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NOVEMBER 1929

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

(ILLUSTRATED)

The NEW TARZAN STORY By Edgar Rice Burroughs

Also
Harold Titus
Robert Winchester
Clarence Herbert New
Bertram Atkey

$500 in CASH for Real Experiences

NOVEMBER 1929 THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE VOL. 50 No. 1

...Raised His Pay $4800* After Reading This Amazing Book Which Is Now *FREE!*

* Based on the combined experiences of F. B. Englehardt, Chattanooga, Tenn., A. F. Thompson, Sioux City, Iowa, L. D. Mather, E. Cleveland, Ohio, and many others.

Caught in a Rut

I wonder I put up with it as long as I did! Every day was filled with nothing but deadly routine and monotonous detail. No freedom or independence. No chance to get out and meet people, travel, nor have interesting experiences. I was just like a cog in a big machine with poor prospects of ever being anything more.

Long, Tiresome Hours

Every hour of the day I was under somebody's supervision. The TIME-CLOCK constantly laid in wait for me—a monument to unfulfilled hopes and dying ambition. Four times a day, promptly on the dot, it hurled its silent challenge at my self-respect, reminding me how unimportant I was and how little I really COUNTED in the business and social world!

Low Pay

Paid just enough to keep going—but never enough to enjoy any of the GOOD things of life every man DESERVES for his family and himself. Always economizing and pinching pennies. Always wondering what I would do if I were laid off or lost my job. Always uncertain and apprehensive of the future.

Desperate

Happened to get a look at the payroll one day and was astonished to see what big salaries went to the sales force. Found that salesman Brown made $200 a week—and Jenkins $275! Would have given my right arm to make money that fast, but never dreamed I had any "gift" for salesmanship.

A Ray of Light

Stumbled across an article on salesmanship in a magazine that evening. Was surprised to discover that salesmen were made and not "born" as I had foolishly believed. Read about a former cowpuncher, Wm. Shore of California, making $525 in one week after learning the ins-and-outs of scientific salesmanship. Decided that if HE could do it, so could I!

The Turning Point

My first step was to write for a certain little book which a famous business genius has called "The MOST AMAZING BOOK EVER PRINTED". It wasn't a very *big* book, but it certainly opened my eyes to things I had never *dreamed* of—and proved the turning point of my entire career!

What I Discovered

Between the pages of this remarkable volume, I discovered hundreds of little known facts and secrets that revealed the REAL TRUTH about the science of selling! It wasn't a bit as I had imagined. I found out that it was governed by simple rules and laws that almost ANY man can master as easily as he learned the alphabet. I even learned how to go about getting into this "highest paid of all professions". I found out exactly how Mark Barichievich of San Francisco was enabled to quit his $8 a week job as a restaurant-worker and start making $125 a week as a salesman; and how C. W. Birmingham of Dayton, Ohio, jumped from $15 a week to $7500 a year—these and *hundreds* of others! It certainly *was* a revelation!

FREE Employment Service

Furthermore, I discovered that the National Salesmen's Training Association, which published the book, also operates a most effective employment service! Last year they received requests from all over the U. S. and Canada for more than 50,000 salesmen trained by their method. This service is FREE to both members and employers and thousands have secured positions this way!

Making Good At Last!

It didn't take me long to decide to cast my lot with N. S. T. A.—and after a few weeks I had mastered the secrets of Modern Salesmanship during spare time, without losing a day or a dollar from my old job. When I was ready, the Employment Manager found me over a dozen good openings to choose from—and I selected one which paid me over $70 a week to start!

Was It Worth It?

Today my salary is $4800 greater than ever before! No more punching time-clocks or worrying over dimes and quarters! NOW my services are in REAL DEMAND with bigger prospects for the future than I ever dared HOPE for back in those days when I was just another "name" on a pay-roll!

Get Your Copy FREE

Right now the book—"The Key to Master Salesmanship"—which banished all my fears and troubles and showed me how to get started on the road to success and independence—will be mailed as a gift to any ambitious man, absolutely FREE. And since there is no obligation, why not see for yourself what amazing facts it contains! Just mail the coupon now—for there is no better way in the world to invest a 2-cent stamp! I KNOW!

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

Without obligation, please send me a free copy of "The Key To Master Salesmanship."

Name ..... Address .....

Town ..... State .....

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

THE BLUE BOOK

EDWIN BALMER, Editor
DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

Cover Design: Painted by Frank Hoban to illustrate "Tarzan at the Earth's Core."
Frontispiece: "Songs of Sea and Trail: IV—'Cole Younger.'" Drawn by Paul Lehman.

Two Fascinating Serials

Short Stories You Will Remember

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MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER, 1929

BIGELOW NEAL

This favorite Blue Book Magazine writer first won notice through his splendid story of a beaver, "Captain Jack," and gained new friends with each of his succeeding contributions like "The Field of Amber Gold," "The Night Hawk," "The Cloud King," and many others. He is the son of an old-time North Dakota sheriff and cattle-man, and is himself a real alumnus of that hard but thorough school—the Old West. One of his best stories is scheduled for our next issue under the title—

"TORNADO"

America Makes Men

FOR four years now we have been selecting each month five prize stories from among the hundreds which our readers have offered us. And more and more have we been impressed with the splendid qualities which these stories reveal in the men who make up this country of ours.

For the most part the stories offered are records of adventure; and in many of them a heart-warming record of courage is described—the other fellow's courage, usually. Indeed many stories offered are unavailable because the writer's inherent modesty has so minimized his own share in the episode that the story lacks drama. Or he merely narrates a story of heroism wherein he was simply a bystander; and as the rules require the memorable experience to be one's own, another must be given preference. Or again, where the writer does set down the story of a praiseworthy exploit in which he was the chief actor, in nearly all cases he asks that a pen-name be used, rather than his own.

It's a fascinating job, conducting this Real Experience department. For as a cross-section of American life the stories are singularly illuminating. And as we have tried to imply, the stories that we cannot find place for, fully as much as those we print, give us an added respect and admiration for our readers and for our fellow-citizens of these United States.

—*The Real Experience Editor.*

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 50 NOVEMBER, 1929 No. 1

Novelty

"NOVELTY," observed Addison, "serves us as a kind of refreshment, and takes off from that satiety we are apt to complain of in our usual and ordinary entertainments." And nowhere, probably, is novelty more valuable or essential than in the fiction we read—the very word *novel,* indeed, emphasizes the fact.

It is with this idea in mind that we strive earnestly to offer you as much as possible of this important element of novelty in each issue. Clarence Herbert New's remarkable Free Lance story in this issue, for example—"Airways of the Sea"—deals with a wholly new international problem, and with a situation that has never before occurred in human history. It is a drama, indeed, of tomorrow. And yet it is none the less vital and real, for all of that. So, too, with Warren Hastings Miller's spirited adventure of the Hell's Angels Foreign Legion squad: it deals with war in North Africa as it is being fought *today.* And "Tarzan at the Earth's Core" —especially Tarzan! For it is absolute novelty, such as can be achieved only by a really creative imagination, that is one of Tarzan's greatest attractions.

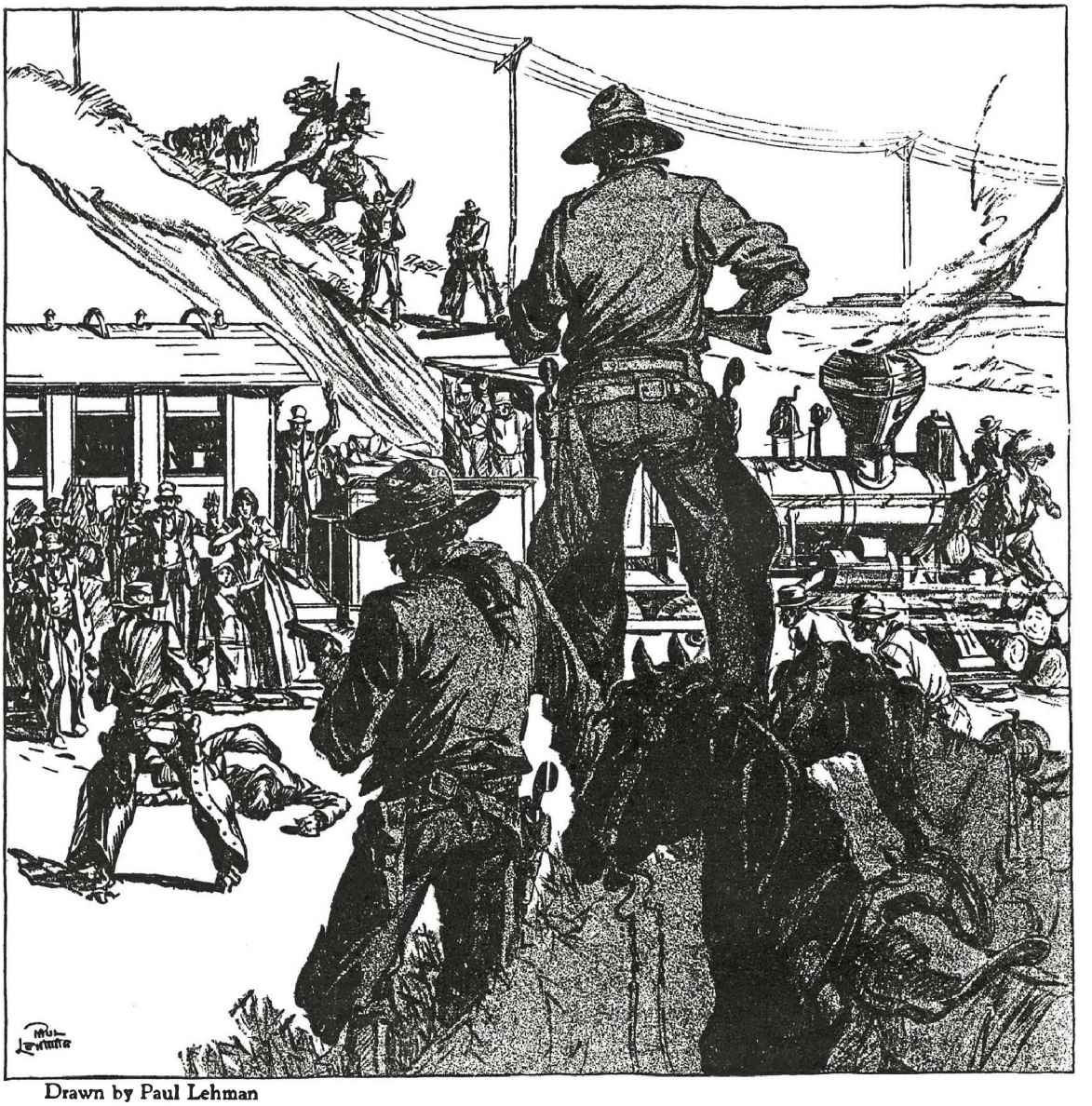
So on through the magazine: not every story, by any means, deals with the last word in modern invention; but when they discuss familiar scenes and themes and places, they handle them in the spirit of our immediate day, from the keenly alive present-day point of view.

In this connection we wish particularly to call your attention to a short novel, "The Murder in the Air," by Forbes Parkhill, which will be a feature of the next, the December, issue. This is one of the most engrossing crime-mystery stories we have ever read. More, it is absolutely new in its situation:

A big cabin plane with a dozen wealthy guests aboard is about to land; the lamps are switched off; a shot rings out—and when the lights are turned on again, the owner of the plane lies dead, a bullet through his heart. . . . . Half the people aboard had reason for killing Avery Stilwell. But—which of them fired that shot?

From this point the story proceeds with ever mounting drama to a stunning climax—in the same plane an hour later. There's novelty for you —and a story that you will not soon forget. Don't fail to read it and the many other good ones that will keep it company in this forthcoming December issue.

—*The Editors.*



Drawn by Paul Lehman

SONGS OF SEA AND TRAIL

V—"Cole Younger"

I am one of a band of outlaws; Cole Younger is my name;
My crimes and depredations have brought my friends to shame;
Of many a bold high-robbery, the tale to you I'll tell,
Of banks and trains and miner men who unto us befell. . . . .

A Union Pacific Railway train one day we did surprise;
The crimes done by our bloody hands bring tears unto my eyes.
The engineer and fireman killed; conductor 'scaped alive.
And now their bones lie moldering beneath Nebraska's skies.

Then we saddled horses and northwestward we did go
To the God-forsaken country called Minnesoteo.
I had my eye on the Northfield Bank, when brother Bob did say:
"Now, Cole, if you undertake the job, you'll surely curse the day."

But I stationed up my pickets, and up to the bank did go.
And there upon the counter, sir, I struck my fatal blow. . . . .
The robbing of the Northfield Bank, the same I can't deny,
And now I am a prisoner; in the Stillwater jail I lie.

WAR PAINT

A right diverting tale of sudden love and battle down on the Texas border, by the competent writing-man who gave us "My Deputy" and "No Flyer Is Ever Lost."

By ROBERT WINCHESTER

Illustrated by Ralph Frederick

THE two lean-bodied Texas rangers stood on the sidewalk of Wirton's main street, their thin, bronzed, grave young faces immobile, watching the girl who had pulled up to the curb in a long high-powered roadster that carried a New York license.

"Doggone," said Sam Earp, plaintively, "I sure wish Ma was along so's she could see it. Ma's been reading herself a lot about these new kind of girls, and she don't believe it a-tall. Hot damn, boy! Look at her puttin' her war paint on. Reckon she's goin' to hold up the bank, Bud?"

Bud Yancey grinned. "She's a right pretty girl even if she does—my gosh, Sam, maybe-so she heard us?"

The girl calmly powdered a very pretty straight little nose, touched her red hair with a dainty hand in one or two places, looked at the general result in a little mirror, took out a lipstick, worked on her lips for a moment, looked again in the mirror—then snapped her compact shut, got out of the car and walked directly up to the two young rangers.

She wasn't more than nineteen, and her graceful, exquisitely proportioned slim body, in its silken sheath, was the very heart of youth. Her eyes, dark gray-blue, surveyed the luckless pair, starting at their feet and slowly rising until they reached the eyes of the now much embarrassed Messieurs Yancey and Earp.

They lingered on the heavy cartridge-belts, from which hung the holstered revolvers, then once more came level with theirs, and she asked, sweetly: "When does the rest of the circus come to town?"

They both knew then that there could be no further doubt as to whether she had heard them or not. She had—and was going to give battle.

"Well suh," grinned Sam Earp, "it aint plumb certain just what time the rest of the outfit does get in, is it, Bud?" Now that active hostilities had started, they both felt better.

"That's right, it isn't," agreed Bud. "You see," he went on gravely, his keen young black eyes, with the tiny wrinkles at the corners already forming from gazing over the hot shimmering desert, intent on hers, "there was a right bad accident happened to the lion over yonder in Laredo, and it might delay them. Were you waitin' to see the show?"

"Yes suh," said Sam Earp, "I don't figure that lion will ever be the same again, will he, Bud?"

The girl's beautiful eyes had widened quite a little when they so readily took up the circus gibe, which she had meant as a double-barreled insult, in payment for the words: "I wish Ma was along to see it."

"Why—I don't believe there is a circus at all," she said, "and—"

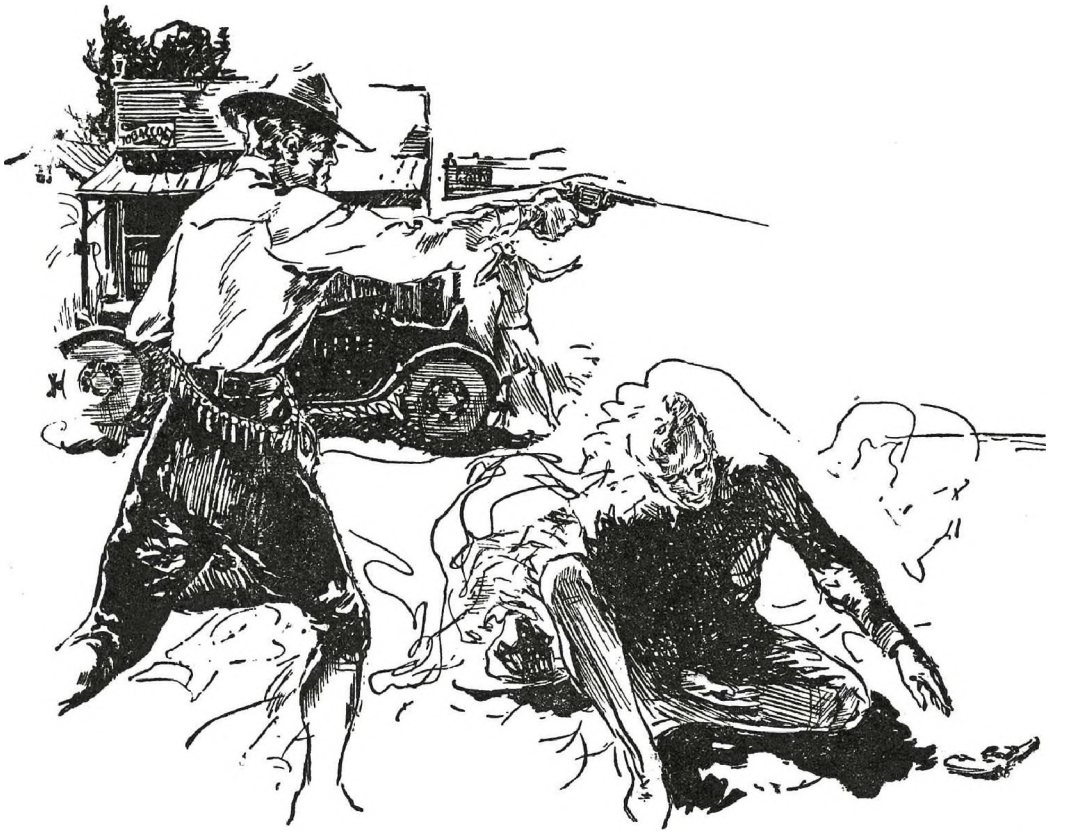
"What?" interrupted Bud sorrowfully. "Doggone, Sam, this here girl doesn't believe there is a circus! Don't you believe in Santa Claus, either?" he asked anxiously.

Miss Elaine Norcross Webb, only daughter of Charles P. Webb, New York and Newport, multi-millionaire, with yachts, country-houses and all that goes with them at her disposal, had never been referred to before, at least within hearing, as "this here girl." But having fighting blood herself, she rallied quickly.

"What happened to the lion?" she asked, just as gravely as Bud.

"It's a right sad thing," answered Sam Earp slowly. "He was—what was he doing, Bud? You were around when it happened."

"It was this-a-way," said Bud, a look of



scorn in his eyes as they dwelt a moment on the uninventive Mr. Earp. "That lion had a right bad habit of trying to climb the tent-pole backwards, and every time he got out, he'd—"

THE muffled sound of two shots came from the adobe house next to the bank; the door crashed open, and five Mexicans ran out. They turned at the edge of the sidewalk, and as a white man staggered from the doorway, an old single-action .41 in his hand, they raked the doorway and the windows of the house with a stream of lead. The white man pitched forward on his face, and the Mexicans started to run up the street directly toward Elaine and the two rangers.

She had just time to see the faces of Bud Yancey and Sam Earp suddenly become grim and cold before she felt Bud's arm close around her waist, forcing her to her knees behind him.

"Lie down," he commanded, no trace of a drawl now in his voice. Then she saw them run to the middle of the street, guns materializing in their hands as if by magic. There was a quick flurry of shots that came before she could get on her feet, which she promptly did, in spite of the command to get down.

Two of the Mexicans lay in the street; one was retreating toward the corner, firing as he went; one did not attempt to do any fighting but ran swiftly to the corner and disappeared; the other stood still, his hands above his head. Sam Earp was sitting in the dusty street, the right side of his face a blur of blood, his right arm hanging limp, and his left hand reaching for his gun, which had dropped from his hand as a bullet had torn through his wrist.

Bud Yancey stood erect, his heels together, swaying a little as the red splotch on his soft white shirt up near his shoulder widened. Elaine could see the frozen-looking little smile on his lips, and his eyes, now as cold and wintry as northern ice in the gray of dawn. The Mexican fired twice, then as Bud's weapon rose and fell, whirled around as if hit by a giant fist, his knees gave way and he sank slowly to the ground.

A mild-looking old man had stepped out of the bank next door at the first shot, a revolver in his hand, the butt of which was notched in several places. He watched the fight, making no attempt to get in it. When it was over, he sheathed his gun in a holster under his left armpit and walked over to where already men were bending over Sam Earp and Bud Yancey, now lying across Sam.

Bud's weapon rose and fell; the Mexican whirled as if hit by a giant fist, then sank to the ground.

THE old man talked a moment with the men who were lifting Sam and Bud in their arms, felt gently Sam's wrist and head, opened Bud's shirt a little, gave a curt order and started back toward the bank. He saw Elaine standing there, one lovely hand over her heart, and came up to her. "Honey," he said in a soft disapproving drawl, "you-all mustn't get up when men-folks are gun-fightin'. Next time you-all keep down—like a right good girl should."

"Next time!" gasped Elaine. "I—it happened so quickly, and—"

"It does that-a-way down here," the old man said, a twinkle coming in his calm blue eyes, "every once in a while."

"Are they—is he—oh, he stood there with a smile and—is he badly hurt?"

"If you-all mean that wuthless young Bud Yancey," answered Ranger Captain Coudray, "no, ma'am, he isn't. Neither is that scoundrel of a Sam Earp."

She had been referred to as "this here girl" and had been told to act as "a right good girl" in the course of five minutes, but she decided right then that she would defer for a day or so arriving at the army post where her brother was stationed—at least until she had heard more about the accident to the lion, and—found out that Bud Yancey was not really badly hurt.

"I was going into the bank to get a traveler's check cashed," she explained, "and they were talking to me when it happened. I'm Elaine Webb, and my brother is Lieutenant Webb, stationed at Fort Combes."

"Well suh, I know him right well—and I knew your daddy's brother when he was soldierin' down here a long time ago. My name is Coudray, honey. I'm kinda the boss of them two jaspers I caught gun-frolickin'."

Elaine looked at the famous old ranger captain that her brother had written about when telling of men and ways in Texas.

"Honey, after you-all get through at the bank, I sure would admire if you'd come home with me and meet up with the best-lookin' girl in Texas. Mrs. Coudray don't get out much nowadays, and she loves young people, specially right pretty ones."

Elaine smiled. "I'd love to. I didn't want to go until—are you sure he isn't hurt very much, Captain?"

"That Bud Yancey isn't hurt hardly a-tall," answered the old Ranger. "Honest Injun. You go and 'tend to your bankin', and then come home with me. Ma'll take you over to the hospital this evenin', I reckon."

"Why, I don't want to see him," Elaine hastily declared. "I—just wanted to know that—"

"I know you don't, honey," drawled Captain Coudray, a twinkle in his eyes. "There aint a nicer boy in the State. He's got him a mighty good range, too. Some day he'll have his company, I bet you."

"I don't see why you are telling me," Elaine said haughtily. "I haven't the slightest interest in—either what he is or what he has!"

"Yessum," said Ranger Captain Coudray, stepping aside so that Elaine could precede him in the bank, "I'd bet me a lot of money that you—"

Elaine hadn't waited to hear the rest of it, but with her patrician little nose well in the air was halfway to the banking counter.

LIEUTENANT JOHN WEBB was standing in front of a long glass frankly admiring the fit of a tunic on which was spread the silver wings of a flyer. "Hey, Lainy," he said, without turning around, "is that a wrinkle up there by the collar? Come on over and take a look."

"It isn't," answered Elaine lazily from the couch. "I can see from here. Boy, it fits you like the paper on the wall. I can—"

"You can like fun. Get off'n that couch before I come over and trun yez off. This is an important matter."

"Oh, for Pete's sake," said Miss Webb inelegantly. "I'm halfway through this story, and what between you and the rest of the infants around here asking me how their uniforms fit, I'll never finish it. It isn't a wrinkle, I tell you." But she rose just the same and came to the mirror. "See," she went on, "it fits smooth—except right here."

"Ouch! Quit it, you darn' monkey! Gee, you shouldn't tickle anyone like that without warning. I'll—"

"Take that in payment for making me get up," answered Elaine. "Jack, did you ever meet this Bud Yancey I told you about?"

"No, not Bud. I've met Jimmy and Wes—they're his cousins, I guess. All the Yanceys down here are related. Man, you ought to see Jimmy's sister Betty. She's one lovely piece of work. I've seen 'em under every flag that flies, and she's the starweno."

"Yes?" scoffed Elaine. "So you have fallen for a Texas beauty after all your fussiness? Remember who you are, young feller."

"That's just it," answered her brother. "I got as much chance as a jackrabbit, ding it."

"What! You—a Webb—and you haven't any chance? Does she know who you are, darling?"

Her brother eyed her suspiciously. "What are you trying to do—kid me?" he demanded. "The Yanceys were cattle barons and governors of Texas back in the days when the Webbs were running around barefooted peddling fish, you poor prune! Money doesn't count for anything down here. It's what you weigh and how you can stand up to it in Texas—"

"Down by the Rio Grande," sang Elaine gayly. "So the proud and haughty Yanceys scorn the poor Webbs, do they? Never mind, Johnny; we'll make them—"

"I've told you nine million times not to call me that," said her brother hotly. "I'm going to try out that new 5N bus that came in this morning. Want to go along?"

"Not I, my darling," answered Elaine, stretching luxuriously. "It's too hot, for one thing; and—"

"I dassen't, for another," jeered her brother from the door. "Stay there and get fat, then."

"Stay here and keep all in one piece, you mean," called Elaine to the retreating back.

But about an hour later she decided to go down to the flying-field after all and at least watch her brother try out the new 5N. He was in the air when she arrived, watched by quite a group of officers and "kiwi."

"Hullo," she was greeted by a young captain. "Come on over here and sit down. That brother of yours is trying to break his fool neck. He's been doing barrel-rolls and flying on his back while he's resting. I'll bet that bird he's got up with him wishes he'd stayed on the ground. Anyone that would go up with Jack Webb when he's testing out a crate is as crazy as he is."

"He asked me to," said Elaine, sitting down. "Who is it he has up with him? Must be some one that doesn't know him very well."

"I dunno," answered the captain. "I wasn't here when they started. Some lad said it was a ranger named Yancey."

"What?" said Elaine, sitting up straight. "What Yancey? Was his— I mean is his name—Bud Yancey, Billy?"

"Whadda you care?" asked Captain William Carter with a grin. "His name will be mud if he monkeys around flyin' with Jack, very much. Oh, ho! You're the reason we are honored with the presence of a ranger, are you? How-come Jack wants to kill him? Doesn't he approve, Lainy?"

"Don't be any more of a fool than you can help," answered Elaine crossly. "I just—my goodness, look at him!"

The great plane came roaring down in a tight spiral, to straighten out, skid, then side-slip to reduce the excess speed, the field being a small one. However reckless her

brother acted in the air, he was cool enough to make a perfect landing and bring the plane to a stop within ten feet of where Elaine was sitting. As he crawled out of the cockpit, he was followed by Texas Ranger Bud Yancey, whose tanned young face seemed a little paler than usual, although as immobile and grave as ever. "I'm right much obliged to you," Bud said, holding out his hand to Webb. "That was sure a ride. I reckon from now on, though, I'll take mine forkin' a bronc'."

ELAINE arrived, with battle showing clearly in her eyes. "John Webb," she began, "what do you mean by taking anyone up with you when you're trying out—"

"Aw, go on," her brother grinned. "He wanted to go. —Didn't you, Bud? Tell sis about it." And he beat a hasty retreat.

"Bud Yancey, you come over here and sit down this minute. The very idea—and you not out of the hospital a week. You should have better sense," Elaine scolded, leading the grinning Mr. Yancey firmly away to a quiet corner near one of the hangars.

"I always wanted to go up in one of those things," he protested, as they sat down, "and I'm all right. Last time you-all came to see us, the doctor said that—"

"I don't care what the doctor said. You shouldn't—"

"Honey, don't jump on the old man thataway while he's plumb dizzy. You-all be a good—"

"What did you call me?" demanded Elaine, her lips tightening.

"Darlin', how can I tell what I'm callin' anyone, after gettin' rolled around and around way up yonder?" asked Bud sorrowfully. "Ask me sometime when I've right good sense. All I know is that I'm sittin' here with you. A jasper told me one time that when a man gets as dizzy as the dickens, he always says what he thinks."

Elaine eyed him with a good deal of hostile suspicion. "You're a fraud," she declared, "and—"

"No, I am not," interrupted Bud. "My head is clearing right fast now, and I remember. I came all the way over to tell you that after you'd been to the hospital the second time, I decided that you were."

"I was what?" asked Elaine.

"What I called you when I was dizzy," explained Bud with a grin.

"Well," said Elaine grimly. "I can still see that you are as dizzy as the dickens, like you say. You better come right up to John's with me, and let Chi-sui make you something cool to drink. You are still awfully dizzy, Mr. Bud Yancey. Come on." And she slipped her slender little hand in his, much to the disgust of several young officers hovering around in the background. On the way she asked: "That day in Wirton—what did those men do, that you—were they trying to rob the bank?"

"No, they were some of Garcia's men from across the line. Reckon they had a deal on with old 'Pache Brown. He's more or less tied in with those jaspers. I mean he was," amended Bud, with a grin.

"Then why did they try to kill him?"

"Well suh, I don't figure they did aim to do that. Maybe-so it was the other way around. Old 'Pache was right apt to reach for a gun if he got fussed up, and it never took much to start him that-a-way. He may have thought they was holding out on him."

"Well, wont this Garcia try and—and do something to you and Sam Earp, Bud?"

"Yessum," answered Bud cheerfully, "I reckon he will. He's been trying to do something to us for a long time. Not only us, but the Border Patrol gents also."

"You seem to think it's funny," said Elaine hotly. "My goodness, don't you care at all whether you get killed or not?"

"Darn' right I do," said Bud promptly. "I don't want to get killed a-tall. Especially now."

"Why especially now?" asked Elaine, as they started up the veranda steps. If she had thought to embarrass Mr. Buford Yancey with that question, she woefully failed. Mr. Yancey was always ready to give a direct truthful answer to an equally direct question.

"Because," he said, halting on the top step and turning so as to face the very pretty little Miss Webb, "I've fallen in love with you, and want to live a long time after we are married."

"What!" gasped Elaine. "You've—after we are married! Well, Mr. Bud Yancey, you've got a long, long time to live before that ever happens. Why, you've only known me about three weeks! How do you know that I—"

"I don't," interrupted Bud sorrowfully. "That's just what is keeping me dizzy. Do you reckon that you—"

"No, I don't," said Elaine, interrupting in her turn, "and furthermore, I think you better sit right down here on this step until you get less dizzy, Mr. Yancey."

"I'll have to," said Bud, as faintly as possible. "Better have that Chink hurry with the drink; I'm getting worse."

"Here he comes now to see if we want anything. I think you are much too dizzy to have anything put in yours, either. You'll get lemonade, plain."

"My gosh!" said Bud, sitting down. "I sure wish you hadn't asked me that question." Then, being young and gay and happy, they both laughed and Elaine sat down beside him.

TWO weeks later Lieutenant Webb, his right arm in a sling, a bandage around his head, looked up from where he was lying on the living-room couch. "Where the dickens have you been?" he demanded as Elaine came in.

"I got here as soon as I could after I heard about it," she answered, coming over and kneeling by the couch, kissing him. "What happened, Johnny? Are you badly hurt, tell me! Darling, you should be more careful. Did you break your arm?"

"Who, me? I should say not. I keep it this way because it's cooler and—"

"John Norton Webb, you answer me! What happened, and how badly are you hurt?"

"Aw, I'm not hurt at all. Quit fussin' at me. I tried out a bus this morning, and when I landed her, the undercarriage came away, and I washed out, that's all."

"And got a broken arm and a—is your head bad, Johnny?"

"No, only a scratch, honest and truly, no foolin'. Where you been?"

"Up on the Lazy W Ranch to see Ma Earp. Bud took me up there. I met Betty Yancey, Jack."

"You did! Isn't she a bearcat? Listen, Lainy—put in a good word for me, will you? You know, tell her what a noble guy I am, and what a swell husband I'd make, and—"

"I wont—do your own horn-tooting, young feller. Oh, Jack, you'd love Ma Earp. She's—"

"Where do you get that 'Ma' stuff?" demanded her brother.

"Everyone calls her Ma," defended Elaine. "Bud asked me to."

"And that reminds me," said John sternly, "how-come you running around all over the lot with that darn ranger? Hasn't he got any rangering to do at all? Whenever I asked where in the dickens you were, some one says, 'Why, she just started with Bud Yancey for Gafoozalum or Doflicker, or some place.' "

"Why, darling," answered Elaine, trying to look surprised, "I just wanted to see if a Webb could make a Yancey—like them. It was on your account I have been doing it, Jonathan."

"Yeah? You fool around with these birds down here, and you'll wake up married."

Elaine laughed. "Don't worry, Jonathan; I can take care of myself."

"That's what all you darn' flappers think," said John, whom enforced idleness had made rather fussy. "But how'd you like Ma Earp?"

"Oh, she's a duck. She's about eighty, and she was here when there were Indians and outlaws and everything. She sits up there on the big ranch, Jacky, and bosses them all—all the Earps and the Yanceys and everybody. She's the prettiest old thing with silver hair, and her eyes are just as black and snappy. You should have seen her look me over when that darn' fool of a Sam Earp and Bud took me in to her."

"Why darn' fool?" lazily questioned her brother. "Go and chase up Chi-sui, will you, Lainy? I want him to find my pipe."

"It's right on the couch beside you, dumbbell," answered Elaine with sisterly candor. "Why, he said, 'Ma, you-all claimed there wasn't no such animal like you-all been readin' about. Me and Bud, here, caught us one down in Wirton and tamed it a lot so we could bring it up here for you-all to look at.' "

"Yeah? What did she say?"

"Well, first she said to them: 'You young scoundrels, go on away from here right now, you hear me?' And honest and truly, they both did."

John laughed. "Then what, Lainy?"

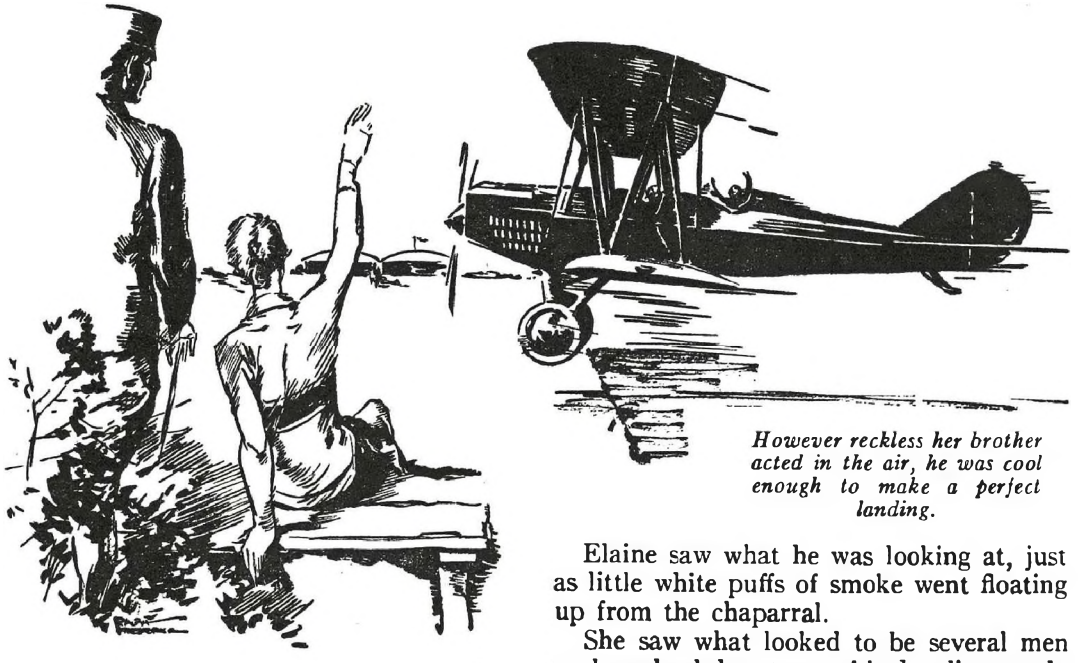
"Why," Elaine admitted, "she told me to sit down, and she asked me a lot of questions, and—"

"Hard ones?" grinned her brother.

"Some of them," Elaine confessed. "And then she told me to open my compact and show her how I used the rouge and the powder, and she asked me what I did it for—being a right pretty girl. And when I told her all girls did, she—she just snorted; that's the best way I can describe it."

"I'll bet she did," said John, delighted.

"Well, anyway, she did—and then we talked some more, and when I was going she called me over and kissed me, and said: 'Sugar, you're a right good girl and a smart one; you can't fool me a-tall.' And she



However reckless her brother acted in the air, he was cool enough to make a perfect landing.

went on to say," continued Elaine, with a boyish grin, "that she'd heard a lot about that poor fish of a brother of mine that was shining up to Betty Yancey, and from all she had heard he was—what was it she said? Oh, yes, that you were a no-'count scoundrel of a flyer, and—"

"Go on, now you're romancing. Go and make me a glass of iced tea, will you, Lainy? Spike it heavy with corn licker."

"I'll make the tea and spike it light, if at all. Corn licker and flying don't go together, me lad."

"Aw, have a heart," complained John to a very pretty back disappearing in the direction of the kitchen.

ELAINE stopped her car on the comb of a hill and stood up.

"Bud," she said solemnly, "I think that's the most beautiful view I've ever seen, and I've been in Switzerland and— Bud Yancey, are you listening to me?"

"No," answered Bud, from his seat beside her in the roadster, "I'm watchin' something."

"What?" demanded Elaine, sitting down again and turning so that she could see in the direction Bud was looking. "Where? Show me, Bud."

"Over there on the left. . . . . No, follow my finger. See, way over there just the other side of that bunch of chaparral—"

"What, Bud? What is chaparral?"

"Oh, my gosh! That bunch of—see, that thicket over there. That's the line and—hot damn!"

Elaine saw what he was looking at, just as little white puffs of smoke went floating up from the chaparral.

She saw what looked to be several men on horseback burst out of it, heading south. A moment afterward she could just barely see two men come out on foot, go to where there were two horses, get on them and ride along the west border of the clump.

"That's Sam and Bill Earp, darn their onery hides!" announced Bud. "Sneakin' off on me this-a-way!"

"What? How can you tell from here who they are? I can hardly see them. What were they doing? Bud Yancey, you better come out of it and tell me."

"Shucks," said Bud, his eyes still on the two men, "I can see them plain enough. Those darn' jaspers must have got a tip that something was coming across. Wait till I meet up with those polecats, goin' off like that without me."

"Did you hear what I said?" demanded Elaine. "I am not accustomed to having my questions totally ignored, Mr. Yancey. What were they doing down there?"

"I just told you," answered Bud. "Some gents were trying to get across the line, and Sam and Bill Earp stopped them—that's all."

"How lucid!" said Elaine hotly. "What a word-painter you are! Some gents were trying to get across the line, and Sam and Bill Earp stopped them, that's all," she mimicked. "That tells a lot, doesn't it?"

"Doggone it," answered the surprised Bud, "how else can I tell you?"

"It isn't what you tell; it's the way you told it. You tossed it out at me like a—like a—the way you would a bone to a dog. Who do you think you are, to talk that way to me? I'm not—"

"For Pete's sake," interrupted the still surprised Bud. "I don't know a thing about it, honest Injun. You asked—"

"Yes, I did," said Elaine angrily. Her hand went to the gear-shift, and her little arched foot to the starter. "Well, I'm going down there and see just—"

"Hold 'er," said Bud, sitting up straight. "You can't go down there. There may be some more that have sneaked over before Sam and Bill got there."

"What? I *can't!* Who are you to tell me what I can do? Are you afraid, Mr. Yancey, and you a ranger?"

"I told you not to," said Bud. As he spoke, his left foot came against the gear-shift, and he reached over and shut off the ignition.

"You dare!" flared Elaine, who had the full complement of temper that is supposed to go with red hair, and hers was brick red, not bronze nor auburn. "Take your foot away—get out of this car!"

"I wont," returned Bud, "not any. That's darn' dangerous ground down there at the minute, and you're not going down there, a-tall."

"I'm not—a-tall," mocked Elaine, her lips tight. "Well, I am—just as far as I want to go, Mr. Texas Ranger Yancey. Why, you're afraid to go! You are just as white as—as anything."

"That's right," drawled Bud silkily. "I'm afraid."

"Get out, then, and wait until I come back," said Elaine.

"I don't reckon I can do that," answered Bud, "because you're not going in the first place."

"Well, I am," asserted Elaine. "Take your foot away, please."

"Wait a minute," said Bud. "You don't *sabe*, I reckon. If any of those raiders got across before, they're holed up somewhere. If we ran on to them, I might not be able to stand them off. Then you'd—"

"If we do," Elaine interrupted, "you can get out and run as soon as you see them—you can see so far."

BUD YANCEY'S face really did go white at this taunt. None of the Yanceys were noted for much of an even temper, and Bud ran very true to type. But his voice never raised above the slow, soft drawl.

"Yes'sum, I could do that—if we got down there. But we aren't going. You better start back to the Fort, I reckon."

"Well," said Elaine bitterly, after one good look at the frosty black eyes of Mr. Yancey, "I'm not big enough to lick you, much as I'd like to; so you can take your foot away. I'll take you back to the Fort where you'll be safe, Mr. Yancey; and before I start, I'll tell you one thing—that is I think you are nothing but a scared cat, and I don't ever want to see you again."

"I'm right sorry you feel that-a-way," courteously answered Bud as he took his foot from the gear-shift. There wasn't another word said by either of them on the drive to the Fort. When they arrived, and Elaine had stopped in front of her brother's, Bud got out of the car, took off his wide soft hat, bowed and said, "Thank you very much for a right pleasant ride," and walked over towards Captain Carter's quarters.

Elaine sat there at the wheel for a moment with a look on her face that plainly showed she was still angry but not quite as happy as a young lady should have been who had told a young man she hated just what he was.

"WHERE'S the gent that's been hanging on to your apron-strings, Lainy?" asked Webb at the breakfast-table sometime later. "He hasn't hove in sight for a week or more."

"I don't know—and I don't care," answered Miss Webb shortly.

"What!" he shouted. "Don't tell me he's done quit you!"

Elaine looked at her only brother dispassionately. "Do you know," she stated in a conversational tone, "I always wondered how you managed to slip through at the Point. And now, as I see what you look like when you laugh that way, I wonder more."

"What do I look like, Lainy?" grinned Webb. "I thought sure as shootin' that you and Bud—"

"You look like an absolute idiot; and you are not far from being one, at any time."

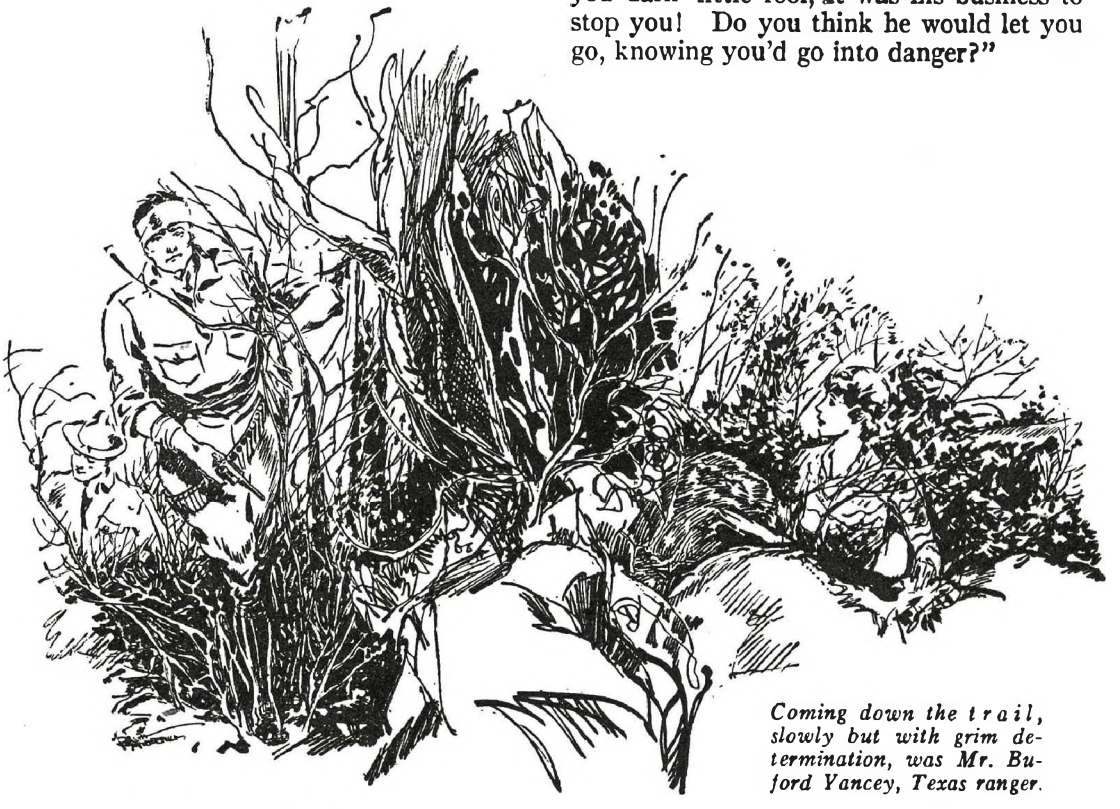
"My heavens," teased Webb, "it must have been a fierce battle! Do you mean to tell me you allowed a Yancey to ruffle the feathers of a Webb this way? Make up, old kid, and do it darn' quick. I need your help with Betty."

"Well, you wont get it," declared Elaine firmly, "and I wont make up with him."

"Even if you do get a chance," jeered her brother. "He hasn't come around lately, has he? Couldn't you hold—" Webb stopped and looked keenly at her. "What's the matter, sis?" he asked in an entirely

different tone of voice. "Tell old John about—if you can."

"Certainly I can. It—that day we drove over to see a man Bud wanted to ask something. When we were coming back, I stopped to look at the view, and there was a fight down in the—chaparral, and after it was over I wanted to go down and see it, and he wouldn't. He put his foot over against the gear-shift, and—"



Coming down the trail, slowly but with grim determination, was Mr. Buford Yancey, Texas ranger.

"Wait a minute," interrupted Webb. "What went before this foot-putting stuff? You say there was a fight down in the chaparral? You mean a fight in the car, don't you?"

"No, I don't—not that kind of a fight, anyway, though there would have been if I'd been big enough. He held it with his foot, and I couldn't move it."

"That's what I am trying to get at. Why did he?"

"Why, he said it was dangerous to go down there, because there might be some more of the raiders, he called them."

"And you were going, anyway?"

"Yes, I was—or no, I wasn't really; but after he said I couldn't, then I—"

"Oh, I see. He said you couldn't, so you were going anyway. Then he put his foot against the gear-shift and stopped you. Did it ever occur to you that a Texas ranger, in his own country, might know whether a thing was dangerous or not?"

"No, it didn't; and even if it did, he had no right to stop me."

"Well, my persecuted race!" said John Webb, in honest amazement. "And you sit there looking at least half-witted. Why, you darn' little fool, it was his business to stop you! Do you think he would let you go, knowing you'd go into danger?"

"I wasn't going into danger," said Elaine furiously, "and if I were, he ought to protect me. He was afraid, and—"

"What? Afraid? Bud Yancey? Now I know you're goofy. What the heck and high water is the matter with you, Lainy? My gosh, if being in love makes people act that way, I'm darn' glad I'm—"

"Oh," said Elaine, getting up from the table, "you make me so—so damn' mad!"

"Well," grinned Webb, rising also, "so does Mr. Yancey. . . . . H'm—I wonder who the heck that is? Boy, howdy, see him make that turn? Take it easy, boy; Liz wont stand much of that. Holy cats! He's coming over here!" And Webb ran down the steps to meet the flivver that was charging up to the steps.

A YOUNG Mexican jumped out almost before it stopped, and began talking to Webb. Elaine promptly ran down the steps

and tried to get what he was talking about. Her Spanish ran about twenty or thirty words, and the very much excited young Mexican was going up around three hundred a minute. Elaine got: *"Los Rangeros—mucho malo batalla—"* and then was entirely lost trying to follow. Finally, she got: *"El Rangero Earp y el Rangero Yancey, muy malos hombres—"*

"Jack," she said, seizing Webb's arm, "what is it? Tell me!"

