many confidential agents lease and furnish two small houses, each with a patch of garden, in West End blocks which were narrow in proportion to their length so that the rear walls of the houses which backed up each other on the two parallel streets were not over forty feet apart. After one

They suddenly grasped the ankles behind the curtain, and with powerful hauls lifted them shoulder-high.

of the supposed Americans had taken up his residence in one of these and the other had settled down in an exactly similar house a few blocks away, workmen from the Trevor estate in South Devon, coming by night, proceeded to run underground tunnels connecting each pair of houses—so that a person might be seen entering the house on one street and leave the other on the next street a few minutes later without being seen at all, unless both were being watched at the same time—a merely negligible chance. After this, Sir Charles was twice followed to his cousin's house on foggy days and not observed coming out—but the spies supposed he might have stepped out when other people were passing in the fog, and had escaped while mistaken for them. In reality he had left, of course, by the other street—but he had the impression that he had escaped being shot or stabbed by a narrow margin—and when he went to his supposed cousin's house again, picked out a taxi-driver who hadn't an equal in London for dodging a following car—then stopped at the rear-street house. . . .

Lord Comynge made a more rapid recovery than had been expected. Three days before it was known that he had left the hospital, he was driven in a police inspector's car to the Marquess' Park Lane mansion for a conference

—his host and Tenterdon giving him an account of the attack upon the Baronet, the spies they had found in his club and home, the spy they had spotted in Comynge's own case, and the evidence secured by private detectives that the Asiatics were closely watching every office or building which Tenterdon, Lord Comynge, Lord Salcombe and the Marquess were known to frequent on business. Two or three times Lyonesse or his son had left the offices of some big industrial corporation after a directors' meeting, by a communicating passage with some other building, while spies of the Asiatics were watching the front entrances from windows across the street—armed with silencer-equipped rifles with which the financiers certainly would have been killed or dangerously wounded had they come out that way.

IT took but little persuasion to make Comynge adopt the same measures for protection that they were using, and presently there came a day when the three,—made up in the disguises they had assumed,—were dining in the supposed Richard Tenterdon's house when the butler fetched in cards of two Oriental bankers who requested an interview with Mr. Richard Tenterdon on the subject of American securities—particularly mining stock, upon which he was supposed to be more or less of an authority. Sir Charles, at first, was strongly against granting the interview.

"But consider, Marquess!" he urged. "If they fancy their suspicions are confirmed, they'll have three out of four of us right here in a bunch to attack at the same time—and some of us certainly are likely to 'go west'!"

"On the other hand, if they become convinced that we are exactly what we're supposed to be, that will settle it—they'll pay no more attention to us at any time," the Marquess countered. "Not one of us has the slightest appearance of disguise or make-up. In the drop-light over this table, they'll not see any indication whatever that we are the men they're after—and they'll spread the report all through their organization. Tenterdon can refer to me as bein' better posted on mining stock than he is—that'll let me do most of the talkin', with you chaps puttin' in an occasional word. On the other hand—I shall be ready to shoot both of them at the first sign of their drawing a weapon. Jervis, Symes an' Gunning are all crack shots an' good boxers—they'll be just outside the door ready to lend a hand on the jump if we need 'em. Mrs. Brady and Mary Hobbs are also good shots. They'll be watching the rear garden and roof-scuttle. Jervis will be keepin' an eye out for any others tryin' to get in by the front door or windows. I'd say that any serious risk is really negligible. Let's have 'em in here—convince 'em that we're of no possible importance of int'rest in their business. It's the best move we could make—all round! An' keep one point fixed right in the front of your minds. Your lives an' some pretty far-reaching int'rests outside of your mere lives depend absolutely upon just how perfectly—how thoroughly at ease—you carry out your impersonations. This is all 'play-acting'—very true; but there's a pretty deadly edge to it if you get either nervous or careless. Got that?"

The Asiatics were surprised to find themselves escorted back to a small but cozy dining-room in which the man they wished to see was dining with friends—but Tenterdon explained that they hadn't finished their meal and hoped the visitors might join them. The callers glanced at each other, then smilingly shook their heads and said they had just dined at one of the hotels—but they willingly sat down at the table and accepted cigars, presently unbending so far as also to accept some of the champagne. They were an entirely different sort from what Tenterdon

had expected—educated men of evident position in the world, who might be after information concerning some of the world's leading financiers but most assuredly, he thought, couldn't afford to be assassins. In reply to their questions about certain mining stocks, Tenterdon nodded toward his friend on the right, who he said had dealt in them longer than he—and the supposed John Framingham, of Oregon, took up the conversation:

"Of course we all buy mining-stock in the Western States, gentlemen, because those mines're something which every former prospector knows about—but we keep close watch for reports of matrix on the various dumps. A paying vein is likely to pinch out at any moment, or a new one develop. Mining-stock is more of a gamble than industrials; unless you know mining, I'd say let 'em strictly alone. I hold a very small amount of such stock at present—I prefer having my money in gilt-edge securities which I don't have to watch, so I can play golf and enjoy life."

"But we understood, sir, that Meester Tenterdon dealt quite largely in soch stocks—bought an' sold moch block of soch securities?"

"Guess you're confusing him with a second cousin of his over here, Mr. Noguchi. He's not in any business, now—never dealt in stocks at any time—been a rancher ever since he came to the States as a boy of eighteen. His cousin, over here, has been connected with a very well-known banking house until he practically retired a few years ago, leaving its management entirely in the hands of his junior partners. In fact, I heard him telling this Mr. Tenterdon that he didn't go down to the office unless there were very important papers for him to sign."

The situation had in it a good deal of latent tenseness in the background, but nothing of this showed on the surface. The Asiatics got into their heads the conviction that such men couldn't possibly be the English financiers they were determined to eliminate, and whose personality was so noticeably different. When they left the house they were firmly convinced that the three Americans were exactly what they appeared to be—and they so reported.

THIS assurance did not go so well, at first, with the Asiatic ambassador—one of the shrewdest, most experienced politicals of his race. He said, in a voice as cold as blue Arctic ice:

"Consider, Noguchi! I myself spent an hour in Park Lane the other night with the Right Honorable the Marquess of Lyonesse—because I'd happened to get the information that a confidential meeting of the governing committee of Garrod's, Limited, would be held in their London branch next day and that the Marquess, as chairman of the committee—with his son, as chairman of the board—would have to attend if any decisions were reached. While I was there, Lord Comynge came in—he lives on the next block. Now I know those three men—would know them in Nirvana! They were not impostors or masqueraders. Yet the executives we had posted across the street from the Garrod's block got no glimpse of them going in. Nobody has had a glimpse of either one since. And dispatches in this morning's news-sheets report all three as cruising on the Marquess' famous yacht in the Mediterranean—they were seen at Naples and Malta. Unless they went down by plane they couldn't have reached that yacht since the meeting at Garrod's—yet our agents are positive they saw the men themselves. As for the three you called upon this evening, Richard Tenterdon was seen in Regent Street on the day of that meeting—he is now spending the week-end in Bucks at Sir Charles' place. John Framingham was dining at the St. James club on the evening after the Garrod's meeting—and again last night. Those two could have attended that meeting—"

"Excellency will pardon—but he is for the moment forgetting that Sir Charles Tenterdon put up his cousin Richard at his own club and introduced him to many of the members. Also, that the Marquess of Lyonesse himself put up John Framingham at the St. James for six months because they had once met in Santa Barbara, where the Marquess owns a beautiful estate. Obviously, if Framingham is masquerading as one of the English financiers we are endeavoring to eliminate, it can't be the Marquess, and he is more than an inch taller than Sir Charles. Obviously, Sir Charles can't be his second cousin, since he put up that cousin at his club and introduced him to several members. At least thirty members of the two clubs swear to these facts. Whatever the mystery may be—and one is inclined to fear those elusive financiers are jinn instead of human beings—they most certainly can't be the ones we called upon!"

BUT no game is altogether one-sided, indefinitely. If one set of players have determination they eventually will come dangerously close to reaching their objective.

Two months after their first offensive, the islanders had not withdrawn more than a third of their forces from the Asiatic mainland—but they still were utterly unable to float a Government loan, and their financial position was daily getting worse. They had been assured that they could get all the money they needed for their own budget and development if they would get off the mainland and stay off—but their reverses already had made them lose face. They were determined to go down into utter ruin rather than abandon their determination for conquest. And try as they might they were unable to get definite information that this or that group of financiers were holding them up. Merely from the fact that they had been unable to kill any of the Trevor-Comynge-Lecouvrier group, they were convinced that these men must be responsible for putting the loans beyond their reach—and they redoubled their efforts.

Through a leak which cost them a heavy bribe, they learned that a conference between eight of the most influential European financiers was slated for the thirteenth in the board-room of Henderson-Fyles, Inc., on Mincing Lane, and that among those present would be the four men they had been attempting to kill. That board-room was on the top floor of the building, reached by a narrow stairway at the other end of the corridor from the single lift, which ran to the third floor only. There was a ladder to the roof in a porter's closet at the other end of the top-floor hall—and the Asiatics located it. A smaller office used for hats and top-coats adjoined the board-room, which had no other entrance—and, like the board-room, had its two windows draped with heavy brocade curtains. Henderson-Fyles employed four special constables who relieved each other in pairs and were supposed to inspect the premises thoroughly before each meeting was held—after the close of the business day when the building was otherwise empty. When the financiers arrived, these constables were not in sight, but were supposed to be in one of the other offices on that floor. As the Marquess and his *confrères* came in—having entered the building by a rear entrance from a parallel street—Salcombe glanced about for the special constables. Then he muttered to his father:

"Don't see Cooper an' Jackson anywhere about! . . . They should be in the hall outside this coat-room! Prob'ly resting in some other office."

"Never heard of their doing that before!"

"Wonder where the rest of our party are? They should have been here before us. H-m-m—something's wrong! I'll get through to Portwain on the phone!"

When Lord Salcombe picked up one of the phones from

the directors' table, he got through to the offices of the banker, and was told by his secretary that a message had come postponing the meeting, and that Sir David was then on his way out of town for the week-end. That settled it. The Marquess glanced at the floor, where the window-curtains fell to within an inch of it—and saw a pair of shoes behind those of each window. A quick flash of thought convinced him that two of the scoundrels would not start anything with their four until they were reinforced by others from the lower part of the building, catching their prey between two fires. A whisper to Comynge warned him to guard the door; then an expressive glance directed Salcombe's attention to the curtains. The Viscount nodded.

Stepping quietly along, one by each window, they suddenly stooped—grasped the ankles behind the curtains—and with powerful hauls lifted them shoulder-high, the heads at the other end crashing down upon the parquet flooring with stunning force. They took knives—and pistols with silencers on them—from each man, then tied them securely with the window-cords. Scouting cautiously from one office to another, they found the two constables, with their wrists bound, and still groggy from heavy blows, in the farthest one. They liberated the men and sent them up the ladder to the roof in a search for more of the assassins. But there were none up there. Salcombe sent one of the constables down to search the lower floors. After twenty minutes, Cooper failed to return—and when Salcombe tried to use the phone again, he found it dead. Beckoning the others after him, including Jackson, he led the way up the ladder to the roof—locking the door of the porter's closet on the inside. After closing the scuttle, he glanced about the roofs and said:

"What we're up against, gentlemen, is escaping this way—we'd not have a dog's chance for getting down through the building! Now—let us see: Got to fasten this scuttle somehow or the scoundrels'll come up here an' catch us! Ha! Fancy this'll do! Sorry to put some decent chap's wireless out of business temporarily, but—"

An aerial was strung between two fifteen-foot lengths of gas-pipe. Pulling one of these down across the scuttle, he jammed the end under a stone coping between that and the next building—which settled the question of raising that scuttle for some time. Then they scouted along the leads until they came to an eight-foot drop to the roof of a lower building where they found an unfastened scuttle over an attic in which bales of jute and oakum and coils of one-inch rope were stored. As the door to the lower floor was bolted, they made some of the rope fast to a beam and lowered it into a small court with an arched passage for lorries out to the street in the rear.

They got out of this little difficulty—then picked up a taxi and were driven to Sir Charles' club, where he and his supposed cousin had taken adjoining rooms with a communicating door and had all materials for changing their appearance, in a couple of strong sea-chests with spring locks. There were enough spare clothes to outfit the other two, also—though not altogether like the suits they had been wearing. However, the impersonation was good enough to get them outside without attracting attention.

UPON a hint from the Home Secretary, the two Asiatics captured in the board-room were sent to Dartmoor for a ten-year stretch. And as the proprietors of the building where they had found the rope concluded in the morning that sneak-thieves had attempted to loot their attic but had been frightened away,—and had quietly hauled their rope up again,—the Asiatics haven't discovered to this day how their proposed victims escaped. . . . As their efforts appear to have been discontinued, there is an inference that the undertaking has now been abandoned.



There were a dozen palpitating seconds; then a red mushroom of fire that seemed to ribbon to the tree-tops, blotted out the daylight.

The Story So Far:

IT was rather terrible, mused Elsa Peterson as she waited for her brother Martin to come home, to be only half-Russian in the Red Republic. Worse, still, when the Russian half was of hated aristocrat blood—even though Elsa and Martin were citizens of the Soviet now.

Nitchevo! What did it matter? It had been a lovely house, and she had had a lovely mother and a fine father; but they were dead, and the Government had taken the house, turned it into a barracks, and filled it with five hundred people. It was now Apartment House 187.

Martin came in from his work, and they ate their scanty supper. "I wonder if John Worden ever thinks of us, now," observed Martin presently.

Somehow the name of John Worden lightened the dingy apartment. Yet tragedy lay in memory of him. John Worden had been their demi-god six years before. They were children in their 'teens, and he was a great, clean-limbed giant of twenty, with blue eyes that laughed at the lean years and the lean people about him. And then one snowy night, in the days of the Tcheka, the blow fell. The secret police came swiftly and silently; John Worden's father and mother were pistoled as they walked through the dark garden to the waiting prison-van.

While the suave explanations of an "accident" were being made, David Peterson and his Russian wife were sent

to the Siberian timber-camps. They had both died on the way, peacefully, it was said, in each other's arms.

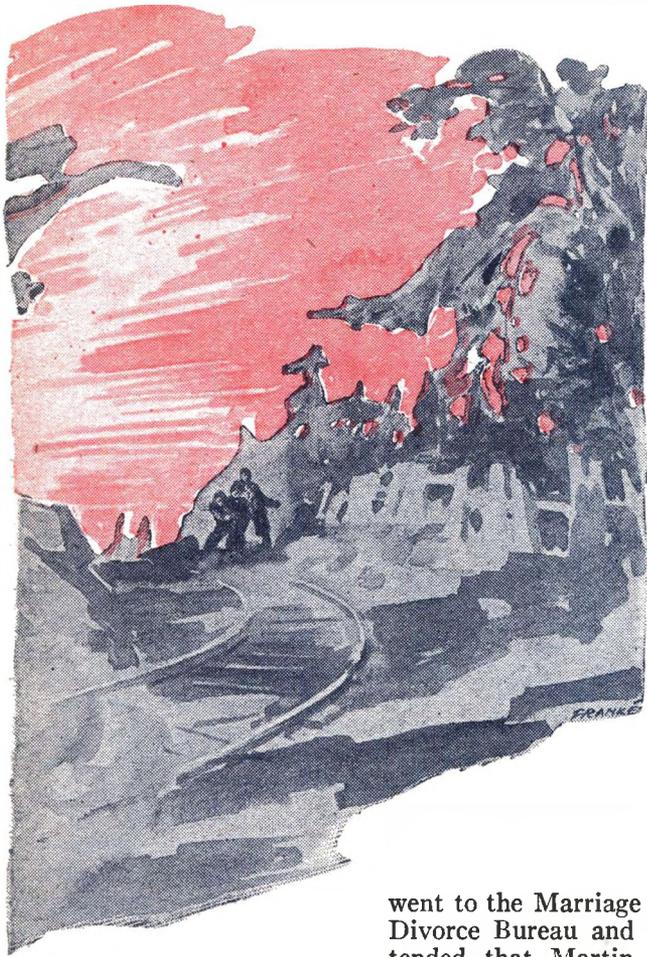
Somehow, John Worden had got out of the very teeth of the Tcheka, escaped from Russia, reached England and then America—to be successful in that dear country which seemed to belong to another planet. And Elsa and Martin Peterson were left behind in the chaos. . . .

But this evening another blow fell. For again the dreaded secret police appeared, asking questions about one John Worden. Martin was hauled off to the sinister Butyrka prison—and "questioned rather severely."

The police had indeed reason to ask questions about John Worden. For it was he himself, disguised as a workman, who spoke to Elsa next day. He had come back to Russia to rescue them—and to exact vengeance from Boris Vladimir, who was responsible for his father's death.

Boris Vladimir told Elsa that he would procure Martin's release if she would come to him at his "house of the red door." And when Elsa saw how Martin had been tortured, she consented. Just in time John Worden appeared, knocked out the Cossack, and drugged him. Then with Elsa, and the order for Martin's release, Worden went to the prison, brought away the badly injured Martin—and laid a plan for their escape out of Russia.

This plan was made to fit the new Russia. The three



Comrades of Chaos

*"When a girl and a fella stick around each other till death do them part, I guess there's God in it—even in Russia, where they've took Him for a ride."
... The climax of this splendid novel of two Americans' great adventure in Soviet Russia.*

By S. ANDREW
WOOD

Illustrated by Joseph Franké

Worden was her lover, whom she wished to marry. In a few moments Elsa obtained a "divorce" from Martin and a certificate of "marriage" to Worden. Their false identities thus established by documents, they took a train for the Polish frontier. . . .

But the OGPU—animated by Feodora Federoff, a beautiful but terrible young woman mockingly called the "Bright Angel of the Butyrka" and who had known and perhaps loved Worden in earlier days—caught up with them when they left the train near the frontier. They escaped by a desperate ruse, but Martin, succumbing at last to the wounds inflicted upon him, died in a monastery where they took refuge.

Elsa was recaptured and put to work in an underground factory for the production of poisonous war gasses. A fire in this hell-pit nearly cost her life but provided opportunity for escape instead. And another American—a wild little, good little Texan named Nick Gunter—helped her and gave her shelter on a river barge where he was living in hiding with a Russian woman. For though Gunter had come to Russia to work for the Soviet, he had rebelled at the cause he was aiding, and had committed a serious act of sabotage which caused him to be outlawed.

Worden pretended to accept the Bright Angel's offer and joined the Gay-pay-oo—thinking thereby to reach Vladimir. Instead the Russian and his Mongol cornered Worden in an upstairs room and the American escaped only by clambering down a huge electric sign on the wall outside. The Bright Angel also tried to kill Worden—but he had substituted blanks for the cartridges in her revolver. On hearing that Elsa had been captured, he surrendered him-

self, and with Elsa and Nick was brought to trial by the Soviet Government.

Sentence was at length pronounced:

"You have been found guilty, Nicholas Gunter, of sabotage against the State, inasmuch as you destroyed twenty dynamos at the Litaygorod generating station. Furthermore, it is proved that you set fire to Tenement No. 3627, in which many citizens perished.

"You, Elsa Peterson, are found guilty of being also concerned in the burning of Tenement No. 3627, and other crimes which have been since pardoned. As a Russian citizen, you are an enemy to the State, since all along you have been associated with John Worden, a spy.

"John Worden, you came to Russia in disguise, with false papers, and have plotted against the State ever since. You were even audacious enough to join the Government police, the G.P.U. Your own country cannot intervene for a spy. You too are found guilty.

"The sentence in each case is—death! It is richly deserved. But there are enemies of the Soviet all over the world, who accuse us of savagery and bloodthirstiness. The Council of Commissars instruct me to make a generous gesture, out of friendship for America, the Russia of the West. The sentence is commuted. The prisoners are pardoned and set free."

Free? Only so far as the dark pillared corridor that led out of the prison. Then each was struck senseless with a revolver-butt. . . . They recovered consciousness shackled in a jolting cattle-car on their way to Siberia. (*The story continues in detail.*)

THERE was a keg of water in a corner of the jolting wagon and a pannikin which Worden could just reach, manacled as he was to his two companions. Some of the liquid spilled upon Elsa's face when he tried to put it to her lips. She stirred, and came awake.



Some of the water spilled upon Elsa's face when he tried to put it to her lips. She stirred. "I must have been sleeping!" She tried to smile at him.

"I must have been sleeping!" He saw that she tried to smile at him. Even at that juncture, she was so unconquerable that, though she was one of a cargo of human cattle, she refused to acknowledge it. "It's quite a long time since I came to my senses."

"Are you hurt?"

"They hit you and Nick Gunter the hardest—under the impression, perhaps, that I wasn't so tough as either of you. I don't think you're quite as tough as Nick, at that."

"Do you see?" He made the chain that bound them rattle a little.

"Yes, and I know where we're going to. It's strange how nothing is so bad that it couldn't be worse! I was sure we were all going to be shot, as we walked along that corridor, after the trial."

Worden was silent. He did not know that Elsa spoke thus because she caught the strained despair that was visible upon him under the shadows the swinging hurricane-lamp flung. He was thinking, with the touch of awe he had felt before, how born to terror she must be, to stand it like that. In his guise of Mitka Ivanovitch, a Moscow mechanic, he had met Communist women who passed through fire, and came out calm-eyed. But they had their glowing faith, and were, somehow, dehumanized, and beyond feeling. Elsa only had her native courage.

"I came to Russia to help you—among other things. This is what that has come to. And the helping has all been on your side."

Her face was in shadow, so he could not see it, but she shook her head. By her side, Nick Gunter groaned, stirred, and sat up. Elsa, taking up the water, began to bathe his

clotted temples, forgetting the throb and ache of her own. Men and women sat round, and watched them in stupid lethargy. This was the litter that stood in the path of Russia's progress: scrapings of the middle classes and aristocrats who were too battered to whip up holy fervor for the Five-year Plan, and so were being sent to help it in the timber-camps, till the last of their class died out and left the world to its just inheritors, the workman and the peasant.

"What's the racket?" Nick Gunter, his face a mere dough-colored lozenge of furrows, stared stupidly. "Who're

all these Ivans? I was hit, wasn't I?"

"Hard," said Worden laconically.

There was a long silence. Sickly understanding came crowding visibly upon Nick Gunter, and froze him to a little lean mass of humiliation. He seemed to grow smaller at the slow comprehension that the Bolshies had double-crossed him. But he said nothing, save that he put out his hand to Elsa's with a husky and dejected, "Sorry, girlie!" and a quiver which might have been rage or the pain of his lacerated scalp.

Slowly, wearily, the night wore on. Once the train stopped and soldiers entered with black bread, feeding the fetid wagon-load as cattle are foddered. Then the steady clank again, till at last, morning and a faint daylight came. Worden saw the wintry sun through the ventilator, and judged it was a southeast trail they were making—the Urals, no doubt, where a million people, mostly doomed, stripped the giant forests to give blood, money and material to the new Russia. But the Urals stretched from the arctic circle to the Caspian, from eternal snow to countries of azure skies and colored minarets. It was impossible to tell where they were going.

Night again, and some big town where factories glowed about an ancient Kremlin, and in the vast fantail-lights of a large airdrome, airplanes circled past the ruins of a Grand Duke's palace. The lumber-camp prisoners, chained in half-dozens, were driven through icy slush into some clearing-house where they were numbered and labeled, and then distributed to various other trains which waited. In the slush, a few old men dropped and were left behind. . . . And here, though Nick Gunter fought savagely against it,—and carried a knout-weal for days after,—the men's heads were shaven and the women cropped.

On again, bumping monotonously. The old man with the tangled imperial beard, who had passed a word with Worden, opened a vein, and died. His body lay shaking stiffly all night, till the guards cleared it out next morning,

Nick Gunter turned gaunt and wolfish-looking and talked of Maryanka in his sleep. But Elsa hid in some inner strength, and scarcely changed during the purgatory of that long journey. Looking at her, with eyes that occasionally turned bloodshot, Worden thanked God for the chain that still bound her to him.

Yet, at the Ekaterinovsky timber-camp three days later, the chain was taken off.

With an indefinable dread, Worden felt the weight of it fall from him as they stood, weak-limbed, in the mud before a dozen low concrete huts, which were tangled in barbed wire and rough man-traps, and half-hidden by a malarial vapor from the swamps and forests that stretched on every side.

A whip cracked. The women, separated from the men, huddled together like a drove of frightened sheep.

"Good-by!" said Elsa. "I shall see you again, soon." And she went, the only woman who smiled. . . . Worden, looking after her felt with a twinge of anguish that Vladimir, and the Bright Angel, and the long hunt in Moscow, was better than this. There could be no end to it, except death, even as death had been the only get-away out of Siberia in the old days of the Czars.

"Cheer up, boy!" said Nick Gunter as hoarsely as a crow.

They were almost the first words the little American had spoken for days. He stood looking at the hopeless faces about him, the lounging guards, and the deadly, steaming Avernus that was the Ekaterinovsky prison-camp, and seemed to come awake for the first time.

"Lord!" he said wonderingly. "Nick Gunter lumbering timber for the Bolshies!"

He stood lost in thought. Even when a harsh order was barked, and the men began to shamble forward, he did not move, so great was his mental consternation. The crack of a lash on his shoulder made him look up.

"Who did that?"

"Forward with the rest, *Amerikanka* dog!"

Nick Gunter crooked his fingers and leaped, before Worden could prevent him. The guard he sprang at was double his size, but Gunter in a madness shook him like a terrier, bearing him to the ground, pressing his face in the thick mud till he made choking, uncouth sounds. His moment was brief. Like a snake, a knout fell and curled about his neck, dragging him away, half-strangled, and the butt of a gun knocked him reeling.

Worden picked up the twisted little form in his arms, and spoke to the hulking sergeant who had felled Gunter.

"He is half insane, comrade. Fierce little men are good workers when they calm down. I will take care that he behaves after this."

"He will behave well," said the sergeant, with a saturnine stare at Worden, "since he will be flogged each morning instead of breakfast, and will work in chains. His number?"

Worden joined the dazed trail, carrying the little American thrown over his shoulders. That night they slept in one of the concrete huts, foul with smell of crowded humans, and so wet with ooze that the very vermin seemed to be of an amphibious species. Worden's rough doctoring brought round Nick Gunter, and they huddled together, in a vain attempt to keep warm, while the chill night brought flakes of ice upon their wet clothing.

DAYS of deadly drudgery in the forests followed, and black hours in the concrete prison-hut, with a horde that gambled a little, talked a little, but mostly had the dumbness of animals. In No. 7, by night, a giant Tartar, almost naked save for a sheepskin, kept order with a heavy club. In the forests, by day, there were guards to every

gang, with lead-loaded knouts and rifles. Each morning Nick Gunter was taken out for his knouting, and came back quieter, more sunken and shriveled. It seemed to Worden that the little American's spirit was breaking. . . .

One night when, drunk with fatigue, they sprawled in the light of the smoky lamp, Gunter produced a newspaper which by some means had reached the prison-hut. His finger shook upon a heavily blacked column of the Russian characters.

"See that?"

It reported that a Soviet bombing-plane had come down in the Polish marshes outside Warsaw, and taken fire. Aboard it, as passengers, were Nicholas Gunter, John Worden and the woman Peterson, who were being conveyed across the frontier to rid Russia of the danger of any future activities on their part. In the desolate marshes, crew and passengers had perished in the flames and the remains of the airplane were only found a day later, after it was reported missing.

"The hell-hounds have sure killed us dead, this time, buddy!" Nick Gunter's voice was a croak. He was silent for a long time afterwards, till he fell asleep on his stomach, to give his wealed and bloody back a rest. Worden heard him far into the night, making sounds that might have been sobs or curses.

BUT the next evening there was a change in Nick Gunter. He came back to the camp, chained to his fellow-misdemeanants who had also earned the knout, from some distant swamp where they worked; mosquito-eaten, and chattering with an ague he had caught. Side by side in the hut with Worden, he wolfed the filthy and insufficient food quietly—but there was something on his lean face that was like grim mirth masked.

"Listen!" They were close together under their lousy and tattered blankets. "That knout-squad got a bad jump, this morning. Seven of us strung up barebacked in a clearing, with the punishment-guy—a Kalmuck that a knout comes as natural to as a trunk to an elephant—getting to work in dandy fashion. Suddenly there's a rifle-crack, and that Kalmuck bumps to the ground with a hole in his head. Hell of a hullabaloo follows—guards running round—typewriters turned on the forests! But could they find where that shot came from? No sir!"

Nick Gunter drew in his breath softly.

"It was when the Kalmuck was just going to lay on to me that it happened. Gee, that was a funny coincidence, wasn't it?"

Worden, in the dimness, smiled wearily. He said it was probably some prisoner who had gone insane, and taken to the forests, till the bloodhounds should catch him.

"Maybe," agreed Nick Gunter.

Presently he spoke again:

"Got a touch of indigestion. Swallowed a piece of paper I found tucked in a split that's in the end of my ax, after I left it leaning against a tree. . . . Aw, I'm not telling you. Too dangerous, yet. If there's any hot-irons coming along, it had better only be one of us—an' you never know."

"There's no chance of a get-away, Nick. Cut that idea out!" Worden spoke earnestly, fearful of something the little man might do to seal his own doom. "If you get clear of the camp by a miracle, there's nothing but swamps and steppes for hundreds of miles."

"Don't I know? They dig skeletons out of the bog now and again and stick 'em up as a warning. There's the river, and the rail-head. But they're both stiff with typewriters and sawed-offs. Aw, don't worry. I'm going to be a good boy, Worden. Mean to get a soft job, I do. You wait-see."

There was quiet. Nick Gunter cracked a louse in the dark, and groaned a little with the pain in his red-raw back.

"Supposin' there was an earthquake wiped out the camp, you wouldn't go without that little sweetie of yours?"

"No."

"Well, when a girl and a fella stick around each other till death do them part," said Nick Gunter with unwonted feeling in his voice, "I guess there's God in it, even in Russia where they've took Him for a ride. . . . Wonder who put the sun shining through that Kalmuck's skull?"

IN the women's quarters of the Ekaterinovskiy penal camp the squalor and misery was perhaps even worse than in the men's. Ragged, chilblained, clad in rough breeches, the women worked at tree-felling and lumbering, and only those who were too young to die, or too tough to care, survived to work under knout and rifle for the New Paradise.

Elsa deliberately anaesthetized herself. Ghastly as it all was, it was not so bad as the W.E.F., the Moscow Death Factory from which Nick Gunter had rescued her, she told herself, and now and then she caught sight of John Worden. Once, too, he had smuggled a note to her. When the nightmare of the long dark hours in the prison-hut grew too bad, she drew comfort from that, and was shudderingly glad that the Bright Angel was in far-away Moscow.

Her work lay by the river. Here the felled timber was carried by wheeled trestles to which the women were yoked, and then floated upon a vast lagoon, to be thrust later into the swift river-current and carried away. It was slave labor, unloading the giant logs by primitive block and tackle, chaining them together as they floated in the water, thrusting them laboriously, with aching muscles and bleeding hands, upon their two-hundred-mile journey, and there were times when it seemed to Elsa that she had never known what it was to be a gentle and civilized woman. The mud of the swamps, the gloom of the forests, the cruel clamor of the river seeped into the soul.

There came one morning which Elsa was never to forget. The ganger had sent her from the lagoon to the camp for some tools, and she was returning by a miry path that led through the undergrowth—lingering a little with a sense of sweet relief that she was alone for a moment.

Suddenly she felt herself caught from behind. A hand was clapped over her mouth and a strong arm encircled her.

"Not a word, on your life, little one!" said a voice. "Quick! Into the bushes with me."

The arms dragged her deep into the undergrowth of willow and alder which grew on the river-edge, and not until they were deep in the quagmire of a hollow was she released, and allowed to look at her captor.

It was Maryanka, Nick Gunter's sweetheart, who squatted on a tree-trunk, and nodded to her; but a Maryanka who was scarcely recognizable. Gone was the fat, calm, satiny face and plump body. The girl of the *Timo-feev 2* was now as lean and gaunt as a puma, and her eyes, watchful, quick, never-resting, were those of a forest animal. She was clad in rough breeches, soldier's boots and a bearskin that had the look of a fresh pelt, for the mask of it hung like a hood over her shoulders. A revolver, stuck into her waist, completed her strange appearance.

"It is me, little Nicholas' Maryanka. Did you think it was a werewolf? Ah, little one, how they have changed you!"

Maryanka could apparently still cry, for her eyes filled with ferocious tears.

"But there is not much time for talk now. I wanted

you to know I was here—watching. With little Nicholas gone, Moscow was no use. How I screamed and scratched my way into those cellars, to see my Nicholas, after the trial! They let me in to laugh at me, the pigs! But I was watching all the time. I saw them carrying you forth, and knew that it was not Paris and America, but Siberia or the timber-camps."

Elsa glanced over her shoulder.

"I must go, Maryanka. I can't believe it is you, though it must be. If the guards found us—"

Maryanka listened. She seemed almost to sniff, like the wild creature she had changed into.

"The guards are having their dinner. There is five minutes before they will look for you, *matushka*. There is nothing about the Ekaterinovskiy that I do not know. Me, Maryanka of Moscow! But I was not always of Moscow; after the Terror my mother and I lived like a wolf and her cub in the forests of the Ukraine. So I am at home here."

Elsa crouched and listened fascinatedly to this new lean, hard-bitten freebooter which was Maryanka. Wonder stirred in her heart, even if no hope dared come. For Maryanka, it appeared, it had not been difficult to find out the timber-camp train which carried them and to bribe the *provodnick* to smuggle her, disguised as his boy-brakeman. She had starved, because the *provodnick* grew what little Nicholas called "fresh," and when she raised a lump on his jaw with her fist, he munched his food before her eyes and gave her none. But, since the Ekaterinovskiy was in Russia and not in America, she had been able to reach it by various means, fair and foul.

"One does such things for love, eh? How would you have liked your John Worden to come alone, even though you may never touch hands again? I am Maryanka of the forest. I live in a cave across the river which was a bear's den before I shot the bear with a rifle I stole. I wear his skin and keep the smell of him about me to deceive the bloodhounds when they prow round. I am thin and tough, which makes me light as a lynx—though it also makes me uneasy because little Nicholas says he likes them fat and soft as I was."

Maryanka frowned.

"I shall grow fat again, later, if the good God lets me. How could a fat Maryanka have sat in the tree-branches and shot the son of a yellow dog who was knouting my Nicholas the other morning? I steal food, rifles, whatever I wish, and none of them see me—though one must admit the guards are mostly drunk when they are off duty. The lions of the Kremlin can be monks—but not the jackals of the timber-camps."

Maryanka broke off.

"Back to the path, little Elsa! Listen, I give you no hope yet. But, on the contrary, do not lose it. Soon I shall show myself again, if those hyenas do not get me. It may be here; it may be anywhere. I am Maryanka of the forest."

She sprang from the tree-trunk with a light and feline movement. The undergrowth barely rustled as it took her, as though she had never been there.

THE Kremlin raised its sky-shattering line of towers and palaces against a winter sunset which was brighter than usual. Some optical effect of the light upon the freshly fallen snow made the great ramparted palace more menacing and dominant than ever, as the lights above Moscow began to twinkle in the streets and squares. It was like the crash of some symphony whose end no one could tell; the climax of a story which might finish in triumph or tragedy. Old Russia, superimposed upon and dominating the new—grimly, jealously.

The man and woman perhaps felt it to be so. They

watched it in silence, while the light slowly died and soaked away the vision. It was Vladimir who spoke first.

"You loved Worden, Feodora," he said.

"Do I deny it?" The woman shrugged almost listlessly. "I suppose there were hundreds of men like him, but I never met one. What do the Communist schools call it? Something scientific but vague. And now, he's in some timber-camp and will no doubt escape and die miserably in the swamps. *Nitchevo!* I tried to kill him when I knew they wanted him, Boris. How do the scientists explain that?"

"Perhaps because you're a Cossack woman. Yogatai told me about it all. He was disappointed and concerned to find you there, in the place of Worden, that night."

"Don't let us talk of it. You loved that girl, didn't you?"

"Yes. I would have taken her to Tiflis, out of this Moscow where the individual is nothing."

"The individual is nothing in all Russia, Boris. From being everything for a few hundred people and nothing to the rest, it has come to be nothing to all. If you were a good Communist you should rejoice in it."

"Do you rejoice in it?"

"A woman is always an individual. The Creator made her so when Lenin was a boy and the priests were not looking." Her eyes were mocking behind their somberness

for an instant. "Heavens, a People's Commissar and an Ogpu officer in rebellion against the State! See what disappointed love does! I wish you joy in Tiflis, Boris, and trust you spread the Five-year gospel in the Caucasus."

"I am tired of the Five-year gospel," said Vladimir sullenly; and Feodora, putting on her furs, laughed, "Treason!"

It was amazing to think what fools men were, Feodora thought, a little wearily, as she stepped out into the Petrovka. Boris Vladimir had an Oriental plan for gathering loot in the Caucasus, of leading some fantastic Ivan-the-Terrible life for a brief while, and then fleeing across the Caspian to Persia. He did not realize that Tiflis was full of Stalin's factories and airdromes, any more than he was aware that Menjinsky was studying his *dossier* and Koregorvsky was rubbing his knucky fingers and watching him like a ferret. . . .

Tonight Feodora Fedoroff too felt a little mad, though outwardly she was indistinguishable from any other trim Communist girl of Moscow, as she trod the lighted streets. She had left behind the cloak of the Bright Angel, as she

sometimes did, to mingle with the crowds. John Worden! She could have seen him dead with hardly a tremor. If they had pistoled him, instead of sending him to a prison-camp chained to Elsa Peterson, she could have almost forgotten him.

An unexpected shudder passed through Feodora. The end of everything was different than one foresaw. What would be her own end? She would like to be assassinated in her full Ogpu uniform, in the brilliant sunshine, with the Bright Angel's name on everybody's lips, Red Guards darting in swift and terrible vengeance, with, perhaps, Menjinsky by her side.

"Idiot!"

Feodora quickened her footsteps.

There was a big meeting in Red Square where the lights of Lenin's tomb glowed.

Under the arc-lamps a young woman, her face like a pale flame, addressed the surging crowd in a voice which came through the loudspeakers like little wafts of fire.

"The Plan has already ended the class-struggle in Russia, comrades. . . . We of the new generation will see the end of every other struggle save that between what is good and what is evil. . . . God is dead, but there will be a new God and we shall be that new God. The people. . . . Death, work, starvation mean nothing. The Five-year Plan—"

Beyond the calcined glow of the arc-lights, it was dark. In it, like dim, white velvet, lay a small, quiet park, completely deserted

at the moment, yet within sight of the brilliantly lighted square. The snow was clean and crisp on the paths, the trees cloaked in heavy snow and picked out in white filigree. It was good to pass through the scrolled gates, and walk in darkness, surrounded by radiance, within a stone's throw of the intent crowd, with the girl's fresh, fierce voice ringing faintly.

"Little possessed fool!" Feodora's hands closed tightly. Once, fresh from the Lenin Institute, she had been like that. Now she was the Bright Angel, an instrument of that Paradise the girl talked of.

There was a frozen fountain with a seat by it, and here she sat down, relaxing her lissom body negligently, lighting a cigarette. A Communist girl of Moscow, hard-eyed and emancipated, waiting for adventure, perhaps, if any adventure should come into that little dark park—anybody but the Bright Angel.

As she shook a spark from her cigarette, from the outer fringe of the crowd which surged so close, yet kept away, a figure came negligently through the gateway—a man, in the Communist's leather-jacketed garb, a large and



By night a giant Tartar, almost naked save for a sheepskin, kept order with a heavy club.

powerful creature whose face was in shadow. He strolled carelessly yet sheepishly, obviously aware of the girl's presence, but pretending otherwise. Suddenly he stopped.

"Give me a light from your cigarette, comrade."

In the glow of the two cigarettes, as Feodora held hers out, and the young Communist sat down with a grin of thanks, his high cheek-bones and chipped almond eyes were visible. She lowered her face quickly. . . . Comrade Yogatai, of the Kremlin staff, desirous of scraping acquaintance with a lonely woman-comrade.

"She is a very great speaker, that Kossilena. To sit in the dark and listen to her like this—it makes one dream."

IT seemed to Feodora that the Mongol trembled. The thought caused her hidden lips to curve amusedly. Yogatai always trembled when she was near—even when he stood, the stolid servant, and she merely brushed past him. He had been like one drunk and dazed that night when he took her out of the chair where John Worden had bound her. Yet, he did not see who she was. . . .

"To dream of anything is sometimes rather dangerous, comrade."

"But pleasant. To sit in the dark and dream—unseen, unknown, with thousands of people within earshot, yet none of them aware of you."

The Mongol's huge hands rested on his knees, and drummed softly there. A hoarse murmur from the crowd, and then only the voice of the girl Kossilena, clear as an April wind with wild prophecies. The labial Tartar sounds in Yogatai's voice seemed to thicken as he spoke again.

"Are you bashful, comrade? Let me see your face. It is pretty enough to see in the dark, I'll swear, if one can do such an old-fashioned thing as pass a compliment."

Feodora tilted her chin with a low laugh. It left her slender throat white and visible in her fur collar. . . . From his knees, the Mongol's big hands rose suddenly and closed on it, one on each side, overlapping, pressing slowly, great thumbs in the pale flesh, wrists swelling like whipcord—like some machine which had been thrown into gear and began to function. . . .

Kossilena's voice shrilled upwards.

"Through evil will come good. We use evil things, comrades—fear, treachery, death—but when it is all over, they too will be thrown into the gutter of the past with the capitalist, and the brotherhood of man will be here." . . .

Yogatai lowered his face, to peer into the dull gold of the filming eyes above his strangling hands.

"Kossilena talks of treachery and evil things. Do you hear her, Madame Angel? If the Englishman had been dead, the Gay-pay-oo would have taken me that night. You had it planned, even as I had this. We go to Tiflis together tomorrow, my master and I. I bid you good-by."

He looked down at the limp figure which slid to the seat and lay there. A deep shudder ran through his big frame, as though some spell fell away from him. He stood to his feet, and stared at his two hands. The nail of one thumb was red, and Yogatai washed it in the snow. Beyond the railings, the people cheered Kossilena as they bore her, shoulder-high, across the white-lit square, past the crimson flag of Lenin's tomb which was visible like a tremulous ruby from where Yogatai leaned against the seat before striding out of the little park.

Red Square emptied. A black prison-van hummed through the square, now and again, as the night grew old, breaking the silence only to leave it deeper. The tomb of Vladimir Ilyitch Lenin, prophet of the new world, still glowed there, austere and aloof, while the body of a Communist girl froze on a seat in the little park. . . .

The driver and stoker of the small locomotive which brought supplies up to the Ekaterinovskiy timber-camp had

died of typhus. There was a new crew on the footplate—prisoners Numbers 3437 and 3438, the little American engineer and his big countryman. It was all quite satisfactory and approved. The little fellow's spirit was knouted out of him, and the big one had always been well-behaved. Number 3437 was a clever engineer and 3438 was strong and healthy. So each day now they drove the clanking little supply-train from the rail-head ten miles away to the hideous wilderness of mud and malaria which was the Ekaterinovskiy. For close upon a fortnight they had been thus engaged.

"Better than tree-felling, I'll say," said Nick Gunter simply, "though of course"—cocking an expressionless eye at Worden—"there's no more chance of an escape than a bull has from a slaughterman's corral, if that's the idea. Wouldn't go without your sweetie, anyway, would you, buddy?"

This was one day in the middle of the forest, when Nick Gunter had swung himself back on to the footplate after going through a certain engineer's ritual he hardly ever neglected—which was to stop the train about a mile from the camp, and clean out the red-rusted points of a certain loop in the crazy rails. At first the two soldiers who rode on the freight wagon accompanied him suspiciously; but later they only watched him with indifference from their perch.

"But," said Nick, setting the little locomotive a-tremble again, "if you could take her as well, and get, say, a comfortable passage aboard a sort of swell liner down the river to somewhere, it'd be another matter, wouldn't it?"

"Nick,"—Worden found excitement shooting through him,—*"are you drunk?"*

Gunter turned from his regulator. The flogged and humiliated little man who had sobbed and cursed at night in the prison-hut was not there. This was the slightly cock-a-hoop Nick Gunter of Moscow again.

"Nope—no such luck. Skin your eyes on that, quick as you can, then snap it into the furnace! I found it in those points I just cleaned. Take it in quick."

It was a piece of screwed-up paper, with a sentence written upon it.

"The little one and I will be ready, this morning, by the timber-lagoon. I shall wear a red kerchief. When you see it, follow it."

That was all.

"Maryanka," said Nick Gunter simply, wiping his hands on a piece of oily rag. "She's been playing 'Babe in the Wood' ever since we came. Those points have been our mail-office for days. *Poste Restante*—to be left till called for! Gotta let you into the secret now, pard. I hid it before for safety. Know what cargo's aboard this morning?"

"Dynamite," answered Worden slowly, staring at his companion. That Maryanka had followed to the timber-camp hit him with a gasp of wonder and excitement.

THE locomotive, volleying from her long funnel, began to quicken. She was pushing her load, this morning, with the two wagons, upon which the guards were perched, ahead of her. Through the forest twilight she thrust, at a good ten miles an hour.

"And nitro-glycerin," said Gunter with relish. "Cartridges and kegs, for the quarries. We'll blow hell into the camp to begin with, and create a diversion. Little Nicholas quits being a good boy from now on. Sorry, pard, if it's sudden."

"Not the prison-huts?" Worden began to see a glimmering of the little engineer's desperate plan. Gunter had dropped it like a thunderbolt, but he was ready for it.

"Nope. Where do these rails finish? Why, outside the

quarters of these mangy knout-wallopers an' their commandants, sez you. And if this little loco sails on without stopping, what does she hit and make a holy hades out of? *Them!* And the guards for miles round get the ear-crack, and come runnin' like all Russians when they hear a bang. But you and me have jumped, and sloped off to that red kerchief which takes charge from then on. Hold tight till I yell. We're coming to it. Don't worry about the dames now. They're all right, I tell you."

Nick Gunter fell silent. Worden saw him like a little sliver of whipcord with his hand on the regulator. Ahead, the forest opened into the camp-clearing with its concrete buildings and guard-huts. Across Worden, when he saw it, a savage pleasure swept, and then blew away into calmness, and he knew that the resignation he had forced upon himself until then was purely artificial—merely a waiting for something like this.

The little train clattered forward into the clearing. Nick Gunter shut off steam, pretending to slow down.

"More sabotage," Worden heard him murmur, "and another hole in the pants of the little old Five-year! Oh, Nick boy!"

He opened the throttle with a violence that made the engine shudder with a flurry of wheels before they bit again.

"Jump!" he snapped.

They hit the ground side by side, while the train with its freight of explosives went reeling crazily along the hundred yards of rail that remained. Nick Gunter wound his arm round Worden's neck and held him there. There were a dozen palpitating seconds and then, prompt as the percussion of a mine, a red mushroom of fire that seemed to ribbon to the very tree-tops, blotted out the daylight. The ground where they lay rocked and rolled them over; a great spatter of wreckage sang over their heads, with the echo of the reverberation. Then there was silence. . . .

Worden found himself running. Something warm was on his ear-lobes—blood. He saw Nick Gunter gesticulating, but could catch nothing he said. They were among the trees an instant later, and then knee-deep in a sucking swamp. Climbing out of it, Nick Gunter pulled him aside from the rusty jaws of some trap that snapped together with a flash of copper sparks as they passed it. In the clearing behind, gray smoke poured, and guards were running from every point. A soldier stood in their path, his hand falling mechanically to his holster at the sight of them. Just in time, Worden's fist made contact with the man's chin, and dropped him, snatching the revolver as he went down.

"See?"—he could just hear Gunter now. The little man was pointing. Between the aisles of the tree-trunks,



"The punishment-guy—a Kalmuck—was just getting to work in dandy fashion, when suddenly there's a rifle-crack and the Kalmuck bumps to the ground with a hole in his head."

a red kerchief moved forward, and by its side, as Worden realized with a leap of his heart, was a second kerchief. They were making down to where the timber-lagoon glistened through the

forest, vanishing now and again, as figures came pouring out to the clearing, but always reappearing, and moving by the thickest and most roundabout route for the big, still pool where the felled logs floated.

The red kerchief was running along the mud and concrete outer wall of the timber-lagoon now, and Maryanka turned for a moment to wave. The gesture was in the nature of a warning. Maryanka had everything in hand.

"Get down!" commanded Nick Gunter, who seemed to understand the signal.

He and Worden had reached the bank of the river, where the turgid water, though winter was nearly upon it, still slipped past smoothly, bearing the giant logs as they swung out into the current, chained by half-dozens into rafts the size of barges. Peering through the willows, it seemed to Worden that the two girls had vanished. The lagoon also was deserted.

"Guards've rounded 'em up and drove everybody back home," explained Nick Gunter, whose eyes now showed bloodshot with excitement. "That's the orders if anything happened in camp. We banked on that, Maryanka and me."

"They mustn't know we got away by the river, if that's the way we're going. Is it one of those rafts, Nick?"

"Got it. The one that just nosed out of the lagoon."

"Menjinsky!" He laughed. "Here I am!" He dropped lightly past the cupola . . . toppled down into the courtyard with the shining insignia of a régime long dead, flying about him.



That's the Volga boat, if you don't know it. She'll keep going till the freeze-up. You look close, boy, and see if you can't see two heads close underneath by the front chain. There aint no red hanky on one, now—and the other you oughta know all right. As it slips past, we dive."

"Listen!"—there was another dull explosion in the distant camp, smaller than the first, but violent enough.

"Trust the Ivans to sky any explosive that doesn't happen to have gone off, the left-handed sapheads!" said Nick Gunter calmly. "Now we dive. Keep soused right under and allow for the current. It's cold."

The icy water took them both. Worden kept under with tight lungs, and a body that fought little whirlpools which would have lifted him to the surface. His thoughts were clear and grim. What was to happen when the raft took them clear of the Ekaterinovskiy—if it did—scarcely crossed his mind. One thing was certain. Recapture meant the wall, and a firing-squad for all of them. . . .

He came up to daylight with the black bulk of the raft looming above him, and felt an almost savage happiness pass through him as he spoke Elsa's name.

Her head was just above water, where she clung to the chain, the hair dank on her brow as she looked at him.

"There's an hour of this before we get out of sight of the camp, Maryanka says. You're not hurt in any way, John?" she asked anxiously, through chattering teeth.

"No. We can't last an hour or anything like, I don't believe. It can't be very far from freezing. Look at the reunion of Nick and Maryanka!"—for, on the other chain that bound the logs together, Nick Gunter had his free arm around his sweetheart's neck, and Maryanka, with mingled anxiety and delight was obviously making sure that he still loved her, though she was no longer fat and soft. Worden's eyes returned to Elsa. "You can stick this? It's terrible for you."

"I can stick nearly anything, now we're out of that place, and—and clear of Moscow, too. I expect we're in just as big danger as we were in Moscow, but somehow—I can stand it." The water, rippling past, made her eyes look darker. She shook her wet, cropped head and gave a laugh that was cold and shivery, yet happy. "Maryanka knows all about this raft. There's a sort of little cubby-hole between three of the trunks, and she's brought a tarpaulin to fix over it; she's provisioned it too, even to an oil-stove—all stolen from the camp. We shall be *Huckleberry Finns* of the Volga—if this is the Volga."

"I don't know what it is yet. Probably some tributary coming down from the Urals." Worden scanned the low shore.

It was strange to think that while they talked, almost submerged in that heart-stopping water, machine-gun fire might burst out at any moment to end their conversation. "I only heard half an hour ago of the marvelous Maryanka. How did she get you here?"

"She joined the women this morning. I looked up and saw her working by my side like one of us. We were not very distinguishable from each other except by our numbers. And Maryanka had her number complete. When the explosion happened, the guards rounded us up. But Maryanka and I slipped away. . . . She's been living in a sort of cave over the river and came across in a little fisherman's boat at night to do her pilfering."

Elsa stopped talking at a sound which floated from the shore. It was the deep, baying cry of bloodhounds. Two or three dark objects were visible moving at the water's edge. Worden remembered quickly that the hound-kennels were not far from the buildings which the dynamite-train had stuck. Probably the brutes which were not destroyed were roaming at large, and these were they, driven by the hunting instinct that was stronger than panic, to the river-bank.

"One of them is swimming out to us," he said quietly.

In all likelihood, the wind had carried their scent over the water. There was a wolf-strain in most of the hounds that were used for man-hunting, which made them powerful swimmers. Worden felt for the revolver he had plucked from the soldier, though he thought it was more than likely that the water had penetrated the cartridges.

But the beast stopped paddling, threw up its muzzle, and whined. The water was colder than it had expected,

and the raft of logs evidently a suspicious and menacing object. It turned reluctantly, and paddled for shore again, after one sharp bark.

"Luck number one, unless one of the guards saw him," Worden commented.

A bluish shadow was creeping upon the faces of all four of the fugitives, as they clung in the biting water. Shivering, before the last sensation should leave their bodies, they climbed on to the logs, lying low while their raft slowly carried them round the bend, and the Ekaterinovskiy lumber-camp was swallowed in the mist of the marshes.

"Reckon this is about the last packet of timber to leave the Ekaterinovskiy by water till next spring. And this won't go much farther."

It was Nick Gunter who spoke, some hours later, as darkness fell. There was a cavity beneath one of the logs where, under the tarpaulin, the two girls dried their clothes at Maryanka's stove while Worden and Gunter worked with axes to hew some sort of rough dug-out and restore their circulation. It was bitterly cold, and Gunter pointed with a grim look to a scum of ice on the water, as he made his remark. If the raft was held up by ice within sleigh-distance of the Ekaterinovskiy the outlook would be black.

"The freeze comes later here, but it comes. We must be nearly a thousand miles southeast of Moscow," said Worden; "somewhere in the Cossack country."

"The Cossacks can keep it," said Gunter, staring at the flat wilderness with his teeth chattering.

Not one of the four but realized how nearly hopeless was their chance of ultimate escape. Yet, when darkness came, there was laughter, with an unfamiliar sound about it, in what Nick Gunter christened the "stateroom." Maryanka had broken into the stores of the camp, the night before. By some means knowing when the raft was to be poled into the river, it had been possible to hide her booty upon it—canned foods, a stove, blocks of fuel, even two fur coats belonging to the camp-commandant, and a hundred rubles in money which was her own. But, more than that, Maryanka had also purloined an accordion which Nick Gunter—who it appeared was an accordion-virtuoso—seized upon with the hunger of an artist. Far into the night he whined softly upon it, accompanied by Maryanka in a voice like a nightingale.

NEXT morning, though there was blue sky and sunshine, thin ice was grinding about the raft, turning its movement to a sluggish drift. The distance they had covered from the Ekaterinovskiy, Worden computed, was about forty miles by water. For all he knew, by land it might be no more than four and the hunt would be up at the Ekaterinovskiy. . . .

"We shall freeze in tonight," said Nick Gunter with a return of his prison-camp gauntness. "Everybody think up what to do next, and we'll pool the notions."

His prophecy came true. With daylight again, the raft lay motionless on an iron-gray floor which would be her resting-place for the next four months. It was Worden and Nick Gunter who stood staring with unspoken despair over the desolate landscape which seemed to stretch to infinity, broken by nothing. It was Elsa and Maryanka who came forward with a handful of the iron dowels which had helped to clamp the logs together.

"One can skate on ice," said Maryanka calmly, "and in Moscow we made our own skates out of these. I know how. You, little Nicholas, who are so good at working dynamos and locomotives, will help me. We shall reach some Cossack village."

"And then?" Worden could not but ask.

"And then, we continue to trust in the good God. I find that I believe in Him in spite of what the razor-nosed

teacher at the Communist school taught me. Also," added Maryanka,—suddenly pagan again,—"I have a hundred rubles, which means a hundred separate religions to buy salvation with—and little Nicholas has his accordion."

Elsa knew that Maryanka carried a small butcher's knife in her heavy boot with which to prevent herself and her little Nicholas from being taken back to the penal-camp, to be shot—and before that probably tortured—if they were captured. Quite naïvely, the Russian girl presumed that the soldier's revolver which John Worden carried would be used for the same purpose, and Elsa, with the Russian part of her, told herself that she would try to make sure that it was.

THEY reached a Cossack village of miserable log huts at nightfall, after the rough skates had fallen to pieces on their feet. There was a little quay, plastered with propaganda posters and the inevitable loud-speaker was quavering, but with such a grotesquely distorted sound that it was obvious the inhabitants of the village had lost interest in it long ago.

Maryanka stood thoughtfully before the posters. She pointed in silence to one that was scarcely legible. Half-hidden among the lurid Soviet pictures, it announced that the Proletarian Circus of Igor Isvolski, of Moscow and Leningrad, would perform for two days in the village of Rybov, before passing on to the great city of Tsaritsin.

"So," said Maryanka, "before one ruble is spent, the good God begins to help! Watch! Little Nicholas, have you forgotten the *trepak* dance that we practised on the *Timofeev*?"

"Nope!" Nick Gunter grinned sheepishly, and seemed to blush. "But, say, Maryanka—"

But Maryanka was moving toward the small mud square of the village, with the accordion in her hands. As she started playing, an extraordinary nervous twitching came to Nick Gunter's legs. He began to spin, with his lean face as serious as a waxwork figure, and suddenly he flung out his arms, dropped upon his hams, and sprang high in air again with a loud "Whoop!" Maryanka, just as suddenly, lifted her voice like a bird and the squalid quiet of Rybov was shattered by music. A dog howled.

Doors opened. Nick Gunter whirled and shuffled on his heels, circled Maryanka dizzily and with a streaming face, whooped and danced. Mercilessly Maryanka plied the accordion till it seemed it must come apart in her hands. There was a throng of men, women, children and dogs before the dance was half-finished. But not until the last squawk of the accordion did the two ecstatic artists admit that they were aware of them.

There was a hubbub. Vagabond performers did not often pass through Rybov, and, since Isvolski's there had been nothing but the loud-speaker and an occasional Communist lecturer.

"It is as good as Isvolski's," said a voice.

Maryanka smiled pityingly at the speaker.

"We *are* of Isvolski's, comrade," she said. "We were left behind through illness—and go to join them at Tsaritsin, I and the little dancer,—who is dumb, save when he dances,—and the big man and his wife who is in delicate health." Maryanka, who was nothing if not thoroughly Russian, smiled in a motherly and compassionate way at Elsa. "There were bandits on the marshes and they robbed us, so that we travel like beggars. Is there an inn where we can eat and rest? Then we perhaps will dance again."

WE'RE hundreds of miles from any frontier, in the very heart of Russia—if it has any heart," Elsa said. "We're supposed by the outside world to be dead in an airplane smash. The OGPU must know we've escaped from

the Ekaterinovskiy. And this disguise can't last long. It has been marvelous luck."

Worden looked into the dark-ringed, brown eyes. He divined that, long before, she had given up hope. For two weeks, while they had wandered Southern Russia as a missing fragment of Isvolski's Proletarian Circus she had waited night and day for the heavy hand to fall. And so too had John Worden. There was a breaking-point which everything reached, though sometimes the fracture was hidden. . . .

They sat in a corner of a frowsy café in the old Volga city of Yanovar. The owner of the café, a smiling Jew whose hair seemed to have slipped down from his bald head only to grow with redoubled luxuriance about his mouth, set drinks before them. Nick Gunter and Maryanka practised a new step behind the greasy curtain. Presently, when Stungo's café filled, they would perform a marvelous dance in which Nick changed from flesh and bone to India-rubber.

"We're a drag on them, I'm afraid. Together they could dance their way to Astrakhan and work their passage over the Caspian. Though I'm not sure that Nick is particular now. He's quite happy. The man's a boneless wonder."

WORDEN glanced with sudden intentness at Elsa. "Something's troubling you."

"I meant to tell you. I don't intend that they should ever get hold of me again. I've managed to get some veronal. It would be melodramatic—in England. But it isn't here. Somehow, I should get a tiny bit of comfort out of cheating them."

Her voice was level and she even smiled a little. Worden, more like a lantern-jawed mountebank of the circus than he knew, in his black *rubaska* and sheepskin hat, lowered his face. He felt Elsa's lips touch his cheek lightly, saw something mystic in her eyes. They had kept their love intact, and it lay like a casket that must not be broken open yet, even in the chaos. . . .

"It's worse than Moscow!" he muttered. "Quieter, but worse. I nearly managed to do something there. But here—I'm helpless. Nick's more useful."

The café was beginning to fill. Yanovar, the old city of the Volga, had the color of the Orient, with the smoke and clamor of Soviet Russia. Its old palaces reared their golden domes over the frozen river, cheek-by-jowl with raw ironworks and factories that toiled for the Five-year Plan. Young Communist workmen, with their shingled and painted young women, and bearded Chuvash men with silver-hilted daggers at their belts, who had left their women at home, lounged into Stungo's café.

"Look behind you," said Elsa, "as carelessly as you can."

The note in her voice sent a throb of warning through Worden that gave him the measure of his strung nerves. He dropped his cigarette and picked it up. Shouldering into the doorway was a big figure in sheepskin; it came lounging across the floor, hesitated a moment, then sat by the table which Elsa and Worden occupied. They looked into the face of Yogatai, Boris Vladimir's servant. But he did not so much as glance at them.

Maryanka's accordion struck up, and Nick Gunter came shooting on his haunches through the curtain into the center of the café floor. Worden, with his hand mechanically ready to his revolver-butt, watched the happy little fellow gyrate. To Nick Gunter, public admiration was the breath of life, and he was in his element in that atmosphere of clapping hands and thumping glasses. Already he talked of putting salt on the Bolshie tails by dancing, with his identity unknown, in the Moscow ballet!

Worden found the palm of his hand moist. Yogatai. . . . Vladimir only wanted the two of them. If it was

a trap, how could he shake Nick and Maryanka free from it?

"A match, comrade, if you please," said Yogatai, leaning over.

A ball of paper dropped from his hand on the table before Worden. He lit Yogatai's cigarette; then, still watching the sweating Nick Gunter, he opened it and when the applause roared, read it.

"I am the new Commissar here, and can help you if you wish. Menjinsky is in this city, and everything is known. But if you follow Yogatai to my palace I can hide you and get you out of Russia. I swear I will do so. I am all-powerful, though the fools in Moscow do not know it. Trust me and come."

Yogatai finished his glass of *koumiss*, and flung a coin into Nick Gunter's hat. Finishing his cigarette, he rose.

"Stay here, Elsa dear," said Worden.

"No," she answered in a low voice. "We'll leave Nick and Maryanka. But I'm coming."

It was she who went first after the broad back of Yogatai. She passed lightly out. With a drumming heart Worden followed, though first he scribbled a warning on the back of Vladimir's note and thrust it through the curtain into Gunter's astonished hand. Not for a moment did he believe the note anything more than a satirical intimation that the game was up.

"It was to be Tiflis," said Elsa under her breath. "I wonder what he's doing here?"

"We'll see. I never thought I should obey a command from Vladimir."

"I understand. It gives Nick and Maryanka a chance to get clear. We owe them that."

Worden thought of the veronal hidden somewhere about her, and his lips shut at the thought that, though his desire for revenge which had seemed such a thing of steel when he first came to Russia had somehow all gone, he would have to take care that neither should Vladimir keep on living. That much was only justice. As Yogatai, moving ahead, slipped aside from the streets and began to climb some hill above the river, the brilliant domes and minarets of old Yanovar crashed into view and seemed to promise an apt setting for the end that Worden contemplated.

IT was a strange place for a Commissar's quarters. Grass and undergrowth grew upon the long flight of steps they ascended. Pariah dogs skulked about the russet-red walls, black crows roosted on the bulbous, fish-scaled towers of a church, the walls of the palace were broken and scarred by the shells of the revolution. Not a sign of human beings was there in all that riot of color which Ivan the Terrible had built nearly four centuries before. But down among the smoking chimneys a hooter went hoarsely, and the clang of riveting-hammers floated up. . . .

Yogatai stopped. He looked at them under half-closed lids.

"This is the Commissar's palace. His room is up in the cupola there. The stairs are rough, so keep close to me."

Through a battered gateway that flared with mosaic, and across a wide courtyard where stunted mimosa grew among the dove-colored tiles. . . . Yogatai entered a black doorway and began to climb what had once been a magnificent staircase. Dumbly Elsa and Worden followed. Bats flew from their path. Sandbags and a rusty machine-gun spoke of later killings than the terrible Ivan's. The dank smell of decay was like Death which had grown weary and thrown down his scythe—to sleep a little, till mankind should waken him again.

Boris Vladimir rose from where he sat in the cupola of the old palace of Ivan in Yanovar and made a grave bow to his visitors.

"This is a pleasure," he said. "One gets tired of the affairs of State and yearns to meet old friends. You received the note I sent by my servant?"

"Yes"—Worden knew he was staring incredulously at the slim, lissom figure, which was garbed in the white-and-blue uniform of an officer in the old Czarist guard. The uniform was tarnished but had obviously been carefully cleaned. There was rust on the jeweled hilt of the sword by Vladimir's side. The epaulettes on his shoulders were still touched with verdigris.

"I shall provide you with the passports I promised," he said, with a charming smile at Elsa. "But first you will drink with me. *Yogatai!*"

The wind from the Volga, sharp as a knife, whistled through the cupola. *Yogatai* produced cut-crystal glasses and a bottle of wine crusted in dust.

"To new friends and new enemies!" toasted Vladimir, and Worden realized that Feodora's prophecy had come true—he was quite mad. . . .

He put down his glass, to wave a slim hand to the broken window of the cupola.

"From here, you can see the twenty chimneys of the Internationale steel-works, the new tractor-factory, the Yanovar flying-ground and the smoke of God knows how many other places," he said. "It is so all over Russia. We put peasants into a machine and they come out mechanics. Those who do not fit, we kill. No doubt when we are all mechanics we shall make the other nations buy our goods, either by putting them to the sword, or going humbly on our knees to them. No one knows which, yet. . . . By the way, Madame Feodora is dead. Did you know, Worden?"

"Dead?" Worden shut his hand tight. But even that seemed a part of the fantasy of the moment.

"She was strangled in a park—I'm not sure who by, but I suspect. They kept her in the mortuary for three days, thinking she was an ordinary Communist girl who had become a victim of some man's biological insanity. But she was accorded a magnificent funeral. Menjinsky was there."

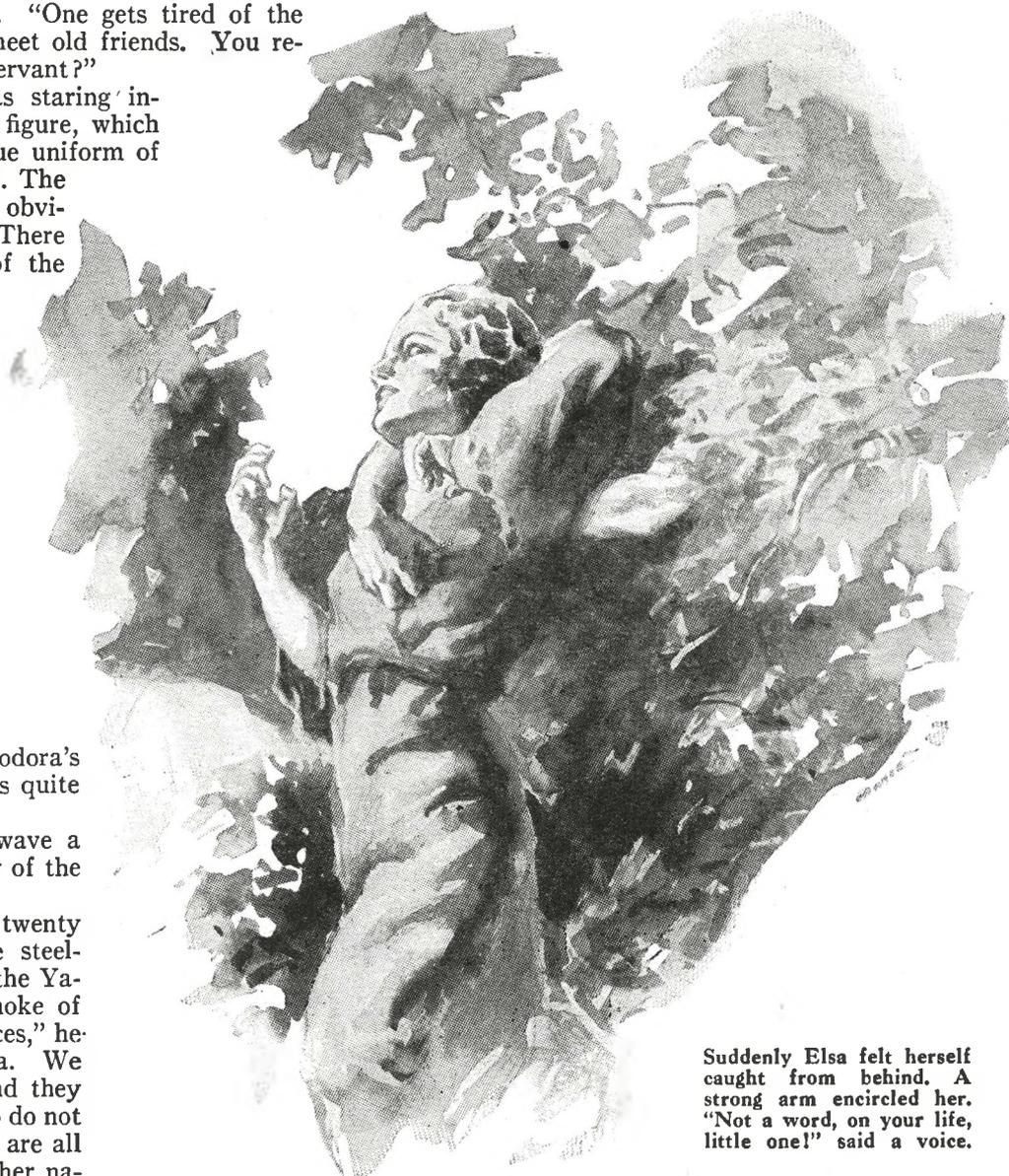
"But, man,"—Worden forced calm to his voice,—"you said Menjinsky was in this place."

"He will be here, quite soon."

"For whom?" demanded Worden, putting his hand to his pocket. Vladimir saw the movement with the ghost of a smile on his ivory-pale face.

"For me. Be careful, Worden; *Yogatai* is very sharp-eyed. No killing now, by anybody. Menjinsky wants me. They promised me Tiflis,"—Vladimir's voice sank,—"but they have made Tiflis like this, iron-works and Soviets and *fabkoms* and the brotherhood—the brotherhood of a greasy-handed scum! How long have we been in the palace of my ancestor, Ivan the Terrible, waiting for Menjinsky, *Yogatai?*"

"Five days, master," *Yogatai* answered impassively. "There is not much longer to wait."



Suddenly Elsa felt herself caught from behind. A strong arm encircled her. "Not a word, on your life, little one!" said a voice.

As he spoke, the Mongol pointed through the broken window of the cupola. In the courtyard a full hundred feet below, Worden and Elsa could see that some people were stirring, where before there had been silence and emptiness. A little shaggy man in a heavy fur cloak came through the archway and stood gazing curiously at the palace of Ivan. He was joined by half a dozen others, wearing the long, bottle-green greatcoats of the *Ogpu*.

"It was a pity you throttled the Bright Angel, *Yogatai,*" said Vladimir querulously. His eyes were changing to an opalescent green. "But for that, it would have been she, and not that tow-headed goat. The Bright Angel belonged to old Russia—my Russia. She would have washed out the taste of those damned factories yonder."

A spasm crossed the Mongol, but he made no answer. Vladimir was crouching closer into the window embrasure. He looked down past the glittering pinnacles and the crudely colored roofs where the crows hopped and wheeled.

"Menjinsky!" He laughed. "Here I am!"

He dropped lightly past the bulging blue wall of the cupola, and struck one of the slender pinnacles below with a crash that shattered its golden filigree-work and set the crows to wheeling against the clear winter sky—hung limply on the gables for an instant, then toppled down into the courtyard with his sword and spurred boots and the shining insignia of a *régime* long dead, flying about him.

"Back!" said Yogatai's harsh voice.

Worden was flung aside reeling, as the Mongol followed his master, and the thud of both their bodies was almost simultaneous. Down in Yanovar, another hooter went off, as though in mockery, and a gout of flame sprang up from the furnaces of the International steel-works.

WORDEN took Elsa's hands and pulled them gently from her white face. His voice shook when he spoke, but his mouth was hard.

"We've got to think of ourselves. They must know we're up here, and I'm afraid there's no way out except through the courtyard."

He read something in Elsa's eyes, saw her hand move.

"No!" he said sharply, and then, with a deep breath: "Don't you see? The longer we last out, the better chance for Nick and Maryanka to get clear."

Elsa leaned against the plaster wall, and waited. She was aware of a shaft of pale sunshine that lit John Worden's fair head and set his features in cameo against that great chamber which had been reared by the slaves of a long-dead Russia. He was looking in silence at the pall of smoke where other slaves built what they dreamed would be a temple of freedom worth any human sacrifice. After a long time his glance shifted.

"They've taken them away. They don't make any sign of coming up after us yet."

He broke his revolver, to count the cartridges. His thoughts were incongruous enough: chiefly, that he would be robbing Nick Gunter of an act which legitimately belonged to that fierce little man, by keeping at bay, till the last cartridge, a squad of the Gay-pay-oo in a crazy palace of the old Czars. . . .

It was then that the sound of music reached his ears. The thin strains of an accordion floated up to the cupola followed unmistakably by a sharp "*Whoop!*" Where Ivan the Terrible had walked, Nick Gunter of Kansas, U. S. A., was dancing a wild *trepak* on his heels, while Menjinsky of the Ogpu and his officers stood negligently aside. With a last "whoop" Nick Gunter darted into the dark doorway of the palace, followed by Maryanka, their shouts sending the winged vermin of the old palace fluttering.

THE walls and towers of the Kremlin were a mask that never changed. They enclosed a terrific stone heart whose beating nobody ever saw, though its vibrations were felt everywhere. Life and death came in unseen pulsations from it. It saw everything—save the future. . . .

In an austere room, furnished as barely as a monk's cell, a grizzled man with a square forehead and fine eyes in a worn face, looked at a sheet of paper before him.

"This is written in English. Translate it for me." He had the power of an Emperor, and a strength and wit which no Romanoff had ever had, but he knew only Russian.

"It is a note from the Americans, but private and unofficial—about that unfortunate Gunter Case. Some newspaper correspondent in Poland has discovered that the man Gunter and his companions were not in the airplane which was burned in the marshes there."

"Where are they?"

"They were sent secretly to a timber-camp. It was thought wiser by the Public Prosecutor, though it was announced that they were pardoned. Some word of it has unfortunately leaked out. In America the newspapers are clamoring about it, and demanding that no more specialists come from their country for the Five-year Plan, until the truth about Gunter is known."

"So the publicity that was given to the case proves unfortunate. I wonder why that happens so often? They

should have been freed. The day is past when Russia could move on her way without considering other countries." The grizzled man frowned at his own bitter admission. "Who did this?"

"Koregorvsky, the Prosecutor's secretary."

"I will see him."

He sat, sunk in thought, while outside a soft flutter of snow fell upon the palaces and squares, and the telephones rang softly. He only raised his massive head again when his secretary announced, "Koregorvsky," and a little greenish-pallid man stood before his desk.

"The people in the Gunter Case—where are they?"

"They escaped from the Ekaterinovskiy timber-camp, but the Gay-pay-oo—"

"They must be found."

"They will be found, Comrade Stalin." Koregorvsky was nibbling his lips till they were scarcely distinguishable from his white face. "I will see to that. I trust—"

"There must be no more treachery," said the grizzled man wearily. "It does not always pay."

"None," stammered Koregorvsky. "I did my duty. I trust—"

The man at the desk had turned to his papers again. A Koregorvsky who looked more like a little shriveled monkey than he ever had, left the quiet room. Once in his own chambers, he began to telephone frenziedly, biting his fingernails as he waited for each reply. Far away in South Russia a deputy camp-commandant, with his hand bandaged where two fingers had been blown away, trembled at the sound of Koregorvsky's voice, unaware of Koregorvsky's own tremors. In Yanovar, where the Ogpu was on the track of Boris Vladimir,—another good hunting that must be postponed,—Menjinsky's tones answered, with a touch of the saturnine. Perhaps he was better able to gauge the little secretary's fright.

"They are here. Do the instructions extend to Vladimir?"

"No!" half-screamed Koregorvsky. "Not if you get him. But leave everything for the other three, and don't hurt a hair on their heads—may flames take them! I am coming."

The telephone-bell rang again just before he left, for Comrade Koregorvsky who had forsworn all women—his private telephone. It was a seductive and experienced voice that breathed softly over the wires:

"Do you come tonight, *matushka*?"

He dropped the receiver back onto the telephone without answering, and wiped the moisture from his face. Satan was abroad in all the Russias that day, grinning at him and pointing to Siberia—where more powerful men than he had gone before him, for their blunders! One did one's duty and took a little pleasure in it; one kept outwardly St. Anthony-like, and this was the reward!

"LISTEN," said Nick Gunter. "I could just get one of those Ogpu *wallahs* below there, with one of these loose tiles. And there'd be no retaliation! No sir! The others would just click their heels and beg us to have lunch with 'em. You never saw such a change from bloodhound to lap-dog as that Menjinsky! This is his cigar."

The American's face beneath its dancer's astrakhan cap, still daubed with sweat and paint, swam a little before Elsa. It was Maryanka who saw it, and placed her arm about her, where they stood in the cupola of the palace of the old Czars.

"There is no trick in it this time, little one, though it is hard to believe. The cat is tired and lets us go at length, that is all. They came into the café after you had gone and spoke to Nicholas, very politely. There was another with them—that gorilla-faced Koregorvsky, dressed up as

if for a wedding, and wishing to kiss my hand. He told us that we were pardoned—and when Nicholas refused to believe it there were almost tears in his eyes.”

“Koregorvsky!” Worden spoke almost mechanically.

“He comes from Stalin,” said Maryanka in an awed voice. “And he says the passages are already booked to Paris—by the train-de-luxe. I shall come to—I shall come to the station and see you off. He has promised me that. He is very kind. And he says that afterwards he will come to the *Timofeev* to see me.”

“Does he?” asked Nick Gunter softly. “What kind of flowers is he bringing—blood orchids?”

“When you are in Paris, what will it matter?” demanded Maryanka, weeping stormily all at once. “Even now, I am not worth two rubles to you, not two miserable rubles which would buy a marriage-card at any Marriage and Divorce office! Just a little card that I could show, after you were gone—”

“Hell’s bones!” said Nick Gunter with a resigned look at Worden. “Aren’t they conventional, even the female Ivans that pretend to be free women? We’d better get down out of this tower.”

IT was snowing gently in Moscow; the rush for the street-cars was like a stampede, beneath the bright fire-signs and under the raucous loud-speakers which nobody heeded. Dumb and patient, the horde waited in the slush of the boulevards, young men and women with the exhaustion of toil on their faces and in their eyes the arrogance of a generation which believed itself emancipated; older ones, more timid, who stepped back to the pavement from the big foreign car that splashed past with its OGPU chauffeur, and lost their places in the never-ending queue.

Inside the car, Nick Gunter, clad in a neat lounge suit and with a buttonhole-bouquet for which he had paid twenty rubles that morning, leaned forward.

“Got two rubles, Brother Koregorvsky?” he inquired, good-humoredly. “Break out your wallet. I want to make a call somewhere about here—Number 3 Marriage and Divorce Office. You stop the automobile, when we reach it, will you? And if it’s requisite, keep the *train-de-luxe* at the station, too.”

He took the two rubles from Koregorvsky’s nerveless fingers with a nod of acknowledgment and leaned his head out of the window. Elsa and John Worden sat in their corner, pervaded by a quiet happiness that had no words. Perhaps even Nick Gunter’s outward self-possession masked something-else. Maryanka sat upright, breathing quickly.

“You got that passport made out in the names of Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Gunter, Brother Koregorvsky?”

“All is in order,” answered Koregorvsky, somewhat huskily.

Maryanka gave a little cry at Nick Gunter’s question, but before she could speak, the car stopped outside the Number 3 Marriage and Divorce Office. It was obvious that the little man had made all the arrangements beforehand. He stepped forth, pulling Maryanka after him, and called impatiently:

“Come on, Papa Koregorvsky! You got to give the bride away as arranged. And get a move on the clerk if we’re to get that train.”

After Koregorvsky, with a fixed smile, had followed, Elsa and John Worden sat alone in the big car. It was Elsa who spoke first.

“I think I can hear Martin laughing,” she said softly. “He always laughed—even in Moscow.”

Worden held her closer. High up on some building near

by a fire-sign ran blue, red and white, and showed their faces to each other. Far away a loud-speaker mumbled, but they could not tell what it said, nor did they care.

“You’ve finished with Moscow, and with Russia,” he said. “I’ve failed—failed utterly in everything. I did not even want revenge on Vladimir, at the last. You cured me of that, and made it seem childish, ignoble, somehow. We shall be over the frontier tomorrow morning, with the blessing of the Kremlin, that big, blundering giant. . . . I wonder what will have happened to this country by the time we come back, if ever we do?”

Elsa watched the thronged pavement. She also wondered.

“Will you come back as Mitka Ivanovitch?” She drew in advance on the store of laughter and happiness which was waiting for her over the frontier, and flashed it at Worden.

“He’s dead—he died while a member of the OGPU,” Worden answered. “Though his name is still in the register where Nick and Maryanka are very likely inscribing their names just now. And yours, too, is there—at least, the one you assumed. We’ve been man and wife for weeks.”

“It was a terrible honeymoon!” She drew closer. “It will be strange to feel safe. Shall I ever get used to it?”

MOSCOW pulsed and reverberated about them, bubbling in the melting-pot. Some white-hot orator began on a near-by loud-speaker. A beggar crawled on the curb. The bloused and kerchiefed crowds drifted past, thousands of them, as much alike as robots, with neither happiness nor misery in their looks. A Black Crow prison-van shot by, like an unclean bird that had come into the light by accident. . . .

“Here’s us,” announced Nick Gunter’s cheerful voice. “Married as tight as two rubles can do it! Meet Mrs. Nick Gunter. Step in, Papa. And turn off the tank, Maryanka!”

But for all his careless words, Nick Gunter rubbed his cheek sentimentally against Maryanka’s wet one. Elsa’s fingers crept into those of the Russian girl as the big car, still engaged upon the business of the Kremlin, swept on its way to the station. Only Koregorvsky, secretary to the Public Prosecutor, appointed to see the people in the Gunter Case departed from Moscow, sat in his corner with a fixed and polite grin on his face, quite out of it. . . .

The *train-de-luxe* was almost ready to start. It stood like a warmly lighted corridor to freedom and sanity, out of the great chaos that stirred in the dark and waited uneasily for the dawn. As he looked beyond the surging crowds of the waiting-rooms, where once he and Elsa had hidden from the Bright Angel, it seemed to John Worden that he looked upon a multitude of people who searched restlessly for their soul and never found it, through all the centuries.

The train began to glide slowly forward. By some trick of the arc-lights, the face of Koregorvsky, left on the platform, seemed to change and become that of a sad and robbed animal. Then he was raising his hat, still with that polite smile fixed and embedded in the wrinkles of his face, until the station rolled behind.

John Worden and Elsa stood at the window, very close to each other. Moscow came into view, its sky written upon by moving letters, its distant factories glowing, and—visible for one instant by the invisible Kremlin—the illuminated red flag of Lenin’s tomb. The voice of a loud-speaker wafted past the carriage, and died away behind.

“What does it say?” asked Nick Gunter with a grin.

“God knows,” answered John Worden solemnly.

A poignant and ably written drama of life among the strangers within the gates of Gotham —by a newspaper man who knows his New York well.

By

ROBERT R. MILL

Illustrated by Joseph Maturo

Hands

YOU probably have seen the advertisements for the hotels situated in the various little communities which make up the babel of New York. These advertisements nearly always read about like this:

HOTEL COMFORTS AT ROOMING-HOUSE PRICES.
Live at Drumore Hall and walk to work. Free gymnasium, swimming pool and spacious lounges. Social life. Separate floors for men and women. References required. Send for free descriptive booklet.

To hotels like this come the boys and girls who hope to wrest their fortunes from the greatest of cities. There, in the spacious lounge, which boasts not a single window, and the ventilating system of which is slightly hampered by the proximity of the intake to a stable, they find a sorry parody of the life they have left behind in the towns and villages.

As a rule they do not stay long, these boys and girls. Some of them move upward to pseudo-smart apartments on the reclaimed East Side. Others return to the towns and villages, some broken in health, others whipped by the city. Some slip downward, seeking dingy rooming-houses, more tawdry hotels, and eventually, perhaps, the lodging-houses and missions. Every now and again there is the clanging of a gong, and an ambulance draws up to carry one of them away. . . .

A typical day in Drumore Hall was nearing the close: (*Kitty O'Connor, in 2046, who had hoped to dance in the chorus, went back to sing in the Methodist choir. . . . The young man from Wall Street had been promoted and was checking out. . . . The mother of 449, who had pneu-*



"Put 'em up!" directed the detective. "Reach for the stars!"

monia, had been sent for. . . . The man in 337 left the lounge and went to his room for the same length of time he would have devoted to his dinner, if he had been able to buy a dinner. . . . In 1465 a girl penned a rather splendid lie: "Dear Mother: I am very happy here.")

And in the lounge, beneath the imitation tapestries, a boy and girl were following the prescribed ritual. The tabloids, often accused of destroying morals and manners, here were working for the conventions.

He waited just the correct length of time, then spoke:

"I see you are reading the *Looking Glass*. Would you care to see the *Gleam*?"

She hesitated just long enough:

"Thank you. Maybe you would like to see the *Looking Glass*."

They exchanged what a large percentage of the population of New York call newspapers. They pretended to read for the period required by the ritual. Then, almost as if a signal had been given, they both laid the papers aside. He broke the silence:

"Silly things, tabloids."

She smiled. The smile combined reserve and warmth in the correct proportions.

"They surely are; but they sort of fascinate you."

There was another pause. That was as it should be. One makes haste slowly in the spacious lounges.

"My name," he said, "is George Palmer."

"I am Alice Hughes."

She smiled again. It was a nice smile; it represented the nearest approach to the things he had lost since his arrival in this city, which is either effusively friendly or deadly hostile. So he made a bid to insure its continuance.

"I'm a reporter," he told her. "I'm on the *Gleam*."

"Oh!" She rescued the discarded tabloid. "Show me something you have written."

A wave of his hand dismissed that as unimportant.

"I didn't write anything today. I was working on something big, but it didn't pan out. It's often like that in the newspaper game."

She pondered that.

"Yes, I suppose it is." She thrilled as she recognized a little bit of the glamour that flashed through the pages of the tabloids, that must lurk in the very streets about Drumore Hall, but which somehow had always eluded her. She made an effort to hold it. "I am an actress."

The result was more than satisfactory. He regarded her with new interest.

"What show are you in?"

"None just now," she told him. "But I am expecting my manager to have something for me any day."

They talked for an hour. They had a drink together at the fountain in the drug-store which the hotel booklet described on various pages as "our restaurant and luncheonette," "our pharmacy" and "our circulating library." They parted at the elevators. One car carried her to the sixteenth floor. The other carried him to the ninth. Drumore Hall has a rigid code governing such matters.

The following morning he left the hotel at seven o'clock. He rode in a downtown Elevated train past uncurtained windows inside which people were sleeping, eating, dressing. He alighted at South Ferry. There he changed to another train, which ran through the financial section, and then uptown on the other side of the city. He left the train at a station near Wall Street.

There he entered a booth on the platform. He donned a green eyeshade, pinned paper cuffs about the sleeves of his coat, and climbed upon a high stool. Before him was a mass of coins, separated into the various denominations, with nickels predominating.

A messenger-boy approached the window of the booth, placed a dime upon the window and received two nickels, one of which was fed to the clicking turnstiles. George Palmer's day had begun. . . .

She left the hotel at eight o'clock. She took the same route, and alighted at the same station. The exit, however, made it unnecessary for her to pass the booth.

She entered one of the little linen and hosiery shops that cluster beneath the Elevated structure. She took her place behind the counter. A breathless and belated stenographer demanded a pair of stockings "like those in the window, size eight." Alice Hughes' day had begun. . . .

(The boy in 449 died. . . . A girl in 1524 decided it wasn't worth while and moved into the apartment she could have occupied two months ago. . . . The elderly clergyman, who had been a missionary, obtained a parish at last, and departed to it. . . . The first violinist of the high-school orchestra in Wayne, Neb., moved into 623. . . . A girl fainted in the lobby. The druggist gave her aromatic spirits of ammonia and then some food.)

And that night they met in the lounge again.

"Any luck today?" he asked her.

"No," she admitted. "But I expect something soon. Did you get any good stories?"

He hesitated.

"No. I am working on something that will take a long time to get. It may never pan out, but if it does, it will be a peach of a story."

A bellboy crowded by them with folding table and chairs for one of the many never-ending games of bridge.

"You know," he told her, "I get passes to all the shows,

but I hardly ever use them. I have enough excitement during the day; and besides, my office might want to get me. That's why I am here almost every night. It's nice and restful after a hectic day."

"Yes," she admitted. "It is. I can't go out, either, because I expect a call from my manager. That's why you see me here every night. Anyway, theaters and night-clubs are no novelty for me."

The clerk behind the fountain winked at his companion as they entered. The operators of the separate elevators grinned as they appeared together and separated.

"Them two is *dat* way," said the black boy who had carried him to the ninth floor, when the elevators returned.

"Hush yo' mouth," said the yellow girl who had carried her to the sixteenth. "You is the romancingest man!"

(In 623 the violinist drew bow across the violin which had charmed Wayne, Neb., and which he hoped would captivate New York. . . . The girl who had checked out of 1524 for the apartment was wishing she was back in her old room. . . . In 712 a young man hurled a pile of manuscript into the wastebasket, then rescued it, and thereby saved the play of plays during the following year. . . . A boy on the ninth floor and a girl on the sixteenth were beginning to believe that New York was a wonderful place.)

He saw her on the opposite platform one day as he was about to leave the booth for the day. He at once pulled the shade over his eyes and bent low over the piles of coins. His heart beat violently. Rescue came in the form of a South Ferry train.

She was a "swell girl"; he was sorry he had lied to her. She wasn't like the actresses he had read about. He almost believed she would have been just as friendly if she had known that he was a nickel-shover on the Elevated. But the lie had been told, and must be lived up to. Exposure would mean the end of everything. He couldn't give her up. He couldn't leave this city of romance and go back to the dreary, lonely and sordid city he had lived in before he knew Alice Hughes.

All of which, although he didn't realize it, was a round-about way of arriving at the confession that Alice Hughes meant a great deal to him—more, even, than New York.

She too regretted her lie. He wasn't hard-boiled and wise-cracking like the reporters she had seen in a movie. She was quite sure that if he liked a girl, it wouldn't matter if that girl worked in a shop in Rector Street. She was either keener of perception or more honest than he was. She knew that he, and he alone, had removed the ache of loneliness from her heart. She knew that it was the same city. The only thing that changed it was her love for him. She couldn't give him up; she needed him so desperately.