"What? Where the—go away, woman."

"I wont. You tell me."

"All right, if you want to know, I'll tell you. Garcia's gang came across the line to get some rangers that mopped up on some of them a little while ago. This bird says they found the rangers, and there is one bearcat fight going on down near the old Three C ranch. He's a friendly Mex and has come in to get help. He says that some Earp and Yancey are holding the fort, but they wont last long. He also says that they are very bad men in a battle. Now, you know, go on away. I'm going to phone to Bill Carter to get his doughboys over there *pronto.*"

"What Yancey?" asked Elaine directly of the Mexican.

"El Señor Budero Yancey y—" He stopped as Elaine whirled around and ran to the house.

"Can cars make it up to this Three C ranch?" Webb asked.

"But no, señor," answered the Mexican, getting a strangle-hold on what English he had. "These bridge at the *valle es debajo del agua—mucho agua.*"

"Holy cats—under water! How close can they get?"

"Dos milas. These Garcia—he 'ave *muchisimo hombres* weeth—"

"Yeah? I'll get very much men on his tail too, darn' quick."

WEBB put down the telephone receiver after having been profanely ordered away from it by Captain William Carter, commanding fifty-odd hardboiled infantrymen who were literally spoiling for want of a fight—Carter's last words being: "Get away from that phone and give me a chance. Don't you call up anyone else, either, or I'll bust you wide open."

"Oh, my sainted aunt!" Webb said as he started away from the telephone. "Every darn' bus out jazzing around, and me with a busted arm! By gosh, I'll go with those—Where do you think you're going?"—to Elaine, who had returned, dressed in flying overalls.

"That Martin bomber is on the line, and I'm—"

"What? That old crate? She's out of commission—and even if she weren't, you couldn't fly her."

"Major Carnduff said I could fly any bus on this station," protested Elaine, "and I'm going to. I can fly as well as you can, and—"

"Better," agreed Webb, "much better. Only you're not going to, because there is no bus to fly, ding it all. If there were, I'd fly it myself. The oil-line is out of that baby, and— There goes Bill Carter and his gang! Holy smackers, Bill's copped the old man's pet car and loaded it to the guard-rails. I'm going with the next load, no foolin'. You stay here, Lainy."

"My car is much faster than any of theirs," insinuated that young lady.

"Yeah? That's right. I'll take it. Go get it for me, Lainy, like a nice girl. Manuel, you wait here. Go and get something to eat. *Mucho dinero* coming to you, old kid."

Elaine brought her car around in front. "You can't drive and shift gears with one hand," she pointed out, making no effort to get away from the driver's seat. "I'll drive you as far as the bridge."

Her brother, knowing her full well, looked at her with deep suspicion. "You will? And then what will you do? Holy cats! There go two more cars! I've missed the first bunch— All right, you drive me to the bridge. Catch up with Bill Carter if you can. Then you turn around and come back, you hear me?"

"Yes, dear," Elaine answered meekly, so meekly that Webb looked at her grimly and said: "I mean it, sis."

Without any further discussion Elaine devoted her attention to the wheel; the roadster not only caught up to Captain Carter's load of doughboys but passed them, long before the bridge was in sight, and raced on ahead.

The bridge was three or four feet under water. Generally the little stream that came slipping down from the hills was quiet and peaceful, but a cloudburst had made it a roaring torrent. There was a foot-bridge about a mile up, connecting the walls of a narrow deep cañon from which the stream issued to the valley below. It wasn't much of a bridge, being used by men going up in the hills who did not want to circle the

valley. The water had not nearly reached it, and as Elaine stopped at the edge of the flood-water, she pointed it out.

"Go right ahead, Mr. Webb. There's your bridge up there on the right."

"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread," chuckled Webb. "I'll wait for Bill and his cohorts."

He didn't have long to wait, for they arrived about two minutes later. Carter smiled cheerfully at Elaine.

"Hullo, Lainy! Going in as Red Cross?"

"No, I am not," answered Elaine hotly. "I'm going home. This darn' old brother of mine wont let me."

"That's where he shows sense for once. Come on, you terries—show me something! Sergeant Bate, detail four men to stay with the cars. Let's go!" The other cars had arrived and unloaded.

"Well," said Elaine bitterly, to anyone who cared to listen, as she watched Captain Carter, her brother and some fifty infantrymen start for the bridge in what looked more like a free-for-all race than an orderly advance, "I'll never forgive that John Webb or that Bill Carter, either!"

She started her car, turned, waved goodby to the four disgruntled doughboys left behind, and headed for the Fort.

But instead of keeping on the trail, after she had gone about five miles, she turned sharply to the left. As she did, she said to the wheel: "I'll bet anything I can get right around in back of the Three C. That's the old ranch I saw the other day, and—" The trail she had turned on began to narrow and twist, and Elaine wisely decided to put her attention on her driving. About half an hour later, she said aloud: "That darn' road I came down ought to be around here somewhere. I know I passed that big rock right after— There it is!"

THE trail leading off to the left could hardly be called a trail, let alone a "road," as Elaine named it. It was hardly wide enough for a car, even where it tied in with the one she was on. Now there was a lot of fallen timber and rocks in it. "My heavens," she said, standing up and looking it over, "I'll bet that cloudburst has ruined it. I can't drive over that! I guess I'll have to go back. Well, I wont, and that's that. This road leads up in the hills right back of the Three C, and I'm going to find out if—" The last was said as she was getting out, and the wheel,—not deigning to get into an argument with a red-headed young lady,—keeping quiet, Elaine started up the trail on foot. It was much farther than she thought, and after a steady climb for more than an hour, without sighting the hill she was sure topped the old ranch buildings, she decided to sit down and rest.

JUST then the sound of shots came down the trail to her; then a moment later, the patter of running feet. The trail, a little above where she was sitting, took a curve around a big boulder, and then another around an outstanding ledge.

Without a second's hesitation Elaine rolled off the rock she was sitting on and burrowed into the tangled windfall behind it. In doing it, she proved that she was, as Ma Earp had said, "a right smart girl" and worthy of the border, where the old rule still holds good in spots: "If it's strange, it's hostile."

When she stopped, she was under cover, and by pulling a couple of the branches over a little, could still see up the trail. As she did, there were three more shots, and she heard some one wail, *"Madre de Dios! Soy muerte!"* Then, rounding the curve and running as fast as they could, falling over rocks and windfalls, scrambling up, came four of Garcia's band, who had tried to ambush some Texas rangers. Their gay serapes were torn and muddy, their heads bare, their mouths open and their faces expressing their one thought, which was to get as far away as possible from whatever was behind them. They came by Elaine's hole-up so fast they did not even look in her direction.

"My goodness gracious," she gasped, "they must be—the boys must have ar— Oh! It's—it's Bud!" and she pushed her way out.

Coming down the trail, slowly but with grim determination, on foot, with rough homemade bandages on him in several places, a rakish reddened one around his head, almost covering one eye, was Mr. Buford Yancey, Texas ranger. In addition to the above described decorations, he had firmly held in his right hand an old ivory-handled .45; and around his waist, hanging on one side almost to his knee, was a belt in which most of the cartridge-loops were empty. His face and lips looked gray, but his eyes were holding the same look that they did when he stepped into the street that day at Wirton; and on his gray lips was the same little frozen smile. Back of him, about ten feet, came another young

man, with about the same number of bandages, the same kind of a gun in his hand—and quite the same kind of a look and smile.

WHEN Elaine rose to her feet from the windfall, Bud stopped and regarded her gravely, a puzzled look taking the place of the cold, bleak one in his eyes. He stood there swaying a little; then he shook his head and closed his eyes for a moment, as if to get rid of a vision. Sam Earp had come up when he opened them. As he did, Bud looked at Elaine and announced gravely: "We're goin' to chase those jaspers plumb through to the Guatemala border. You go on home, if you're real." And he started down the trail.

"Bud Yancey," said Elaine, taking the one hop necessary to get in front of him, "you are not! You are not going another step. Why, you are wounded and everything! Bud—you can't go and leave me here! I'm afraid! Don't leave me, Bud."

Sam Earp had stood there, doing more than a little swaying on his own account. "That's right," he said solemnly. "It's your girl, Bud. Can't leave any woman who's scared—you stay and I'll go and get us those *hombres*." Mr. Earp, having settled the matter, started out; but on making the first step, he slid to the ground and lay there.

"Doggone!" said Bud, looking down on him. "Sam's out—and Bill is out—and Capt'n Coudray is full of lead. Reckon it's up to me to do the protectin'. Come on."

"Oh, thank God!" Elaine had been standing so that she could see up the trail. As she spoke, Bud tried to turn around. He made it halfway; then as his eye caught the flash of steel and the brown of khaki uniforms, he joined Mr. Sam Earp on the ground at Elaine's feet.

Lieutenant Webb, a sergeant and twelve or fourteen men, arrived a moment later.

After one look at the rangers, he snapped out several orders that resulted in improvised slings attached to gun-barrels. All the way down the trail until Elaine's car came in sight, he did not speak to her. Garcia's men had turned off the trail, heading south before they reached the car, and it was as she had left it. Finally Elaine eased over beside him.

"Jack, do you think that he—that they are badly wounded?"

"I don't think so. If they had been, they couldn't have chased those birds up and down hills." He had fully intended sending Miss Elaine Norcross Webb home to New York with only a few chosen words, but the sight of her woebegone little face and the real tears in her eyes made him change his mind. "We got there just as Garcia was making a final charge with all his outfit. These lads were holed up in the house with two or three more. Boy, howdy, it was lovely billiards! They were so intent on scragging the rangers that we snuck up on 'em. There was enough of them left to make it even. Hot damn, Lainy, old kid, we run 'em ragged! You ought to have seen the ground in front of the house and on the sides where they'd tried before. It was covered with—"

"How did Bud and Sam Earp get—" interrupted Elaine.

"Why, some of them scattered out toward the hill in the rear, and all of a sudden the side door came busting open, and out came those two young hell-cats." (Lieutenant Webb was all of twenty-four.) "And up the hill they took after them. I jarred loose, thinking you might want to see your dear Bud in the flesh once more, and rounded up these men and came after—Say, that reminds me: just how come you here, madam?"

"Three of them came running by," Elaine said, ignoring the question, "and then Bud and—"

"Three of them? Holy mackinaw! I wonder if those two got all the rest. This Bud Yancey of yours didn't act much as if—"

A soldier came back and saluted. "If the Lieutenant pleases, the ranger ahead has come to and is asking for Miss Webb."

"Go ahead, Lainy," Webb started to say, but Elaine was already on her way.

SHE slipped in between the bearers and took firm hold of Bud's hand.

"Bud, are you all right? Tell me."

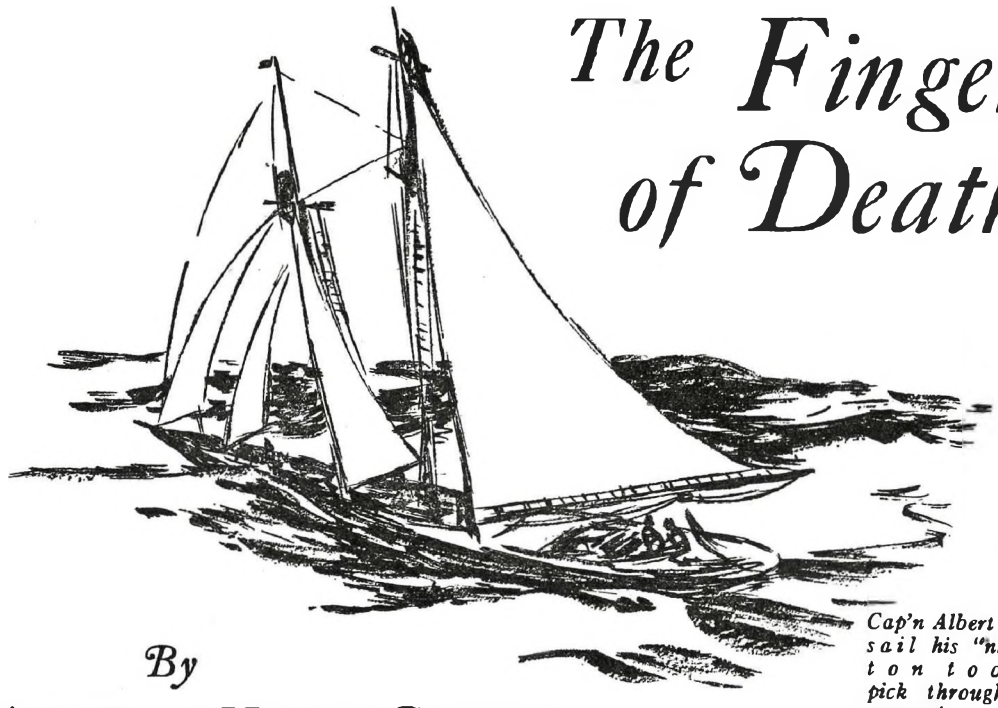
"I am now," answered Bud, with a grin that was rather a weak one, but a grin just the same. "Darlin', I knew it was you up yonder, and all the time I didn't, some way. Honey, you're a right nice girl, and I love you like—"

"Bud Yancey, you are not to talk. You just lie still. Bud—I'm sorry I said that—"

"Darlin', you better tell me right quick if you're going to love me, while I'm not dizzy and—"

"If you don't keep still," threatened Elaine, "I wont tell you, ever, that I love you. And—and—I do, Bud."

The Finger of Death



Cap'n Albert could sail his "ninety-ton toothpick through the eye of a needle."

By

ARTHUR HUNT CHUTE

Blow high, blow low, insurance canceled or not, this skipper was master of his ship—and ventured much: a stirring story by the author of "Storm Fever."

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

THE *Androvia* was getting ready for sea. With the last of the frozen bait aboard, hatches fast, and the great mainsail flapping thunderously, she tugged at her riding hawser, impatient to be trampling down the salt and windy roadways.

Captain Albert Kimmelman, a tall, red-headed fellow with an imperious manner, paced the quarter in his shirt-sleeves, indifferent to the biting blast. Somehow you could not think of him as giving in before the mere assaults of weather; his every attitude bespoke inflexible defiance. A graduate of the North Atlantic Banks, Cap'n Albert represented a vanishing type —last of the real sailors. Practice in picking up his dories in all weather had given him an uncanny adeptness in the handling of a vessel. In his own words, he could sail his "ninety-ton toothpick through the eye of a needle, or turn her round on a sixpence."

Conscious of that freedom of the seas purchased alone through strife, Cap'n Albert was no respecter of times or seasons; no matter what the probabilities, he came and went according to his own sweet will. On this especial night, gulls flying low, and blown spindrift, told of boisterous elements without. The fleet was due to sail that evening, but in deference to storm-signals decided to ride out the worst of it in the comfortable shelter of the inner harbor.

The *Androvia* alone was putting to sea. Amon Zinc, her mate, thought they might just as well wait over with the rest; but Amon knew enough to keep his opinions to himself. No debating-societies were ever tolerated on the *Androvia's* quarter.

After a last squint at the howling, ill-intentioned night, Cap'n Albert jumped into a dory and cast off, with the injunction: "Just goin' over to fetch our papers—have everything ready fer breakin' ground as soon as I get back."

FIVE minutes later he burst into Deacon Brady's office with the abruptness of a head-wind tide-rip. The Deacon always kept his clerk Willy Gilroy in a little cubicle outside, to prevent intrusions. But at that moment the clerk happened to be in the

holy of holies, being raked over the coals for leaving the inkwells open.

This scoring was suddenly cut short by a sonorous: "Evenin', Deacon! Are my papers here?"

"What? You're not going out tonight, Cap'n Albert!"

"Sure thing. Aint my style to miss a leadin' wind down the coast."

Brady drummed the desk impatiently. "But I tell you, you shouldn't take such chances!"

"My own vessel is my own affair."

The Skipper's easy manner appeared in marked contrast to the infirmities of Deacon Brady, but the little man's outward hesitancy was merely a mask for inward dominance. With mortgages on half the farms in the county, and shares in most of the vessels of the fleet, his was a power that brooked no insolence. Albert Kimmelman might be able to knock a man down, but Deacon Brady was the kind to "make 'em or break 'em."

Secretly everyone railed against this 'longshore autocrat; but it was easy to fall into his clutches. Lost gear on the Banks, depredations of sudden storms, a parted cable, dragged anchors, collision, ice and fog, all these conspired to deliver unfortunate skippers into the clutches of Brady.

The loans of the Deacon like a snowball waxed ever greater and greater, until this little wizened old man had become a sort of Laird of the Grand Banks.

If "safety first" was the motto of the cautious, scheming, dollar-chasing Simon Brady, "safety last" was the slogan of the ramping, stamping, hard-driving Albert Kimmelman. These two were never meant to sail the same courses. But as financial arbiter of Water Street, it was inevitable that the Deacon should have dealings with Cap'n Albert, and it was inevitable that in such dealings they should clash.

People were continually telling Albert: "You wait; he'll get you yet!" This carried just enough sting to make the Skipper furious, consequently he always came into Brady's office with a "chip on his shoulder."

Sensing imminent battle, the little man motioned Willy Gilroy out of the room.

"Shut the door," he snapped, and the order was instantly obeyed.

WHEN the two were alone, the Deacon walked over to a high desk.

"Here's your clearance papers, Cap'n. Since you're set on goin' out tonight no one can say nay, but if I had control of your vessel I'd certainly forbid your sailing."

"You can't give me no orders," said Albert stubbornly.

"Well, if I can't, there's just one word of warning, and that is that you are to keep clear of the Sable Island Bank."

KIMMELMAN snorted. "I guess that's my own business!"

"Yes, and it's also the business of the underwriters. As you know, last fall we lost five of our finest vessels and over a hundred men off Sable Island. This can't go on forever, and so to put an end to it, our Company have decided to declare March a closed season for the fishing-fleet in and about these waters."

"That kind of stuff sounds better in an office than it does aboard a trawler."

"But look at the chances you're takin'."

"Sure; that's fishin'! A man that's scared o' chances aint got no business on the banks."

Deacon Brady wagged his head.

"Tut, tut, be reasonable. You've got the LaHave Bank, the Middle Ground, Brown's and the whole o' Quero. Why go snoopin' around a danger-spot like Sable?"

"I don't go snoopin' round there fer my health, that's sure."

"Well, why go at all?"

"To find the fish!" The Skipper trailed off into a string of lurid blasphemy. He was not the type to brook interference. Let the Deacon attend to his ledgers, and he'd attend to his sailing courses! But Brady, parish head by right of half a hundred mortgages, was in no wise inclined to a compliant view.

"Let's waste no more chatter! Read the clause in your contract—you will see it is stipulated that if you expose your vessel to the perils of Sable Island at this season you forfeit your claim upon the underwriters."

There was something staggering in this information. Albert blinked as though he had received a blow; then blazed forth:

"Do you mean to tell me that you would hold up the insurance from my kids if I was lost on Sable bars?"

"No need of being lost. Just do as I tell you, that's all."

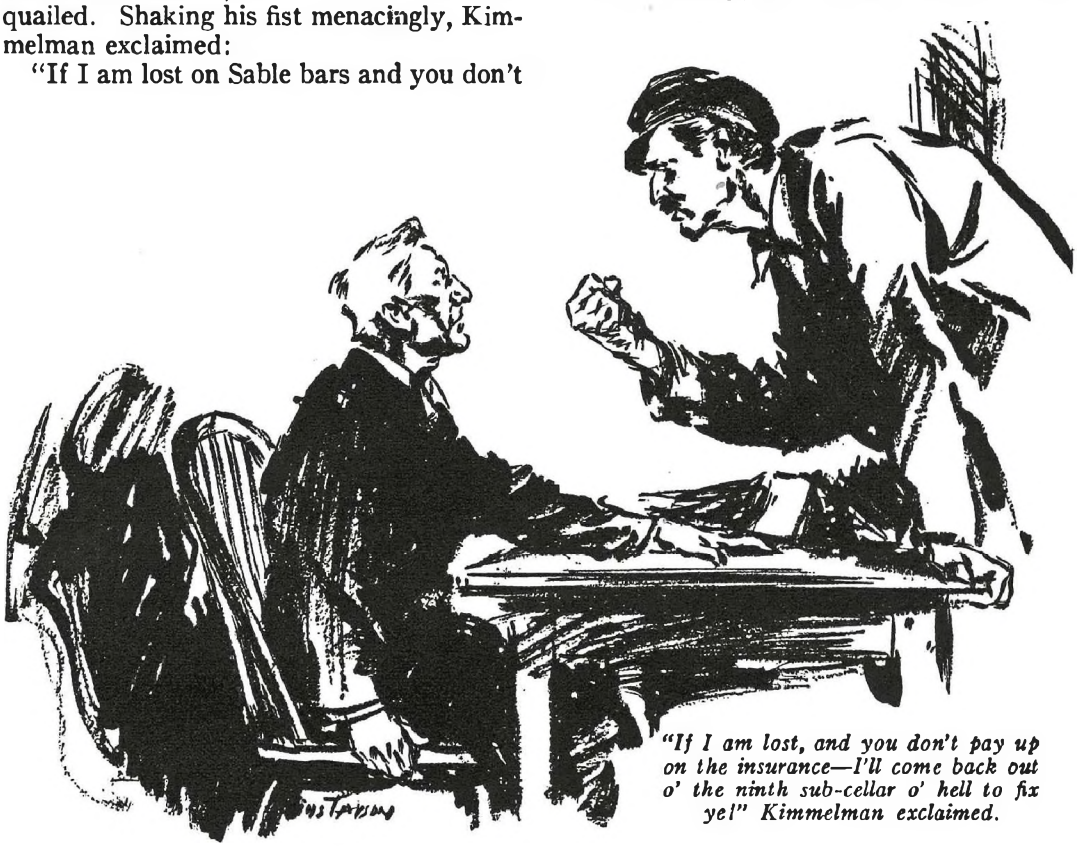
"You stick to your business o' testifyin' in prayer-meetin', Deacon, and I'll stick to mine, which is shootin' my gear in the likeliest places. There aint no man ashore can tell a trawlin' skipper where he's a-goin' to lay his bottom—he'll go where the fish

take him, in spite o' wise guys back home with their rubbers under the stove."

"You're stubborn, Albert Kimmelman—but if you're lost on Sable at this season there wont be one cent of insurance!"

Albert's answer was to step aggressively toward his accuser; but the little man never quailed. Shaking his fist menacingly, Kimmelman exclaimed:

"If I am lost on Sable bars and you don't pay up on the insurance—by God, I'll come back out o' the ninth sub-cellar o' hell to fix ye!"



"If I am lost, and you don't pay up on the insurance—I'll come back out o' the ninth sub-cellar o' hell to fix ye!" Kimmelman exclaimed.

The Deacon was starting to rebuke this awful blasphemy, when Albert strode out, smashing the glass door of the inner office as he banged it behind him, a gesture eloquent of what he would have liked to do to Simon Brady.

After his departure, the Deacon was in a white rage. Recognizing the signs, Willy Gilroy lay low, while the ship-owner paced up and down in his tiny office, muttering to himself:

"Yes, yes; I'll take the stubbornness out o' him yet!"

A few minutes later, the sound of a windlass pawl and the note of an anchor-chain coming in caused the Deacon to pause in his fierce stamping and gaze out of the seaward window. Outside he saw the headsails of the *Androvia* go fluttering up, as like a great white winged sea-bird, she spread her pinions to the blast. Then with the anchor broken out, he saw her take on a beautiful slant and go ramping down the harbor, to vanish in the smother of the wildering night.

Momentarily, the Deacon was held before the mystery and the majesty of that sight. The long nights, the great storms, the far-off banks, and these tall racing schooners had given unto his home port a touch of beauty born of faith and courage. In flashing glimpses, even Simon Brady saw something of this inner beauty. For several moments he stood by the seaward window, lost in contemplation, gazing wistfully where the *Androvia* had vanished. A sigh escaped him, then coming back to reality with a start, he exclaimed:

"Bah, fiddlesticks!"

THE mere fact that a counting-house navigator had commanded him to "keep off" was enough to send Cap'n Albert straight into the danger-zone of Sable. But his penchant for big chances was not as strong as it had been. A large and growing family made increasing demands upon him, while the business of owning his own vessel

added much to responsibility. The last salt-fish trip had been disappointing, which meant strict economies on the part of the Skipper.

He had intended to buy a radio and build an ell on his house in the spring, but with a poor catch these cherished plans had gone glimmering. This, however, was not half as hard on Albert as were restrictions aboard his schooner. Painted a dazzling white, her clean, clear lines were the pride and delight of the home port.

Everything that went into the *Androvia* was storm-tested. She was braced at the break with nine sets of iron knees, timbered and sparred in the stoutest manner. She had come off the ways a queen, and Albert had kept her up as such. Let the slightest fray appear in sheets or topping lifts and they were at once replaced by fresh bright cordage. Others would have fished a cracked topmast; Albert always had a new one in its place.

But on this March trip the *Androvia* had not been repainted and refitted as usual. The hull was gray from the chafing of ice, while the golden scroll of her counter lacked in brilliance. On account of recent bad luck, Cap'n Albert for once was forced to put to sea without everything tuned up to the nines. A loan might have been effected from the Deacon, but that course was unthinkable.

Talking to his vessel, as was his custom, he declared: "No, no, we wont borrow anything. But we'll get a big catch this time, and then we'll come back and fit you out, my lass, in the old style!"

On the first night on the Middle Ground, jogging under bank's sail, the Skipper came out for an inspection, choosing the hours of darkness so that the rest of the crew might not see him at this painful and humiliating task. On the way for'ard, he paused with his hand on the weather shroud. The wind was sounding with a loud high note, while taut stays spoke of wholesome stress.

His examination of the standing rigging was satisfactory. But the running gear was not so reassuring. The riding-sail was threatening to blow out of the bolt-ropes, the great manila hawser had too many seizings. Last of all he turned his attention to the dories nested in the waist. After but a cursory examination, he murmured: "Aint stanch enough, that's sure—bad shape for heavy boarding seas!"

Next morning, when the Mate began to kick about various shortcomings, Albert cut him short.

"I know, I know, without yer tellin' me. There's nothin' fer it but to make the best of a bad job."

"Aye," repeated the Mate, "we've got to get the fish."

This refrain passed from Skipper and Mate down to the merest throater. All alike voiced like a fervent prayer, "We've got to get the fish."

As though to mock their apprehensive mood, they found themselves in the midst of a vast sea of floating ice. The whole North Atlantic for hundreds of miles seemed to be covered with sheet ice; wherever they went they were still in the thick of it.

After three weeks of this discouraging work their fresh bait went bad on them, and they had to put into Canso for supplies and a new riding-sail, which cost Albert all the money he had remaining to his account.

As they put to sea again, Amon Zinc remarked despairingly:

"If we don't make good this time, Skip, we're bust."

"No *ifs* about it, this time," Albert growled in assent, his face like flint.

THEY made their first berth on Brown's Bank, and in spite of threatening weather set their trawls toward nightfall, planning to make the first underhauling early the following morning.

With his vessel "clubbed down," the Skipper went below leaving the watch on deck with the instructions:

"Call me if she breezes up."

He had hardly turned in before one of the watch came clambering down and gave him an awakening shake.

"Hey, Skip, she's blowin' like great guns. Looks as if she needed more cable."

With a grunt the Skipper sprang out, fully clothed. The minute he pushed back the companion slide he was met by the full force of a nor'east snow-squall. The roaring of the waves as they went rushing by, the dismal howling of the wind through the rigging, and the darkness of the night intensified by blinding snow, left no choice.

"Come on, below there! Rouse out quick; we got to pay out the whole string!"

Notwithstanding the danger from seas that broke across her bows, the crew mustered around the windlass and cable was veered out to enable them to ride easier.

As the night wore on, the gale increased

in fury, while to make matters worse the tide hawsed the vessel up till she lay almost in the trough of the waves. She acted so badly that at last they were compelled to set the riding-sail, bag reefed, to keep her nose more nearly headed to the seas.

Shortly after the riding-sail was set, there came a succession of tremendously heavy snow squalls. The *Androvia* quivered like a stricken bird as she strove weakly up the steep sides of the mountainous waves, which threatened to bury her beneath their curling crests. Even with the small rag of a sail, lying head to the wind, she buried her lee side nearly to her hatches.

Just before morning, a monstrous beam sea crashed inboard over the waist, smashing the dories beneath tons of pounding water.

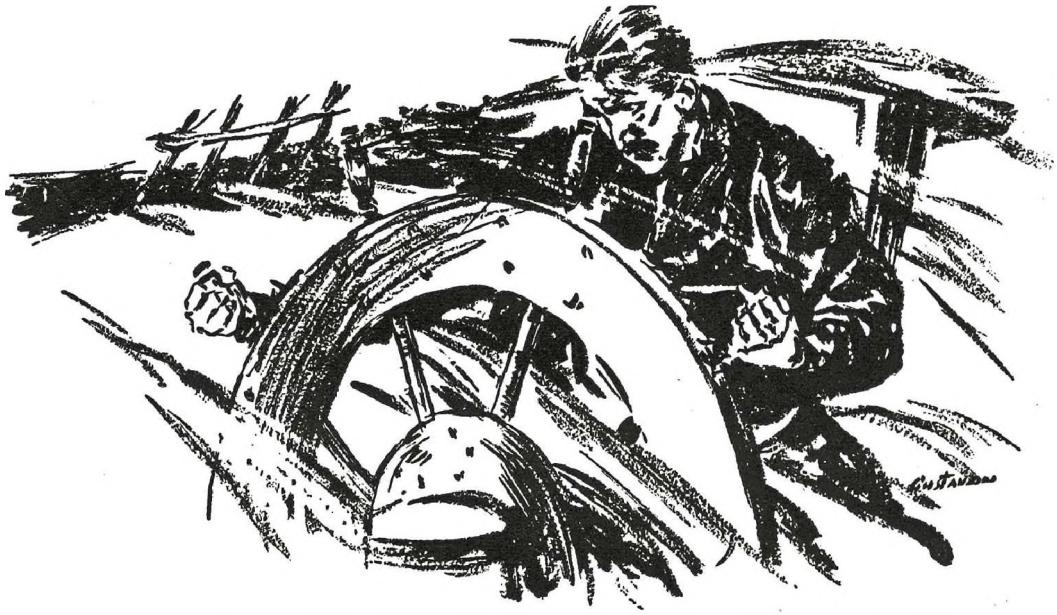
Here indeed was a pretty pass. All their trawls out, and now no means to go and underhaul them!

For once Cap'n Albert had to admit himself completely beaten. If they had cut off his hands and feet they could not have rendered him more helpless. Without dories to underhaul his trawls he might as well have been tied up at the wharf back home.

Wouldn't the boys give him the laugh, though, when he came in with pens empty, without even an ounce of his salt wetted? He could stand the chaffing, but what about the loss of the trip? After previous misfortunes this would put him on his beam ends!

As the realization of this was borne upon him, the Skipper groaned aloud. Utterly broken, he went with sagging feet into his cabin, where he crawled into his bunk, burying his head beneath the blankets. He might have found oblivion in sleep, but no sleep came—instead, his brain raged as if in a fever.

In this bitter hour he remembered the last time that he had walked into Simon Brady's inner office, owing nothing, asking nothing. Now, in contrast, he saw himself going back there with hat in hand, like some wheedling mendicant. And with the horror of this picture a sense of inequity and of injustice began to force itself upon him. It wasn't right! He had fought like a man; he had stood up to the worst without a whimper. Now, by the merest chance, was he to become a mortgaged helot of banks? Was that freedom of the seas, belonging to him and to his sires for generations, to pass because of some old money-grubber at his desk ashore? Was he to become the liege man of a sniveling hypocrite, whose heart was stone?



Outside on that foaming deck Cap'n Albert was locked in death-grips with Sable.

An overmastering rage began to take possession of Albert. The tiny bunk and the tiny cabin could no longer hold him. Storming up on deck, he was met again by the spectacle of his smashed dories, and the mocking sight of the highflyers of his trawls.

It was like the match to powder. In that instant Albert Kimmelman exploded:

"I'll show ye if I'm through! There's only one Man that ever walked upon the water, but by the leapin' lightnin', I'm goin' over the water to get them trawls!"

With wrath suddenly fused into white heat, he started to drive all hands at the job of mending the shattered dories. Using the parts of the two most hopelessly broken ones to mend the others he overbore all objections. He converted the cabin stove into a forge, and turned the fo'c's'le into a joiner's loft. Thus by means of a resourcefulness peculiar alike to frontiersmen and fishermen, he had six of his eight dories practically made over before nightfall.

By means of these reconditioned dories they were enabled on the following morning to make a couple of sets. But the school of fish had moved on. The total underhauling of the trawls that morning did not yield a large enough return to satisfy a single dorymate.

THE dejected manner in which all hands came aboard at noon, told that their morale was weakening. Around the fo'c's'le table at the midday meal everyone was predicting failure and blue ruin.

"What's the good o' keepin' on?"

"We was hoodooed from the start."

"Only thing to do now is to haul up our killick and get out."

Seated in the master's place at the end of the long fo'c's'le table, Albert Kimmelman began to hear in this discontent a challenge to his own command. It was incumbent upon the Skipper to find the fish.

For some time Albert sat in moody silence. At last, rousing himself, he turned to the loudest of the croakers with the query:

"Well, what are we goin' to do about it?"

"Head her fer home," said the other dejectedly.

"Like hell we will! We've tried all the regular grounds and nothin' to show. There's only one place left and that's the Sable Island Bank."

"But we're supposed to stand clear o' there at this season," answered a timorous one.

"Bah, you better get a job ashore if that's your style! How many fellers here is willing to try old Sable?"

With one single dissenter the crew declared themselves in favor of a policy of "win or bust." Accordingly they put sail to the *Androvia,* and late that afternoon raised the West Point light of Sable Island, coming to anchor about sixteen miles off, in a depth of ninety fathoms.

As though to mock man's weakness, the fisheries hereabouts are immensely valuable. Tragedies from time to time had sent vessels scurrying, but ere long, the hardiest returned, and soon all were venturing there again as fearlessly as though Death had never stalked upon the waters.

Desperate, despairing, but unbeaten, it was to Sable that Cap'n Albert came, prepared to risk all in one last chancing.

"A man had better be dead an' buried underneath them bars," he said bitterly, "than come crawling back to port to offer up his soul and body for a bloody mortgage."

After his companions had gone below, Albert still trod the poop, pacing up and down as though fretting at some restraint. Now and again he paused to gaze across the sea floor where gloom was thickening. The March night came on apace; then suddenly out of the dark a star arose, casting its reflected ray across a waste of broken water. In that first flashing moment, under the revolving light the jagged edge of the breakers appeared like teeth of hungry wolves.

Albert gazed in fascination. He had seen the breakers a thousand times, but never before had he seen those wicked teeth.

A shiver of apprehension passed down his spine. Yet not for an instant did he think of turning back. To be afraid of something and yet to do it, was a part of his nature.

LATER Amon Zinc came up from below, and joined the Skipper.

"Ever been ashore there, Amon?" asked Captain Kimmelman.

"Yes. Washed in on a dory one time. It's a lovely spot on a fine day, lyin' so peaceful-like in the lap o' the waves—but I seen something there that sure cured *me* o' any likin' fer the damn' place! While I was there the schooner *Topaze* drifted in bottom-up on the north side at Number Three station. She broke up at once and eight bodies come ashore, their faces as black as their boots. Seein' them cured me o' Sable!"

The Skipper needed none of Amon Zinc's reminders to bring home to him the menace of this fifty-mile finger of death.

Voices seemed to come to him, increasingly insistent. *"Begone! Begone!"*

"Begone—like hell!" the watch-mates

On came the white-topped comber, with foam and roar, flooding the waist until the man on the main gaff saw but the after-house above the welter of water.

heard him mutter, as he pulled back the slide and went below. . . . .

Before sunup the following morning, the *Androvia* had started dropping her dories along their trawls. Standing at the wheel, Cap'n Albert saw in the paling gleam the West Point light; and he shuddered in the cold uncertain dawn.

Day creeping on apace revealed the crests of the gray-green seas extending farther and farther into the gloom, until there again was Sable, wicked as ever in the coming of day. Outward lay miles on miles of broken water; to landward, low dunes and shifting sand.

The following days passed without untoward incident, save that the calculating features of old Deacon Brady were continually appearing on the Skipper's mental vision, while the querulous warning was ever in his ears:

"Begone! Begone—before it is too late!"

These psychic appearances were more dreaded by Albert than were the roarings of the bars, but he steeled himself like a man who clings desperately upon the edge of a volcano. Muttering grimly, "I come out here fer a trip o' fish, an' a trip o' fish I'm goin' to have!" he remained, day after day.

As though willing to reward dogged energy and daring, Sable offered up an ever-increasing toll of fish. Sometimes they took over five thousand pounds in a single day; in three weeks they had a record fare.

"Looks as if Cap'n Albert has changed his luck at last," declared the Mate to one of his cronies.

"Aye, ye can always depend upon the Skip to stage a walloping come-back," the other agreed.

Their conquest had not been easy; consequently it was that much more delightful. A gale of wind had blown most of the time; but during the respite there were opportunities to set the trawls and in these brief lulls Cap'n Albert had snatched his trip—snatched it from a snarling and unwilling ocean.

The last dawn of their stay broke bitter and gray, with high wind, and ice making rapidly. In spite of foreboding prospects, all hands were out early. Shortly before noon, almost frozen, they struggled back to the straining schooner and got their fish aboard. Long fierce squalls were springing up, with dory-killing weather. The Skipper decreed that fishing was over for the day.

During the afternoon the wind continued to rise; before nightfall a howling sou'-easter was upon them, the rigging whistling and a terrific sea making up.

WITH three hundred fathoms of cable out, the *Androvia*, under storm try-sail, lay cradled like a sleeping gull. By six o'clock, the gale was howling through the darkness, driving thick with blinding snow. The vessel, no longer riding easy, now was straining and pounding at her cable.

The whole string of four hundred fathoms was paid out, but with the storm increasing the Skipper called, as a precautionary measure:

"Double reef the fores'l, an' reef the jumbo!"

This order was barely carried out before a mountainous sea struck the vessel a staggering blow across the knightheads. As soon as her bows came up out of the foaming welter some one shrieked:

"My God, the cable's parted!"

The worst had befallen them. They were adrift in the awful "Bend"—adrift with wind and tide bearing them in toward the graveyard of the Atlantic.

Sable Island and its bars form a crescent concave to the northward, extending for more than fifty miles—a fifty-mile finger of death! Ever since Cap'n Albert's father had started to teach him the lore of the Banks, he had said:

"Whatever ye do, son, be careful and never get caught in this Bend, in a gale from the nor'ard, when the ebb is settin' over the bars!"

NOW this was exactly his present predicament. The wind which had been prevailing from the south'ard had suddenly jumped into the opposite quarter—one of Sable's vilest tricks.

Within a few minutes the wind had jumped from forty to eighty miles an hour. The waters which earlier in the evening were indigo-blue, were now tawny from the churned-up sand. No need to tell the secret of that tawny tide; it meant that they were drifting in toward the sounding bar.

The long deep seas were giving way to the sharp short breakers, while their tone changed from the lion's roar of the open deep to the wolf-like howl of vicious shoals.

Realizing their position, the Mate lost his nerve completely.

"We're lost! We're lost!" he wailed. "Aint nothing now can save us."

The crew were similarly affected.

With this complete demoralization, Cap'n Albert came aft to take the wheel. Lashing himself to the after bitts, he began to bellow forth his orders. Double-reefed foresail and reefed jumbo were set and sheeted home as taut as bar iron. Thus stripped for action, Albert stood the *Androvia* to the westward. There was just about room enough to make it, but after going about ten miles the wind started to head them.

THE battling figure at the wheel saw at last that they were on the brink of complete disaster. The graybeards were pressing them closer and ever closer, like a pack of hungry wolves. By now the seas were breaking from the bottom. At any moment they expected to hear the keel grating and pounding in the sand.

"Give us a cast of the lead there," he called.

"Ten fathom," came back the hail.

Ten fathoms! Those words sounded to Cap'n Albert like the knell of doom. He knew that off here a few feet might take a laboring vessel from a depth of ten fathoms to pile her up on those shifting sands.

The *Androvia* was as near disaster as any sailing vessel could possibly be, for to pile up here on such a night meant quick and utter destruction under the onslaught of those crashing seas.

Everyone aboard had thrown up the sponge except the Skipper who stood desperately to the wheel. In that bitter moment, there had come to him the last fling of Deacon Brady:

"If you're lost on Sable at this season there wont be one cent of insurance."

Listening to this taunting fling, Albert Kimmelman became like one possessed. Clawing off this lee shore, he was struggling for something more than life. He had promised the Deacon that if he failed to pay, he would arise from the depths of hell. But he would not die to accommodate that safe and comfortable old hypocrite ashore—he would come back from Sable bars to fling taunts into his teeth!

HE put a lookout on the main gaff, and the rest of the crew were commanded to go below, for the ferocity of the seas made it unlivable on deck except for a man who was lashed there.

Obeying the order, like a herd of sheep, all hands crowded into fo'c's'le and cabin, closing the slides fast, leaving the Skipper alone upon the poop.

Outside on that foaming deck, clutched at by wild seas and blinded by snow and sleet, Cap'n Albert was locked in death-grips with Sable. At times he was almost submerged as his gallant vessel threw off the white horses that evermore came charging down upon her.

The lives of all aboard depended now upon two things only—the battling prowess of the man at the wheel, and the ability of

his far-famed vessel to sail, close-hauled, along the fringes of disaster.

In the acme of conflict, Cap'n Albert and the *Androvia* were no longer man and vessel, separate and distinct; the crisis had suddenly welded them into one, one heart, one brain, one pulse-beat, one all-consuming purpose, to claw off from the far-flung and tenacious grip of the bars.

"They've got ye now! They've got ye now," a querulous voice seemed to snarl out across the breakers, while schooner and Skipper alike kept flinging back:

"Not yet! Not yet!"

IN the grimness of the conflict, Albert gradually quit his cursing. Instead, he was talking to his vessel, pleading, coaxing, inspiring, while the *Androvia,* like a living thing, answered with efforts better than her best. Spars and gear were shrieking out from this unheard-of strain, but he held her to it with firm yet sympathetic hands.

A frightful graybeard hissed down upon them. The schooner quavered, then answered to his cry: "Up! Up and meet it—right over it, old girl!"

On came the white-topped comber with foam and roar, flooding the waist from rail to rail, until the man on the main gaff looking down saw nothing but the after-house showing above the welter of wild water.

Cap'n Albert himself was entirely submerged and for one awful moment the coordination of man and vessel was broken. It seemed as though the end had come. The *Androvia* yawed wildly; then, rolling to leeward, she was conscious once more of a fierce grip upon her wheel, while the same calm voice muttered:

"Aye, stand up to it; stand up, lass, an' we'll show 'em yet."

As though responding to his pleadings, the *Androvia* under those masterly tenacious hands was sailing almost into the eye of the wind, clawing off that lee shore like a fighting thoroughbred.

She was taking bitter punishment, but fortunately on account of a deep heel, and the peculiar cut of her bottom, she was able to take it over her bows. Albert had always claimed that his vessel was the greatest storm-bird of the fleet, and now there was no doubt about it. In this situation any other fishing schooner would have had to take some broadside punishment, and no wooden vessel could have taken such punishment that night off Sable.

But the *Androvia* was not to come through this testing of the gales unscathed. While she wavered in a moment of weakness, a sea caught her unprepared, and before she had time to meet it, came crashing in upon her bows. Quivering from that staggering blow she started to heel over. Instinctively her Skipper knew that his vessel had received a mortal blow. Sensing the same alarm, all hands tumbled up on deck. The damage was plainly visible. The giant sea had carried away thirteen stanchions, the rail, and everything on deck. Some of the great oak stanchions were broken off like matchwood several feet below deck and the seas were pouring in for'ard.

"Canvas her! Canvas her!" yelled the Skipper.

Amid the roar of the seas and the shrieking darkness, the stricken vessel was canvassed from the bow aft to the middle of the fore-rigging. All through this terrific ordeal a voice crooned at the wheel: "Easy, lass, easy; we'll soon be through."

This blow to the vessel was to Cap'n Albert like pain in his own body. An exquisite sympathy seemed to flow through his soothing hands as he nursed her with the tenderness of a woman. Responding to those wondrous hands, as though she felt and understood, the stricken queen was soon pointing high once more, fighting to windward as gallantly as ever.

Hour after hour, in spite of her wounds, she continued to eat into the gale. At midnight the wind hauled, while the Skipper, collapsing on the lines that lashed him to the after bitts, muttered incoherently:

"We're safe, auld lass, we're safe!"

ON a Sabbath evening, the *Androvia* came limping into Lunenburg harbor. Even the soft light of a waning moon could not hide the marks of combat; she was a gaping wreck for'ard; her decks were yellow with sand. No need to ask where she had been, for she bore the marks of Sable.

Simon Brady, standing at the end of the wharf, was the first to greet them. He was always there when the ships came in.

There was a polite parley for convention's sake; then there came the fretful admonition:

"But you know, Cap'n, you never should have run such risks!"

"That kind o' talk's all right fer you, Deacon," replied Cap'n Albert loftily. "But when a man's after fish, he's got to go where he can find the fish!"

TARZAN at the Earth's Core

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

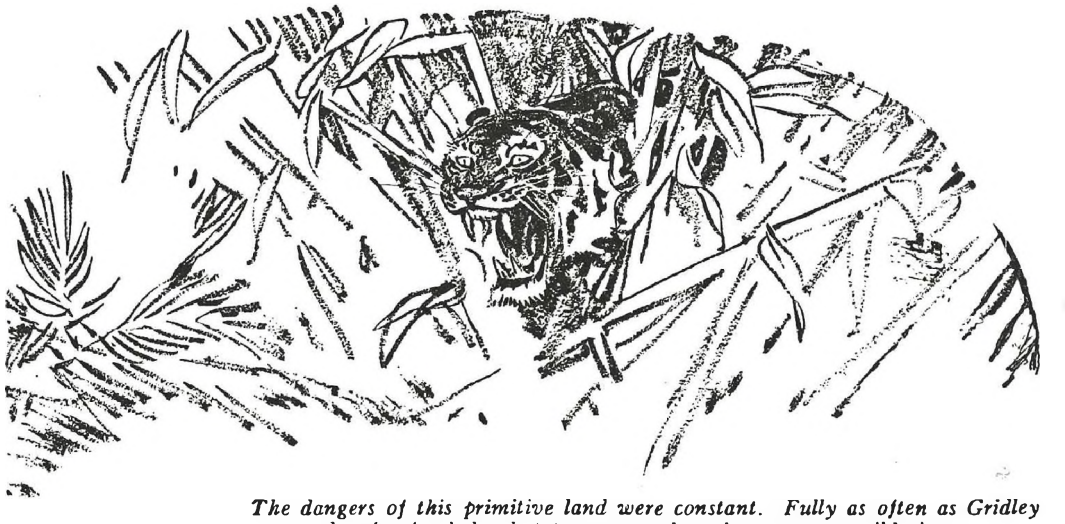
The greatest fiction adventurer of our time here sets forth upon a valiant enterprise among the savage beasts of primeval Pellucidar.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

TO Tarzan in his African jungle kingdom came Jason Gridley to ask his help in the most stupendous adventure ever undertaken by man—a journey by air to the uncharted world of Pellucidar. Two men, indeed, had penetrated to this wild primeval world at the core of this our earth—David Innes and Abner Perry: while experimenting with a tremendously powerful "iron mole," a boring device designed to prospect in the earth's crust for valuable minerals, David and Abner lost control and presently found themselves in this strange reversed cosmos of Pellucidar; and the fascinating story of the amazing things that happened to them came to Edgar Rice Burroughs by means of the far-reaching waves of a remarkable radio designed by his friend Jason Gridley.

The last message received showed that Innes was in dire peril, a captive to the savage Korsarians; the message told, likewise, of strong evidence that a passage between the inner world and our outer one existed near the North Pole. Gridley wished, in brief, the help of the most valiant of all adventurers—Tarzan—for this most perilous of all undertakings.