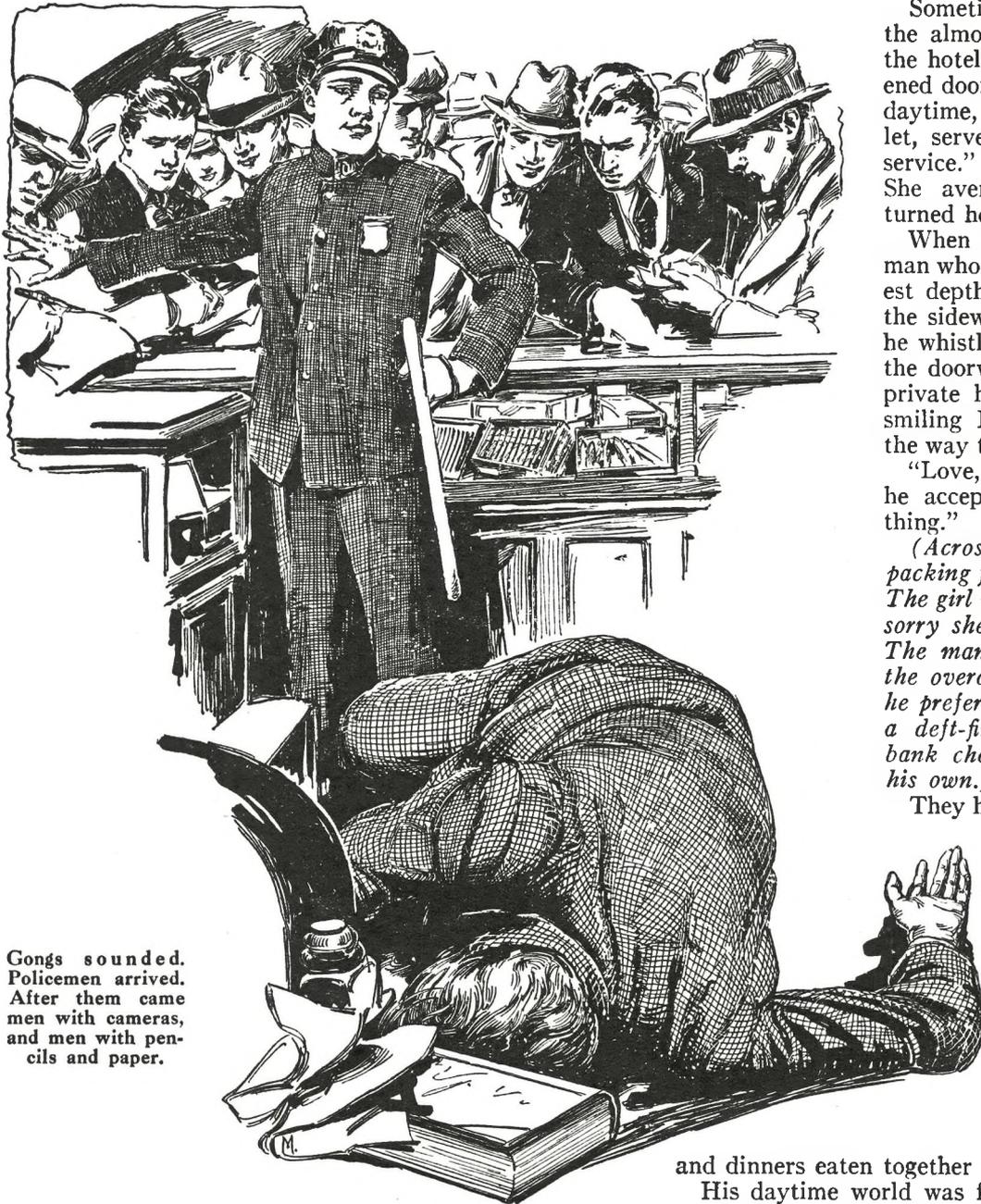
So she too continued to live the lie. . . .

She had a moment of panic one day when a gun barked in a near-by store. The proprietor fell to the floor. A youth, with his collar pulled about his face, fled to the street and entered a tenement house. Gongs sounded. Policemen arrived. After them came men with cameras, and men with pencils and paper in their hands.

The girl cowered in the rear of the store. Then she saw that he was not among them. She murmured a little prayer of thanks for her escape.

(The man in 337, who had been going without dinners, left the hotel in a large automobile with an overdressed, elderly woman. . . . The violinist had learned that New York was not like Wayne. . . . The girl who had fainted





Gongs sounded. Policemen arrived. After them came men with cameras, and men with pencils and paper.

had learned how not to be hungry. . . . The girl who had moved to the apartment learned there are worse things than hunger, and returned to 1524.)

And that night George Palmer and Alice Hughes rode the top deck of a fairy chariot which in reality was a Fifth Avenue bus.

"I don't expect to hear from my office tonight," he told her. "Do you think you could take a chance on missing a call from your manager?"

She hesitated just a minute.

"I'll take the chance."

The fleet was anchored in the Hudson. White uniforms dotted the drive. White fingers from huge searchlights traced fantastic figures in the sky. His hand found hers. She made a feeble attempt to withdraw it, then allowed it to remain.

"You are wonderful," he whispered. The bus lurched and threw them close together. "You are the most wonderful girl in all the world."

For just a moment she felt his lips pressed against her hair.

"I am glad you think so," she whispered in return.

Sometime later they walked along the almost deserted street that led to the hotel. He drew her into the darkened doorway of the office which in the daytime, according to the hotel's booklet, served as "our laundry and valet service." He gathered her in his arms. She averted her face, then frankly turned her lips to meet his.

When they had passed on, a policeman who had been standing in the darkest depths of the doorway, stepped to the sidewalk. He twirled his club and he whistled as he crossed the street to the doorway of what appeared to be a private house. He rang the bell. A smiling Italian admitted him and led the way to a room that contained a bar.

"Love, Tony," said the policeman as he accepted a glass, "is a wonderful thing."

(Across the street the violinist was packing for a return to Wayne, Neb. . . . The girl in 1524 decided she was almost sorry she had left the apartment. . . . The man who had driven away with the overdressed woman was quite sure he preferred to be hungry. . . . In 815 a deft-fingered youth traced upon a bank check a signature that was not his own.)

They have no thirteenth floor in Dru- more Hall. So only five floors separate the ninth and sixteenth. But to two persons they seemed miles apart that night. . . .

From that time on George Palmer lived in two worlds. His world at night was one of romance in which the girl was supreme. There were other bus rides, visits to neighborhood picture houses,

and dinners eaten together in little out-of-the-way places.

His daytime world was filled with fear. He wore the shade far down over his eyes. He acquired the habit of bending low over the counter. He seldom raised his head. During his working hours he was determined to avoid recognition by the girl. So, throughout the long days, his world became a world of hands.

There were long, lean hands. There were short, stubby ones. There were clean hands, dirty hands, gnarled hands which spoke eloquently of toil, and soft hands which told a story of a life of idleness.

Soon those hands began to assume the personality of the faces he refused to look at because he feared to encounter the girl. Some of the hands returned to the window day after day, and he recognized them. Some even had a regular hour for their appearance, and he waited for them. But of all the hands he knew, only one pair were more than a familiar shape. Those were the hands of Red Nolan, a reporter on the *Gleam*.

It was impossible to ignore Nolan or his hands. He roamed about the streets of the city, with his fiery red hair uncovered, on the trail of battle, murder and sudden death. His conversation was as breezy as the streets he roamed, and he carried it to the lowly and the mighty, the righteous and the ungodly, equally at home with them all.

George Palmer remembered his first encounter with him. A hand extended a dime.

"Two of your very best nickels—eh, what?"

Palmer looked up. Two little shopgirls standing on the platform giggled.

"That's Red Nolan, of the *Gleam*," one of them whispered.

Nolan bowed.

"In person." He turned to Palmer. "That's my public. I've been looking for it for years."

Then the closing doors of an uptown express swallowed him.

But the hands came back. Each time they appeared, some breezy comment accompanied them. Now and again, with the roar of the passing trains punctuating his terse, close-clipped sentences, which were like headlines, Nolan would tell the story that had sent him rushing from his near-by office.

Gradually—he was very shy at first—Palmer took part in the conversations. Soon the two men, so unlike in manner and station, were friends. There was nothing unusual about that for Nolan. His friends ranged from taxicab-drivers to millionaires, from bishops to thieves. But the reporter was the one friend of Palmer's working days.

AFTER Nolan was gone on the trail of adventure, leaving Palmer to his sordid task, he took the material the reporter had given him, embroidered it and used it as the basis for the imaginary adventures which he told to the girl at night.

(The girl in 1524 made a telephone call, but there was no answer, so she did not return to the apartment. . . . A thick-set man, who wore a blue serge suit and square-toed shoes, called for the youth in 815, and he did not return. . . . The clerk handed a red notice to the girl in 1942, and she shuddered a bit. Her salary had gone to an invalid brother that week. "Weekly rates," as the booklet says, "are payable in advance.")

And that night, as they met in the lounge, the first rift in the land of make-believe they had created appeared. He told her one of Nolan's adventures, substituting himself for the reporter.

"How is the story you have been working on for so long coming on?" she asked him.

His heart beat a little faster. Was this the end of it all? He looked at her anxiously. She was very calm; her eyes were friendly and sympathetic.

"Almost ready to break," he assured her.

"Oh, I am so glad."

He studied her face again.

"Why?" he demanded.

"Nothing." One of her fingers traced the pattern of the imitation tapestry hanging behind her chair.

"Yes, there was something. Tell me. I want to know."

She laughed nervously.

"It is nothing at all, really. Just one of these cats here said you weren't a reporter."

His heart stopped for a moment. This was the end—the end of romance, the end of one of his worlds, the end of everything. All that was left was a sordid world of greedy hands clutching for nickels. The other world had been so wonderful. And he had hoped—

But the girl's smile reassured him.

"I told that cat plenty. They are just jealous. All their friends are clerks and things like that. Why, the whole thing is ridiculous. The next thing they will be saying that I am not an actress."

He laughed aloud—laughed with relief, laughed with amusement at the very thought of anybody doubting her.

She studied his face for a moment; then she asked:

"They haven't told you that about me, have they?"

His fists doubled. The joyous light of battle gleamed in his eyes.

"No," he said, "they haven't. I wish they'd try it."

He wore his eyeshade very low and kept his head bent the following day. That had been a narrow escape. It had served to show him just how bitter exposure would be. Nothing, nothing in the world, must bring that about. It just couldn't.

So his heart was singing as the clutching fingers, some of them familiar and some of them strange, were thrust forward for the nickels. Soon he recognized Nolan's among them, and raised his head a trifle. He accepted a quarter.

"Haste on the wings of love," directed the reporter. "Big doings."

"What?" asked Palmer.

Nolan glanced down the track. No train was in sight.

"Bandit enters Holman's office—brushes by secretary—covers financier with revolver. . . . Secretary creeps up behind bandit—slashes gun-hand with scissors. . . . Bandit drops guns and flees. . . . Big name, heroism, human interest and all that stuff. . . . Keep your socks pulled up, old thing."

An express thundered into the station.

"Let 'em out!" bawled the guards.

Nolan was gone.

(A maid prepared 1524 for a new occupant. . . . The young man in 712 prepared to mail the manuscript he had rescued from the wastebasket. . . . In 414 a youth rehearsed wearily the speech that was guaranteed to make housewives desire a certain vacuum cleaner. . . . A girl inspected 1936 and decided it would do until the time when the parents of a certain young man decided it would be advisable to install her in more comfortable quarters. . . . The boy in 339 counted his stamps and decided he could answer three more advertisements before returning to Richfield, Va.)

And in the lounge, George Palmer made one more attempt to stave off the inevitable.

"The story is coming along fine," he told her. "It may break any time now. Why, it wouldn't surprise me if it was in the paper tomorrow."

"That's fine," she said. "I do hope it has your name on it. Then I can show it to those cats."

He hesitated, then decided to go the whole way.

"It will be signed," he assured her. "Nolan and I sign all our stories."

NOLAN'S hands were at the window early the following morning, and neither they nor their owner were in a hurry.

"Salutations," said the reporter. "Are the nickels running well today? You see before you a person engaged in what is jokingly called investigation. I am looking for the bandit who stuck up Holman. I know I am, because the city editor told me so. Never contradict a city editor. You haven't seen the bandit, have you?"

"No," said Palmer. "I haven't." He smiled.

"I was afraid you hadn't," Nolan admitted. "Well, the thing for me to do is put myself in the bandit's place. Where would I be on a day like this?" He appeared to be deep in thought. "I have it. Eddie's place. It is cool. The waiters, while they do not rush the tables, have brains enough to know that when you shake the ice in your glass it means you want another. The house buys every third round. Just the place a bandit off duty would like. Duty calls me there. Never shirk duty, young man. Particularly when it calls you to Eddie's."

"I won't," Palmer promised.

Other hands appeared, some familiar, more that were

strange. There were the languid hands of the secretary of a near-by broker. . . . Strange hands—more strange hands. . . . The stubby hands of a janitor. . . . Many strange hands. . . . The well-kept hands of an insurance man. . . . Lots of strange hands. . . . A woman's hands, with brightly tinted nails. . . . A familiar pair of hands, with fingers stained yellow, and which held a dime. But there was something different about those hands today.

Palmer fumbled with the two nickels. He saw that a crude bandage was placed about the knuckles above the yellowed fingers. He saw a thin, cruel face, with piercing eyes. The bandaged hand scooped the nickels into another hand. The man was gone.

Palmer, his heart pounding in his throat, reached for the telephone at his side. He replaced it. It was one chance in a million that this was the man. He picked up a ruler and held it as a man would hold a gun. He figured the angle that a pair of scissors, held in the hands of a girl standing behind him, would have struck the hand. The bandage on the yellowed hand was in the right place.

But it couldn't be, he told himself. Suppose it was, he kept demanding. Then, as he realized what it would mean, he prayed that it wasn't the man. His capture would mean newspaper publicity. He saw the headlines above the story of the capture of a bandit by a clerk in a booth on the Elevated platform. That would end his romance forever.

He shrugged his shoulders and came back to the present as the acid voice of a woman demanded to know if he was making the nickels. He gave her the change mechanically. What did it matter? The bandit, if he was the man, was gone. The chance, or the danger, had passed.

But had it? The owner of those hands, assuming him to be the bandit, had appeared at the window at almost the same hour every day. He had been there just a few minutes before, and on the day after the attempted robbery. There was every reason to believe that he would return tomorrow. Of course, he might have the exact change and not come to the window, but he would be almost sure to appear on the platform.

Palmer thought of Nolan, his one friend in the daytime world of clutching hands. The reporter was hunting the bandit. He owed it to him to tell him of his suspicions. Perhaps, if the bandit was captured, Nolan would be willing to keep his name out of the paper. Anyway, he realized with a pang of remorse, exposure was just a little way off. Tonight the girl would be waiting to see the story with his signature. All this would neither hasten nor delay the inevitable.

He picked up the telephone and called the office of the *Glean*.

"Mr. Nolan," the operator told him, "is out on an assignment."

He asked her to tell the reporter to come to the Elevated station as soon as he returned. He gave the girl directions.

"All rightie," came her answer.

IT was late in the afternoon when Nolan appeared. "Very satisfactory day," he declared. "Bandit didn't show up at Eddie's but that's a reflection on his headwork—not mine. What's on your mind, besides your hair?"

Palmer told his story. Nolan whistled.

"It's a thousand-to-one shot, laddie," he declared. "A long chance." He grinned, the crooked, attractive grin that had carried him into many different sorts of places. "But this is a long-shot town. And I love 'em. We'll play it to win."

(A gong sounded, and a boy in 629 was carried to a bed in a dismal ward overlooking a yacht with the lines of a thoroughbred horse . . . The girl in 1409 had a raise and demanded a better room. . . . The girl in 1936 had hastened the action of the certain young man's parents by tele-

phoning to a noted lawyer . . . The girl who had played the leading part in the production of the dramatic club of the high school at Salem, Kansas, was installed in 1853. All her friends said she was ever so much better than Greta Garbo. And she had the clippings from the local paper to prove it.)

In the lounge George Palmer made one last effort to retain his world of romance, the girl, and as he knew, all that mattered in the world.

"It didn't break today," he told her. "One little thing that had to be cleared up. But we'll print it tomorrow, sure."

Her eyes showed her love and her faith.

"I know it will," she said. "And I know it will be a wonderful story, well worth waiting for."

NOLAN, a photographer and two detectives appeared on the platform shortly after Palmer arrived at work the next day. The reporter and photographer entered a little room in which tools for the workmen were kept, and waited there with the door slightly ajar. One detective remained on the platform, apparently about to board each incoming train, but changing his mind at the last minute. The other detective sat on the floor at Palmer's feet.

"When he shows up, you cough," the man on the floor directed. "And then you duck."

The hours dragged along, and soon it was time for the man with the bandaged hand to appear.

The secretary—strangers—the janitor—lots of strangers. . . . The insurance man—more strangers—the woman with the tinted nails—strangers. . . . Still more strangers—a familiar charwoman—strangers—a familiar broker. . . . And then the man with the yellowed fingers and the bandaged knuckles.

Palmer coughed. The detective stood up. He had a gun in his hand. The detective on the platform closed in. Nolan and the photographer appeared. The camera was clicking furiously.

"Put 'em up!" directed the detective with the revolver. "Reach for the stars. Keep reaching, or I'll blow you up there after them."

"Well, well, well!" said the detective on the platform. "If it isn't our old friend Boston Charley!" He stepped forward and removed a revolver from a holster under the left lapel of the man's coat. "Has a cut hand. Homemade bandage on it, too. And rusty scissors are liable to leave an infection. Why didn't you look up old friends like me if you didn't have money to go to a doctor, Charley? We'd sure have fixed you up great."

"Boston Charley!" repeated the detective with the revolver. "He's a ringer for the description given by Holman and the stenog. And we never tumbled. Is my face red, Charley?"

Boston Charley swore fervently.

"Naughty, naughty!" said the detective on the platform, who was adjusting a pair of handcuffs. He turned to the reporter. "You're the doctor, Red. What's the dope?"

"Could you sort of ride him around for an hour or so?" asked Nolan. "We have this thing sewed up until you book him. We'd like to keep it until we can get on the street with it."

"Right," said the detective. "You go for a nice automobile ride, Charley. We'll take you up to the park. They have a monkey there, and a cow. Did you ever see a cow, Charley?"

"I'd like to see the guy that squealed!" declared Charley.

Nolan stepped forward. "There wasn't any rat. It was a long shot." He grinned. "You might say that you are a victim of regular habits, Charley."

"It was a long shot, all right," agreed the detective. "The

guy who holds the ticket stands good to collect two grand. He's worth that—in Boston. Come along, Charley."

Nolan turned to the photographer.

"Hey, you with the box! Snap this guy in the booth. Then take your pictures in, print 'em and sit on 'em until I get there. Any big words in that you didn't understand?"

The reporter walked to the window.

"Well, boy friend, what can I do for you? Make it snappy. Time, as they say in the classics, is fleeting."

Palmer swallowed hastily.

"Mr. Nolan, have you ever lied to a girl?"

The reporter's laugh boomed out above the roar of a southbound local.

"Have I ever lied to a girl? Say, if all the lies I have told to girls were placed end on end—well, the mooring-mast on the Empire State Building would look as small as the spire on Trinity. What's the plot?"

Palmer told him. He described Drumore Hall. He told of meeting the girl. He admitted the deception he had practiced in order to hold her interest. He only hinted at how sordid his life had been before the girl came, but the active mind of the reporter had the full picture in a minute. His story was punctuated by the noise of the trains and the interruptions caused by persons who appeared beside Nolan demanding change.

"I get you," said Nolan. "This girl, this actress, what's her name?"

"Alice Hughes."

The reporter pondered.

"Never heard of her. Thought I knew them all."

Palmer's face fell.

"That's what I get for staying at home one Tuesday night last year," Nolan hastily added. "They slipped a new one across on me. And now, boy friend, it's up to little Red to make your lie good."

He was silent for a moment.

"To begin with, you have two thousand dollars coming to you."

"At least half of that is yours," declared Palmer.

Nolan lifted a protesting hand.

"Nothing doing. Say, I've written a nice, fat part for myself in this little drammer. Don't you crab it. And God have mercy on your soul if you ever tell anybody I turned down a thousand dollars. They wouldn't believe you. That's one consolation!"

He chuckled softly.

"Hand me that telephone, man-hunter."

There was a pause while the connection was made.

"Hello, beautiful. Yeh, sure I love you. What can I lose? Now give me what we jokingly call our city editor. Hello, Pete. Yeh, it's Red. I work there, or I used to. Say, Pete, if a bright young boy was to go out and catch the Holman bandit, could you find room for for him along with your other so-called reporters?"

No, it wasn't me. All I caught was a cold.

No kidding, Pete. The bandit is Boston Charley. And we have the story tied up. Can you use the kid, Pete? . . . Good. Put his name on the pay-roll before you forget it. He'll be in tomorrow morning.

"Say, what's the next deadline on the Home-brightener, Pete? All right, put on one of your alleged desk-men who can take dictation. I'll shoot it fast. Always keep a little place in your heart for little Red, Pete."

There was a pause.

"Hello, Useless! Got your earphones on? Are your shoes shined? Is your heart clean? All right, let's go:

"A *Gleam* reporter today made it possible for

detectives to capture Boston Charley, notorious bandit, who was accused of the Holman robbery, and who also is wanted in Boston for robbery and assault.' Period. Paragraph. And buy your wet goods at Eddie's."

He winked at Palmer. Then, in short, terse sentences, he finished the story.

"What's that? . . . You bet it rates a by-line! No, now wait a minute. It isn't my piece. Put this by-line on it and mark it 'must.' Ready? 'By George Palmer.' Yeh, that's all. Say did you ever think of hanging yourself? No? Well, give it some thought."

He handed the telephone through the opening in the window.

"Well, that seems to fix every little thing. The congregation now can rise and sing the doxology. No, don't thank me. That would spoil everything. Besides, I really haven't done you a favor. From now on you'll meet a lot of interesting butlers.

"Say, I put that over rather neatly—eh, what? Never knew what a swell guy I really was. Now cut that thanks off. Just hold your breath while I go over here and look at my splendid self in the mirror on this stenographers'-delight gum-machine. Ta-ta, boy friend!"

His flaming red hair was lost in the crowd. . . .

The girl was sitting in the lounge beneath the imitation tapestry. Palmer entered, a newspaper in his hand. It really was a terrible thing, with glaring headlines, objectionable pictures, lurid stories and offensive slang. But the little gods of love had chosen it as their medium. And his face was transformed as he handed it to her.

Her soul was in her eyes, and her fingers were eager as she read the page-one headline and obeyed the instruction: "Story on Page 3," with as much enthusiasm as if she had not seen the whole thing some three hours ago.

"Oh," she said, "it's just wonderful." Her face clouded. "But you mustn't take chances like that again. I don't know what I would do—if anything happened to you."

"Alice." His voice was loud enough to be heard above the din of the tinny piano, but not loud enough to carry to the ears of the near-by bridge-players. "You know I love you, don't you?"

She was calm and unafraid. "Yes."

He put his whole world to the test. The thought that the last lie had been told gave him courage.

"Do you think you could love me enough to give up the stage, your career, and—and—marry me?"

She hesitated. She knew the answer. Only one thing troubled her. She wanted to tell him the truth. But this happiness was so great that she was afraid to endanger it. So, while she waited to speak, she was making a vow never to tell him a falsehood again.

(The girl who was better than Greta Garbo was packing.

. . . A boy in 472 ate an "unemployed apple" in lieu of supper. . . . A girl in 1729 took twenty dollars from an envelope, sealed it in another envelope, addressed it and dropped it into a mail-chute before she could change her mind. . . . The boy in 712 sat staring at a letter telling him his play had been accepted and marked for production.)

Red Nolan stood before the bar in Eddie's. He raised a glass to his lips. He chuckled. He raised the glass again. Then he chuckled once more.

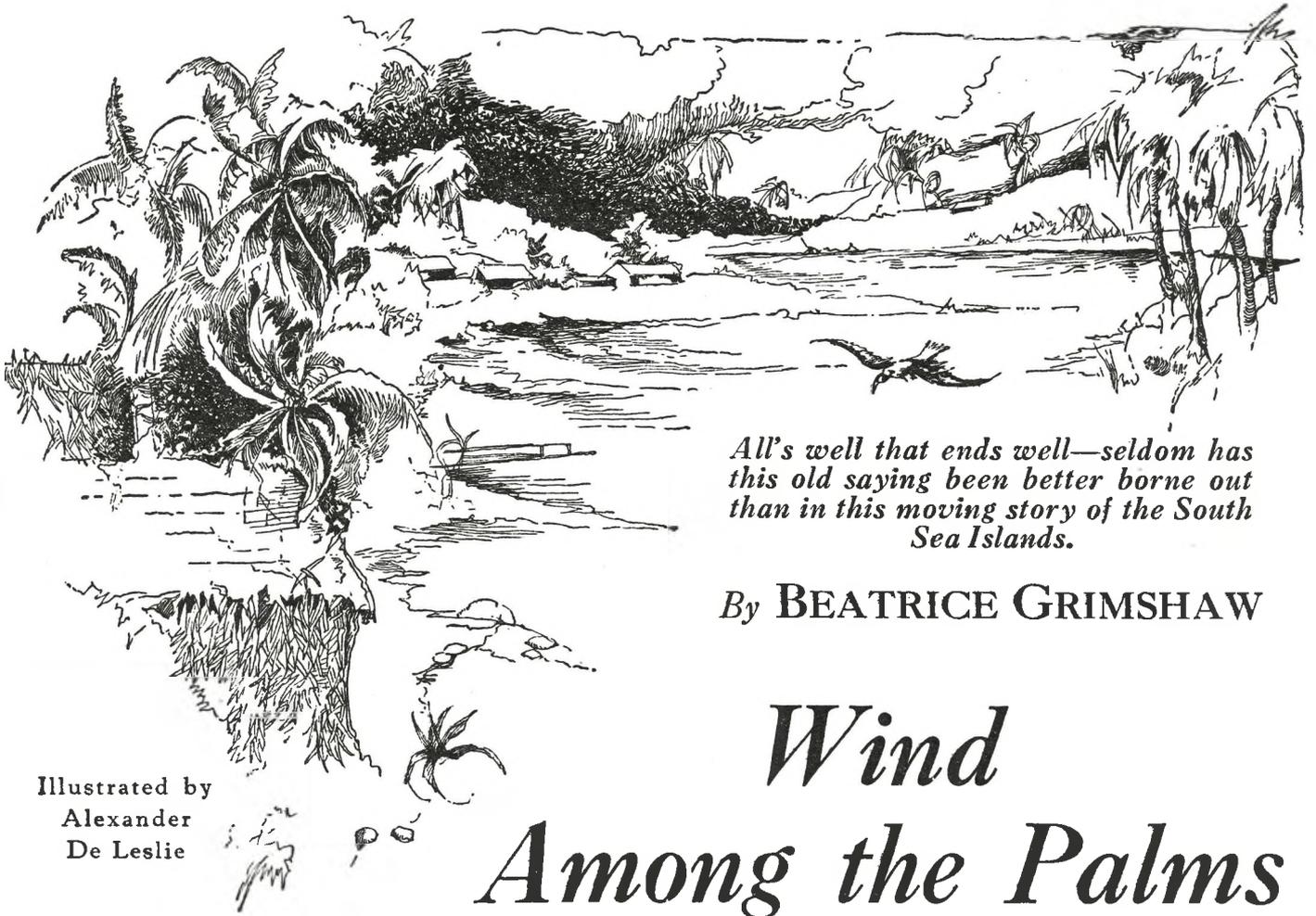
"Is it a drill?" asked the bartender.

"On your way, menial," ordered Nolan. "Don't bother a splendid guy." . . .

Back in the lounge, the girl spoke. Her eyes were shining like stars.

"Of course I can," she said.





Illustrated by
Alexander
De Leslie

All's well that ends well—seldom has this old saying been better borne out than in this moving story of the South Sea Islands.

By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

Wind Among the Palms

NIGHT and day, the thought of the Shebas had drawn her: those islands at the world's end, dark, mysterious, cruel; those islands, where she was to reach the "golden close of love"—where Francis Ireland, first and last of men, was waiting.

She had seen them in dreams, hauntingly lovely. She had smelled the spice and sandalwood, caught the flash of foam on jade and sapphire shoals, devourers of men; seen the dark faces of the Sheba savages, their cruel and splendid eyes. She had felt the very wind that blows, late in the morning, under palm-thatched roofs, rustling dreamily, talking softly of things that only Island people know.

Irresistibly it had called to her. What part of the call was Frank himself, what part came blowing to her on the first breath of tropic airs, she could not have told. But, love apart, she longed for the Island world. Never did an Island bride prepare a trousseau with hands more willing: never to any such, did the commonplace Cook's ticket seem more like a talisman, promising magic casements, and the freedom of the perilous seas. Romany was eager to go. . . .

When the news came, it came through the morning papers, not by letter or cable. No one in the Shebas had known of Frank's engagement, so there was no one to tell Romany Lyle, gently, by kind degrees, that she was widowed before her bridal. The *Daily Mail* broke the news as one might have broken a club, smashingly, over her head.

Frank was killed. He had gone inland to explore an untraveled part of the Sheba group, and had not returned. A rescue-party, following weeks after, had found and brought back his bones. On the shores of the Island they

had buried those pitiful remains. Report had been made to headquarters, a new district officer appointed, and that was all of the matter—and all of Frank, forever.

After the immediate shock, Romany found herself almost angry with Frank. It was not like him. He never failed anyone. He was strong. How could it be possible that he actually had failed her, abandoned her, torn himself away from her clasping hand—he who loved her? It seemed an incredible weakness in Frank, that he should have died.

That was at first. Then came the dreadful days, the haunted nights, when one hated, feared to dream, because every dream was false and cruel. Then the passing of the dreams: the knowledge, daily growing, that in no country, upon no sea of all the world, could one any more find sight or sound of Frank Ireland. One might take ship and spend a century exploring every river, climbing every mountain, sailing in and out of every bay and inlet—but never would he be found again.

It was then that Romany, with utter absence of logic, or perhaps with that high instinct that rises above all logic in a woman's heart, decided that she would keep her ticket, use her waiting outfit, and go, after all, to the Shebas. One could live there as happily as anywhere else—which was not to say very much. And only in the Shebas was there that little fragrance left, that mere smoke of remembrance, which was all now remaining of Frank Ireland.

Romany's mother, preparing for her own second marriage, and rather annoyed than otherwise by her daughter's inconvenient grief, made no objection. She increased Romany's already liberal allowance; suggested that as Ro-

many was twenty-six and sensible she should take a good look at the Southern Hemisphere, and not think of hurrying home: gave her a sheaf of letters of introduction, and saw her off, with all the proper expressions of emotion—and entire inward satisfaction. Romany, who did not want for a certain bitter sense of humor, told her mother that she supposed she was to regard herself in the light of a remittance-woman, paid to keep away. Mrs. Lyle, soon to be Mrs. Wilbraham, passed over the remark uncomprehendingly.

"You talk like your poor father," she said. "His people were all romantic. I remember he told me that when his father was on the Australian station, he fell in love with a cannibal queen. So amusin'! Are you sure you have enough dinner frocks for the *Otranto*? You know, they should all have been black."

Romany said that she had. "As for black," she declared, "mourning is the damndest idea—sorry!—that any idiot ever invented. It's tearing your heart out and pinning it on your sleeve. It's stripping yourself naked and standing up for fools to stick pen-knives into you. I've every color of the rainbow in my frocks, and I've six pairs of dancing-shoes—and now let them come on with their condolences!"

"I am sure," said Mrs. Lyle with dignity, "that everyone has been most kind."

"That's the very blazes of it," said modern Romany. "No one on the way to the Shebas is going to be kind, if I know it."

And no one, in the sense that she intended, was "kind." It was possible to keep her sorrow to herself, to swallow tears silently, and in the absence of meddling hands, to let the sore wound heal. The healing was superficial: pain throbbed at times, but she knew, by the time the first of the Shebas came in sight, that she was once more fit to take her place in the world of ordinary people; bearing, as she now knew most people did, an invisible load, but able to stand up under it bravely, as—she had learned—those others also stood.

On the *Otranto*, and on the little Island boat that followed, there had been plenty of people willing to enliven the tedium of long stretches between port and port, for this nice girl with the dark blue wistful eyes, and honey-colored hair, who was traveling all alone. Romany accepted all that came to her, played games, betted on the ship's daily run—was, in ship parlance, a good sport all through. But she did not flirt. She had flirted, before Frank came into her days, as simply as she ate or breathed. Since that fateful visit "home"—since he had come and gone—something was burned out of her; some flame had died to sodden ashes.

"I suppose," she thought, amused at herself for being so Victorian, "it was what they used to call 'true love.' I suppose I was lucky in finding it, even if I didn't keep it. Look at Mother!" And then, like *Mrs. Primrose*, she "fell into a great fit of laughter" at the thought of her mother's recurring romances. "If she marries six times, and has sixteen children—not jolly likely!—I would know more of love, in the end, than she."

That brought her back to the thought of her grandfather.

"Marrying seems to be a confirmed habit among my people. Didn't Granddad marry an Australian first? I wonder how that fitted in with the love-affair he was supposed to have with a cannibal queen?"

They were nosing slowly through reefs and long reefs of foamy emerald, into the harbor of Malacanan, the entry-port of the Shebas. Romany, hanging over the ship's rail,

filled her eyes with the beauty of the pale shore and the palms that hung above it; with the glow of scarlet reefs peering out of green that was surely greener than any other in the world: with the rain mists that glided over clambering smoke-blue forests. On the horizon, small as turquoise beads, were little distant islands.

"Well," said the voice of the ship's purser at her elbow, "are you trying to see your step-grandmother's island?"

Romany answered, in amazement: "What?"

"Sorry if I've butted in," said the purser. "I quite thought you were going to stay there."

"I have letters of introduction to the Anglican Mission, and to the Resident Commissioner. I—I'm afraid I don't understand the joke."

She looked so slim, so upright, so very like the pictures in the *Tattler*, or the *Sphere*, with her little chin projecting and her eyelids lowered, that the purser felt snubbed, and consequently angry.

"Didn't you say, on the voyage, that your grandfather had been on the Australian station, and that he was Commander Lyle?"

"I believe I may have, if the subject came up. But what—"

"Everyone in the Shebas knows the history of Queen Alicia, if you don't. You'll probably see her on the jetty, when we get right in. She mostly does meet the steamers. She is— Passports? Yes sir, I'll see to it at once. All passengers to the smoke-room: passports ready—"

By the time the passports were examined, the ship had reached the jetty. Romany, set free, saw close at hand a crowd of forty or fifty, the whole white population of the port, waiting impatiently for the boat to make fast. Conspicuous among these stood out a female figure.

"I don't know what that cad can have meant by step-grandmothers," Romany thought; "but if there is a Queen Alicia on the island, I'll wager that's she."

The woman was extremely tall, an inch or so over six feet, and very stout. She wore a sweeping dress of mauve silk. Beneath it bare plump feet of ivory-brown showed candidly. She had no hat; an attendant native held above her head a tent umbrella patterned in many colors. Large, staring pale-green eyes—very like a cat's, though handsomer—looked out of her broad brown face. Her graying hair was parted, combed and coiled; but it was kinky and live as a handful of watch-springs. There were diamond earring in her ears, and round her sagging neck hung a chain that supported a diamond pendant.

"That's Her Majesty Queen Alicia," laughed a home-going trader. "Pretty dignified for a half-caste native, eh?"

Romany scarcely heard him. A horrible, unreasoning fear had seized upon her, causing her to retreat to her cabin, there to stare at herself in the mildewed looking-glass, lift her hands and scan the root of every nail.

"No," she decided. "Whatever the yarn is, it isn't *that*. Father was almost of German fairness, and I'm what Oliver Wendell Holmes would have called a positive blonde. But then—what did he mean?"

She collected her luggage, found native porters, went ashore. The heat struck her like a blast from the ship's stokehold. Men meeting the boat stood coatless, with dripping shirts clinging to their backs; women wiped arms and faces with handkerchiefs. Only Queen Alicia seemed unmoved by the heat. Beneath her gigantic umbrella, she scanned the disembarking crowd—interested, cool, a trifle amused. . . .



Queen Alicia

Suddenly the enormous eyes became yet larger, dilating like a cat's. She took one long flowing step forward, and placed herself directly in Romany's path. The latter, thus halted, was conscious of a curious scent, compounded of musk, commercial; frangipanni flowers, fresh; cedarwood, ancient and suggestive of dress-boxes: soap, rose-perfumed; and a hint of starch and newly ironed underlinen. She was also conscious of the smiting glitter of Queen Alicia's diamonds, under full sunlight; and of an immense and undefined dismay.

"What is your name?" demanded Royalty calmly. "Romany Lyle."

"Lyle? Was your grandfather Commander Ezekiel Lyle? Yes? I should have known it. You are as like him as a young leaf is like an old one: the same tree, the same— Come to my island."

Queen Alicia's voice had seemed imperious at first; now it was soft; it cooed like a dove's.

"I don't trust you a little bit," thought Romany, intrigued, amazed, "but this seems to be an adventure, and one doesn't turn adventures down. Besides, I'm frightfully curious—" Answering the strange woman's curtness with equal brevity, she said: "Thanks—I should like to; how do you get there?"

They got there in a launch that was more like Queen Elizabeth's royal barge than anything else—a gilded, scarlet-enameled, velvet-cushioned craft, fitted, as a touch of modernity, with twin screw engines that fairly shouted money, and doubtless ate it also, if one were to judge by speed. Queen Alicia's island was farther away than it seemed: fifty miles the launch covered between eight o'clock and twelve, and all the time that farthest blue dot kept changing, darkening, growing larger, clearer, until at last it stood revealed as a fine coconut plantation of several hundred acres, with a snowy, green-shuttered bungalow, set on as many high black piles as there are mangrove stems in a river mouth. Behind the bungalow one caught glimpses of another, smaller and less important. The whole effect was of riches according to island ideas, of order, efficiency, and withal, a certain bareness, due to the fact that the island was entirely level, planted all over, and so meticulously weeded that not a yard of cover for mosquitoes or anything else remained on its entire extent.

Romany noticed these things, with a rather tepid interest. Her attention was taken up by the human side of the adventure. What had the purser meant? And what had Queen Alicia, clearly a half-caste, to do with her or her people?

She had not long to wait for the knowledge she craved.

They had dined; the silent servants, who seemed innumerable, all native and scantily clothed, had cleared away the silver and the crystal and the lavish food and wines. Long chairs had been brought out onto the veranda, and women clad in fringes of dried grass stood with enormous fans in their hands ready to wave away mosquitoes. On the invisible lagoon long threads of silver trembled, each the pathway of a star. Palm-trees, black against the sky, were rather felt than seen.

Alicia waited until her cigar, and Romany's cigarette, were well lighted; then after a puff or two, she said: "My dear, I am your step-grandmother. Did you know?"

"But that's impossible," answered Romany, staring through the dark. "My grandfather married an Australian, and when she died, he married my grandmother, a Miss Mallory."



"If there is a Queen Alicia on the Island," thought Romany, "I'll wager that's she."

She stopped, puzzled, for Alicia was laughing softly, but as if something had amused her and piqued her at the same time.

"Australian—that's quite right," she said. "My father was a Russian-Australian. My mother was of the Sheba Islands."

"But his Australian wife died!"

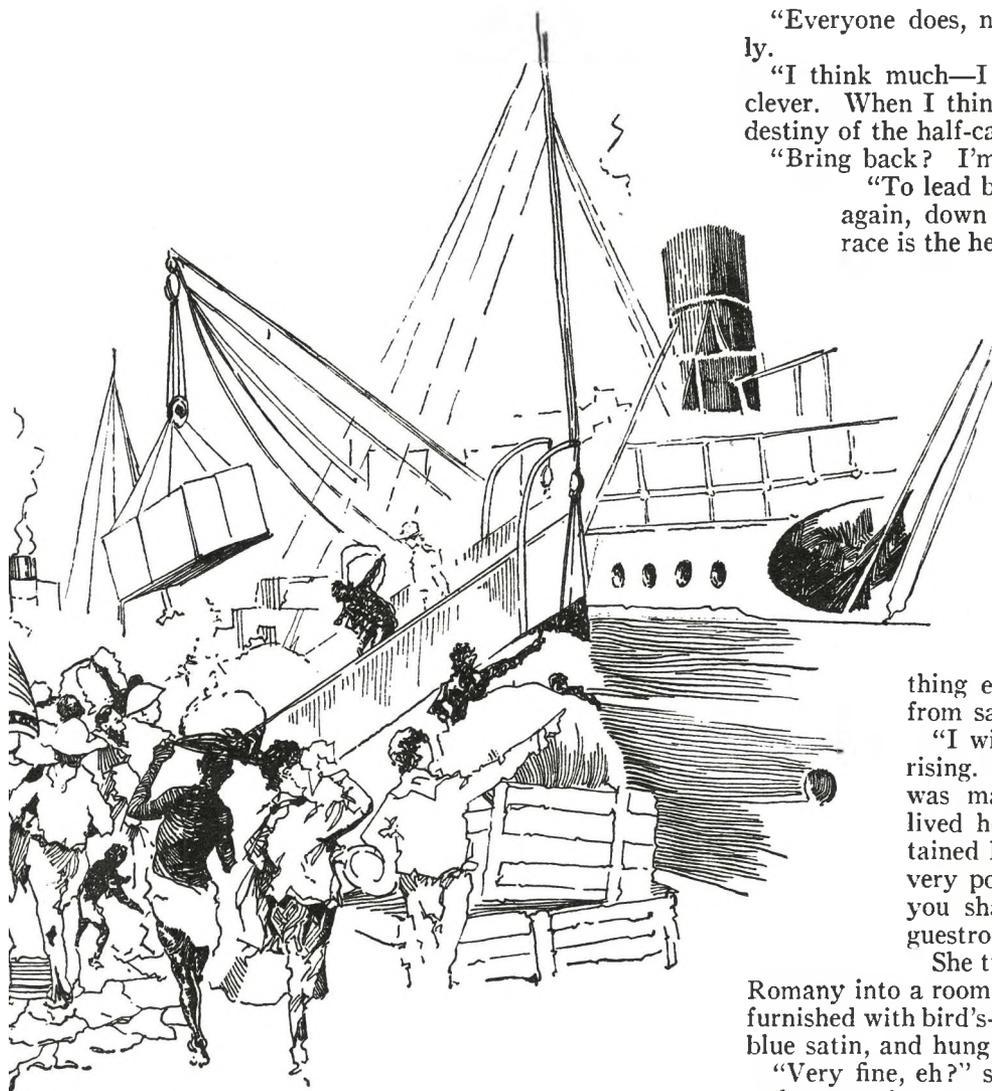
"Ah, no, my dear. Your grandfather divorced me."

This was embarrassing; but Alicia did not seem to feel it so.

"Yes," she said coolly. "We had a son—your uncle, of course. And one day your grandfather found out—things that had happened when he was away. . . . Ah, well! Your grandfather was very impulsive, my dear. But he had left me alone for two years—and my mother's race called, very strongly, and I went back to it. And so he divorced me. . . . Afterward he married your grandmother, and your father was born. But I should have been your grandmother."

"But—how could you be old enough to be my grandmother?" Romany asked. "I'm twenty-six."

"Twenty-six?" There was a certain sharpness, almost a touch of disappointment, in Alicia's voice. "You don't look it—but you fair English people— Ah, I am older than you think. My son was born when I was fifteen.



In the Islands we don't wait for eleven years, after fifteen, to marry. What has kept you 'single?'

She seemed extremely interested in that matter, even anxious about it. Romany wondered why.

"I was engaged to be married, for two years," she said in a low voice. "Six months ago he died."

"And you came here—why?"

"Because—" She was searching for a suitable white lie, when Alicia suddenly broke in.

"You were Ireland's fiancée!" she cried.

"What? Did you know him?" Romany was dismayed. She clung to her secret; she hated the idea of seeing it clawed over by condoling gossips.

"I have seen him," answered Alicia, motioning to the girls behind her. "A great strong man, wasn't he, with fine shoulders and narrow hips, and a beautiful neck, like a pillar of brown marble? Yes, a beautiful man!"

Romany was silent. Alicia's gusto roused a fastidious distaste in her—it was as if she had seen Frank actually pawed by the dimpled ivory hands, aging yet greedy, of Queen Alicia.

"I knew little of him, but I heard he had a sweetheart," said Alicia, after a pause. "I know everything that happens in the Islands. . . . This is not the only island I have—there are others, many. This is the island of my home, that's all. I am very rich. It's not for nothing they call me queen. But—even queens grow old."

She was silent for a moment.

"Have you ever thought upon the question of our native races?" she said suddenly.

"Everyone does, nowadays," replied Romany cautiously.

"I think much—I have always thought. And see, I'm clever. When I think, I arrive somewhere. . . . It is the destiny of the half-caste to bring back."

"Bring back? I'm afraid I don't—"

"To lead back his race—or hers—up the heights again, down which it has fallen. For the white race is the height, the high mountain—we all know it, who have white blood." . . .

Silence again, again the steady fanning of the girls, the faint hushing of ripples at the edge of the lagoon.

"My son Ezekiel married a half-caste girl, and they are dead. And my grandson has been educated—Sydney schools and colleges. But he is as I am. Ah, well, you are here to have a 'good time,' as you say, not to talk about—natives." She flung the last word out with scorn. Romany had a curious idea that Alicia had meant to say some-

thing else and had refrained with difficulty from saying it.

"I will show you to your room," she said, rising. "I am a good hostess, eh? When I was married to your grandfather, and we lived here for months of his leave, I entertained half the Australian station. We were very popular, and saw much society. Now you shall have the fine guestroom, the big guestroom."

She turned on the electric light, and showed Romany into a room that was twice as large as any other; furnished with bird's-eye maple, quilted and cushioned with blue satin, and hung all over with gilded mirrors.

"Very fine, eh?" she said. "Now you go to sleep, and wake up quite rested and happy, and we shall have some good times ready for you."

Not soon did Romany sleep. Lying in the huge gilded bed, with the thin vapor of the mosquito-net veiling, like smoke, the shadowy palms, the lagoon and the stars in the lagoon outside, she thought long and sadly. Her first Island night! Not thus had she dreamed it. . . . Yet she had come—the Islands held her, widowed before she had been wife to Frank Ireland, who, heart and soul, was one with the Pacific world. What a mate she would have been to him! Till now, she had not known how completely they were in accord.

Alicia was magnificent, a true master-woman. A Russian-Australian father, a Sheba mother—a strange mingling, a strange result!

At last Romany slept. . . .

For a day or two, Alicia gave herself up entirely to her guest. Her hospitality was magnificent. A dozen servants were assigned to Romany: there were women to dress and undress her, to prepare her bath in the marble bathroom, to go with her when she bathed in the tea-warm waters of the lagoon, and frighten away sharks with their own bodies, to gather hibiscus and frangipanni and pale scentless roses for her, and fill her room with sheaves of flowers. There were men told off to care for the two fine horses Alicia lent her, to saddle for her, and follow her on her canters round and round the island, if Alicia—who rode superbly—was otherwise engaged. There was a small gilded launch for her, and a Sheba Island canoe—a wonderful thing with high crescent-shaped bow and stern, with inlayings of pearl that glittered in the sun. Alicia, who

was too fat for games, detailed a trained native to play tennis with Romany.

"My grandson taught him, so that *he* could keep in practice," she said. "You will find him most respectable."

Although the island was a plantation pure and simple, with no "sights," and no scenery save the coconuts and the wonderful running reef waters—colored amethyst, amber, sapphire and emerald—Romany did not feel time hang heavy on her hands. She was astonished to realize one day, that it was nearly three weeks since her arrival. She made some tentative suggestions about returning to the port; but Alicia shook her head.

"Oh, no," she said, "you must not go now. I expect my grandson any day, and you must meet him. He's your cousin, you know—you had the same grandfather."

Her cousin! Romany savored that doubtfully.

When he arrived, he went straight to his house from the jetty, and Alicia met him there; it was plain that she wanted to have a private talk with him. The talk was a long one; not for nearly an hour did Alicia rejoin her guest. She was as self-possessed as usual, but under her dark skin the blood flushed crimson, so that she looked as if she had been rouged, and her great cat-eyes shone vividly green.

"Must have been an exciting interview," thought Romany. "I suppose they've been quarreling."

"My grandson is coming to see you," said Alicia, slightly out of breath. "He will in a minute be here." Her English halted in moments of excitement.

"What's there to be excited about?" Romany wondered.

She saw a tall figure advancing across the space of cleared lawn that divided the two houses.

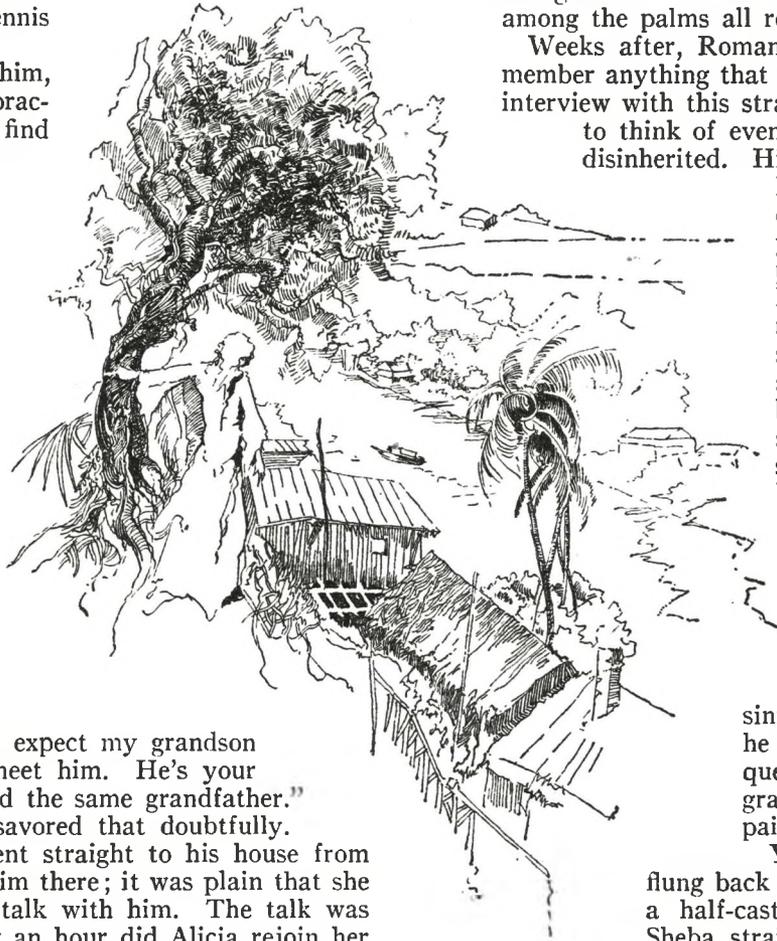
"Enough of him, anyhow," she thought. "And well dressed," was the next comment. Then as he came nearer, mounted the veranda steps, and with somewhat elaborate grace bowed over her hand, "Why, he's good-looking; looks like a gentleman, too."

"My grandson—Ezekiel Lyle. Zeke, your cousin Romany Lyle," Alicia introduced them.

Romany stared almost rudely—she could not help it. This tall, thin man, with a somewhat worn face, deeply bronzed, and of handsome hawklike features, was, save for his black shining eyes, the very image of Grandfather—as one remembered him in his portrait at home. Strange to say, he was a little like Father too, in spite of Father's fairness. The family likeness was there. Romany, remembering her own face in the glass, could even see that the third Ezekiel Lyle was rather like herself.

It took her breath away: she did not know what to say to this strange relative. Lyle, however, was perfectly self-possessed; she remembered that he had been to Sydney grammar school and Sydney University.

He found a seat beside her, and began to talk upon the current topics of the hour. Alicia quietly disappeared. They were alone on the great veranda, with the murmur



and glitter of the reef before them, and the wind among the palms all round. . . .

Weeks after, Romany found it difficult to remember anything that had been said, in that first interview with this strange cousin whom she was to think of eventually as the cast-out, the disinherited. His physical aspect occupied

her mind almost to the exclusion of all else. So like, yet so unlike, her father's people, her dead father and herself! So charmingly mannered, so well educated, so gay, with the light restrained gayety that good breeding demands, yet with such a fount of unspoken sorrow in the depths of his black eyes. . . .

What must it be to feel one's self on sufferance with the best and kindest people, to know one's self despised by the lowest? Grandfather Ezekiel Lyle had sinned against his race when he married this alluring island queen, and Ezekiel Lyle the grandson was paying—had paid.

Yet, if Alicia's son had not flung back to the dark races, married a half-caste and so intensified the Sheba strain, Zeke might have been fair enough to pass muster among ordinary whites. The Sheba blood must be dominant, tending to reappear. For Zeke, there had been only one chance—a mother of definitely fair ancestry.

"If he'd had that," thought Romany, "he'd have been a cousin to be proud of: he has the very mind of an Englishman. What a tragedy!"

She thought it still more of a tragedy, as weeks passed by. Zeke was so pathetically glad of her society, so delighted to talk with an Englishwoman, who for family reasons recognized him as an equal, that she had not the heart to carry out her intention of going back to the port. Alicia did not openly dissuade her from leaving: the Queen was too clever for that.

Alicia once said: "Be a little kind to my poor Zeke. Life has been one long cruelty to him." And Romany's heart, soft with the remembrance of late sorrows, understood (or so she thought) the lifelong sorrow of her cousin Zeke. He could not hope to marry the sort of woman whom alone he would have cared for—and so he would go lonely through life. Romany could never marry because her heart was buried in Frank Ireland's grave. They were sad pilgrims, bound along the same melancholy road.

"What nonsense people talk about half-castes," she thought, remembering things heard on the voyage out. "That woman who said that you couldn't trust the dying oath of one of them upon his death-bed—and the man who said that a Islander's sole idea was to marry a white woman, but that she'd better cut her throat any time, than do it. . . . Zeke is as determined to stay unmarried as I am myself. How little they know of the heart of these sad people!"

Sometimes a small, sneaking doubt assailed her. Did she herself really know them? Were Alicia and Zeke cruel to the labor they employed? If not, why were all the

Sheba Islanders on the place so dull, so afraid to speak? Romany pondered this.

And the next day Alicia, who seemed to have a curious knack of reading thoughts, explained to her how the Sheba folk were among the most backward races on the face of the earth, how they felt the clash with civilization and to some extent suffered from it. The new-caught tribes went about for many months as if stunned. By-and-by they adjusted themselves to the changed conditions; they brightened.

"I wish," said Queen Alicia, "you could have seen the last lot we signed off and sent home. They were new men and women! They will civilize their whole district. These are all new, poor things." And she sighed, as one who felt the white man's burden weigh somewhat heavily.

In these days Romany began to feel as though she were drifting, slowly and not unwillingly, to a goal as yet unknown. The air of the place was hypnotizing. The endless murmur of the reef, the wind that blew always among the rustling tops of the palms, the sole society of Alicia and Zeke, of those soft-voiced, supple creatures, seemed to work strange magic upon her. For the first time in many months, the constant pain of loss was soothed away. She did not cry any more for Frank, in the night-watches; she seemed to see him only as a shining spirit, far above her little needs and longings. Frank had "gone on before."

And the woman's need of sacrifice, the passion for mothering and helping something, encompassed her more closely every day. Yet it was many weeks before she began to understand that which Alicia and Zeke were constantly, wordlessly asking of her. They were asking her to save the fallen branch of the family. She could do it, and only she. The marriage of cousins, even step-cousins, was likely to magnify, in their offspring, whatever qualities the parents held in common. Zeke and she had in common the white blood of the Lyles, that unusually fair race. The corollary was plain.

As for Zeke himself, the outcast, the disinherited, what would it not do for him? He left her in no doubt upon that point. He had begun to make love now, delicately, tentatively, almost irresistibly. Romany, who had known only the straight-from-the-shoulder, almost awkward love-making of Frank Ireland, did not realize that Zeke's delicate handling was the product of long practice and experience. She thought him wonderful. She regretted honestly that she had so little to give him—she whose heart was dead. All she could do was to take that dead heart, lay it on the altar of sacrifice and let it burn, so that Zeke himself, and his race—which after all was hers—might be saved. Perhaps that was worth the doing.

What would the port think, what would the Shebas say, what would one's own people do about it all? Romany did not care. Here on Alicia's remote island, with the palms always whispering, the jade and damson-blue shoal waters clasping the shore in a magic, changing ring, it seemed as if time had ceased, as if the outside world scarce existed. There was only the island and the gliding, quiet Sheba folk, and Alicia, tall and queenly, and Zeke—like yet unlike her people,—pathetic, handsome Zeke, always waiting—and herself, for whom he waited.

It was not until Alicia came to her one day, put her great arms around the girl, stifling her in a cloud of musk and frangipanni flowers, and said, "Romany, dear, the missionary comes tomorrow," that Romany realized just where she stood—at the end of the long road down which

she had been drifting, almost in the arms of Zeke. He had never even kissed her. Zeke knew. . . .

"Oh!" was all that Romany had to say. Alicia embraced her gently, and softly let her go. She seemed to understand without a word the girl's swift longing to be alone.

Now, for the first time, Romany began to feel the want of solitude on that island, the flatness, openness of it all. Wherever she went, she couldn't get out of sight of the houses. She went as far as she could, to a quiet place on the beach, and sat down there, careless of sun, to think.

Missionary—tomorrow? One of Alicia's launches had gone out some days earlier, had returned the night before. That boat must have brought the news. They must have been very sure of her. . . .

She could not think clearly; the suddenness of the news had set her head spinning. Was it her fancy, or did the whole island, the sea itself, look different? Why should the landscape change because— But it had changed. The brightness of the sky was gone. The sun showed pale and greasy behind an impalpable veil that was scarcely cloud, scarcely mist; a smear, rather, spreading sinister and ugly across the entire heavens. The jewels of the reef water were dimmed. Above Romany's head, eighty feet up, the heads of the coco palms were beginning to bow and strain, showing the pale undersides of their leaves.

"There's weather coming," Romany thought. "Perhaps he won't be able to get here." And she scanned the heavens anxiously. "It does look queer," she decided, with a sudden throb of excitement. "Quite likely he won't come."

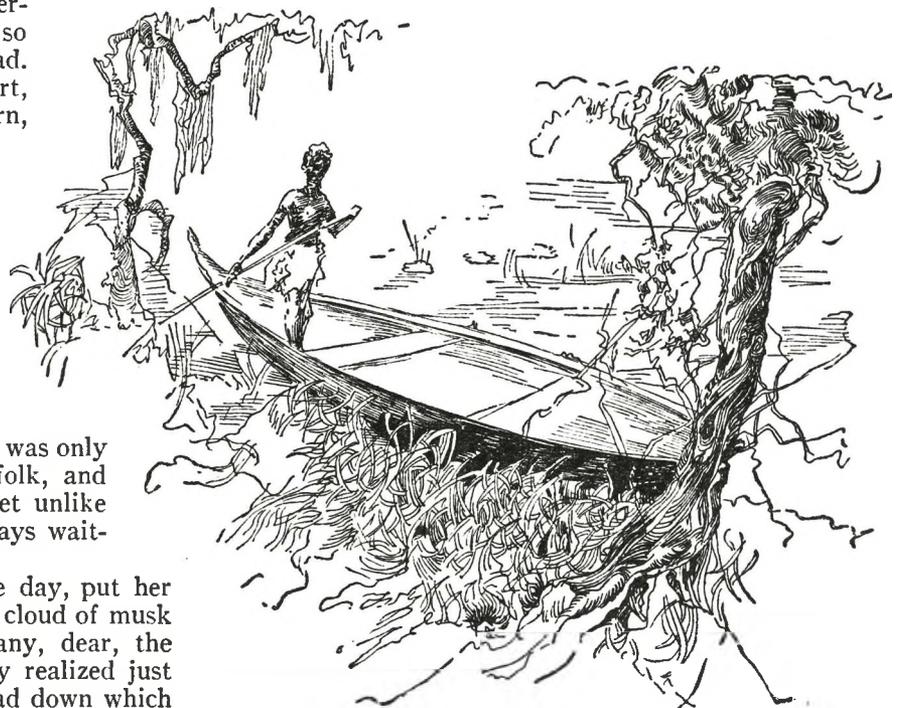
She got up, and turned toward the shelter of the houses. Not now could she find the solitude she desired.

"Anyhow," she said, "I don't believe he'll manage it."

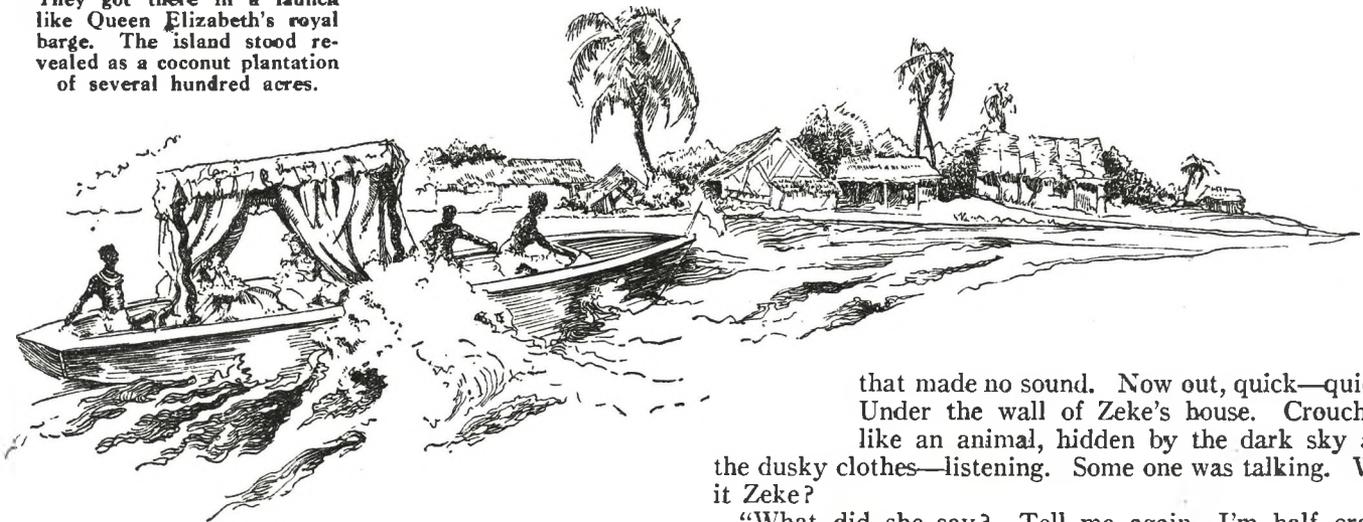
The words had scarcely formed themselves in her mind, before she caught sight of a small black dot far out beyond the reef.

"It can't be the missionary!" she exclaimed. "Surely he was to come tomorrow."

But she must find out whom this newcomer might be. Callers were few on Queen Alicia's island; Romany had a vague idea that neither Alicia nor Zeke encouraged them. All the more curious she felt, as she hurried down to the wharf. But her curiosity was not rewarded; the boat



They got there in a launch like Queen Elizabeth's royal barge. The island stood revealed as a coconut plantation of several hundred acres.



turned out to be only a Port Sheba launch, with stores on board. There was a native engineer, a native pilot. The latter handed Romany a packet of letters. "For de house, missus," he said hoarsely. Romany carried them up, not without a glance to see whether there were any letters for herself. There were none—only a handful of bills and invoices addressed to Zeke, and a queerish scrawly scented note for Alicia.

Alicia took them from her, smiling. "That's my friend in Port Sheba," she said. "My mother's half-sister. She married the store manager. A sweet woman, Romany. You must meet her some—"

She was still smiling as she opened the letter. Suddenly her face grew dark—changed, in one moment, to the likeness of a wild Sheba savage from the bush. Romany stared, hardly believing her eyes. Alicia, whom she had so often compared to Queen Elizabeth—Alicia, glaring, mouthing, looking like a head-hunter's woman!

In another moment the look was gone; Alicia had regained command of herself. She was even smiling as she folded the big sheet of pink paper that had been inside the envelope. Romany saw that it enclosed another envelope, a letter for some one. Was she crazy, that she thought for one moment, it was addressed to herself? Clearly she was. Alicia remarked, with leisurely dignity, "Ah, a letter for Zeke. I suppose he must have it. Romany, child, will you order yourself tea, while I go to his house?"

Romany ordered the tea, and sat down to wait for it. It was very quiet on the big veranda, now that Alicia had gone, and no footstep stirred in the house. It was getting dark too, with the sudden gloom that falls about six o'clock in equatorial lands, a gloom doubled this evening by the unusual aspect of sea and sky. Romany could hear the faint *chuff-chuff* of the launch going seaward again. Evidently her crew were anxious to get back to Port Sheba.

What was that?

From Zeke's house came a sudden howl, like a wild beast in anger. Who could have made such a sound? Not Alicia. Not any woman. A man, a furious savage man, driven beyond all self-control, might thus have bellowed forth his rage. But there was no such man on the island; there were only the still, cowed native laborers, and—Zeke. Zeke!

In that moment Romany stopped thinking. Simply, instinctively, she acted.

It was all but dark now. A dusky-colored raincoat, a dark handkerchief over one's fair curls. Tennis-shoes,

that made no sound. Now out, quick—quick! Under the wall of Zeke's house. Crouching like an animal, hidden by the dark sky and the dusky clothes—listening. Some one was talking. Was it Zeke?

"What did she say? Tell me again—I'm half crazy. She said that they had not killed—"

"The pig!" cut in Alicia sharply.

"The pig. Not killed the pig!"

"Yes. Keep hold of yourself, Zeke. What does it matter? The wedding-feast's tomorrow." Suddenly Alicia laughed.

"Pigs can always be killed. Shall be, too," she said, and laughed again. Romany, breathing hard, crouched closer to the wall.

"Where's Romany?" asked Zeke. His voice was harsh and strained. Romany was quite sure now that it was he who had uttered that savage cry.

"She's having tea at the house," said Alicia. "At least—"

There was a sudden silence. And Romany, anticipating what was to come, sprang up, doubled like a hare across the lawn and fled to her bedroom. She tossed raincoat, handkerchief and shoes away, flung herself on the bed, and was lying there quietly by the time that the bulkier Alicia had reached the house.

"Are you there, Romany?" came the Queen's sweet voice outside.

"Yes," answered the girl. "Resting and thinking."

"Did you have your tea?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Ah, well, rest and think as much as you like, child. Tomorrow is your great day."

"What about the weather?" asked Romany. She knew Alicia to be weatherwise.

"Ah, you are anxious? Don't trouble. If there is storm, it's twenty-four hours ahead. We'll have the missionary safe here by afternoon, and the wind won't spoil your feast. For we will have a feast, Romany—such a feast for you and Zeke! And all the laborers will have theirs; it'll be a glad day for them, as for us."

She came across in the dark to Romany's bed, lightly kissed her, and was gone.

Romany, after Alicia had left, lay still as the dead. One word kept racing through her brain—the word she had heard Zeke and Alicia laughingly use, while she was crouching underneath the window of Zeke's house.

"Pig!"

Hadn't she read, in some book of Pacific travel, that "pig," among Melanesian tribes, was used occasionally as a synonym for "man"? Especially when it was a case of killing. . . . Who was the man who had not been killed, whom they meant to kill if necessary?

"No," said Romany to herself, suddenly sitting up in bed. "That's impossible; it couldn't be! Remember how you cheated yourself with dreams—at first. Don't go

back to it. That way, my good girl, lies madness. And we're not going to go mad. We want all our brains to get out of this mess."

She concentrated her mind deliberately on one thing. How was she to escape this marriage, planned for tomorrow? She did not argue with herself now, as to whether she really wished to marry Zeke or not, whether she was not being hypnotized into it. Those enlightening five minutes under Zeke's window had changed the world. She knew him, and Alicia, for what they were: throw-backs, Sheba savages in silks and tailored clothing! There were half-castes white in soul, though dark in color. But Alicia and Zeke were not of these.

"They wouldn't be bad all the time," she thought, in the light of her new knowledge. "There's a lot of good in both. But—scratch them, and you find a man-eater. My half-caste cousin, you'll have to get some one else to pull the Lyles out of the mire, some one who doesn't know—as I do now—just how black that mire is!"

She decided to feign headache tomorrow. That would allow her to keep away from Zeke, to hide the sudden change in her feelings. It would give her a chance to make plans. What about running off with the launch, when the missionary came? She could drive a launch well enough to serve. Or she could appeal to the missionary himself. Surely—

Like the cold touch of a snake, an unpleasant recollection crept into her mind. She had heard of an ex-missionary—degraded from his office because of drink—who lived on an island nearer to Alicia's island than Port Sheba. If *that* should be the man—

But even if it was he, drink did not turn a decent fellow into a fiend. Surely he'd help her. He must.

On this partly consoling thought, she turned and slept. Storm was certainly coming to the island; thunder, every now and then, muttered and grumbled above the uneasy palms. There would be weather tomorrow. . . .

Even as she closed her eyes, the thought that she had kept back leaped forth again, and pursued her in her sleep: Who was the man they had not killed? Romany's dreams made answer.

But when she waked, to a heavy purple morning, with coppery clouds banking fast above the north-west reef, she knew that dreams were only dreams, and that she had cheated herself again. There was no Frank in all the world—and this was her wedding-day, with Zeke. . . .

Zeke and Alicia were down at the jetty, watching the launch come in. The sea was a sheet of steel, copper-damascened where, in the west, the angry clouds of sunset towered. There were strange shapes among those clouds, burning volcanoes, ruins leaping into flame, a welter of torn and fleeing armies, with huddled figures and red robes afloat. Against this sinister sky the palms of Alicia's island stood motionless, grim, their enormous heads cut stark as iron. Alicia pointed to them.

"They'll be lively enough before long," she said.

Zeke nodded; in the Islands, the palm is the barometer of a coming storm.

"If that's not the launch," said Alicia, tapping her foot impatiently, "he'll be too late."

"It's the launch, all right," Zeke told her. He was standing as still as the palms—very tall, very broad-shouldered, his long arms folded across his chest.

"I've hardly seen her today," said Alicia. "She had a headache—so she said. Probably the sulks. You were wise to keep away."

"I can wait," answered Zeke, somewhat grimly. "All the same," he added, "I've been damned anxious, Gran, since we got that news."

"This is my island," was Alicia's oblique reply, "and my people, body and soul. Nothing could have happened. Nothing will."

"Well, nothing can now, for there's the launch."

"Got the champagne, dearie? You can't prime him properly on whisky. He might be on one of his water-wagon bouts, but he can't resist champagne, and once he's half drunk, he'll do anything."

"Got everything, arranged everything. We'll have the wedding at eight. Did you tell her?"

"Yes. She said hardly anything. Zeke, I suppose you know the law?"

"Of course. No question of undue influence, Gran. If she doesn't marry me willingly at once, she will—eventually."

Alicia looked at him sidewise.

"I've been called some hard names in my time," she said, "but I'm not a patch on you, dearie, for all that butter wouldn't melt in your handsome mouth."

"Come on down the jetty," was all the answer he made. . . .

Romany had risen, dressed herself in the white wedding-gown Alicia had helped her to make, arranged the long lace veil above her forehead, and pinned a spray of orange blossoms at her breast. She did not want to awaken the suspicions of Alicia and Zeke a moment earlier than could be helped. Two plans fought for supremacy in her anxious mind: Would it be best to throw herself on the compassion of the missionary, or to slip down to the jetty in the dark, and take the launch out alone? Something, she must do—the idea of marrying Zeke was, now and forever, impossible.



"My dear," Alicia said, "I am your step-grandmother. Did you know?"

She decided that she would try both. It was scarcely six o'clock. The missionary's boat was even now nosing in to the wharf. She would try her best to see him alone, and if that failed, or if she could do nothing with him, she would take the launch out, storm or no storm, danger or no danger. Better to drown cleanly out there beyond the reef, than be the wife of a Sheba savage, who howled

like a head-hunter, and talked of killing men. . . . And who was the man?

Somebody began talking on the veranda outside. A boy came padding quickly. Glasses clinked.

"Just one for me," said Alicia. "Fill his glass, Zeke. Yes, of course you will—you must. Not drink champagne at a wedding! Toss it off, and wish her luck."

A strange voice spoke, after an interval. "Thanks, thanks. Splendid stuff! No, really— Well, if you insist, but—"

"Fill it up," said Alicia's voice imperiously.

Romany understood, and her last hope faded.

Nevertheless she was determined upon action. The threatened storm had begun. A crash of rain, beating against her window, was the first of it; then followed a howl like that of a million wild beasts let loose; then such a battering and smashing of wind, as shook the bungalow from roof to foundation. It was dark almost immediately.

"I don't care," said Romany to herself, peering out into the dark and the rain. "It's not a hurricane; they don't have hurricanes in the equatorial belt. It's only a storm, and anyhow I'd rather die in it than stay here."

How the wind was rising! How dark in a minute, it had become! There was a young palm behind the house; its low-growing fronds, storm-driven, beat wildly on the iron roof. Romany, although it was new to her, recognized that sinister sound. Frank used to speak of it—

THOUGHT stopped. The world stopped. Romany's own heart stopped, then plunged furiously forward.

"God," her lips said soundlessly. "God, it's he!"

Like a fleeting ghost, in the depths of the storm-beaten panes, she had seen the face of Frank Ireland!

Not for a moment did she think herself deceived; her hand was on the latch, even while she yet whispered the name of God. She swung the lattice open, let in the wind and the rain, saw the lamp blow out, and felt—in a storm of bliss that seemed to sweep her very life away—Frank's arms about her, Frank's living lips on hers!

They fell apart, then caught one another again. Whispering questions, answers, love-words, clinging to each other as if the gale outside were striving to blow them apart, they stood together in the darkened room.

"—It was the other man they killed, a fellow who went with me. He'd borrowed my watch, and they found it on the body, or what was left of the body; the natives don't leave much. So everyone thought—"

"But you?"

"Natives copped me. Kept me in a village for months."

"Were they—"

"Oh, quite decent; wanted me for a mascot or something; wouldn't let me go. I couldn't get away—not until about two weeks ago. Then I heard— Romany, it isn't true—it can't be! Of course I made for Port Sheba the moment I got away and heard you were here. I wrote to you, and then I caught hold of a rumor—it seemed too mad to be true— Romany, before God, did you mean to marry this—"

"Oh, don't waste time—think of something, quick! What does that matter? It was like suicide; I didn't care. . . . Frank, there's not a soul on the island who wouldn't do anything, to back up those two. He could set a hundred natives on you. How did you come? Has he seen you?"

Frank was astonishingly cool.

"No, sweet," he answered, his arm round her. "You may be sure of that. I couldn't get a boat in time—I only found out that this blighter of a sky-pilot was leaving, just as he put off. He was busy with the engine and saw nothing else, and I simply nipped into the dinghy he was tow-

ing astern, pulled a tarpaulin over me, and got here. I waited till it was dark before I got out, and that's all."

"Do you understand? Do you know he and Alicia are each as mad as the other to have me marry him, for the sake of the family, and they'd kill—"

Ireland closed his hand on her arm.

"Hush!" he whispered. Somebody was in the next room, breathing heavily, talking to himself.

"Cham," the voice said. "Can't refuse cham! Too mush? Le' me see f'ler who shays too mush. Naw a bit. Perfectly sober." The unseen speaker let himself down with a thud on a chair. There was a faint rustling of paper. "Dearly b'luyd brerrren," the voice resumed. "We're garrered togerrerr—"

Romany stole on tiptoe to the communicating door, opened it and peeped through a crack.

"He's beginning the service," she whispered. "He thinks Zeke and I are there."

She felt Frank's hand upon her arm again; this time it closed like a vise.

"By God, Romany," he said, "I've an idea!" He laughed softly. "See the launch boys peering in at the window? They're this devil-dodger's own chaps. They'll see what's going on, or bust. Romany, have you the pluck to do anything I say?"

"Anything," she answered, turning white.

"Got a torch?" She gave it to him. Holding it in one hand and standing at her looking-glass, he quickly brushed his hair—oh, the brown head that she remembered!—straightened his clothing, even retied his tie. "More like a bridegroom now," he whispered.

"A—what?"

"Pull yourself together, chicken! I know something of this chap. When he's got about six drinks aboard, he can't see for nuts. He'll marry you and me like a shot—and there are the two witnesses, with their eyes bursting out of their blessed heads!"

"Zeke will kill you—and maybe me too!"

"Maybe! . . . I know that bird. He won't kill people unless—unless there's something to be got by it. You understand. . . . We'll take the wind out of his sails before he finds out. Carry on!"

She followed him into the lighted sitting-room. The clock on the sideboard stood at half-past seven. Only half an hour until the time set for the wedding—until they would expect to see her, recovered from her headache, smiling, snowily dressed and veiled, standing beside Zeke in Queen Alicia's big drawing-room. . . .

The renegade missionary, Bates by name, looked up from his book. Those bemused eyes, that once had glowed with faith and fervor, as they ranged over the bowed heads of a hundred worshipers, were dim and stupid now. Bates saw only the expected bride, and a man standing beside her. Tottering, he rose to his feet and began the marriage-service over again.

ROMANY, oddly calm, stood by Frank. She comprehended in part his daring plan. She knew Zeke would shoot her unarmed lover like a dog, if he caught the pair in time; that her own life as well might be forfeit, if he did not. This last troubled her little. Something else did trouble, however.

"Will it hold?" she whispered, as Bates plowed stumblingly through the preliminary address.

Frank understood at once. "On my word, as an R. M.," he whispered in reply, "it will! Irregular—but the law is very kind to that sort of— Ready? He's coming to it."

"Ezekiel," droned Bates, "wilt thou—"

"Francis," corrected Ireland. Bates took the correction mechanically. "Francis," he repeated, "wilt thou—"

Frank answered clearly, and touched Romany significantly when her turn came. She corrected Bates again, and again he accepted the altered name. Rapidly growing more intoxicated, he pronounced them man and wife, and sank back into his chair. And Romany, looking at the glitter of Frank's seal ring upon her finger, knew that at last the heavens had opened for her. . . .

But there was no time to think of that. As quickly as possible, Frank hurried her back into the bedroom.

"Have you got a raincoat?" he demanded. "Got a dark hat? Put 'em on! Hit her up, angel; come along!"

She would have followed him to death—through hell. She made no complaint, asked no question, as they stepped out of the window into the heart of the storm. It caught them instantly, lashing their faces with the heavy whip of its rain. Speech was impossible. Ireland, with his arm about her, guided her, and held her up. The light from the sitting-room window fell upon them for an instant; then they passed it, and were gone into the night.

IT was ten minutes to eight. Zeke, parting his hair, and refraining with difficulty from soaking it in the jessamine oil that he loved, saw in the glass over his shoulder that which made him drop his comb and swing round as if the Sheba head-hunters had been after him.

"What's the matter?" he shouted.

Alicia, ghastly-green, was standing behind him. Her brown hands clawed the air.

"Romany's gone!" she cried. "I was dressing; I felt a warning—something telling me things were wrong. In one moment I ran—I ran to her room. And the window was open, and the rain was coming in, and—"

She paused, choking.

Zeke, with a savage blaze in his eyes, caught hold of her and shook her.

"Go on," he said. "What else did you see?"

"On the floor—a man's handkerchief!"

"Where's Bates? Don't have hysterics, or I'll cuff your head off."

"Drunk, asleep in the parlor."

"The launch? Quick!"

"I don't know."

Even Alicia was frightened by the look in his eyes. When Zeke was angry, and at the same time cool—

But instantly he forgot her; there was something else to think of, to do. A pistol lay handy in a drawer of the dressing-table. Alicia, twisting her long nails between her teeth, saw him put it in his pocket.

"Stay here," he ordered. "Go from this house to yours and back again. Keep on doing it. Watch. There's not a yard of shelter on the island. If they haven't taken the launch, they're caught."

In the bright room, strewn with Zeke's clothing, Alicia waited, her heart throbbing furiously. She knew what would happen if he caught the launch. Could one hear a pistol-shot, in that storm? Dared she leave the houses, run down to the jetty, and see?

She did not dare. She was not afraid of bloodshed, but she feared her grandson. Reluctantly she crossed back to her own house by the covered connecting gallery and looked again into all the rooms. Nothing, nobody—only the drunken Bates sleeping in his chair, and the wind lashing into Romany's deserted room.

"Oh, my God," said Alicia, dropping on to the bed. "Bad will come of this, I feel it in the verree bones of me! Oh, Lord, it is time I died!"

Nevertheless she waited, with anxiety that increased every hour, for the return of Zeke; speculated, in the intervals between the furious bursts of storm outside, how she might best pacify him, if things had indeed gone wrong.

It was full midnight when he returned, and Alicia instantly saw that matters were as bad as they could be. "He hasn't killed him," ran her thoughts, "but he hasn't found him either."

She did not dare question Zeke, as drenched, wind-beaten, exhausted, save for the savage fires in his eyes, he lurched to the sideboard, and poured a stiff drink.

"Here," he said presently, without looking at her. "Take one too; you'll want it, before we're done with this cursed business."

The fiery stuff revived her.

"What have you done?" she asked.

"The boys and I have quartered every yard of the damned island with flashlights. I've hunted the labor-lines and looked through the sheds—but I didn't expect—There isn't shelter for a rat. The launch is at the wharf; no one's in it, and no one's seen anything. Throw a bucket of water over Bates."

Bates woke, shifted in his damp chair, stared at Zeke.

"Where'sh your wife?" he asked thickly. "Married ye to her all ri'! Where'sh the money?"

Zeke kicked the half-conscious man, cursed him horribly, and rushed out of the room.

Not till dawn did Alicia see him again. His figure, wilder and more haggard than ever, appeared in the sitting-room doorway, a black tower against the flaming eastern sky. The storm was gone; silver-glass were the waters of the lagoon, rose-silver the creaming foam of the outer reef. On its long line the little reef islets, lovely but useless, lifted their plummy heads to heaven.

Zeke drew Alicia out on to the veranda.

"Look there," he said, handing her a glass.

On the farthest of the tiny islets, seated side by side with their backs against a coconut palm, were Romany and Ireland. The powerful glass showed their forms in detail. They were drenched through and through, covered with grass and sand. They looked like drowned creatures newly cast ashore. But their arms were round one another, and their faces turned toward the rising sun—and toward the small Island schooner, probably blown out of her course, that was casting anchor a hundred yards or so offshore from them. Had they signaled the schooner? For even as Alicia watched, a small boat put off from her and made for a little cove in the islet.

Zeke stood looking at them, so long and so silently that Alicia began to fear. She slipped a hand into his pocket.

"The pistol," she breathed. He did not seem to hear her. In a moment he had collapsed, fallen into himself like a ruin and was lying on the floor. She heard him sobbing. "It's over," he said. "All over!"

ON Manly Beach, beyond Sydney, children clad in bright-colored bathing-suits were playing.

"Come out to the surf," one small boy dared another. "My Mum's there; see her splashing? I always go out to my Mum. Where's yours?"

The other, a handsome little creature, with fair tousled hair, pointed to two figures farther down the beach.

"Dad's come on hol'day, and so's Mum—and I'm out of school, and we all play togever. But Mum won't come out to the deep."

"Why won't she come?"

"She never does. Dad says it's a long story. He says Mum came once, in a big storm, and she was very frightened, but she came all the same, and now she won't go out no more."

"Did you see her go?"

"No. I fink I was asleep in my bed somewhere. Dad says, 'You're a lucky young man that she did.' —Come and play sand-castles!"

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson



Bluejay pulled back the hammer; the sight-bead found its object. . . . The brown hand on the grip squeezed.

Flame in the Forest

The Story Thus Far:

SMALL Kerry Drake had been outside the sawmill office, staring up the road which Jack and the crew had taken before daylight, and where the cook had just gone with dinner for the fire-fighters, when the book-keeper called to him.

"Listen, Kerry," Tod had said. "I took the pay-roll out of the cash-drawer, see? It's in this letter-file—this one, right here." He laid his hand on the brown box on top of the safe. Another file was on the desk, and more were on a shelf above it; but Tod put his hand right on that special one. "I'm goin' out to scout around. If anything happens, it may happen fast. The speeder's right on the track, now—right by the water-tank, there. If I yell, you bring the file and come a-runnin'. Understand?"

"Sure, Tod," said Kerry. The fire had grown rapidly worse—had come close. Tod had yelled to Kerry as he had planned; the boy had brought the precious file, and the speeder had carried them through the flaming forest to town.

A group quickly gathered, mostly old men and boys, because the best man-power of town was out on the fire-line, and they followed Tod and Kerry across the street to the bank, listened to Tod tell in quick high-pitched words what a good hand Kerry was to help save Jack's cash.

They crowded into the bank, and a man rose from his desk behind the counter.

"Jack's headquarters are gone," said Tod, handing the file to the man. "But we brought in the pay-roll. Did my damndest to save something of camp, but I was alone. Kerry lugged the money out of the office just in time."

"That's fine," said the banker, pressing the catch of the file. "That's sure lucky! I happen to know that if Jack should lose—" He stopped short. "Why!" he said. "Why, Tod, it's *empty!*"

A moment of terrific silence followed, and then Tod looked down at Kerry and said in a queer, unfriendly way: "Kid, which file did you bring?"

The boy swallowed, with a new sort of thrill running through his small frame. "Why," he said, "I fetched—You told me the one on the safe, Tod!"

The bookkeeper swore slowly under his breath and looked at the banker.

"Good God, I trusted him!" he said in a whisper.

The other clicked his tongue. "Oh-h," he said, long-drawn. "But he's only a little boy," he added, and slapped the file shut. "That surely is going to be tough for Jack!"

It was indeed tough for Jack—it broke him, in fact. He was already seriously ill, and that night he grew worse—

he would sit up in bed and talk wildly; and finally the boy, trying to soothe him, crept close into the arms, and that seemed to bring peace to the old man.

After Jack was quiet, the boy whispered:

"It aint so, what they're tellin', Jack. I didn't take the wrong one, unlest he told me wrong."

Jack Snow swore, a slow and terrible oath, then. "He *could* of," he muttered. "He *could* of set that fire himself. And buried it and dug it up since the fire, and put the bee on a little feller!"

Before morning Jack was much worse, and that day they took Kerry away; and before the week was out, he had no old Jack looking after him, nor would he ever have again. The Poor Commissioner was his boss now, and was boarding him out. . . .

Years later, a man grown who earned his living as a wandering timber cruiser, Kerry Drake heard of a man named Tod West who had become a little king in the lumbering business along Madwoman River; and with his Chesapeake retriever Tip, Kerry turned his canoe in that direction. He arrived opportunely—saw through his glasses a girl leap into the water from a boat to escape from a man. Kerry ran a swift rapid to reach the spot, threw the man into the river, took the girl to shore—and discovered to his great joy that he had paid part of his score, for the man was Tod West. The girl, he learned, was Nan Downer, whose father had had a very up-to-date scheme in the lumbering business—selling off his land to rich men for hunting and fishing clubs while himself retaining certain timber rights. But he had been murdered the previous year and Nan was trying to carry on while West was using her debts as a lever to force her into marriage.

As Ezra Adams, the local physician, explained the matter to Drake, Downer had been shot dead while driving with a twelve-thousand-dollar pay-roll in his car, and the money stolen. Two men had been suspected: Jim Hinkel, a hireling of West's who had been drunk at the time of the murder; and Holt Stuart, a young forester who was in love with Nan but had recently quarreled with Downer—and who, the Doctor knew, had been laid up with a sprained ankle at the time the fatal shot was fired.

But Adams, who was the local coroner, still had hope of tracing the criminal through the serial numbers of the stolen bank-notes—one of which had recently come to light; and he swore in Drake as coroner's deputy to help him. Drake took another job also—as timber cruiser for Nan Downer; and he distinguished himself by rescuing Jim Hinkel's little girl from drowning. On the other side of the ledger were attempts to kill him or drive him away made by Hinkel, the halfbreed Bluejay and others of West's emissaries. Finally Drake surprised an intruder in his tent—and his dog Tip brought back in triumph from the encounter a piece of blue corduroy such as Tod West habitually wore. (*The story continues in detail.*)

KERRY was mad to his marrow as—leaving Tip to guard camp—he set off retracing the way he had just come.

But even before he was crossing the river his rage began to ebb. More was at stake than his personal feelings, he told himself. This man West was no child. Perhaps he was a

A mystery of the North Woods that leads to swift and stirring adventure—by the noted author of "Timber," "The Beloved Pawn" and other popular books.

By HAROLD TITUS

murderer and a thief; if so, to recover what he had stolen, to bring him to answer for the greatest of crimes, it would be wise to move slowly. . . .

Boats and canoes were beached on a shelf of gravel below the Landing. Kerry made his way there and stood listening. The buildings of the little town were dark, now.

Above, loomed the small depot; across the way from it was West's house. West might be there now, but no lights showed in the windows. . . . He would wait awhile.

And wait he did. It was not long before his ears detected the sound of a cautiously wielded paddle, and he stooped behind some bushes for complete concealment. A prow grated; a foot splashed in water; a man grunted as he lifted a canoe.

Drake could see, but remain unseen. He saw that large hulk of a man deposit the canoe carefully, bottom up, and stand a long moment, peering downstream as if listening, then turn abruptly and make his way up the bank.

Kerry did not follow at once. He gave West—if it was West—opportunity to enter the house before he moved—and when he did slip noiselessly up to the depot and around the corner he was rewarded by a glow of lights in windows across the way.

The light grew brighter; he crossed the street, melting into the shadows about the house, taking up a position at one corner where he could peer through a window.

Tod West was standing there, putting light wood into the fireplace. That done, he crossed the room to a cupboard, took from it a whisky-bottle and drank deeply. He wiped his mouth with the back of a wrist, then shook his hands and felt his breeches and shivered.

He stood for a moment close to the fire and then began undressing. His shirt came off first and he shook it on the hearth; then hung it carefully over a chair back. As he turned, Kerry could see the pistol holster strapped to his side. Off came the pacs and then the breeches and the man stood there in his underclothes, drinking again from the bottle. He drank deeply—too deeply, Kerry remarked to himself, for a man under suspicion!

The firelight was not so brilliant now. The birch wood evidently was dozy—a great bank of dense white smoke sucked into the throat of the chimney.

But the master of the house was either satisfied with the fire or else considered that he had more important things to do. He took the bottle from the mantel, and shaking his head as though muttering to himself, made his way slowly up the stairs.

"Well, now," Kerry said, "maybe it might be a good plan for a deputy coroner of the county to inform himself on the home life of T. West, Esquire!"

He slipped along the end of the house and reached the rear—just as a shaft of light shot out into the spruce thicket there. The light came from a dormer window set in the gently pitched roof. Stepping away from the wall, Kerry could see West's head and shoulders.

The man raised the bottle to his lips for a fourth time and then, evidently placing it on a table, unbuckled the strap of his shoulder holster and put it down.

Alone in the darkness, Kerry let one eyelid drop and cocked his head. That pistol might



be a most important item in his own official life. But how to get possession without having West know where it had gone?

A clump of small birches grew close to the rear wall of the house, their trunks almost touching the low eaves. He stooped, unlaced his pacs, tied them together and slung them about his neck. Then, hand over hand, he went up the saplings and hitched himself to the wet shingles, stretching out on his belly.

Now he could see West plainly. The man was sitting in a chair, the whisky bottle in his hands, and as Kerry gazed in at him he began shaking his head from side to side as though in sorry and solitary debate. The pistol, Kerry saw, was hung in its holster over the back of a chair.