Tarzan joined up. And in a helium-lifted dirigible Jason Gridley, Tarzan, his attendant Waziri spearmen and a dozen men of the crew reached the Polar path



The dangers of this primitive land were constant. Fully as often as Gridley shot for food, he shot to protect them from some terrible beast.

easily, descended to Pellucidar and moored their ship with its small companion airplane. The rest was by no means easy, however; for Tarzan, venturing forth on foot, was caught and jerked up into the air by a huge snare set for a tiger—and the tiger himself soon after appeared.

The ape-like creatures who had set the snare drove off the tiger and rescued Tarzan—though they were minded to kill him until his knowledge of the universal ape language spoken by these Sagoths persuaded them of his kinship. When a fight arose between two rivals for leadership Tarzan joined the loser Tar-gash, and together they journeyed off through the forest.

Meanwhile an expedition sent out from the airship to rescue Tarzan was attacked and scattered by the giant beasts of Pellucidar's appalling jungle. Jason Gridley alone contrived to make his way back to the airship. And he, after a brief rest, at once set out in the small scout plane carried by the dirigible, to find and save Tarzan and his other comrades. . . . . So it was that shortly thereafter Tarzan and his Sagoth companion heard the drone of an airplane and saw a speck in the sky. But it passed without seeing them. *(The story continues in detail:)*

AS they resumed their journey the well-marked trail, which Tar-gash said led through the hills, followed the windings of a shallow cañon which was rimmed on one side by low cliffs, in the face of which there were occasional caves and crevices. The bottom of the cañon was strewn with fragments of rock of various sizes. The vegetation was sparse, and there was every indication of an aridity such as Tarzan had not previously encountered since he left the *0-220;* and as it seemed likely that both game and water would be scarce here, the two pushed on at a brisk, swinging walk.

It was very quiet, and Tarzan's ears were constantly upon the alert to catch the first sound of the hum of the motor of the returning airplane, when suddenly the silence was shattered by the sound of hoarse screeching which seemed to be coming from a point farther up the cañon.

Tar-gash halted.

"It is a dyal!" he said.

Tarzan looked at the Sagoth questioningly.

"It is a dyal," repeated Tar-gash, "and it is angry."

"What is a dyal?" asked Tarzan.

"It is a terrible bird," replied the Sagoth; "but its meat is good, and Tar-gash is hungry."

That was enough. No matter how terrible the dyal might be, it was meat, and Tar-gash was hungry; and so the two beasts of prey crept warily forward, stalking their quarry. A vagrant breeze, wafting gently down the cañon, brought to the nostrils of the ape-man a strange new scent. It was a bird scent, slightly suggestive of the scent of an ostrich, and from its volume Tarzan guessed that it might come from a very large bird, a suggestion that was borne out by the loud screeching of the creature, intermingled with which was a scratching and a scraping sound.

TAR-GASH, who was in the lead, and who was taking advantage of all the natural shelter afforded by the fragments of rock

with which the cañon-bed was strewn, came to a halt upon the lower side of a great boulder, behind which he quickly withdrew; and as Tarzan joined him he signaled the ape-man to look around the corner of the boulder.

Following the suggestion of his companion, Tarzan saw the author of the commotion that had attracted their attention. Being a savage jungle beast, he exhibited no outward sign of the astonishment he felt as he gazed upon the mighty creature that was clawing frantically at a crevice in the cliff-side.

To Tarzan it was a nameless creature of another world. To Tar-gash it was simply a dyal. Neither knew that he was looking upon a Phorohacos of the Miocene. They saw a huge creature whose crested head, larger than that of a horse, towered eight feet above the ground. Its powerful curved beak gaped wide as it screeched in anger. It beat its short, useless wings in a frenzy of rage as it struck with its mighty three-toed talons at something just within the fissure before it. And then it was that Tarzan saw that the thing at which it struck was a spear, held by human hands—a pitifully inadequate weapon with which to attempt to ward off the ferocious attack of the mighty dyal.

AS Tarzan surveyed the creature, he wondered how Tar-gash, armed only with his puny club, might hope to pit himself in successful combat against it. He saw the Sagoth creep stealthily out from behind their rocky shelter and move slowly to another closer to the dyal and behind it; and so absorbed was the bird in its attack upon the man within the fissure that it did not notice the approach of the enemy in its rear.

The moment that Tar-gash was safely concealed behind the new shelter, Tarzan followed him, and now they were within fifty feet of the great bird.

The Sagoth, grasping his club firmly by the small end, arose and ran swiftly from his concealment, straight toward the giant dyal; and Tarzan followed, fitting an arrow to his bow.

Tar-gash had covered but half the distance when the sound of his approach attracted the attention of the bird. Wheeling about, it discovered the two rash creatures who dared to interfere with its attack upon its quarry, and with a loud screech and wide-distended beak it charged them.

The instant that the dyal had turned and discovered them, Tar-gash had commenced whirling his club about his head; now, as the bird charged, he launched it at one of those mighty legs, and on the instant Tarzan understood the purpose of the Sagoth's method of attack. The heavy club, launched by the mighty muscles of the beast-man, would snap the leg bone that it struck, and then the enormous fowl would be at the mercy of the Sagoth. But if it did not strike the leg, what then? Almost certain death for Tar-gash!

Tarzan had long since had reason to appreciate his companion's savage disregard of life in the pursuit of flesh, but this seemed the highest pinnacle to which rashness might ascend and still remain within the realm of sanity.

And indeed, there happened that which Tarzan had feared—the club missed its mark.

At once Tarzan's bow sang; an arrow sank deep into the breast of the dyal. Tar-gash leaped swiftly to one side, eluding the charge, and another arrow pierced the bird's feathers and hide. And then the ape-man sprang quickly to his right as the avalanche of destruction bore down upon him savagely, its speed undiminished by the force of the two arrows buried so deeply within it.

Before the dyal could turn to pursue either of them, Tar-gash hurled a rock, many of which were scattered upon the ground about them. It struck the dyal upon the side of the head, momentarily dazing it, and Tarzan drove home two more arrows. As he did so, the dyal wheeled drunkenly toward him, and as he faced about, a great spear drove past Tarzan's shoulder and plunged deep into the breast of the maddened creature, and to the impact of this last missile, it went down, falling almost at the feet of the ape-man.

IGNORANT though he was of the strength and the methods of attack and defense of this strange bird, Tarzan nevertheless hesitated not an instant; and as the dyal fell, he was upon it with drawn hunting-knife.

So quickly was he in and out that he had severed its windpipe and was away again before he could become entangled in its death-struggle; and then it was that for the first time he saw the man who had cast the spear.

Standing erect, a puzzled expression upon

his face, was a tall, stalwart warrior, his slightly bronzed skin gleaming in the sunlight, his shaggy head of hair bound back by a deerskin band.

For weapons, in addition to his spear, he carried a stone knife, thrust into the girdle that supported his gee-string. His eyes were well set and intelligent, his features regular and well cut. Altogether he was as splendid a specimen of manhood as Tarzan had ever beheld.

Tar-gash, who had recovered his club, was advancing toward the stranger. "I am Tar-gash," he said. "I kill."

The stranger drew his stone knife and waited, looking first at Tar-gash and then at Tarzan.

The ape-man stepped in front of Tar-gash.

"Wait, Tar-gash," he commanded. "Why do you kill?"

"He is a gilak," replied the Sagoth.

"He saved you from the dyal," Tarzan reminded Tar-gash. "My arrows would not stop the bird. Had it not been for his spear, one or both of us must surely have died."

The Sagoth appeared puzzled. He scratched his head in perplexity. "But if I do not kill him, he will kill me," he said finally.

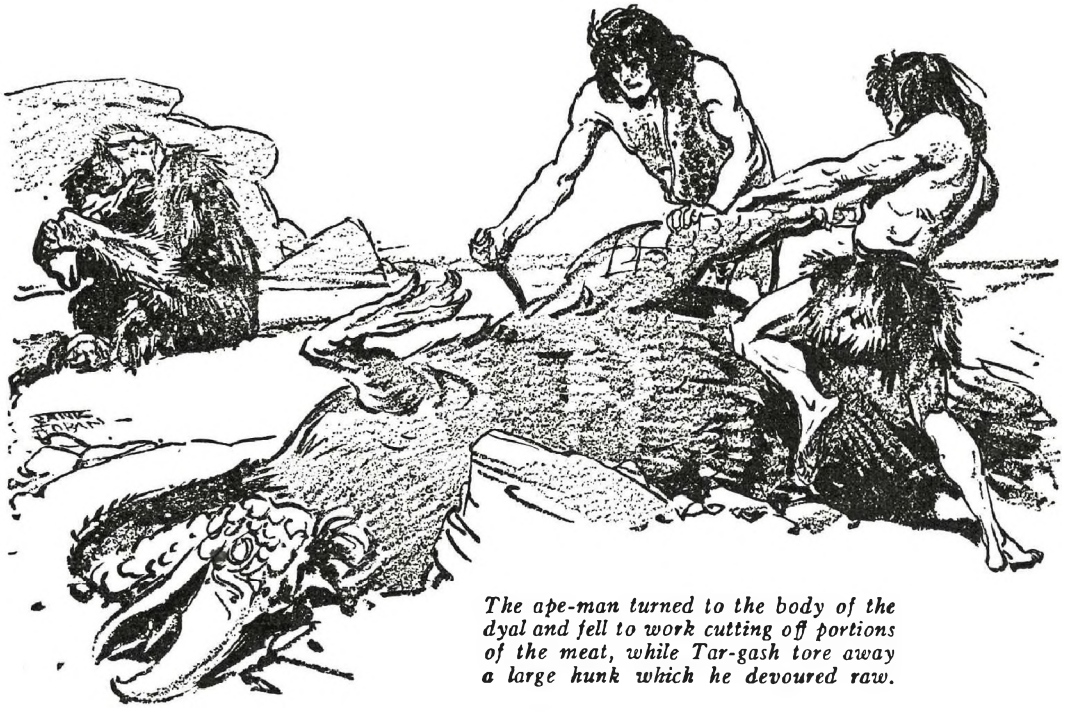
Tarzan turned toward the stranger. "I am Tarzan," he said. "This is Tar-gash." He pointed at the Sagoth and waited.

"I am Thoar," said the stranger.

"Let us be friends," said Tarzan. "We have no quarrel with you."

The stranger looked at him in a puzzled manner.

"Do you understand the language of the Sagoths?" asked Tarzan, thinking that possibly the man might not have understood him.



The ape-man turned to the body of the dyal and fell to work cutting off portions of the meat, while Tar-gash tore away a large hunk which he devoured raw.

Thoar nodded. "A little," he said. "But why should we be friends?"

"Why should we be enemies?" countered the ape-man.

Thoar shook his head. "I do not know," he said. "It is always thus."

"Together we have slain the dyal," said Tarzan. "Had we not come, it would have killed you. Had you not cast your spear, it would have killed us. Therefore we should be friends, not enemies. Where are you going?"

"Back to my own country," replied Thoar, nodding in the direction that Tarzan and Tar-gash had been traveling.

"We too are going in that direction," said Tarzan. "Let us go together. Six hands are better than four."

Thoar glanced at the Sagoth.

"Shall we all go together as friends, Tar-gash?" demanded Tarzan.

"It is not done," said the Sagoth, precisely as though he had behind him thousands of years of civilization and culture.

Tarzan smiled one of his rare smiles. "We shall do it, then," he said. "Come!"

As though taking it for granted that the others would obey his command, the ape-man turned to the body of the dyal, and drawing his hunting-knife, fell to work cutting off portions of the meat. For a moment Thoar and Tar-gash hesitated, eying each other suspiciously, and then the bronzed warrior walked over to assist Tarzan, and presently Tar-gash joined them.

Thoar exhibited keen interest in Tarzan's steel knife, which slid so easily through the flesh while he hacked and hewed laboriously with the stone implement; while Tar-gash seemed not particularly to notice either of the implements as he sunk his strong fangs into the breast of the dyal and tore away a large hunk of the meat, which he devoured raw. Tarzan was about to do the same, having been raised exclusively upon a diet of raw meat, when he saw Thoar preparing to make fire, which he accomplished by the primitive expedient of friction.

The three ate in utter silence, the Sagoth carrying his meat to a little distance from the others, perhaps because in him the instinct of the wild beast was stronger.

WHEN they had finished, they followed the trail upward toward the pass through which it led across the hills, and as they went, Tarzan sought to question Thoar concerning his country and its people; but so limited is the primitive vocabulary of the Sagoths, and so meager Thoar's knowledge of this language, that they found communication difficult, and Tarzan determined to master Thoar's tongue.

Considerable experience in learning new dialects and languages rendered the task far from difficult, and as the ape-man never for a moment relinquished a purpose he intended to achieve, nor ever abandoned a task that he had set himself until it had been successfully concluded, he made rapid progress, which was greatly facilitated by the interest which Thoar took in instructing him.

As they reached the summit of the low hills, they saw, hazily in the far distance, what appeared to be a range of lofty mountains.

"There," said Thoar, pointing toward them, "lies Zoram."

"What is Zoram?" asked Tarzan.

"It is my country," replied the warrior. "It lies over there—in the Mountains of the Thipdars."

This was the second time that Tarzan had heard a reference to thipdars. Targash had said the airplane was a thipdar, and now Thoar spoke of the mountains of the Thipdars.

"What is a thipdar?" Tarzan asked.

Thoar looked at him in astonishment. "From what country do you come," he demanded, "that you do not know what a thipdar is, and do not speak the language of the gilaks?"

"I am not of Pellucidar," said Tarzan.

"I could believe that," said Thoar, "if there was any other place from which you could be, but there is not, except Molop Az, the flaming sea upon which Pellucidar floats. But the only inhabitants of the Molop Az are the little demons, who carry the dead who are buried in the ground, piece by piece, down to Molop Az; and while I have never seen one of these little demons, I am sure that they are not like you."

"No," said Tarzan, "I am not from Molop Az; yet sometimes I have thought that the world from which I come is inhabited by demons, both large and small."

As they hunted and ate and slept and marched together, these three creatures found their confidence in one another increasing so that even Tar-gash looked no longer with suspicion upon Thoar; and though they represented three distinct periods in the ascent of man, each separated from the other by countless thousands of years, yet they had so much in common that the advance which man had made from Tar-gash to Tarzan seemed scarcely a fair recompense for the time and effort which Nature must have expended.

TARZAN could not even conjecture the length of time he had been absent from the *0-220*, but he was confident that he must be upon the wrong trail; yet it seemed futile to turn back, since he could not possibly have any idea as to what direction he should take. His one hope was that either he might be sighted by the pilot of the plane, which he was certain was hunting for him, or that the *0-220*, in cruising about, would eventually pass within signaling distance of him. In the meantime he might as well be with Tar-gash and Thoar as elsewhere.

The three had eaten and slept again and were resuming their journey, when Tarzan's keen eyes espied from the summit of a low hill something lying upon an open plain at a considerable distance ahead of them. He did not know what it was, but he was sure that whatever it was, it was not a part of the natural landscape, there being about it that indefinable suggestion of discord, or more properly, lack of harmony with its surroundings that every man whose perception has not been dulled by city dwelling will understand. And as it was almost instinctive with Tarzan to investigate anything that he did not understand, he turned his footsteps in the direction of the thing that he had seen.

The object that had aroused his curiosity was hidden from him almost immediately after he started the descent of the hill upon which he had stood when he discovered it; nor did it come again within the range of his vision until he was close upon it, when to his astonishment and dismay he saw that it was the wreck of an airplane.

CHAPTER VIII

The Red Flower of Zoram

JANA, the Red Flower of Zoram, paused and looked back across the rocky crags behind and below her. She was very hungry and it had been long since she had slept, for behind her, dogging her trail, were the four terrible men from Pheli, which lies at the foot of the Mountains of the Thipdars, beyond the land of Zoram.

For just an instant she stood erect, and then she threw herself prone upon the rough rock, behind a jutting fragment that partially concealed her, and here she looked back along the way she had come, across a pathless waste of tumbled granite. Mountain bred, she had lived her life among the lofty peaks of the Mountains of the Thipdars, considering contemptuously the people of the lowland to which belonged those who now pursued her.

Perchance, if the men from Pheli had followed her here, she might be forced to concede them some measure of courage and possibly to look upon them with a slightly lessened contempt; yet even so she would never abate her effort to escape them.

Bred in the bone of the Red Flower was loathing of the men of Pheli, who ventured occasionally into the fastnesses of the Mountains of the Thipdars to steal women, for the pride and the fame of the mountain people lay in the beauty of their girls, and so far had this fame spread that men came from far countries, out of the vast river basin below their lofty range, and risked a hundred deaths in efforts to steal such a mate as the beautiful Jana, the Red Flower of Zoram.

The girl's sister Lana had been thus stolen, and within Jana's memory two other girls of Zoram, by the men from the lowland; and so the fear, as well as the danger, was ever-present in her mind. Such a fate seemed to the Red Flower worse than death, since not only would it take her forever from her beloved mountains, but make her a low-country woman and her children low-country children—than which, in the eyes of the mountain people, there could be no deeper disgrace, for the mountain men mated only with mountain women, the men of Zoram and Clovi and Daroz taking their mates from their own tribes or else stealing them from their neighbors.

Jana was beloved by many of the young warriors of Zoram, and though as yet there had been none who had fired her own heart to love, she knew that some day she would mate with one of them, unless in the meantime she was stolen by a warrior from another tribe.

Were she to fall into the hands from one from either Clovi or Daroz, she would not be disgraced and she might even be happy, but she was determined to die rather than to be taken by the squat and hairy men from Pheli.

LONG ago, it seemed to her now, who had no means for measuring time, she had been searching for thipdar eggs among the lofty crags above the caverns that were the home of her people, when a great hairy man leaped from behind a rock and endeavored to seize her. Active as a chamois, she eluded him with ease, but he stood between her and the village, and when she sought to circle back, she discovered that he had three companions who effectually barred her way; and then had commenced the flight and the pursuit that had taken her far from Zoram among lofty peaks where she had never been before.

Not far below her the four men from Pheli had stopped to rest. "Let us turn back," growled one. "You can never catch her, Skruk, in country like this, which is fit only for thipdars and no place for men."

Skruk shook his bullet head. "I have seen her," he said, "and I shall have her if I have to chase her to the shores of Molop Az."

"Our hands are torn by the sharp rock," said another. "Our sandals are almost gone, and our feet bleed. We cannot go on. We shall die."

"You may die," said Skruk, "but until then you shall go on. I am Skruk, the chief, and I have spoken."

The others growled resentfully, but when Skruk took up the pursuit again, they followed him. Being from a low country, they found strenuous exertion in these high altitudes exhausting, it is true; but the actual basis for their disinclination to continue the pursuit was the terror which the dizzy heights inspired in them, and the perilous route along which the Red Flower of Zoram was leading them.

FROM above, Jana saw them ascending; and knowing that they were again upon the right trail, she stood erect in plain view of them. Her single soft garment made from the pelt of tarag cubs whipped about her naked legs, half revealing, half concealing the rounded charms of her girlish figure. The noonday sun shone down upon her light, bronzed skin, glistening from the bare contours of a perfect shoulder and imparting golden glints to hair that was sometimes a lustrous brown and again a copper bronze. Part of it was piled loosely upon her head, and held in place by slender hollow bones of the Dimorphodon, a little long-tailed cousin of the thipdar. The upper ends of these bone pins were ornamented with carving, and some of them were colored. A fillet of soft skin ornamented in colors encircled her brow, binding in place the remaining masses of hair. She wore bracelets and anklets made of the vertebræ of small animals, strung upon leather thongs. These too were carved and colored. Upon her feet were stout little sandals, soled with the hide of the mastodon, and from the center of her headband rose a single feather. At her hip was a stone knife, and in her right hand a light spear.

She stooped, and picking up a small fragment of rock, hurled it down at Skruk and his companions. "Go back to your swamps, jaloks of the low country!" she cried. "The Red Flower of Zoram is not for you." And then she turned and sped away across the pathless granite.

To her left lay Zoram, but there also yawned a mighty chasm. Along its rim she made her way, sometimes upon its very verge, but unshaken by the frightful abyss below her. Constantly she sought for a means of descent, since she knew that if she could cross it, she might circle back toward Zoram; but the walls rose sheer for two thousand feet, offering scarce a handhold in a hundred feet.

AS Jana rounded the shoulder of the peak, she saw a vast country stretching away below her—a country that she had never seen before; and she knew that she had crossed the mighty range and was looking on the land that lay beyond. The fissure that she had been following she could see widening below her into a great cañon that led out through foothills to a mighty plain. The slopes of the lower hills were wooded, and beyond the plain were forests.

This was a new world to Jana of Zoram, but it held no lure for her; it did not beckon to her, for she knew that savage beasts and savage men of the low countries roamed its plains and forests.

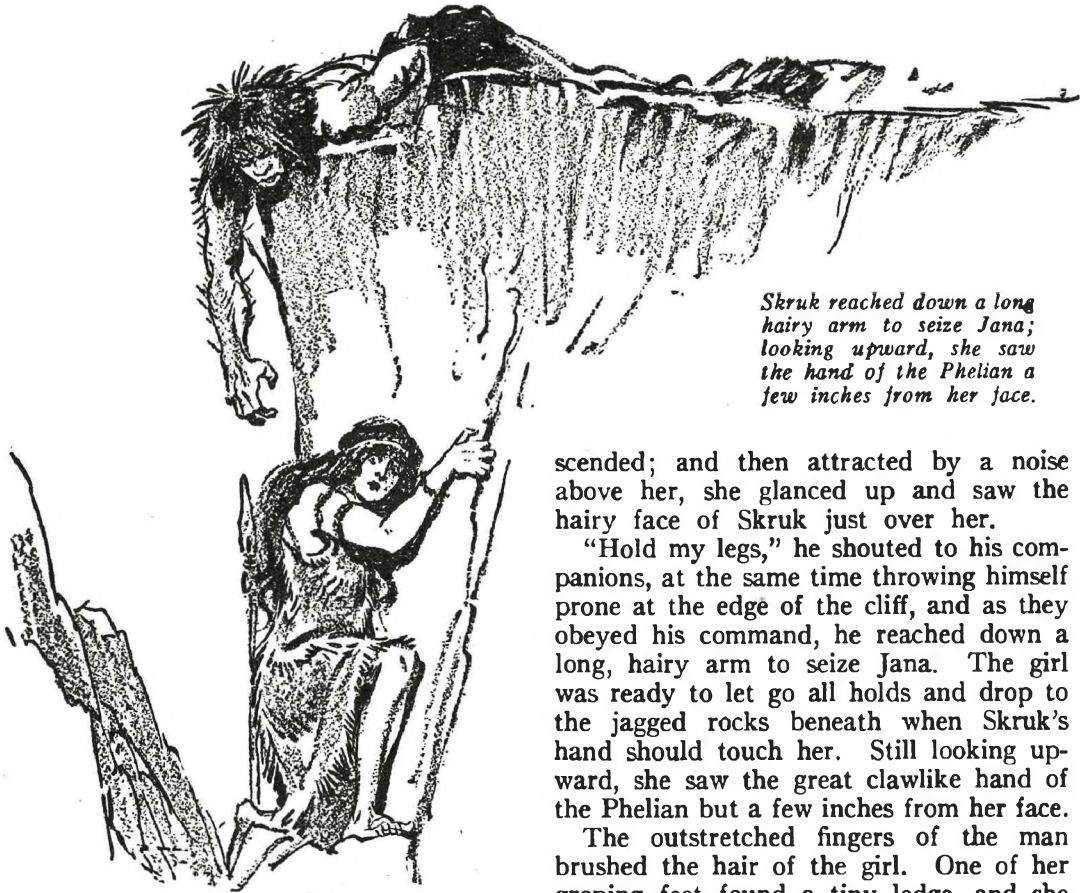
To her right rose the mountains she had rounded; to her left was the deep chasm, and behind her was Skruk and his fellows.

For a moment she feared that she was trapped; but after advancing a few yards, she saw that the sheer wall of the abyss had given way to a tumbled mass of broken ledges. Whether there were any means of descent, even here, she did not know—she could only hope.

From pausing often to search for a way down into the gorge, Jana had lost precious time, and now she became suddenly aware that her pursuers were close behind her. Again she sprang forward, leaping from rock to rock, while they redoubled their speed and stumbled clumsily after her in pursuit, positive now that they were about to capture her.

JANA glanced below; and a hundred feet beneath her she saw a tumbled mass of granite that had fallen from above and formed a wide ledge. Just ahead the mountain jutted out, forming an overhanging cliff.

She glanced back. Skruk was already in sight. He was stumbling awkwardly along in a clumsy run, and breathing heavily; but he was very near, and she must choose quickly.



Skruk reached down a long hairy arm to seize Jana; looking upward, she saw the hand of the Phelian a few inches from her face.

There was but one way—over the edge of the cliff lay temporary escape or certain death. A leather thong, attached a foot below the point of her spear, she fastened around her neck, letting the spear hang down her back; then she threw herself upon the ground and slid over the edge of the cliff. Perhaps there were hand-holds; perhaps not. She glanced down. The face of the cliff was rough and not perpendicular, leaning in a little toward the mountain. She felt about with her toes, and soon located a slight protuberance that would hold her weight. Then she relinquished her hold upon the top of the cliff with one hand and searched about for a crevice in which to insert her fingers, or a projection to which she could cling.

She must work quickly, for already the footsteps of the Phelians were sounding above her. She found a hold to which she might cling with scarcely more than the tips of her fingers; but it was something, for the horror of the lowland was just above her and only death below.

She relinquished her hold upon the cliff edge with her other hand and lowered herself very slowly down the face of the cliff, searching with her free foot for another support. One foot, two, three, she descended; and then attracted by a noise above her, she glanced up and saw the hairy face of Skruk just over her.

"Hold my legs," he shouted to his companions, at the same time throwing himself prone at the edge of the cliff, and as they obeyed his command, he reached down a long, hairy arm to seize Jana. The girl was ready to let go all holds and drop to the jagged rocks beneath when Skruk's hand should touch her. Still looking upward, she saw the great clawlike hand of the Phelian but a few inches from her face.

The outstretched fingers of the man brushed the hair of the girl. One of her groping feet found a tiny ledge, and she lowered herself from immediate danger of capture. Skruk was furious, but that one glance into the upturned face of the girl so close beneath him only served to add to his determination to possess her. No lengths were too far now to go to achieve his heart's desire; but as he glanced down that frightful escarpment, his savage heart was filled with fear for the safety of his prize. It seemed incredible that she had descended as far as she had without falling, and she had only commenced the descent. He knew that he and his companions could not follow the trail that she was taking; and he realized, too, that if they menaced her from above, she might be urged to a greater haste that would spell her doom.

WITH these thoughts in his mind, Skruk arose to his feet and turned to his companions. "We shall seek an easier way down," he said in a low voice; and then leaning over the cliff edge, he called to Jana. "You have beaten me, mountain girl," he said. "I go back now to Pheli in the lowland. But I shall return, and then I shall take you with me as my mate."

"May the thipdars catch you and tear out your heart before ever you reach Pheli again!" cried Jana. But Skruk made no

reply, and she saw that they were going back the way that they had come; but she did not know that they were merely looking for an easier way into the bottom of the gorge toward which she was descending, or that Skruk's words had been but a ruse to throw her off her guard.

RELIEVED of immediate necessity for haste, the Red Flower of Zoram picked her way cautiously down the face of the cliff to the first ledge of tumbled granite. Here, by good fortune, she found the egg of a thipdar, which furnished her with both food and drink.

It was a long, slow descent to the bottom of the gorge, but finally the girl accomplished it, and in the meantime Skruk and his companions had found an easier way and had descended into the gorge several miles above her.

For a moment after she reached the bottom, Jana was undecided as to what course to pursue. Instinct urged her to turn upward along the gorge in the general direction of Zoram, but her judgment prompted her to descend and skirt the base of the mountain to the left in search of an easier route back across them. And so she came leisurely down toward the valley, while behind her followed the four men from Pheli.

The cañon wall at her left, while constantly lessening in height as she descended, still presented a formidable obstacle, which it seemed wiser to circumvent than to attempt to surmount, and so she continued on downward toward the mouth of the cañon, where it debouched upon a lovely valley some miles in extent.

NEVER before in all her life had Jana approached the lowland so closely. Never before had she dreamed how lovely the lowland country might be, for she had always been taught that it was a horrid place, and no fit abode for the stalwart tribes of the mountains.

The lure of the beauties and the new scenes unfolding before her, coupled with a spirit of exploration which was being born within her, led her downward into the valley much farther than necessity demanded. Suddenly her attention was attracted by a strange sound coming suddenly from on high—a strange, new note in the diapason of her savage world; and glancing upward she finally descried the creature that must be the author of it.

A great thipdar, it appeared to be, moaning dismally far above her head—but what a thipdar! Never in her life had she seen one as large as this.

As she watched, she saw another thipdar, much smaller, soaring above it. Suddenly the lesser one swooped upon its intended prey. Faintly she heard sounds of shattering and tearing, and then the two combatants plunged earthward. As they did so, she saw something separate itself from the mass; and as the two creatures, partly supported by the wings of the larger, fell in a great, gliding spiral, a most remarkable thing happened to the piece that had broken loose. Something shot out of it and unfolded above it in the air—something that resembled a huge toadstool; and as it did so, the swift flight of the falling body was arrested, and it floated slowly earthward, swinging back and forth as she had seen a heavy stone do when tied to the end of a buckskin thong.

As the strange thing descended nearer, Jana's eyes went wide in surprise and terror as she recognized the dangling body as that of a man.

JANA'S people had few superstitions, but here was something that could be explained according to no natural logic. She had seen two great flying reptiles meet in battle high in air, and out of one of them had come a man. It was incredible, but more than all it was terrifying. And so the Red Flower of Zoram, reacting in the most natural way, turned and fled.

Back toward the cañon she raced, but she had gone only a short distance when directly in front of her she saw Skruk and his three companions.

They too had seen the battle in mid-air, and they had seen the thing floating downward toward the ground, and while they had not recognized it for what it was, they had been terrified, and were themselves upon the point of fleeing when Skruk descried Jana running blindly toward them. Instantly every other consideration was submerged in his desire to have her, and growling commands to his terrified henchmen, he led them toward the girl.

When Jana discovered them, she turned to the right and tried to circle about them, but Skruk sent one to intercept her, and when she turned in the opposite direction, the four spread out across her line of retreat so as effectually to bar her escape in that direction.

Choosing any fate rather than that which must follow her capture by Skruk, Jana turned again and fled down the valley; and in pursuit leaped the four squat, hairy men of Pheli. . . . .

At the instant Jason Gridley had pulled the rip-cord of his parachute, a fragment of the broken propeller of his plane had struck him a glancing blow upon the head,

Maddened by pain, the creature leaped for Jason's throat. Again the revolver spoke.

and when he regained consciousness, he found himself lying upon a bed of soft grasses at the head of a valley, where a cañon, winding out of lofty mountains, opened onto land more nearly level.

Disgusted by the disastrous end of his futile search for his companions, Gridley arose and removed the parachute harness. He was relieved to discover that he had suffered no more serious injury than an abrasion of the skin upon one temple.

His first concern was for his ship, and though he knew that it must be a total wreck he hoped against hope that he might at least salvage his rifle and ammunition from it. But even as the thought entered his mind, it was forced into the background by a chorus of savage yelps and growls that caused him to turn his eyes quickly to the right. At the summit of a little rise of ground a short distance away he saw four of the ferocious wolf dogs of Pellucidar. As hyænodons they were known to the paleontologists of the outer crust, and as jaloks to the men of the inner world. Large as full-grown mastiffs, they stood there upon their short, powerful legs, their broad, strong jaws parted in angry growls, snarling lips drawn back to reveal their powerful fangs.

As Jason discovered them, he became aware that their attention was not directed upon him—that they seemed not as yet to have discovered him; and as he looked in the direction that they were staring, he was astounded to see a girl running swiftly toward them, and at a short distance behind the girl four men, who were apparently pursuing her.

As the vicious growls of the jaloks broke angrily upon the comparative silence of the scene, the girl paused, and it was evident that she had not before been aware of the presence of this new menace. She glanced at them, and then back at her pursuers.

The hyænodons advanced toward her at an easy trot. In piteous bewilderment she glanced about her. There was but one way open for escape, and then as she turned to flee in that direction, her eyes fell upon Jason Gridley, straight ahead in her path of flight and again she hesitated.

TO the man came an intuitive understanding of her quandary. Menaced from the rear and upon two sides by known enemies, she was suddenly faced by what might indeed be another, cutting off all hope of retreat.

Acting impulsively and in accordance with the code that dominates his kind, Gridley ran toward the girl, shouting words of encouragement and motioning her to come to him.

Skruk and his companions were closing in upon her from behind, and from her right, while upon her left came the jaloks. For just an instant longer she hesitated, and then seemingly determined to place her fate in the hands of the unknown, rather than surrender it to the inevitable doom which awaited her either at the hands of the Phelians or the fangs of the jaloks, she turned and sped toward Gridley, and behind her came the four beasts and the four men.

As Gridley ran forward to meet the girl, he drew one of his revolvers, a heavy .45 caliber weapon.

The hyænodons were charging now, and the leader was close behind her; and at that instant Jana tripped and fell, and simultaneously Jason reached her side, but so close was the savage beast that when Jason fired it fell across the body of the girl.

The shot, a startling sound to which none of them was accustomed, brought the other hyænodons to a sudden stop as well as the Phelians, who had been racing rapidly forward under Skruk's command in an effort to save the girl from the beasts.

QUICKLY rolling the body of the jalok from its intended victim, Jason lifted the girl to her feet. As he did so, she snatched her stone knife from its scabbard. Jason Gridley did not know how near he was to death at that instant. To Jana, every man except the men of Zoram was a natural enemy. The first law of nature prompted her to kill lest she be killed, but in the instant before she struck the blade home, she saw something in the eyes of this man, something in the expression upon his face that she had never seen in the eyes or face of any man before. As plainly as though it had been spoken in words, she understood that this stranger was prompted by solicitude for her safety, that he was actuated by a desire to befriend rather than to harm her; and though in common with the jaloks and the Phelians, she had been terrified by the loud noise and the smoke that had burst from the strange stick in his hand, she knew that this had been the means he had taken to protect her from the jaloks.

Her knife hand dropped to her side, and as a slow smile lighted the face of the stranger, the Red Flower of Zoram smiled back in response.

THEY stood as they had when he had lifted her from the ground, his left arm about her shoulders supporting her, and he maintained this unconscious gesture of protection as he turned to face the girl's enemies, who after their first fright seemed on the point of returning to the attack.

Two of the hyænodons, however, had transferred their attention to Skruk and his companions, while the third was slinking, bare-fanged, toward Jason and Jana.

The men of Pheli stood ready to receive the charge of the hyænodons, having taken positions in line, facing their attackers, and at sufficient intervals to permit them properly to wield their clubs. As the beasts charged, two of the men hurled their weapons, each singling out one of the fierce carnivores. Skruk hurled his weapon with the greater accuracy, breaking one of the forelegs of the beast attacking him, and as it went down, the Phelian standing next to Skruk leaped forward and rained heavy blows upon its skull.

The cudgel aimed at the other beast struck it a glancing blow upon the shoulder but did not stop it, and an instant later it was upon the Phelian, whose only defense now was his crude stone knife. But his companion, who had reserved his club for such an emergency, leaped in and swung lustily at the savage brute, while Skruk and the other, having now disposed of their adversary, came to the assistance of their fellows.

The savage battle between men and beast went unnoticed by Jason, whose whole attention was occupied by the third wolf-dog as it moved forward to attack him and his companion.

Jana, fully aware that the attention of each of the men was fully centered upon the attacking beasts, realized that now was the opportune moment to make a break for freedom. She felt the arm of the stranger about her shoulders, but it rested there lightly—so lightly that she might easily disengage herself by a single quick motion. But there was something in the feel of that arm about her that imparted to her a sense of greater safety than she had felt since she had left the caverns of her people—perhaps the protective instinct which dominated the man subconsciously exerted its natural reaction upon the girl, to the end

that instead of fleeing, she was content to remain, sensing greater safety where she was than elsewhere.

And then the fourth hyænodon charged, growling, to be met by the roaring bark of the revolver. The creature stumbled and went down, stopped by the force of the heavy charge; but only for an instant—again it was up, maddened by pain, desperate in the face of death. Bloody foam crimsoned its jowls as it leaped for Jason's throat.

Again the revolver spoke; then the man went down beneath the heavy body of the wolf dog, and at the same instant the Phelians dispatched the second of the beasts which had attacked them.

Jason Gridley was conscious of a great weight upon him as he was borne to the ground, and he sought to fend those horrid jaws from his throat by interposing his left forearm; but the jaws never closed, and when Gridley struggled from beneath the body of the beast and scrambled to his feet, he saw the girl tugging upon the shaft of her crude stone-tipped spear in an effort to drag it from the body of the jalok.

Whether his last bullet or the spear had dispatched the beast, the man did not know, and he was only conscious of gratitude and admiration for the brave act of the slender girl, who had stood her ground at his side, facing the terrible beast without loss of poise or resourcefulness.

The four jaloks lay dead, but Jason Gridley's troubles were by no means over, for scarcely had he arisen after the killing of the second beast, when the girl seized him by the arm and pointed toward something behind him.

"They are coming," she said. "They will kill you and take me. Oh, do not let them take me!"

JASON did not understand a word that she had said, but it was evident from her tone of voice and from the expression upon her beautiful face that she was more afraid of the four men approaching them than she had been of the hyænodons, and as he turned to face them, he could not wonder, for the men of Pheli looked quite as brutal as the hyænodons, and there was nothing impressive or magnificent in their appearance as there had been in the mien of the savage carnivores—a fact which is almost universally noticeable when a comparison is made between the human race and the so-called lower orders.

Gridley raised his revolver and leveled it at the Phelian who happened to be in the lead.

"Beat it!" he said sharply. "Your faces frighten the young lady."

"I am Gluf," said the Phelian. "I kill."

"If I could understand you, I might agree with you," replied Jason, "but your exuberant whiskers and your diminutive forehead suggest that you are all wet."

HE did not want to kill the man, but he realized he could not let him approach too closely. But if he had any compunction in the matter of manslaughter, it was evident that the girl did not, for she was talking volubly, evidently urging him to some action, and when she realized that he could not understand her, she touched his pistol with a brown forefinger and then pointed meaningly at Gluf.

The fellow was now within fifteen paces of them, and Jason could see that his companions were starting to circle them. He knew that something must be done immediately, and prompted by humanitarian motives, he fired his weapon, aiming above the head of the approaching Phelian. The sharp report stopped all four of them; but when they realized that none of them was injured, they broke into a torrent of taunts and threats; and Gluf, inspired only by a desire to capture the girl so that they might return to Pheli, resumed his advance, at the same time commencing to swing his club menacingly.

Then it was that Jason Gridley reluctantly shot—and shot to kill. Gluf stopped in his tracks, stiffened, whirled about and sprawled forward upon his face.

Wheeling upon the others, Gridley fired again instantly, for he realized that those menacing clubs were almost as effective at short range as was his revolver. Another Phelian dropped in his tracks, and then Skruk and his remaining companion turned and fled.

"Well," said Gridley, looking about him at the bodies of the four hyænodons and the corpses of the two men, "this is a great little country, but I'll be gosh-darned if I see how anyone grows up to enjoy it."

The Red Flower of Zoram stood looking at him admiringly. Everything about this stranger aroused her interest, piqued her curiosity and stimulated her imagination. In no particular was he like any other man she had ever seen. Not one item of his strange apparel corresponded to anything

that any other human being of her acquaintance wore. The remarkable weapon, which spat smoke and fire to the accompaniment of a loud roar, left her dazed with awe and admiration; but perhaps the outstanding cause for astonishment, when she gave it thought, was the fact that she was not afraid of this man.

Not only was the fear of strangers inherent to Jana, but from earliest childhood she had been taught to expect only the worst from men who were not of her own tribe, and to flee from them upon any and all occasions. Perhaps it was his smile that had disarmed her, or possibly there was something in his friendly, honest eyes that had won her immediate trust and confidence. Whatever the cause, however, the fact remained that the Red Flower of Zoram made no effort to escape from Jason Gridley, who now found himself completely lost in a strange world, which in itself was quite sad enough, without having added to it responsibilities for the protection of a strange young woman, who could understand nothing that he said to her, and whom, in turn, he could not understand.

CHAPTER IX

Jana and Jason

TAR-GASH and Thoar looked with wonder upon the wreckage of the plane, and Tarzan hastily searched it for the body of the pilot. The ape-man experienced at least temporary relief when he discovered that there was nobody there, and a moment later he found footprints in the turf upon the opposite side of the plane—the prints of a booted foot which he recognized immediately as having been made by Jason Gridley. This evidence assured him that the American had not been killed and apparently not even badly injured by the fall. And then he discovered something else which puzzled him exceedingly. Mingling with the footprints of Gridley, and evidently made at the same time, were those of a small sandaled foot.

A further brief examination revealed the fact that two persons, one of them Gridley and the other apparently a female or a youth of some Pellucidarian tribe, who had accompanied him, had approached the plane after it had crashed, remained in its vicinity for a short time and then returned in the direction from which they had come. With the spoor plain before him, there was nothing for Tarzan to do other than to follow it.

The evidence so far suggested that Gridley had been forced to abandon the plane in air and that he had safely made a parachute descent, but where and under what circumstances he had picked up his companion, Tarzan could not even hazard a guess.

He found it difficult to get Thoar away from the airplane, the strange thing having so fired his curiosity and imagination that he must needs remain near it and ask a hundred questions concerning it.

With Tar-gash, however, the reaction was entirely different. He had glanced at it with only a faint show of curiosity or interest, and then he had asked one question: "What is it?"

"This is the thing that passed over us and which you said was a flying reptile," replied Tarzan. "I told you at that time that one of my friends was in it. Something happened, and the thing fell, but my friend escaped without injury."

"It has no eyes," said Tar-gash. "How could it see to fly?"

"It was not alive," replied Tarzan.

"I heard it growl," said the Sagoth; nor was he ever convinced that the thing was not some strange form of living creature.

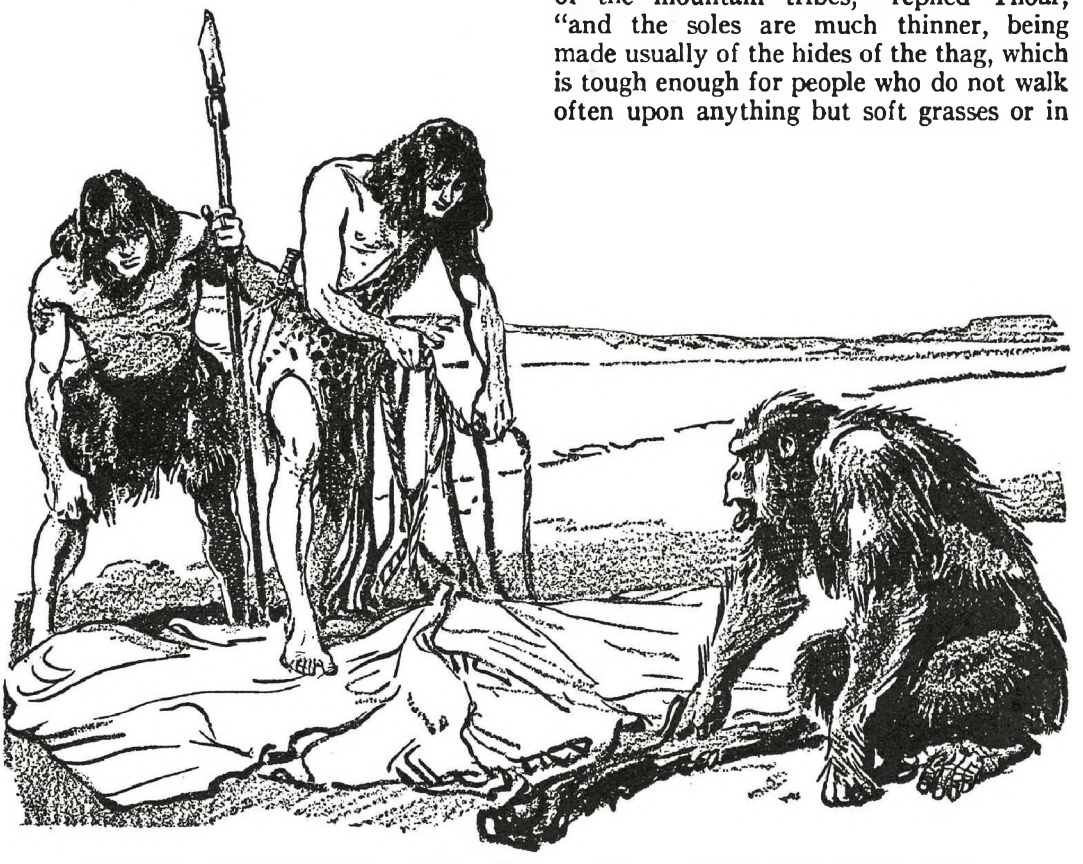
They had covered but a short distance along the trail made by Gridley and Jana, after they had left the airplane, when they came upon the carcass of a huge pteranodon. Its head was crushed and battered and almost severed from its body, and a splinter of smooth wood projected from its skull—a splinter that Tarzan recognized as a fragment of an airplane propeller—and instantly he knew the cause of Gridley's crash.

Half a mile farther on, the three discovered further evidence, some of it quite startling. An open parachute lay stretched upon the ground where it had fallen, and at short distances from it lay the bodies of four hyænodons and two hairy men.

AN examination of the bodies revealed the fact that both of the men and two of the hyænodons had died from bullet-wounds. Everywhere upon the trampled turf appeared the imprints of the small sandals of Jason's companion. It was evident to the keen eyes of Tarzan that two other men, both natives, had taken part in the battle which had been waged here. That they were of the same tribe as the

two that had fallen was evidenced by the imprints of their sandals, which were of identical make, while those of Tarzan's companion differed materially.

As he circled about, searching for further evidence, he saw that the two men who had escaped had run rapidly for some distance toward the mouth of a large cañon, and that apparently following their retreat, Jason and his companion had set out in search of the plane. Later they had returned to the scene of the battle, and when they had departed, they also had gone toward the mountains, but along a line considerably to the right of the trail made by the fleeing natives.



The three discovered further startling evidence—an open parachute lay upon the ground.

Thoar, too, was much interested in the various tracks that the participants in the battle by the parachute had left, but he said nothing until after Tarzan had completed his investigation.

"There were four men and either a woman or a youth here with my friend," said Tarzan.

"Four of them were low-country men from Pheli," said Thoar, "and the other was a woman of Zoram."

"How do you know?" asked Tarzan, who was always anxious to add to his store of woodcraft.

"The low-country sandals are never shaped to the foot as closely as are those of the mountain tribes," replied Thoar, "and the soles are much thinner, being made usually of the hides of the thag, which is tough enough for people who do not walk often upon anything but soft grasses or in soggy marshland. The sandals of the mountain tribes are soled with the thick hide of Maj, the cousin of Tandor. If you will look at the spoor, you will see that they are not worn at all, while there are holes in the sandals of these dead men of Pheli."

"Are we near Zoram?" asked Tarzan.

"No," replied Thoar. "It lies across the highest range ahead of us."

"When we first met, Thoar, you told me that you were from Zoram."

"Yes, that is my country," replied Thoar.

"Then, perhaps, this woman is some one whom you know?"

"She is my sister," replied Thoar.

TARZAN of the Apes looked at him in surprise. "How do you know?" he demanded.

"I found an imprint where there was no turf, only soft earth, and there the spoor was so distinct that I could recognize the

sandals as hers. So familiar with her work am I that I could recognize the stitching alone, where the sole is joined to the upper part of the sandal, and in addition there are the notches, which indicate the tribe. The people of Zoram have three notches in the underside of the sole at the toe of the left sandal."

"What was your sister doing so far from her own country, and how is it that she is with my friend?"

"It is quite plain," replied Thoar. "These men of Pheli sought to capture her. One of them wanted her for his mate, but she eluded them and they pursued her across the Mountains of the Thipdars and down into this valley, where she was set upon by jaloks. The man from your country came and killed the jaloks and two of the Phelians, and drove the other two away. It is evident that my sister could not escape him, and he captured her."

Tarzan of the Apes smiled. "The spoor does not indicate that she ever made any effort to escape him," he said.

Thoar scratched his head. "That is true," he replied, "and I cannot understand it, for the women of my tribe do not care to mate with the men of other tribes, and I know that Jana, my sister, would rather die than mate outside the Mountains of the Thipdars. Many times has she said so, and Jana is not given to idle talk."