TOD sat up. He shifted the bottle to one hand; with the other he began gesticulating. His lips moved, but Drake could not hear. He held a hand over his mouth, however, to stifle the laughter that rose at sight of this weird pantomime: the great man of the community, well on his way to a thoroughgoing drunk, addressing imaginary listeners on some matter he considered important. And he did think it important, too. He rose and paced the room. He stopped and shook his head. He pointed a finger unsteadily at a mirror and delivered himself of an unheard but highly emphatic oration. Then he drank again and sat down heavily, a sodden-looking figure. Once he sat straight suddenly and turned his head to listen. The movement revealed his face clearly and Kerry thought it stamped with heavy fright.

The wind was light and fitful. It blew from the north, then from the east and, in that direction, sent heavy smoke rolling down across the man prone on the roof. He choked, and smothered his coughing against a sleeve; then moved cautiously to be closer to the window, away from the flow of smoke from the chimney. . . .

West drank once more, and whisky trickled over his chin. His movements, replacing the bottle on the small table, were uncertain. He rose and groped for the hanging light-bulb, hit it, set it swinging, captured it and then fumbled for the button.

Night shut down suddenly and bed-springs creaked as a heavy body fell upon them. . . .

Kerry Drake no longer had the impulse to laugh. He lay very still, considering. He was within feet of that weapon, possession of which took on increasing importance as his mind worked. And he had a plan to get hold of it.

He rose from his position on the shingles and began making his way along the roof, cautiously. His sock-clad feet made no sound. Bent over, he kept his hands on the shingles above him to guard against a slip and a fall. After he had passed the window he went more rapidly and as he gained the ridge he stood erect.

The chimney belched great volumes of smoke. It was light in color, thick, acrid. Off came his coat, now; over the flue opening it went, and he crouched against the masonry, waiting.

Down in the maw of the fireplace, feeble flames died from orange to blue and then expired in the rolling smoke which, cut off from escape above, flowed out and filled the great living-room. It drifted up the stairway and into the upper hall, growing thick and thicker as the punky birch smoldered. Along the hallway it went, and into the room where a man lay, breathing heavily, still muttering to himself.

Tod West was in a stupor, half-asleep, and half the befuddlement induced by raw whisky. He moved his head restlessly on the pillow and worked his tongue and lips. He rolled over and cursed thickly. He coughed and strangled and struggled up to one elbow, staring about in the

darkness. He coughed again; then the instinctive alarm of human beings for elements out of control shocked him into a state bordering full consciousness.

His feet hit the floor. He flung the door wide open and made for the stairway. He could not breathe, could not see. He turned about and ran for his room again, choking and gasping. He fumbled at the catch of his window, threw up the sash and his great voice roared into the black night.

"Fire!" he yelled. "Fire!" And again: "Fire! Help! Fire!"

Given that draft, smoke billowed through the window and he could not breathe, even though he leaned across the sill. He threw a foot to the wet roof and scrambled out—slipped, rolled over, threw out his arms and brought himself to a sliding stop almost at the eaves.

"Fire!" he yelled again. "Hi, you! Turn out! Fire!"

Close against the chimney, Kerry Drake shrank, watching West, stifling his own laughter.

His plan had worked more promptly and with greater convincingness than he had dared hope for.

A voice came out of the night: "Where? What's afire?"

A light showed in the next house. A door slammed. "Fire!" came a shout from down the street.

The town was turning out, while Tod West was making his way down the birches that had given Kerry easy access to the roof.

Footsteps sounded below Drake; voices were raised.

Leaning over the edge of the roof, cupping a hand over his mouth to make his location more difficult to determine should any be curious, he yelled:

"Get the furniture, boys! Get Tod's stuff out!"

He whipped his coat from the flue, and put it on, running along the ridge toward the break of the dormer, laughing excitedly.

"Get Tod's goods out!" he heard some one yell. Feet drummed on the wide porch, he heard a heavy object drawn across the floor below.

In a second he was inside the window from which West had made his exit. His hands fumbled over the furniture there, found the chair, found the holster with its burden. He slipped pistol and holster into his pocket, threw the chair through the window to the roof, followed it with the small table, and scrambled out himself.

The gathering crowd was in front. He could hear their voices inside, coming and going.

"Smoke's so damn' thick can't locate it!" some one complained loudly.

"Careful of that clock!" another cried. "Take it into my house!"

Kerry slid down the birches, slipped into the timber which grew close to the rear of the house and drew on his pacs. Then, circling to the street, careful not to reveal himself in the lights which came from other houses or the lanterns carried by a half dozen men, he watched.

FURNITURE was already scattered about the dooryard. Two men were on the roof, shouting puzzled questions to one another. A light was turned on in the living-room and the confusion within suddenly dwindled.

"Hell!" some one said. "The' aint no fire, boys! It's that damn' chimney!"

And another said, loudly enough for Kerry to hear: "I tol' you, Tod, 'at you can't build a chimney that'll draw proper, no such damn' way as 'at. Now, was I build-in' me a fireplace chimney I'd—"

Smoke was clearing from the interior. Tod West, garbed in his underwear, stood confused and crestfallen in the center of the group, his hair in disarray. He had a ludi-

crous look. Moments before he had been in panic, had turned out the town—and all for nothing! Just because his chimney smoked! Some one outside chuckled. Faces clustered about Tod betrayed efforts to subdue grins as West gesticulated and frowned and protested.

Under cover of the excitement Kerry Drake, the pistol safe in his pocket, made for the trestle, running when he safely could, so he could put distance between himself and the crowd back yonder. He wanted to be away where he could laugh himself sore! The most powerful man in the community—smoked out, in his underwear!

"He looked," he gasped to himself later, wiping tears out of his eyes, "he looked like something a cartoonist'd thought up!"

CHAPTER XII

NAN DOWNER, so Kerry Drake discovered the next forenoon, was the most businesslike young woman he had ever encountered.

He sat on a stool before the drafting-board, translating into lines and colors, field notes that had been given him.

And while Kerry was thus employed, Nan talked business with the two fishermen he had seen with her that first afternoon and who later had engaged in

the poker game which had ended so dramatically. With maps spread before her and detailed information at command, the girl made such a sales-talk as Kerry had never before heard. She pictured the selective logging operations which, under her plan, would continue indefinitely all over the properties; she recalled visits these men had made to the sites of such cuttings, pointed out how streams always would have their watersheds cloaked under such a scheme, how deer and grouse and all wild things would forever find food and shelter in a forest so administered.

She had figures in her head and argument in her wit; and behind all this, she had conviction: the conviction that only by such a plan of management can mankind have its forest cake and eat it, as well. The men—men of affairs, surely—listened intently, and when they had asked their last question, cleared up the final detail of the proposal, one said:

"I rather think, Miss Downer, that we can deal. Of course, it depends on how the rest of our crowd reacts. But you've got us so well steamed up that I wouldn't be surprised if we'd be back here with money in a few days and ask you to draw the papers!"

That was encouraging, surely, but when they left she wilted suddenly and sat down at her desk as if weak.

Drake, watching her, said after a moment:

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing," she answered. "Everything!" She faced him, her eyes dark with trouble. "I think they're sold;

I think at least two more groups are ready to deal. But under the terms of my contract with the Northern Wood Products Company—which is Tod West—I can't deliver the title we *must* deliver until another principal payment is made. He's—he's sort of got me in a corner!"

"That's tough!" Drake said and glanced at his coat, hanging from its hook.

In the pocket was Tod West's pistol. Would the findings of ballistics experts, relating to that pistol and the

ball which took her father's life, be a help to this girl? He shrugged. It might help, provided what might be found could be used in clearing up a months'-old mystery with dispatch.

Tip, curled beneath the drawing-board, had been looking steadily at Nan. Now he rose, crossed the room, and put his nose on her knee.

"Good dog!" she murmured and, with a sigh, turned back to the papers which lay spread before her. . . .

That evening Drake borrowed a car from Holt Stuart.

"I'd like to run in to Shoe-string for a bit," he said.

"A l l

right; take

my car," the other responded, but without much graciousness and as Drake walked away he turned to watch him, frowning a little. Then, with a sigh, he turned toward Nan's office.

"How'd Drake get along?" he asked.

"He's like lightning, Holt! See all that he did today!"

The other followed to the board and nodded.

"Fast, all right; good job, too."

"But—you don't like him, do you?"

He did not reply at once. Then he burst out explosively:

"I've got nothing against Kerry Drake. It's—it's just the idea, Nan, of having him in here with you all day, after the way you looked at him the other night!"

"The way I— What do you mean by that?"

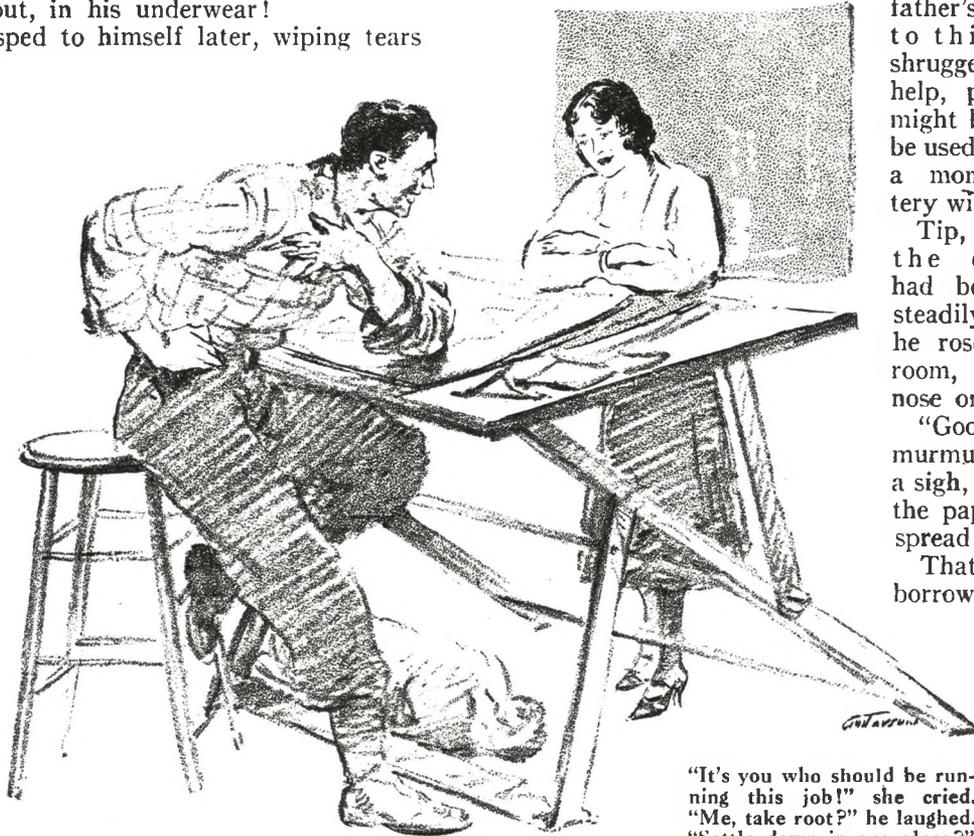
"You know what I mean!"—hotly. "He's a swaggering, good-looking devil. He comes into this country from nobody knows where. And you sit and talk to him with your heart in your eyes! And me—I've been so crazy about you ever since—"

Her hand stole over his mouth, cutting off the words.

"You should be ashamed!" she cried. "Holt Stuart, you act like a child! Jealous of a stranger when—"

"And I've a right to be!" he declared, twisting free. "You can't deny that when you sat here talking to him last night it was an effort for you to keep your mind on what we were supposed to be talking about! Isn't that so? And if it isn't, what are you blushing about, now?"

"Oh, Holt, don't you see? Don't you see that I've no



"It's you who should be running this job!" she cried. "Me, take root?" he laughed. "Settle down in one place?"

time to think of anything else but the job?" Nan said in a deprecatory manner.

"Still, you're blushing! I've got a lot of things to talk over now, but I'm going to cool off first!"

He stamped out and Nan laughed reprovingly at his boyishness. But when he slammed the outer screen behind him her laughter died. . . .

The road from West's Landing to Shoestring was only a sand trail through choppings and standing timber; where it traversed swamps, corduroy had been laid. Not many cars had traveled it since last night's rain and Drake's eyes were fixed ahead, on the watch for spring-breaking chuck-holes and stumps. So he did not watch behind, did not observe the ancient flivver with a tattered top which kept pace with him. . . .

Ezra Adams was in his shabby office behind the small waiting-room when Drake walked in.

"Kerry!" the old man whispered. "What brings you here? And so soon?"

He shoved his spectacles up and peered anxiously into the younger man's face.

"Yeah. Soon, sure enough. But we can't begin soon enough in this case, can we?"

He reached into an inner pocket and produced pistol and holster, placing them on the physician's littered desk.

"What the dickens 've you got here?"

Drake looked at the door behind them. He turned and closed it before he made reply.

"That, Coroner Adams, is perhaps the gun that killed Cash Downer!"

"No! You don't say!"—low.

"Well, perhaps not!" with a shrug. "But when you're adding two and two and trying to get more than four for an answer, it doesn't pay to overlook any bets."

He sat down and motioned the physician to another chair.

"You see, a lot happened yesterday that sort of plays into our official hands, you might say." He went on then, relating the pertinent events which had transpired since Ezra had left him. When he came to the story of how he obtained possession of the gun and arranged matters so that it would be natural for West to believe it had been lost or mislaid or appropriated by some of his townsmen, he sketched a picture of Tod West in his underwear, rousing the town with cries of fire, that set old Ezra's paunch shaking with mirth. But thereafter he leaned forward and all mirth went out of his face.

"Now, even if we can hook up bullet and gun, it will prove nothing. West could swear he found the gat or

bought it from a deer-hunter after the shooting; could get away with almost any story of how he came to have it. So it's out as an important piece of evidence, but it may be awfully damned important to us in getting set on the right course ourselves.

"West may be as innocent of the murder as I am, but I'm convinced now that he's not what you'd call his brother's keeper. Hinkel's story looks bad for West. But if the State police report that the gun which West has been packing fired the bullet which killed Cash, then we'll know that any effort we make to hang the thing on him won't be wasted. Does that make sense?"

Ezra nodded emphatically.

"I'd say it did—sound sense! Now,"—turning to his safe,— "here's the bullet I took out of poor old Cash's brain." He held up a small box, rattling it. "I'll get these things right off to the police. We can't trust Sheriff Bridger. He's a puppet of West's, anyhow, and even if he wouldn't be apt to protect Tod,—or want to,—still, he couldn't keep his mouth shut.

"Meantime, we've got to lay low and wait and watch. What other plan have you?"

Drake frowned and scratched his temple.

"None. Finding the murderer is one thing; finding the cash is another. If it's only just commenced to come into circulation, we may expect more of it. If West has it, he's too smart to have it around his place. I'd say, offhand, he's the sort that would cache it in the bush somewhere. The important thing, as I see it, is to try to get a line on his hiding-place for the money before he suspects us of being busy on the Downer matter at all.

"Will you have me," West cried, "or've I got to take you? I'm desperate, I tell you!"

"And the situation's getting awfully tight. Nan's got a chance, it seems, to commence selling big tracts of stuff with logging rights, under the prescribed plan, reserved. She can't give title until she's negotiated another payment on the contract with West. It looks to me as though he had waited for her to do the work and now's going to step in and skim the cream."

"That's just it!" sighed Ezra. "No, Kerry Drake, we've got no time to lose. . . . Who'd have thought—" he exclaimed, rising, and as he stood up letting his voice rise as well, "—who'd have thought that we'd ever get enough in the way of suspicion to start diggin' into the Downer case again? Drake, I sure am glad you came down the Madwoman day before yesterday!"

And on that, Frank Bluejay, who had been standing in the waiting-room, one ear against the panel of that closed door, made his way on moccasined feet to the entry, and disappeared in the darkness.



Later that night Tod West stood in the shadows of his own doorway and had his report from the breed.

"I couldn't hear no-t'ing until the las'," he said. "The Doc he said then they was startin' diggin' up the Downer case again."

"Is that all?" West put the question sharply.

"All I could hear. They made a lot of talk before, but they said it so low."

"Well, that means nothing, then." But his voice shook and in the dusk he could see the other look at him intently.

"You keep after this Drake, Frank. I want to know everything he does—everything, understand!"

Bluejay made no response for a moment. Then he muttered:

"I don' like that man, Tod. He's one damn' fool. He's strong as hell. He aint scared of no-t'ing."

"And he's got you scared?"

"Naw, he ain' got me scart!"—boastfully. "Maybe-so he'll get himself into trouble with me yet, eh?"

"Yes, maybe," growled West. "But you watch him; you're on the pay-roll to watch him, remember."

The breed walked away and West turned within. Alone there he wiped the clammy sweat from his face and stood motionless a long time. His breathing was quick and light. He did not like the word that Frank Bluejay had brought back from town, nor had he liked the way the 'breed looked at him when his voice shook.

He turned to the cupboard and took down a fresh bottle of whisky; then, after a moment of indecision, put it back resolutely.

"Not too much of that," he growled, and began to pace the floor, calling on all his resources for clear thought and careful poise.

This Drake was evidently bent on remaining in the country. But why was he running to Ezra? And what did he know about the Downer case? A persistent, arrogant devil! He was the one man West could recall who had encountered Frank Bluejay and not shown at least some misgivings. He was the only man he knew who had put fear into the breed's heart. . . .

At that he paused, squeezing his lower lip thoughtfully.

Bluejay, afraid of Drake; Bluejay, knocked off the trestle by Drake; Bluejay, savage and vindictive; Bluejay who, could he be certain of escaping detection, would sooner kill than not. . . . West stood still for a long while. "Perhaps," he muttered to himself, "perhaps!" And later: "Sure! . . . By God, I'd bet on it!"

He turned to the doorway, staring out into the star-hung night. Insects sang and the river murmured. Somewhere a radio blared. Upstream, he could see the lights of Downer's headquarters. After he had held his eyes there for a time he turned, with a sort of moan, and walked with determination to where his whisky waited.

CHAPTER XIII

FOR a week Kerry Drake made maps, sitting in the office with Nan Downer for hours each day.

Sometimes long intervals would pass without a word being exchanged. Again, she would go to him abruptly with some question and her manner would betray her profound respect for his judgment. He had said that he could do many things in and about the woods; she learned the truth of his statement. Intelligent as she was, well as she had been trained by her far-sighted father, flaws had developed in her procedure, errors in judgment had gone undetected.

Drake did not force his opinions, did not offer advice.

But when she brought matters to his attention in which he discovered flaws he pointed these out. Daily he assumed stature and importance to her undertaking.

"You're right again!" she cried once. "You're always right! It's you who should be running this job!"

"Me, take root?" he laughed. "Me, settled down in one place?"

"Why not?" she challenged and curiously, he asked that of himself.

Tip rose then from his place beneath the drawing-board and nuzzled Nan's knee, which made it unnecessary to pursue that question further.

"I must run down to the mill for a half hour," she said.

The dog watched her prepare to depart.

"Want to go, Tip?" Drake asked. The dog wagged an affirmative. "All right, then; go along."

Nan stood in the doorway, watching. The retriever apparently could not believe this order to follow another. "Go on!" Kerry said. "Go with Nan!" And doggishly dumfounded, with Nan he went—close to other heels for the first time since puppyhood.

IT became a little game between the three. Whenever Nan went out Tip gave evidence of wanting to go, but always he awaited Drake's word before following. And once, when the girl had crossed to the Landing to send a telegram and was urgently wanted by telephone, Kerry scrawled a note, gave it to the dog and told him to find Nan. . . . He did, after much running here and there and snuffing at the ground, and it would have been difficult to determine which was the more pleased, girl or dog.

"You'll finish tomorrow," Nan said, looking over Kerry's shoulder. "Can I get you to make next a new cruise of the stuff northwest of Townline Lake?"

"You can get me," he said with odd soberness, "to do about anything you want done." The words gave him a strange giddy feeling.

"We'll go the next morning, then," she replied, overlooking his inference.

With a canoe on a trailer behind her car, they drove to the end of the road which gave access to Townline Lake. Then they set off on that body of water to spend the day making a swift reconnaissance of the country in which Drake was to work.

A family of ducks swam before them, ruffling the placid surface. The mother's head was raised high, she uttered low quacks of warning and the brood clustered close about her. As the canoe drew closer, the old one took wings and the youngsters, doing their best, skittered along the water, half flying, half swimming, making a great to-do.

A little breeze arose and the lake which had lain like a burnished plate of steel, was touched to life. Lobes of light blue appeared, turned to indigo, and ran together until the body of water lay like a great sapphire, flecked with emerald islands. An eagle soared majestically above and as they rounded a point a deer, having late breakfast in the shallows, lifted its head in quick alarm and loped noisily for cover.

"Water's cold," Drake remarked, trailing a hand.

"Like ice! This lake is terribly deep in the channels. The Indians say it never gives up its dead, and Father said that was probably so."

Drake's eyes held on Nan's competent shoulders, watching their rhythmic swing. Her voice came back to him talking of the job, but he caught only the music in it and again that strange giddiness came over him. . . . Why, he told himself, the thing that had made of him a wanderer was gone! He had at last found an answer to his doubt of responsibility for ruining old Jack Snow. Know-

ing that, why wander farther? Why not take root—and here? The thought produced a queer fever in his veins. Surely Nan Downer was the most loyely, the most—

"We'll land here," she was saying, breaking off this wild manner of thought. "I can see the corner stake. Father had a survey made three years ago."

They landed. Nan produced a map, and spread it on a log.

"Here we are. Right here. This creek—Otter—is alive with trout, and beaver ponds make it splendid fly-fishing, which is what the sort of folks who might buy will want. There are bass and other fish galore in the lake. One of the best yarding areas for deer in the country runs right down into Section Twelve, here. There are some moose too, and plenty of grouse.

"This happens," she continued, "to be the northwestern corner of our holdings. The road we used today is the only one that comes close. There's no one at all in the country beyond. In winter a trapper or two work the edges, but the swamps are big and thick. I've wanted to take a look at it but haven't had time. Tod West knows it like a book and I guess he's the only man alive who does."

Tod West! The name struck temper within Drake. Tod West, who had ruined one he loved in boyhood; who now sought to ruin one he perhaps was to love in maturity! . . . Little did Kerry reckon in that moment that Nan's idle remark connecting West and that vast lonely country beyond them, would one day come back to him, would pound in his ears with the rush of fevered blood, that he would fight the fog of sickness and pain to remember it—to remember that none but Tod West knew those vast swamps and untracked uplands!

They went on. A covey of half-grown grouse fluttered out of the way, not particularly alarmed. A spotted fawn ran before them and a spruce hen stared stupidly from a low limb. Bear sign showed in the game trail and a wolf had passed that way last night. Off to the right sounded a sudden tremendous crashing which could only have been a moose, making away from man, his worst enemy.

Here was an old burning where lightning had started fire. Wild grasses and fireweed abounded and Drake stopped, watching bees work in the brilliant blossoms.

He was about to go on when a small movement on the ground attracted him; he stooped and gently put down one hand; palm cupped, and rising showed Nan a bee crawling over his fingers.

"Pig!" he chided. "He's loaded up so heavily that he can't fly! Go on! Try it from here!" He waved his hand and the bee took wing, going slowly and groggily, but with that aid finally making a successful attempt.

He stooped over again, watching a busy worker.

"Pretty fair Italians," he said. "Not pure; hybrids, but they look like right good honey-makers."

"Are you, among other things, a bee expert?" Nan laughed.

"No, but once I had to live for awhile with an old codger who kept 'em. That was about the best time I had when I was a kid. I got real clubby with bees—liked 'em. When I get so old I can't ramble any more maybe I'll settle down and keep 'em and let 'em keep me!"

"Is that the only plan you have?"

He straightened and looked at her so intently that she flushed.

"Maybe not," he said gravely. "I'll know before long."

IT was late afternoon when they beached the canoe on their return.

"We've time to look at the cabin now," Nan told him,

nodding toward the log structure on the high bank; and she led the way.

Beside the door was a rack of implements for use in fighting forest fires and the door itself was unlocked.

"My father didn't like locks, in the bush," she explained. "Our men use this camp some but they always leave it open so anyone in trouble could get in."

The place was amply furnished—blankets on the bunks, insect nets hanging above them; cooking utensils and a goodly supply of unperishable staples on shelves above the stove.

"It's a snug camp," Nan said. "You'll be comfortable here, Kerry."

He scratched a temple thoughtfully.

"D'you mind if I use my own outfit?"

"Why, no! Don't you fancy this camp?"

"Oh, it's got shingles and glass in it. I'd rather set up myself on one of those islands."

"Certainly, if you want it that way. I used to come here with my father, but now the place has been a little spoiled for me. . . . You see, Holt stayed here alone the night Father was killed and if it hadn't been for wise old Ezra he'd have been carted in to jail and held a while. That wouldn't be pleasant to remember."

"You think a lot of Holt, don't you?"

"Of course! Why shouldn't I? He's the most loyal boy in the world. He's worked his head off for me."

"Anybody would," he said—and wondered why she colored quickly and looked at him when she spoke of Holt Stuart!

CHAPTER XIV

OTHER cars were there when they drove up to headquarters. One was Ezra Adams' battered roadster and the old Doctor looked up from tinkering with the motor in a way which commanded Kerry's interest.

But Nan, with a wave to Ezra, was more intent on the group about the other.

"Oh, there's Mr. Dexter, up from Chicago!" she said excitedly. "That means he's ready to close!" Her face clouded. "And day before yesterday I mailed Tod West a formal request for permission to deed that section. It's our first chance at a real sale. Oh, I hope it won't be blocked!"

"Who's sick, Ezra?" Drake asked, as she walked rapidly on to greet the others.

"Nobody much, except this 'tarnal motor!" he said loudly. Then, with caution: "Come close, Kerry! Stick your head down here with me, like you were trying to help me tinker at somethin'."

He gave a quick look about.

"The bullet that killed Cash," he whispered, "was fired from Tod West's pistol!"

For a moment Drake did not reply; a savage feeling of triumph swept him, followed by a sinking sensation. Tod West, the slayer of Nan's father and, perhaps, the slayer of her hopes as well! He knew that even despite her misgivings, the girl was hoping that West would be generous enough to permit her to close the deal which tonight seemed to be in prospect. And it was such a forlorn hope!

"Well," he said, "that gives us a course to steer, Ezra!"

"What's the first move?"

"To watch him. What else can we do? If he's started using that money, he'll keep on; anyhow, that's a good bet. We've got to locate it before we tip our hand."

"But suppose he suspects and lights out?"

Kerry twisted his head doubtfully.

"He won't light out so long as there's a hope left. All he has worked and schemed and killed for is in this country. A man of his age doesn't run away from it so long as there's a chance of hanging on.

"Now, I can get Jim Hinkel to trail him. He won't suspect Jim. That can be fixed up. With me out of the picture for a few days, maybe he'll feel more free to act. I'll see to it that plenty of folks know I'm to be gone for a while."

"I swear it's going to be up to you, son!" the old man said. "I get all fluttery inside, now, thinking about what might happen — and about what you and I've got to *make* happen!"

Nan Downer sat desolately at her desk that evening. The man Dexter and his companions had gone from the dinner-table down to the river. Soon they would return and want to talk business—and as yet she could not talk. She had an opportunity to bring to realization some of the dreams she had shared with her father, but not yet the legal right!

She had been conscious for a moment of another's presence, but did not look up at once. When she did, it was into the flushed face of Tod West.

"Oh!" she cried, and rose quickly from her chair.

"Surprised, eh?" he asked and stepped closer. "Why surprised? I got a letter from you yesterday. I was here before, to give you my answer."

Now, she caught the reek of whisky on his breath.

"Well, you want my answer now?" he taunted.

"Y-yes, Tod. I—you see, I've a chance to sell two sections at a very fine figure. Under our agreement—"

"You can't sell a damn' foot of land!" he cut in. "No, Miss Nan Downer, you can't sell one damn' foot of ground!" He drove a fist into the other palm and straightened with a gesture of gloating. "You had your chance, once. I give you your chance a week ago. It'd have all been downhill and shady for you then—but what'd you do? Tried to wham me with an oar, that's what you done!

"You know, well's I do, where we're at. You're right up ag'in' foreclosure this minute. You can't sell an acre until you've come acrost with the principal payment, 'most a year overdue."

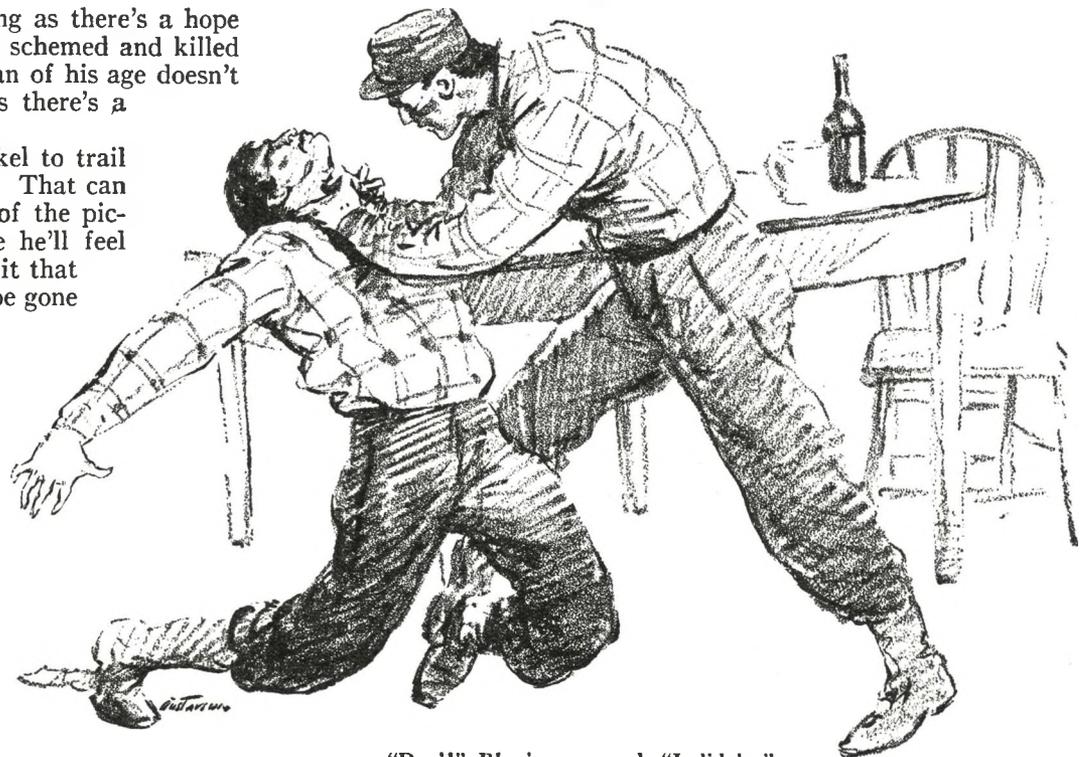
She retreated around the corner of her desk as he advanced.

"And you don't like it, eh? Don't like doin' business that way! You can be high and mighty to me one day, and then expect favors the next! Well, I'll show you my heart's in the right place! I'll show you a contract's a contract! I'll show you that I'll see you busted and smashed and on the road without a roof, before we—"

"Tod! Don't, Tod! Please—"

He had crowded her against the wall; now he leaned above her menacingly, one hand upraised and, on her words, the hand began to descend slowly. Rigidity went from him and a strange sound, half-laugh, half-sob, came from his throat.

"Hurt you? Hurt you, little Nan? . . . God, I'm



"Don'!" Bluejay moaned. "I didn'—"
But Kerry's grip closed on his throat.
"You lie!" he growled. "You're guilty
and I'll make you answer for it."

sorry for the things that've happened!" He stepped back a pace or two unsteadily, and drew a hand across his mouth. Confusion lay in his eyes. He had come to gloat, but now—

"I meant that, up the river the other day," he said huskily. "I meant all I said: I want you, I need you, little Nan! I'll make you a good lover—I'll make you a good husband!"

Perhaps it was the loathing in her face, touched to life by his hoarse, unsteady voice, which stirred afresh the hell in his heart. Anyhow, he threw his arms wide, fists clenched.

"Will you have me?" he cried. "Will you have me, or've I got to take you? Because, by God, I'll have you, just as sure as hell itself! I'm desperate, I tell you! I'm desperate and I—"

Nan had opened her lips to cry out, when a white fury flung through the doorway. The cry was lost in that gasp of breath which burst from Tod's throat as a hand caught one of the outstretched arms, as he was spun about and Holt Stuart's fist bashed into his lips.

The boy struck hard—struck with all his weight coming in, and when he had struck he squared for another blow.

But Tod West was not too drunk for action. He dropped his head, and fended off the flailing fist. He swung forward and charged and wrapped his great arms about Holt's slender body, sweeping him from his feet, crashing with him against the door-casing, falling with him to the floor.

The lad was no match for that ponderous strength. He was overwhelmed, smothered, made helpless. He kicked and writhed, but West had one arm pinned beneath a knee, the other secured in his iron grasp and his fist raised to do its cruel work on that defenseless face—

And then Nan screamed. The quality of it, the shrillness, the terror, struck through West's intent, made him hesitate. In that instant Holt freed a hand; he was over from his back to one side, upsetting West, grappling for the man's knee, throwing him over and floundering free.

But it would have been but momentary advantage, that.

He never could have prevailed against Tod's superior physique. However, Nan's cry had brought others. Feet sounded on the steps; feet sounded in the rear rooms and before West could charge again and maim and batter, he was surrounded by a dozen people.

Two men had Holt. Another stood before West, blocking the way to the boy, should he attempt advance. But he did not. Breathing heavily, he glowered for a moment at Stuart and then, seeking out Nan's face, nodded heavily.

"All right," he said. "All right—I said my say. And that, I guess, will be all."

He turned for the entry and none blocked his departure. He left the steps slowly, feeling his bruised lips gingerly. Then outside the lighted office window he halted, looking within as Nan, leading Holt by the hand, drew him close to her and closed the door.

It was there that Ezra Adams, returning to Nan's after an hour in Jim Hinkel's home, blundered upon them. He came first into the excited group in the big room, was told what had happened, asked Nan's whereabouts and went, without knocking, into the office.

They stood close together, the girl holding both Holt's hands in hers, looking up into his face intently, her lower lip caught between her even teeth. The old physician, struck by the apparent significance of their postures, hesitated as if to withdraw.

"Come in, Ezra!"

Nan said and then to Holt, with a little shake of his hands: "And so you *will* be careful, Holt dear?"

Stuart withdrew his hands from hers and turned, going out abruptly, not looking at Adams.

When he was gone and Nan had closed the door, she swung back toward the old man with tears in her eyes. He opened his arms at her choking sob and gathered her close.

"Oh, Ezra!" she moaned. "Oh, if anything should happen to Holt!"

"I heard what went on. Don't fear. We'll watch to see nothin' does happen!"

"But Tod's so savage, so brutal! And I feel such a responsibility for Holt. He's such—such an emotional boy! If Tod harms him, I'll feel I'm to blame and—Don't you see?"—beseechingly. "Oh, why must things like this come up to be faced just when—just when love comes, Ezra?"

She was as a little girl in his arms and though her words had given him a sort of shock the old man downed his curiosity and the questions that they provoked, and devoted all his resources to comforting her. He stroked her hair and patted her shoulders until her emotions were under control. Then she asked him to go.

"It's my problem," she said. "I can think better alone. I'm so glad you were here to let me be female and weak for a moment!"—wiping her eyes and smiling bravely.

He left her then, with a deal to think about. He carried his news to Kerry later in the evening.

"Looks like Stuart's finally got what he seems to want most," he said, and did not notice that his companion appeared to stop even his breathing to listen. "She's awful upset because she's afraid somethin'll happen to him. And she's in love, too, which doesn't make for calm thinking. . . . To be sure, I promised we'd look after Stuart, but,"—with a shrug,—"I wouldn't bet that that can be done. Tod'll have him on his list now, and Tod's got a long memory when he's been angered! Course, he was drunk—"

Drake did not hear this last. He was concerned at the moment only with one thing which Ezra had had to tell. A cold dismay filled him as he realized the thing that had been fermenting for days, which had almost crystallized into recognizable thought this afternoon: that, when finished with this job, his body might wander on, but that finally his heart had taken root! He was in love to his ears with Nan Downer and yet here was old Ezra, bringing word of her love for another! His heart had discovered a home, only to find it already occupied.

He shut his teeth and stirred himself to follow the Doctor's grave talk.

"He was drunk," Ezra repeated. "And he may forget when he sobers up; may forget enough of it to keep his vengeance away from Holt; then again, his bein' drunk when it happened may make his grudge only that much worse."

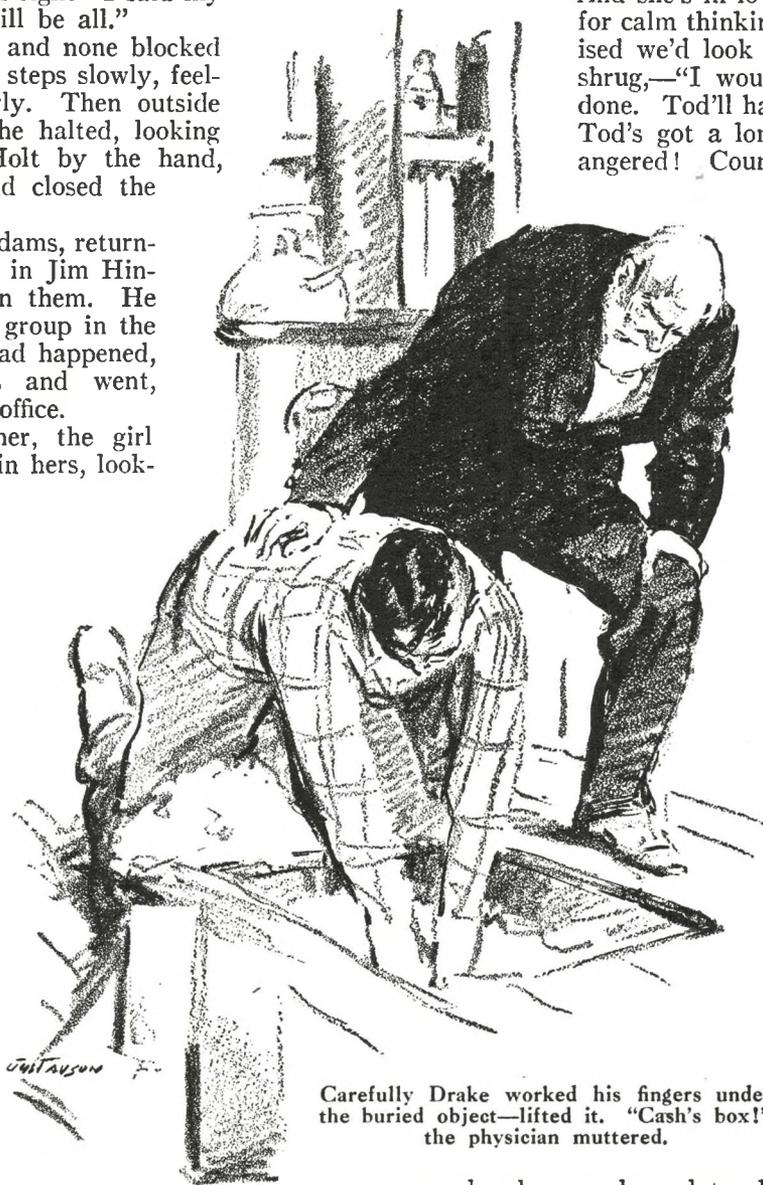
But West was sober enough when an hour later he stood in the shadow of Frank Bluejay's rattletrap fliyer not far from Mel Knight's store at the Landing and talked rapidly, jabbing a finger now and again against the 'breed's chest.

Bluejay was in from the blueberry camp he had established to the northward a few days before, where his wife and progeny gathered the ripening fruit which a buyer came to buy each evening. Frank did not pick much himself and he cursed his family for not being more adept at the harvest. And so the proposal which Tod West made fell on ground doubly fertile.

"—And he's made you a joke, here, knockin' you into the river that way, Frank! He'll drive you out of the country if he stays and—and I want him gone because he tried to frame me!"

The 'breed's eyes were fixed on the white man's face. "How much?" he asked.

"Well, not much. It's your fight. I can get along; I'd



Carefully Drake worked his fingers under the buried object—lifted it. "Cash's box!" the physician muttered.

rather have him gone, but I can get along. You, though—And there'd be no chance, you see, out there on Townline if—"

"How much?"

Under his insistence West paused.

"Ten dollars."

"Huh! You do your own job, Tod West!"

He turned to his car.

"Hold on!"—grasping a sleeve. "Money's scarce."

"Well, I aint goin' to take no chances for no ten dollars. For a hunnerd, now—"

"A hundred! You're crazy!"

They bartered longer, but without heat, and finally Bluejay nodded.

"All right. But when?"

"When the job's done."

"I'll see, eh? And this other—you tell me when you want me to say I seen Stuart there, Tod. In the corner, eh? And buryin' a—"

His voice dropped to a cautious whisper.

Bluejay cranked his car and clattered away and Tod West strolled toward the store. He did not enter, however; stood there staring within and felt his bruised lips carefully.

A changed man, he had become, in this span of a few short days. Before, he had conducted his affairs with confidence; he was sure of his own standing and his abilities. Secrets had rested in his heart, to be sure, but they had rested easily, comfortably.

And then, out of the welter of Dead Bear rapid had come this laughing stranger who upset not only his body but his mind; who had replaced confidence with harrying misgivings, had driven out assurance with doubt and made of those secrets not cherished possessions but rankling growths. . . .

Lastly, like the clanging of a ominous tocsin had come Bluejay's sketchy report of Drake's talk with Ezra Adams. Why should these two be talking of the Downer case, when that had been considered closed months ago? He tried to shrug off the question but the movement changed to a shudder. And there was the disappearance of his pistol on the night he believed his house burning. Explainable, probably; the chances were that its disappearance was, in reality, a simple, casual affair. . . . But he did not *know* that, and in his state of mind shadows were taking shapes. This evening Ezra and Drake had had their heads together for long over the Doctor's motor—but West, watching, had not been fooled. Their talk was not of mechanics, he felt sure.

He walked on home, not daring to enter the store and be seen by others. Safe within his own walls he went hastily to that cupboard and resumed the drinking which his visit to Nan had interrupted.

And across the way Kerry Drake lay in his blankets, that strange numbness persisting. His eyes were open; sleep would not come. In boyhood he had thought he knew suffering, but now he realized he had not even skirted the edges of the fields of human misery.

CHAPTER XV

BY noon of that Thursday, Kerry had his camp made on an island a quarter-mile offshore in Townline Lake.

A strange mood he had been in—so strange that Tip sat for long intervals watching him intently, studying his face and, now and then, whining lowly. Sober, his master was, but his mind evidently insisted on straying from the job at hand. He was clumsy, too, and dropped his belt-ax. It struck a stone and a deep nick was knocked from

the bit. He held it in his hand and stared at the useless implement for long.

In the afternoon he gathered himself as with an effort and, the dog in the canoe, set out for his first hours of cruising. Before sundown he paddled across to the cabin where he might have stayed, took an ax from the tool cache, went inside and looked about and then returned to camp.

They were alone. They had not seen a soul, or heard a man-made sound. . . . Of course, Frank Bluejay, squatting in the alders, made no sound except a surly, impatient grunt. That was when he raised himself to one knee and sought to cover the man in the canoe out there with the worn rifle he carried, and found that the glare of sunlight made the bead show large as an orange. When the canoe was out of the glare, the range was too far for certainty.

And the next morning when Drake put out, he crossed the green of shoals and held his course there for a mile. By the time he was over the indigo of depths again he was far beyond the point where the 'breed waited.

So Bluejay went surlily back to camp and cursed his squaw and their children for not picking faster, and grumbled over the salt pork. He had hunted for two days, now, and had not found a deer.

"Then you aint so smart," his woman snapped. "We see lots o' deer. If you're so crazy for fresh meat you better come with us."

"I'll get meat!" he growled, and in the morning, set out after it. He carried buckets, saying that he might as well pick berries after he got his deer if he happened to find a good patch.

THURSDAY and Friday passed with no fresh meat in the Bluejay camp; when the 'breed left on Saturday morning it was early, at the crack of dawn—a splendid time to find deer browsing or making their way to the ridges where they bedded for the day. But his eyes were not alert for deer. He made speed, threading the timber at a lope when camp was safe behind, covering the miles swiftly. . . .

Kerry Drake was up early as well, on this day, stripping and running naked into the biting cold water, plunging, blowing, splashing great fronds of water at Tip, who had followed him in. The dog liked it; he barked and yelped and seemed to be trying to say:

"That's better, chum! That's the way to act! That's your old self! I belong to a laughing rascal, not to a man who's as solemn as a church!"

Drake played roughly with the dog and then, turning shoreward, outswam him to the fringe of reeds.

A spanking little breeze had come with the sunrise, flattening out the smoke of the small fire, making coffee slow to boil and delaying the frying of bass he had caught last evening.

Wavelets hissed through the rushes. The deep blue of the channel was flecked with small white-caps and stringers of foam writhed down the seaway. Drake looked at the weather and opined that the day would keep clear, though the wind might rise to half a gale.

That is what Frank Bluejay thought too, as breathing heavily, he made his way to the edge of a cedar thicket on the shore and saw the smoke of that breakfast fire. The wind was increasing, and that was good. The sound of a shot would not travel so far on a day when the elements rioted.

He did not fidget nor fuss through the interval of waiting. He had enough Indian in him to preclude that. But when the canoe put out he rose slowly, certain of his good concealment, and stiffened.

Drake paddled straight toward the ambushed Indian, holding his canoe into the seas to gain shelter before altering his course. The light craft pitched and rolled rhythmically under the impulse of his paddle. In the bow Tip balanced nicely, letting his tongue loll.

Close and closer to the fringe of distant cedars they progressed, within two hundred yards, a hundred and seventy-five, a hundred and fifty; then the seas having subsided, Kerry swung sharply to the left, putting his canoe broadside to the weather.