"My friend would not take her by force," said Tarzan. "If she has gone with him, she has gone with him willingly. And I think that when we find them, you will discover that he is simply accompanying her back to Zoram, for he is the sort of man who would not permit a woman to go alone and unprotected."

"We shall see," said Thoar; "but if he has taken Jana away against her wishes, he must surely die."

AS Tarzan, Tar-gash and Thoar followed the spoor of Jason and Jana, a disheartened company of men rounded the end of the great Mountains of the Thipdars, fifty miles to the east, and entered the Gyor Cors, or great Plains of the Gyors.

The party consisted of ten black warriors and a white man, and doubtless never in the history of mankind had eleven men been more completely and hopelessly lost than these.

Muviro and his warriors, than whom no better trackers ever lived, were totally bewildered by their inability even to backtrack successfully. The stampeding of the maddened beasts, from which they had barely escaped with their lives and then only by what appeared nothing short of a miracle, had so obliterated all signs of the party's former spoor that though they were all confident that they had gone but a short distance from the clearing into which the beasts had been herded by the tarags, they had never again been able to locate the clearing, and now they were wandering hopelessly; and in accordance with Von Horst's plans, keeping as much in the open as possible in the hope that the cruising *0-220* might thus discover them, for Von Horst was positive that eventually his companions would undertake a search for them.

Aboard the *0-220* the grave fear that had been entertained for the safety of the thirteen missing members of the ship's company had developed into a conviction of disaster when Gridley failed to return within the limit of the time that he might reasonably be able to keep the scout plane in the air. Then it was that Zuppner had sent Dorf out with another searching-party; but at the end of seventy hours they had returned to report absolute failure. They had followed the trail to a clearing where jackals fed upon rotting carrion, but beyond this there was no sign of spoor to suggest in what direction their fellows had wandered.

Going and coming, they had been beset by savage beasts, and so ruthless and determined had been the attacks of the giant tarags, that Dorf reported to Zuppner that he was confident that all of the missing members of the party must by this time have been destroyed by these savage beasts.

"Until we have proof of that, we must not give up hope," replied Zuppner. "Nor may we relinquish our efforts to find them, whether dead or alive, and that we cannot do by remaining here."

There was nothing now to delay the start, and while the motors were warming up, the anchor was drawn in and the air expelled from the lower vacuum tanks, and as the giant ship rose from the ground, Robert Jones jotted down a brief note in a greasy memorandum-book: *"We sailed from here at noon."*

WHEN Skruk and his companions had left the field to the victorious Jason, the latter had returned his six-gun to its holster and faced the girl. "Well," he inquired, "what now?"

She shook her head. "I cannot understand you," she said. "You do not speak the language of gilaks."

Jason scratched his head. "That being the case," he said, "and as it is evident that we are never going to get anywhere on conversation which neither one of us understands, I am going to have a look around for my ship; in the meantime, praying to all the gods that my thirty-thirty and ammunition are safe. It's a cinch that she did not burn, for she must have fallen close by and I could have seen the smoke."

Jana listened attentively.

"Come on," said Jason, and started off in the direction that he thought the ship might lie.

"No, not that way!" exclaimed Jana; and running forward, she seized his arm and tried to stop him, pointing back to the tall peaks of the Mountains of the Thipdars, where Zoram lay.

Jason essayed the difficult feat of explaining in a weird sign-language of his own invention that he was looking for an airplane that had crashed somewhere in the vicinity, but the conviction soon claimed him that that would be a very difficult thing to accomplish even if the person to whom he was trying to convey the idea knew what an airplane was, and so he ended up by grinning good-naturedly and, seizing the girl by the hand, gently leading her in the direction he wished to go.

Again that charming smile disarmed the Red Flower of Zoram, and though she knew that this stranger was leading her away from the caverns of her people, yet she followed docilely, though her brow was puckered in perplexity as she tried to understand why she was not afraid, or why she was willing to go with this stranger, who evidently was not even a gilak, since he could not speak the language of men.

A half-hour's search was rewarded by the discovery of the wreck of the plane, which had suffered far less damage than Jason had expected.

It was evident that in its plunge to earth it must have straightened out and glided to a landing. Of course, it was wrecked beyond repair, even if there had been any facilities for repairs; but it had not burned, and Jason recovered his thirty-thirty and all his ammunition.

Jana was intensely interested in the plane and examined every portion of it minutely. Never in her life had she wished so much to ask questions, for never in her life had she seen anything that had so aroused her wonder. And here was the one person in all the world who could answer her questions, but she could not make him understand one of them. For a moment she almost hated him; then he smiled at her and she forgave him and smiled back.

"And now," said Jason, "where do we go from here? As far as I am concerned one place is as good as another."

Being perfectly well aware that he was hopelessly lost, Jason Gridley felt that the only chance he had of being reunited with his companions lay in the possibility that the *0-220* might chance to cruise over the very locality where he happened to be, and no matter whither he might wander, whether north or south or east or west, that chance was as slender in one direction as another, and conversely, equally good. In an hour the *0-220* would cover a distance fully as great as he could travel in several days of outer earthly time. And so even if he chanced to be moving in a direction that led away from the ship's first anchorage, he could never go sufficiently far that it might not easily and quickly overtake him, if its search should chance to lead it in his direction. Therefore he turned questioningly to the girl, pointing first in one direction, and then in another, while he looked inquiringly at her, attempting thus to convey to her the idea that he was ready and willing to go in any direction she chose; and Jana, sensing his meaning, pointed toward the lofty Mountains of the Thipdars.

"There," she said, "lies Zoram, the land of my people."

"Your logic is unassailable," said Jason, "and I only wish I could understand what you are saying, for I am sure that anyone with such beautiful teeth could never be uninteresting."

Jana did not wait to discuss the matter, but started forthwith for Zoram and beside her walked Jason Gridley of California.

JANA'S active mind had been working rapidly, and she had come to the conclusion that she could not for long endure the constantly increasing pressure of unsatisfied curiosity. She must find some means of communicating with this interesting stranger, and to the accomplishment of this end she could conceive of no better plan than teaching the man her language. But how to commence? Never in her experience or that of her people had the necessity arisen for teaching a language. Previously she

had not dreamed of the existence of such a means. If you can feature such a state, which is doubtful, you must concede to this primitive girl of the stone age a high degree of intelligence. This was no accidental blowing off of the lid of the teapot upon which might be built a theory. It required, as a matter of fact, a greater reasoning ability. Give a steam engine to a man who had never heard of steam, and ask him to make it go—Jana's problem was almost as difficult. But the magnitude of the reward spurred her on, for what will one not do to have one's curiosity satisfied, especially if one happens to be a young and beautiful girl, and the object of one's curiosity an exceptionally handsome young man. Skirts may change, but human nature never.

And so the Red Flower of Zoram pointed at herself with a slim brown forefinger and said, "Jana." She repeated this several times, and then she pointed at Jason, raising her eyebrows in interrogation.

"Jason," he said, for there was no misunderstanding her meaning. And so the slow, laborious task began as the two trudged upward toward the foothills of the Mountains of the Thipdars.

THERE lay before them a long, hard climb to the higher altitudes, but there was water in abundance in the tumbling brooks, dropping down the hillside, and Jana knew the edible plants and nuts and fruits which grew in riotous profusion in many a dark, deep ravine, and there was game in plenty to be brought down, when they needed meat, by Jason's rifle.

As they proceeded in their quest for Zoram, Jason found greater opportunity to study his companion, and he came to the conclusion that nature had attained the pinnacle of physical perfection with the production of this little savage. Every line and curve of that lithe, brown body sang of symmetry, for the Red Flower of Zoram was a living poem of beauty. If he had thought that her teeth were beautiful, he was forced to admit that they held no advantage in that respect over her eyes, her nose or any other of her features. And when she fell to with her crude stone knife and helped him skin a kill and prepare the meat for cooking, when he saw the deftness and celerity with which she made fire with the simplest and most primitive of utensils, when he witnessed the almost uncanny certitude with which she located nests of eggs and edible fruits and vegetables, he was conscious that her perfections were not alone physical, and he became more than ever anxious to acquire a sufficient understanding of her tongue to be able to communicate with her, though he realized that he might doubtless suffer a rude awakening and disillusionment when, through an understanding of her language, he might be able to judge the limitations of her mind.

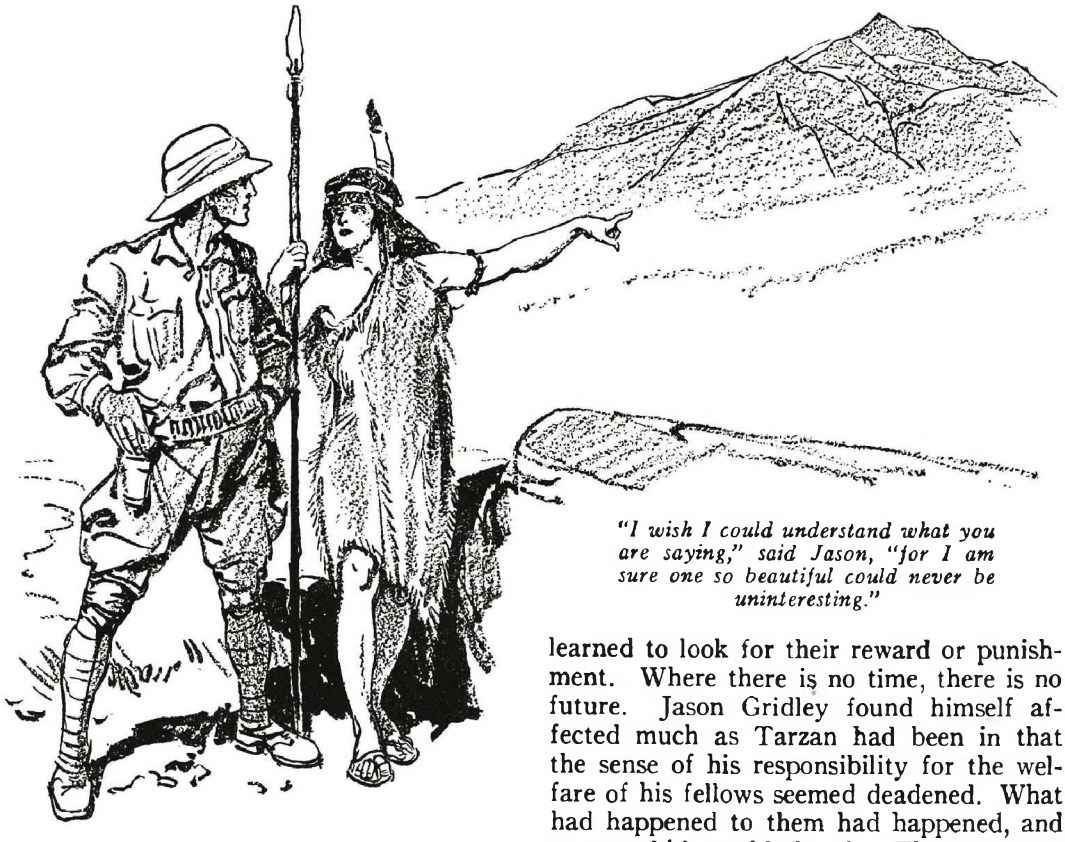
When Jana was tired, she went beneath a tree, and making a bed of grasses, curled up and fell asleep immediately; and while she slept, Gridley watched, for the dangers of this primitive land were numerous and constant. Fully as often as he shot for food, he shot to protect them from some terrible beast, until the encounters became as prosaic and commonplace as does the constant eluding of death by pedestrians at congested traffic-corners in cities of the outer crust.

When Jason felt the need of sleep, Jana watched, and sometimes they merely rested without sleeping, usually beneath a tree, for there they found the greatest protection from their greatest danger, the fierce and voracious thipdars from which the mountains took their name. These hideous flying reptiles were a constant menace, but so thoroughly had nature developed a defense against them, that the girl could hear their wings at a greater distance than either of them could see the creatures.

Jason had no means for determining how far they had traveled, or how long they had been upon their way, but he was sure that considerable outer earthly time must have elapsed since he had met the girl, when they came to a seemingly insurmountable obstacle. Already Jason had made no inconsiderable progress toward mastering her tongue, and they were exchanging short sentences, much to Jana's delight, her merry laughter often marking one of Jason's more flagrant errors in pronunciation or construction.

AND now they had come to a deep chasm with overhanging walls that not even Jana could negotiate. To Jason it resembled a stupendous fault that might have been caused by the subsidence of the mountain range, for it paralleled the main axis of the range. And if this was true, he knew that it might extend for hundreds of miles, effectually barring the way across the mountains by the route they were following.

For a long time Jana sought a means of descent into the crevice. She did not want



"I wish I could understand what you are saying," said Jason, "for I am sure one so beautiful could never be uninteresting."

to turn to the left as that route might lead her eventually back to the canon that she had descended when pursued by Skruk and his fellows and she well knew how almost unscalable were the perpendicular sides of this terrific gorge. Another thing, perhaps, which decided her against the left-hand route was the possibility that in that direction they might again come in contact with the Phelians, and so she led Jason toward the right, and always she searched for a way to the bottom of the rift.

Jason realized that they were consuming a great deal of time in trying to cross the fault, but he became also aware of the fact that time meant nothing in timeless Pellucidar. It was never a factor with which to reckon, for the excellent reason that it did not exist, and when he gave the matter thought, he was conscious of a mild surprise that he, who had been always a slave of time, so easily and naturally embraced the irresponsible existence of Pellucidar. It was not only the fact that time itself seemed not to matter, but that the absence of this greatest of all taskmasters singularly affected one's outlook upon every other consideration of existence.

Without time there appeared to be no accountability for one's acts, since it is to the future that the slaves of time have learned to look for their reward or punishment. Where there is no time, there is no future. Jason Gridley found himself affected much as Tarzan had been in that the sense of his responsibility for the welfare of his fellows seemed deadened. What had happened to them had happened, and no act of his could alter it. They were not there with him, and so he could not be of assistance to them, and as it was difficult to visualize the future beneath an eternal noonday sun, how might one plan ahead for others or for himself?

JASON GRIDLEY gave up the riddle with a shake of his head and found solace in contemplation of the profile of the Red Flower of Zoram.

"Why do you look at me so much?" demanded the girl; for by now they could make themselves understood to one another.

Jason Gridley flushed slightly and looked quickly away. Her question had been very abrupt and surprising and for the first time he realized that he had been looking at her a great deal. He started to answer, hesitated and stopped. It seemed silly to say that it was because she was beautiful.

"Why do you not say it, Jason?" she inquired.

"Say what?" he demanded.

"Say the thing that is in your eyes when you look at me," she replied.

Gridley looked at her in astonishment. No one but an imbecile could have misunderstood her meaning, and Jason Gridley was no imbecile.

Could it be possible that he had been looking at her *that* way? Had he gone stark mad that he was even subconsciously entertaining such thoughts of this little barbarian who seized her meat in both hands and tore pieces from it with her flashing white teeth, who went almost as naked as the beasts of the field, and with all their unconsciousness of modesty? Could it be that his eyes had told this untutored savage that he was harboring thoughts of love for her? The artificialities of a thousand years of civilization rose up in horror against such a thought.

Upon the screen of his memory there was flashed a picture of the haughty Cynthia Furnois of Hollywood, daughter of the famous director Francois Furnois, alias Sam Smith. He recalled Cynthia's meticulous observance of the minutest details of social usages, and the studied perfection of her deportment that had sometimes awed him.

He saw, too, the cold aristocratic features of Barbara Green, daughter of old John Green, the Los Angeles realtor from Texas. It is true that old John was no purist, and that his total disregard of the social precedence of forks often shocked the finer sensibilities that Mrs. Green and Barbara had laboriously achieved in the universities of Montmartre and Coconut Grove, but Barbara had had two years at Marlborough and knew her suffixes and her hardware.

OF course Cynthia was a rotten little snob, not only on the surface but to the core of her shallow, selfish soul; while Barbara's snobbishness, Jason felt, was purely artificial, the result of mistaking for the genuine the silly artificialities and affectations of the almost celebrities and sudden rich that infest the public places of Hollywood.

But nevertheless these two did, after a fashion, reflect the social environment to which he was accustomed, and as he tried to answer Jana's question, he could not but picture her seated at dinner with a company made up of such as these. Of course, Jana was a bully companion upon an adventure such as that in which they were engaged, but modern man cannot go adventuring forever in the Stone Age. If his eyes had carried any other message to Jana than that of friendly comradeship, he felt sorry, for he realized that in fairness to her, as well as to himself, there could never be anything more than this between them.

As Jason hesitated for a reply, the eyes of the Red Flower of Zoram searched his soul, and slowly the half-expectant smile faded from her lips. Perhaps she was a savage little barbarian of the Stone Age; but she was no fool, and she was essentially a woman.

Slowly she drew her slender figure erect as she turned away from him and started back along the rim of the rift toward the great gorge through which she had descended from the higher peaks when Skruk and his fellows had been pursuing her.

"Jana," he exclaimed, "don't be angry. Where are you going?"

She stopped and with her haughty little chin in air turned a withering look back upon him across a perfect shoulder. "Go your way, jalok," she said, "and Jana will go hers."

CHAPTER X

To the Thipdar's Nest

HEAVY clouds formed about the lofty peaks of the Mountains of the Thipdars—black, angry clouds that rolled down the northern slopes, spreading far to east and west.

"The waters have come again," said Thoar. "They are falling upon Zoram. Soon they will fall here too."

It looked very dark up there above them, and presently the threatening clouds swept out across the sky, blotting out the noonday sun.

It was a new landscape upon which Tarzan looked—a sullen, bleak and forbidding landscape. It was the first time that he had seen Pellucidar in shadow, and he did not like it. The effect of the change was strikingly apparent in Thoar and Targash. They seemed depressed, almost fearful. Nor was it man alone that was so strangely affected by the blotting out of the eternal sunlight; for presently from the upper reaches of the mountains the lower animals came, pursuing the sunlight. That they too were strangely affected and filled with terror was evidenced by the fact that the carnivores and their prey trotted side by side, and that none of them paid any attention to the three men.

"Why do they not attack us, Thoar?" asked Tarzan.

"They know that the water is about to fall," he replied, "and they are afraid of the falling water. They forget their hunger

Their greatest danger was the fierce thipdars—these hideous flying reptiles were a constant menace.

and their quarrels as they seek to escape the common terror."

"Is the danger so great, then?" asked the ape-man.

"Not if we remain upon high ground," replied Thoar. "Sometimes the gulleys and ravines fill with water in an instant, but the only danger upon the high land is from the burning spears that are hurled from the black clouds. But if we stay in the open, even these are not dangerous, for as a rule they are aimed at trees. Do not go beneath a tree while the clouds are hurling their spears of fire."

AS the clouds shut off the sunlight, the air became suddenly cold. A raw wind swept down from above, and the three men shivered in their nakedness.

"Gather wood," said Tarzan. "We shall build a fire for warmth." And so the three gathered firewood, and Tarzan made fire, and they sat about it, warming their naked hides, while upon either side of them the brutes passed on their way down toward the sunlight.

The rain came. It did not fall in drops, but in great enveloping blankets that seemed to beat them down and smother them. Inches deep, it rolled down the mountain-side, filling the depressions and the gulleys, turning the cañons into raging torrents.

The wind lashed the falling water into a blinding maelstrom that the eye could not pierce a dozen feet. Terrified animals stampeded blindly, constituting themselves the greatest menace of the storm. The lightning flashed, and the thunder roared, and the beasts progressed from panic to an insanity of fear.

Above the roar of the thunder and the howling of the wind rose the piercing shrieks and screams of the monsters of another day; and in the air above flapped shrieking reptiles fighting toward the sunlight against the pounding wrath of the elements. Giant pteranodons, beaten to the ground, staggered uncertainly upon legs unaccustomed to the task; and through it all the three beast-men huddled at the spot where their fire had been, though not even an ash remained.

It seemed to Tarzan that the storm lasted a great while; but like the others, he was inured to the hardships and discomforts of primitive life. Where a civilized man might have railed against fate and cursed the elements, the three beast-men sat in stoic silence, their backs hunched against the storm, for each knew that it would not last forever, and each knew that there was nothing he could say or do to lessen its duration or abate its fury.

Had it not been for the example set by Tarzan and Thoar, Tar-gash would have

fled toward the sunlight with the other beasts, not that he was more fearful than they, but that he was influenced more by instinct than by reason. But where they stayed, he was content to stay, and so he squatted there with them in dumb misery, waiting for the sun to come again.

THE rain lessened; the howling wind died down; the clouds passed on, and the sun burst forth upon a steaming world. The three beast-men arose stiffly and shook themselves.

"I am hungry," said Tarzan.

Thoar pointed about them to where lay the bodies of lesser beasts that had been crushed in the mad stampede for safety.

Now even Thoar was compelled to eat his meat raw, for there was no dry wood wherewith to start a fire; but to Tarzan and Tar-gash this was no hardship. As Tarzan ate, the suggestion of a smile smoldered in his eyes. He was recalling a fussy old nobleman with whom he had once dined at a London club, and who had almost suffered a stroke of apoplexy because his bird had been slightly underdone.

When the three had filled their bellies, they arose to continue their search for Jana and Jason, only to discover that the torrential rain had effectually erased every vestige of the spoor that they had been following.

"We cannot pick up their trail again," said Thoar, "until we reach the point where they continued on again after the waters ceased to fall. To the left is a deep cañon, whose walls are difficult to scale. In front of us is a fissure, which extends along the base of the mountains for a considerable distance in both directions. But if we go to the right, we shall find a place where we can descend into it and cross it. This is the way that they should have gone. Perhaps there we shall pick up their trail again." But though they continued on and crossed the fissure and clambered upward toward the higher peak, they found no sign that Jana or Jason had come this way.

"Perhaps they reached your country by another route," suggested Tarzan.

"Perhaps," said Thoar. "Let us continue on to Zoram. There is nothing else that we can do. There we can gather the men of my tribe and search the mountains for them."

IN the ascent toward the summit, Thoar sometimes followed trails that for countless ages the rough pads of the carnivores had followed, or again he led them over trackless wastes of granite, taking such perilous chances along dizzy heights that Tarzan was astonished that any of them came through alive.

Upon a bleak summit they had robbed a thipdar's nest of its eggs, and the three were eating when Thoar became suddenly alert and listening. To the ears of the ape-man came faintly a sound that resembled the dismal flapping of distant, powerful wings.

"A thipdar," said Thoar, "and there is no shelter for us."

"There are three of us," said Tarzan. "What have we to fear?"

"You do not know them," said Thoar. "They are hard to kill, and they are never defeated until they are killed. Their brains are very small. Sometimes when we have cut them open, it has been difficult to find the brain at all; and having no brain, they have no fear of anything, not even death, for they cannot know what death is; nor do they seem to be affected much by pain; it merely angers them, making them more terrible. Perhaps we can kill it, but I wish that there was a tree."

"How do you know that it will attack us?" said Tarzan.

"It is coming in this direction. It cannot help but see us; and whatever living thing they see, they attack."

"Have you ever been attacked by one?" asked Tarzan.

"Yes," replied Thoar; "but only when there was no tree or cave in which to hide. The men of Zoram are not ashamed to admit they fear the mighty thipdars."

"BUT if you have killed them in the past, why may we not kill this one?" demanded the ape-man.

"We may," replied Thoar, "but I have never chanced to have an encounter with one, except when there were a number of my tribesmen with me. The lone hunter who goes forth and never returns is our reason for fearing the thipdar. Even when there are many of us to fight them, always there are some killed and many injured."

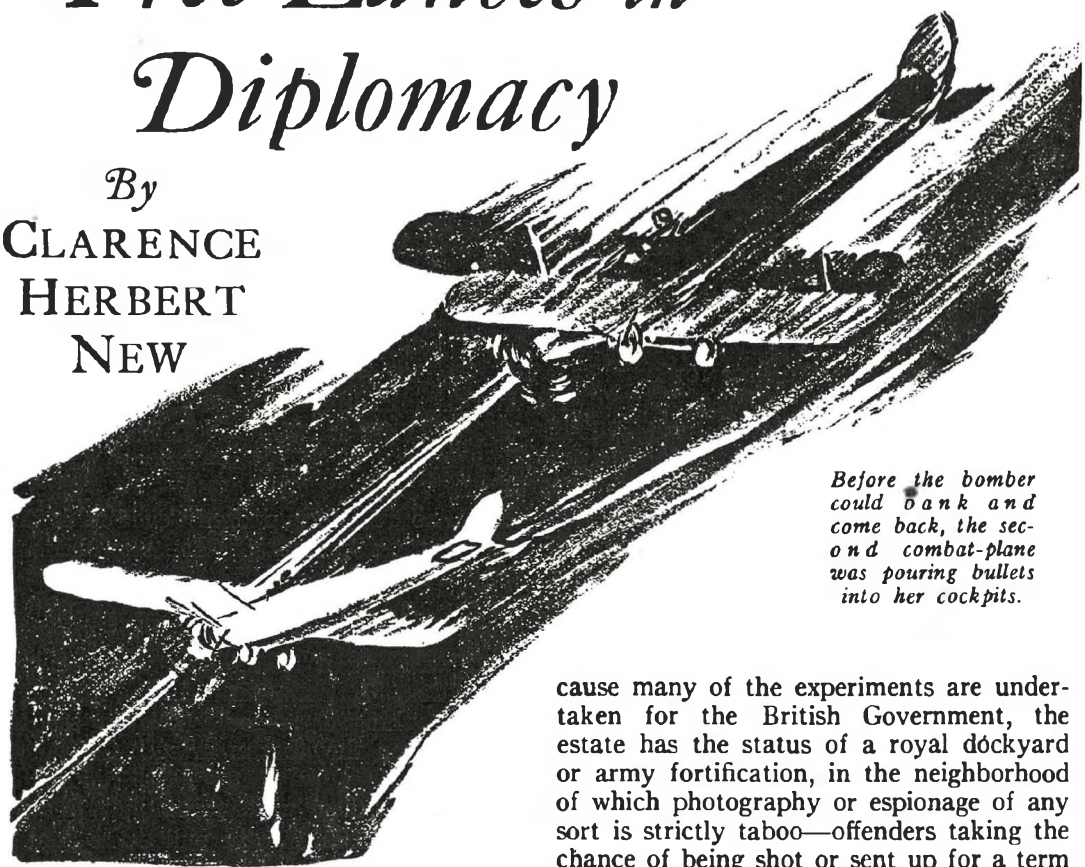
"It comes!" cried Tar-gash, pointing.

"It comes," agreed Thoar, grasping his spear more firmly.

Even more perilous and amazing are the adventures which befall Tarzan in the next installment—in our forthcoming December issue.

Free Lances in Diplomacy

By
CLARENCE HERBERT NEW



Before the bomber could bank and come back, the second combat-plane was pouring bullets into her cockpits.

"Airways of the Sea" is a timely and vital story of the beginning international struggle for trans-Atlantic air supremacy.

Illustrated by
William Molt

TREVOR HALL, the beautiful home estate of the Earl and Countess of Dyvnaint, lies for a mile and a half along the top of Scabbacombe Cliffs, over four hundred feet above the waters of the English Channel, in south Devon. Where the Hall itself stands a little back from the cliff-brow at the southeastern corner of the estate, the drop is a sheer four hundred twenty feet to the narrow strip of sand upon which a fairly heavy surf is usually breaking at high tide. In the heart of the thick forest which covers two-thirds of the property there are machine-shops, laboratories, airplane hangars and a powerful radio-beam station — His Lordship and some of his intimate friends devoting a good deal of their time to experimentation in airplane and radio development. And because many of the experiments are undertaken for the British Government, the estate has the status of a royal dockyard or army fortification, in the neighborhood of which photography or espionage of any sort is strictly taboo—offenders taking the chance of being shot or sent up for a term of imprisonment if caught.

Surrounding the entire estate, with its ends starting from the cliffs, there is a fourteen-foot concrete wall four and one-half miles long, with two heavy copper wires running along its top charged with a thousand-volt current. In this wall there is but one gate—with a lodge-keeper's concrete house just inside. Opposite the Hall on the cliff-brow there is a one-story bungalow with wide verandas, and going down through the rock from its landward wall is an elevator-shaft communicating with a series of dressing-rooms and storage space cut out of the solid cliff eighty feet above the narrow beach. From these rooms a small steel-truss bridge extends out over the water to a point well outside of low-water mark, where an electric lift takes one down to a dock built upon iron-piping in a depth of fifty feet, it being impossible to get ashore from this dock except by boat, or swimming, or the overhead bridge, in which there are three steel gates. . . . .

This narrative begins, properly, last fall, when Earl Trevor, his friend Earl Lammerford and his master mechanic Harry Archer took down in the lifts with them a hollow

tin float four feet long, two feet wide and six inches deep along the edges, with a V-shaped bottom that went down to a keel two feet below the surface—together with a basketful of lead-lines and weights. Coming out of the good-sized dock-house into which the lift had dropped them, they carried the float and basket down a gang-plank in the center of the dock—which was U-shaped, with a gate-protected opening on the north side—to a speed-boat which was moored alongside the landing-float with two other small craft. When the dock-keeper had opened the gate for them, the speed-cruiser shot out into a choppy sea and anchored a thousand feet away. Half a mile out beyond the dock there was a line of buoys with red flags extending the full length of the estate—it was well understood in the neighborhood that, because of the Royal Navy Ensigns on the end buoys, no other craft might pass inside of them without special permission.

When the little cruiser was anchored, the men looked up and down the coast-line with their glasses, spotting a few craft out in the Channel but nothing else near them except a somewhat larger speed-cruiser which appeared to be trolling, a mile out. So, after hooking on forty-foot lead-lines to each of its corners, they lowered the float over the side and began paying out the weighted lines, one after the other, with ten pounds at the end of each. This combined weight, when the float got the full drag of it, pulled it down three inches in the water. Keeping the cruiser on the weather side of it, thirty feet away, they began watching the action of the float.

"My word, Lammy! Did you see that? Outer edge entirely clear of the water, inner edge submerged—not more than a five-degree slope on the top! Fancy we must be rather close to the right balance between depth, weight an' buoyancy. But —I say! What the dev—!"

The bigger launch, a mile out, was heading straight toward them at a thirty-mile gait, throwing aside great fans of spray.

"Harry! Cast that machine-gun loose in the bow and spray a few bullets each side of them!" said Trevor. "They can see that naval ensign on the outer buoy as well as we can. It's no novelty havin' some one determined to spy on us, but it's dev'lish annoyin'! We've been too damned polite, so far—an' it hasn't any effect."

The men on the launch paid no attention to the first splashes of bullets around them, but when they began ripping the awning canvas and chipping splinters off the woodwork, they stopped their motor and swerved off a bit. One of them caught up a big megaphone and shouted:

"What the devil do you mean by firing upon defenseless people? We'll come back here with an officer in a little while and see what you've got to say about it!"

"Get outside of those buoys—and stay out! You can see that naval ensign as clearly as anyone else can! If you come inside again, we'll riddle you!"

Another spray of bullets alongside was a sufficient hint to start up their motor. The launch went slowly off like a dog with his tail between his legs—the men on board cursing audibly.

"Who t'e tefil supposed t'ey wouldt dare to anyt'ing like t'at! Couldt you make out what t'ey wass doing—at all?"

"When we started toward them, they were putting something over on the lee side and watching it in the water—some kind of a float, I think. But I couldn't make out anything else—couldn't even see the thing when they began firing."

WHILE they were stopping the other cruiser, Earl Trevor pulled the float as close as he dared under lee of his own craft. The weights suspended from it, which of course didn't show at all above water, made a pretty heavy drag and prevented its being slammed against the cruiser when it was fairly close. But just then, a familiar drone made them look toward the north, where a plane was approaching in the distance, flying pretty low. Archer grabbed up a tarpaulin which was folded on the cabin skylight and threw it over the float before the approaching plane got near enough to see what it was with a glass. The three grinned at each other—and sat down to light their pipes.

"Those bounders are a blasted nuisance, but they'll not last long after our boys up at the hangars hear 'em. Somebody'll be out with a combat-plane in a minute or so. . . . . Ah! There he comes now!"

On the three land-sides of the estate there were ground-signs in six-foot letters, picked out with white-painted cobbles:

NO FLYING PERMITTED OVER THIS ENCLOSURE
R. N. R.

The intruding plane had approached from somewhere in the northwest, possibly

from the moors at the top-end of Cornwall, perhaps from some steamer at the mouth of Bristol Channel. From its build and markings, it belonged somewhere on the Continent. But the pilot must have seen at least two of the warning signs before he crossed over the wall and flew diagonally across the estate. He wasn't over the water before the combat plane was climbing above him. Inside of the next minute, machine-gun bullets began ripping through the plane-cloth rather close to the cockpit. Looking up and back, the pilot saw the other plane—saw the man at the machine-gun motioning with his hand to the eastward and pointing to the line of floats off-shore. When the intruding pilot paid no attention to this, he was warned by another hail of bullets which chipped the fuselage—there wasn't any doubt whatever that the next lot would be fired squarely into the cockpit. As the air in that particular spot was getting too hot, the intruder banked and swerved off to the east with the combat-plane still policing him. . . . .

After the overcurious speed-boat had run outside the line of buoys, half a mile from Earl Trevor's cruiser, the men stopped their motor and lay there with their glasses focused upon him. Grinning at his companion, Archer started up the powerful motor, and the boat jumped from the crest of one wave to another until she circled within fifty feet of the other boat. Trevor's tone was pleasant as he megaphoned:

"Gentlemen—you're delaying us quite a lot, and we really haven't much time to spare this morning. Of course we prefer not to hurt anybody, but any fool can see that this property is under Governm'nt restriction and unless you keep more than a mile from us, you'll be arrested the moment you step ashore. If you come inside the buoys, you'll be fired upon—and the next time, some of you will be hit! I trust I make myself clear? Your plane up there had a narrow escape from being sent down in a crash!"

After some discussion among the intruders, their cruiser whirled about and ran straight for the boat-yard where they had hired it, at Torquay. After which, Trevor ran back to his tin float, retrieved the tarpaulin, cast a line over the float and hauled it near enough to hang three pounds more weight to the end of each corner line, which lowered the float another inch in the water and left but two inches above the surface. They could have calibrated a Plimsoll-mark on its six-inch edge with a little close figuring—it was simply a problem in algebra to establish the ratio between under water-weight and buoyancy. This time the choppy waves when they heaved up the float from trough to crest, didn't tilt it more than two degrees on the top surface—at least a quarter of the outside edge being entirely out of water while the edge next to the wave was under water for a distance of four inches toward the middle. To put it in another way, the even distribution of weight so far below the heavier surface of the water, in proportion to the square-inch area of the deck or top of the float, stabilized its floating position so thoroughly that the different angle of the heaving waves did not materially affect the level of its deck—the V-shaped bottom having a tendency to shunt off the lifting force on the under side.

AFTER making a number of tests with varying weights, they hauled in their float and returned to the Hall. There from the radio- and telephone-room next to his own private suite, Trevor called up a department chief at the Admiralty in Whitehall, who had charge of radio-development:

"Are you there, Jennifer? . Aye—Trevor of Dyvnaint, speakin'. You chaps were to have our patented radio-beacon installed upon one of the fast light cruisers, so as to make a test with me, as soon as possible. Regular sea-test, you understand—Western Ocean conditions—an' find out whether we can successfully chase her with my deep-sea yacht, in spite of any dodgin' or tricks—run her down, guided only by the beacon, which she's to keep in operation until we come up or communicate."

"Quite so, Your Lordship. The beacon has been installed upon the *Penelope*—second class, Commander Welling, now lying off Cardiff. They have been testing it all the morning—seems to be working perfectly. Cruiser is under your orders any moment you're ready."

"What'll she do—under forced draught?"

"Thirty-five—along the measured mile in the Mersey. Possibly a knot or two better under favorable conditions."

"My boat, the *Ranee Sylvia,* was formerly rated in Lloyd's 'Yacht Register' as a good steady thirty-two, but she was overhauled after the war, fitted with oil-burners an' high-pressure boilers, so that we've now a few knots in reserve, which should make it about an even thing with the *Penelope.* Very good. Will you kindly order her to

leave at once, proceedin' due sou'west? My boat is lyin' in Salcombe Harbor. We'll be aboard of her—pullin' out in possibly three or four hours. That'll fetch the *Penelope* about off Land's End when we're startin'—sixty or eighty miles out an' a hundred an' fifty from us. I'll talk with her directly we clear Bolt Head—an' then the chase will be on."

"I say, Your Lordship! What do you figure as the range of your radio-beacon?"

"One mile to six thousand, dependin' upon which of several short waves is used. That's to say, a boat off Rio Janeiro would get it distinctly from anywhere in these waters an' head directly up through the south, middle an' North Atlantic until she struck the beacon."

"But—wait a bit! She'd be gettin' a lot of shore beacons on the way up, some of 'em on the same waves?"

"Aye, but with diff'rent individual signals. Most of the shore beacons are a series of dashes to the left an' dots to the right—T's and E's. Just at present we're using A's and B's. Every beacon has a registered signal, as you know. Well, d'ye see—the master down off Rio would only need to shift his dials until our signal came in—then set his radio-compass an' steer directly for 'em."

AT dinner that evening—on the *Ranee Sylvia*—the two earls, Archer and the Countess Nan, were laughingly pitting their intelligence against that of Commander Welling of the *Penelope*, who was becoming interested in this sea-game of hare and hound. His only disadvantage was that he had to keep his radio-beacon going steadily every five seconds. On the other hand, he fancied he had a little the edge on speed and after crossing the line between Land's End and Cape Clear, he was not restricted as to his course; he might go north, west or south, or steam in a great circle. If the *Ranee Sylvia* overhauled him, he lost, and had to stand the best dinner his cruiser could put up. If he kept her out of sight forty-eight hours, he won, and would dine with his lieutenants and ensigns on the *Ranee*. It seemed like a sporting proposition—and until he had been running at thirty-four knots over a heavy but not choppy sea, he didn't begin to realize that the game with his pursuers was not a question of sea-racing, but the ability to spot a certain boat at any point, on any ocean, with enough certainty to make that particular radio-beacon one of the most valuable aids to navigation yet invented.

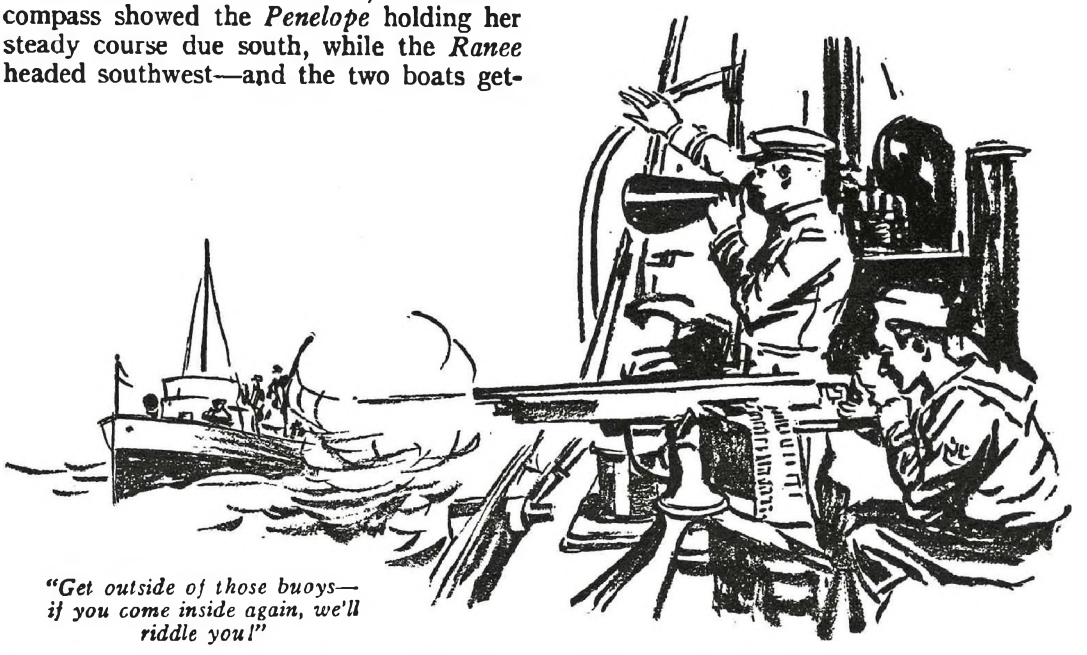
After dinner they gathered round the Earl's desk in the forward starboard corner of the big saloon. In the corner itself was a brass binnacle with a Kelvin compass. Directly over it a steel shaft with an auger-handle at the lower end of it came down through a sleeve in the overhead deck-plating, and attached to that sleeve was an eighteen-inch movable compass-card of sheet-iron, painted white. On a ledge projecting from the bulkhead at the right of the desk was a twelve-tube receiving set with a short-wave set alongside of it. On the bulkhead itself hung a three-foot cone. On the desk stood a powerful microphone. Behind the Earl's swivel-chair, on the outside bulkhead, was a switchboard connecting with every room and space on the yacht—also the long- and short-wave transmitting-sets, so that, sitting at his desk, with chart-drawers underneath the cushioned transom-seat which ran along under the ports at his left, he was in control of all communications to, from and inside the yacht, and could navigate her without getting out of his chair. In the wheel-house, laboratory, machine-shop and engine-room the phone-receivers were supplemented with eighteen-inch cones upon the bulkheads, and microphones, so that he could talk with his officers and crew without holding a receiver to his ear. The wireless-room was in the after end of the deck-house directly over his desk, and the shaft of the radio-compass passed up through it.

Switching on the short-wave set, when they were seated around him, a tapping of A's and B's came loudly from the cone every five seconds. Reaching up over his desk, Trevor set the movable compass-card so that it exactly calibrated with the Kelvin compass in the binnacle, on the "lubber's-mark." Twisting the auger-handle at the end of the radio-compass shaft back and forth, when the signals came in again, he found that they were strongest at exactly 180 degrees, or due south.

"Commander Welling is stealing down toward Spain, hoping we'll follow directly on his tail—forty-five degrees off his course from Cardiff. Let's see if we can't outthink him! I doubt if he'll head for Gib. If we just happen to be a little better than he's figurin', we might be creepin' up on a long straight chase. Chances are, when he fancies he's got us headin' a bit east of south along his wake, he'll shove his wheel

over an' try a big circle around to west'ard. On that probability we'll just keep our present course of two hundred an' twenty-five degrees—due sou'west—an' be steamin' along the diameter of his circle, when he turns, while he's goin' around the rim—losin' a knot to us every hour—more likely eight or ten if we've guessed right."

For the next three hours, the radio-compass showed the *Penelope* holding her steady course due south, while the *Ranee* headed southwest—and the two boats get-



"Get outside of those buoys—if you come inside again, we'll riddle you!"

ting farther apart with every mile they steamed. By that time the cruiser had made a hundred miles of southing. It was part of the rules that, while His Lordship called her as he was leaving port to indicate that the test was on, neither was allowed to call the other afterward unless one of them gave it up; consequently, Commander Welling could only guess where his pursuer might be. And he guessed wrong. When he swung around due west and then a bit north of that, he was heading on a course which must bring the two boats together in a few hours. Among other things, he was to flash his number once an hour through the night with his Ardois lights on the foremast.

At three in the morning, the *Ranee Sylvia*—knowing by the power of the signals that the two craft were rapidly approaching—made out the *Penelope's* Ardois lights on the horizon. Thinking it only fair, now, to give the Commander a sporting race to close in or avoid it, Trevor had one of his quartermasters flash his own number. Then he called Welling on the short-wave radiophone-set:

"Are you there, Welling? Pleased to see your lights!"

"I say, Your Lordship! We've been doin' a steady thirty-three—takin' a deal of water aboard—an' we must have had a good hundred an' fifty the start of you. If you've made that up since one in the afternoon, yesterday, your boat's a holy wonder!"

"It wasn't the speed, Welling—you've been runnin' around in circles, while we've been respectably keepin' a straight course, though we've done between thirty-two an' thirty-five, according to the way we were heading. But the test has been a success—absolutely! No craft afloat, with one of those radio-beacons operatin' on her, could escape unless she was a lot faster than the pursuin' boat, because every trick of dodgin' she tried would be known the minute she did it. I'll guarantee to hit any boat on deep water, large or small, with one of our beacons on her. The thing didn't miss a single beat, an' it was so noticeably louder when the compass-loop was pointin' your way that they synchronized as I hoped they would in actual practice. I'm under obligations to you an' Admiral Jennifer for the assistance you've given me. If you care to see how good our beacon really is, we'll be the hare and you can be hound on the way back—we'll keep our beacon operatin' for the next twelve hours, shiftin' our course two or three times so you can check up. . . . . Er—about that dinner, now? If you'll drop anchor in Sal-

combe Harbor next Friday afternoon, we'll come aboard of you an' eat it. Then you an' your officers run up to the Hall with us an' spend the week-end—I fancy we've a number of things which might int'rest you. . . . . Agreed? Good!"

WHEN Countess Nan appeared at breakfast, she found that they were running up St. George's Channel instead of for Salcombe—the *Ranee's* home port.

"Where are you taking me, George? We've no guests due immediately, that I can recollect, but I'm busy with a number of things at home."

"Do you good to rest a bit—you work too much. We've tested out the beacon for airplane use—though Welling an' the navy people have no suspicion of that; an' now we're proceeding with that float we tried out the other morning when those spies were determined to get a look-see."

"Fancy I don't quite get the practical application of that float—yet. I know you demonstrated to your satisfaction that any sort of a floating object can be kept upon more or less of a level in a heavy sea. But just what have you in mind?"

"A practical trans-oceanic air service. You've seen the newspaper articles, of course, on the scheme this chap has for building a string of islands across the Atlantic so that planes may land on them for repairs or refueling? Eh? Well, that fellow has a good idea by the tail, but as far as he's gone, he's not worked out a scheme which is in the least practical. But I fancy I have! First place, as we demonstrated, you can't keep that platform or deck anywhere near level in a heavy sea without a stabilizing weight below it at least far enough down to be in absolutely motionless water—or rather water not in the least affected by surface motion. He proposes to build his islands upon pontoons which must be sixty or eighty feet down to get away from surface movement. Well, in what shipyard on this round globe can you launch a big deck fifteen hundred feet long with any such depth of structure under it? Then—he proposes anchoring those islands of his to the ocean-bottom. No reason under the sun for doin' that, by the way! Certainly nothing smaller than three-inch steel cables would begin to hold 'em! And the ocean floor across the Atlantic is from three to five miles straight down—from one thousand to more than three thousand fathoms. Just figure the approximate weight of six or eight three-inch steel cables, each three or four miles long, with anchors heavy enough to hold 'em, and tell me how long a fifteen-hundred-foot float is going to stay above water with that weight hanging from it—say thirty pounds to the foot, for the cables? A good two thousand tons dead-weight for six cables an' anchors. You can float that weight on the surface in a good-sized steamer, but when you've got Western Ocean billows a mile long an' two thousand feet between crests, heaving that long float against that weight, something's going to let go."

"I suppose any such floating islands would have to be held in a fixed spot somehow—wouldn't they?"

"Nan, my dear! I'll admit as a sop to your argum'nt that, with navigation back where it was five-an'-twenty years ago, they would have to be rooted in some way to a fixed latitude an' longitude. But this beacon experiment we've just tested out does away with all that. Give those floatin' islands a bit of motive-power, equip 'em with our radio-beacons—an' we don't give a damn how much they drift, temporarily, because they can be navigated back to their regular position in two or three hours at the most—an' any plane can hit 'em, wherever they are, on the face of the waters! Do you get it?"