It was now that Bluejay pulled back the hammer of his worn old rifle. Slowly he pressed his cheek tight against the cool stock. The sight-bead came down, wavering, found its object. The muzzle moved thrice, following the rise and fall of the canoe. The brown hand on the grip squeezed. . . . The 'breed stood there for a long moment, lips loose, watching.

On the shot Drake had pitched forward and sideways, across the rail. For an instant the canoe hung so, on its beam's end; then with a quick roll and a little splash it went bottom up and began to drift with the seas.

Tip, thrown into the waters, head held high, began circling swiftly. Around and around he went, crying out for the master who had disappeared.

With a sharp nod, Bluejay turned. He left the cedars, climbed the bank and pushed on through the hardwood. A little later a yearling doe leaped up before him. He shot quickly, and shot again; then he walked on toward camp, bearing the hindquarters. Unlawful, this—but the wardens winked at men of the country living from the country. No one would trouble him; he rather hoped he might be seen. The venison would explain his having the rifle along, and while Townline Lake never gave up those who died in its depths—well, a man can never be too safe!



CHAPTER XVI

TOWNLINE LAKE never gives up its dead. That was the thought which flashed through Kerry's mind as he went overboard. Once down in the channels—

But he was not going down in any channel! He was there, under his capsized canoe, still holding the shattered paddle in one hand.

The blow of the bullet had all but torn it from his grasp. Just as he was dipping the blade that terrific impact had struck. Perhaps the smooth ash had deflected the missile; perhaps the aim of his assailant had not been good. But the sound of the rifle, a flat, dull crash, had reached his ears before he could make a move in reaction to amazement. And then his first act was for self-preservation.

Some one had shot at him from shore; some one had lain in wait to kill him. Some one had shot with reasonable accuracy—and to let them believe that an end had been achieved was at once smartness and caution.

So he went over the far side, his torso lolling in the water, the move throwing Tip out with a great scrambling. Slowly Kerry extricated his legs; cautiously he twisted his body so he would come up beneath the craft.

In there, he could hear nothing but the slosh of water, the rustle of wind, the sharp, inquiring bark of the dog.

Drake wanted to call out, to reassure the dog that all was well, for Tip was in a great state of excitement and distress. But to do that, he feared, would set the animal diving for him and that, to a watcher, might betray the secret—that he was safe and in concealment.

The toss of the canoe grew more pronounced as they drifted into heavier seas. The chill of the water ate into his flesh, into his bones. His teeth commenced to chatter.

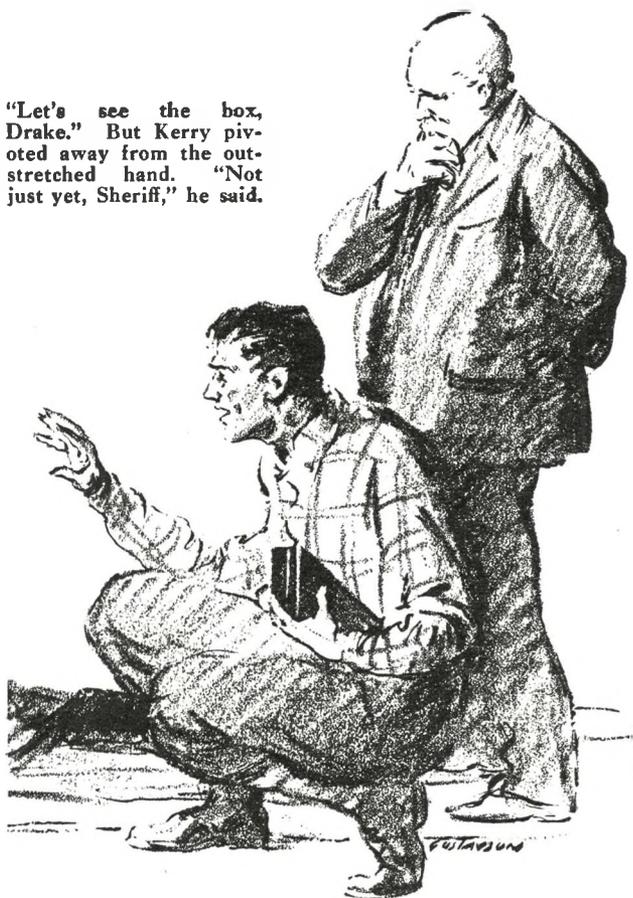
With great caution, he shoved himself downward and came up on the leeward side. With a shake of his head he cleared water from his eyes, and opening them, burst into laughter.

The dog had just rounded the bow again. His look was tense, almost agonized, but when he came thus face to face with his master and heard his rolling laugh, the ears picked stiffly and then relaxed, the orange flare left the eyes and a pink tongue showed.

"Okay!" Kerry choked. "All jake, chum! Hi! . . . All right, then!" And he turned his cheek to the frantic tongue for a moment.

"Listen, Tip," he said, holding the dog afloat with one hand while the other rested on the canoe. "I got to get out of this! Cold? D'you ever feel colder water in summer? Before we'd drift to shore I'd freeze."

"Let's see the box, Drake." But Kerry pivoted away from the outstretched hand. "Not just yet, Sheriff," he said.



He looked about. The waves were high. Straight downwind was his island, reed-fringed, with warm sunshine beating down upon it. To one on shore, a swimming dog would scarcely be noticed. . . .

"You, Tip! . . . You get to camp! Savvy?" He reached for a hold on the dog's tail. "Ho, on, now! Camp! Hie on!"

Obediently, the dog turned downwind. Kerry kept his hold on the tail, let go the canoe. He turned to his side and then to his back, and as his weight came on Tip the retriever slowed and looked backward.

"Camp!" gasped Kerry. "Hie on!"

Tip settled down to swim, low in the water, making slow going of it, but nevertheless towing his master, steadily. . . . And a watcher, had he seen the dog, would never have guessed what dragged behind. . . .

Kerry wormed his way through the reeds, once they were reached, and stretched flat on his belly on the clean sand, letting the sun lick up the chill from his bones.

He lay there a long time before he moved. Then he wriggled into the brush, got behind his tent, extricated his binoculars from the pack and for a long time studied the point from which the bullet designed to take his life must have been fired.

His canoe had followed him ashore but for a time he made no move to secure it. At length, reassured, he embarked; his rifle at hand, Tip again in the bow, he set out for the mainland, following a course that would take him from the point of ambush. There he cached the canoe in bushes and began circling the shore.

He spent considerable time trying to determine the course of the bullet, and searched the shore for sign. But there was no sign. In a thick clump of cedars he found faint traces of movement: a trampled seedling, a bruised herb. But an animal might have done these. No footprints showed. He went on, to the cabin.

He opened the door, peered in, then stooped, frown-

ing. A fine dusting of dry sand was on the floor. Sand? No, his fingers told him it was powdered clay. It went from the doorway across toward a far corner; just a light dusting of it, a ragged stringer. He wondered what that might mean. Following, he found that it ended at two short sections of flooring. At some time—there was no way of determining when—these had been tampered with. Perhaps broken boards had been replaced. Still, why that dirt on the floor? It had not been here Thursday.

"Tip," he said, as he stuffed tobacco into his pipe, "I'm getting good and hot under the collar! Shot at from ambush! Now, who the devil—" He lighted his smoke and stood frowning, debating.

"Let's go to town," he said to the dog, "and see who's surprised to see us!"

That was about noon; he had fourteen miles to go. . . . He could cut off five, he remembered, if he took an old road, long disused, which Nan had pointed out to him when they had traveled this way together. Beaver work had flooded it years back, she had said. This spring the abandoned dam had gone out. With a little work it might be made passable.

So he went that way, walking intently, with the space-eating stride of the woodsman, rifle in the crook of his arm, seeing but little of what he passed. He did stop once, to watch bees working in fireweed.

CHAPTER XVII

NOW Nat Bridger, the Sheriff, though a man large in stature, was small in heart and soul. There were those in the country who called him a boot-licker.

He was alone in his office when the outer jail door opened and Tod West entered the corridor. He glanced around, at the rooms right and left, at the barred door to the bull-pen straight ahead with a man standing against it, holding one bandaged hand in the other gingerly.

"Hullo, Dick!" West said, with something of his old genial manner, because he felt that affairs were shaping themselves more to his liking. "Heard you drank too much of your own hooch! What ails the hand?"

"Blood-poison," the man growled. "'Most drives me crazy! Doc Adams says it's better, but it don't seem so to me. . . . I'll be out this evenin', anyways."

The voices had attracted the Sheriff, who came to the doorway.

"Oh, hul-lo, Tod!" he cried. He went on to remark how well this sight of an old friend pleased him, and shook hands, and went through a performance of greeting which to an understanding person would have explained clearly just why he was considered a boot-licker.

"Good Lord, what happened to you?" he demanded as West followed him in to where the light was better. "Why, Tod, you're all swoll' up!"

West touched his neck gingerly. It was swollen out of shape, his face lop-sided and one eye slightly puffed.

"Damn' hornet got me yesterday," he said. "Was fishin' up Big Beaver and kicked 'em out of a stump. They sure are good at their job!"

"I'll say so! Why—" And the Sheriff discoursed volubly of hornets. "But what brings you here?" he asked at last. "Anything I can do for you, Tod?"

West sat down and crossed his legs and put his hat on one knee.

"Well, not for me, mebbe," he said, "but I heard some- thin' the other night that I kind of figure you ought to know. Likely nothin' to it, but you never can tell."

"Yeah?"

"Yes." He readjusted the hat. "You know Frank Blue-

jay, don't you? Thought so. Kind of scum, Frank is. He's worked for me off and on and I don't trust him much, but there's things about him— For instance, he's always snoopin', always sees things.

"He's been camped out north of us pickin' berries, and comes in most every night to spend what his family makes, I expect. Well, last night he come to me to get a little he had comin', and I got to visitin' and he told me something kind of suspicious.

"He says he'd been lookin' for berries south of Townline Lake Thursday and long about sundown swung past that Downer cabin on his way back to camp. He says he heard poundin' inside.

"Now, you or me, we'd have walked right up to the door—but we aint 'breeds. There's no explainin' 'em and mebbe it's a good thing for Frank and for you and for the county itself that he didn't—leastwise, if there's anything to his story."

He was leaning forward now, and nodded seriously. A little draft through the open transom above fluttered his graying hair and the lone prisoner in the bull-pen leaned closer against the bars, straining to listen.

"He didn't show himself in the door. He just peeked through the window—and, Nat, he says he saw young Holt Stuart on his knees in a corner takin' money out of a tin box he's got buried under the floor!"

HIS voice had dropped to a whisper on this last. He watched the look of amazement spread swiftly over the Sheriff's face.

"Stuart?" Bridger asked in surprise. "Stuart, takin' money out of a tin box buried under the floor? My God, Tod! Why— And he was in that cabin the night Cash was knocked off!"

Tod sat back in his chair.

"Of course, Nat, you're not dumb!" He narrowed his eyes and nodded wisely. "You and I, we'd've had the young lad in for a talkin'-to, anyhow, if it hadn't been for Ezra. But he was so damned sure that that ankle had been sprained the night Cash was killed and that the kid couldn't've gotten out. . . . Oh, well—the best of us'll make mistakes and overlook bets."

Bridger's face was gray with strain.

"We won't overlook *this* bet!" he snapped. "By God, Tod, if I can just clean up this Downer mystery, then I guess these other birds that've been threatenin' to run for this office, come fall, will crawl back into their holes!"

"Yes. . . . But if you don't— Some of the boys are gatherin' up a lot of support!"

"Now, let's see. Butch's away out south, servin' some papers. He'd ought to be back a little after noon. —No-body knows this?"

"Not a soul, far's I know. I told Bluejay to keep his mouth shut."

Bridger was pacing the floor in agitation.

"It won't do to go alone. If this stuff's there, as the 'breed says it is, we'll have to bring the lad in with us. Takin' a man as a murder suspect aint a simple matter. As a matter of duty, I'd ought to have my deputy with me."

"Yes, and then some, maybe."

"Would you go along, Tod?"

"Anything I can do I'd feel it my duty to do." He rose. "Tell you what: I've got to drag along home. I might hear somethin' there. I'll be waitin' when you and Butch show up."

"And that'll be as quick as I can get hold of him. I'll try it by telephone."

So it was that when Ezra Adams, rusty black bag in his hand, mounted the jail steps to make a last call on

his patient there before the man was due for release, he heard the story the prisoner had heard; he learned that Bridger and his deputy had started north a few moments before—and he went back down the steps excitedly!

CHAPTER XVIII

KERRY DRAKE, his dog at his heels, swung into the men's shanty behind Nan Downer's headquarters, set his rifle carefully in a corner and immediately went out. He strolled down through the mill yard, speaking to a man here and there, scrutinizing faces, talked briefly with the foreman and the pond man and then crossed the trestle toward West's Landing.

A car stood before Tod West's house, its motor running. A group lounged before the store; a blueberry-buyer's truck, half-loaded, came to a halt there. He looked long at West's house, but saw no one. . . .

Tod West, within, had his back to the Sheriff and his deputy. He was busy changing shoes for pacs so the flush on his face, so far as they could tell, might have come from bending over. They had not seen Drake's passing, but West had—and for a moment the man felt panic come again into possession of his faculties.

Drake, alive and in town! And when he returned from Shoestring at noon Frank Bluejay had been waiting for him with word that Drake was forever removed from the Madwoman! Collected his money, too—two twenties and a ten—and had gone to wait for the coming of the Landing's most patronized hooch-maker!

Tod's first thought was that Bluejay had been mistaken; that his shot had gone wild, that Drake had escaped. But the 'breed had been so sure; had told of how Drake never moved; of how he had gone down into the deep waters of Townline Lake; of how his dog had swum round and round the drifting canoe and finally struck out for shore. . . .

A shaking rage gripped him. The Indian had lied, then! The 'breed had taken money under—

"We'd ought to be gone, Tod!" Bridger's voice broke in on his swift train of speculation and doubt and suspicion. "We want to be back before sundown. He might light out."

"Ready in a minute," West said thickly. Drake was out of sight when the Sheriff's car, bearing the three, whirled around in the street and drove past the store.

Yes, Drake was out of Tod West's sight, but in full view of Frank Bluejay, sitting in a chair tilted against the wall of Knight's store. He had been in full sight of the man for perhaps ten seconds, standing there in the doorway, surveying the dozen people in the establishment. One by one he saw them look at him, some with nods or words of recognition, others with the blank and casual notice of strangers. Then his gaze came to rest on the breed.

Bluejay's one foot had been swinging idly. On Drake's appearance the arc it made diminished. More slowly, it swung until it came to rest, and during that interval the man's jaw sagged.

He sat so, gaping, unmoving; then his chair came down on all fourlegs with a thud.

No one else had noticed his perturbation—did not until Drake spoke. He hitched at his belt and said, easily enough: "Surprised, Bluejay?"

Slowly Bluejay rose to his feet, hands behind him, shoving on the chair back to aid his weakened leg muscles. His bronze face was oddly lined and a luminous fear danced in the black eyes.

"Surprised, eh?" Drake began to advance with a curious swing to his shoulders. "Surprised to see me here. . . .

That's what I came for, Bluejay, to see who'd be surprised!"

The man was retreating, now, his hands spread against the wall, sidling along, making for the rear. He did not speak, though his lips worked.

Kerry moved faster and as the 'breed lurched down the room, he was upon him.

"I didn'!" Bluejay gasped as Kerry's hand fastened on his shirt at the shoulder, spinning him around, halting his flight. He quailed as those hands imprisoned his arms. "I—I didn'—" he moaned.

"Didn't *what?*" Drake's voice was like the crack of a whip. "Didn't *what?*"—insistently, when no reply was forthcoming. "All right, don't answer! I don't need your words, you snake!"

He let go an arm and his hard fingers grasped the 'breed's throat. Beseechingly, Bluejay let drop something he had held in one hand and grasped Drake's wrists.

"Don'!" he moaned. "Don', Drake! I—I didn'—"

His knees were sagging, but Kerry held the man half erect by the grip on his throat.

"You lie!" he growled. "You lie, Bluejay! You're guilty as hell and I've come to make you answer for it. And what you're going to do is this: You're going out of this store! You're going out of this town! You're going out of this country as fast as the good God will let you! And if you show up again,"—shaking him slowly,— "if you show your face here again so long as I'm here I'll strangle you to death as sure as water runs downhill! Now do you understand?"

With a sideways fling, he let the man go. Bluejay sprawled on the floor, knocking over a chair as he fell, but before he came to rest he was scrambling to hands and knees, then to his feet, circling to be away from Drake. Toward the door he scuttled and down the steps he ran.

As Kerry stooped to pick up that which the 'breed had dropped, the sputter and roar of a motor could be heard, and as he smoothed out the bill and searched its crisp surface for the serial number, gears whined and a battered and tattered flivver stirred the dust of the street.

Mel Knight came from behind the counter. Men outside were crowding in.

"My gosh, Kerry, you sure put a crimp in that Injun!" Knight said with a grin. "I'd like to bet he won't be seen! My gosh, what made him look so scared afore you even made a move?"

But Drake did not answer. He knew certain serial numbers by heart. This was one! A twenty-dollar bill of a certain series—crisp, unused, folded, evidently, only twice.

He was about to answer; he was going to tell them all what had happened this morning out on Townline Lake—but as he drew breath to speak car brakes squealed outside and Ezra Adams' voice, curiously strained, called sharply: "Has anybody happened to see Kerry Drake around today?"

Drake turned from Knight.

"Hi, Ezra!" he called, starting forward. "What's up?"

WHAT was up? Enough was up! As quickly and as clearly as he could, Ezra repeated the story that the prisoner had told him.

"A frame-up!" muttered Drake. "Good God, West's hand is in this! He's planted that stuff and hired the 'breed to swear to a lie! Unless we beat 'em to it—"

"And they've gone!" Ezra rasped. "They crossed the wagon bridge just as I made the turn: Bridger, and Butch his deputy, and Tod West! They're bound for the cabin sure as you're born and—"

"Get out of that seat and let me drive!" Drake ordered, shoving the old man from the steering-wheel.

"What d'you think we'd ought to do?" Ezra cried.

"Hang on, for now!" snapped Kerry as, throwing in the clutch, he spun the car about, headed downstream, lurched into the ruts leading to the wagon-bridge and shot across with a roar like thunder.

Upstream, then, past Nan's mill, behind headquarters and into the road the Sheriff's car had followed.

"Listen, Ezra!" he cried above the rattle and roar of the car. "We've got just one thing to do—if we smash axles and hearts trying to do it! That's get to that cabin before they do, hold 'em off, see what's been planted there, keep Stuart from arrest and have a chance to pin the frame-up, at least, on West. Nobody else'd want to do it."

"But how—"

"I don't *know!* I don't know how! The important thing is— Lord, what a bump! Hurt you? Hang on, then! Here's a better stretch!"

THEIR way was now through an old burning where the ruts ran straight and the chuck-holes were few. For a mile they traveled at high speed and then, brakes on, stirred vast dust-clouds as they slowed for a left turn into a dim trail.

"Here! Where're you— *That's* the only way!"

"It was, Ezra, until a few weeks ago. Beaver dam's out! I came through here on foot this morning. Unless I overlooked a lot, we can get through. If we get through, we'll be ahead. If we don't, we're sunk for the time being, anyhow!"

Tall grasses raked the fenders; briars squealed their way along the dusty paint. Here they crawled on low through a marshy stretch; there they made a sandy grade by a hair. Drake got out once to lift a dead sapling from the way and leaped back in to start forward with a vicious lurch. Down-grade they went, into a cattail bottom, into a silt basin that had been until this summer a beaver pond for many years.

He slowed as they reached the creek-bed, eased the front wheels gingerly up on the water-bleached corduroy, bound to the stringers by iron bands, held his breath as the car's weight went on the structure and then, as it sank and crackled beneath them, gave the motor all it could take!

They tilted, they sagged. A hind wheel spun, tire singing, and the smell of burning rubber was strong. He clamped his jaws and gripped the wheel until his knuckles showed white. Old Ezra clutched wildly for a hold as the car tilted. And then the spinning wheel found purchase. They crawled forward, slewed sideways and finally, with a bump and a bounce, were away from the culvert, roaring for the high land beyond!

"Made her!" Kerry yelled and slapped Ezra's knee. "Made her, Coroner, and we'll have almost a half hour's edge at the cabin!"

They were ahead of Bridger and his companions, for certain, but they had not gained a whole half hour. The one tire, frayed by its tussle on the culvert, went down, and they made the last two miles of sand trail through the timber on a flat, bouncing and rattling madly.

Drake was out of the car before the motor stopped spinning. He strode to the door and threw it open.

"See that dirt?" he asked, pointing to the trickle of dust across the floor.

The Doctor's old eyes followed his pointing finger.

"That's where it'd've been!" he muttered, glancing at the one window. "Bluejay said he looked through the window. It's the only corner he could see, handy!"

"And he said he saw Holt in here about sundown, Thursday?"

"As I recollect it."

"A plant, for sure! I was in here about then, on Thurs-

day. The floor was clean, Ezra. But today—this stuff was here! Let's go!"

He was on his knees beside the two short sections of flooring where the trail of dirt began, eying them closely.

"See? Here's where they were pried up with something," he said excitedly. "A wrecking-bar, crowbar, or something. Then they dug a hole for the box and carried the dirt out—maybe in a bucket or a newspaper—anything. But they were either careless or what they used leaked. That's why they dirtied the floor. . . . Now!"

He reached for an ax leaning against the wall, inserted the bit in a crack between boards and pried carefully.

"Ah!" The nails gave readily.

"Careful of these boards, now. They may be evidence. . . . Here we go!"

He began scooping at earth that had once been hard-packed. It came out in chunks and lumps, some of which crumbled to dust in the handling. A little heap grew beside the hole in the floor. And then his busy hands touched metal.

OLD Ezra, stooping far over, breathed in quick gasps. Carefully Drake worked his fingers beneath the buried object, lifted, and out it came, a dirt-covered, flat box of japanned metal.

"Cash's box!" the physician muttered. "Cash's box and—"

He did not finish the question; his voice trailed off in suspense as Kerry tugged at the catch of the cover. Was the money there which would forever put Nan Downer beyond the reach of Tod West? Was emancipation for this girl—

The catch gave; the cover opened and Ezra's low moan joined the sound of a swiftly approaching car.

"Only *that!*" he said flatly.

"Three of 'em," muttered Kerry. "Three hundred-dollar bills!"

"And the rest of it gone beyond—"

"Not for sure! This is a plant, remember. He'd put only enough here to pin the thing on Holt. Yes,"—scrutinizing the bills,—"they're the correct numbers! The rest, Ezra, is cached somewhere yet!"

"And here they come!"

The car swung into the clearing, its motor died and a voice said sharply: "What the hell—"

Other voices, subdued. Then they heard the words: "Ezra's bus—"

"What'll we do now?" the old man whispered.

"Stand pat!" Kerry muttered, closing the box; closing it and flipping the cover up again quickly to stare at the inside surface, black and glossy, its lacquer unmarred. A curious smile of triumph was in his eyes as he raised his face. "Stand pat, Ezra! This is your investigation. Don't let 'em get their hands on a piece of this evidence, because—"

It was Nat Bridger, swinging through the door, one hand significantly at a hip, who interrupted him.

"What comes off here?" he demanded and stopped, poised just within the room, frowning, mouth loose. "Oh, you, Ezra!" His ready hand dropped from the hip. "You're here, eh?"

"Yes," the Coroner said, shoving up his spectacles.

"Yes, Nat. Good afternoon! Howdy, Butch!" as the deputy appeared.

Bridger turned to his subordinate and then looked past him at Tod West who approached slowly, as if perhaps not just sure of how to conduct himself.

"Well, this is a surprise!" the Sheriff growled. "How come you're here, Ezra?"

"Official business, Nat. I got a tip this afternoon that

mebbe there'd be somethin' of interest to the Coroner of this county in this camp. And I guess, mebbe, the tip wasn't so far wrong."

Here Tod West showed himself in the doorway. He halted there and his eyes rested an instant on the old physician. Then, as if he forced himself to an ordeal, they swung to Kerry Drake, still kneeling by that hole in the floor, the box on his thighs. But if he expected to find a challenge or accusation on Drake's face he was wrong, and a sort of relief relaxed the set lines of his countenance.

"They heard it too, Tod," said Bridger, and in his voice was an appeal for guidance, perhaps.

But West's mind was not simple. He was thinking things, many things—trying, in his swift reasoning, to encompass all the elements possible to this situation.

"Frank probably peddled his story," he said.

Bridger now moved closer to Drake, and his deputy followed.

"So that's where he had it cached, eh?"—stopping and peering down at the hole. "You found it all right! Well, by God, this's a su'prise! Let's see the box, Drake."

He reached down, a matter-of-fact gesture, but Kerry pivoted away, snuggling the box against his side, swinging it away from the outstretched hand.

"Not just yet, Sheriff," he said.

Bridger gasped.

"Not just— Say,"—straightening and turning to Ezra,—"just what comes off here?"

The Coroner's face showed bewilderment. This was a situation a bit too complex for his resources.

Kerry spoke quietly. "What's coming off, Bridger, is a Coroner's investigation."

"Well,"—harshly,—"*it's a Sheriff's investigation, now!* Give me that box! I want a look at what's in it!"

Drake rose swiftly.

"No, Bridger. When the Coroner has finished, then it'll be time for you—"

"Who the hell are *you*? Can the Sheriff ask that, then? Who are you, Drake, to be buttin' into a murder case?"

Kerry shrugged.

"I'm only a deputy coroner," he said.

"Deputy cor— Since when?"

Ezra seized the cue.

"For a couple of weeks now, Nat. You see, this thing aint exactly new. It's been simmerin'. I appointed Drake as my deputy so's to have another pair of eyes and ears in this country."

THE Sheriff scratched his head and grunted. Tod West took a step or two which put him close to the table; he leaned against it, watching, listening. A tin cup was there; he picked it up and twirled it in his hands. His heart was pelting against his ribs, now, but it was no moment to make a move, to say a word. Things had been happening of which he had been ignorant. His play was to learn as much as possible.

"Well, even so—" began Bridger and scratched his head again. He was not sure of his ground. He hazarded a course:

"But you had your inquest; you got nowhere. Now, seems to me, we got a hot lead on this case. I guess it's up to my office to go through with it and make the pinch. We've got to have evidence—so I guess I'll demand what you've found here."

"Demand away!" snapped Kerry, his dislike of the man mounting. "Demand and be damned to you, Bridger! Your authority isn't one-two-three with a Coroner's! Go read your law!"

No need of this. Bridger knew that much, but on the

rebuff he flushed hotly. Before he could speak, however, Drake went on:

"There's nothing about what we've found to cover up. In this box are just three hundred dollars in three bills. The serial numbers correspond to those Cash Downer drew from the bank the day he was killed. There may be other items here which will figure quite largely in the case, though!"

That, he knew, was bad judgment. He knew it before the words were out of his mouth, before West dropped the tin cup. He did drop it and it rolled with a metallic rattle across the floor.

"Just what d'you mean?" Nat demanded.

"We don't know, yet. We've just made a start. Now, you're at liberty to do any investigating you want to just so long as you don't mess things up for us. Our plan," he concluded, "was to take this stuff in and go over the evidence taken at the inquest."

"But what about Stuart?"

"Well, you answer that. *What* about him?"

"My God, aint you goin' to make a pinch?"

KERRY debated. Have Holt Stuart dragged off to the Shoestring jail before Nan's eyes? Have him lodged there,—though even for no more than a few hours, perhaps,—charged with her father's murder?

"Do you think that's wise?" he asked in a more conciliatory tone, sparring for time. "So far as we know, there's not a great deal against him, yet. The boy's in the country. He can't get out if he wants to; can't get far, anyhow. You and your men know it like a book. You could pick him up if he did try to beat it, Sheriff. And if we keep quiet until tomorrow—who knows what'll develop?"

Bridger saw his chance of making an immediate and impressive arrest fading.

"I'm not so damn' sure, Drake. Throw 'em in the can first and investigate afterwards, I say! If he—"

"But you might spill the whole platter of beans! Don't you think, Ezra, it would be wiser to hold back?"

"I certainly do! I'm not going off half-cocked on this case, Nat. I want a chance to sit down and add up what we've got now."

Kerry nodded encouragingly and looked covertly at Tod West, retrieving the tin cup, twirling it with apparent casualness in his fingers again. The hands were trembling.

"What d'you think, Tod?" Nat asked.

"Why, that's up to you. Me, I'd take Stuart if you've got anything on him. First, though, I'd look this lay-out over pretty careful."

"And Ezra and I," said Drake, "we'd probably better be heading for town."

"I think so, too," said the old man, but his eyes were mystified; he was following his deputy's lead.

"Better bring along those boards," Drake suggested. "We've got that tire to change."

They went outside, then, leaving the other three within, walked directly to the car and Kerry put the box carefully on the seat cushion.

"Stall!" he whispered. "Let 'em clear out!"

He looked at his right hand and rubbed his fingertips together.

He touched again a smear of sticky dirt on the edge of the box and then busied himself with jack and wheel wrench.

For twenty minutes he stalled for time in the changing of that tire. In the beginning a low and hurried muttering came from the cabin and then Nat spoke freely.

"All right, Butch. Let's measure this thing off, now, so's we c'n tell a jury all about it."

Sounds of pacings came from the interior, observations, argument. Then, consciously intent, the Sheriff and his deputy searched the entry and the cabin's surroundings for what they might find. Tod West remained leaning against the table until they came out; then he followed them with a fine show of impersonal interest.

"Well, mebbe you're right about Stuart," Bridger said finally, approaching Ezra and Drake. "But I got a duty. I won't wait too long. I'll drive to town and come to your office tonight. I'm leavin' Butch at the Landin'. I'll take no chances with that baby. If he should get away—it'd be just plain hell!"

They drove away and when they were gone from sight Kerry dropped his wrench.

"Give me those boards!" he said excitedly. "Here! Come on, Ezra! Let's see what he used to pry 'em up with!"

He went directly to the cache of tools beside the doorway, eying the implements one by one.

"It's a bet!" he muttered, and ducked inside, coming out with a newspaper in his hands.

Shielding his palms with a torn page he lifted from its resting-place a worn and shining crowbar.

"What's the idea—" Ezra began.

"What d'you see there?" Drake demanded triumphantly. "Look at the end, Ezra!"

The old man peered closely.

"Dirty," he muttered. "Dirt stickin' to it."

"And what kind of dirt? Don't you get it? It's the same color and kind as that under the floor, there! Scrape a little of it off in a clean paper. . . . There! That's right. . . . He used this bar to bust up that hard clay and make a hole for the box, and he used it to pry up those floor-boards. Here—give me one! See? The mark on the board fits exactly!"

"But I don't see yet, why—"

Drake gave an excited laugh.

"Good God, Ezra! This old bar's as smooth and bright as if it'd been polished! Fingerprints will be all over it. Inside the cover of that box, big as life and twice as natural, is a man's thumbprint—and Tod West stood in there for ten minutes fooling with a bright tin cup!"

A light of understanding dawned in Ezra's old eyes.

"Spread out that newspaper," Drake said before the other could give voice to his emotions. "Lay it on the ground. . . . So. . . . Now we'll roll up this bar so the prints wont get rubbed away and— What the devil—"

HE had put the bar down and started to lift away the paper which had shielded his hands. It stuck, peeled off slowly and he held it up to the level rays of a sun setting behind the timber.

He sniffed the smear on the paper, frowning; touched it tentatively with his tongue and gave a grunt.

"Honey! What's honey doing on that bar, Ezra? And something sticky on the box, too." They gazed at one another. "And Tod West," he said slowly, "is all swollen up. Notice that?"

"I did. What you make of that?"

Drake, puzzled, stared blankly at the ground and scratched a temple.

"Nothing, yet," he muttered. "Nothing. . . . But we've got a mess of stuff to make something of!"

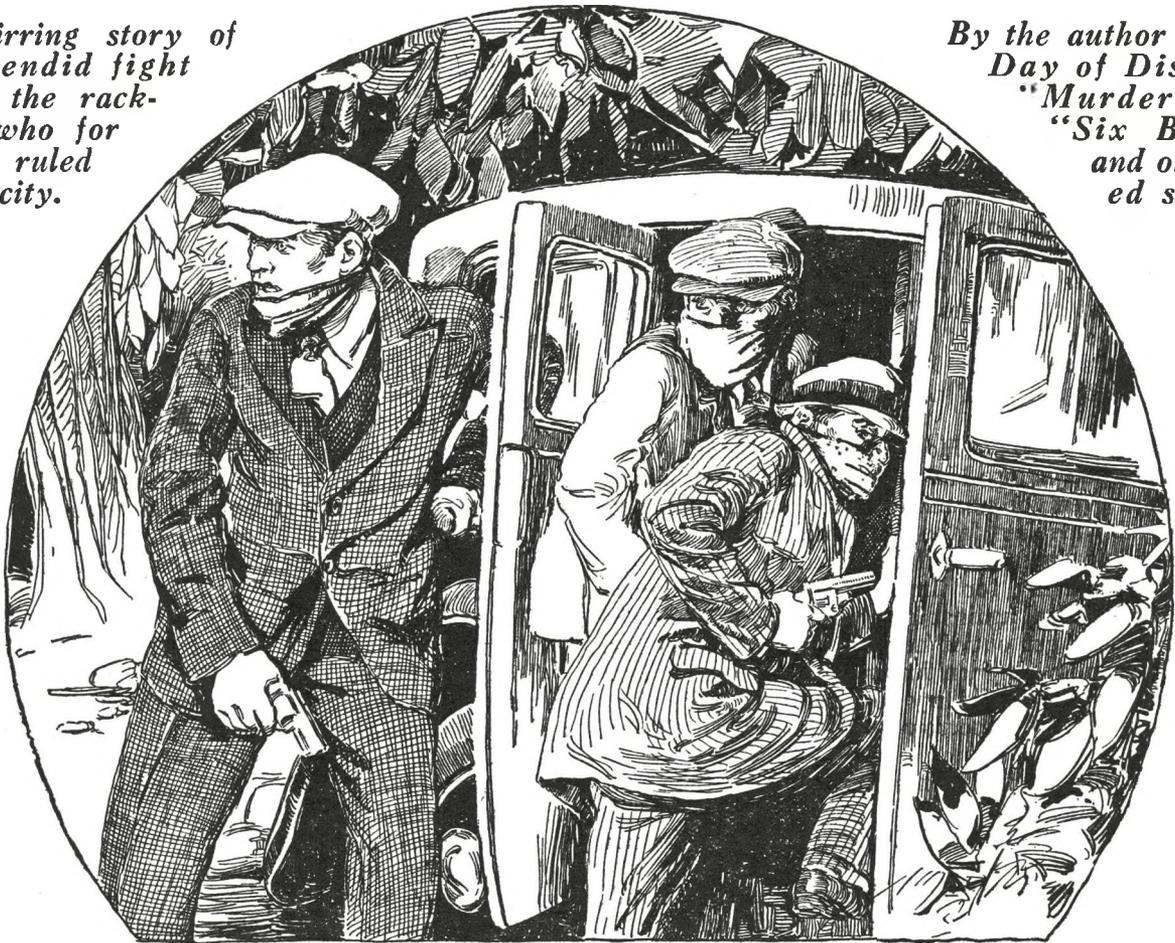
Carefully they gathered up their evidence: the box, the bar, the floor-boards and, lastly, also carefully wrapped in paper, the tin cup with which Tod West had busied his trembling hands!

The swift action of this story mounts to a thrilling climax in the next, the August, issue.

Phantom Foemen

The stirring story of the splendid fight against the racketeers who for a time ruled a great city.

By the author of "The Day of Disaster," "Murder, Inc.," "Six Bombs," and other noted stories.



IN the small front office of the Apex Cleaning and Dyeing Shop Porter Gaffney, the tall young proprietor, stood behind the receiving counter and eyed the man who had just entered the establishment. The visitor was a big, red-faced, fat youth. He was flashily dressed and carried himself with an arrogant air. His name was Jake Sauers and he was a "collector" for an entirely mythical Guardian Insurance Company. Putting it clearly and truthfully, he was a taker of tribute-money for "Hefty Sam" Marlin, big shot of the North Side rackets.

Without uttering a word, Sauers extended his hand. He knew that Porter Gaffney knew why he had called at the shop.

"I haven't got it, Sauers," declared Gaffney flatly. "There is only seven dollars in the till—and what money I have in the bank will not cover the amount of the bills I must pay within the next week to keep from being closed up."

"Too bad—too bad," declared Sauers. "Business must be pretty rotten."

"Business is good enough," snapped Gaffney, "but it can't stand this hundred-dollar-a-month shakedown by you pirates. That's all there is to it."

"What do you think about that offer the friend I told you about made for your joint a while back?" inquired

By **SEVEN ANDERTON**

Illustrated by Joseph Maturro

Sauers softly. "It still stands, you know."

"Damn it, Sauers," said

Gaffney through tight lips, "this place is worth twice what you offered, and you know it. But if you'll come up a thousand dollars I'll let you have the shop."

"I don't want a joint like this,"—the sneering smile on Sauers' face had given place to an expression of sinister cunning,—"and the offer I made you for my friend is his top price. He won't raise it a dollar."

"I won't sell for that," declared Gaffney firmly.

"Well, then—" Sauers again extended his fat hand and made a suggestive motion with the fingers.

"I tell you I can't pay it," cried Gaffney.

"No?" Sauers shrugged. "Well, I'll come back again this afternoon. Maybe you can raise the wind by then. If not, I advise you to sell the dump to my friend." He swung about and moved toward the door.

Porter Gaffney's face went white. His left hand pulled open a drawer beneath the counter, and his right reached for a blued-steel automatic which lay therein. Then the hand was reluctantly withdrawn, and the door swung shut behind the gangster.

Gaffney shrugged wearily, took his hat from a peg and jerked it onto his head. He stepped into the back room. A big negro boy and a wiry little Jewish youth were at work on the pressing-machines.

"Watch the front, Abe," Gaffney said to the Jewish youth. "I'm going out for a bit."

A moment later he was crossing the street. He entered the Astor theater,—a neighborhood motion-picture house,—crossed the tiled lobby and climbed a flight of stairs.

Henry Wisner looked up and nodded a greeting as the sober-faced Gaffney entered his office, which opened off the mezzanine floor of the theater. Wisner was a tall, gaunt man past thirty. He owned the Astor theater.

"I'm sunk, Henry," said Gaffney as he dropped into a chair facing the man at the littered desk. "Jake Sauers was in this morning—he just left," Gaffney went on. "I couldn't pay him. He's coming back this afternoon. I've got to have his money or sell the shop for what he offered me before—or else—"

There was silence for a few moments. Wisner's eyes had narrowed and a frown knit his brows.

"I'll have to let the place go," Gaffney broke the silence. "There's nothing else to do. If I do that and pay up all my other debts, I'll only have seven hundred dollars left to pay on the thousand you loaned me when I started up the business. My wife and I are young and healthy; we'll get away from here and start over. I'll pay the other three hundred as soon as—"

Gaffney broke off and both men turned toward the windows which opened on the street, as the wail of an approaching siren reached their ears and grew louder as it drew rapidly nearer. The two men strode to a window.

The police ambulance and another police car had stopped before a stairway a few doors from Gaffney's cleaning-shop. A milling crowd was rapidly gathering about the scene. Officers and white-coated orderlies with stretchers were pushing through the mob to mount the stairway.

"Let's go down," said Wisner. . . .

Police who had broken into a small flat above a chain grocery discovered a ghastly scene of slaughter. The place was a shambles. A man, his wife and five children, ranging from a girl of eight to a three-months'-old baby, were dead. The scene told its own story: Emil Lentz had shot and killed his wife and children and then put a bullet through his own brain. The gun with which the deed had been accomplished was still clutched in the man's hand.

TEN minutes after they had left Wisner's office, Henry Wisner and Porter Gaffney returned to it.

"God in heaven!" cried Gaffney. "Can't something be done? You know and I know who is guilty of—of that! Marlin—Hefty Sam Marlin—is the murderer of those seven people! He killed Lentz and Mrs. Lentz and those five poor little shavers just as surely as if he stood in that flat and pulled the trigger of that gun. He bled Lentz for his profits—and more—every month, until Lentz couldn't pay his bills and the wholesale houses closed him out of business. Lentz was broke, and he couldn't find a job. Why didn't he take that gun and go empty it into Marlin's dirty racketeering heart?"

"Yes," nodded Wisner. "In that way he could at least have done the rest of humanity a service, poor devil! But Lentz couldn't have got within range of Marlin, if he had tried. That grafting blackguard stays entrenched every minute behind a young army of gorillas who would rather kill somebody than not."

"Somebody ought to kill him!" cried Gaffney. "I came within an ace of emptying my gat into Jake Sauers' fat belly this morning. I wish now that I had—and I may, when he comes back this afternoon!"

"Snap out of it, Porter," commanded Wisner. "None of that! Suppose you did kill that flabby rat? It wouldn't help matters a bit—and you'd hang for it."

"Yes," Gaffney almost shouted, "I'd hang for it! I'd wipe out a slimy snake that had lived too long the minute he was born, and I'd be hanged in a hurry! But Marlin can murder a family of seven and not even be arrested!"

"PORTER, please gather yourself together," begged Wisner, stepping around the desk and laying a hand on Gaffney's shoulder. "True, Marlin is a murderer. He is also guilty of setting fire to Ross Hampton's store. Ross poured the gasoline and applied the match—and he's in prison now for the crime. But he was insane with desperation. He had paid the Marlin mob until he could pay no longer and he faced ruin of the same sort that overtook Emil Lentz. Hampton took a different way when he found his back to the wall. He was caught. Now his wife is working as a scrubwoman and his baby is in a home; they'll have a tough two years before Hampton is able to help them again. Think, Porter—and keep your head!"

"It's thinking that drives me nuts," growled Gaffney. "Is this damned murdering racketeer to keep on doing things like he has done to Emil Lentz and to Ross Hampton—and like he is doing to me? Henry, you know that I put every penny Rose and I had saved before we got married into equipment for that shop—and added a thousand borrowed from you. You know I've worked like a slave—worked night and day—to make a go of it. And I'd have made it, too, if I hadn't had to carry the extra load of being shaken down by Marlin's mob for a hundred dollars every month. But as it is, I'm sunk—finished! And you tell me to think and keep cool! Can't something be done?"

"Something has got to be done—and something will be done," replied Wisner. "But you can't do it alone, nor by going crazy and shooting some cheap hoodlum like Jake Sauers. I'm going to call up Raymond Shields at the district attorney's office. He's one fellow among the crooked mob of officials in this city whom I know is square. He's been trying hard to get at the gangsters and racketeers since he forced his way onto the district attorney's staff, and he's still trying hard. He's an old friend of mine. I'm going to have him come over here for a talk. Maybe he can help. You stick around—I'll try to get him to hustle over right away."

Wisner picked up the telephone from his desk and called a number. Gaffney walked over to the window and gazed moodily out into the street. He would give his life, he told himself, just to have his two hands firmly on Hefty Sam Marlin's throat!

"Shields will be right over," announced Henry Wisner, turning from the telephone. "He—"

The sound of heavy steps, mounting the stairs to the mezzanine, caused Wisner to cease speaking. A moment later Jake Sauers stepped into the room. He had come to collect from Wisner.

A SNARL came from Porter Gaffney, and he suddenly went berserk. With clenched fists and eyes in which murder blazed he flung himself at the oily hoodlum. But Wisner had seen the move coming. With catlike speed the theater-owner leaped between Sauers and Gaffney. Sauers, his face pasty white, staggered back against the wall.

For a moment it seemed that Wisner would be unable to cope with the angry Gaffney. He was talking rapidly while he struggled. Then Gaffney grew quiet and was pushed back beyond the desk where he stood, white and shaking, his eyes fixed on the object of his rage.

Wisner, breathing hard, went to a safe against a wall and pulled open the door. He counted a number of bank-

notes from a drawer, went over and thrust them into Jake Sauers' hand.

"There," he snapped, "is my hundred, and Gaffney's too. Take them and get out while the getting is good."

"Yeah," sneered Sauers, "I'll be going—but first I want to tell Mr. Gaffney that my friend has changed his mind. He don't want that dinky cleaning joint at any price."

Gaffney's fists clenched—the gangster almost fell out of the little office, and a moment later he was thumping hastily down the stairs.

"Why did you do that, Henry?" demanded Gaffney. "Now I owe you eleven hundred—and I can't even sell the shop and pay part of it! Nobody else will buy it—"

"Forget it for the present, Porter," interrupted Wisner. "Sit down and cool off! Shields should be here any minute."

A few minutes later Raymond Shields arrived. He was a tall, rangy chap in the middle thirties. His features were too rough-hewn to make up a handsome whole, but they harmonized. Men liked his face at first glance. It inspired immediate confidence and respect. Scion of an old and wealthy family, Shields had finished college and then forced himself into a post under the District Attorney, despite the fact that that post was a political plum coveted by many henchmen of the grafting administration. Shields had too much backing from certain high places to be denied the post. But he had found that the hostile administration could and did tie his hands effectually and block his every move to hit at organized crime and vice.

Wisner introduced Porter Gaffney, and Shields shook the youngster's hand. Then the three sat down and went into conference. More than an hour passed before Shields rose to leave.

"I agree with you fellows," said Shields. "This condition has got to be remedied. So far I have failed, but I have hopes for this plan I have outlined to you. We can do no less than try it. Spread the word at once and set the date I suggested for your meeting. We may get somewhere."

"Let's hope so," agreed Henry Wisner.

The suggestion made by Shields was this: Wisner and Gaffney were to see the other merchants and shopkeepers of the outlying shopping center in which their places of business were situated. The shopping district lay along the edge of Bryant Park. Wisner and Gaffney were to call a meeting of their fellow business-men for the following Saturday night, with the purpose of organizing to defy those who were extorting money from them in the name of "protection." Numerous other similar organizations were to be formed on the same night in all parts of the city and all the organizations were to join as soon as possible in the common cause.