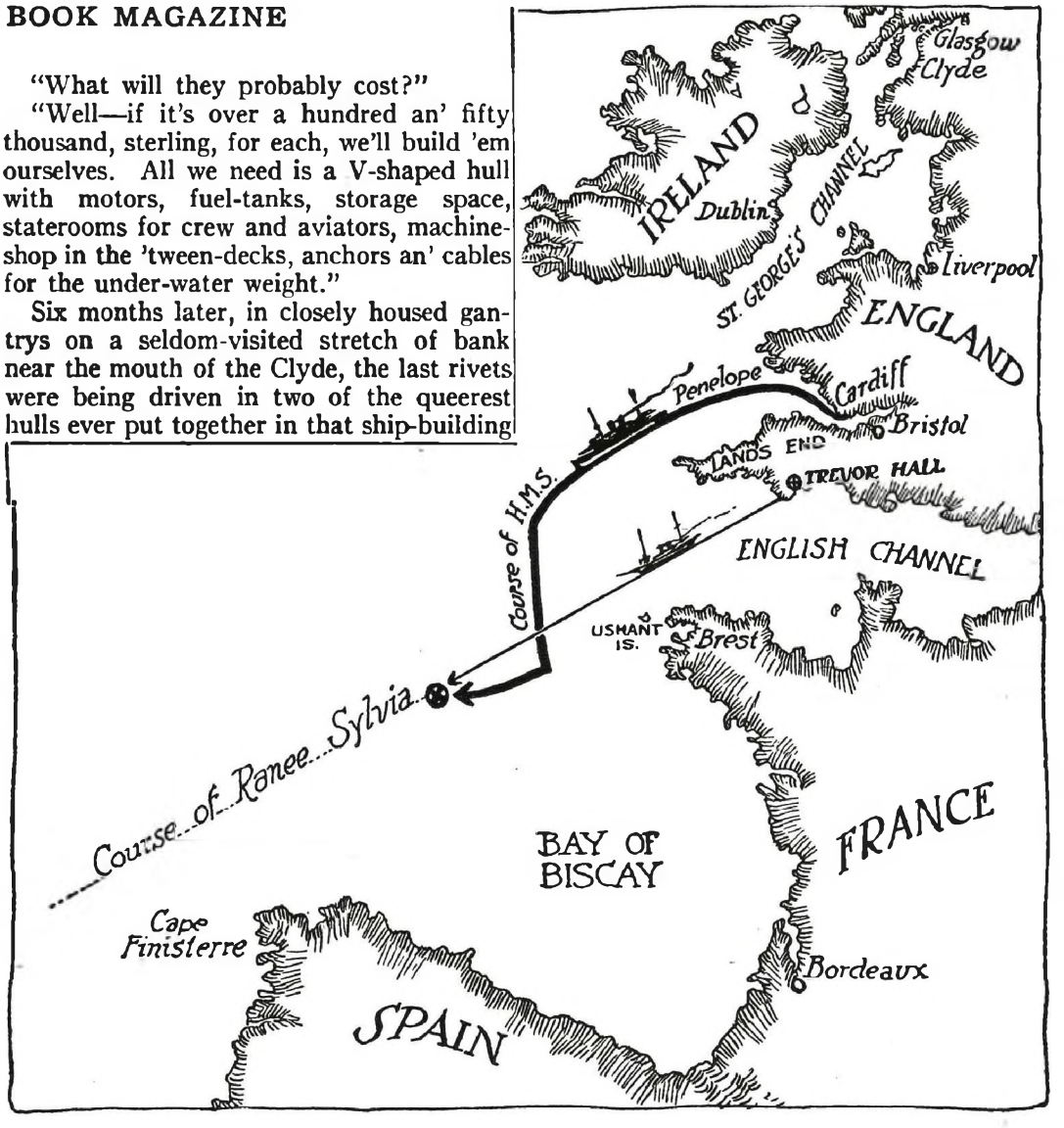
"Oh—I *say!* That's one-up for you, old boy! Then the only two requirements to make that chap's floating-island proposition really practical are these two you've been testing out? What? The means of stabilizing a fairly level deck from which any plane can land or take off—and the beacon to locate 'em, unerringly, at any time of day or night whether they're actually on their proper peg-post or not? Two hundred miles in one direction or another is nothing to an aviator—an hour-and-a-half run at the outside. Good work! And you're running up to the Clyde to have some islands built, are you?"

"That's the idea, exactly—now that we know just where we're at. Two of 'em as a starter—twelve or fifteen hundred feet long—hundred an' thirty feet wide—V-shaped under water—triple-screws—Diesel motors. Lammy's squanderin' his money on one, an' I'm building the other. When both are working successfully, it's a simple enough matter to promote a comp'ny an' sell 'em to it. But we've so beastly much money that we'd never miss the price if we have to junk 'em."

"What will they probably cost?"

"Well—if it's over a hundred an' fifty thousand, sterling, for each, we'll build 'em ourselves. All we need is a V-shaped hull with motors, fuel-tanks, storage space, staterooms for crew and aviators, machine-shop in the 'tween-decks, anchors an' cables for the under-water weight."

Six months later, in closely housed gantrys on a seldom-visited stretch of bank near the mouth of the Clyde, the last rivets were being driven in two of the queerest hulls ever put together in that ship-building river. The day they were launched—with a mere sprinkling of people to see it done, so well had the date been kept secret—a rough wooden box was built over the decks from end to end. No outsider got his nose into that box during the additional three months during which the motors and internal fittings were being installed. A good deal of this work had been done before launching—the less weighty part—so that nine months after the keels had been laid, the still boxed-in monstrosities started down St. George's Channel at a leisurely gait and disappeared in that No Man's Land of the North Atlantic which lies in the bald-spot between the steamer-lanes.



The secret as to the ownership of the two mysterious hulls had been well kept. And when the ugly Noah's arks went off under their own power, the partners, with the senior's private secretary and their chief clerk, were the only persons in Glasgow who knew who were paying for the job—and even they had no clear idea as to what the big floats were to be used for, or where.

THERE was one man who had been hanging about, off and on, from the time the keels were laid. He tried a dozen schemes to get inside the enclosure. In any other country but Scotland, he would have succeeded. But—"Whin a Scot says nae, he aye means nae—he'll no' argue wi' ye!" Haupt was one of the scattering few who saw the launching—from a boat in the river, which was hustled so far up by the firm's boatmen who were keeping the river clear that he only got a fleeting glimpse some distance away. He dropped down alongside the hulls when they were in the water, but never got aboard—he was quickly hauled out by the river-patrol.

When the "arks" disappeared, Haupt took the night train for London. Next afternoon he called at the very respectable house, in a very respectable street, of Dr. Karl Earhardt—a nerve-specialist who was becoming rather famous. The doctor received no patients in the afternoon. Those who called by appointment were employees of one sort or another, though supposed to be special patients who paid rather stiff fees. When Haupt entered the private office and closed the door, he stood at attention—waiting for the Doctor to speak.

"Well, animal!" exclaimed the supposed physician, in a Continental language. "What have you to tell me—from Glasgow?"

"Nothing but inference and theory, Excellency. That gantry-enclosure and the boxes on those hulls were the only places in all my life that I couldn't get into! I have told you, Excellency, of the various ways I have tried. In all the other yards, I've not done so badly!"

"And who are you that you should talk about doing well or badly?"

"I—I do my best, Excellency; if it is not satisfactory—well—I put a bullet through my head."

"And then perhaps it is a month—two months—before I get another animal who would not make even more mistakes than you! You will not plop the bullet until I say! I do not permit! Look you. It is necessary that we should control the world commerce—that is self-evident. But these English—they work all the time in very underhanded way to accomplish the same thing for themselves. There is somebody here in this country who is like the big whale—not the small flappers which squirt the water on the surface, but the old grandfather whale way down deep who make everything else move when he moves. Haupt, I suspect this Earl Trevor and his friends, for many years. He has wide commercial interests, he is millionaire so many times that the word does not mean anything to him or his most intimate friends; he was in the Cabinet—in fact, I think he ran the Cabinet. Now he is out, he must have a hobby to occupy his time. He experiments for the Government in radio, chemistry and aërial navigation. . . . .

"Now—those hulls in Glasgow? We do not know who is building them; we cannot learn. Perhaps the Government. Perhaps this Trevor and his friends *for* the Government. It is more likely he than anyone else I can think of. For what he builds them, we do not know—I could guess for some kind of airplane-carrier, but they cannot be fast enough for that with any such length and bulk. Anyhow—we must watch everything doing over here until we find out what for, and then—we get busy! You understand? You will be discreet—you must be efficient, or I flay the skin off you! Here is money! Go!"

BACK at Trevor Hall on that same day, they were completing in one of the hangars a new type of amphibian plane which would carry twelve passengers with mail and luggage, be constantly in communication with its airdromes by radio-telephone, be navigated almost entirely by radio-beacon, carry enough fuel for a two thousand mile flight with full load, or three thousand miles with half-load. Two of the admirals were down for the week-end to inspect it with His Lordship, and admitted that it was the most practical, businesslike ship they had yet seen. But the radio-telephoning they didn't quite understand.

"How much range does Your Lordship expect to get with the voice over the equipment we see here in this cabin? Is this all of it?"

"Aye—an' I've got the total weight down to a hundred an' eighty pounds. Most planes run their motor-generator by a wind-fan outside of the fuselage, which slightly retards the speed of the plane. I run it by storage battery while actually broadcasting, but when not transmitting I can be recharging the battery with the outside fan or stop it if I don't really need the juice. Then if the motors fail and you have to land, the wireless is still good for some hours use from the battery alone. We don't expect to need much over three thousand miles range—but using the six short-waves upon which we've been experimenting, we get over five thousand, night an' day."

"My word! I'd not have believed that possible! But why telephone instead of using code—which is lighter and cheaper?"

"Altogether too slow for an airplane traveling nearly three miles a minute! A pilot may have a lot of instructions to give between the time his motor fails an' the moment he hits ground or water."

"An' what particular use do you put these two loops to, if one may ask? I notice you run your aërial back from a short streamline pole to the rudder-socket."

"Hmph! That's the time you caught me, Admiral! Something the boys have been

rigging-up, I fancy. What are they for, Harry?"

Archer was grinning delightedly.

"Oh, that's just a bit of surprise Her Ladyship worked out for you. She said you'd been ritzy about your old radio-beacon ever since that test with the *Penelope*, so she came down from the Hall a few evenings and worked this out all by herself—calls it a 'radio-beacon detector.' An'—no joking, Your Lordship—we fancy she's put it all over you! It's really the slickest contraption we've yet seen! I can diagram it on paper better than I can show you from anything there is to see—it's as simple as a hairpin fish-hook. You notice the two loops, one at each side of the cockpit, locked in position—edges pointing fifteen degrees to the right and to the left of the ship's longitudinal axis? Below them, these two little black boxes with single dial and control-knob—short-wave sets. The right-hand one is tuned to thirty-five meters—the left one, forty-five meters. Head-phones connect with both at the same time. The radio-beacon, wherever it happens to be, is transmitting A's on thirty-five meters—B's, on forty-five. Well—you catch it, don't you? Swing your plane a little off your true course to the right, and your B-loop on the left comes directly in line with the beacon—while the A-loop on the right is fetched broadside to the beacon and doesn't bring in anything at all. The B-loop, being tuned to forty-five meters, is catching the B's from the beacon on the same wave. You know that if you were getting A's from the beacon on your right side-loop, the beacon would be on that side. As you're getting nothing but B's, the beacon must be on your left. Consequently, you are steering to right of the beacon. To get back onto it again, you must shift your rudder to port and steer left until you begin to get A's through your head-phones—then shift a little to the right, again, and you're dead-on the beacon—simply can't miss it! Of course these fixed loops accomplish much the same result as your radio-compass—loosen the nut and you can use them as a compass. But they do it automatically, without any calculating—no looking at the chart, no synchronizing a compass-card—practically no weight to speak of—not ten pounds altogether, if you rob a trickle of juice from the main storage-battery. As long as your old radio-beacon is working, you can nail it from any distance, straight as a homing pigeon!"

"By Jove, Harry, that's one of the cleverest things I ever saw worked out! But—look here! That dead-side loop wont be *altogether* dead—will it?"

"If you're using a lot of power, you may get a faint murmur from it, but it'll be a fade-out compared with the strength of signal from the other loop, just as a big radio-compass loop is nothing but a murmur on the flat side. With the vibration of the plane, I doubt if you hear anything at all from the dead loop. With the power slightly cut down, I know you wont!"

"Fancy we'll have to give the Countess a party for this stunt! What?"

"She's been hinting it'll run to rather more than that, sir—says she's going to pilot the plane as soon as the bearings are smoothed down a bit and the beacons are working."

"Hmph! Joke of it is, we'd have one deuce of a job stoppin' her! Only thing we can do, I fancy, is get the ship in first-class running order before she tries it."

THAT evening, in the radio-room at the Hall, they got the first beats of the radio-beacon on one of the big floats—which was then in the position it was to occupy for some months at least: Lon. 13-30 W.—Lat. 47 N. The other float was just about reaching the spot in the North Atlantic where she was to remain indefinitely: Lon. 19 W.—Lat. 43-30 N. Each of these positions was from one hundred to five hundred miles from the regular steamer-tracks to Europe. When the regularity of the beat indicated that the float had settled down to business with all of her radio-equipment in working order, His Lordship switched in a short-wave telephone-transmitter on fifty-six meters and commenced calling: "GLOX—GLOX—GLOX"—the short-wave letters which had been assigned to it; and in a moment, he got an acknowledgment. The master in command of the float was enthusiastic over the appearance and performance of his odd-looking craft, now that all the wooden boxing had been removed. He said that with his three screws and the Diesel motors he had been able to maintain an average of nearly sixteen knots—with the long cables and anchors hauled up into the hull, of course—and had done over twelve in a pretty heavy sea. Two days' observations with a pretty heavy sea running showed the drift to be about a quarter of a knot an hour, with the anchors twelve hundred feet below the

deck-level at the end of their chain-cables. He was under the impression that with a fairly smooth sea the drift wouldn't amount to half a knot a day; it would not be necessary to turn his screws over more than half an hour each day to keep exactly on his position. As for his four auxiliary planes, he said that even in the heaviest sea the angle of slope from a dead-level on deck hadn't been more than three per cent—that the planes had taken off from and landed on the deck without a single mishap.

His Lordship had been a little doubtful about the obstruction offered to planes in the air by the big squat ventilating-funnel, conning tower and aërials, but Manning explained that there could be no risk as long as the wind was not blowing directly toward them. This risk he obviated by keeping the float constantly bow and stern to the wind. Hauling up his anchors for a few moments, he reversed two of his screws and turning the other ahead—then dropped his anchors when he was heading into the wind. It took some hours to swing off again—usually the wind shifted first. They had speculated somewhat upon how much trouble the lift of the whole float when riding the big deep-sea billows was going to make in landing a plane on the deck—but had found in actual practice that the twenty or thirty feet of rise between trough and crest was so much slower than the plane's landing speed that the pilots had been able to gauge it successfully. Their greatest anxiety had been from the flooding of the deck when the seas were shorter and choppy. But the long space had been paved with rough tiling which absolutely prevented any skidding of the rubber tires when landing—and running through a few inches of wash was all in the day's work for any plane.

BEFORE Manning signed off, he reported a close investigation of them by what looked like a fast yacht of possibly twelve hundred tons—painted black, flying no flags of any description. After circling about the float twice and examining her with glasses from their bridge, they had steamed away in a northeasterly direction, talking by wireless as they went, with some W/T Station on the Continent, and in a language which Manning didn't recognize. It appeared evident that some other government or organization was observing their operations closely, and undoubtedly would be out to look at them again in that same general neighborhood. After repeating this to the others, His Lordship switched off and lighted a fresh cigar.

"I anticipated sabotage from some of those bounders on the Continent as soon as they found out what we were up to—and armed each of those scout-planes connected with the floats with two machine-guns, also equipm'nt for refueling in the air if necess'ry. But it looks to me as though machine-guns'll not be enough! I fancy their first attempt at interference will be from a bombing-plane—which, with luck, might sink the float with high-explosive an' get back to land without having its identity discovered. Well—the scout-planes will take care of that, I'm fairly confident. The masters of the floats will know several hours in advance just which an' how many of our planes are on the way to them, and exactly how they are marked, so that build an' markings will be recognized at some distance. They'll also know in advance of any trans-Atlantic flights an' be lookin' for those planes. But those bounders are likely to come out with a deep-sea yacht or any fast secondhand boat with one or two eight-inch naval guns. I fancy we'll just send down a couple of tri-motored bombing-planes for each float. At the least sign of unlimbering a gun in the vicinity of our floats, we sink 'em, taking photographs of 'em first—telephoto-lens—just as proof that we were justified. . . . . Harry—you've two bombers down there in the hangars which can start within an hour or so. Get them off, will you?"

DURING the next two days they made test-flights with the new amphibian plane until it was pronounced in perfect condition for a trans-Atlantic flight. After dinner on the second evening, it was run out over the cliff-brow with Countess Nan at the controls—Harry Archer looking after motors and equipment, and the two earls and two admirals as passengers in the comfortable cabin chairs. The cabin was very well insulated from the noise of the three big motors, though some of it got in through two windows of armor-glass which had been partly opened for ventilation. But conversation was much easier that it would have been in a subway-train, at that. As yet, the admirals had not grasped, from anything which had been said, just what sort of air service His Lordship and his friends had in mind, and they now wished to know if this might be explained to them.

When Lammerjord saw through his glasses that both guns had been elevated for a four-mile range, Nan swooped down abreast of the yacht.

He drew from a locker at one side of the cabin a radio-beacon and W/T chart of the Atlantic, and spread it out upon a folding-table between the chairs.

"Eighteen months ago, gentlemen, the question came up at a Cabinet meeting as to how far we were from established air-mail and passenger service across the Atlantic. I tried to impress upon the other ministers that when such service is in operation it must be along just one course—which never will be the northern one via Newfoundland. Told 'em I had already formed a syndicate, got a concession from the Portuguese governm'nt, bought up the only four practical areas for landing-fields in the Azores, and equipped them for such purpose—and under the rose, fortified them sufficiently for protection. A German syndicate wasn't more than two jumps behind me, at that—but I beat them all along the line from Lisbon to Horta. Well, the ministers couldn't see the southern route at all—admitted the danger of ice, snow and westerly gales up north, but said the Azores route was much too far—though there isn't more than four hundred miles difference between the two—to New York. I bet five thousand pounds that I'd fly over an' back that way without mishap—my landing-field on Pico, across the strait from Horta, was already equipped. They took me up. I left Trevor Hall on Monday morning, was in New York an' Washington a day—and walked into the Cabinet room at Downing Street the following Friday afternoon.

"Well—I learned a good bit on that trip. I made it—am perfectly confident of doin' it again with a plane I'm sure is in proper condition. But in the present stage of airplane, an' more particularly pilot developm'nt, the service quite probably could not be dependable. We've been working upon the problem of how to make it more so. Then along comes this chap with his scheme for anchored landing-islands in mid-ocean. He's on the track of the right idea—but his proposition, so far, isn't practical at all. We borrowed from it—an' have worked out something which is entirely practical. From Plymouth to Horta is twelve hundred sixty-eight sea miles—perfectly all right for any of our lot from Trevor Hall, but not a dependable flight over water in the teeth of an ocean gale with average pilots. So I'm splitting that distance up into three flights of about four hundred an' twenty miles, each. If a pilot can't make that in most any old weather, he'd better keep an instructor with him when flying. The Countess' beacon detector makes it impossible to miss any of the floats—you fly to them straight as an arrow—and if you don't like to risk landing on 'em, one of their planes comes up an' refuels you as you fly.

If your motor goes phut, they come out an' rescue you. From Horta to New York is two thousand ninety-four miles. Three floats cuts it down to five-hundred-an'-twenty-five mile hops. We're trying out the Azores flight until we do it as dependably as clock-work. Then we'll have those other floats ready and open up the whole service. We're by long odds the first in the field of commercial trans-oceanic flying—and that's going to be of immense advantage to every corner of the Empire. But we shall have to fight for it and stand some losses before we're through!"

THE amphibian was good for 160 miles an hour if crowded, but about a hundred was a more economical speed. So they should be within a mile or two of "GLOX" before two o'clock in the morning. There was no chance of their missing her—the old beacon was rapping away as steadily as the heart-beat of a healthy person. At midnight, after he had picked up a lot of ship-gossip on six hundred meters, Lammerford called the float on fifty-six and got the night-operator at once. He said that another plane, possibly two hundred miles behind them, had been talking with some Continental station on 39.7 meters in a foreign language. He was fairly sure that he had caught the letters AFU—which would be Königswusterhausen—but not positive. After telling him that they should be on the float in an hour and a half and that it might be well to have two combat-planes in the air within a few minutes, Lammerford switched to 39.7—kept shoving the power up and down for ten minutes without any results—though stations were talking a few points on either side. Then suddenly there came a call for AJXY, and a transmitter rather close to the plane replied in French:

"Have you reason to believe A-B signals are some sort of beacon on that plane-carrier?"

"They are in direction carrier was last seen, Excellency. Radio-compass checks up. Consider that source probable."

"How far are you from plane-carrier?"

"Less than 500 kilometers from position logged by yacht, Excellency."

"Fly toward supposed beacon. If plane-carrier is located before daylight, sink it. Make no attempt in daytime. There must be no evidence. With no evidence left about, anyone may sink a boat on the high seas and get away with it."

Lammerford whistled.

"What's up, Lammy?" asked Trevor.

"That damned scoundrel behind us has just got orders to sink our float before daylight if he can locate it—and he thinks A-B beacon must be on it! Wait till I call up Manning!"

The float master was at the "mike" in less than five minutes.

"I say, Manning! Switch off your beacon at once! We'll manage to locate you, somehow. Throw the flood-lights along the deck so that we can see where we're landing. We're fifteen thousand feet up, so we'll prob'ly see the glow from the floods somewhere along the horizon, an' make for it—lucky it's a good clear night. The moment we're down on your deck, switch off every light that shows outside. There's enough wind to drift that other plane a bit wide of you without the beacon to guide him. Are the combat-planes up? Good!"

IN about five minutes, they spotted a little spark of light on the horizon and headed for it, as the spark appeared to be in exactly the right direction. Hurriedly scribbling on a bit of paper: "Enemy following—beacon ordered off—head for spark of light on horizon—as you are," Lammerford passed it around Nan's shoulder in the pilot-enclosure. She nodded—having suspected some such reason for the beacon's silence. Another twenty-five minutes, and they came down softly in a perfect landing on the light-flooded deck of the big float. The moment they were all out of the cabin, a sudden pall of darkness fell upon them, for every visible light was switched off. The conning-tower, the tall aërial mast and the big squat funnel and its gratings were the only projections above the deck-level. Both conning-tower and funnel were built out from the side of the float on a sponson, and the steering was done by electric control when the motors were running.

Climbing to this navigating-cabin, they made themselves comfortable while the radio-operator, who was listening on 39.7 meters, presently told them that the enemy had been talking with his superior officers again, reporting the stoppage of beacon-signals and saying that he was proceeding on the same course in the hope of locating the mysterious float. Then Sparks tuned to fifty-six meters and spoke to the pilot of one combat-plane, who had a telephone-exchange transmitter strapped on his chest and head-phones inside his leather helmet, with the short-wave dial on the instrument-

board in front of him. His mechanic started or stopped the motor-generator at a hand-signal. Sparks told him of the enemy approaching from about 55 degrees (N. E. by E.) and suggested his flying back a few miles in that direction.

As it began to look increasingly likely that there would be an aërial fight close aboard if they were not actually bombed, Captain Manning became nervous.

"Beg pardon, Your Lordship, but it looks as though we may be catching it hot, here, within the half-hour! Wouldn't it be advisable for your party to be takin' off in your own plane an' at least gettin' well above the mess, in the air?"

The earls and Archer chuckled.

"Er—thank you, Manning. Very thoughtful of you. But none of us ever yet have asked our people an' friends to stop on in a spot where we didn't fancy it safe to stop, ourselves. Thanks, old chap, but we stop an' see the show with you! No argum'nt!"

AT first it seemed as if what show there was might be a mile or two away—it was at least that when the combat-plane began peppering the enemy bomber from a point over her. And in the darkness, with nothing but a vague blur underneath to shoot at, they did very well. But the bomber happened to be a faster boat, and in shooting ahead, passed directly over the float—low enough to see the outline on the water. Banking and whirling about, the bomber came directly back and released two of her aërial torpedoes. It was impossible, however, to calculate speed and angle of drop in the darkness, and the torpedoes hit the water a good six hundred feet beyond the float, not exploding until they were fifty feet down. A great mound of water was thrown upward, and those on the float were almost jarred off their feet by the shock, but—no other harm was done. Before the bomber could bank and come back, the second combat-plane was pouring machine-gun bullets into her cockpits, killing the men in her and sending the plane down out of sight in the sea.

The whole affair was over inside of an hour from the time they had landed. Then, their amphibian having had her fuel-tanks refilled, they took off for the second float—*GBTX*—which had reported by phone that she was on her position ready for business. Her beacon was turned to 30.8 and 40.7 meters, and so the loop-sets on the amphibian were tuned to synchronize with those frequencies. Without even making any conscious effort to lay a course, Countess Nan—automatically shifting her joy-stick as indicated by the A's and B's in her head-phones—flew straight to the deck of *GBTX*, and came down in a beautiful landing at eight-thirty in the morning.

Chalfont, the master, reported no sign of interest in them from any steamer or plane—in fact, being farther off from any of the steamer-tracks than the *GLOX*, he had seen but one trail of smoke on the horizon since he parted company with her. As he was sending up no smoke at all, and had a deck but eighteen feet above water, with conning-tower and funnel making but a single narrow projection of sixty feet over that, he couldn't have been made out with a glass on a clear day at ten miles' distance. And this was a feature which the two earls had calculated upon in designing the floats—first, to give them the lowest possible visibility, and then to select positions on the chart where even cargo-boats were not likely to come within two hundred miles of them at least. Leaving the *GBTX* shortly after ten, they came down on the Pico flying-field owned by the syndicate which the Trevors controlled at half-past two in the afternoon, just seventeen hours from South Devon—which would have been under fifteen except for the delay caused by the bomber. Next day they started back, stopping but an hour on the *GBTX*.

Half an hour that side of the *GLOX*, however, they sighted a black yacht which seemed to answer Manning's description.

HE had said nothing about seeing a gun on her, but as they looked down upon the yacht's bow, four sailors were removing a wooden housing from an eight-inch naval rifle. On the after-deck were other sailors casting off housing from another gun. A broadside of two eight-inch projectiles filled with high-explosive which lets go upon impact can be amazingly destructive, though with twenty-four transverse steel bulkheads in her fifteen hundred foot length, it would have taken a dozen or more of such charges to sink the float.

Unquestionably the yacht's commander proposed to use those guns upon something—and the *GLOX* was the only "something" within a two hundred-mile radius. Trevor called the float, told Manning to get his two bombing-planes into the air at once, fly at top speed for the yacht and sink her as soon as she fired the first shot. Then

the Countess took the amphibian out of sight, but not before Harry Archer got a dozen five-by-seven negatives from a camera equipped with a telephoto lens—negatives which showed every detail of the two guns, with the projectiles on carriers alongside of them and the men loading.

The bombers flew sufficiently wide to prevent being spotted by the yacht, and when they came up astern, were supposed to be planes sent out to assist in her work, so that no attention was paid to them when they were directly overhead. Countess Nan was now coming up behind, over the bombers. When Lammerford saw through his glasses that both guns had been elevated for a four-mile range, he tapped Nan on the shoulder. She swooped down abreast of the yacht, not more than two hundred feet above the water, and when the yacht's bow swung to port so that both guns could fire, Archer's hands and Earl Trevor's were jabbing the cable-releases of their cameras on one one-hundredth-second exposure just as the fire and black smoke belched from the muzzles of the guns. They got two more shots when the projectiles hit the water eight hundred feet short of the float.

It takes some time to swab and reload an eight-inch naval gun. The gunners never had a chance to fire another shot. One aërial torpedo plunked through the yacht's funnel-grating, wrecking engines and boilers, ripping a hole in her bottom. Another hit the stern not far from the gun. Thirty or more of the officers and crew managed to get boats into the water before she went down, and started pulling toward the float four miles away—but this the bombing-planes wouldn't allow. They sprinkled the water ahead of the boats with bullets and waved them away to eastward. One of the boats was a petrol launch—presumably with enough in her tanks to make the coast of France near Brest, towing the others. All ships' boats are supposed to have water and hard-tack aboard. If these didn't, they were out of luck—but they were not going to be taken aboard that float. That much was certain. . . . .

Beginning very shortly—if the big floats are not sunk by Continental competitors—you may leave Croydon at six in the morning and eat an eight-o'clock dinner that same evening at the new hotel in Fayal of the Azores—thirteen hundred miles away, in a tropical climate. And three other floats have been laid down in the shipyards at the mouth of the Clyde.

It Takes the Legion

By

WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

Wherein the Hell's Angels squad undertakes a desperate mission on behalf of a Trans-Saharan railroad —and many exciting things happen.

Illustrated by
Paul Lehman

HELL'S ANGELS squad of the Foreign Legion certainly thought this scheme of Hortet's the craziest yet, but they had all volunteered just the same. They were to make a night dash of sixteen miles into the heart of the turbulent Tafilelt, were to talk with a certain old Soudanese marabout who was well up in voodoo and witchcraft, and with his "magic" were to find a ten-year-old Arab boy who was the Caliph of the Tafilelt, if one still existed. He had been hidden away for more than five years.

The Tafilelt, a huge oasis at the foot of the Grand Atlas on the Sahara side, may be described briefly as the key to the new Trans-Saharan Railroad now going forward. Many great caravan routes converge here, and from it lead, through two mountain passes, the main highways to Fez and Marrakesh. Politically it belongs to Morocco, but it is of more interest to Algeria, for her Trans-Saharan is to run down the Saoura Valley, and right on the flank of that is the Tafilelt, only the Hammada du Guir separating them. This hammada, being a dry stony waste, is impenetrable to infantry and is therefore the finest of refuges for raiding harkas from the Tafilelt attacking the traffic in the Saoura Valley.

Five years ago the Légion and some na-

tive units had taken the Tafilelt after twenty pitched battles against its desert invaders under Belkacem; and Hortet himself had actually captured that desert sultan during the taking of Tighemart. And then—Abd-el-Krim had struck out of the Riff up north. What had happened since then only Intelligence knew. There had been civil war throughout the Tafilelt, and the Caliphate had been wiped out. Belkacem had escaped, had retaken the Tafilelt and proclaimed himself sultan, independent of Fez.

During the Riff War, and for two years after it, nothing had been done by Morocco about the Tafilelt. And now it had come to the point where Algeria had to pacify it if Morocco couldn't or wouldn't. For she required a cessation of Belkacem's continuous raids if her Trans-Saharan was to be built. And the first thing needed was a new Caliph, for without him no help could be expected from the friendly tribes, and the French themselves would be regarded as invaders. And then that daring firebrand Hortet had proposed to Commandant Knecht that a small party of the Légion make a dash into the oasis and try to locate this boy as a first preliminary. Knecht had bethought him of a certain holy man who had voodoo powers and had been useful to them in the earlier campaign. He would know all about this boy, if anybody. He was to be found in a certain cemetery near the citadel of Abd-el-Halim.

At that moment there rang down from the minaret cupola high above the palms the dread cry: "Harka! Harka! Close the gates!"

A bizarre and fantastic enterprise; but you would not have guessed it to hear the prompt and businesslike yelps of *"Présent!"* as Sergeant Texas Ike called the roll by the yellow light of a lantern: "Criswell! Blake! Di Piatti! Austen! Rosskoff! Mora!"

One by one Hell's Angels jumped into line in the dark court of Poste Erfoud, stood with bayoneted rifles grounded, olive-drab wool overcoats with tails buttoned back exposing their olive-brown breeches and spiral puttees in marching order—stood with faces set rigidly "front," black képis all in a line, coat-lapels another line of black points with the green letter "2" on them, their blue sashes, with can-

vas belts centering the blue in a slash of white, a third line of similarity. Just a squad, out of seventeen thousand Légion men just like them; but as Commandant Knecht had said when Intelligence owned up to failure with this Caliph business: *"Bah!* It takes the Légion!"

"And back of it all is our railroad, the Trans-Saharien. Eh, Ressot?" Commandant Knecht was saying at that moment. He advanced out of the midnight shadows of the court to give the squad its final send-off. The lantern had been set down, and Lieutenants Hortet and Ressot had taken positions at opposite ends of the short line. Before them stood their chief of battalion, huge, bearded, genial and urbane.

"Mes enfants," he addressed them huskily, "dangerous as is your mission, I have seized for you the moment most propitious. Sultan Belkacem, we learn, has left the Tafilelt with a harka of six hundred guns. Over in the Hammada du Guir our comrades of the Auto-mitrailleuse Corps are making a daring reconnaissance as far south as the Teniet el Beradine. We believe this harka is looking for them. . . . . They have been warned by wireless from Bou Denib. And meanwhile your road is open for a bold push south to Tighemart and beyond if necessary. We know the former Caliph Moulay el Mahdi, also his brother Moulay Abdallah, were killed in battle with Belkacem after we left here five years ago.

"What is left of the Caliphate, then? Was all the family killed, where we left them installed in Khasbah Abd-el-Halim? Through Intelligence we learn that a little boy of six was on pilgrimage to Mecca during those native battles around Tighemart after we left. He returned by the usual route, by ship to Gabès in Tunis; by caravan via Tozeur, Ouargla, El Golea, Timimoun. One thousand kilos of desert, *mes enfants,* and it takes six months! There are rumors that this boy Caliph reached the extreme south of the Tafilelt and has been hidden there, out of Belkacem's reach, these five years. How are you to find him, in this great oasis that has two million date-palms and is fifty miles long and twenty wide? *Le voudou!* It is fantastic, *hein?* But we who have lived long in Africa, we are humble before *le voudou!* We have seen too much to laugh. I myself have consulted this marabout Sidi Bou Soudani, with profit. *Eh bien,* if you fail, you will have at least made a valuable reconnaissance.

"Enfants! The eyes of Algeria are on you! At the ancient capital of the Tafilelt —at ancient Sidjilmassa, *mes enfants*—will we build a new fort and a palace of government. And there we will install the rightful Caliph—I care not if he is but a boy of ten! My brave *garçons,* my heart and my prayers are with you! May you succeed! And—*toujours l'audace!"*

KNECHT ceased with that stirring war-cry of the Légion. Ike felt like raising a cheer, but all he said was: *"Houp! Gardez vous! Salut!"*

They presented arms to the Commandant's drawn sword upheld before his visor. Then out of the gate under the dark stars they marched, down the long zigzags of the Djebel Erfoud to the valley of the Ziz.

Slam—slam—slam! Down that immemorial caravan route from the Tafilelt over the mountains to Fez marched Hell's Angels—to interview an old voodoo man and find a child Caliph who was probably nonexistent! Surely a fantastic mission anywhere, but—in Africa! It was the first time in five years that the military step of marching men had been heard in this vast palmery, ruled arbitrarily now by Sultan Belkacem.

The squad knew that they were walking into the jaws of death with this night raid into his territory, but they pounded along at their fast quickstep, occupied mostly with memories. Yonder in the gloom they could see the towers of Ksar el Meski, where Criswell's platoon had been badly cut up in a savage fight five years ago, beleaguered by those desert allies of the Aït Atta, the Regg and Ferkla. Hortet had made the sortie that had saved Criswell, but had been killed himself—only he wouldn't stay dead! An Arab slug had bounced off his thick skull. They would have buried him, however, had not Knecht attempted to remove his watch to send to his people —at which the old zou-zou had suddenly come to life.

Slam—slam—slam! The *ksourien* in his little fortified farmhouse by the roadside heard that military sound in the dead of night and nudged his wife, praising God. Were the French back, at long last? They had been taxed to death under Sultan Belkacem these five years! The *fonduks* heard it, and sleepy caravaneers of the Doui Menia confederation listened in wonder and in hope. They had been paying shameful tribute to Belkacem for the mere priv-

ilege of coming into the Tafilelt with their great caravans, up from the desert and the Soudan. Yet the Tafilelt was the sole Saharan port for Morocco, this great oasis where the road to Fez began.

IT was two o'clock in the morning, and they were passing Dar el Beïda, where the great palmery battle under Knecht, Lamy, and Courtois had taken place. Four miles more to Tighemart!

Ressot left the main road at Dar el Beïda and struck due south down a palmery lane. Dawn was nearing, and to the ceaseless barking of dogs at them was now being added the prodigious chorus of thousands of roosters. Every little *ksar* had its flock, and old chanticleer was thinking about getting up and telling everyone else about it. Their footfalls were muffled, now, in the soft clay. Beyond lay the big fortified town of Khasbah Abd-el-Halim, built entirely of the ruins of Moorish and Roman architecture. Ike wondered if those steel butcher-hooks of sickle size still adorned its citadel court. Moulay el Mahdi had been installed there by Knecht after Hortet had taken the town for its Roman loot, but he had not lasted long, once Belkacem had escaped.

Ressot turned up the slopes toward the high escarpments bordering the Ziz valley when about a mile from Abd-el-Halim. In the pale gloom of early dawn they came to a wretched and forlorn Arab cemetery, with low mud walls, some distance above the farthest palms. It had a small white *koubba* in it, the domed hut of a marabout, surrounded by narrow Moslem graves with pathetic crescents on sticks and tattered rags of flags planted all about. Here the squad halted, grounded their arms, rested on knees and hams. It did not seem possible that that hut could hold an entire human being, however wizened and small, but it did. The muttering of prayers came from within: *"B'ism Allah, Er-Rachmani, Er-Rahim!"*

—"In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate!"

"Ya Sidi Bou Soudani!" called out Ressot. No response from within. The Fatha, the opening sura of the Koran, was occupying all the marabout's attention and his murmur continued: *"Eyaka nabudu, u Eyaka nastaeen!"*

—"Thee only we adore, to Thee only cry for help!"

"Ya Sidi Bou Soudani!" repeated Ressot impatiently. "Comes the dawn, and we must go!"

The prayer continued a moment more. Then there was a rustle within and presently emerged through the low door of the *koubba* what appeared to be the head of the marabout, incredibly old and wrinkled. Its black eyes were bright as points of light, and penetrating. One felt a queer sensation when they rested on one, and Hortet crossed himself surreptitiously.

"Praise be to God!" said the head in a high, thin voice. "The Deliverers! *Aiwa*—him who ye seek is not here, O soldiers."

THERE was an uncomfortable movement in the squad. No one had told him yet of their mission, but he seemed to have divined it. Ike and Anzac Bill were looking on him with the keenest interest now, for both knew something of voodoo. The African witch-doctors had powers of divination, thought-telepathy, hypnotism, that no one seriously doubted save educated people bolstered up by the conceit of scientists. Mental mysteries, these were, things of which we know little but Africa much. Ike had known cases of magic in the negro South that left you little but blank incomprehension to fall back upon. And Anzac Bill, during his service with the Basutoland Mounted, had seen marvels that you could believe or not as you pleased; they had happened, and there was no explanation. Ressot, with his service in the Camel Corps, had seen more of it than any of them. Commandant Knecht could not have picked a better man for this curious mission, bizarre and Oriental in the extreme—white soldiers relying on the weird powers of a voodoo man!

"Is he hidden somewhere in the Tafilelt, ya Sidi?" asked Ressot as if it were the most natural question in the world.

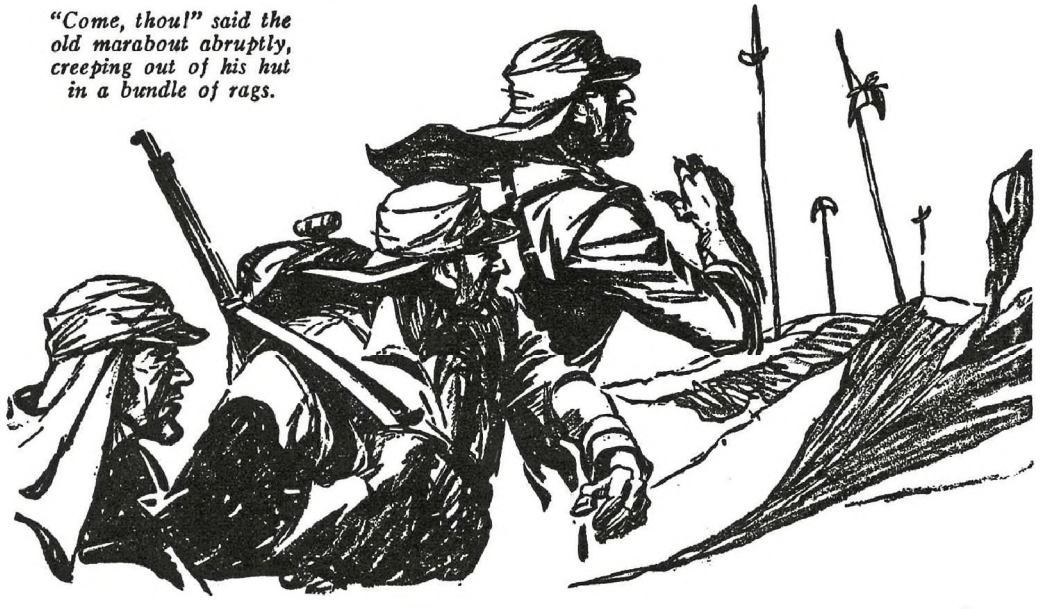
"Nay, I know not. But I ask my tree," replied the marabout.

"Morbleu!" grunted Hortet impatiently. "The sun rises, Ressot!" he growled, fidgeting.

"Peace, thou!" said Ressot sternly, and Ike nodded agreement. He too had heard of this "tree-talking." The voodoo man established some subtle thought transference with a certain tree. Somehow it put him in communication with facts that might be happening continents away, or might have happened years ago. The tree knew. All that men knew was that the facts turned out to be so. "Lay low an'

learn somethin', Looie!" Ike rumbled, forcing Hortet down with a horny paw.

"*Aiwa,* murder was like the drinking of milk here, after ye French went away!" reminisced the marabout, becoming excited. "Nay, but he frowned! May he be cursed, how he plotted! Nay, but he was outrageous, and stormed the citadel of the Caliph with men and ladders! Yea, they drove him up a hill, but he prevailed and all were slain! But Allah, He hears and knows, and terrible will be the day of His smiting!"



"Come, thou!" said the old marabout abruptly, creeping out of his hut in a bundle of rags.

They pieced out this outburst with what Intelligence already knew. Belkacem had escaped or been rescued, then had stormed Abd-el-Halim. There had been a sortie and a battle, in which the Doui Menia had got the worst of it. That was where Moulay el Mahdi and his brother had been killed and the Aït Atta had taken over the Tafilelt. Then the assassination of their chief, Sidi n' Ifrouten, and Belkacem had proclaimed himself Sultan.

"Were all slain of the House of Alouia, ya Sidi?" pursued Ressot.

"*Aiwa!* He slew them, men, women and children! All but the boy, Sidi el Hadj, who was away on pilgrimage to Mecca."

That they also knew; and the marabout may have known it also, from merely being here, unmolested as a holy man. To test his real powers, Ressot asked next: "What of the Doui Menia right now, ya Sidi?"

"*Now?*" The wizened face closed its eyes and went off into a sort of trance. "*Aiwa!*" he said presently. "A great caravan of a thousand camels! Nay, two thousand! They are crossing the barren hills of the Hammada Guir. *Aiwa!* It is the gorge of the Teniet el Beradine that they near. And lo, four wagons without mules come out of the Teniet. They gleam with steel and have guns in their roofs. *Barik Allah!* The Doui Menia leave their caravan and hasten before the wagons and fall down on their beards adoring! There are soldiers of ye French, who get out and parley with them—the Liberators!"

He awoke at that word, blinked on them inquiringly. What had he seen? he asked. Weird, this! If he was not describing that auto-mitrailleuse reconnaissance of Captain Chevrier's, what *was* he? But the Teniet el Beradine was a hundred and thirty kilometers away, over on the east side of the Hammada. Yet ordinary arithmetic would show that the armored cars ought to have reached there about now.

THE squad looked at each other blankly. Hortet tried to build up a theory about wireless vibrations, for stubborn was the old zou-zou about all this magic. Chevrier was probably talking with Bou Denib at this minute by his portable wireless set, he pointed out. But what apparatus for receiving had this old ape except his own brain? Well, you could not say anything much positive about wireless—after that kettle on an electric stove in California that had played the Moonlight Sonata!

"Come, thou!" said the old marabout abruptly, creeping out of his hut in a bun-

dle of rags and motioning to Ressot to follow. The squad trailed across the cemetery to a dilapidated and ancient palm tree that rose out of its center. Under it the marabout squatted him down and put one bony hand on Ressot's forehead. "Close thine eyes, young officer, and tell us what you see," he commanded.

Ressot laughed as he turned head over shoulder at the squad. *"Le voudou!* I submit, me! Note carefully what I say, Sergeant Ike," he said with a nervous shiver, and then obediently closed his eyes.

The squad growled. They were of two minds about risking their leader this way. Jeff and Criswell protested openly, and Hortet was still puzzling over that hammada business and still unconvinced. Ike looked at Anzac Bill, Mora and Rosskoff and read assent in their eyes. The Spaniard and the Russian knew peasant magic in their own countries and believed in it with all the fervor of benighted superstition. Anzac Bill, as a soldier of fortune, could tell them incredible tales of voodoo in Central Africa, Queensland, and New Guinea. He was deadly serious about it now. They would learn something if they let this old Soudanese marabout alone, he voted.

And soon Ressot began to speak, in empty, expressionless tones: "A ship. . . . . She is coming into Gabès, crowded with deck-passengers. . . . . Long caravan crossing the sands. . . . . Now the Chott Djerid, Tozeur. . . . . *Oui,* now Touggurt. . . . . Now the dunes, the great ocean of sand waves. . . . . Ouargla, the town on the hill. . . . . El Golea, *voilà,* its mud minaret! Timimoun, and the caravan splits up, and some go south to Tuat. . . . . A part is crossing the erg for the Tafilelt. . . . . *Eh bien?* I am close up. . . . . There is a boy in a green turban and a black burnous embroidered in gold."

"And who is that boy, young officer?" suggested Bou Soudani in a crooning voice.

"He is surrounded by slaves and elders who guard him. . . . . *Ha!* Mehari racing across the sands! They stop! There is weeping and tearing of burnouses!" Ressot began to groan, apparently under the same distress as had been that caravan. The squad listened, breathing heavily. If this was magic, it was mighty probable magic! It agreed with the facts as they had probably taken place. The boy, Sidi el Hadj, had returned from Mecca by the usual pilgrim route. Riders from the Doui Menia had met them on the erg and told them of disaster in the Tafilelt. And what next?

"The boy weeps!" groaned Ressot. "His elders confer. . . . . They strip him and put him in rags. . . . . They leave the main caravan and go on alone—a small group. . . . . It is the Erg Er-Raoui; I know those dunes! . . . . *Hélas!* All is blotted out, now, in a great wall of dust! They are lost in the sandstorm! . . . . I see but two, now, on the sands, the boy and a black slave. . . . . He carries the boy over the dunes. . . . . He falls, but the boy staggers on. . . . . *Ya Rachmani,* he lays him down to die!"

BELIEVE it all or not! Some kind of hypnotism, doubtless; but a very real murmur of sympathy was running through the squad as they listened; also exclamations of rage and disgust, for it seemed apparent that the last of the House of Alouia had perished on the sands and there would be no Caliph for them to bring the Doui Menia. And without him, this reorganization of the Tafilelt would be a mere invasion, replacing the Aït Atta by the French. They could expect no help from the powerful confederation of the Camel-Drivers, who wanted their Caliph restored!

As for Ressot, his tongue stuck out now as if he too were dying of thirst. He seemed somehow to have become that boy in the spirit, to have taken the boy's memories into himself and be reproducing them under the spell of this witch-doctor. And presently he gave a sigh of relief, content. "Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate! Green palm trees!" he murmured. "And the sound of running waters! I am being held on a donkey by an old beggar in rags, who is kind. . . . . *Allah el Mumin!* . . . . . Houses! A great white mosque up the lane, having two domes—"

"*Diable!*" burst out Hortet. "That's Gaouz! I fought there, me, under Colonel Doury when in the Thirteenth Chasseurs! One massacre of a palmery combat was Gaouz! It has the only double-domed mosque in the Tafilelt, comrades!" he told them awedly. Skeptic of skeptics, it was Hortet now who was most convinced—now that he had something that he knew all about to go on! He was all for marching there at once.

The marabout was chattering upon him malevolently, for at that shout of "*Gaouz!*" Ressot woke up, and could not be got back under the spell again. "Gaouz?" he asked them all. "Who was talking of Gaouz? It's ten miles below here, at the very southern tip of the oasis!"

"May Allah curse you and your offspring and may your father's house be destroyed!" vituperated the marabout upon Hortet. "Where is *now* the little Caliph? Ye saw but what happened five years ago. Nay, I wash my hands of ye, offenders! May you be cursed, you that drove away the spirit of my tree with loud speech! Go find him yourself!"

He meowed and gibbered at Hortet and went back on all fours towards his hut. Ressot followed, protesting, trying to get his mind off it.

"Nay, but the soldier meant no harm, ya Sidi! Tell us of Sultan Belkacem," he begged.

The ancient man stopped and frowned hideously. "May dogs defile his grave!" he cursed vindictively. "He left the Tafilelt yesterday with six hundred of the Aït Hammou."

Ressot agreed with him. They knew part of that already, through Intelligence, but it was news that only his own tribe had gone on raid with him.

"The Aït Khebbash? The Aït Morghad?" Ressot prompted the marabout. The latter scowled, and his wild eyes blinked on Ressot with hidden meaning. "It wants but a spark to set them in open rebellion against this usurping assassin!" he hinted. "Sidi n' Ifrouten, the murdered chief, was of the Aït Khebbash tribe, and the wound rankles!"

With that he retired into the *koubba* and set off on the Sura of the Cow, which takes all day to recite.

RESSOT faced the squad with gleaming eyes. It was high time for them to be off, for a red sun was rising enormous and dusty, over the barren swales of the Hammada to the east. "Comrades, you heard what he said!" Ressot declaimed. "Just the bare presence of soldiers in the Tafilelt will be enough to freeze the Aït Khebbash in their tents! For the Aït Morghad, their pasturages are across the Gheris, and one section of artillery planted on the plateau between the two rivers would take all the fight out of them. This confederation of the Aït Atta is but a house of cards! It is ready to blow up of itself, at the first sign that we are coming back! We cross the palmeries of the Ziz, openly, boldly. We take a look at the ruins of Sidjilmassa to learn what difficulties there may be in moving our seventy-fives to its site. And then we march south—"

"To Gaouz, my Lieutenant!" finished Hortet for him fierily. "*Toujours l' audace!* Know you what you saw when under the power of the voodoo man?" he asked Ressot, and then told him minutely.

Ressot smiled, shrugged shoulders, then said: "*Le voudou!* Believe it or not, my comrades, as you will. He may have been making it all up from known probabilities, from rumors in the *ksars* passed from mouth to mouth—at least we may pick up a clew there! And we will also have made a complete reconnaissance, *n'est-ce pas? En avant, alors!*"

They had no idea how they were going to get out of Gaouz again, once within its gates, but down they tramped in double-file column, straight across the palmeries of the Ziz below Abd-el-Halim, mounted the scarps of the barren plateau on the other side, visited the six-foot-high curbing of the great well Ben Akki, that was all that was left of Sidjilmassa destroyed by these same Aït Atta in 1818. The batteries could reach here, they decided, by building suitable zig-zags up the escarpments.

And then they went south along the Oued Gheris side of the plateau, a brief column

of Légionnaires, in plain sight of all the world. Down below was the river, and beyond it pasturage, miles and miles of it, camels and goats in thousands, tents innumerable. There were enough tribesmen of the Aït Khebbash and Aït Morghad there to have eaten them up in one mouthful—but not a man of them caught his horse or drew his sword! Later the bulletins of the Armée d' Afrique described it as *"une grande effervescence dans le Tafilelt,"* for, it seemed, each tribe taunted the other for not moving out against that handful of Légion soldiers until both were at open war.

SO far, their raid had been a grand success, though they did not dream of it at the time. Putting their faith in voodoo, they marched on south ten miles in search of a boy Caliph who was probably nonexistent. Above the old walled town of Gaouz, where the Hammada du Guir finally shuts off the Tafilelt with its escarpments, they plunged down into the Ziz palmeries once more. Here the river itself comes to an end, all its water having gone to feed two million date-palms, Gaouz the last outpost towards the desert. It had enormous ogival gateways, with heavy wooden gates that could be closed immediately the alarm of desert harkas was given. They were open when Ressot's column marched in, about noon—and that entrance of those burnished Légion rifles and sloping bayonets into this town at the very bottom of the Tafilelt caused a commotion indescribable. Yelling and cheering mobs greeted them as deliverers, the shrill *"Yoo-yoo-yoo-yoo!"* of their women high over all. Before the double-domed mosque in the central square Ressot halted the squad and sent natives running to fetch the Caïd. And presently a benign old patriarch with a white beard a yard long came tottering out of the mosque and at sight of the line of soldiers raised his arms thankfully and greeted them with a dry howl.

"Praise be to God—the Roumi!" he croaked. *"Aiwa!* And have ye indeed taken Tighemart?"

Ressot knew not what wild rumors had preceded them here, but he passed off that fundamental military question with a smile. "Where is he whom we have come to seek?" he asked boldly, and awaited the effect of his question.

"Aiwa," (yes) said the old fellow cautiously, also noncommittally. "Men do not yield up that which is precious save to a strong force that can guard it. But *Barik Allah,* ye are here! *Aiwa,* long have we waited. Five years."

He eyed Ressot keenly, with raised brows. Was this all his force?—he was trying to find out. Rumor had at least a French army entering the Tafilelt! Ressot knew that his small squad was anything but a safe convoy for the boy Caliph, if here. It was thirty miles, now, back to Erfoud, and they would be massacred to the last man if Belkacem happened to come back with that harka of his. Their plan had been to hustle the boy back by a night march, but he could see now that this old Caïd would not listen to that risk for one moment. To have kept the boy hidden here five years and then have him fall into Sultan Belkacem's clutches at the last moment—not for *his* wise old head!

IT was intensely aggravating, and they had not thought of this complication at all. Nothing had been said, directly, but it seemed probable that the boy was still here and the Caïd was in the secret. Ressot answered, discreetly: "Men talk not of state matters in public, O Father of Wisdom. There be many and foolish ears. *Ana dakhilak!"* (I am thy guest.)

With those words he had pronounced the immemorial formula of the desert claiming hospitality and protection—as one would lay hand on the tent-pole among the Bedouin and proclaim the same thing. The Caïd gave the answering formula: *"Insh' Allah!"* (As God wills) and motioned courteously toward his dwelling adjoining the mosque.

And thereby he let himself and his whole town in for disaster unspeakable. For at that moment there rang down from the minaret cupola high above the palms the dread cry: *"Harka! Harka! Close the gates!"*

There was rushing and shouting in the street, the wooden creak and crash of great doors closing, the hollow rattle of iron bolts. Men dashed into their houses for weapons. The Caïd looked on Ressot with piteous eyes: "Nay, soldier! Thou art my guest, and I am bounden to guard thee and thine, to my last man—but if this be Belkacem's harka—"

He could not say more for agitation. Ressot knew what he was thinking.

Once before the French had gone away, and all those who had been friendly to them had been massacred. The fate of Moulay el Mahdi would be this Caïd's if he protected these Roumi soldiers within his gates.

"Nay, I cannot close against Belkacem!" cried out the old Caïd still more agitatedly. "Can this town alone withstand the full strength of the Aït Atta? Nay, it will be as at Abd-el-Halim; as at Sidjilmassa in the old days! *Allah* have mercy!"

"*Morbleu!*" growled Hortet. "Can we not go up into the minaret and look at this harka ourselves? Ask him, Ressot!"

So frightened was the Caïd that he would agree even to that. Runners were coming in from the palmery now, yelling that it was indeed Belkacem and his harka that were out there on the slopes of the hammada to the east. They were fighting some one, but that did not matter. To this town they would come, either for refuge or to divide the loot. The Caïd nodded and said: "Yea, ye three officers may enter the minaret—provided that ye put on sandals, that the Roumi foot may not defile our mosque."

It was an enormous concession, but his need was great. Ressot, Hortet and Ike went up the mosque steps, were met by *Imama* with huge straw sandals. And with these casing their military boots, they went up and up the wooden steps of the minaret.

Out on the high cupola platform at last. . . . . Binoculars got busy. Below, a sea of feathery palm-tops stretching endlessly to the north. Southward the broiling dunes of the Erg Er-Raoui. And to the east the ragged and pebbly hills of the Hammada du Guir. Out among them could be seen wheeling and trotting long bars of horsemen, hundreds of them, white burnouses, chestnut and gray horses, flashes and smoke coming from them in the white-hot sun-glare. They seemed to be dashing mostly for hollows and ravines; then would fire over their rocky crests at something behind. Even as the three in the minaret watched, these maneuvers took on all the aspects of a forced retreat.

And then they saw why. Bright flashes as of helio mirrors appeared farther back in the folds of the hammada; then the binoculars made out what they really were,—the polished steel sides of armored cars that spat fire out of their cupolas and trailed white wisps of smokeless powder behind. Bobbing and rolling over the uneven terrain, those cars were coming—*here!*

"*Chevrier!*" barked Ressot. Ike crowed: "Waal, you can hev *my* hoss, pardner!"

IT was perhaps the first battle in history between armored cars and cavalry—and Chevrier was giving a convincing demonstration that the cavalry hadn't a chance. His four cars were widely separated, but coming on invincibly, in what was for them extended-order skirmish formation. Belkacem had nothing but the speed of his horsemen—which was far greater than that of the cars over broken soil—to save himself from utter annihilation. Show them a squadron of cavalry, and the machine-guns would pepper it down like mowing wheat!

QUITE evidently Belkacem had pranced out of Tighemart intent on raiding those cars with his harka of six hundred Aït Hammou. They knew all about military cars! You hid in the hills, and slapped down their drivers with one volley, then looted them and set them afire—as these same Aït Hammou had done with three cars over in the Saoura Valley only a few weeks agone. That had been a most successful raid. . . . . But these cars turned out to be different. There was nothing to aim at but two black slots in the steel, one for the machine-gun, one for the driver's eyes, and their bullets pattered on that steel armor without the slightest effect. It had been a running fight, apparently, all the way from Teniet el Beradine here, with Belkacem doing his best to land just one shot through those black slots!

"*Ca va!*" said Hortet excitedly. "We do not need this Caïd's protection, *ma foi!* Look you, those palmery mud walls on the eastern border, *la-bas!*" He pointed out that good infantry position, where the squad could line up and do a little fighting on their own here.

Ike spat vigorously. "You said it, Looie! An' us birds want to hop to it some *pronto*, I'm tellin' *you!* Lookit that squadron!"

They looked. It was a wheeling column of perhaps a hundred riders who were swinging down the hammada slopes, headed directly for the palmery. Their intention was quite evident, to seize and hold this town so that Belkacem could retreat into it with all the rest of his harka. Nothing but artillery could dislodge them, once within its gates.

"*Houp!*" said Ressot. "That goes! *Vite!*"

They clumped down the minaret steps, letting the straw sandals drop where they would. A salute to the old Caïd, a few reassuring words.

"And have him ready whom we seek, ya Caïd!" hinted Ressot darkly as a parting shot. "The matter may be pressing!"

They marched out the south gate, ran at the double down a lane that led through the palmery to its eastern wall. And behind it they lined up, just in time, for that squadron was now thundering down the scarps, heading for this same lane. The Légion greeted them with a line of bayonets leveled

Down on them thundered the harka—a brave charge, but technically impossible against entrenched infantry.

over the wall, then with crashing volleys from their magazines.

The squadron wheeled, cursed, disentangled itself from its falling men and horses. A second squadron was coming down the hill, and on it the first recoiled. Back up on the summits of the plateau they could now distinctly hear the raving chatter of four machine-guns. Another squadron wheeled out of a ravine to the right and joined the other two. A waving and gesticulating sheik led it. He was storming imprecations on the headmen of the other two and pointing urgently at the town. A great green flag, scrolled in golden Arabic letters, fluttered behind him as the three squadrons massed together.

"Belkacem himself!" announced Hortet over his binoculars. "I kill him dead, me, this time!"

The Légion piled clips handy on the mud wall. They were only eight, but if they could swerve this mass off, just once, the

cars would reach the brow of the plateau above and sweep this whole slope with their machine-guns.

"Begin workin' on 'em right now, you birds!" ordered Ike, chewing. "We aint got all the time they is to set off our fireworks!"

SHEETS of flame leaped out all along the mud wall, an intense fire, served rapidly as bolts could be worked. Down on them thundered the whole mass of Belkacem's harka. It was a brave and desperate charge, but technically it was impossible against entrenched infantry. Within ten seconds its front was so cumbered with fallen horses as to become a confused mass of legs and necks and burnouses that stopped all progress, piled up barrier on barrier until there was a dusty wall out there into which the Légion bullets cut and smacked.

Behind it Belkacem's harka recoiled at length, then stretched out in a long gallop by the flank for the desert. All this had been too much for *him,* Ike guessed. He had been chased a hundred and thirty kilometers by those cars that he had set out so blithely to raid; and now, retreating on his own town of Gaouz, up pops Légion infantry in its palmery, just like old times! Being a Bedouin chieftain, he was heading for the one refuge that he knew all about, the desert. Thirty or forty miles farther out there he would come upon the tents of his relatives, the Regg and the Ferkla—and they could consider this matter, some, before venturing back to the Tafilelt.

"If Knecht could only strike *now!*" said Ressot to the squad with vast regret. Tactician that he was, it seemed the veriest irony of fate that this golden opportunity should be passing unused! But it could not be. Knecht's battalions, at that moment, were being merely considered by the General Staff in Algiers!

"Waal, Looie," said Ike, as he set methodically to work wiping out his Lébel, "she's been some raid, you'll have to allow! Hyar come them cyars. We go gits that 'ere Caliph kid an' vamooses up the gravel to Erfoud with him, you take *my* advice!"

The armored cars were now rolling and bucketing down the grades in low, and Ressot led out the Légion squad to meet them. Made in America, the auto-mitrailleuses seemed a useful and handy invention for this part of the world to Ike, as they got near enough for him to take in details. Hoods, driving seats and gun-cupolas were all of bullet-proof steel plate. They had solid rubber auto-truck tires, and one of them bore a twenty-foot wireless mast with which she could talk to Bou Denib wherever the squadron happened to be. That they had crossed ninety miles of raw hammada without roads and steering by compass—or rather by Belkacem's harka—argued well for their sturdiness!

Out of the leading car now stepped Captain Chevrier commanding, hand cupped to ear in the funny French salute, Ressot and Hortet saluting likewise. Ike snickered but was careful to have his own hand up. He never *could* get over that ludicrous French salute!

Ressot and Chevrier exchanged information. Bou Denib, it seemed, had warned the Captain by wireless that Belkacem was after him and had ordered him peremptorily to return. But some distance up the road that the Légion had built across the hammada, the harka had attacked him. *"Pardieu!"* Chevrier was saying. "There being another good road home, up through the Tafilelt, I chase that harka across the hammada, me! A good demonstration for my cars, Bou Denib will have to acknowledge, *hein?* But they are growling devilishly at me at Headquarters!"

IKE liked him right off. Under his horizon-blue képi was that long, humorous, peasant face with the round eyes and arched brows and snipy nose that seems characteristic of the French officer of the line—clear up to Marshal Foch. He grinned dryly when told of the Légion efforts to find a new Caliph of the Tafilelt with the aid of an old voodoo marabout. "Who knows?" he said with a shrug. "Such things are beyond plain soldiers like us! But one thing is certain: we all know what Moulay el Mahdi *looked* like. If your Caïd can produce the boy, *le voilà,* a suitable escort to Erfoud—and we will make sure that we bring back no impostor." He waved a hand at his squadron of armored cars. The Légion squad, it seemed, could be accommodated on their running-boards and would make *"une decoration bien pittoresque,"* as Chevrier put it, rolling up through the Tafilelt along the main highway to Fez.

Headed by the Légion, the four cars chattered down the lane to the highway and entered Gaouz by its south gate. Once more they stood in its main square, a long military line of steel, a file of uniforms, natives crowding the square densely, all silent and

staring. The Caïd stood bowing and smiling on the steps of his house, his town elders around him. This was better—these Roumi wagons that could actually chase the dreaded cavalry of Belkacem clear across their own hammada!

"Where is now he that we seek, ya Caïd?" asked Ressot. "Lo, an escort, safe and sure!"

"*Aiwa.*" The Caïd blinked and again uttered that exasperating "Yes" of his that meant nothing, answered nothing. "Are ye French in the Tafilelt to stay?" he asked.

He was thinking of his own skin, but there were much more important matters than that afoot and Ressot decided it was time for a bit of direct coercion. "Shall we bring ye a Caliph from Fez, then?" he demanded sternly.

Violent agitation, resentment, denial on the part of the Caïd. "Nay!" he cried. "The Tafilelt rules Fez; not Fez the Tafilelt!" he protested. "Our own or none!"

Long are men's memories! For many centuries Sidjilmassa was the capital of all Morocco and Fez still unbuilt, and these people would never forget that. "Let be, then!" went on the Caïd, and smote the steps with the butt of his staff.

At that signal a huge black slave, over six feet tall and all in white, stepped out of the seraglio door. His face was knobby and truculent, and his girdle was stuffed with nasty-looking cutlery. He eyed, grunting and blinking, the line of shiny cars and the file of Légionnaires drawn up. And then out beside him stepped a small boy of ten. A rich black burnous, lined with gold cloth and embroidered with gold, covered him to his toes, and a green turban with a huge ruby gleaming in it buried his head nearly to the eyes.

Oriental as the devil, all this, thought Ike as he studied that boy through narrowed lids. Three others who also knew Moulay el Mahdi—Hortet, Ressot, and Chevrier—were likewise studying that boy's features minutely, to be sure that there was no impostor here. Then simultaneously they nodded agreement. Moulay el Mahdi had looked like almost any good-natured, easy-going, brown-eyed person you happened to know, only disfigured with a superabundance of black whiskers, forked beard and mustache, like the early mosaic portraits of Christ. This boy had some of that good nature and the likeness was unmistakable; but his young jaw had a sternness and there was just a hint of hook to his nose that spoke of a mother who came from far-off Arabia.

"Chip off the ol' block, all right, but better stock!" said Ike, voicing his own conviction. Ressot led off with a sweeping salute of his sword, for they were looking at a lineal descendant of Mahomet the Prophet, and honor was his due. At that the Caïd struck down his staff once more and raised his voice over the multitude.

"*Ya alamoon!*" (Ye peoples!) he cried out. "Behold your Caliph, Sidi el Hadj ben Moulay el Mahdi!" he rolled off the titles in giving out the secret that had been kept here for five years.

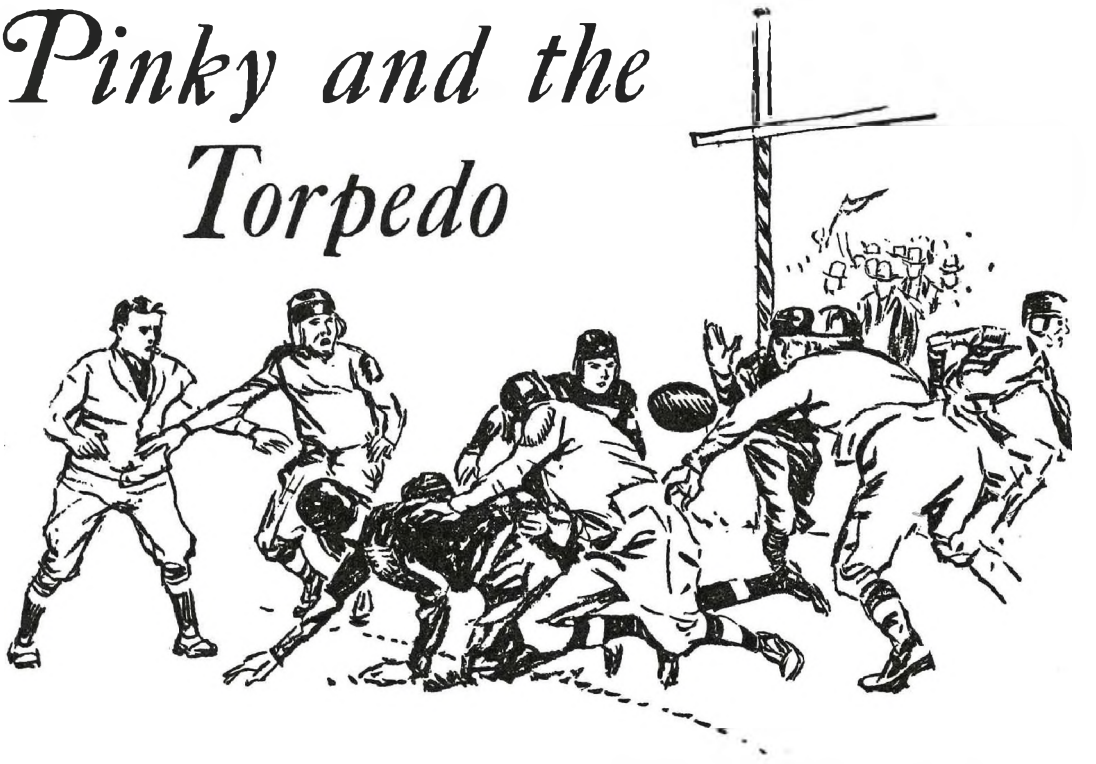
An uproar of joy indescribable. If the Légion had any doubts how the populace of the Tafilelt would receive them, once they returned with the Caliph, they were set at rest now! And now that the secret was out, they could not get away with him too soon, the Caïd went on to point out. Belkacem would expend every harka he could raise to stop them, once *he* heard of it!

BUT the moment was propitious. Belkacem was at that moment out in the desert rallying his Aït Hammou after their first disastrous brush with armored cars. He would raise all the Regg and Ferkla presently, but he would be too late. Young Sidi el Hadj and his giant slave were bundled into the tower of the third car. The Légion hopped the running-boards wherever they could find a foothold, and up the Highway of the Sultans rolled Chevrier's squadron, up through the very heart of the Tafilelt.

Patrols of the Aït Atta were out, now, to catch that audacious squad of the Légion that had dared to raid down here, but they were brushed off the road by the chatter of machine-guns. Right through Bou Am, the great central caravan mart of the oasis, crashed the four cars, past Tighemart close under its very walls, around Dar el Beïda and north past Meski and Maadid. By nightfall they were rolling up the zigzags to Poste Erfoud on its mountain guarding the Atlas passes against Belkacem.

Their great raid was over. No one but Knecht and the Légion would have attempted it, anyhow, as Chevrier generously pointed out, though chance and Belkacem had led his cars over to be of great help. And the Army bulletin that was sent out later was right; they had left the Tafilelt "in a grand state of effervescence!" It took the Légion to do that!

Pinky and the Torpedo



Those boys couldn't work together at all. Either Pinky's passes were wide—or else Torp couldn't hang onto them.

By

W. F. G. THACHER

A good little man, and a good big one, a chorus queen and football—the combination makes an even better story than Mr. Thacher's well-liked "Old Mr. Slump."

Illustrated by
William Molt

DID you ever hear how Pinky and the Torpedo came to meet each other? No? Well, tune in and I'll give you the mike.

When I came down to State three years ago some dodo kidded me into turning out for Frosh football. Spoke Neibert—he was head freshman coach that year—put me in at right guard one night on his fourth or fifth string, and had us lined up against his first-team outfit. Don't laugh at me, now, or I'll cut this picture right here. I only weighed about two hundred and ten then—I hadn't really begun to take on weight yet.

Well, they had the Torpedo in at full. And he was sure doing his stuff, too. When he hit my side of the line, I thought the old mine had caved in on me.

We had a rotten bunch of quarter-backs on our team, and Spoke kept trying one yearling after another. But each was a worse wash-out than the one before. Then Spoke turns toward the forty or fifty candidates waiting around hopefully, and hollers out: "Any more of you babes want to try out for this job? If you do, here's your chance."

And who should jump up but Pinky!—only no one called him that then. He was just about the littlest and the scrawniest of the whole bunch. And the pants they had handed out to him were four or five sizes too big. He had 'em belted around him about twice. But Spoke must have seen something in the kid, for he told him to get in there and see what he could do.

Believe me—he did, too. About the third play, the Torpedo came r'aring right at me. I didn't have a chance to get out of his way—being penned in between center and tackle the way I was. That's when I got my nose busted—and got tee-totally separated from the idea that I wanted to play football.

The Torpedo never stopped to see what he'd stepped on, but kept hopping right along through the secondary defense—just as if his general idea was to make a touchdown. Well, there wasn't anything much in his way—except a scrawny little kid out there all alone, with a shock of kind of yel-

low-red hair. I don't suppose the Torpedo even noticed him. But Pinky came creeping up, and when he was near enough he sprang forward, and twined all his arms and legs around the Torpedo's feet. The Torp came down all right—and bounced right up again. But Pinky didn't get up at all. Spoke walked over to see what was wrong, and we all crowded around to see.

The Torpedo was kneeling down by Pinky's side. "Gosh," he said, "the kid's hurt. Hey—get a doc out here, some one."

BEFORE the trainer came up, Pinky opened his eyes, stared around sort of goofy for a minute—and then grinned.

"I—I'm all right," he whispered—then passed out in the Torpedo's arms. But he wasn't hurt much—just a wrenched side that the trainer taped up. He wouldn't let them take him away in a car, but insisted on walking back with the Torp and me.

"That was a good tackle, kid," the Torpedo said. "Hard luck you got busted up."

"Oh, that's all right," Pinky comes back. "Only Spoke says I can't play any more this year, probably. I wanted to make my numeral, too. But I'm darned glad it was not my hand or arm that got hurt. You see, I play the piano—and the organ."

"The heck you do!" Torp says. "By golly, now I know where I've seen you! You're the guy that plays down at the Bijou, aren't you? Say—you're sure there on the organ, boy. Gosh!"

"Oh, that's nothing," Pinky says. "What I really want to do is to play football. My folks are against it, though. You see—I'm putting myself through college playing during the pictures."

"Boy—if I could play like that!" the Torpedo says. "Say," he goes on, "what d'ye say you come along to the house tonight for chow? And maybe you'd show me a thing or two on the piano."

The Phi Tau's had already pledged the Torp and me—us coming from big prep schools, and Torp being a star athlete and all. But nobody ever heard of Pinky. That's how we came to get him in the house. Torp said he'd break his pledge if we didn't hang a pin on Pinky. Nobody crabbed, though. He's sure a swell kid.

PINKY and the Torpedo have been just like Dame and Pythian ever since—or whatever they call those Greek guys that were such side-kicks. They roomed together—and Pinky spent most of his summers out on the Torpedo's dad's ranch. That sure built him up a lot, too. He was out for football again in his sophomore year, and he developed into a pretty darned good back. Not very brawny, but fast and nervy, and the sweetest passer on the squad. That lad could call the turn and flip the ball into a ten-foot circle any distance up to fifty yards.

In his Junior year, Pinky was out a lot with injuries and didn't get anywhere. But when the squad got together this fall, there was Pinky again in ripping good condition, and r'aring to play. The breaks were against him, though. Vail just had to have beef behind the line.

Of course the Torp was most a whole backfield by himself. Boy—but he was a wow! He could kick fifty or sixty yards. He could snake a pass out of the air. And when it came to backing up the line, he was a sure-enough grizzly. But the best little old thing he did was to tuck that ball under his arm, and hit that line. That's where he got his name.

THOSE two simply wouldn't—or couldn't—play against each other. Vail tried it once—back in sophomore year. Boy, it was funny! But the way they'd work together! Why, in State's first game this year—with Corinth—Vail stuck Pinky in along toward the end of the game; and those two put on an exhibition of forward passing that was a knock-out. And when Pinky toted the ball, the Torp opened up a road you could drive a truck through.

Of course Corinth was easy. Things didn't look so good the next Saturday. We should've taken T. S. C. by two touchdowns instead of just squeezing out a tie. The Torp couldn't do it all. They just laid for him all the time. But T. S. C. was plenty good. Next to Wellington, they're about the best in the Conference. But we had about a month to get ready for those birds—and things didn't look so bad right then.

But that was before Berti Bellou came to the Bijou to do a song-and-dance act. Pinky had to play for her, and the Torp and I went down for the first performance. Torp always wanted to sit right down in the front row just back of the organ, where he could watch Pinky play and fiddle around with the stops and everything.

Well, after the comics, this Berti Bellou was announced as a special added attraction. Pinky began to play, and Berti came out in front of the drop curtain, and began to

sing, "My Croonin' Mamma." She didn't have much of a voice, but there was something in the way she put it over that kinda got you, at that. I didn't pay much attention at first, because I was watching Pinky. I knew how he hated these footlight dames. This girl was singing straight at him. I could see him kind of wiggle around on the bench.

Then the Torpedo attracted my attention. He was leaning way forward in his seat—and I could hear him say, "Boy—boy!"—under his breath.

After the song, there was a quick change, and she came out again to dance. She could hoof it, too. The Torp just leaned forward and stared and stared. Well, I wasn't exactly looking the other way, myself.

Then there was another change, and they raised the back drop. The stage was set with some sort of a crazy, Oriental scene, and at the back there was a high platform, with steps leading down to the floor. Berti took the spot up on top of these steps. What there was of her costume was all peacock feathers. She sort of floated down the steps, and then did her big number—the Peacock dance. After that she went back up the steps to the platform, for her last song. Just as she reached the top, the platform began to sway. The Torp saw it first, and yelled "Look out!"

Pinky's fingers kind of stumbled on the keys, and Berti gave a little cry. Then the whole thing came down with a crash, and the girl with it.

THE Torp was the first to reach her. He gave one leap from the rail back of the pit to the apron of the stage, Pinky right behind him. It took me quite a while longer, of course, and by the time I got there, they had lifted her out of the wreck, and laid her out on the floor. Her eyes were shut, and she was moaning: "Oh, my knee—my knee!"

The doctor showed up about then, and gave her a quick once-over.

"It's a bad sprain—torn ligaments just above the left knee," he said. "But that's all—so far as I can tell now. That and a few bruises and scratches. You're mighty lucky to get off so easy, young lady."

"But my knee, Doc—is it bad? Can't I—dance?"

"Not for some time. Can't say how long—a few weeks, anyway. It's you for the hospital right now. Then we'll see."

AND right there is where two things happened. You wouldn't think it—but it was Berti Bellou's sprained knee that started the split between Pinky and the Torpedo—and just about wrecked State's football prospects.

It didn't surprise me any to see the Torpedo go off his bean over her. He was always dippy over some dame or other. But Pinky had always been girl-shy. When we kidded him about it, he always said he was too busy—what with his music and football and everything. And when a guy like that goes into a nose-dive over a dame, he takes it hard.

It was some time before we got hep to what was going on between those two lads. First I noticed that they no longer sat beside each other at the table. Then they began calling each other by their last names —Sprague and Thornton, instead of Pinky and Torp. Before long they weren't speaking to each other at all.

On the morning of the game with Athens, I drifted into their room to borrow a razor blade. Pinky was sitting there before his desk, staring at a big picture of this Bellou skirt. Across one corner was written in big sprawly writing, *"Yours with love, Berti Bellou."*

Pretty soon Torp came busting in, with a big flat package under his arm. He opened it—and darned if it wasn't another photograph of this dame, with *"Yours affectionately, Berti Bellou,"* on it!

Pinky took one look at it—then jumped up, grabbed his picture, and left the room. The Torpedo stormed around a while—then swore he was going to move out altogether.

But the funny part of it was the way it showed up when the two boys played football. The Torpedo started the Athens game, of course. It didn't take long to show that something was the matter. On the first play, he took the ball and smashed through about half the Athens team for thirty yards. But after that he was terrible. He got crossed up on the signals. He was slow on the interference. He did get off one peach of a punt; but his next one went straight up in the air.

Just after the first quarter, Vail sent Pinky in to replace Job Conklin, who had sprung a bad charley-horse. And then things went completely hay-wire. Those two boys couldn't work together at all. Everything they tried together went phooie. Either Pinky's passes were wide—or else

The platform began to sway. Torp yelled: "Look out!" Then the whole thing came down with a crash, the girl with it.

Torp couldn't hang onto them. Once, on a criss-cross, Pinky shoved the ball into Torp's belly—and he dropped it. The climax came when State took the ball on a fumble on Athens' fifteen-yard line. Twice the Torpedo tried to buck the line, but he made only three yards. It was the time for a place kick, of course. Pinky held the ball, and Torp kicked it. It just dribbled along the ground. And the two boys just stood there and glared at each other. It was so bad it was almost funny.

Vail yanked the Torpedo then, and things got better right away. Pinky played great football after that. He scored a touchdown on a long open-field run, and laid down some beautiful passes. And the best of it was, he lasted out the whole game. But without the Torpedo in there, the team lacked the scoring punch, and lost, seventeen to six.

NOW here this yard of silk—this Berti dame—had busted up a perfectly good friendship, and just about scuttled State's football team. What was the answer?

Right then I went into a huddle with myself and me. Bunny Failing may be an over-size campus comic, and all that. But he's got something in the think-tank besides bubbles. Any time I let a jenny like this Berti get away with a racket like that—I *don't*.

First I went down to the bank to find out what my balance was. I knew it was going to take real sugar to bake the cake I was planning on. Next I placed an order with the Varsity Flower Shoppe that made their eyes bug out. Then I sent three or four suits of clothes to the cleaners, and had the Speedboy tuned up and polished.

Boy—it was soft! No trouble at all. Maybe nobody loves a fat boy; but show me the Mary Jane of this Berti's class that wont fall for the Johnny with sugar to feed her! Oh, I sure know my chorus girls.

And it wasn't hard to take at all. I went into this proposition on a cold-blooded business basis. But between you and me—I got my money's worth. This Berti person wasn't only a keen looker, but she had a snappy line of talk, and she knew how to give a lad a good time.

The Bijou people had done the right thing—had fixed her up at the hotel, and were paying all her expenses. Her knee was coming along in good shape, too. It didn't turn out to be as bad as the doc had thought.

If I live to be as old as Methuselah, I'll never forget the first time I took her out—that is, when Pinky and the Torpedo were there to see. They'd got their dates mixed, someway—and showed up at the same time. These two boys were sitting on opposite sides of the room and glaring at each other when I blew in. It didn't look to me like a happy fireside party. And there wasn't any bluff about Berti's being glad to see me.

When I suggested that Berti go with me for a little spin in the Speedboy, those two

looked at me as if they loved me like a snake. But Berti came through at once.

"I'd just love to," she warbled. "I get so tired of sitting here all day long with nothing to do. And the doc says I should get as much fresh air as possible. You don't care, do you, boys?"

Oh, of course they didn't care—not at all!

Berti went into her bedroom to polish up her eyeballs or something, and the Torpedo jumped out of his chair and came storming over at me.

"Look here, you fat hunk of cheese," he began in his brotherly way, "what the blue heck do you mean by butting in here?"

"Oh," I answered, looking sort of innocent, "is this a private preserve that you and Pinky have staked out? You're in partnership, maybe."

LIE didn't like that a bit—having Pinky and him coupled up together like that. But I wasn't going to let him bluff me—what with the trumps I knew I was holding. "Say," I went on, "who do you think you are, anyway? You don't own this 1930 model, do you? Why, I bet you haven't even made a first payment—either one of you."

There were some other remarks passed, and things began to get pretty hot when Berti blew back into the room. I could see she got the drift of the situation right away.

"I'm so glad you boys are such gentlemen," she sort of gurgled. "Now, big boy," —and she put a hand on Torp's arm,— "what do you say we make it seven-fifteen tonight? There's a good bill on now at the Bijou—only that sister act they've got on there's a ham. And Pinky," she went on with a smile that's good for whatever ails you, "if you can drift in early tomorrow afternoon, I'd be tickled to hear those new dance numbers you were telling me about."

They stood there—Pinky and the Torpedo—with their jaws down, looking kind of goofy, while I took hold of Berti's arm, and helped her out—and into the Speedboy.

We got pretty chummy on that trip, Berti and I—and although I didn't figure on doing it, before I knew it I was spilling all the dope about Pinky and the Torpedo —what pals they'd been, and about the football team, and everything.

When I got through, she just sat there with a little frown between her eyes. "So that's the racket," she said finally. "I kinda suspicioned something was rotten in Norway. Well, believe me, little Berti never broke up any happy homes—nor any friendships either. They're a couple of swell guys—those two; and I wouldn't sleep nights if I thought I had come between them. And as for football—well, I'm a ath-a-letic fan myself. My brother's a star ice-hockey player on the Rosebuds in Canada. You watch your little Berti get action. I got a card or two I can play in a pinch."

Right there I pulled a boner. I figured that what with Pinky and the Torpedo out of the running like that, and with the dinners and flowers and rides and everything, there ought to be a little honey in it for papa. So I slowed down and slid an arm along the back of the seat. She didn't mind that—but just as soon as I began to try a little high-pressure stuff, she stiffened up.

"Pull in your neck, Bunny," she said, quiet-like—but in a way I knew she meant it. "That act aint on the bill—see?"

"Oh, all right, all right," I laughed, making a joke out of the play. "There's only one way to find out, you know."

"Sure thing," she laughed back. "No hard feelings—now that you know where we stand."

THAT night when I got back to the house I found a wire from my folks telling me to come home at once. Not a word as to what for.

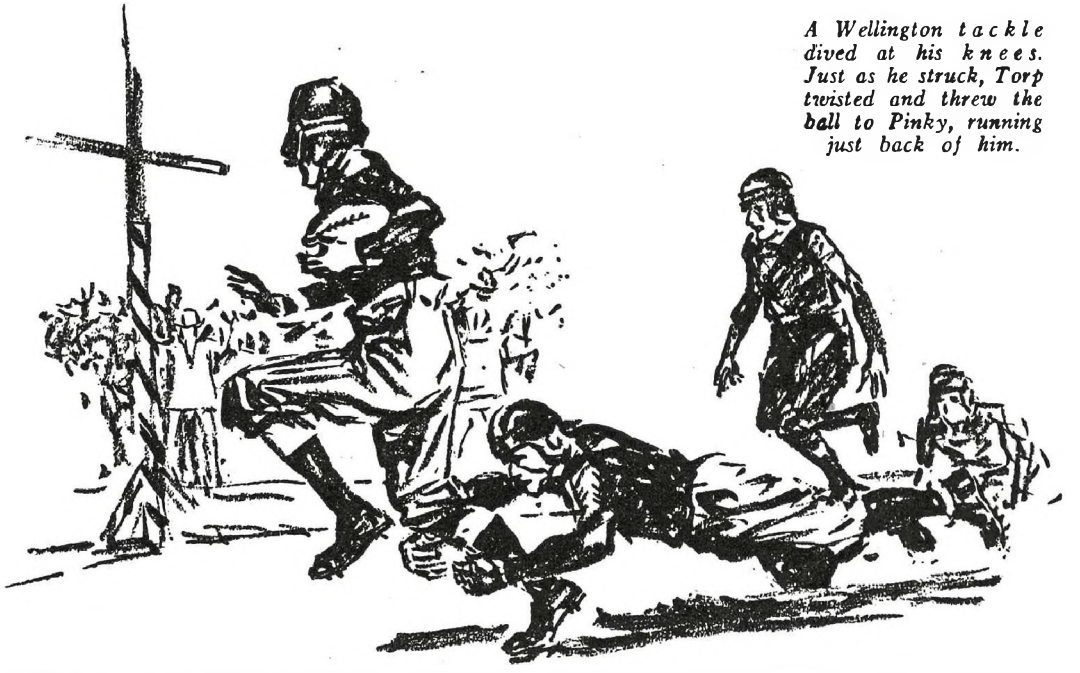
I threw some things in a bag—turned the Speedboy loose—and in about three hours I was there.

Dad had been in a motor wreck, I found, and Mother'd got scared and sent for me. The old boy was pretty well banged up, but there was nothing dangerous about it. Still, Mother wanted me to stick around for a while—and I was sort of tickled to know that they wanted me. It was the first time I'd ever been of any use to my folks, I guess.

I drove back the morning of the game. The last half of the way, the road was jammed with traffic all going where I was. When I got there, the house was filled with old grads. And the campus and the town were lousy with visitors. Even though State had made a pretty rotten showing that year, it was still the Big Game—State against Wellington. All the early-season losses would be forgotten, if we could only take Wellington into camp.

I tried to get some dope, but even the wise ones couldn't tell me much. Vail had had the gates closed all the week. What betting there was was three to two, or five to three on Wellington. It was conceded that State had a strong defensive team—but so far had failed to develop a good scoring combination. And there was that uncertainty about the Torpedo — State's only real offensive threat.

Still there was that die-hard confidence in Vail. He had pulled State through many a tough break. He might do it again.



A Wellington tackle dived at his knees. Just as he struck, Torp twisted and threw the ball to Pinky, running just back of him.

AS soon as I could get to the phone I called up Berti, and asked her to have lunch with me. I'd already dated her for the game. She was sorry—but an old friend of hers had just blown in—and could she take him to the game?

That put it up to me to hustle another ticket. Luck was with me, and I found a guy that had three good ones, and one of his party hadn't shown up. So we traded—and I drove down to the hotel.

Berti was all ready to go. She introduced me to her friend—Loewssohn, his name was. She called him Louie. He was a big guy with a toothy smile and a fur coat on that must have cost a couple of grand. The first crack that he made sure burned me up.

"You State boys are going to take a cleaning today, maybe," he said, showing all his teeth.

"I've got a couple of hundred that says we're not," I came back.

"I'll give you three to two," he answered, "and Berti will hold the stakes." And he began peeling the centuries off a roll of yellow boys big enough to line the stadium. Luckily Dad had been generous when I left, and I handed over my lumps of sugar.

By the time we got there, the big dish was over half filled. Half a dozen bands were playing; and the cheering sections—State's and Wellington's—were warming up to their work.

I may be a fat boy, and a campus joke, and all that, but when the time comes I can't get a wallop out of a State game, I'll be ripe for the last check-in.

Berti was getting a kick out of it too—I could tell by the way her eyes danced, and that cute little giggle she had. If it hadn't been for that big rummy on her other side—and the breaks against State—everything would have been the honey.

Then the sound rose to a great roar—and when the State players came trotting out onto the field, Berti spotted the two boys at once. "There's Torp," she squealed, "the big one—with a 17 on his back. Oo-hoo—Torpedo! And there's Pinky. Look, Louie, the swell little musician I told you about—Number 21."

About this time in a big game, I get cold and numb all over. I couldn't even light a cigarette, my hands shook so. I just sat there and suffered and shivered and shut

my eyes and prayed the game would begin before I passed out entirely.

The sound suddenly hushed down to a kind of high-pitched hum. Then a short blast on the whistle, and the game had started.

As soon as I could get my bearings, I tried to see whether either Pinky or the Torpedo were in the line-up. Job Conklin was playing quarter, and—no, that was some one else at full—I couldn't tell who. Well, it was no more than I expected. I wished I'd been able to ask Berti how things stood, though.

State kicked off, and the receiver was downed after a short gain. On the first play, Zero Kiminiki—Wellington's backfield ace—faked a punt, and then swooped around State's right end—stiff-armed a couple of tacklers—and covered twenty yards before he was dragged down. And on the next play, he took the ball again, and busted right through center for ten more.

"You would like to increase your bet, maybe?" Loewssohn said, with a smile that made me hot. "I will give you better odds."

My teeth were chattering so I couldn't answer.

State rallied after that, and there were no more long gains. But the ball was in our territory all the time, and we were in no position to start a drive.

Just after the opening of the second quarter, Wellington completed a lucky long pass that gave them the ball on our twenty. State held Zero for two downs. And then he dropped back and place-kicked a goal for three easy points.

The Wellington sections nearly wrecked themselves yelling over those three points. But when, a minute later, one of their backs took the ball on the kick-off, cut across behind swiftly forming interference, and carried the ball the full length of the field for a touchdown, they simply went crazy. A moment later they kicked goal, and the score stood, *"Wellington, 10: State, 0."*

Perhaps Vail figured that Job Conklin should have cut down the runner on that last score—anyway, he jerked him out and put Pinky in. You could tell him easy by his hair, as he trotted out with his headguard in his hand.

Right there State got a break. On the kick-off, the Wellington back that took the ball was tackled so hard that the ball popped out of his hands, and a State man fell on it on the thirty-five-yard line.

It was State's first chance to score. But a try at end went out of bounds for no gain. Then Pinky looped a peach of a pass—but the receiver let it slip through his fingers. He had a clear field, too. Some one was hurt on that play, and time was taken out. I could see Vail walk along to where the Torpedo was sitting on the bench. He touched the boy on the shoulder, and Torp got up and began to race along the sidelines to warm up a bit. Then the State full-back came out, and Torp took his place.

It was third down, and Pinky tried another pass. Torp should have taken it, easy, but he wasn't there, and the pass was grounded. There was nothing to do but punt out of bounds, of course. But Torp held the ball too long, and a big forward crashed through, and blocked the kick.

It was terrible. You could hear a groan go up from the State sympathizers all over the field. I just about gave up hope right then. It looked like the feud between those two was still hot. I began to wonder if Berti had double-crossed me.

Nothing happened after that during that half. Wellington kept the ball most all the time; but they didn't score again.

"I BET my money on Wellington because I thought they would win," Loewssohn said, as the teams left the field; "but for the sake of Miss Berti here, I hope State is not disgraced."

I knew I'd murder that big stiff if I sat there between halves, so I told them I'd be back soon, and started to make my way out. But Berti stopped me.

"Could you slip a note to the Torpedo and Pinky for me?" she asked. "It's important."

I said I'd try, and she scribbled something on a little tablet she had in her purse. Down by the dressing-rooms I found a guy that said he would smuggle the note in for me. I was dying to read it—but I didn't.

I knew what was going on in there. No spell-binding harangue such as you read about—but Vail going over the play, and telling the men what to do during the second half. Somehow I felt better when I got back to my seat. State wasn't licked yet—not by a long shot.

Wellington kicked off that time, and while they were fixing the tee for the ball, Pinky and the Torpedo were standing together way back near the goalposts. As they talked, I saw Torp slip an arm over

Pinky's shoulder; and as they separated, Pinky gave Torp a slap on the back.

Boy, that made me feel good! I knew then that everything was all right.

Pinky took the kick, and, with Torp interfering for him, carried it back for fifteen yards. On the first play, he gave the ball to Torp, and the big boy smashed through for seven good yards. An end run lost three. Then Pinky dropped back, and arched the ball twenty yards into Torp's hands, and he plowed ahead for another ten before they stopped him.

That was the first decent gain State had made in the whole game, and the State rooters went goofy. I was yelling my fool head off, and Berti was jumping up and down and screaming and jamming Loewssohn's derby down over his ears.

A sweep off tackle for a small gain. Then a deception play that went wrong. Third down, and nine to go. A punt? No—the Torpedo had taken the ball and was running toward the left. A Wellington tackle got free and dived at his knees. Just as he struck, Torp twisted round, and tossed the ball into the hands of Pinky, who was running just back of him. An end raced in—but Pinky swerved—stumbled ahead—then got his feet under him, and set sail. Two or three Wellington players bore down on him—but without breaking his stride, he reversed—cut across the field, and ran like a scared pup until the fast Wellington safety caught him inside the ten-yard line.

On the next play, the Torpedo exploded right through the Wellington line—and kicked the goal.

"THAT was good football," Loewssohn was saying, when he could make himself heard. "Right now I should say the odds are even."

"This watch cost my dad over a hundred," I said. "I'll put that up if you're game."

Out came the fat wallet, and Berti was again made stakeholder.

Wellington chose to kick off, and it was State's ball on her five-yard line. Then the quarter changed, and Wellington sent in a flock of substitutes. State worked the ball down the field for about fifteen yards by straight football. Then Pinky dropped back for a pass. When the ball was snapped, three big Wellington forwards came pounding through—and Pinky was forced to throw the ball just as he went down under the charge.

"Oh, he's hurt—Pinky's hurt," cried Berti, as Torp helped the kid to his feet.

"They are trying to put him out," explained Loewssohn. "That is dirty football."

State punted, and for some minutes, the ball was kept in play near the center of the field. Pinky was limping badly.

On a third down, with the ball on her forty, Pinky tried another pass. Again that avalanche of Wellington players. And this time Pinky didn't get up. I could see the Torpedo rush in, his big shoulders hunched. Two officials and the State team got around him—but he broke away, and knelt by Pinky's side.

A doctor ran out—and a few seconds later the Torpedo was carrying the limp body toward the side-lines.

Everything got all blurry then, but I couldn't help remembering that time, three years ago, when the Torpedo had done just that same thing.

WELLINGTON took a fifteen-yard penalty on that, and the teams lined up in the center of the field. There was no cheering now, but something kept going through me—like electricity. I didn't know whether I wanted to cry, or curse, or pray.