"Well," said Wisner to Gaffney when Shields had departed, "it sounds worth trying. Let's get busy."

SOME two hours after midnight that night, there was an explosion in the Apex Cleaning and Dyeing Shop. An incendiary bomb had been tossed in through the rear window. The interior of the place was a raging furnace before fire equipment reached the scene.

Henry Wisner dragged Porter Gaffney away from where the flames had finally yielded to the determined efforts of the firemen. "You are lucky that you had no insurance on your stock and equipment," declared Wisner. "Otherwise, you might be blamed for starting the fire, and sent up like Ross Hampton. Now quit raving. I'll see you through for immediate cash—and you'll be free tomorrow and the next day to see all the business-men in the district, and line them up to be at the meeting."

Saturday night came. In Mechanics' Hall, a fair-sized meeting chamber above a clothing-store, about forty men

were gathered for the purpose of forming the Bryant Park Business-Men's Protective Association. The drain of tribute demanded by gangland had brought nearly every merchant in the district to the verge of ruin. All were agreed that something had to be done.

IT was near eight o'clock, the hour set for the meeting to open, when a rotund little man hastily climbed the stairway and burst into the gathering-place. The newcomer's name was Meyer Levy and he conducted a men's furnishing store about a block from the hall.

"Listen, everybody!" cried the little clothing merchant.

The low buzz of conversation ceased and all eyes were turned upon the speaker.

"In my store," said Meyer Levy, "just when I was about to close up and come over here, I am called on the telephone. On the wire is a voice I cannot recognize—but it is a mean voice. To me he says that I shall come quick to the hall and tell you that it will be too bad if there is anybody in this place at ten minutes past eight. And then he says to tell my friends also that for too many to go together to any other place will be very bad for the health.

"I come quick over here, and just as I am in front that lowlife Jake Sauers drives along slow in his big green car and smiles nasty at me. Then he yells at me that I shall not be too long, and drives away down the street."

For a moment after Meyer Levy ceased speaking there was a thick silence in the room. The assembled men glanced nervously from one to the other. The clothing merchant who had delivered the message looked at his watch, turned and moved hastily toward the exit.

"Wait a minute, Mr. Levy," called Henry Wisner, who had leaped to his feet at the far side of the room.

But Meyer Levy paid no heed. The clatter of his feet on the wooden stairs came back through the door which he had left half open behind him. There was a shuffle of feet and a jumble of muttered remarks as most of the crowd began to move toward that suddenly inviting exit.

"Wait!" boomed Wisner's deep voice again. "All of you wait, just a minute! I want to say something."

The crowd, with the exception of three or four men, halted and looked back.

"Listen, men," said Henry Wisner. "Don't be a bunch of rabbits! Where's your nerve? We can get police protection under the circumstances. They can't deny us such protection while we hold this meeting. We—"

"Ach!" cut in the guttural voice of Fritz Hauserman, who ran the Elkhorn meat-market. "Cops in eight minutes cannot get here—but away from here I can be!" And he proceeded to demonstrate his statement.

On the heels of the butcher moved half a dozen more. In spite of the pleading of Henry Wisner, the next minute turned the retreat into a stampede and the theater-owner was left with but three companions.

"Jellyfish!" Wisner's tone made the word an epithet.

"White-livered skunks," spat a stocky youngster with red hair. His name was Wayne Donahue and he owned the neighborhood garage.

"What do we do now, Hank?" asked Gaffney.

"Are we licked?" This question came from the third of the men who had remained with the belligerent theater-owner. He was a middle-aged Italian of the better type, named Angelo Feroni. He ran a well-patronized restaurant called the Bryant Park Grill.

"No, by thunder, we're not licked!" declared Henry Wisner. "And what we'd better do next is get out of here. We can't gain a thing by staying. But we will meet at my apartment at ten o'clock. Let's do some thinking between now and then. Don't come together. I'll be at home at half-past nine. Feroni, you come at nine-thirty;

Gaffney, you at nine-forty and Donahue at ten. We—"

Wisner fell silent as there came the sound of heavy feet on the stairway. He gave his companions a significant look and started toward the exit. As they were nearing the door three men entered the hall. In the lead was Jake Sauers. The two men who followed him were typical gunmen, bleak-eyed killers who kept their hands in their coat pockets and said nothing.

"Why, hello, gents," said Sauers. "I didn't know there was anybody up here! I just brought up a couple of friends who want to look at the hall and see if it's big enough for a little social dance they plan on giving."

Neither Henry Wisner nor his comrades made any reply. They walked around and past the trio of hoodlums and down the stairs to the street. Jake Sauers' big green roadster stood at the curb before the hall. Across the street another big car—a sedan—held two men who grinned as they watched the exodus of the business-men.

At the nearest corner Wisner and his companions parted.

"Remember—and be careful," said Wisner in a low tone.

They nodded; then went in different directions. . . .

The city had a mayor. There were also numerous officials, ranging in importance and size of salary down to the dog-catcher. But the dog-catcher caught no dog until he made sure that neither Hefty Sam Marlin nor "Slick" Federici nor any of their friends had any interest whatever in the pooch.

The same thing was true of the other men on the city's list of office-holders. For instance, the official whose function it was to issue building permits issued them, or refused to issue them, according to the desire of Messrs. Marlin and Federici. The men who gathered to let contracts for paving and the like made sure before they gathered that they knew to whom Slick and Hefty wished the plum awarded. And so on. For Hefty Sam Marlin and Slick Federici had become the real rulers of the city. They had divided their domain, designating as their frontier a certain street that split the metropolis in half. North of this street Hefty Sam's mob of killers, thugs, burglars and such held sway. This horde of unsavory henchmen extorted tribute from the territory as directed by their chief, and poured thousands of dollars weekly into the Marlin coffers.

South of the dividing street a similar and equally numerous crew of assorted gangsters and hoodlums did the same thing for Slick Federici. The two gang rulers had long since learned that war between their mobs was expensive and filled with menace to their power.

As for the list which began with the mayor and ended with the dog-catcher, Slick and Hefty Sam let those gen-

"Hello, gents," said Sauers. "I just brought up a couple of friends who want to look at the hall."



tle men have the "honor" of holding their offices, and drawing the salaries attached thereto—and saw to it that those salaries were at least doubled by stipends set aside from the spoils of gangland. Furthermore, Marlin and Federici saw to it that the names of the numerous gentlemen were kept on the list so long as they remained docile and obedient. But let one of those gentlemen become recalcitrant, and his name was likely to be transferred from the list to a tombstone, while a new one filled its erstwhile niche. Therefore Marlin and Federici were troubled with little or no insubordination in the ranks of officialdom. Besides the fear of a premature demise, the gentlemen on the list were quite well satisfied. Few if any of them could have gone out into private life and earned one-half or one-quarter of the money they now received.

All this and more was known to the four men who met in the apartment of Henry Wisner at ten o'clock on the night when the meeting in Mechanics' Hall turned into an ignominious flop. Some of the Bryant Park merchants, when first approached by the racketeers for tribute money, had appealed for help to the sources from which they had a right to expect it—and they had received no help, but instead had paid dearly for making the appeal.

"We are through in that direction," declared Henry Wisner grimly, as he leaned on the back of a tall chair and swept his companions with a keen gaze. "The only man of all the official gang that I'd dare to trust is Raymond Shields."

"It was Shields who gave me the idea of forming a fighting crew out of that bunch of yellow-bellied cowards. Shields is square, and he's white. Just the same, District Attorney Farnsworth and the rest of those crooks keep him tied up with red tape until he can't do a thing to fight the racketeers and gangsters of this city."



Gaffney was pushed beyond the desk where he stood, white and shaking, his eyes fixed on the object of his rage.

"Farnsworth is a slick devil," observed Porter Gaffney.

"He is," agreed Wisner. "Raymond Shields told me that he is certain Farnsworth has so much on the crooks in this town that he is one man Marlin and Federici don't dare kick out of office, or monkey with."

"Sounds reasonable," nodded Gaffney. "He's been in that office more than six years—and looks good for a lifetime."

"Why not draw straws to see which one of us shoots Farnsworth?" asked Wayne Donahue. "That would make Shields the District Attorney, and then we might have a fighting chance."

A smile twitched for a moment at Wisner's mouth. "Not a bad idea," he said, "if only we were not decent white men."

"My decency is slipping fast," declared Donahue. "On the square, these damned racketeers have got my back to the wall. I can't go on paying—it's driving me nuts! Don't be surprised if I brain Jake Sauers with a wrench next time he shows up in my garage!"

"Don't get wild, Donahue," said Wisner. "We are all in the same boat. So are those other fellows who ran like a bunch of scared deer because Hefty Sam Marlin had one of his hoodlums say 'boo!' to them. So is the whole city, for that matter. Something has got to be done. Now I had you fellows come here tonight to add your wits to mine and consider some things. Let's try to do it with cool heads."

They fell into a protracted discussion. . . .

It was after three o'clock in the morning when the other

three men prepared to leave Wisner's apartment. They all looked tired, but there was definite purpose and a gleam of desperate hope in their eyes.

"You fellows want to be sure," said Henry Wisner. "We are going to be playing with fire."

"Boy," declared Wayne Donahue, "this will be worth flirting with a morgue slab for—if we can do it!"

Gaffney and Feroni endorsed the red-headed garage-owner's sentiment.

"Then we meet here again at eleven tomorrow night," said Wisner. "I'll have the help we need if it is humanly possible."

The group dispersed; but trouble was brewing for the arrogant powers of gangland—and for bribe-fattened officialdom.

Nevertheless, nearly two months passed and early autumn came with gangland still confident, still sucking the lifeblood from the business and industry of the city. And

then one night—

The mayor's big, custom-built car rolled majestically along the nearly deserted streets as its uniformed chauffeur guided it homeward. That chauffeur was a burly fellow named Robert Holland, a member of the city's police force, assigned to special duty in the service of His Honor.

On the soft cushions of the back seat Mayor Jim Caldwell sprawled in comfort, half dozing as the huge auto slipped along. The mayor was a big man with the well-groomed body of the one-time athlete who has gone soft from years of easy living. Beside His Honor sat Mrs. Caldwell. Like the mayor, his spouse was in evening attire. Her fat white hands wore too many rings and the interior of the car was heavy with the expensive perfume she affected.

The driver swung the big car into the winding drive leading through spacious grounds to the mansion which was the Caldwell home, situated in an exclusive northern suburb of the city. Mrs. Caldwell's plump elbow nudged her husband out of his doze. The car glided to a halt at the side door of the mansion.

Holland sounded a short blast on the siren to summon the butler, then jumped down and opened the rear door. The mayor and his wife stepped from the car. The butler had not appeared.

Four figures appeared suddenly from where they had been hidden behind the thick shrubbery growing between the drive and the house. All four were dressed in ordinary dark garments and each held ready an automatic of heavy caliber. Handkerchief-masks covered their faces and soft felt hats were pulled low over their eyes. One of them thrust the muzzle of his weapon hard into the back of the astonished chauffeur and at the same time snatched Holland's police gun from its holster.

"Stand still," came in a crisp tone from behind the mask the bandit wore. "And don't make a sound."

The chauffeur obeyed. The other three masked men had surrounded the mayor and Mrs. Caldwell. One of them clapped a gloved hand over Mrs. Caldwell's mouth

as that lady opened it to scream. Mrs. Caldwell promptly fainted and the bandit let her plump body slide none too gently to the drive. Bending over her, the man quickly stripped the jewels from her fingers and took a glittering diamond and emerald choker from about her soft white throat. He dropped the gems into a side pocket of his coat and remained kneeling beside the woman, ready to keep her from screaming should she recover too quickly.

Meantime, the two bandits who had taken charge of the mayor had relieved that official of a large emerald ring, a diamond pin that had adorned his cravat, and a fat wallet. "All clean," announced the fellow who had searched His Honor.

"You two guys," growled the man whose gun was pressed against the chauffeur's back, "take a seat there on the steps! Stay there until we are on our way."

The mayor and the chauffeur moved to the steps and sat down. The bandits backed toward the big car, keeping the pair on the steps covered with their weapons. The whole affair had taken less than three minutes. It was nearly two o'clock in the morning and the neighborhood was quiet. And the scene of the robbery was hidden from the street by luxuriant shrubbery, so that a chance passer-by would have noticed nothing wrong.

One of the robbers slid under the wheel of the mayor's car and the others made for the rear seat. As the man who had been kneeling beside Mrs. Caldwell was about to step into the auto, the scarf that had covered his face slipped down. For a moment the light from the globe under the *porte-cochère* shone full upon the fellow's features. Then, with an oath, the bandit jerked the silken cover back over his face and dived into the car. The purr of the powerful motor gained in volume and the big car backed swiftly down the drive toward the street.

The car reached the street in a jiffy and sped away into the darkness of the summer night. The policeman-chauffeur jerked a police whistle from the breast pocket of his tailored uniform coat, but the big hairy hand of the mayor halted the whistle halfway to Holland's lips.

"Don't, Holland!" snapped the mayor. "Didn't you see that fellow's face?"

"Sure, Chief," answered Holland.

"Recognize him?"

"Sure," said the officer. "He was Joe Gable. Couldn't mistake that mug."

"Then—"

A sound that was half a moan and half a cry of fright interrupted the mayor. Mrs. Caldwell was struggling to a sitting position. The two men sprang to her side and assisted her to her feet.

"Please, honey," the mayor was begging, "be quiet—don't scream—don't make any noise. Everything will be all right. Come on into the house and I'll get some brandy."

They got Mrs. Caldwell into the house and onto a lounge. The mayor hurried to a cabinet and came back with a stiff glass of brandy. Holland went at the mayor's command to see what had happened to the servants. The brandy revived Mrs. Caldwell, and her husband assisted her upstairs to her room.

WHEN the mayor came downstairs he found Holland, and Foster the butler waiting for him. The butler was somewhat disheveled. The mayor listened to his story of how the servants, five in number, had been overpowered by the robbers and locked in the fruit-cellar after being securely bound and gagged.

"Huh," grunted the mayor. "Well, Foster, see that Mrs. Caldwell's maid goes to her mistress at once. Holland, get out the roadster at once and wait at the door."

Holland and the butler went on their errands. His Honor strode to a telephone and called a number in a voice that was more than half snarl. The mayor was decidedly angry.

"Is Sam Marlin there?" he barked when a voice presently answered his call. Then, after a brief period of listening: "I don't give a damn about that! This is Mayor Caldwell—and I'm coming right over to see him. Tell him I'll be there in ten minutes."

The mayor slammed the phone into its rack and strode from the house to fling his big form into the roadster beside Holland. The officer-chauffeur had found another gun and filled his holster. He sat grim-faced behind the wheel.

"To Sam Marlin's house—and step on it," snapped Mayor Caldwell.

HEFTY SAM MARLIN sat in the library of his home—a house even more palatial than that of the mayor—and waited in frowning thought for His Honor to pay his nocturnal call. Marlin was out of sorts at having been routed from his bed by Caldwell's message. What the devil could the big slob have on his mind, that wouldn't keep until morning?

Hefty Sam was a big man physically, almost as large as the huge mayor and in much better condition. He had a square, rugged face that ended in a stubborn chin. The mouth was firm and more than a trifle cruel. His was the face of a despot.

A manservant showed Mayor Caldwell into the library. Marlin, in a dressing-gown over some hastily donned garments, rose frowningly.

"Hello, Jim," said Marlin as the servant left the room and closed the heavy door behind him. "This is a hell of a time to get a man out of the feathers! What's up?"

"Alone?" asked the mayor.

"Yeah," grunted Marlin. "Sit down and spill your trouble."

The mayor dropped into a chair and Hefty Sam took another, facing his visitor. In short, explosive sentences His Honor told the gang chieftain of the holdup.

"And," concluded Caldwell, "one of the bunch was Joe Gable."

"Joe Gable!" cried Marlin, leaning forward in his chair. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm telling you that one of the gang that robbed us was Joe Gable," retorted the mayor. "The mask he was wearing slipped down off his face just as he was climbing into my car. I got a good look at him and so did Holland, my chauffeur. We both recognized him beyond a doubt. What I want to know—"

"Just a minute," interrupted Marlin, a hard glint in his eyes. He rose and went to a telephone. In the next ten minutes he made four calls while the mayor remained silent, listening.

"Well?" demanded Caldwell as Marlin returned to his chair.

"Couldn't locate Joe," shrugged Marlin. "I'm having him hunted up. You're dead sure it was him you saw?"

"Absolutely," snapped the mayor. "And he and the fellows with him took ten thousand in jewelry from my wife and me. Besides that, they took my car and my wallet with nearly two thousand dollars in it. I want everything back at once. You agreed to see that I—"

"I know," cut in Hefty Sam. "I'll take care of you. Cool down and go on home. Leave things to me. If Joe had a hand in this, I'll attend to him. I still think there was some mistake. But even if some outside mob has butted in—you'll get your stuff back. You didn't make any report of this, did you?" added Marlin abruptly.

"Hell, no!" snorted the mayor. "Think I want the whole town laughing at me? All I want is my car and money and stuff back. And I don't want any such thing happening again."

"Well," said Marlin slowly, "you go on home and make sure that your help forget all about it. I'll call you tomorrow, after I've looked into this."

WHEN the mayor had departed Hefty Sam Marlin dropped into his easy-chair, his brows knit in a black frown. All desire for sleep had been jolted out of the gang leader. His mind was busy with this unexpected situation.

Joe Gable, better known to police and underworld circles as Joe the Knife, was one of Hefty Sam's most trusted and most able lieutenants. Gable was of Latin heritage and his favorite weapon had given him his cognomen. He was a crafty and totally unscrupulous rascal, clever at worming out of trouble, but a killer if cornered.

Marlin couldn't make the picture come into focus. There was no reason why Gable should have done such a fool stunt as the mayor had just reported. Joe's weekly split was enormous. He had plenty of boodle salted away. And it seemed almost impossible that Gable could have a personal grudge at the mayor. Even if he had, he surely wasn't fool enough to pull such a stunt on his own—and risk losing his soft spot in the Marlin mob.

All this and more passed through the big racketeer's thoughts as he sat rigid and grim—waiting. The telephone rang. Marlin answered to hear the voice of Mayor Caldwell.

"Found my car parked at the curb in front of my place when I got here," Caldwell announced.

"So?" grunted Marlin. "Then that's *that* much. Don't worry about the rest. See you tomorrow. So long."

Half an hour dragged past. Marlin began pacing up and down the library. Finally the telephone rang again. Hefty Sam turned and snatched it up.

"Hello! Yes. . . . Where the hell have you been? Never mind gabbing over the wire. Chase yourself out here as fast as you can. I'm waiting."

Marlin snapped the phone into its cradle and resumed his pacing. Twenty minutes passed and then the heavy-eyed servant ushered another visitor into the room. Dawn was just beginning to creep in around the curtains.

"Go on to bed, Carter," said Marlin to the servant.

The man closed the library door and the gang chieftain stood with feet spread, hands shoved deep into dressing-gown pockets and eyes fixed unwaveringly on the visitor.

Joe the Knife stood meeting his chief's gaze, a rather puzzled expression on his face. It was truly a face not likely to be mistaken or quickly forgotten. Joe Gable was very dark-skinned. His straight hair was as black as the proverbial crow's wing and made a sharply defined peak above his nose, which was prominent and beaklike, with thin nostrils. His brows were heavy and black and almost met over eyes of the darkest brown with a hint of the Asiatic in their shape. There was a cleft in his chin. Altogether, Joe Gable was handsome except for a small scar on the right temple that reddened when he was angry or excited. He was slender of build and of slightly more than medium height. He was dressed now in evening garb which did credit to his tailor.

"What's up, Sam?" inquired Gable.

"Sit down," growled Marlin, jerking a thumb toward a chair.

Gable obeyed and the gang chief stood looking down at him. The slender gangster produced and lighted a cigarette.

"Where were you tonight?" demanded Marlin. "What you been doing?"

"I had a damned funny experience, Chief," answered Gable slowly, after a moment of silence.

"Yeah?" said Marlin flatly. "Tell me about it. Tell it straight too. I've got a reason for asking. And I'd better not be kidded."

"Well," declared Gable, "I got a sweet chump made out of myself. And the hell of it is that I can't dope out the play. When I do, somebody is going to wish they'd picked a different guy to have fun with! Here's what happened: I've been making a play for a cute little blonde trick on the cigar-stand at the Boulevard Hotel. She—"

"You'd be a lot better off," interrupted Marlin, "if you'd keep the twists off your brain." The racketeer chief was himself a strictly one-woman man. His wife, whom he had married in the days when he was driving a delivery-truck for a brewery, was now in Europe with their daughter.

"They're a lot o' fun." Gable shrugged. "Anyhow, as I was telling you, I finally talked this little blonde into a date for tonight, and I picked her up at nine o'clock when she got off work. I'd told her I'd take her out to the Wander Inn to eat and dance. Well, she said she wanted to go home first and change her clothes. So I drove her out to an apartment-house on Spring Street, and she said I'd just as well come up and wait while she switched her rags. We went up to an apartment on the second floor. When she opened the door a bozo stepped out and poked a gat into my belly. Another one popped around him and wound my head up in a blanket, and they yanked me into the apartment. There was ether in that damned blanket—and I passed out. When I woke up I was lying on the floor, tied up tight as hell and gagged until I couldn't make a sound. The place was dark, but when I rolled over some guy told me to lay still or he'd quiet me.

"I laid there for what seemed like a week. Finally somebody knocked on the door and whispered a few things to the bozo that had been sitting there in the dark with me. Then they loosened my hands and told me good-by. . . . It took me two or three minutes to get the ropes off my legs, and find the light-switch. I was alone in the joint. My gat and knife were lying on the table. They hadn't taken anything else off me. My dough was safe and my watch too. It was three o'clock. I looked around the dump and couldn't find a thing to show that anybody lived in it. Looked like a furnished apartment that hadn't been rented for quite a while.

"I went downstairs and looked at the name on the mailbox—and damned if it wasn't my own name! My car was standing at the curb in front of the place. I got in, and beat it for Charley's joint. The minute I walked in Charley said you was looking for me. I called you up—and here I am."

"Huh!" grunted Hefty Sam. His eyes had never left Gable's face while the slim gangster was telling his story. "You've handed me the straight dope?"

"Flat," declared Gable. "I don't know what it was all about, but I'm going to find out—and somebody's going to be sorry for it."

"Huh!" grunted Marlin again. "You go on home and stay there until I get in touch with you again. I got to do some things—and I want to know where you are. Don't leave the hotel for any reason—except to see me, if I call you."

THE dapper Gable departed and Marlin stood for several minutes, thinking deeply. . . .

About ten o'clock Sunday night Hefty Sam Marlin's big bullet-proof limousine rolled up the drive to the door of Mayor Caldwell's home. Marlin entered, leaving the

car waiting with the hard-bitten gunman-chauffeur at the wheel. Marlin had spent a busy afternoon. He had visited the apartment on Spring Street where Joe the Knife claimed to have had his peculiar experience on the night before. He had found the apartment vacant. There were no ropes on the floor such as Gable claimed to have freed himself from. There was no name on the mail-box that belonged to the apartment and the janitor declared that the apartment had been vacant for more than two months. Marlin was worried.

He went other places and asked numerous questions after leaving the Spring Street place. Among other things he learned that the little blonde girl, Freda Larson, had quit her job at the Boulevard Hotel. Saturday had been her last night. The hotel manager gave Marlin the address the girl had given him. It proved to be phony.

"Well?" inquired Mayor Caldwell when he and Marlin were seated in the mayor's den.

"Been checking up," said Hefty Sam crisply. "No results yet. I'm going over and have a chin with Slick Federici. I'll have to tell him about you being stuck up—but he's safe. His boys may be able to report something that mine haven't been able to find out."

"What about Joe Gable?" demanded the mayor.

"He's all right," snapped Marlin. "Forget him and let me handle this. I've got Joe planted where I can reach him any minute. There's been some monkey-business, but I'll straighten it out."

Hefty Sam wasn't so sure in his own mind about his dapper lieutenant, but he wasn't yet ready to admit this to Caldwell.

A few more minutes ended the interview, and the mayor himself went with his visitor to the door. Marlin's chauffeur jumped down and opened the car door as his chief descended the steps. The mayor stood by the open door.

The still night was suddenly shattered by the report of a heavy-caliber gun. At the same instant the pearl-gray fedora jerked sideways on Marlin's head as a bullet tore through its crown. The chauffeur jerked stiff and his hand dived for the rod under his left arm. Marlin leaped for the protection of the limousine.

Bang! Again the weapon spoke, and a bullet whistled past as the racket lord gained haven inside the bullet-proof auto. The chauffeur's weapon was out and that worthy's sharp eyes were eagerly seeking a target as he crouched in the shelter of the open door of the limousine.

Mayor Caldwell stood speechless in the doorway.

Then, from the direction of the street, came the sound of running feet pounding the concrete. A nightstick beat a tattoo on the sidewalk. Then the running feet turned into the drive. The patrolman on the beat was coming.

"Put that rod away," snapped Hefty Sam to the chauffeur. "Let me do the talking." The gang chieftain put the bullet-punctured hat on the floor of the car as he spoke.

"What's wrong?" The officer, gun in hand, came panting into the circle of light beneath the *porte-cochère*.

"Nothing here, Officer," answered Marlin coolly. "But those shots were close by. Next house east, I believe."

"Yes," put in the mayor from the doorway, "they sounded from that direction."

The officer recognized both Marlin and the mayor. With a grunt he

turned and dashed away. At the same moment a lithe

figure in dark garments leaped over the privet hedge that divided the Caldwell

grounds from the neighbor on the west and sped across a darkened back yard toward an alley.

From his car Marlin spoke to the mayor. "Remember—you don't know anything except that we heard a couple of shots."

"Sure," nodded the mayor.

"Let's go," snapped Hefty Sam to the chauffeur who was back in his seat. "Nearest telephone—and step on it," he added as the big car gained the street.

Five minutes later Marlin was at a telephone in an all-night restaurant. He called the number of the Calumet Hotel and asked to be connected with Job Gable's suite. There was no answer.

"Page him," ordered Marlin.

Presently the voice on the wire announced that Mr. Gable was not in the hotel. The gang lord's face was set and grim as he left the restaurant and climbed into his limousine.

"Calumet," he directed the driver.

The racketeer was well known at the Calumet. A boy with a pass-key let him into the seventh-floor suite occupied by Joe Gable. Joe the Knife was not at home. The bed was neatly made up. Hefty Sam gave the boy some instructions and a yellow bank-note. Then he went downstairs to his car and told the chauffeur to drive him to Slick Federici's home on the south side. As the limousine sped southward Marlin lighted a cigar, clamped his rugged jaw upon the weed and lay back upon the seat in furious thought. . . .

Slick Federici lived in luxurious quarters on the top floor of a swanky apartment-house which belonged to him.



"And," Caldwell concluded, "one of the bunch was Joe Gable."

The apartments on the lower floors were occupied for the most part by others high in the Federici organization. The place was named the Albermarle.

As Hefty Sam Marlin's limousine drew near the Albermarle a man who had approached on foot from the opposite direction mounted the three steps to the small landing before the ornate doors of the building.

"Look, Chief," said Marlin's driver. "There's Joe the Knife!"

"Pull in to the curb," snapped Hefty Sam, as he leaned forward with eyes fixed on the dapper figure that had paused before the Albermarle entrance.

As the limousine slid to a stop at the curb, the slender figure struck a match and with cupped hands applied the flame to a cigarette. The yellow flare of the match shone for a long moment on the dark, hawklike features of Joe Gable. Then the match was flipped away and the natty figure entered the Albermarle.

"Listen," Marlin ordered. "You go to that drug-store on the corner of the boulevard and telephone Ike Berry and Don Garvin to beat it out here on the jump. You wait for them at the drug-store. Have them park their boiler close behind this one. I'll be right here watching that door."

It was half-past eleven when Marlin, accompanied by two bleak-eyed gunmen, rapped on the door of Slick Federici's apartment.

"Who is it?" demanded a voice from within.

"Sam Marlin," growled the gang chief.

"Just a minute, Sam," answered the voice.

There were sounds inside the apartment. Then the door was opened.

"Come in, Sam," invited the man in evening clothes who had opened it, and Marlin and his henchmen entered. Slick Federici was a slender man of medium height, who looked more like an artist or musician than a super-gangster. He was that rarity in America, a blond Italian. His face was long and handsome, with a nose that was almost Grecian, a mouth too pretty for a man, a mass of blond hair that waved slightly and was worn long, and blue eyes flecked with hazel that held in their depths a spark that could, upon occasion, become a flame. A feature-writer for a newspaper had once said that Slick Federici had the soul of a tiger in the body of a kitten.

"What's up, Sam?" inquired Slick. "Sit down on something and I'll find a drink. . . . You caught me entertaining—I shooed her into the bedroom." Federici was a bachelor and had a reputation as a Lothario.

"Yeah?" grunted Marlin. "Never mind the drink, Slick. We aint going to stay but a minute. Just checking up on a little funny business. Do you happen to know anything about a certain prominent guy and his wife being stuck up Saturday night?"

"I—why, no," replied Federici. He was really puzzled—or else he was a consummate actor. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing," replied Marlin, "if you don't know. Seen Joe Gable lately?"

"Seen him the other night—Thursday, it was—eating at the Golden Pheasant. Why?"

"Just wondered," replied Marlin. "Long as you don't know anything about the stick-up I mentioned, I'll beat it and keep busy—may be seeing you tomorrow."

FEDERICI closed the door behind his visitors and stood for several moments frowning. His mouth hardened until most of its prettiness had disappeared. The spark in his eyes was brighter. Why had Hefty Sam Marlin paid him a visit with two rodmen for company? What the devil had he meant?

Federici shrugged his shoulders and crossed the room to the closed door of the bedroom. . . .

Pausing beside his armored car, Hefty Sam Marlin spoke to the two killers, Ike Berry and Don Garvin.

"You two stay right here," he ordered. "Watch that dump. If Joe Gable comes out, burn him down! I'm going to get some of the other boys busy. That rat is through!" As he bit off the last words, Marlin climbed into his car. "Take me to Charley's place," he snapped to the driver.

IN the back room of a north side dive an hour later Hefty Sam finished giving orders to four more of his men. They were an evil-looking quartet—and more evil than they looked.

"A grand to the one of you that rubs him out," concluded Marlin. "And find him quick. You know where he lives. You might try to locate that cigar-store blonde. You might pick him up by tailing that show-dame he's been playing with for the last few months. I don't care how you find him. All of you report to Charley's before midnight tomorrow. I'll get Charley's report then."

The killers nodded their understanding and Hefty Sam left the place and stepped into his car. He ordered the chauffeur to drive to a corner some two miles northwest. There he left the auto, instructing the driver to take it to the garage, and to remain at the garage until he was called. When his own car was out of sight, Marlin hailed a taxi and had himself driven to another corner some dozen blocks distant. There he dismissed the cab, waited until it was out of sight and walked four blocks through the quiet, middle-class residence district to a small cottage which he entered with a latch-key.

The cottage was a hide-out of Marlin's about which none of his mob knew. The old couple who lived in it were unknown to gangland and Hefty Sam knew he was safe there. He had once hidden with the old couple for more than a month while the city was being combed for him because he was wanted as a witness in a sensational trial.

Inside the house Marlin turned on lights and called, "Hey, John!"

"Yes," came a sleepy answer from the rear of the house.

"This is Sam," said Marlin. "I'm going up to my room and turn in. You haven't seen me. I'll chin with you when I wake up."

"Okay, Sam."

In the comfortable room on the second floor that was kept ready for him at all times, Marlin disrobed and sat down on the side of the bed to think.

The harmony that had existed for nearly two years in gangland had suddenly been broken by this jangling discord. The things that had happened during the past twenty-four hours were a puzzle that Marlin couldn't fit together. One thing stuck out: Joe the Knife was mixed up in it. And he had put the finger on Joe. When the news that Gable had been bumped off spread through racketland, things would probably come to a head and Hefty Sam would be able to straighten out the mess.

It looked as if Joe the Knife had gone over to Slick Federici. It looked as if Joe had tried to bump off his erstwhile chief. By Federici's orders? Marlin wondered.

And what had been behind the hold-up of the mayor and his wife? Slick couldn't hope to gain anything by getting the mayor up on his ear! Marlin tumbled into bed. Tomorrow would bring developments. . . . If Hefty Sam could have foreseen those developments his slumber would have been much less sound.

It was just three o'clock on Monday morning, when a large auto turned into the drive and came to a halt before the home of Judge Arthur Freiberg on the western out-

skirts of the city. The policeman on the beat was at the moment fully a quarter-mile from the Freiberg home. The men in the big car had previously checked up on the patrolman. The lights of the big car were turned out, and five dark-clad men emerged from the car. They were masked with dark silken scarfs which completely concealed their faces from eyes to chin.

With barely a sound the five men moved up onto the wide veranda. One of them went to a window and began to work, swiftly but silently. The other four remained in a group before the front door.

Presently there came a faint click from where the man was working at the window. Then the window was slowly and noiselessly raised and the workman climbed through it. A few moments more and the front door opened noiselessly; the four waiting figures entered and the door closed behind them without a sound. The auto, without lights, was not visible from the street before the place.

One of the men produced a flashlight and moved down the hall to mount a broad, carpeted staircase. Two of his companions trod closely on his heels. The remaining pair, one of them carrying an electric torch, made directly for the back of the house.

Ten minutes later the five masked men stood in Judge Freiberg's study at the rear of the house on the second floor. Four prisoners, sketchily dressed, sat facing their captors. The prisoners were Judge Freiberg, his daughter Laura, and an elderly man and woman, the house servants.

The Judge was a pompous man in the middle fifties—one of those whose name was on the gangster pay-roll. He had amassed considerable wealth.

All the prisoners sat silent, their white faces turned toward their masked captors. Four guns covered the victims. The shades on the study windows were tightly drawn. The man who held no gun spoke.

"Judge," he said in a low and slightly thick voice, "we want ten thousand dollars. That won't break you. We are going to take you and this old man and woman for a ride to a place where you will be safe until your daughter delivers the money. We'll tell her where to meet the collector tomorrow night. If she doesn't bring it, or if she squawks to the police, you'll be a job for the Coroner when they find you. We will accept either cash, in small unmarked bills, or unregistered bonds. Now get busy and write your check or make whatever arrangements you need to, so your daughter can get the dough. We've got to travel quite a piece before daylight."

While the masked man spoke, the Judge's eyes had flicked over the group of robbers. A sudden gleam came into those eyes as the Judge brought them back to the speaker. One of the men had turned his head slightly and Judge Freiberg had caught a glimpse of a purplish-red blotch on the jaw and neck just ahead of and below the ear.

"Well," said the bandit spokesman as the Judge remained silent, "get busy!"

"You say you want ten thousand dollars," said the Judge slowly.

"That's it," the bandit confirmed.

THE Judge had a vital reason for not wishing to be absent from the bench on the following day. He gave a searching look into the eyes that showed above the mask of the bandit spokesman.

"Suppose I give you that sum in unregistered government bonds at once," he said. "Will you take them and go without molesting us further?"

The bandit leader seemed to consider a moment. "I don't see why not," he answered. "Can you dig up the boodle here, and quick?"

"Yes," said the Judge. "I'll give you the sum in bonds at once, if you promise to leave as soon as you are paid."

"Produce," said the bandit. "Where is it?"

"Here in my wall safe," answered the Judge, rising. "I'll get it."

The robber leader nudged a man. It was the fellow upon whose jaw Judge Freiberg had glimpsed the birthmark.

"Keep your rod in his ribs while he opens the box," ordered the leader. "If he tries any monkey-business let him have it."

With the robber's gun against his body and his face set in a hard expression, the Judge opened a safe which he disclosed by pushing back a tapestry.

"Now step back away from it," ordered the bandit leader as the door swung open. "Bri—our buddy will see what's in it."

The Judge said nothing as he stepped back, but his stern face went a trifle paler. The bandit began to examine the interior of the safe. Presently he turned and laid several bundles of securities and a thick sheaf of bills on a small table and thumbed them through.

"Well, what have we got?" inquired the leader.

"Eighteen grand in safe paper and twelve C's in cash," replied the bandit who had looted the safe.

As the fellow spoke the eyes of Judge Freiberg narrowed a trifle and the gleam in their depths brightened slightly. He knew that slightly nasal tone and slowly uttered words.

"More than we counted on," said the leader, "but we can use it. Thanks, Judge. Now we're going to tie all of you up tight enough that it'll take you a little while to get loose after we leave. And just remember that if we have any trouble getting rid of these bonds, you'll not live very long afterward."

A FEW minutes later the big car rolled away from before the Judge's home and sped off into the graying dawn. Up in the study the four prisoners soon released themselves from their bonds.

"Shall I telephone the police, Judge?" asked the old butler.

"No," snarled Judge Freiberg. "And I don't want a word of this breathed to a soul, by any of you! I shall be able to handle it—and recover all that was taken. I recognized one of those thieves. The rest will be simple. Go on back to bed, all of you."

Judge Freiberg went downstairs, sat down in his library, and slowly turned things over in his mind. Those unregistered bonds had been delivered to him by Hefty Sam Marlin in payment for services rendered. They had been delivered after the banks had closed on Saturday. Now they had been taken by a gang of gunmen among whom he had recognized "Brindle" Donaldson, of Marlin's mob!

Donaldson was unfortunate for a crook in that the right side of his face and neck were splotted with purplish birthmarks. He had been up before Judge Freiberg a number of times and had either been discharged or had received suspended sentences. It was partly because he had recognized Brindle Donaldson that the Judge had been so willing to turn over to the robbers the securities in his safe. If Brindle Donaldson was in the crew of thieves, it stood to reason that the rest of them were also Hefty Sam's gangsters—and therefore Marlin had taken back with one hand what the other had bestowed. The Judge reached for the telephone, then thought better of it, and went back to his bed. But tomorrow— The Judge had an ace in the hole.

Monday came. In the little cottage where he had taken refuge, Hefty Sam Marlin passed the day with newspapers brought in by his host.

Meanwhile wintry-eyed men with deadly weapons snuggled under their armpits prowled through the city like hungry wolves through a forest. The finger was on Joe the Knife. Hefty Sam had placed it there. Grim killers who had been his comrades but a short time past were now eager to earn a thousand dollars by filling Joe Gable's dapper body with lead. He was a rat—not entitled even to a fighting chance. He would be rubbed out wherever and whenever he was found.

MIDNIGHT approached. Hefty Sam Marlin emerged from the cottage in its silent neighborhood where nearly every house was dark, their occupants long since in bed. Hefty Sam walked more than a dozen blocks to where there was a telephone-booth in an all-night restaurant. He entered the booth and called Dago Charley, proprietor of a dive that was a favored hangout for Marlin gangsters.

"What's the word, Charley?" asked Marlin.

"This you, Sam?" There was a note of worry in Charley's voice.

"Yeah."

"Listen, Chief," said Charley. "I gotta see you quick. Can't gab over the telephone."

"What's up?" snapped Marlin.

"Hell's loose, Chief! I been breaking my neck all day trying to find you. I'm afraid of the telephone—and I got good reasons. I gotta see you right away. Where are you? I'll grab a cab."

Marlin did some quick thinking. Dago Charley was one man of whose unwavering loyalty the racket leader felt absolutely certain. But recent happenings had quickened Hefty Sam's natural caution. He hadn't forgotten those holes in his hat and the death-threat in the whisper of the second bullet that had missed him as he dived to safety in his armored car.

"If you're afraid of the phone," growled Marlin, "why tell you where I am? You remember the spot where you met me last fall while I was ducking the witness-stand?"

"Yeah."

"Well, you meet me there as soon as you can get there—and be damned sure you aint tailed," ordered Marlin. Then he hung up the receiver without waiting for Charley's answer.

The racketeer left the restaurant and walked rapidly away down a side street. The place he had named for a rendezvous with Charley was just nine blocks from the restaurant in which he had made his telephone-call, but Marlin walked fifteen to reach it. He had no intention of being followed.

The meeting-place was at the intersection of two quiet side streets, one of which skirted a small park. Hefty Sam had been waiting in the shadow of some bushes for ten minutes when Dago Charley approached. Charley was on foot. A low whistle from Marlin brought the gangster to his chief's side in the shadows.

"Cab wasn't followed," said Charley. "And I walked the last five blocks."

"Good," growled Marlin. "What's it all about? Did the boys get Joe?"

"Not yet," replied Charley. "Didn't locate him until a couple of hours ago. Listen, Sam! Like I told you, hell is sure popping. Bulls and dicks have been hunting you all day. I got a tip that Judge Freiberg is behind it. The—"

"Freiberg?" cut in Marlin. "What in hell's eating on him?"

"I don't know," declared Charley. "And the mayor called up my place twice, looking for you. And then tonight, about ten o'clock, Spotty Hale came to the back

door of my place and called me out. He was about scared to death and he said you done him a good turn once, so he was going to tip you off to something. He said Joe the Knife and Brindle Donaldson had sold out to Slick Federici and that them and Slick have cooked up some kind of a mess to get you in bad with the mugs at Headquarters and the City Hall. He—"

"Huh!" snarled Hefty Sam. "I begin to see something. Spotty say anything else?"

"Said Slick and them rats was fixing to put you on a spot and clean up on your mob," replied Charley. "Said he came to put you hep, because—"

"I know why," declared Marlin. "What else did he say?"

"Said Joe the Knife and Brindle was holed up in Slick Federici's apartment waiting for Slim's mugs to get you bumped off. That's all he said, except to tell you that he was taking it on the lam to Philly and for you to send him a couple of grand there at the Atlas Hotel."

"Huh!" grunted Marlin. "Did you check up on Brindle Donaldson?"

"Just as soon as Spotty left," answered Dago Charley. "Aint nobody seen him since Saturday afternoon. The boys that are covering Slick's place reported just before you called up—said Slick came home just after eleven o'clock. I told them I'd send out word to them as soon as I heard from you."

"You used your bean, Charley," said Marlin grimly. "So Slick and the boys have decided that they need the whole town? We'll see about that. Come along. I'm going to give Freiberg a buzz. Then I'll tell you what to do."

The pair hurried along the quiet streets to another neighborhood business district where Hefty Sam found a telephone-booth from which he called Judge Freiberg's house.

"I'VE been trying to get hold of you all day," declared Freiberg when he had been called to the telephone and had learned the identity of his caller.

"So I just heard," replied Marlin. "What's the rumpus?"

"Some trouble I need to talk to you about," answered the Judge. "Can you come out to my house in an hour—or sooner? I'll be waiting."

"What's the toot?" inquired the racketeer.

"I'll explain when you get here," replied Freiberg. "It's urgent. The sooner we can get together, the better. Will you come?"

"Yeah," answered Marlin. "It's a quarter past one now. I'll be there about two."

"And come alone."

"All right," agreed Marlin, after a moment. At the final request the gang chieftain's mouth had tightened and his eyes narrowed. He hung up the receiver and joined Dago Charley. They were silent until they were again on a quiet side street.

"Here's the dope, Charley," said Marlin grimly. "Who is covering Slick Federici's place?"

"Berry and Garvin," answered Charley.

"You grab a cab and get back to your dump," directed Hefty Sam. "Get hold of two more of the boys and send them out to join Berry and Garvin. Tell them to bust into that joint and rub out Slick and everybody they find in his apartment—and anybody else in that dump that gets in their way. This is going to be a one-mob burg and the mob is going to be mine. Got that straight?"

"Sure, Chief."

"Then get six of the boys that you know we can depend on, and have them meet me at two o'clock at the corner three blocks south of Judge Freiberg's house. I

want them on time—and they'd better bring a couple of tommy-guns besides their rods. Now beat it back to the avenue and grab a cab. You'll have to make time."

As two o'clock hovered over the city, a hell's broth was about to boil over in a manner that would make underworld history for years to come.

A man approached the ornate entrance of the Albermarle apartments and pressed the button that rang the bell in the top-floor apartment of Slick Federici. Federici's voice over the house wire asked the identity of the caller.

"Don Garvin," replied the man. "Hefty Sam sent me with a message."

"I have company," said Federici, after a moment. "I'll come down in a minute. We can talk in the lounge. It's through the arch to your left, just inside the door."

"Oke," answered Garvin.

The electric release clicked and Garvin pushed open the door. As he closed it behind him he blocked it with a package of chewing gum so that the bolt did not catch. Then he went into the small, luxurious lounge and stood just inside the arched entrance with his eyes fixed on the self-operating elevator across the hall. As the elevator started up, the waiting gangster brought out a heavy-caliber automatic equipped with a silencer.

Now the elevator was descending. Just as it reached the level of the hall floor, and before Slick Federici could open the door, there was a soft step in the hall and another man entered the lounge. He was a small, wiry fellow with hard, bright eyes and one hand was in the pocket of a coat that had been put on over an undershirt. He was Digger Maywood, one of Slick Federici's most deadly gunmen. His sharp eyes were fixed on Garvin.

"Lo, Don," greeted the little killer. "Just lift your mitts a minute. Slick asked me to be sure you was safe to talk to."

Garvin managed a grin. His evil brain was working fast. He knew that death's arms were reaching out to embrace him. He was covered by the rod in Digger Maywood's pocket and Slick Federici, now stepping from the elevator, held in his right hand a thirty-eight automatic. But Garvin had his finger on the trigger of his own weapon; he moved as if to obey Digger's order to put up his hands. There was a "*phut-t-t*" from the silenced weapon as it came into sight and Digger, standing, took the slug squarely in the stomach. Like a springing cat Garvin stepped sidewise, and almost before the stricken Digger began to double over the gun in Garvin's hand hissed twice more through its silencer. Two speeding bullets tore into the slender body of Slick Federici, expelling life before them—but even as the searing lead sought his vitals Federici pressed the trigger of his weapon. A crashing report rang through the building, but the bullet sped from the dying hand missed Garvin and shattered a marble urn. Slick Federici pitched headlong to the floor of the entrance hall, his automatic slipping from his hand and sliding across the tiles to thump against the wall. Digger Maywood lay on the floor of the lounge moaning softly as his evil soul took leave of its shell.