"There are three minutes left to play," announced Loewssohn, who held a big watch in his hand.

State snapped out of the huddle, and Torp raged through center for six yards. A Wellington guard was out on the play, and a sub went in.

The Torpedo smashed between guard and tackle for four yards. Another forward was laid out and had to be replaced.

Two plays later, their right end had to be helped from the field.

I saw it then—or thought I did. That Torpedo was cleaning up the Wellington team. He was avenging the hurt they'd done to Pinky—his friend.

He took the ball on every down. It looked like he didn't try to make long gains—and every play was at a different man.

After a few downs, Wellington got wise, and began to play for the Torpedo. But that just gave him a bigger mark to shoot at. He was like this Juggernaut thing—he just crushed and ground his way through—and on about the twelfth play he went over the last white line.

For a moment he stood there by the ball, then took off his headguard, and started to run toward the dressing-rooms.

I knew he was going to see Pinky—to find out how he was. And I guess most everybody knew. They didn't yell, the way they usually do when a player leaves the field after a great piece of work. They did something that's never happened before or since—so far as I know. They paid the Torpedo the tribute of silence. . . . .

I didn't see the rest of the game—what there was of it—for I was busting down toward the dressing-rooms. And Berti and Loewssohn were just behind me. As we reached there, I heard the gun that meant the end of the game.

State won, but right then I didn't care.

There was a big crowd milling around, of course. But I managed to get word through; and after a while who should show up but Pinky himself! He was limping a little, but there wasn't anything else wrong with him. He wasn't even pale — after Berti threw her arms around him and kissed him. The Torpedo came out, and she gave him another.

"Now I want you two grand boys to meet Mr. Loewssohn. He's going to star me in his new show, 'Letty, Let Go'—aren't you, Louie?"

"If things turn out right, maybe," Loewssohn answered. "But I want to congratulate you on the game today. I'm sorry we have to hurry to catch the first train out. Berti, if you'll pay the young gentleman here—"

You should have seen their eyes bulge as I collected.

They didn't have much to say—just sort of stood there and grinned, first at Berti and then at each other.

The last I saw of them as I started away, they were standing with their arms thrown across each other's shoulders.

IN the station Loewssohn had to see about tickets, and that gave me a chance to ask Berti what I was dying to find out—what she had written in that note.

"I just asked them to wait after the game and meet my fiancé—Louie; that's all. That was enough, wasn't it?"

She was stripping the glove off her left hand, and flashed a chunk of ice that would blind a bat. I must have looked sort of goofy, for she began to laugh. Loewssohn was hurrying toward us.

"It'll be 'Berti Bellou' just the same in the big lights on Broadway. 'By, Bunny—'by. You're a good kid. Give my love to Pinky and the Torpedo."

The Bear That Busted

By

BUD LA MAR

The amazing saga of the most extraordinary bear-hunt ever staged —by the unrepentant author of "Scandalous Bill to the Reskue."

Illustrated by
Frank Hoban

ONE-CARD HARRIGAN and me, (Cold Deck Scully, as I am called) was standin' up to the bar in Larry Schoonover's—café; and Larry says to us: "Boys, if I had a place like yours, I would start the finest dude-ranch in this country. I'll bet you that at five dollars a head a day you could stock the country full of 'em, as far as the eye could reach. What they want is scenery and fresh air, and them two elements is actually bloomin' all around you and goin' to waste. Of course, you got to figger that they require a lot of lookin' after. No fence will hold 'em, and I've heard it said that at the first sign of a rain they would shut both eyes, open their mouths an' crane their heads back, never movin' from the spot until they was drowned complete. But even if you only saved three out of five, you'd likely make money on the deal."

Larry runs a pretty good place, but he's allus reelin' off some crazy idea which it is a good thing not to pay any attention to 'em, because if you do, they will get you into trouble. And so when he spouted off this new one, I was ag'in' it from the first, knowin' that no good would ever come of such locoed undertakin's. But One-Card was took in, and the more I argued ag'in' it, the more he became convinced that we could become successful dude-ranchers.

"If you want to raise something, you old satchel-seat," I said to him as we was ridin' back to our cabin on Kerry Mountain, "why don't you raise cows? What do you know about dudes?"

And I would of done just as much good for myself by glumin' onto a rattlesnake's

"The oldest inhabitant, as I live and breathe!" exclaimed the Colonel. Silurian reared back. "Herumph!" he said, lookin' mad.

tail to see if he would bite. That crazy jigger is stubborn. He's a tall, sad-lookin' *hombre,* a trick and fancy poker-player, all around cowboy and a good shot. He has a loopin' eye on the off-side, a divin' Adam's apple, and his ears stick out from his head like the flaps on a pair of bat-wing chaps. When he talks, you look all around to see who could it be blowin' a horn down a badger-hole. His upper lip has give birth to a mustache which so closely resembles a couple of horses' tails, that he is allus gettin' asked how does he keep the cockle-burrs out of it.

Before settlin' down in this country, me and him had been ridin' the same trails for a good many years. In our younger days we used to shoot and cuss, up and down the Western plains, until we felt a desire to spend the rest of our days in peace and quiet. And so we built us a shack on top of Kerry Mountain, four miles west of Broom-tail Gulch, and even if it aint no glitterin' palace, we think it is a pretty good place to be in when the wind is blowin' the sage-brush out of the ground outside.

"WE wouldn't need to start out on a big scale," said One-card. "We could advertise for a couple of dudes, say some what's already growed up and wouldn't need so much care. Then, if we can stand it, we can allus get more."

That same night One-card and me sat up until after midnight composin' a fancy advertisement which we sent to one of them readin' magazines in New York, saying: "WANTED, 1 or maybe 2 male adult dudes on a ranch which is surrounded all around by gullies, draws, cañons, trees, berry-bushes, buffalo-grass, fishin'-cricks and all kinds of other scenery and no rain to speak of. Write to One-card Harrigan, Broom-tail Gulch."

TWO months goes by, and I have almost forgot about dude ranchin' when I'm settin' on the doorstep, one evening, and I hears a wagon rattlin' up the road, and here's One-card comin' up the mountain, lickety-split, crash-bang, hell-bent-for-leather.

He's settin' straight up on the bouncin' seat of the buck-board, flickin' them crazy bronc's every jump and lettin' out long-drawn-out war-whoops. I decides right away that the old goat has went and got loaded up at Larry Schoonover's soft-drink parlor.

He brings his horses to a stop by the corral gate, jumps out and comes at me wavin' a paper.

"What do you mean, you old hammer-head?" I calls out to him. "Drivin' them horses like that on a hot day! Aint you got no sense, you old fool?"

"Shet up!" he answers. "I'll wring the tails offen 'em if I so desire. Hell's poppin'! We hooked a dude!" And he shoves a letter under my nose. The letter reads as follows:

"One-card Harrigan, Esq.,
"Broom-tail Gulch.
"Dear Sir:

"Your very enticing notice in the *Utilitarian* has been brought to my attention. There is just one point I would like to have settled. Have you any bears? If you do have them, old bean, I am on my way to your jolly old rancho.

"Tally 'o, One-card, old fellow!

"George Throckmorton Hackett,
"Colonel, Retired."

"Bears?" says I, not knowin' what to make of it. "What does he want with bears?"

"How should I know what he wants with 'em?" asks One-card. "Maybe he likes to see 'em trippin' about!"

"Well," I says, "there aint been no bears around here for ten years, so I guess we'll never set our eyes on Colonel George Throckmorton Hackett, Retired. It's too bad, too. I shore would like to gaze on a man with such a noble name. I'll bet he's a ring-tailed wonder!"

"We'll get to see him, all right," says One-card. "We can fix the bear question after he's here."

And I hope to be et by buzzards, if that dang One-card Harrigan don't go and write a long letter to the Colonel, tellin' him that large herds of grizzlies had been seen grazin' near by, no later than last week, and for him to come right down.

GRIZZLIES! Grazin'! Around here! Why, I never heard such flummery before in all my life!

About a week later we're in town, standin' up to the bar in Larry Schoonover's restaurant, and Gin-eye Walker, who runs the post office, brings us a letter. One-card opens it and reads it in a loud tone of voice.

"'One-card Harrigan, Esq,'" he reads. "Who the hell is Esq?" Nobody knows, so he goes on: "'Your letter in my hands and I am on my way. I have spent many years hunting big game in Asia and Africa. I've bagged the wild yak in the mountains of the Himalayas and tracked the koodoo to its lair. But as I look over my trophies, I find that I lack the noble head of the shaggy grizzly. I can have no rest until I have slain this animal with my own hands. I take it from your letter that you gentlemen are top-hole sportsmen and especially suited to conduct an expedition of the sort I have in mind. I suppose you will attend to the matter of trusty gun-bearers and whatever native help we may require. I am packing all my what-nots and leaving New York tomorrow.

"'Ta-ta, old chap; long live the grizzlies!

"'George Throckmorton Hackett,
"'Colonel, Retired.'"

THE silence which followed the readin' of this letter was startlin'.

"He wants to scuffle a b'ar with his hands!" exclaimed Larry, his eyes bogged out in awed astonishment.

"One-card," says I, "this is once you have went too far with your wild ideas and careless braggin' manners!"

"And the wild galoot'll be here tomorrow, too," muses One-card. "Him and all his what-nots, a-dribblin' at the mouth for the blood of a grizzly b'ar! We've got to do something."

"I'll tell you boys what to do," puts in Larry, who's allus runnin' over with bright ideas. "Most likely this military gent is a man of means, and you could make yourselves quite a piece of change from this if you worked it right."

"Damnation!" grunts One-card. "We couldn't give birth to no b'ar, not even if we was to get a million for it!"

"You wouldn't have to have one!" continues Larry, winkin' one eye and leanin' his elbows on the bar. "I mean, you don't need no real b'ar. Take the gent out and give him a good time! Gun-packers, campfires and all the fixin's. Keep him out a week or so. You can allus say the b'ars have went south early this year!"

Just then Toots Blare and Wing-shot Wilson come up to the bar, and Larry slaps his hand down on the mahogany and shouts: "There's your trusty gun-packers! You couldn't find any better ones if you was to ride a hundred miles either way from this town!"

Wing-shot and Toots is a couple of salty boys which call themselves wild-horse trappers. Last winter, at Christmas time, the Reverend Hornbeek spoke a piece in church, and he never took his eyes off them boys while he was doin' so.

The text of that sermon was: *"Thou shalt not see thy brother's ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thyself from them; thou shalt in any case bring them again unto thy brother."*

Well, sometime after that Johnny Rapp was ridin' the range for poor stuff, and he caught 'em drivin' a fat two-year-old heifer branded *JP*, and they both up and swore that they was takin' the animal home to Miss Alfrieda, who runs the JP. But we all had our doubts. Most likely they was high-tailin' it the other way.

We explain the situation to the boys, and they agree to act the parts. Only we'll have to watch 'em, because they have a silly grin on their faces which don't stand for no good.

Then we hired old Silurian Smith for a head guide. Silurian used to be a prospector, but now he has took up trappin' and coyote-poisonin'. He lives out in the Bad Lands with a lot of yappin' hounds. You couldn't find a more suited lookin' *hombre* for the part by advertisin' from Deadwood to Tombstone.

NEXT day we went to meet the noon train. We had set up all night in Larry Schoonover's place, arrangin' the details of the oncomin' bear-hunt.

The train pulled in, and a strange-lookin' object dismounted from one of the cars. There could be no doubts about it being Colonel George Throckmorton Hackett Retired. He was a stoutish man, with a pink face and a little stiff gray mustache. He wore a big white kettle on his head, and a pair of pants cut off above the knees. This was the first pair of knees to be exhibited in their raw state in Broom-tail Gulch, and a wild cheer broke loose from the assembled spectators.

"What 'o!" boomed the Colonel, advancing in a brisk, military manner. "What 'o, what 'o, what 'o! Capital weather for bear-hunting, eh?"

"Well," said One-card, "they're apt to be kind of mangy this time of the year."

"Nice air you've got here!" said the Colonel, takin' a long breath. "Ahhhhh! Invigorating no end! . . . . I say, who's this? What, what, what! Well, by Jove!"

He had sighted Silurian Smith, who was standin' behind me. He advanced toward the old prospector, holdin' up half a pair of spectacles to one eye and squintin' sharp with the other.

"The oldest inhabitant, as I live and breathe!" exclaimed the Colonel. He bent down to get a good view of old Silurian's wrinkled face. "Well, old fellow," he said, "you're a hearty-lookin' old chap and mighty well-preserved for your years!"

SILURIAN reared back on his little short legs; his beard bristled like the quills on a porcupine, and he started sputterin' like a fish out of water.

"Herumph!" he said, lookin' mad. "Herumph!" I thought he would leap astraddle of our dude, but instead he whirled around and made for Larry's ice-cream resort, mutterin' to himself and walkin' fast.

"That's our top-hand guide," I explained to Mr. Hackett. "You got to excuse his gruff ways; he aint used to bein' examined through a telescope. You're lucky he didn't unbutton you with his skinnin'-knife!"

The Colonel looked surprised but said nothing. You could tell that he thought he was in the midst of very uncouth persons.

His what-nots consisted of fourteen large pieces of baggage. There was some tents, guns of all sizes,—from .22's to great big fowlin'-pieces, the barrels of which looked like railroad tunnels,—mosquito-nets, fishin'-tackle, cookin'-utensils enough for a round-up spread, camp-chairs, a brass bed, a radio set, a foldin' library, a typewriter, a large medicine-chest, a saxophone and many other things which would prove very useful on a bear-hunt.

We tied the stuff on the best we could and drove through Main Street lookin' like the Mormon exodus. I felt some better when we got away from town and reached open country.

OUR plan was to take plenty of grub with us, circle around the hills for a few days, then, at an appointed time, have somebody shake a buffalo-robe behind a rock for the Colonel to shoot at. We would then tell him that he had spoiled his only chance. Johnny Rapp, who was out of a job, was to be the rug-shaker.

The expedition set out the same day, and never has such an outfit come down Kerry Mountain, before or since. First came Silurian Smith, astraddle of an old dun mule with eight hounds howlin' in his tracks; then me and One-card, mounted on our bronc's, a six-shooter on each hip and a rifle apiece. Behind us followed Toots Blare, a silly grin on his face, luggin' a monstrous old blunderbuss which looked like it should of had wheels put under it. Then the Colonel, with his knee pants and his white kettle, anxiously scannin' the sky-line for approachin' herds of grazin' grizzlies. Wing-shot Wilson was next, carryin' another blastin' instrument of large dimensions. Johnny Rapp brought

up the pack-horses, of which there was six, each loaded down with bear-huntin' equipment.

It takes time to get a layout like that in motion, and we didn't get any farther from home than three miles when we was overtook by darkness and had to make camp by the side of Hell Crick. And I thought it would come daylight before we got all the tents and gimlets set up like the Colonel wanted 'em. So far, we had not met up with any wild life, only a bunch of cows and calves belongin' to Miss Alfrieda Cawthorne of the JP. Them cattle took one look at our pageant, put up their tails and went for home, leapin' gullies and skimmin' the high spots. I don't know as I could blame 'em for it.

After it looked like we was squatted for the summer, the Colonel had us make a big fire; then he give us a little sawed-off chair apiece and told us to gather round. Nothin' like a campfire to warm a sportsman's heart, he declaimed. It was so soothing to tired limbs, so picturesque, so poetic.

Well, maybe so; I couldn't say as to that. But this happened to be a pretty warm night, and we kept sweatin' and edgin' away, wishin' that a big rain would come up and put out his dod-gasted fire.

"It's strange, is it not, that we didn't encounter this herd that Mr. One-card mentioned in his letter! It seems to me he was very emphatic about their numbers, and especially certain of their proximity to your preserves," said the Colonel.

"Well," said One-card, "they have come pretty close to the shack, all right, but I couldn't say that they ever got in the preserves. Them bears we got around here sort of prefer fresh meat on the hoof to any other kind of vittles."

"Another thing too," put in Johnny Rapp, backin' a couple of feet from the fire, "you aint much liable to see 'em only just before the sun has come up. They're nocturnal jiggers, goin' about through the night, crunchin' sheepherders and stray campers."

"You don't say!" exclaimed the Colonel, not lookin' very scared. " 'Strordinary, don't you know! Friendly beggars, eh, what? Sociable and all that sort of rot, eh? Haw, haw, haw!"

"Yeah," continued Johnny. "Now, you take the case of them fossil-hunters which camped in this very same spot, no later than last summer. You remember 'em, don't you, Silurian?"

"Huh-huh," growled Silurian from back in the shadows, where he had sneaked unbeknownst to the rest of us.

"Well, they was pretty good *hombres,* in their ways. I felt real bad about them fellows. It was too bad. Yes sir, it shorely was."

"Did they—er—meet with an accident?" asked the Colonel.

Johnny squinted one eye, scratched his nose and let out a long sigh.

"Nobody ever knowed for shore what become of 'em," he said, very mournful. "I was the man what found their camp—the remains of it, that is; and I can truly say that there wasn't nothin' there which even looked like a fossil-hunter. Stray pieces, maybe, here and there, but not enough to identify anybody."

THE fire crackled, and not a word was spoke for a minute. A coyote barked, away off in the distance, and all was seen to hitch closer to the fire. Of course we all knew this was a big string of lies, but it sounded pretty spooky the way Johnny was puttin' it.

"There was only two things which pointed to bears," he went on. "The first was the large number of tracks which they left around the place." Here he paused and rolled a cigarette, gazin' sorrowful-like at the flames.

"And—er—the second?" inquired the Colonel settin' very straight in his swivel chair.

Johnny reached out, picked up a burnin' twig and lit his smoke. He took a long, lazy drag before answerin'.

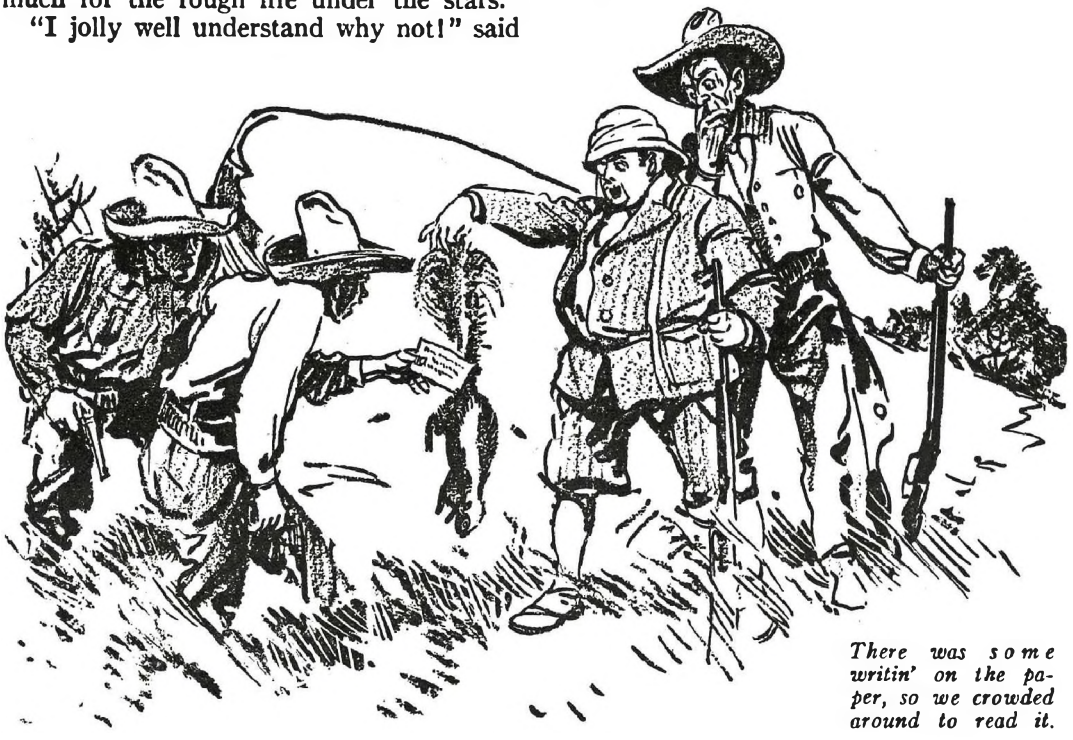
"That was a funny thing," he said. "Of course, us folks in the bear-country know this to be a fact, but I don't suppose it ever was bruited around as far as Africa. You see, the damn' hellions will not eat a human pan-creeass. They will run for miles at the mere mention of the word. Well, sir, about forty rods from the camp, we found four pan-creeasses wrapped up in old newspapers. After that, there wasn't much doubts left but what them four fossil-hunters had been et by bears."

Toots Blare and Wing-shot Wilson give a big squawk and jumped up off their chairs like they had been shot from behind. They disappeared in the darkness, emittin' strange chokin' noises. Silurian swallowed his chaw and beat on his stomach with both hands, lookin' like a man sufferin' his death-throes, One-card and me put on our poker faces.

"Humph! Ah-rumph! Er— I had no idea!" gasped the Colonel. "Is this—er—a common occurrence?"

"No-o," drawled Johnny, "it aint. You see, people hereabouts don't go campin' of nights. They stay to home. We don't care much for the rough life under the stars."

"I jolly well understand why not!" said the Colonel. "Yes of course! It's no sublime pleasure to have an infernal bear prodding your insides in search of your bally pancreas. It's very thoughtful of the beggars, wrapping up the objects in newspapers. No wonder they call 'em *Ursus Horribilis!* This reminds me of the time my old friend King Boulamoosh sent for me to rid his country of two man-eating lions. And I see, gentlemen, that I must remain here until I have put an end to this bally mess. No, no, don't thank me! It's nothing at all. I'm absolutely used to it."



There was some writin' on the paper, so we crowded around to read it.

EVERYBODY had returned, and Johnny was lookin' sort of sheepish, like his joke had backfired on him, which it had.

"Of course," continued the Colonel, "it's all hands on deck, eh, what? Every man to his post, and the first to see one of the beasts is to call out, loudly: 'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' I'll toddle from place to place and keep everyone awake. Nice generalship, what say?"

"I don't hardly think they'd show up tonight," put in Johnny. "This aint the right kind of weather for 'em. They're more apt to bust out on damp, chilly evenings, right after a big rain."

"Tut-tut-tut!" clucked the Colonel. "Say no more, my boy. I've no wish to have my jolly old pancreas snatched from me. Wherever the bally thing goes, I go! On guard, men!"

Now, a man aint hardly expected to shout with joy when he's asked to stay up all night, lookin' for something which he knows aint there. We sure cast murderous glances at Johnny Rapp, the ornery, lyin' story-teller, but he aint abashed by our coolness. In fact, he fell right into the part, and started sneakin' through the sage-brush like a horse-stealin' Soo.

The Colonel grabbed one of his cannons, girdled himself with a couple of belts full of ammunition, and began makin' his tours of inspection. I fell asleep a couple of times, but the Colonel would sneak up through the grass, tap me on the shoulder, and I would set up right quick, cussin'.

Just before daylight I was again woke up with a start. My carcass was all stiff in the joints, and I couldn't make out what was takin' place, when all to once and without warnin' I heard a terrible squall of terror, right in my ears, and about six boot-heels went stompin' on my prostrate form. I managed to set up and beheld old Silurian

Smith, his long hair flowin' in the breeze, leapin' over the prairie like a startled antelope, yellin', "Hallo, hallo, hallo!" in a piercin', squeaky voice.

Bang, bang, bang! went somebody's six shooter, than a goshawful KE-ROOM! from the Colonel's mountain gun. Chunks of lead hummed through the morning air like bees, and I flang myself down to keep from gettin' hit. Silurian's dogs yipped and howled fit to wake the dead. Everybody was runnin' around, shootin', yellin' and cussin', and some of the horses had broke their hobbles and gone snortin' through the camp, knockin' down tents and kickin' expensive bear-huntin' equipment to the four winds.

After a few minutes of this hell-raisin', the shootin' died down, and I rose up on my knees to see if there was anybody left alive.

The boys had bulldogged Silurian, and they was all settin' on him tryin' to learn what was the cause of his alarm.

"Let go o' me, you hell-hounds!" squealed the old man. "I'll larn you to fool with growed-up folks!"

They turned him loose, and he sat up.

"What's the matter, Silurian? Did you see a bear?" asked Johnny, lookin' serious and concerned. I noticed that Toots and Wing-shot was also very sober, and I knew right away that there had been some dirty work at the crossroads.

"Hey?" said Silurian. "What bear?"

"How do we know what bear?" said Toots. "Or maybe you was only takin' your exercise?"

"Hrumph!" snorted the old man. "Do ye see this?" and he pulled out a big bull-knife and glared at all present. "Undesarvin' of warnin' as ye all are, you pack of snappin' coyotes, I'm a-warnin' you! I was slayin' buffaloes afore your daddies was pupped, and I'll not stand fer you shakin' saddle-blankets in my face when I'm asleep. And ef I ketch ary one o' you even so much as lookin' cross-eyed at me, I'll rip the livers out of you and feed 'em to the dogs!"

And this out of his system, the old boy strode off lookin' like an insulted pelican.

THE COLONEL had not said a word until then but he now again assumed full charge.

"Haw, haw!" he howled. "A bad case of nerves, eh, what? Immensely humorous occurrence. Well, daylight over the jungles, old fellows! It's coffee and hit the trail for us!"

"What!" said One-card. "Don't we get no sleep?"

"If the bears wont come to us, we'll go to them," replied the Colonel. "There's no speaking of sleep until we have rid the country of these beasts."

"DID you ever see the likes of that critter?" One-card said to me while we was waitin' for breakfast, which was bein' cooked by Toots and Wing-shot while Johnny was roundin' up the horses. And I was forced to admit that the Colonel was a freak of nature which was not to be met up with every day in civilized communities. He was now engaged in takin' what is known as a "tub," a strange process which consists of fillin' a rubber hinkus full of cold water, jumpin' into it headfirst and makin' noises like a trained seal.

"I don't aim to spend another night out of my blankets," said One-card. "B'ar-huntin' be damned! First thing you know, we'll all be down with rheumatism or pneumonia. It aint natural!"

"It's all your fault, anyway, you locoed old ranny!" I shot at him. "If it wasn't for you havin' them wild ideas, we could just as well be to home, or in Larry Schoonover's coffee-shoppe, standin' up to the bar like human beings, instead of humorin' a crazy African hyena what aint happy onless he's slayin' to the right and left of him!"

"And what if he finds out we been spookin' him," I added. "You aint got no way of knowin' what a ring-tailed wolf like him'll do in a case like that!"

"Huh!" grunted One-card. "I could plunk him six times between the horns before he could even get one of his elephant-shooters in action!"

"You couldn't blame him for gettin' sore," I put in. "We promised him a bear, and he's got a right to it, aint he?"

"We'll give him his chance today," said One-card. "The earlier the better, so's we can all go home to recuperate."

Johnny Rapp had returned with the horses, and now he joined in the pow-wow. One-card told him where he would be expected to do his bear act. The place he picked out was on the edge of the Bad Lands, and Johnny was to hide in a draw and shake the buffalo robe with a long stick, followin' which he would hide the robe, circle around and get back to camp.

"Now Johnny," ended up One-card, "no more of your jokes!"

"Don't worry," said Johnny. "I'm just

Silurian stopped his mule and held up one hand. "B'ars!" he said.

as anxious to bring this thing to a head as you are!" And with this we all went to eat our breakfast.

An hour later we was all out again on the trail of the great American grizzly, in the same formation used the day before. Only we had not took the pack-horses, since we aimed to get back to camp in the evening, and maybe sooner.

About eleven o'clock and nearin' the Bad Lands, Silurian stopped his mule and held up one hand, lookin' very impressive.

"B'ars!" he said.

"Where?" asked the Colonel, jerkin' his gun from Toots' hands.

"They aint in sight yet," explained One-card. "But the dogs have smelt 'em. Look at that one. They allus do that when they smell bears!"

The hound he was pointin' to looked like he was interested in something, all right, but it wasn't nothin' to do with bears.

"We better split up and flush 'em out," said One-card.

"Toots, you and Wing-shot ride to the rear of 'em, and me and Cold Deck'll stay with the Colonel to lend him our moral support. Be careful, boys!"

The Colonel's face was all shiny with joy; he was at last to conquer a live grizzly!

"Now," One-card cautioned him, "you don't dare to miss one, for if you do, they'll never stop this side of the Big Water, and we aint got a horse to catch 'em."

"I thought you said they were fighters?" said the Colonel.

"Well, they're hell-benders, all right," said One-card. "But they're liable to run out on you if they aint cornered, and you can't afford to spoil your chance."

We figured that by this time Toots and Wing-shot had joined up with Johnny, and we snuck up onto the appointed place with great caution. Silurian stayed behind with his dogs.

All at once One-card throwed himself down on the grass and motioned for us to do the same.

"Shhhhh!" he said. "I see one. Look! Yonder there, behind them bushes!" Shore enough, we could see something brown and shaggy movin' through the thick underbrush. We heard the animal give a deep growl in a very gruff voice, and then he began shakin' and disportin' himself like he was very much displeased at the proceedings. "He seen us," said One-card. "You better look out!"

"Ahhh!" exclaimed the Colonel. Then he began aimin' his gun very careful. One-card and me stuck our fingers in our ears, shut both eyes and waited for the explosion.

"KER-BOOM!"—went the blamed thing, and the earth quivered for miles around.

Followin' his shot, the Colonel made to jump up, but One-card grabbed him and held him down. "You better wait," he said. "Sometimes they play possum."

"I got the beggar!" yelled the Colonel. "He rolled down into a depression. I saw the blood flowing from his wound!"

"The devil you did!" I exclaimed. "We better go and see about that!"

We ran up a slope to the rocky place where the bear had last been seen. But if the Colonel expected to find a dead grizzly behind them bushes, he was a sadly disappointed man, for it wasn't no bear, but instead a skunk, dead at least a week, and with a piece of paper tied to his tail.

I looked at One-card, and One-card looked at me, and the Colonel looked at the skunk. Then he looked at both of us, and he was a puzzled big-game hunter. He went over and picked up the skunk, holdin' him by the tail between his thumb and forefinger. There was some writin' on the paper, so we crowded around to read it and it said on there:

"ALL MY LIFE I WAZ A GRIZZLY BAR. NOT AFEARD OF HELL OR HIGH WATER. BUT I AM SO SHAMED TO OF LET MYSELF GOT SHOT BY KERNEL GEORGY THROCKMUTTON HACKITT THAT I HAVE TURNED INTO A SKUNK."

The Colonel put the defunct skunk down very carefully, and wiped his fingers on his sawed-off pants, and then he went and sat on a big rock. There wasn't nothing said for quite a spell, and the silence might of lasted for hours only the peace and quiet of the afternoon was suddenly shattered by a most gosh-awful crashin' in the underbrush.

We all turned to see what could it be, and beheld Johnny Rapp comin' down the slope, runnin' like a striped mule with his tail on fire. His boot-heels was only touchin' ground now and then; he was flyin' most of the time. We only had a few glances of him, leapin' and boundin' in the general direction of Kerry Mountain.

He had no more than got out of sight when another fleein' apparition followed him out of the brush and flashed past us like a ghost caught in a strange country by daylight. We kind of thought this had been Toots Blare but there was no way to make sure.

"It must be a great day for foot-racin'," said One-card. "Well, I'll be dad-blasted! Looky yonder, here comes another one! Two more, by chowder! . . . . *Three!*"

ONE of the figures we recognized as Wing-shot Wilson. The other two was a couple of surveyors which had been layin' out a new road across the Bad Lands. Like a bunch of startled mountain goats they came down the hillside, never lookin' to the right or left of 'em.

This was a state of affairs which could not possibly be explained in an offhand manner. You could see at a glance that this wasn't no joke.

"Where you headed for?" yelled One-card as Wing-shot flew past.

"*Er-r-r-r-r-r-r—*" answered Wing-shot, and his shirt-tails went a-floppin' away into open country.

"Run!" panted one of the surveyors. "Run for your lives!"

"Who?" called One-card. "What for?" But this, it appeared, was no time for explanations.

On top of all them crazy doings came a loud exclamation from the Colonel. Expectin' to see another flock of foot-racers, we turned to take a look—and got the surprise of our wild lives. For a live, genuine bear was a-comin' out of the woods, and he wasn't stoppin' to pick flowers.

It was only a little old harmless black bear, but something had happened to him; his eyes looked boggy, and his tongue hung out a foot. He might of been last in that race just then, but he was gainin' fast.

"Now, you blasted bounder!" yelled the Colonel. "You'll perform your bally tricks of prestidigitation in the open!" He lifted his cannon to his shoulder and took aim.

THIS is the last thing which remains clear in my mind. Right after this I saw a big old cottonwood tree which was about two hundred yards away come sailin' out of the ground at me. The earth heaved under my feet like a pitchin' horse, and I felt myself bein' propelled through the atmosphere like a home-run baseball. Large chunks of Western country came floatin' by, accompanied by uprooted trees, bushes and rocks. Then the bottom dropped out of the sky, and I tumbled down great distances. This fallin' wasn't so bad, but the landin' was terrible!

After a little I sat up and took a quick look around. I thought I must of lit into another county, everything looked so different. Another funny thing was that I wasn't wearin' no pants, and all I had left of my shirt was the collar and the cuffs.

A wild-lookin' cannibal rose up from out of the branches of an uprooted tree, and I saw that it was One-card, only he was totally undressed, and covered with dirt.

"What happened?" he yelled. "Who done this?"

"How do I know?" I answered. "Somebody sure raised hell!"

We started lookin' for the Colonel, and found him settin' in a big hole. He had also suffered considerable damages.

"The beggar blew up!" he said. "I shot him, and he blew up!"

"Now, you blasted bounder!" yelled the Colonel. "You'll perform your bally tricks of prestidigitation in the open!" He took aim.

"What blew up?" asked One-card.

"The bear," answered the Colonel. "The bloomin' bear blew up like a bally old firecracker."

"The hell you say!" I exclaimed.

"I never heard tell of explodin' bears before," put in One-card. "I never thought I would live to see one!"

"You damn' near didn't!" I added.

We was sittin' there tryin' to figure it all out, when the foot-racers finally circled back to the scene of the disaster.

"Did the bear bump against a tree?" asked one of the surveyors.

"I shot the bounder," said the Colonel. "And when the bullet struck him, he went into a volcanic eruption."

"You shot him?" exclaimed the foot-racers, starin' at the Colonel. They looked at each other, whisperin': *"He shot him!"*

"Well," said One-card, beginnin' to look mad, "was that any reason for him to fly off the handle that-a-way?"

"Migod, yes!" exclaimed the surveyor. "That bear was soaked in nitro-glycerine!"

"Wha-a-t!"

"Nitro-glycerine. We've been using the stuff to blast markers through the Bad Lands. It was left over from shooting a feller's well and he gave it to us and that saved us buying dynamite. We had it in the fork of a tree away from our tent—along with a side of bacon we'd put there so the coyotes wouldn't get it. We found the bear had et the whole side of bacon and had upset the can of nitro all over himself. Why it didn't let go right then I don't know, but it didn't. There must have been better than a gallon of it soaked into that shaggy pelt of his. We watched him; he made one dab with his tongue to lick it off, and right away he got wild and come for us. And we went away from there. And—"

He stopped to get his breath.

"And then," finished Colonel Hackett, very thoughtful, "my bullet exploded him!" And next day before he left, when we was all lined with our feet on the rail in Larry Schoonover's candy-store, he puts down his fifth and shakes hands all around. "I'm satisfied, gentlemen," he says. "I've done something no hunter ever did before!"

The Forest War

By HAROLD TITUS

The able writing-man who gave us "Spindrift" and "Timber" and "The Tough Nut" here contributes a deeply interesting novel of the North Woods lumber country.

Illustrated by W. O. Kling

The Story So Far:

STEVE DRAKE was a son of the Forest. His most vivid recollection was of the blizzard through which his father had carried him—the time that father, discouraged with his clerk's job at Jim Flynn's lumber-camp, had stolen a thousand-dollar pay-roll and with his little orphaned son had tried to abscond. Overtaken by a blinding snowfall, the man had been obliged to carry the child; and so Jim Flynn had caught them—rescued them, rather; for he not only saved their lives and forgave the thief, but gave him another job. And so—"If we ever get a chance, Stevie," the elder Drake had often said, "we've got to do somethin' for old Jim Flynn."

The chance had come now: The elder Drake was dead; and Steve, a man grown, and with his first endeavor to win fortune for himself just ended in failure, was roaming the woods in search of a new venture, when he came upon the hunting-camp of young Jim Flynn—and upon young Jim, drunk. A little later Steve went on his way carrying a new pack-sack initialed *J. F.*, which young Jim had given him in trade for some needed salt. And presently Steve came to the Flynn lumber-camp and learned that young Jim had chosen the poorest of all times for his debauch. For in an accident his father, old Jim, had suffered a broken hip, and his sister Kate had been nearly blinded. The camp was in charge of an old man, McNally, until young Jim should show up. Flynn was being crowded hard by his more powerful rival, the Midwestern Company, who were eager to lay hands on his lumber lands. More, Flynn's men, led by Franz, a presumable emissary of the Midwestern people, were going on strike.

Franz was making an inflammatory speech as Steve entered the camp, and cursing old Jim. Steve stopped him; a savage fight followed—a fight which Steve finally won. Old McNally, noting the initials on Steve's pack-sack, exclaimed: "Young Jim! I might 'a' known." And Steve, seeing how he could help the man to whom he and his father owed so much, accepted the identification and took charge of the camp.

McNally explained the situation to Steve: they were building a railroad to get the lumber out, but found themselves blocked by the Midwestern holdings, by the land of a queer Scotch recluse named McDonald and called the Laird, and just ahead of their railroad, by land recently bought in Franz' name, probably by Midwestern. And Steve learned other things:

That Franz had come into the country three years before, posing as a cruiser; that he had met Kate and old Jim at Good-by, that Kate had been charmed by him for a time, that suspicion had been born in her mind, that evidence finally was unearthed to show that he was only an agent for the Midwestern interests, spying on Polaris and working craftily to put himself into the good graces of Duncan McDonald, whose property would have been welcomed by either of the large outfits. McDonald, however, had steadfastly refused to sell his timber or to grant amicably a right-of-way for Flynn's railroad through his property.

"What about La Fane?" Steve asked.

"He's another queer one. He's been in here, squattin' on your property, since before I come. La Fane is the best woodsman I've ever seen, but he wont work at it. He breaks bird-dogs for rich folks, traps a little and recently's been carryin' our mail."

A little later Steve saved one of La Fane's children from a savage dog the man had been training. And by good luck Steve himself was saved from a shotgun man-trap Franz had set near his cabin. But Franz had other means of retaliation, apparently. For meeting Steve shortly afterward, he said:

"Don't you figure that you've crawled

"Jim!" she cried, bewildered. "Jim, why don't you say something to me?"

about far enough out on this particular limb?"

"Meaning just what?" Steve countered.

"Principally," replied Franz, "that the real Jim Flynn Junior is on his way in, or will be, when he sobers up." *(The story continues in detail:)*

FOR an instant Steve's head did swim. But it was not thought of what young Jim Flynn, whose part he was playing, might do to him that caused confusion. The factor in the situation which loomed high in his consciousness was the ultimate effect on a blinded girl, hundreds of miles distant, that the arrival here of the one with true authority might have.

Franz was right in his deduction of what would happen should young Jim come to Good-by fresh—or stale—from a debauch. Steve knew that he had kept the job alive by his ability to give men confidence in his leadership. This was no feeling of self-satisfaction, self-esteem, or conceit; it was simply clear thinking, straight reasoning.

Young Jim, on his way here! It would send the fragile structure of Polaris hopes crumbling!

But, in solving a complex problem, in confronting a situation filled with a multitude of important factors, one must accomplish one thing at a time. The important matter before Steve Drake now was to seal Franz's lips, to prevent spread of the news the man bore, for should Steve be questioned he would be forced to admit the truth. That alone would put the camp in a bad state of mind.

He studied the other closely, noting the deep pockets in the breast of his shirt. He raised a hand to fumble in one of his own pockets, fingers closing on something there.

"Franz, you're untidy," he said.

The man looked hard at him and then down at his own appearance and laughed.

"I should worry about my looks, when I've got you where I—"

"But a man who's careless about where he leaves buttons from his clothing, may find something to worry about!"

"Buttons! I got other things to think about than buttons!" the other sneered.

Steve nodded. "Of course. Perhaps many things." He opened his hand, displaying a smooth, brown button. "This, however, belongs under the flap of your right-hand shirt pocket, Franz. Its mate is on the other. Not an ordinary button, is it?"

The man's mouth twitched, and his eyes changed, losing their light of assurance, becoming cautious and crafty.

"And even if it weren't for this button, I was mighty careful handling the gun, Franz!"

"Gun? I don't know what—" But Drake's snort of contempt cut him short.

"A good gun, well cared for. Grease all over it to keep the rust away—and to take the print of a man's fingers!" He thrust his head forward, eyes burning.

"I don't know what you're driving at, I tell you!"

"But maybe you'll be telling the sheriff how the gun comes to be set in my trail with your fingerprints on it; and how I come to be in possession of a shirt-button I didn't have before I made a grab at the man who set that gun! You damned skunk, why don't you fight your battle in daylight and face to face?"

Franz's face blanched.

"Talk!" he snarled. "Bunk! If you think you can tie me up to something I don't know about you've got a flock of guesses coming!"

"I'll make just one guess, Franz. It's this: one word from you about the game I'm playing, about another man said to be young Jim Flynn in this country, and I'll have the sheriff so hot after you that—well, that *your* head'll swim!

"We've got a personal war on, you and I. I'm willing to go through with that and ask no odds. But when you try your tricks on this job I'll fight fire with fire, I'll bite and scratch and foul! I've got it on you in this little matter of an attempted murder and if you want to find out how hard and how quick I'll bear down and tattle to the sheriff's office, just let your tongue run! Do you get that, you damned scavenger?"

Franz made no reply. Not in words, that is; but a baffled look swept his face, mingling with rage and relief. Relief because, fairly trapped, he had a conditioned escape; rage because he was not able to use the club he held.

WITH a deep, long stroke of the paddle Steve resumed his way, never looking back or saying another word. He knew when a dangerous enemy was well scotched and although Franz called out, protesting, evidently wanting to talk further, he gave no heed.

Before he went on, Franz twisted off that other button and hurled it into the lake.

Steve went on to the camp, pondering this new complication. Disaster for the job, young Jim's coming would mean, yes; but it would mean something else; heartbreak for Kate Flynn and this, strangely, seemed more important than the other.

As he came abreast of La Fane's cabin on the return the man and his children appeared. More, the great dog, Duke, was with them, walking slowly at the man's heels and on either side of the great beast walked a child!

Steve turned his canoe shoreward, mystified. "Morning!" he hailed and La Fane stopped, saluting gravely with a wave of one hand.

The group halted and as Steve stepped out he saw that the dog's eyes were fast on him with a malignant stare. The lip twitched back, exposing the long, white fangs and then the animal, as if reminded of some important matter temporarily forgotten, looked up into La Fane's face. The man was not observing him; his gaze was directed toward Steve, but the animal's threatened snarl did not materialize; he licked his chops as if in chagrin and the tip of his tail waggled ever so slightly. He sat down and panted, docile as a lap dog!

"Come on and touch him," La Fane said, a flicker of laughter in his face.

"Hello, Duke!" Steve muttered, stepping forward, hand extended.

The dog checked his panting, lowered his head and stiffened. But when the hand touched him in light caress he flopped his bushy tail and let his tongue loll again.

"Great tin can, La Fane, how'd you do it?" Drake gasped.

The other chuckled, then, as one will when his pride had been pleased.

"There are ways," he said. "Take him for a run, children."

The three little girls scampered along the beach, the eldest calling to the dog. Duke still sat there, but he stared eagerly into his master's face, ears cocked alertly.

"Go on!" the man said. The dog tensed, his tail threshed and his eyes brightened, as if only half sensing that a privilege had been granted. "Yes! Go on! Take care of 'em, Duke!"

With a great bound the dog was gone, flying after the children as fast as he had rushed on another day, but this time his roach did not bristle, his tail was not held low, he did not pursue quarry to maim and kill. He bounded high, plume waving and when he overtook the children he ran among them, bunting them aside, licking ecstatically at hands and faces, frolicking like a spaniel puppy!

La Fane gave his deep chuckle again.

"But how under high heaven—" Steve insisted.

"I had it to do. And when a man has

a thing to do, it must be done. Isn't that so?"

He seated himself on a log and began picking a splinter to bits.

"When you first saw him, I had had him only three days. I had been watching him, trying to find out what he was like. I knew him pretty well but I made one mistake: I was not sure of the strength of the chain that held him. I should have made sure of that, knowing what he was, and with the children around."

He paused; his hands shook slightly.

"He was as dangerous as I'd thought. If it had not been for you, we would be bearing great sorrow, now. I took him that afternoon into the woods—just the two of us. He came back—mine."

"You mean, you knocked the poison all out of him?"

La Fane shook his head. "No. I struck him three times only. That was all. Most dogs do not need to be struck more than that. I don't think he can smell yet, though, from those three blows on the nose.

"And after that I put him in harness. I made him drag things through the brush. I let him get hung up and then made him pull loose, with my help. When he found out that he had a thing to do and could not do it without my help, and that he must try his best before I would help him or else suffer, he was mine."

Steve sat down with a surprised: "Well!"

The other smiled grimly.

"It works, with dogs and with men. There are few outlaw dogs, just as there are few outlaw men. A dog or a man is bad because he is either weak or headstrong. Give a man or a dog a picture of his duty, of his job, and see that he wants to do it—wants to from the inside, I mean, and—well, there you are.

"If I had shot him that morning after he rushed my babies, it would have been a coward's way out and they would have known it. They would have grown up, knowing that I had put them into danger and could only remove that danger by destroying something. But you gave me the chance to finish what I had started to do without—without hell coming into my home. That is why I am waiting to do something, anything, for you."

STEVE, strangely touched, growled that La Fane owed him nothing.

"But men and dogs, La Fane. . . . . You've not lived here always then?"

The other snorted a laugh. "I've tried other places."

"And handled men?"

"Handled! I've *herded* men! I was a prison guard until I got filled up with it."

"Didn't like man-herding?"

"Didn't like seeing them herded without a chance to find and unearth the thing that would make them fit to work and walk alone, free. Some, of course, must always be herded: the weak ones. But so many of the others never have a chance at the right handling."

Drake was thinking fast as he studied the man's fine profile.

"You think, then, that if you had a chance you could break men as you break dogs?"

"I'm no breaker. I'm a handler. No, I don't want to break dogs . . . . or men. You asked a question. Yes, I can handle men. I've done it; I did it in the prison, a doctor and I. He had ways of understanding men that I didn't have, but he could not handle them, even when he knew what was the matter. We sent a dozen to parole that might have been there yet."

Steve locked his hands behind his head and stared out across the lake.

"Do you like to try handling men? Young men—who are strong but who haven't discovered what their job is?"

"No. I'm happy here, with the dogs and the children. But—you've a man in mind?"

He did not look at Drake but the query was peculiarly pointed.

"La Fane, can I trust you to keep a secret?"

"A secret of yours?"

"Yes; a special, personal secret which involves others."

"I have kept it."

"Huh?" Startled, Steve searched the man's face, seeing a queer suggestion of a smile about the lips.

"I have told no one that you are not young Jim Flynn."

"Well, how in—when did— Who told you that, La Fane?"

"You."

"I! I haven't breathed it!"

"Oh, no! You have said nothing. You have been very smart and wise." He turned his eyes on Steve and in them, for the first time, was a warmth, a light of high amusement, as one will be amused at the petty deceptions of an old friend. "But the first day I took the mail up to your cabin after

you had moved your things from McNally's, I walked in. I thought you were out, but you were there, sitting at the table, and you thought you put it away in time. But you did not. I saw it and saw your face as you looked at it. . . . . No man looks at his sister's photograph as you were looking at Kate Flynn's!"

STEVE gaped. He felt himself flushing. He remembered the incident well, the casual manner in which he had appropriated several of the photographs in the room which had been occupied by old Jim in the past for the sole purpose of getting possession of the one of the girl. He recalled, too, how he had been re-reading her letters that first day in his cabin and of how his heart had speeded up when he looked at her likeness. He had taken the picture tenderly in his hands and was staring at it when La Fane entered.

"Well, there's nothing much for me to say!" He laughed wryly.