"Now step back away from it," ordered the bandit. "Bri—our buddy'll see what's in it."

The building had come to sudden life. There were shouts, curses, screams of women and the sound of doors opening. A moment after Federici's gun had spoken the plugged front door burst open and three men pushed into the lighted hall. Two of them held guns ready in their hands and the third carried a sinister-looking object.

"Set her down, Slim," barked Garvin to this man.

The man addressed set the object down quickly but carefully within a foot of Slick Federici's blond head. The other two men backed out of the door which Garvin now held wide open.

"Let 'er go!" snapped Garvin.

Looking back to see that the way of retreat was clear, Slim flipped over a small lever on top of the infernal machine which he had placed. Then he leaped through the door and was racing away down the street with Garvin at his heels. The other two were fifty yards ahead.

Ninety seconds after Slim had pulled over that little lever the four Marlin men were in a big car at a corner a hundred yards from the Albermarle and the engine of their machine had leaped to life. As the gears howled and the auto jumped away from the curb, the night was rent by an ominous crashing roar.

The Albermarle shivered, seemed for a moment to grow taller, then buckled and collapsed in ruins, taking along the wall of a building that joined it on the west. As the neighborhood started from its slumbers, the vandal car disappeared into the night with its four silent and grim-faced passengers. It was seven minutes past two o'clock.

Five miles away, across the city, at that exact moment, Hefty Sam Marlin stood just inside the door of Judge Freiberg's library. The Judge himself had admitted the racket chief and led the way to the room where Marlin now stood looking with a stony expression at four other men who sat in the comfortable library. The four others were Mayor Caldwell, Police Commissioner Haynes, District Attorney Farnsworth and Detective-Sergeant Dun-

ning. Marlin knew all of them. He grunted a flat return to their combined greeting.

Marlin had been alone when he rang the bell at the Freiberg door, but the burly racketeer knew something that the men seated before him did not know. The Judge's house was even now being surrounded by six Marlin gunmen whose mission it was to see that their chief was rescued from any tight corner in which he might find himself. Those men were not to betray their presence unless a certain signal was given or there was evidence of trouble in the house.

"Sit down, Marlin," invited Judge Freiberg. "I believe you know all of these gentlemen. We want to have a little talk with you."

The Judge indicated a chair, but before seating himself in it Hefty Sam moved it to a position where he faced all the others in the room.

"Well," began the racketeer, "let's have it."

"First," said the Judge, "I'd like to know how quickly you can return the money and bonds your hoodlums took from me last night?"

MARLIN was completely taken by surprise, but the stony expression on his face did not betray that fact. He met Freiberg's eyes squarely.

"Are you telling me that you were robbed last night?"

"You know I was," retorted Freiberg crisply. "Let's dispense with the stalling. I recognized one of the crew that broke into my home and terrorized my daughter, my servants and myself. He was the crook known as Brindle Donaldson. I suppose you don't know him?"

Marlin's eyes narrowed a bit. "How much did you lose?" he inquired.

Judge Freiberg shrugged disgustedly.

"Your gunmen took the bonds that you gave me late Saturday, and twelve hundred dollars in cash," said the jurist. "And I want it all back before court opens in the morning or else— You know I am to pronounce sentence on Steve Latano tomorrow, or rather today. And if I send him to the pen, he'll knock over a lot of your crooked playhouses before he goes. He'll explode when I fail to pronounce the suspended sentence he has been promised you would arrange for him."

"Are you threatening me?" Hefty Sam's voice was frosty.

"You heard what I said." The Judge spoke in a defiant tone, but his gaze wavered a little.

"Are we alone in the house?" asked Marlin abruptly, after a long moment of glaring in silence at Freiberg. The racketeer's sweeping glance included the others in his question.

"I sent my daughter elsewhere to spend the night," replied the Judge, "and let the servants go for a short visit to the home of their son in Fairfield."

"I see," nodded Marlin. "Then we can talk turkey. I don't know what this business is all about—but I intend to find out as soon as possible. You say a gang of my boys, Brindle Donaldson among them, robbed you of more than nineteen grand. There's been monkey-business going on and I'm the boy that's going to put a stop to it. But you fellows don't want to go off half-cocked—remember that. Let me handle the job in my own way. I'm telling you straight, Freiberg, that I don't know where your bonds and money are—but I'll see that you get them back; just give me time."

"That's what we're thinking about doing," said Farnsworth, a scowl on his florid face. "So much time that you'll be a very old man when you get through doing it,"

Hefty Sam's eyes flashed dangerously. "Listen here," he growled, "I don't like the way you fellows are talking

and acting. As I've told you, I don't know anything about who robbed you, Freiberg, nor the mayor. I—"

"I suppose you don't know anything about what happened to me, either," interrupted the District Attorney. "You don't know where I was from Saturday night until nearly noon Monday?"

"I don't," snapped the racketeer. His angry gaze clashed with that of Farnsworth. "Where were you and what happened? I'll bite."

"You've already bit off more than you can chew," retorted Farnsworth. "Your hoodlums were darned careful to be masked and all that when they came and got me at my apartment. They took a lot of pains to blindfold me and confuse me as to direction and distance when they took me to where they kept me. They tied me on a bed in a room with windows tightly boarded up, and held me there until they got the combination of the safe in my office and got what they wanted out of it. But I got a peep at one face—and I know Joe Gable. And you slipped up on something else, Marlin."

"Yeah?" sneered the angry racketeer.

"Yes," continued the District Attorney. "It happens that the old farmhouse which you bought last spring to make into a summer camp was my home when I was a boy. The room where I was imprisoned hasn't changed much since I used to wake up in it every morning. I knew it in a minute. And that isn't the worst slip you made. You got all the papers and other evidence that I've been holding since I took my office—but that won't do you any good. You might have known that I would have certified photostatic copies of everything. I've played with you—and played fair. Just the same, I kept everything so that you couldn't give me any run-around. There's enough in my little collection to put you and all your hoodlums in storage for a long time. And that's just what's going to happen unless you hand back everything that has been taken from me and from the mayor and Judge Freiberg."

"So?" sneered Marlin. "And if I do?"

"Then we'll let you and your mob clear out of town. But you're through. You have the choice of the Big House—or new fields of endeavor. That's all. Federici will be able to run things all right. And he'll do no double-crossing."

"You may be right about that," muttered Hefty Sam. Then, raising his voice: "So you've got it all figured out fine! Haven't you stopped to think that I may do a little figuring?" His hard gaze was fixed on the District Attorney. He had never thought of Farnsworth as dangerous, but now he suddenly saw the man in a new light.

YOU'LL not figure any more in this town, Marlin!" said Farnsworth. "If you're not an utter idiot you know that I have the whip-hand; and don't kid yourself—I mean to use it. I've played with you and Slick Federici because it paid; and I'll go on playing with Slick—unless he gets some funny ideas, such as you did. But I'm telling you just what you are going to do. And you're going to do it because I can smash you and land you behind bars if you don't."

"And you won't have me bumped off either, because the documents and other evidence to blow up your playhouse are where you will never find them. Things are so fixed that if anything happens to me the stuff will be placed in the hands of my successor with the knowledge of certain officials high in the State and national governments. And you know who would step into my office if it were suddenly left vacant by my demise: Raymond Shields would become District Attorney—and you should know what *that* young man would do with the evidence which would be handed him! He'd prove too much for you to stop. It

has kept me busy keeping him muzzled and tangled up in red tape so that he couldn't get loose and fly at you boys and your rackets. Don't you think you had better hand back the property that belongs to these other gentlemen and myself? You are rather over a barrel."

There was a tense silence in the room. Hefty Sam sat with his jaws clamped and his angry eyes burning into those of the District Attorney.

"Is this the idea," snarled the gang chief, "—if I hand back the stuff you fellows lost, I get three days to wind up my business and clear out?"

"And stay out!" answered the District Attorney with a jerky nod.

"You'll have it by noon tomorrow," growled Marlin. "This is a dirty deal after all I've done for you guys, but I'll land on my feet. Where do I deliver the stuff?" He rose as he asked the question.

"Not so fast, big fellow," said Farnsworth with a menacing smile. "You're not running out on us! There is a telephone here—and you are staying right here until our property is brought and placed in our hands. We are stealing a page out of your own book. As you remember, we are alone in this house and will be—as long as necessary. Yonder is the phone. Get busy."

Hefty Sam stiffened. This caught him hard, for he had not the slightest idea what had become of the loot taken from the men who blamed him for their losses. He had pretended he did, in order to get away and clear out of the city while the clearing was good. Now he was in a tight corner.

After a moment he shrugged his big shoulders and took a step in the direction of the telephone. Then his hand made a darting movement and he halted, with the ugly weapon he had snatched from beneath his arm covering the men before him. Not one of the covered men moved. A triumphant smile twisted Marlin's hard mouth.

SUDDENLY the report of a heavy revolver crashed in the room, but it was not Marlin's weapon that spoke. One of the District Attorney's men, a crack pistol-shot, had been hidden in an alcove behind half-drawn curtains. Farnsworth had foreseen such an emergency. The bullet from the gun of the hidden marksman shattered the wrist of Marlin's gun-hand. A howl of pain came from the lips of the racketeer and his weapon clattered to the floor.

Then there was a crash of breaking glass and splintering wood. The muzzle of a machine-gun was thrust into the room through one window. The night silence began to shiver with the stutter of the deadly weapon, Marlin had flung himself to the floor as the tommy-gun poked its snout through the window. For half a minute the spray of leaden slugs raked the room.

The District Attorney, who had half risen from his chair, dropped back into it, both hands clutching at his riddled breast. Judge Freiberg screamed as he leaped for the nearest door, then pitched headlong. The detective sergeant died where he sat and Mayor Caldwell, a look of astonishment on his face, stood swaying like a tree in the wind before his huge body sank down upon the rug. Searching lead ripped through the curtains of the alcove and the body of the hidden marksman crumpled to the floor, dragging one curtain with it. Then the chattering gun went silent. . . . Death had laid a heavy hand on that room.

"All right, Chief?" called a voice from outside.

His face white with pain, Hefty Sam scrambled to his feet and rushed for the door. Blood dripped from his shattered right wrist as the racketeer grasped it with his left hand in an effort to stem the bleeding. As he made for the exit the racketeer bellowed a profane order to his men; a moment later he was racing down the walk toward

the big car parked at the curb before the Freiberg home. His men were beside and ahead of him.

Then disaster overtook the fleeing murderers.

A police-patrol car that had been cruising the neighborhood bore down upon the scene with motor roaring. The car had been crossing the street a block distant when the shooting started. Now it sped up, with the officer beside the driver holding a machine-gun ready and calling to the fleeing gangsters to halt.

Hefty Sam barked an order and the gangsters' tommy-gun answered the command from the police car. But the Marlin gunner did not get his weapon unlimbered quite as soon as did the officer. The gunman died with the first sputter of the gun upon which his twitching body fell. The police weapon mowed down the rest of the hoodlums before they could dart to cover or get their guns into action.

AS Tuesday's dawn crept over the city, newsboys were shouting their extras along every street. Not since the World War ended had there been so much excitement.

Mayor Jim Caldwell, District Attorney Farnsworth, Judge Freiberg and two city police officers were dead. Hefty Sam Marlin, Slick Federici and eight other gangsters were dead, and eleven gangsters were in hospital beds, more or less seriously injured. The wounded gunmen steadfastly denied any knowledge of what had caused gangland to go up suddenly with a loud bang—and for once they were not holding out on their questioners.

At eight o'clock a rather bewildered Raymond Shields sat at a desk in the District Attorney's office. He had been wakened before daylight to be told that he had suddenly become District Attorney—and that with the office he had fallen heir to one terrific mess.

The new District Attorney ran long fingers through his already tousled mop of sandy hair and swore softly. Where to begin?

And gangland was fully as bewildered as he. Leaderless, the rank and file of both the Marlin and the Federici mobs speedily made up their minds that the city was a good place to be away from for awhile, and lost little time in departing.

While the underworld was still in its daze, Raymond Shields gathered his wits and sent trusted men to raid the homes and headquarters of the big-shots and their lieutenants who had been so suddenly removed from the picture. This move netted the District Attorney much documentary evidence which was to prove of great value.

Then Mayor Caldwell's wife and Judge Freiberg's daughter reported the robberies that had been kept quiet. This made Raymond Shields more certain than ever that the break he had prayed for was at hand—but he still needed a starting-place. The newspapers were running him ragged, but he had nothing to give them.

Then, just after noon, a call came for Shields. He listened briefly, then took his hat and abruptly left the office.

Henry Wisner, Wayne Donahue, Porter Gaffney and Angelo Feroni were gathered in the living-room of Wisner's apartment. Wisner had just replaced the telephone in its cradle after his short talk with Raymond Shields.

"He's coming," announced Wisner.

"I wonder if they feed you pretty well in the penitentiary?" asked Wayne Donahue after a moment's silence.

Nobody laughed or even smiled.

"Now listen, fellows," said Wisner earnestly. "Buck up! Let me do all the talking. You just back me up. This will come out all right. It's the only thing we can do—this. Raymond Shields and I have been friends for years—we went to school and college together. Just you sit tight."

"You're right," admitted Porter Gaffney. "This is the

only thing we can do after what happened. We certainly raised hell and put a chunk under it."

When the doorbell rang presently, Wisner admitted the new District Attorney to the apartment. There was a puzzled expression on Shields' face.

"Hello, Raymond," greeted Wisner. "Meet Mr. Feroni and Mr. Donahue. I think you know Mr. Gaffney."

SHIELDS acknowledged the introduction and took the chair Wisner offered. He accepted a cigarette.

"What did you mean by what you said to me over the telephone?" Shields asked as he exhaled the first cloud of smoke. "I'm in no mood to be spoofed today."

"In the late edition of the *Banner*," replied Wisner, "it is stated that Mr. Raymond Shields, the new District Attorney, admits that his office, in common with the police and detective departments, is without a clew as to the cause of the wholesale murders and other violence that has disgraced the city during the past twelve hours. As friends of yours we have called you here to enlighten you as to what started the rumpus."

"What the dickens do you fellows know about it?" demanded Shields with a sharp glance at Wisner.

"A lot," answered Wisner. "Do you remember sometime ago you suggested to me and Mr. Gaffney in my office at the theater that we organize the business-men of the Bryant Park district for a certain purpose? And sometime later, I told you what happened when we moved to form such an organization?"

"Yes," nodded Shields. "I remember."

"And do you remember we had quite a long talk about how you found yourself hampered in your attempt to fight organized crime?" continued Wisner. "You explained the workings of the whole rotten business."

"I recall that," admitted Shields.

"Among other things you said your hands were tied as long as the perfect harmony existed between the Federici and Marlin gangs and the crooked or frightened officials kept in office by the racketeers. You remarked that if something would happen to disrupt that harmony, you might be able to enter a wedge that would split gangland open and do away with it. Do you remember that?"

"I do," nodded Shields. "And so—"

"And so," replied Wisner, "after our effort to organize the business-men failed, the four of us here got together and finally hatched a plot. The things you had told us gave us the basic idea, and we built it up out of our own heads. This is what we did: We enlisted the help of a certain friend of mine who is a famous character-actor. Then we spent two months in studying the layout—and the faces, characters and habits of certain gangsters.

"Saturday night we started the action—and it developed far beyond our expectations. We kidnaped the District Attorney, Farnsworth, and took him out to a house that belonged to Sam Marlin. Our actor friend was made up to resemble one Joe Gable, a Marlin lieutenant. We had lured the real Gable to a vacant apartment through his weakness for blondes. Then we let the District Attorney get a glimpse of the bogus Gable's face. The farmhouse to which we took Farnsworth was his boyhood home and he knew that Marlin had purchased it. Thus we made it appear to Farnsworth that Hefty Sam was behind what we did to him. We took Farnsworth's keys away from him and made him give us the combination of his private safe. You remember that you told us you were certain Farnsworth had evidence to send more than half of the city's hoodlums and crooks to the pen if he would use it. Well, we found a lot of such evidence in the safe. It is in one of those bundles on that table yonder."

"Humph!" said the new District Attorney. "Go ahead."

"After we got Farnsworth stowed away in the country," went on Wisner, "we came back and robbed the mayor and his wife when they came home from—"

"I know about that," interrupted Shields. "Mrs. Caldwell told me. I suppose the exposé of your synthetic Joe Gable was for the purpose of making the mayor think Hefty Sam was back of the job?"

"It was," replied Wisner. "And it worked fine. That was all we had time for until Sunday night. Then one of us who is rather expert with a gun followed Marlin until he paid a call at the mayor's house. There our marksman shot a hole in the big chief's hat and sent another bullet close to him. Meantime the rest of us had captured Joe Gable again by calling him on the telephone and ordering him to come to Marlin's house in a hurry. We put Gable away for safe-keeping. He will be released tonight.

"After that, we kidnaped two other gangsters who were of the proper build and not too hard for our actor chum to imitate. They were Brindle Donaldson and Spotty Hale. They are with Joe Gable and will also be turned loose tonight. With our actor friend made up as Brindle Donaldson, we paid a call on Judge Freiberg—"

"I know what you did there, too," cut in Shields. "Go on with your confession."

"Well," proceeded Wisner, "so we convinced the Judge that Marlin's mob had done him dirt. Meantime, we had spied a bit and knew that Marlin was worried and suspicious. Then, last night, our actor in the character of Spotty Hale went to Dago Charley, one of Marlin's henchmen, with the story that Slick Federici and some traitors from the Marlin camp were out to put Marlin on the spot and hog the town's graft. We had some more cute little tricks thought up, but things blew up so suddenly that we didn't get a chance to use them." There was a touch of regret in Henry Wisner's voice.

"Too bad," said Raymond Shields. His face was stern, but there was a twinkle deep in his eyes.

Wisner continued: "Well, that's about all. The loot from each of our robberies is in a labeled package on that table and will be delivered to your office by a messenger who will not know who gave it to him. With what came out of Farnsworth's safe, you should be able to jail nearly every crook in this town—"

"Including you four eggs, and a famous actor," grunted Shields.

"No can do," grinned Wisner. "We are alone here with you. If necessary, we will deny having told you a word of this and swear that you came here to shoot craps with us. The crooks we are holding captive have seen none of us unmasked. They don't know where they are shut up. And we're going to do them the favor of turning them loose outside the city with some good advice. There are no fingerprints on the loot nor the packages containing it. We are honest, upright citizens of the community and our word is as good as yours. Besides we are four to one. And anyhow, you wouldn't be ungrateful, would you?"

HALF an hour later the new District Attorney entered his car. Before starting the motor he shook his fist good-naturedly at the window of the apartment from which he had just emerged.

"Highbinders!" he chuckled. "You should all be given ten years in the pen—and the Congressional medal!"

Gangland was beaten. With the evidence which fate had dropped into his hands, Raymond Shields went gladly and speedily to work. The hoodlums and gunmen who were fortunate enough to get away before the net closed remained away, and most of the rest are still in jail. It is apparent that the next city election will express the will of the citizens instead of that of racketeers.

REAL EXPERIENCES

What was the most exciting time of your life? In this department a number of your fellow-readers describe their most thrilling experiences. (For details of our prize offer for real experience stories, see page 5.) The first of these describes the longest parachute flight on record.

45 Minutes In a Parachute

By **Harold L. Osborne**

ON June fifth, 1931, a class of graduating parachute-riggers made the jump prescribed in the course of training at the Air Corps Technical School, Chanute field, Rantoul, Illinois. There were five of us and our nerves had been keyed up for days in anticipation of the event, for it was our first jump. At last, however, had come a day when the wind was warm, the sky cloudless.

Instead of jumping from a transport, as all former classes had, we were to jump from observation-planes—two-place jobs with open cockpits.

For days we had had our 'chutes packed, inspected and waiting. We were using a large twenty-eight-foot backpack and a smaller twenty-two-foot chest-pack. This last in case the first failed to open. We had packed both 'chutes ourselves, one of the purposes of the jump being to prove our confidence in our work. In other words, a parachute-rigger cannot expect some one else to use a parachute packed by him, with which he isn't willing to jump.

Before buckling on our 'chutes our senior instructor called us into the lecture-room and gave us our final instructions. Realizing our excitement, he made as light as possible of the whole business, concluding by relating some humorous incidents, among them cases of fellows having to be encouraged from the door of a transport with the toe of his boot. We went back then to the packing-room and helped each other into our 'chutes with many a nervous gibe and much rather forced laughter.

We found the planes "warmed up" and the pilots waiting on the "line." The flight-leader called pilots and jumpers about him and told us the signals he had arranged. We were to circle the field twice—the second time over, at the altitude of two thousand feet, the pilot was to raise his hand as a signal for the jumper to get out of his seat, stand with one foot in the cockpit and the other on the cowling, balancing himself with one hand and holding the rip-cord in the other. When the pilot's hand dropped we were to bail out.

The pilot gave our ship the gun and we roared off the field. I'll never forget the mingled emotions I experienced as I looked over the side of the cockpit and watched objects on the ground grow smaller and smaller.



Finally, after what seemed a lifetime, we were over the field a second time. My eyes were glued on the back of the pilot's neck. His hand went up. I forced myself out of the seat and stood waiting. Would his hand never drop? He looked back, smiled encouragement—which I returned with a sickly grin—and dropped his hand.

I dived head-first, yanking the rip-cord at the same time. My next sensation was that of being violently jerked. We had been told that when the 'chute opened it would give us quite a jolt, and my first thought was that it certainly did. I looked up, expecting to see the canopy of the 'chute prettily blossomed out. Imagine my horror when I beheld the thing hopelessly tangled in the tail assembly of the plane! My first impulse was to pull the rip-cord of the reserve 'chute, but on collecting my senses I saw that this would be disastrous. That it was all over with me I had not the slightest doubt. I looked down and counted four white round objects; all but myself were out of danger. I studied my predicament and decided there was no chance of the 'chute's untangling itself.

Meanwhile the pilot was having troubles of his own; when my weight of one hundred seventy-five pounds hit the tail, it all but threw the ship out of control. It began losing altitude very rapidly although it was nosed up and would normally have been climbing. It was only by giving it full throttle and winding up on the stabilizer that the pilot was able to get it on an even keel. This accomplished, he looked back, took in the situation and motioned for me to climb back the shroud-lines. I tried again and again, but the air current was too strong. I could only raise myself a few inches, and when I tried to get another hold I slid back again. Exhausted, I at last gave it up.

My position was most uncomfortable, to say the least. We were flying ninety miles per hour and the air current created by the revolving propeller added to the force of the wind against which I was so unwillingly being dragged. It whipped me around like a rag in a gale, causing the harness to cut into my shoulders and hips. My eyes burned and my face felt raw. I could see no way out but to land; I thought I would no doubt be considerably bruised but that I might escape death. Each time the pilot looked back I would point down, but he only shook his head.

On the ground, panic reigned. A large crowd had collected to watch the jumps, and as news of my misfortune spread it increased until thousands were milling about, each wanting to be of assistance and succeeding only in getting in each other's way. Nothing of this kind had ever been witnessed before and they were at a loss to know what to do. The most fantastic means of rescue were advanced. A photographer's ship came down with the report that I was unconscious and had pulled both 'chutes. My senior instructor—who has since died of heart-failure—fainted. We were circling the field at an altitude of fifteen hundred feet, an ambulance following our movements.

After I had racked my brain for some scheme of getting safely down and it became apparent that there was nothing I could do, I settled myself as best I could. If death was to be my fate the fact that there was nothing I could do to prevent it afforded me a queer resignation.

Finally, after a time they tell me was forty-five minutes, but which seemed ages to me, a plane came up with the words "*follow me*" chalked on the fuselage and a cord with a weight on the end of it hanging over the side. After several minutes and many attempts, the cord came close enough for me to grasp. I pulled the weight to me and found it to be a shot-bag of the kind used in packing 'chutes, with a jack-knife tied to it.

This was a godsend, and I hesitated not a moment but immediately began slashing the shroud-lines. There were twenty-eight of them with a breaking-strength of four hundred pounds each, and it took considerable time and effort. When I came to the last rope I hesitated a long minute. Fifteen hundred feet is a long way to fall! The landscape looked like a map. I looked to my emergency pack; everything seemed all right. I figured the thing out. I'd have to slash the line, drop the knife and pull the rip-cord. I took a deep breath, and cut it. The sensation of falling was pleasant. I pulled the rip-cord and fed the 'chute out. The sight of the opened canopy was certainly the most welcome I have ever seen.

The big umbrella carried me safely and gently to "good old earth"—and so ended the longest parachute-ride in history. I landed in a cornfield about twenty miles from the field. The earth felt soft and resilient; I sank into it and lay there panting, while the ships circled above me.

There was a meadow adjoining the field in which I found myself. The planes—one, with the remains of the 'chute still hanging from its tail—flew low, then came down.

I rose, gathered up my 'chute, crossed to the meadow and waited for them. The pilots came running to me. We exchanged congratulations; then one of them gave me his 'chute, and we headed back for Chanute.

I learned afterward that the reason we were so far from the field was that we were on our way to Lake Decatur, a distance of fifty miles. The police in the city of that name had been notified to have boats out on the lake. The planes were to fly low over it and signal for me to unbuckle my harness and drop into it—that was, if the knife idea failed.

Afterward the pilots and I talked the thing over and emphatically agreed that at least two of us had plenty to be thankful for!

Adrift In a Gale

One of our women readers tells how she fought for her life and that of her injured husband while at the mercy of a storm.

By **Mrs. J. Warner**

IF there is one thing I fear, it is the sea, but when my husband's health gave out and he purchased a large fishing-boat and took to the water, I disregarded my horror of it, to go with him. I have had several exciting experiences—one in particular I shall never forget.

It was a bitterly cold day in late November two years ago. We were returning from Block Island with a day's catch, a ton or more of codfish. A little after noon we pulled anchor to go to New London, some forty miles away. It had been a perfect day and still looked fair, though my husband shook his head as we started, remarking that he did not like the sudden calm or the peculiar copper tint in the east.

We had been under way for an hour when a stiff breeze struck us from the northeast. I was standing in the bow watching the sky: gone was the copper tint, and the low-hung clouds were black and threatening.

Suddenly my attention was attracted by the unsteady course the boat was taking. Turning I looked toward the pilot-house. My husband was slumped over the wheel! Quickly making my way aft, I saw upon reaching him that he was unconscious.

How I ever got him away from the wheel and down into the cabin, I don't know—but I did, and got him into his bunk. Making him as comfortable as possible, I went back into the pilot-house.

The wind had risen considerably, kicking up quite a sea. Our one sail was a large piece of canvas fastened to the boom we used for beam trawling. It had to be rolled on the boom, for it did not come down with the ropes like a sail fastened to a mast on a schooner. Now it was billowed out to its utmost, and becoming dangerous. Heading the boat into the wind I lashed the wheel, then watching my chance, I worked my way to the mast. The ropes were a frozen mass where they had been soaked from the spray; to loosen them would be impossible—they must be cut.

Hanging to the mast with one hand, I reached for my scout-knife that was fastened to my belt—a thing I always wore when on the water. I knew all I could do was to cut the ropes and let the canvas flap. One I cut away easily, but the other it seemed impossible to free. Nervously I hacked away at the frozen thing, and when it did part the hanging piece flew into the air with a snap like the crack of a gun. I was thrown forward. Reaching my hand out to save myself, I caught the flying end of the rope which carried me off my feet. Vainly I tried to find a footing on the slippery cabin roof, but to no avail; I kept sliding nearer the edge. Then with a lunge of the boat I was carried over the side, where I swung back and forth—a hu-



man pendulum. My hold would be short, for no one could for any length of time keep a grip on the icy rope. Looking at the blue-black wind-whipped water as the boat wallowed through it, I shuddered.

There was one slim chance—if I could only get my leg around the mast as I swung to and fro. Once as I swung back I was flung against it with a sickening crash that nearly made me lose my hold. Half-dazed, I swung out over the foamy water. I knew when I swung back that it would be then or never. My right leg touched, and twisting desperately I brought my body around so my left leg was a little to one side. Letting go the rope, I threw myself forward and succeeded in grasping the mast. In my anxiety to maintain my hold on the mast, I forgot the swinging rope, but was suddenly reminded of it by a stinging sensation across my fingers. Four of them were crushed, the blood spurting from their tips.

I glanced toward the bow, and saw the boat was about to mount a mammoth wave. As it rose I let go and slid into the cockpit, reaching the pilot-house without further mishap. But there my fear of the sea overcame me, and I huddled, cowering, on the floor.

The gale had increased with the changing of the tide. We were now bucking wind and tide. The wind shrieked through the rigging as if angry at its daring to stand. A monstrous wave hurtled through the pilot-house window, carrying the glass with it. For one horrified moment I thought we were going to the bottom; then she came up and shook from stem to stern, sending dishes, pots and pans across the cabin floor.

A thud from the interior brought me to myself, and I scrambled hastily to my feet. Looking into the cabin, I saw my husband had been thrown between the two bunks and was in great danger of rolling down upon the flywheel. I fastened the wheel; then leaped into the cabin, and

snatching up blankets and pillows I wedged him in so he could not roll and hurt himself again. I thought of the broken glass in the pilot-house, and getting a piece of canvas, some nails and a hammer, I nailed it across the open window to keep any more water from coming in. This was done none too soon—for she was taking green water, no spray over her bow.

With the boat once more on her course, I began to feel a little easier, but not for long. There came a sound that filled my heart with terror: The motor sputtered; there was a loud cough, then silence. The motor had gone dead, leaving the boat at the mercy of the angry sea.

I knew nothing of motors, and for a moment I was completely lost as to what to do. Then I remembered seeing my husband letting the gas run after the motor had stopped, so, opening the petcock, I did this. Upon shutting it I primed the motor and gave her a turn. A cough was the only response. Another turn—a sputter—then an even stroke! I felt like shouting for joy.

I was thankful that my husband had known how to pick a seaworthy boat. The *Gray Gull* was all one could ask for—her lines were perfect, and she cut the water gracefully. The heavy-duty forty-horsepower motor was now keeping an even stroke.

Hour after hour dragged by. No one could describe the joy I felt when I first saw the lights of Fisher's Island. Here we would be in the lee of the storm, which would give me a breathing-spell, though after leaving the shelter of the island I would have five miles more of rough water to pound through.

When I reached the island I went down into the cabin to make sure everything was all right, going over the motor to the best of my knowledge, putting oil everywhere there seemed a place for it, opening the petcock again and making sure there was no more water in it.

My husband was as I had left him; he seemed in a sort of coma.

With tightly pressed lips and a wildly beating heart I left the shelter of the island and again steered out into the rough water. Great waves rose high, threatening to bury us under their white fleecy mass when they broke over her bow. Grimly I fought back my mounting fear.

Race Rock Light was passed and left in the distance; I would soon be in harbor. Letting go the wheel for a second, I looked into the cabin. It was a very foolish thing to do, for the boat wallowed into the trough of the sea, with one wave mounting her that nearly capsized her, and a geyser of black icy water rolled over her.

With bated breath I waited. Were we going down, almost within reach of safety? There was a rending of wood, and the boom fell crashing across her bow. A crunching sound came from under the boat—now she was helpless, rolling and tossing completely at the mercy of the storm, for her propeller had been broken.

There was no time to think—I must act, and whatever I did must be done at once. Staggering into the cabin, I got a broom which I soaked in oil. To this I lit a match while back in the cockpit. I held it until there was only a flicker left; then I did the same with a pillow-case.

Eagerly I watched the harbor. Would my light be seen? If so, would anyone come out in a storm like this to investigate? My one hope was that a Government boat would see my distress-signal—and one did!

Breathing a prayer of thanks, I watched it leave the harbor and make toward us. My husband and I were taken aboard, and upon reaching the dock we were sent to the hospital. Our boat was towed into the harbor and anchored. . . . But many a time since I have awakened, screaming, from a dream of that awful day when I experienced a northeaster!

Adventure Enough

At the bottom of an old well-shaft in an abandoned settlement—with a skeleton to emphasize his peril.

By **Michael Dallas**

I WAS born in the Pacific Northwest, and spent the early years of my life in a little backwoods town at the foot of the Coast Range Mountains, in the State of Oregon. My grandparents were some of the first settlers in the district, and had built their first home, a log cabin, a few miles farther back in the hills in a settlement that was later abandoned as people took up government claims and moved to the farmland in the valley.

As soon as I was old enough to carry a gun, I spent most of my time during school vacation hunting in the hills near town. At the age of fifteen, I found myself in circumstances that forced me to earn my own way in the world; so for some years I worked in logging camps during the summer months, and attended school in the winter. After finishing school I joined a survey party that cruised and surveyed timber all up and down the coast, and did some railroad location. I studied hard and was soon capable of taking charge of minor jobs.

I was married in 1912, and as living in tents and shifting from one place to another has its drawbacks, I took a position as resident engineer in the logging camp of a large lumber company, and settled down to a quiet existence.

A heavy fall of snow one January stopped all logging operations; so having plenty of spare time, I did a bit of hunting and trapping, often being out three or four days at a time. An old friend of mine was tending a line of traps and living in an old timber claim cabin some twenty miles north; and not having seen him for several years, I started out one morning to pay him a visit, telling my wife and some of the men at camp that I would be gone several days.

In order to get the easiest going, I skirted around the higher mountains and deep cañons and into the upper foothills. The snow was not so deep here; I made good progress, and covered more than half the distance by noon.

The old settlement and those who had lived there were the things furthest from my mind as I entered a small opening in the timber, where the salal brush was about waist-high, and very thick. About twelve inches of snow lay on the ground, and quite a lot clung to the bushes.



This condition made walking difficult, and I was forcing my way along, paying no heed to the footing, and holding my arms high in order to keep my rifle out of the snow and to protect my hands, when suddenly the bottom seemed to drop out of everything, and I shot downward in a shower of snow, landing with a thud about eighteen feet below the surface, not seriously hurt, but badly shaken and greatly surprised.

Looking up, I could see only a very small patch of light; the hole I had fallen into was almost entirely grown over with snow; and I had walked right into it.

Enough snow had sifted through the opening to cover the bottom of the shaft to a depth of six inches. The reflection of light from this enabled me to see quite clearly. The shaft was about six feet in diameter, and had been dug in a sort of blue sandstone, which although not very hard, had not crumbled to any extent, as the wall was smooth and perpendicular up to within a few feet of the surface.

I considered the chances of summoning help by firing my rifle, but the nearest house was five miles distant.

Now that I began figuring the location of the spot, I remembered: This old clearing was where that pioneer village had stood, and this hole I was in was a well that had been made by an old fellow so that he would not have to carry water from the stream to his cabin for household use. But he had struck bed-rock without getting any water.

My feet were cold and my body was beginning to chill. I scraped the snow to one side with the gun-stock, uncovering the remains of some round poles. They were so decayed, however, that they were of no use as firewood.

I also found the skeleton of a large dog. Poor hound, he had been chasing something, and tumbled into the well! There was evidence of the effort he had made to escape, as I found claw-marks on the wall, and a tunnel in the side of the shaft, starting near the floor and extending nearly three feet back and at an upward angle.

It was now about one-thirty in the afternoon, and was snowing, which would cover my tracks. The men at camp would not start searching for at least a week, and my trapping friend was not expecting me.

Finally I decided to follow the dog's example and try to dig my way to freedom—but to use a different system. My plan was to dig two rows of holes parallel, and spaced twelve inches apart. The vertical spacing of each row would be about thirty inches, with the holes staggered, making steps of fifteen inches. The first four would have to be six inches deep, and large enough to admit my feet.

The remaining ones would have to be made some ten inches deep, with a notch at the back. By pushing my forearm into these deeper holes and gripping the notch with my fingers, and with my feet in two of the lower holes, I would be able to hold my body in a position that would enable me to dig with the free hand.

I carried a heavy hunting-knife, which proved a very good tool for the work. The sandstone was not terribly hard; but at that, I did not get on very rapidly. By the time the first four, and easiest, holes were finished, it had grown quite dark, so I stopped for a rest, and ate half of one sandwich, two of which I carried as a pocket lunch.

The weather had moderated; it had been raining hard for two hours; and my clothes were wet. After remaining quiet a few minutes I felt chilled, so started digging again.

The hole I was working on now was the first of the deeper ones, and was up as high as I could reach. I made very slow progress, and rain-water was running down my arms—a very uncomfortable feeling. About the only thing I succeeded in doing in the darkness was to fill my eyes with sand. I did finish the hole, however, and tried the next. On this one I was supporting myself clear of the bottom of the well, with my feet and one arm. I found that I could hang for only about five minutes at a time, as the arm that was thrust into the hole became cold, and cramped so badly that I was forced to come down and rest. After a few trials I decided to wait for daylight.

I laid my rifle on top of a heap of snow, dirt, dog-bones, and sticks, sat down on the stock, and tried to rest. I soon began to chill, so got up, swinging and beating my arms and, moving about as much as the limited space would

allow. After doing this I was able to rest for half an hour. It was now ten o'clock, and I kept up the rest and exercise periods all night. Daybreak came at seven; I ate another half sandwich, had a smoke, and went to work.

I made good progress for a while and then began to tire after a few minutes of hanging on and digging. I broke the skin on my knuckles; my hands were swollen from the cold, and the nails torn and bleeding. At noon I was so weak that my legs would hardly support my body.

After eating the remaining sandwich, and resting for half an hour, I climbed painfully back to work, which was truly torture. I was numb with cold, yet ached in every muscle. Climbing up and down for rest periods required a lot of effort, and wasted valuable time.

After ages seemingly had passed, I was able to reach the bushes that hid the top of the well, by which I could pull myself out.

I climbed down into the well again—but how I hated to do it! After tossing out my rifle and recovering my pipe and tobacco from the dog's tunnel I went up for the last time, and over the top.

Darkness was coming on again, so I found my way to the stream and had a good drink, then started out on what was more of a struggle than a walk, to my friend's cabin, arriving there just before midnight. After some bacon, and beans, with a cup of strong coffee, which he warmed for me, I felt much better, and told him my story.

The next day we covered the well with poles, for the safety of others, and I have never been near the place since. But I often think of the well, and wonder what my fate would have been, without the hunting-knife!

The Terror in Siberia

An American doing Red Cross work during the war between Reds and Whites encounters plenty trouble.

By Dr. Maurice Rochelle

EARLY in April, 1919, I found myself in a hotel room in San Francisco, preparing to leave for Siberia as an agent of the Red Cross.

I do not know what picture the word chaos calls forth in most people's minds but in my mind it calls forth an image of Siberia in 1919. There, during that year, the most terrible deeds of violence, robbery, murder and general barbarism were perpetrated by the Reds and Whites. Nowhere have men shown such a lust for the blood of their fellow-creatures as here. In that relentless war between the Reds and the Whites innocent women and children were slaughtered, cities burned and whole peoples exiled. The two sides fought with dauntless vigor, neither side giving or asking quarter, each side knowing what surrender would mean. Anything was possible in Siberia.

I was in the hotel room preparing for the trip; all that remained was to lock up the trunks. But before these could be locked up I had to put in several suits which a fat Russian tailor had promised to have delivered at four o'clock; it was now six and I was furious.

When he finally appeared, an hour later, I flew at him. "Sirkinov, what the devil do you think? How often do you suppose a man has a chance to go off to Siberia? Once a week?"

Sirkinov looked at me with his sparkling gray eyes as if I were an irritated child and then said in an English which I shall not attempt to record:

"When the Doctor reaches Siberia, it would be better not to get angry at all the delays. It would spoil the sweet disposition. This afternoon I have delayed you three hours: perhaps it may be possible for me to prevent a much bigger delay in the future—one never knows."

In the turmoil which followed I completely forgot the incident. But his prediction was true: trains would take weeks instead of a few days, any idea of a schedule was given up. There were officials with endless red tape.

My work was to extend relief to war prisoners, who suffered more than any other people at this time. With a scanty supply of food and clothing, and no fuel, they had been forced to face a Siberian winter. The condition in which I found the survivors can be imagined.

It was impossible for me to visit all the prison camps personally and supervise the relief work. As a result I had to depend largely upon the Kolchak government of Siberia to do the actual distribution of relief. I was greatly surprised by the disinclination on their part to aid in any relief work. Once I had a particularly difficult fight to get permission from a certain White General, Ivan Ranoff by name, to help the three hundred prisoners in the Verchne-Udinsk prison camp. One day I went to see the General and asked him point-blank what were his objections to my helping the prisoners. He replied that since there were six hundred and not three hundred prisoners, it would be better to give no relief since it could not be

given to all. I immediately replied that I was prepared to give relief to all six hundred.

He looked at me, somewhat taken aback by my reply, and sat thinking for a long time; suddenly he agreed to my proposal for giving relief to all six hundred, and even concluded by wishing me success in my work. I was greatly surprised by this sudden change in his manner. But I promptly sent the necessary clothing from Vladivostok to the Verchne-Udinsk camp. I also sent General Ivan Ranoff forty thousand dollars to feed the six hundred prisoners for eight months. . . .

Some months later I found a little extra time on my hands and I wanted to make an inspection tour of all the prison camps. In order to make this trip, I would need the permission of the local representative of the Kolchak government, in this case General Ranoff. With this permission in view, I went to see him a second time.

I was received by the General in the company of several other officers, one of whom was to act as interpreter. I had never let the authorities know that I spoke Russian fluently, because had they been aware of this, they would not have allowed me all the freedom they did.

Ranoff was tall, well built, with smooth-shaven cheeks and short mustaches, and a short Prussian military hair cut. His handshake was cold, his voice expressionless.

He commenced the interview by announcing that he would give me only ten minutes. All the conversation was conducted through the interpreter. As I explained my mission, I came to the point where I named the prison-camps to which I wished passes. It was a long list, but the General voiced no objections until I mentioned the Verchne-Udinsk camp.

At the mention of that camp, he came suddenly to life. He said, "Nonsense!" But he arose, and all his officers with him, and he looked at me as if what I had said was considerably more than nonsense. That stare of his I shall never forget; those two icy eyes suddenly lit up by a cold light of hatred and fear that sent a shudder down my back; and for the first time I realized how utterly at the mercy of this murderous Russian I was. And I recalled the Ekaterinburg Massacre in which three thousand were slain—at the orders, it is supposed, of this man before me. Then he directed his aid to make out the passes. He said to a major:

"See that this American never reaches the Verchne-Udinsk camp. I told him that there were six hundred prisoners there instead of three hundred. He sent forty thousand dollars to feed them, and I kept twenty thousand for munitions for the Ekaterinburg affair."

THEN the whole thing dawned on me, and I realized what was in back of the General's giving in so easily during our first meeting. And I completely forgot myself, and cried in good clear Russian:

"So that's what you did—took Red Cross funds and used them to buy munitions for the Ekaterinburg Massacre!"

Never in my life have I ever seen such expressions of mortification as I did then on the faces of Ranoff and his staff. Suddenly he dismissed all his officers, including the interpreter, since he no longer had any use for him. When the door was shut behind them, I said:

"Wait till the American forces hear of this in Vladivostok! Wait till the Red Cross hears of this! Wait till your own Commander Admiral Kolchak hears of this! No one of you wants trouble with foreign governments less than he."

"You know too much," the General replied calmly. "And in Siberia, when a man knows too much, we do but one thing; we kill him. I cannot kill you because you are an American; but I can gag you so completely that you shall

be as good as dead. No one will ever hear of this. There is no postal service, and all the telegrams go on the military wire. Once a week you will telegraph to your headquarters telling them that everything is all right. The only people that are allowed to leave the city are the soldiers, and they are forbidden to carry any messages. The only way you will be able to leave this town is with a pass from me; and," he added with a laugh, "I can assure you that that is rather improbable."

"And how long will this keep up?" I asked him.

"Till we beat the Reds; then you can have your money back at six per cent and visit all the camps you please."

"And if the Reds are victorious, you won't be bothered by money or relief, or anything at all!" I exclaimed.

I STEPPED into the anteroom in a daze. If I must remain in this little town till something decisive happened, I might have to wait months or even a year!

As I went through the door of the anteroom, to leave, I came face to face with a uniformed man who seemed strangely familiar.

"Dr. Rochelle! I was hoping we would meet," the little man said in unforgettable English.

"Sirkinov!" I exclaimed blankly. I looked him over; he was in a major's uniform! "You here, and a major!"

Sirkinov led me to a sort of inn where, after having been served, he asked me: "My prediction about delays—I suppose you found it true?"

"True? From the present turn of events, it looks as if I may spend the rest of my life here."

"That's too bad. But the Doctor will remember back in the States I promised to help him avoid some big delay in return for keeping him waiting in his hotel. Well, if you will have the goodness to inform me as to the trouble maybe we could fix it up."

I then proceeded to tell him the story of the Verchne-Udinsk prison camp and all the trouble caused by it. He punctuated my account by, "What a shame!" or "That's too bad!" When I came to the part where I burst out to Ranoff in Russian, he looked at me a little skeptically; and to prove it, I had to finish the account in Russian. His own story was very simple; back in the States he had been a railroad telegrapher before he became a tailor. He sailed two weeks after me, to offer his telegraphy to whomever would take it. The Whites used him; and because of the scarcity of skilled men he was soon commissioned and promoted to major.

"Just at present I am inspecting the line around this district. My messages do not have to be censored, so I will send your story in to Omsk. Kolchak would sooner have a Red victory than trouble with Americans." He then pressed my hand reassuringly and added: "Personally, I love Ranoff almost as much as you do."

Two weeks later I was sent for by General Ranoff. I found him with a telegram before him. Silently he made out a pass for me to leave the city.

But I had no Sirkinov to hasten official inquiry, concerning the Verchne-Udinsk affair, so that the White dictatorship was destroyed before any steps were taken. I heard months later that General Ivan Ranoff had been shot; but of my little Russian soldier-tailor I never heard again.

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