"And no need of it. Your business is not mine. Why you came as you did, I don't know; I'm not curious. I know what you have done, which is to save old Jim's hide for a time, anyhow. That is all that matters. He, too, is my friend."

Steve felt an odd sense of being flattered.

"Thanks," he said, knowing that the word was inadequate. "I'm glad you found it out for yourself. I was wondering how to tell it!

"Now, here's my first problem." And swiftly he told of how he had blundered on young Jim Flynn, of how he had come to masquerade and of the worry which Franz's news had given him.

La Fane nodded.

"If he comes, this young Jim, the job goes to hell," he said.

"And if I leave the job and try to persuade him to stay away or to brace him up, it may go to the devil!"

The other agreed.

Steve leaned closer.

"Do you suppose you could do two jobs in one? Keep that young hell-raiser away until we have a chance to set things straight here, and, while you're doing it, handle him as—as you've handled Duke? I can't keep up this game so very long. But until old Jim gets on his feet somebody must be in charge who'll lead the crews."

"You're asking that?"

"I am."

"Where is he?"

Steve pondered. "How much red clay is there in this country? Within a day's travel, I mean?"

"Only one place."

"On a portage between the Madwoman and the Good-by?"

"Yes. You've been there?"

"I came that way. And the bottom of Franz's canoe was smeared with it this forenoon; it was fresh."

"If he is still there and bound to come here, he will use that trail. If the rest are with him it may be difficult." La Fane shrugged and rose. "I will do what I can do."

The man stood a moment, thinking. Then, without speaking further, he walked rapidly away. Steve stood on the beach watching and thinking that, for such a situation, no better man could have been found to accomplish all that could be done.

CHAPTER VIII

AND now, up the waters that Steve Drake had descended on his way into Good-by, went another lone man in a canoe. La Fane's pack was meager and he drove his canoe steadily until he was well past the pulpwood camp. Thereafter he relaxed a trifle and, when approaching bends, proceeded with real caution.

But no other traveler was coming down below the point where he left the river.

He studied the landing at the trail after disembarking and found only two sets of man-sign that could be read. The first was several days old; the other was fresh, made this day. He nodded. Franz had gone this way on his flight after being detected in his plot against Steve's life. He had stayed several days in the wild country and then, blundering on young Jim Flynn and thinking that intelligence gave him the upper hand over the one who was playing the rôle of old Jim's son, he had returned.

Halfway along the trail, where La Fane stopped to rest, he parted the leaves of a basswood sprout and examined a rusted bear trap which hung in a crotch. It had been there for years because one shank was half embedded in the quickly growing wood; still it was intact and workable.

"Wonder Franz hasn't taken it," he muttered. "He seems to want the earth!"

He went on to the Madwoman and worked up the river to Moose Lake. Steve

The man, with a mighty heave, flung him backward into the sparkling water.

had described the camping spot where he had met young Jim Flynn, but none with a good eye would have needed the directions he gave, because the rising smoke of a camp fire against the afterglow and, shortly later, the glow of the fire itself, heralded the place to the solitary paddler who threaded the channels among the islands dotting the upper end of the lake.

LA FANE idled along, waiting for night to come and, when the star-studded sky had lost its last vestige of light in the west, he let his canoe drift into the rushes and sat listening to the sounds that came from the vicinity of the camp fire.

Sounds of revelry, they mostly were; the snatch of a song, loud laughter, a careless oath. He shoved himself along to be nearer and saw the figures. The guide was washing dishes, the others lolling before the fire and even as the stealthy canoe came to a rustling halt in the reeds he saw the glint of a bottle as it was uplifted.

"Better take it easy, Jim," a man said. "That's next to the last live one."

"Hell with it!" a good-natured voice responded. "Gonna get drunk once more. Tomorrow's my las' day here. Gotta go to work day after. Gotta 'sume responsibilities, fellers! Gotta go Good-by 'nd take life seriously!"

"And us, we got to beat it for the Loop!" another growled. "One more day for the fish with us! Such a life!"

The rest drank too, but more sparingly than did young Jim.

"You c'n fish all you wan'," he mumbled. "Me, I'm gonna have a real, firs'-class drunk, see?"

"Well, you're on your way, all right!"

For a long time La Fane sat there, listening, watching; then he backed noiselessly away, paddled half a mile, landed, concealed his canoe in the bushes and, with an insect bar propped on branches above his head, slept in a single blanket.

But he did not sleep long. He was up while the stars still shone brightly, folding his blanket, eating a cold snack, and waiting for the first glimmer of dawn.

When this appeared he began to move slowly and silently through the timber. In a half hour he heard sounds beyond and went still more cautiously. He stopped when he caught the first glimpse of movement and stood motionless.

Smoky, the guide, was up. One of the three young men who comprised his party was just emerging from the tent.

"Ready for cakes?" Smoky asked.

"Dick and I'll be. Jim, though, he's dead to the world. Why, he drank until damn' near morning!"

The guide grunted and went on with his preparation of the meal.

La Fane squatted there, listening, pondering. He heard them try to rouse Flynn, saw them eat flapjacks and drink coffee and then begin rigging fishing-rods.

"Last day!" one said. "Damn, what a head! That's the devil of being out with a sot: you have to drink too much to show your appreciation of his hospitality!"

They embarked shortly, the three in one canoe, and La Fane, rising to full height, watched them go.

The sun was just shoving its rim above the eastern tree-tops when he walked into the camp. He went at once to the tent, jerked the flap aside and looked down at the heavily sleeping figure there.

The face was upturned. A bit pallid, it was, with circles beneath the eyes, a strained sort of grimace about the lips. A handsome face, it would be under normal conditions, but now it bore the marks of dissipation and its occasional twitchings indicated that continued drinking had put its mark deeper than the skin.

La Fane stooped. "Hey, you!" he said gruffly. The sleeper made no response. "Hey, Jim!" He shook the lad by the shoulder and, except for a long breath, Flynn gave no heed.

La Fane looked about. The tent was in confusion—pack-sacks, clothing, and bits of equipment were thrown here and there. He went over the packs carefully and finally selected the one that contained apparel such as would fit the sleeper. Bit by bit he sorted the rest, discarding that which by any chance might belong to the others, packing away articles that were obviously Jim's. This done, he carried the pack to the canoe on the shore and set the craft in the water.

He stared up the lake. The others had disappeared behind an island. No sound of human origin came to his straining ears.

La Fane was no man to waste opportunities and here was one, made for the occasion. He returned quickly to the tent, slung the recumbent figure to his shoulder and bore him, not without effort, down to the canoe and lay him gently in the bottom, his head on the duffle in the bow.

The boy mumbled and brushed at his face. His lips worked and he stretched his legs. However, his eyes did not open.

Then, with a stick, La Fane scratched in the sand on the landing, in large characters, the following message:

"ON MY WAY. GOOD LUCK. J. F."

With a grim smile he shoved off and paddled swiftly down the lake.

La Fane did not stop at the trail which would have led him across to the Good-by. He ran a short rapid just below it and kept on for an hour, watching the sleeping lad he carried until the boy commenced to show some signs of restlessness. Then he watched the bank and, at a point where a ledge of exposed rock, washed clean by spring floods, entered the water, he beached the canoe.

Stepping out he made the craft fast and then grasped the sleeper's shoulder roughly.

"Hey, you!" he said and shook Flynn.

The lad made an inarticulate protest and snuggled his head in his arm.

"Get up!" La Fane insisted and shook him again.

"Lemme 'lone, fellers! Gotta res'—"

"Get up before you get hurt!"

THIS time young Jim came to life with a bewildered start. He sat up so abruptly that the canoe rocked, causing him to grasp the sides and stare about in perplexity. His eyes finally came to rest on La Fane's face.

"Who the devil are you?" he demanded.

"My name's La Fane. Come on. We're going to make a new camp."

This was spoken casually, as though they were old companions instead of one never having set eyes on the other before that moment.

"Camp? Say—where the devil are we? And what—" The boy frowned and made a wry face.

"We're on our way to Good-by," La Fane said. "Get out and have a drink: water, this time. It'll help clear your head."

That suggestion hit a welcome spot, evidently, for young Jim climbed stiffly out of the canoe, lay down on the rock and buried his face in the clear waters of the stream. He drank at length, with frequent halts for breathing. He bathed his head and face and let his wrists lie in the cleansing current. While he did this La Fane bore the canoe up into the protecting screen of bushes, careful to disturb them as little as possible. It might be that those three back yonder might not believe the message he had printed in the sand and come looking. He wanted no complications.

Returning to the stream, he stood looking somberly down at his charge.

Thirst slacked, mind somewhat cleared by the bathing, Jim brushed the water from his black hair and hitched himself about to a half sitting posture.

"Now," he said in a surly tone, "what the hell's all this about? Who are you and why am I not in my own camp?"

"I told you my name was La Fane."

"And I heard you. How comes it that you're with me and giving orders?"

"I came after you."

"From Good-by?"

"Yes."

"And we're on our way there now?"

"Might say so. Sort of a roundabout way."

"What d'you mean by that?"

La Fane studied him a moment, taking in the intelligence reflected in the face, the half tamed, yet half soured spirit which gleamed in the dark eyes.

"We are going to Good-by when you're fit to go. That will be when you've got some of the corruption out of you and can be of some use there."

The lad's lower lip drooped and he rose slowly, wiping his hands on his breeches.

"Say, La Fane, or whoever you are, I'd like to know what authority you've got to tell me what I'm going to do and when!"

"There," said the other, spreading his great hands. "Just these—if I need them."

HIS voice was almost gentle, and the light in his eyes was far from hostile. It was a look of curious speculation with, perhaps, a hint of a plea in it. Still, his manner, beneath its quiet, was firm as steel.

And it was this last which the boy detected; probably he saw only that and his own face, with its marks of physical punishment, went gray. Sweat beaded his forehead and he clenched his fists.

"That's not enough!" he said brusquely and, stepping past La Fane, strode up the ledge to where the canoe had been carried.

"Where are you going?"

The man's voice crackled on the query.

"To get my outfit. I'm going back and damn to you if—"

The grip of one of those great hands on his arm checked both his words and movement. He was spun about to confront La Fane's impassive face in which the eyes glowed dangerously.

"You're wrong," he said quietly. "You go where I take you; you do as I tell you."

"Like hell, I will!"

And young Jim swung quickly, savagely, his blow landing on the other's cheek.

It was a stout, sharp blow, strong enough to rock La Fane's head on his great tower of a neck. But it was the only one Flynn struck. A hard, broad palm smote the boy's cheek, a pair of mighty hands gripped his upper arms. He was lifted from his feet, swung about, shaken in that powerful grip.

The lad kicked, struggled, and swore. He tried to set his teeth in La Fane's shoulder and on that the man, with a long stride, a mighty heave, flung him backward into the cold, sparkling waters of the Madwoman.

Jim's oaths were cut short as he went under and when he came up, shaking water from his eyes, he was gripped again, because La Fane had plunged in after him. He was gripped and shoved under, held there an instant, lifted again, and while the man swam, holding the lad by his clothing, he slapped him, not sharply, but in teasing, maddening cuffs until old Jim Flynn's son snarled in pain and humiliation.

They had gone into the eddy behind the protruding rock ledge and La Fane, swimming with his legs only, touched bottom. Without a word he backed into shallow water, dragging the boy with him.

"Shall I show you more—of my authority?" he asked.

The other, shaking with rage, looked into those eyes. He saw a strange light, a queer smile, not unkindly.

"Damn you, I hate you!" he said between clenched teeth.

On that La Fane relaxed, let go his hold, and gave one of those short, dry laughs.

"Fine! We'll get along fine, now; come along."

He turned his back and stooped to pick up his duffle.

"Take yours," he said as he slipped his arms through the pack straps.

"And what if I don't?"

"You will. Because I'm going into the timber. And you hate me badly enough to want to hurt me and you can't—unless you're near me."

With a shrug the younger man stooped and lifted his own pack.

"Well, where's this hurting going to take place? Where are you taking me?" he demanded.

"On a trail that may be a little hard," La Fane replied.

CHAPTER IX

NOW the weather was dry; and daily the sun shone, unobscured by clouds. Evening brought little dew; the wind blew constantly, licking up the moisture in the surface soil.

It was a period of great forest-fire hazard, the bugaboo of the logger. And although Steve Drake did his share of worrying on this item he had time and attention for a far different matter; more and more time as the days added up into weeks.

The response from Kate Flynn to his telegram was a letter breathing hope and doubt, and he saw that his announced determination not to chance revealing his deception by writing to her would not do.

"Please, *please,* duffer, tell me the whole story!" she begged. "You are on the job after a long delay; that is all I know. Tell me about yourself, first: about the job next. Mac's word that the railroad is blocked is too heavy a secret for me to carry much longer and I don't dare tell Dad." Later, a burst of girlish sentiment: "I love you more dearly than I shall ever love any man but one. I lie awake nights thinking about you, wondering about you. I'm with you always, pulling for you, duffer, but I'm on my knees, now, begging you to tell me everything. . . . . You've a good mind, Jim, a grand body; you've had every chance to make good and have failed. Now here is the big chance and, honestly, there are times when I feel I'll go wild if I don't *know* that you are doing as you know you should do."

Steve debated at length over the first letter he wrote. An old typewriter was in camp, which obviated the chance that the girl who read to Kate might come upon young Jim's handwriting in office files and betray the secret. But matters of address, of style, of the choice of words, are as important as handwriting and it was with a deal of misgiving that he spent an evening composing a long recital of all that had happened.

He did not attempt too much deception.

"I was drunk as a fool for two weeks," he began, believing that Kate was the sort of girl who would rather have blunt truth than diplomacy. "But young Jim is on the job, now, and things aren't as bad as they might be." He proceeded with a truthful account of the situation as he had found it.

Her response touched him deeply:

"You seem so changed. You don't write as you used to. What's happened, duffer? Has the iron, like Dad's, come out? Have you got the old hooch appetite whipped? I'm praying for it every hour and hoping for it. I can't help but feel that the man who wrote this letter is the greatest blessing that has ever come into my life. We'll fight it through together until our old Dad can come up from the rear!"

Steve was carrying Kate Flynn's photograph in his breast pocket; now he touched it through the fabric of his shirt and whispered:

"I'll pull it through, girl—and pull *him* through—for you!"

STEVE and McNally were together one day, caching new fire-fighting equipment in strategic places. They ate their lunch on a high promontory overlooking the lake and rested for a brief half hour.

"Seen Franz the last few days?" Steve asked.

McNally shook his head.

"Nope. He's a queer one. Sometimes we don't see him for weeks, but he's in the country. We know that."

"Bad sort to have loose, don't you think?"

"You bet! He don't like Polaris and he don't like you, Jimmy. Still, it'd take a fox to watch him. Might be down at the Laird's. He stays there long spells now 'nd then."

"How does he get his drag with the old duffer?"

McNally shook his head.

"Got me, unless it's because he's young. McDonald aint never warmed up to any of us old hands; never made friends with anybody in town or in the country. Seems as if he don't care if he never sees anybody but his Injuns—except Franz."

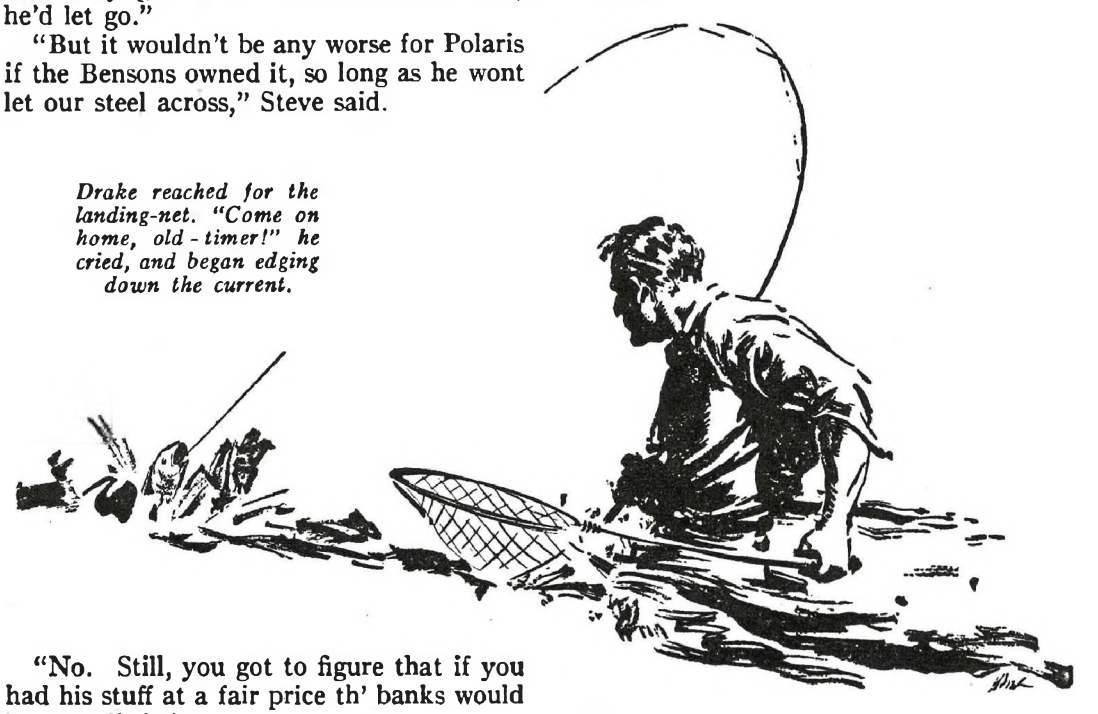
He yawned.

"There's a story that he had a son who died when he was about Franz's age and mebby that's what makes him like the feller. Th' only time your daddy ever got him talkin' much was when he talked about you. . . . . You got to hand it to Franz. He can be slick as they get! My, there's times you would bet that butter wouldn't melt in his mouth! He even fooled Katie good 'nd plenty. Why, it looked for a time that summer two years back that she was goin' to fall plumb in love with him. But she found him out, 'fore any of us did. That hurt him worse 'n anything that's ever happened to him since he come into this timber! He was real cut up when she told him to git, he was!"

A sharp little tingle of jealousy ran through Drake, and he smiled to himself. Jealous of a man who had once known the favor of a girl he himself had never seen, whose voice he had never heard!

McNally went on: "But 'bout him and the Laird, I dunno. If he is after the Laird's timber looks like he had the inside track. It aint price, you see. Three hunderd and twenty thousand dollars was what your daddy estimated it was worth; that's what he offered. Old McDonald said it was a fair price but he just naturally didn't want to sell. . . . . Seems like, though, if somebody got him to likin' 'em real well, he'd let go."

"But it wouldn't be any worse for Polaris if the Bensons owned it, so long as he wont let our steel across," Steve said.



Drake reached for the landing-net. "Come on home, old-timer!" he cried, and began edging down the current.

"No. Still, you got to figure that if you had his stuff at a fair price th' banks would let up a little."

"Yeah. It would give us time."

"And time's what you need, Jimmy! It's gettin' almighty short. It's July, and you've got to be puttin' logs through a mill by November."

The older man talked on, outlining the possible, and even probable, disaster which was to overtake the Flynn interests, while Steve turned his thoughts to the Laird, as they had turned so often of late. He had learned all he could of the old recluse but, reviewing it all, only one really significant thing had ever been said about the man and this by La Fane: Some men, the dog handler had said, are so constituted that they will yield no measure of admiration to another until he can best them at something they want to do. Was this the key to McDonald's friendship?

MILES away, before a little shelter made of a single tarpaulin, La Fane was busying himself making coffee.

To one side sat young Jim Flynn, a ruddy bruise on one cheek-bone. A half hour before he had declared that he was going to take the trail back to the Madwoman launch his canoe and return to the camp on Moose Lake.

"No, you wont go," La Fane had said casually.

"And who'll stop me?"

"I will."

"Then be about it!"

In a childish, impotent rage the boy had hurled himself at the older man, crying out his hatred and humiliation. La Fane had struck him just once, sending him sprawling and panting on his back from the blow in the face. Then he stood over him, looking down, smiling oddly.

"See? You're no match for me," he said quietly. "I can handle you as I would a little kid. Aren't you ashamed of that? You're younger by twenty years; you're as heavy as I am, within ten pounds. By the book, you should be able to eat me alive. And you can't! You can't even get away from me! You can't even make the beginning of defending yourself from me! I can beat you to a pulp with one hand because you're rotten with hooch! Because you're a spendthrift of your manhood!"

The boy, rising, winced. He swore sharply. "Preacher!" he sneered and La Fane only shrugged.

"Perhaps, in a way. Think it over,

though: you should be able to be your own master—yet I handle you like I would a little kid!"

Then he turned his back and made the fire and opened the grub-sack as though he were nothing more than his companion's servant.

Only once did he glance at young Flynn who had seated himself and, nursing his knees, stared out across the little stream before them. La Fane saw the beads of sweat on the other's brow, saw the lips tremble in misery and then writhe in hatred. He smiled a bit to himself, then, as one will who had accomplished an end.

CHAPTER X

DAYS before, Steve had taken the chance that La Fane had known rather than guessed about the Laird.

Thrice he had lain in the brush and watched the old man angle for the great trout that lived in the bend above his home, studying the white-haired recluse carefully.

At these times Drake had watched McDonald take trout of a size that would have made an ordinary angler rave but the old fellow accepted these trophies without comment. It was only when the great fish showed, swirling to the surface in pursuit of food, that the Laird broke his silence. He would talk to his Indian, then, or to himself, and from his concealment, Steve could see the old man's eye gleam.

At dusk a hatch of large May flies had been on the stream for several days and to take advantage of the rises which occurred during this shower of fish food, the Laird had been making nightly excursions to the deep pool. But twice Steve had been there before him and each time he had noticed that the swirlings of the one big trout were fewer after the large flies appeared than they had been an hour earlier when a host of small insects rose from the water, fluttered through their brief span of life and dropped, spent, to the river again.

Furthermore, he had noticed another happening. The trout in that big pool was a wonder-fish, no doubt. But in the next pool above, scarcely more than a long cast distant, a fish evidently lived alone. And this one was a *fish!* The dimplings of no smaller fry marred the surface of his lair. He was no trout to tolerate lesser company. He was a veteran, an ancestor, the patriarch of them all!

Big as the one which engaged the Laird surely was, he could be only a secondary attraction, compared to this larger fish, for the true angler. How the old Scotchman had overlooked him was beyond Steve. Whenever he thought of the lunker he felt himself thrilling in expectancy.

And this day, leaving McNally at headquarters in the afternoon, with something of suppressed excitement about him, Drake paddled down the river alone. In the bottom of his canoe lay the fly-fishing equipment and a goodly assortment it was, too. The rod was English, hand-made, of the finest split bamboo, nine and a half feet long and weighing six ounces, but it lay in the palm like a feather, so perfect was its balance. And stiff! It was a wonder of a rod for backbone!

Steve had tried the rod on large fish in the last ten days but he knew that this rod, —and, indeed, few others,—had never tooled a speckled trout as big as the one which lived above the Laird's personal quarry.

He arrived at the bend above the pool a full hour before sundown. Pulling his canoe out, he set up the rod and threaded the line through the guides. Then, wading downstream in the shallow water, he moved below the pool and stood watching.

The small flies were coming out as they had on other evenings and fish to try the temper of any fisherman were busily feeding in numbers. He could see them rising farther up the river, could hear them below him. Now and again he heard a surging smash downstream which surely was the Laird's fish at his evening meal.

But the thing for which he had come was not happening. Before him the pool lay still and unruffled. No small fish, even, fed there because that water was no habitation for a trout that might make a mere mouthful for the dour old occupant. He waited five minutes and sat down, lighting his pipe; he waited another ten. Then it came: a great bulge of water at the head of the velvety pool; a smooth upheaval as big as a dish-pan which broke with a flick of foam and swept along down the current, leaving only a swirling bubble or two to mark where the disturbance had been.

The monster was satisfying his hunger!

STEVE rapped out his pipe, rose and opened the leader-box with hands that were not just steady. Carefully he selected a strand of gut. It was refina, he judged, calculating its gauge by the eye. He put

it back. Even finer gut than that will break a rod; but the finer the leader the less chance of its surviving those first tremendous rushes of a superfish. He selected another, tied it to the line and began to cast.

No fly was attached. The leader took the water without a riffle. Again he shot it forward over the pool and still again; and as it struck the third time, the great fish rose once more, swirling almost against the gut to seize a floating insect.

"That's that!" he muttered in satisfaction, knowing that the coarseness of his leader was not throwing sufficient shadow to alarm the fish.

He had examined the flies which hatched at this hour before but to make certain that this evening's species were the same that had come to life on other trips he knocked one down with his hat, picked it from the water and inspected the insect closely.

"Light cow-dung's a ringer for you," he muttered aloud and, opening his fly-box, selected a lure of that pattern. It was tied on a Number Eight hook and approximated very well for size the hatching creatures.

Carefully he tested the hook, tied it on with meticulous care, dropped paraffin oil on it from a small vial and then, grasping the leader in both hands, strained on it stoutly. Length by length he put it to the severe test until he was certain that no strand of gut was flawed, no knot imperfect. Then, slipping the landing net over his shoulder, he stepped into the current.

He stripped line from the reel as he made false casts to set the fly traveling in great arcs above his head. Then, crouching a bit, he let it fall on the water at the head of the pool. A good fly, it was; a splendid cast he had made. Erect, lifelike, the thing of feathers and silk and wool rode the water down toward him. He let it go across the feeding-ground of the great fish, retrieved it, sent it shooting out again, making a faint flutter as it winged through the air. Once, twice, three times, the fly rode the velvet water of the pool without tempting a fish. But on the next, the old lunker rose. Steve struck savagely and gulped when no resistance met his wrist. Either the trout had miscalculated or was after something other than the lure.

Again the fly dropped regularly. Once more the fish bulged from his depths within a hand's-breadth of it.

Steve changed his position slightly, edging into the stream until the chill water ran about his thighs. He resumed his casting, regularly, delicately, drying his fly between each cast by sending it in flights through the air.

Each time the fly took the water it was without the suggestion of a disturbance; each time it rode across the pool it was without the slightest indication of a wake. Perfect angling!

Drake felt his back-muscles tensing with suspense. His mouth was dry, and his heart pounded at his ribs in swift cadence. Only the angler will understand these items.

And then this grand fish struck!

ALMOST angrily, it seemed, he came to the surface—as if, for all the world, he had detected the fraud, as if this man-made thing annoyed him, and he had snapped at it to be rid of the influence which was marring his evening meal.

He rolled his dorsal fin out of water as he carried the fly down and Steve, rocking backward, gave him the butt with all the strength in his wrist and arm. The man struck as savagely as the trout had struck, gambling his all on the strength of his tackle to sink that barb so deeply into the trout's jaw that it never would tear loose until something yielded!

For an instant thereafter the pool was as calm, as unruffled as though nothing had happened. Except for the V-shaped riffle where the leader broke the water, it was as satin. The trout did not even sound. He seemed to hang right there, an arm's-length only beneath the surface, surprised, amazed, perhaps stunned and bewildered. . . . .

And then!

A long, curling fin of water was laid back as the singing leader slashed in toward the far bank. Across and up the current when the great fish, plunging into the depths, charging for the snag or rock which had been his private sanctuary; and Steve let him go, holding only enough tension to give himself a chance. He gave slack with his left hand as the creature rushed away. He stripped more line from his reel as the fish searched the bottom for the obstruction which would help him sever this slender strand which hampered his freedom.

Drake gave line, yes; it was his only chance. And then, of a sudden, his rod was straight, his line floating in loops on the surface. But he did not stand still. He turned about quickly, facing downstream; he took line desperately, drawing it through the guides, letting it trail on the

surface about his legs as he began walking downstream.

Well he did take slack, well he was faced about and on his way, because when he started going with the current in earnest, he *went!* A great surge of pressure came on the rod; the line snapped up from its trailing in the water, and the man began to run in long strides, setting the water foaming about his knees, boiling out to either side. He held the rod high in his right hand, butt pointing forward, the whole bent in a rigid half-circle. He stripped more line desperately as the lunker stormed on ahead of him, fleeing this menace that had invaded his pool!

Steve worked toward the edge of the stream as he ran, because he could not go fast enough to relieve the strain with water knee-deep. He covered a stretch of pebbled sand at a gallop. He leaped a down sapling, slipped on a rock and all but fell; the strain of the rod alone kept him on balance. He left the shallows and plunged in to his waist, to his breast, stumbling up a sharp incline, and ran in shin-deep water down a quiet stretch of the Good-by.

ALL the strength in his arm and shoulder and back could not have stayed that rush. Could it, rod or line or something must have given way. He knew that his only chance was to follow that first frantic flight, to go with it as long as he could keep his feet. He gave thirty feet of line, forty—gave until the spool was all but emptied. . . . . Far below him the fish began to zigzag across the current, throwing up a fine spray here and there as the line slashed the water. Froth boiled about Steve's feet, and he was shouting, all unconsciously, as he followed. . . . .

Then, sharply, he stopped. Instead of giving, he began to retrieve line, holding his rod even higher. The trout had found a haven that promised safety; for a moment, he ceased his panicky flight, milled about almost sluggishly. No time for reeling, this; the taken line floated on down the river before Steve as he walked along, drawing nearer to the lunker, watching closely, carefully, missing nothing.

And in a moment he saw the trout's objective. A submerged snag lay against the opposite bank, and somewhere in that maze of bleached branches the fish was working.

Drake stopped. He leaned back on the rod, he held the line far out in his left hand and pulled. Sheer strength counted, now. He could feel the old fellow worrying the hook, moving to and fro, trying to snag and tangle the leader on any of the opportune places down there, so, freed of the spring of the rod, he might snap the line.

The movement of the fish became more agitated. Back and forth he worked against that ever-increasing resistance. It seemed as if something surely must give and render him liberty; it seemed that Drake's arm, if nothing else, must yield to the demands of that tension. And then suddenly, without warning, the trout came up.

He rolled over, flinging his tail into the air, bringing it down with a terrific smash as if to break the strand which held him with the blow, setting up froth with the swish and then, thwarted in that maneuver, turned and darted upstream again.

But this time the man had the current with instead of against him. He followed the fish and gave some line but he did not run, nor did he let out reckless yards of silk.

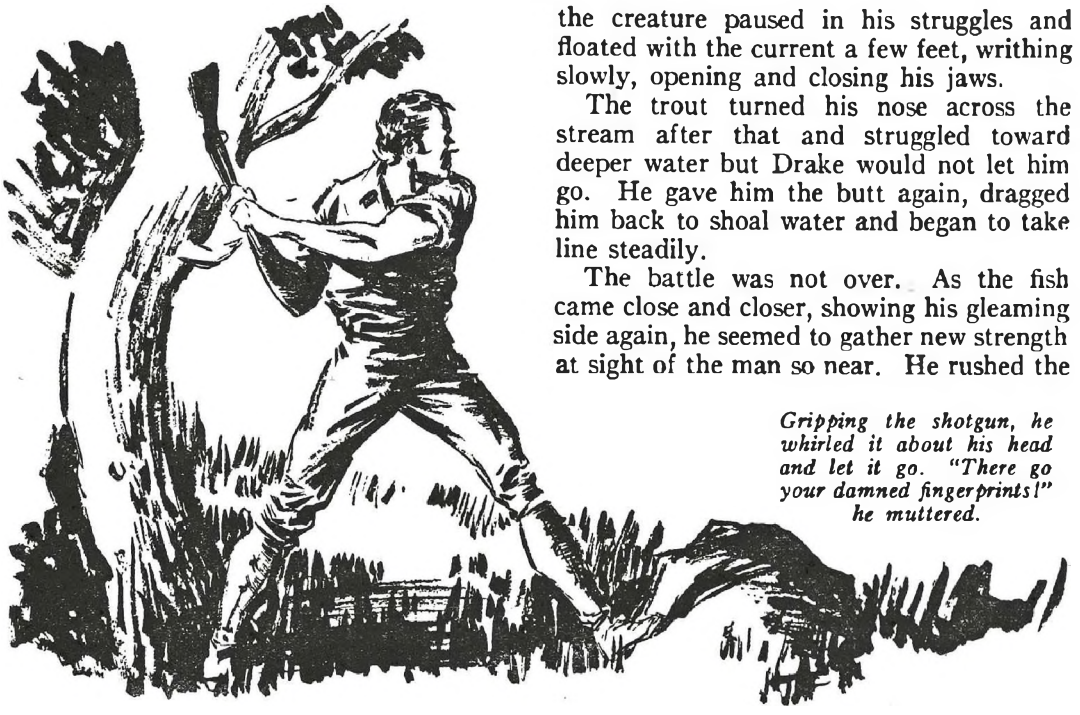
Halfway up to the big pool, a jam pile showed on Steve's side of the river, and toward it the trout ran with a magnificent rush. Out into the current went the man, knowing he could not check that flight by a direct pull, seeking the angle that would give him an advantage. He went in to his armpits, shifting the rod to his left hand and squeezing his eyes shut in an agony of effort.

The trout sounded and nosed the bottom He came to the surface with a rush and crossed the current, rolling over and over, threshing with his tail again. Then he went down and worked for the opposite bank.

DRAKE worked into shallower water as the big fellow began to sulk. He lay in a deep place and let Steve take line as he edged upstream, putting his pull directly across the current. The man worked close, to within thirty feet, perhaps, while the monster lay there, biding his time, regaining some of the strength he had lost. And this last was what Drake did not want.

He began to prod the trout with short, sharp tugs on the rod, inciting the old fellow to motion again.

The fish responded with a short rush downstream, turned about and bored into the current again, forcing out line, working up toward his pool. A strong, steady pull it was, utilizing to full degree that faculty of the speckled trout to make the current serve him in his battle against man even as he breasts it. The line sang with the strain.



Gripping the shotgun, he whirled it about his head and let it go. "There go your damned fingerprints!" he muttered.

They came to the shallows, and Steve could see the fish as he charged back and forth on the bottom; and sight of him in all his magnificent strength and glory, brought a cry of admiration to Steve's lips.

The great creature was tiring now, but with his fatigue came a sort of desperation. His rushes were not so prolonged, not so strong, even; but what they lacked in these qualities they made up in the abrupt, panicky changes of direction.

No split second for thought of other than the battle which engaged him had been spared the man since the lunker rose to his fly. So he had not observed the canoe rounding the bend below as he charged down the stream. In the bow sat McDonald, his white hair bared, his rigged rod ready in his hand.

HE had stopped the paddling of the Indian in the stern with a word and then edged the canoe against the bank as Drake tore through the water toward him. The old man sat and watched; he did not speak again, he did not move except to put the rod down. His great, dark eyes, lighted by a strange fire, watched every move of the angler and when he saw that the fierce vigor of the trout's resistance to capture was ebbing, he motioned to proceed slowly up the river.

They were close enough to see Steve's grin when the fish showed his side in that initial indication of surrender; near enough to hear him laugh a moment later when the creature paused in his struggles and floated with the current a few feet, writhing slowly, opening and closing his jaws.

The trout turned his nose across the stream after that and struggled toward deeper water but Drake would not let him go. He gave him the butt again, dragged him back to shoal water and began to take line steadily.

The battle was not over. As the fish came close and closer, showing his gleaming side again, he seemed to gather new strength at sight of the man so near. He rushed the current with something that suggested his first courage, but he could not take more than a few feet of line, try as he would. Also, that effort was a great drain upon his remnant of remaining strength because he came to the surface when checked, dorsal fin protruding, and threshed languidly, without verve, without that former show of angered majesty and determination.

The line that had been yielded was retrieved, and still more was taken. Only a few feet besides the leader showed beyond the tip guide. Drake clamped the strand between the fingers of his right hand and the cork of the butt, freeing his left. With it, he reached for the landing-net which dangled at his side.

"Come on home, old-timer!" he cried and began edging down the current as, rolling in surrender on his side, the kingly old veteran drifted with the flow.

It was then that he saw the canoe resting there, with the hulking figure in its bow.

Steve shook out his landing-net. He stretched his arm, reaching for the weary fish and probably sight of the device so near to him gave the trout one more impulse to carry on. Anyhow, as the net all but slipped beneath him he flopped over to the other side, churning the water and Drake straightened quickly, cautious lest he defeat himself with victory all but his.

He was within a few feet of the canoe then and, as the fish set the water boiling in his desperation the Laird stirred. He snatched up his long-handled landing-net

which lay in the bottom of the canoe and, lifting himself on his knees, leaned outboard, ready to take the fish as he came past.

"Don't do that!"

Drake's voice was sharp in the admonition, and the older man checked himself, frowning.

"If I can't lick him alone, I wont lick him," Steve added.

HE did not so much as glance at the Scot as he spoke. Instead, he lifted his rod higher, coming to a halt. With the frame of his net again in the water he stooped, stretching out his left arm, drawing his right farther back, dragging the rolling fish close. And then, with a sharp, decisive thrust, he had the mesh beneath the quarry, lifted him high with a swinging movement and relaxed his weary right arm. . . . .

For an instant the trout lay still, curled in the mesh, his gills working vainly, and then he began to strain slowly, stretching his tail upward as his nose found purchase. The great fan slid up beyond the ring of the net and Steve, knowing the danger, knowing that no fish is an angler's until he is killed, hastened to the bank.

There, in a bed of horse-tail rushes, he stood, breathing quickly, staring down at his trophy.

A swelling sense of achievement filled him, and here again it will be only the addict to angling who can understand fully. He was oblivious to the numb ache in arm and wrist, unaware that his knees shook in excitement, even unaware that the Laird was approaching.

When the old man came close, however, Steve looked up. He was grinning broadly in satisfaction, eyes lighted with enthusiasm, and when he observed the other coming a new sort of elation swept him. He had done what he set out to do: had taken a fish bigger than that which had foiled the Laird. And he had done more; he had made the capture under the eyes of the old recluse himself!

But when he looked into that other face his smile died and a chill of apprehension ran through him. Never in any other countenance had he seen that particular sort of rage which now flooded McDonald's!

For an interval the man said nothing; merely stood and eyed the gasping trout. Then he turned his angry gaze on Steve and with an accusing gesture declared:

"Ye've taken my fish, man!" His voice vibrated and dark color flooded his cheeks. A vein on his forehead leaped out, swelling to a welt.

"Your fish, Mr. McDonald? I didn't know it was—"

"Didn't know? Didn't *know!* Mebby not! But it's the fish I've worked over summer after summer, the fish I've dreamed of winter night after winter night! And who may ye be to come on anither's property and poach and pillage and kill what's anither's right?"

His voice had risen, and in it was all the jealousy, all the bitterness that can come only to the voice of one whose dearest ambitions have been thwarted.

Steve was thinking quickly, now. The fish and its capture were forgotten. Instead of having the Laird's admiration by his accomplishment, he had won only the old Scot's animosity. Through misunderstanding, yes, but animosity is a poor foundation for friendship.

"The first time I set eyes on ye, ye spoiled the day!" McDonald went on. "Around yon bend ye came, puttin' him doon so's—"

Steve laughed, and even darker color flooded the old man's face.

"Mr. McDonald, you're mistaken! This isn't your fish. Come here. . . . . Look up there. . . . . Watch a moment."

He led the other a few paces upstream, McDonald suddenly silent at Steve's assurance. They stood still, watching the pool, and after a moment, close in against the far bank, a great fish rose—not so great as this, but a worthy foe for any wrist.

"See! Isn't that where your fish's been lying?"

Almost reluctantly, it seemed, the Laird nodded assent.

"This fellow was in the pool above," Steve explained. "All alone, he lived. He's bigger than the big one there, even, if I'm any judge."

The old man began to nod slowly, and Steve felt relief coming; but on the next words his heart sank.

"Ay! Yoonger muscles! Yoonger minds! A bigger troot, likely, than yon fish." Bitterly he spoke. "Bigger, likely, than the one that's defied me these years, but it's unseemly for a yoong man to belittle the prizes of his elders!"

Slowly he turned toward his waiting canoe and Steve stood with hopes falling to ruin about him. The high quality of his angling had been a double-edged sword!

CHAPTER XI

BUT nothing could be done except to stand there speechless and watch McDonald slowly seat himself and shove off. The Laird did not so much as glance backward at Steve. He took his paddle and dipped it once, swinging the bow out to the current, to head downstream and return to his home. He looked older, somehow; his shoulders were not as firmly set as they had been; the disappointment that had come to him this evening had been an aging influence.

Steve opened his lips, on the point of stammering an apology, and closed them again. When he spoke, it was in no stammer, not at all as a man who is overwhelmed with chagrin and confusion.

Dangling the trout by the gills, he called:

"Mr. McDonald, what do you guess is his weight?"

The Laird took another stroke, then let his paddle trail and turned his head.

"Haven't ye a scale wi' ye?" he demanded in that bitter, biting tone.

"No; and there isn't a decent one at Good-by."

"Fool! What kind of angler are ye, not havin' a scale handy?"

He drove the blade of his paddle into the stream-bed, halting the canoe. His frown was black, his breath a bit quick as he surveyed the man on the bank. Then he said sharply:

"Come wi' us! It's my right, to examine yon troot; it's your obligation to gi' me an hour!"

"Why, sure! Glad to do that, sir. I'd be glad to give him to you. All I wanted was to see whether or not I could take him."

The Scot merely grunted.

THE canoe came against the bank, and Steve, holding the fish, stepped in, seating himself between the Laird and the Indian.

No word was spoken for the quarter of an hour it required to drop down to the great log structure which was McDonald's retreat. Landing there, the Scot addressed the Indian briefly, giving directions, and then with a gesture indicated that Steve was to follow him.

Up the path they went and across the screened veranda to a great cavern of a room, gloomy in the evening darkness.

"Stand there," the old man said surlily. "I'll make a light."

He did, with hands that shook considerably, and the room sprang to life. The beamed ceiling was low, the windows wide and many. A huge fireplace of boulders filled one end wall, flanked by shelves of books, and above these, mounted on slabs of birchbark, were the cured skins of two dozen noble trout. The largest, however, was not within inches or pounds of the one Steve Drake bore.

The Laird adjusted the wick carefully and then turned to his guest.

"Fetch him here!" he commanded imperiously. "Here—lay him so!"

He took the trout from Steve and laid him out on the table, moving the lamp to make room.

A noble creature he was indeed! The great jaw was scarred; his dark gray sides seemed to be lacquered, and the red spots against the gray were large and vivid. His belly was rich gold, and the fins colored like blood with their fine edgings of black.

For an interval the old man stood staring down at the fish. Then, without taking his eyes from it, he opened a drawer in the table, fumbled and brought out a small spring scale. Silently, he adjusted the hook in the gills and then swung the trout's weight upon it.

Together they leaned close, scanning the indicating needle.

"Six pounds!" Steve said beneath his breath.

"Six!"—in contempt. "Six? Look, man! Six pounds and two ounces! Ay! Better'n two. Near two and a *half* ounces!" He sighed deeply and straightened. "Ah, what a fish! What a bonny, *bonny* fish!"

He studied the scale again, giving it a series of sharp jerks as if in the hope that he might make it show another fraction of an ounce. Then he laid the fish back on the table, searched for a small steel tape and measured him, meticulous in his pains; measured for length and girth, and this accomplished, bent low, his hands on his knees, to study the trout.

"And what," he asked, turning his head but not straightening, "was the fly ye used, lad?"

The brusqueness was gone out of his voice, the animosity from his eyes. A glitter was there, but it was of enthusiasm, of deep interest in the subject which occupied them. His lips were a bit parted, and instead of the crusty old fellow he had been, injured and defiant and unrelenting, he was now a seeker after news from a superior!

"I took a chance on a light cow-dung."

"Ay! A gude fly. The smaller *ephemeridæ*. . . . . So he was feedin' on them, eh, not waitin' for the big hatch!"

He straightened and rubbed his cheek vigorously as he looked down at the great fish. That enthusiasm in his eyes grew even more pronounced, and when he turned his face to Steve Drake, he was smiling!

He reached out and placed a hand on the younger man's shoulder.

"Flynn, ye took him! Ye may live to grow to great wealth, to have grand honors come to ye; but it's an evenin' to be remembered, this is—one to be treasured! Wealth and honors and greatness in affairs of the world are some things; anglin' is another—yea, another!

"Noo, sit yersel' doon yonder. Have ye a pipe? So? Well, so ha' I." He walked to the mantel and took down a great briar. "Ay, sit yersel' doon, my lad. Noo, tell me, Flynn,"—nodding as he rummaged in his tobacco pouch,—"hoo long did ye work over yon fish afore he rose to yer fly?"

STEVE, with his heart leaping, seated himself and drew out his pipe. He sat silent an interval, telling himself that he was on the verge of becoming one of the elect: one of the Laird's few friends. He marshaled his wit and his resources, and then he began to talk, slowly and carefully.

The old man had lighted his pipe in the beginning and smoked slowly. He continued that deliberate, cool puffing until Steve had finished with the recital of his preparation. But by the time he commenced to tell of his first casts, of the irregular rises of the great fish, the cloud of smoke about that gray head was thick and when the younger man, leaning forward in his chair and gesticulating as he lived the battle over described the strike and that first terrific rush down the river, the briar emitted puffs of vapor so dense that the Laird brushed them away with sweeping movements of a hand so he might see!

Step by step, Steve re-lived that battle, recounting his own emotions, his hopes and his fears intimately. At the end of a long half hour he sat back and gestured toward the table as he grinned.

"And there he is, Mr. McDonald!" he said.

"Ay, a grand fight fer a lad. I could na done better mysel', Flynn!"

He clapped his hands, and from a doorway a squaw appeared.

"I'll ha' a guest, Mary," he said. "Spread yersel', noo, and do yer best!"

Steve rose, protesting that he should be back at camp, but the Laird would not listen.

"Stay, lad, stay! 'Tis an evenin' to mark well, to celebrate. Ye must stay the night. It's been long since I've had by me an angler such as ye are! The others—I've taught 'em what they know. But ye, Flynn—well, ye took a better fish than I ever took!"

AND stay the night under the Laird's roof Steve did! They drank, before the meal, liquor poured from an ancient jug, and the two ate alone, sitting for long at the table with their pipes. Then into the big living-room Steve was led while the Laird opened a cabinet and took from it the choicest collection of fly-rods his guest had ever beheld.

Joint by joint these must be inspected; one by one they must be set up and handled; in detail the stories of the big fish they had taken must be retold and it was after midnight before McDonald led Steve to the room he was to occupy. . . . .

And while Steve Drake listened and talked, winning the confidence of the old Scot, enjoying him, liking him, heart quickening when he thought of what this friendship might mean to Polaris, Franz sat on a bench in the store at Good-by, smoking cigarettes, sulkily listening to the gossip of the men gathered there.

They gave him no heed. Once, they had; but now he was a fallen favorite and had no place of consequence.

"Where's Jim?" Wartin asked, coming in.

"Fishing," Tim Todd replied.

"I'd ought to see him tonight. Did he say when he'd be back?"

"Nope. But he's been fishin' late into the evenin' recent," the old clerk informed him.

Shortly afterward Franz went out, unnoticed. He walked along the shore and stood and listened. He took a trail that led back into the timber, circled La Fane's house by a wide margin, and approached the cabin which Steve occupied.

He stood a long time in the darkness, listening; then carefully he tried the door, opened it and went within.

It cost him much time and great pains to find the gun and not leave evidences of his ransacking. But he did locate it, finally, wrapped in a grain-sack and resting across

rafters in the loft. He closed the door and walked away noiselessly.

A half-hour later he came out on the lake shore. A little breeze had sprung up, and wavelets lapped at his feet. He tossed the sack into the water. Then, gripping the shotgun by the barrel with both hands, he whirled it thrice about his head and let it go. The splash was far out, out where the water was deep enough so that the chance of finding the weapon would be negligible.

He had a flash of the man's face—the face of a pursuer, ruthless, determined!

"There go your damned fingerprints!" he muttered. "*Now* find a way to stop me—if you can!"

CHAPTER XII

FOR breakfast Steve and the Laird had portions of the great trout, broiled to a turn.

"Food!" the old man muttered as he surveyed the platter. "After all his years, all his triumphs, he ends up as food! It's so wi' the country, lad: man destroys the wild to put it to his use."

He sighed, and a brooding look was on his face. He was silent during much of the meal; and try as he would, Steve could not rouse him from this depressed mood.

They finished, and Drake said:

"I'll have to be getting back to headquarters now, Mr. McDonald. There are things to be done today."

The Laird lighted his pipe slowly.

"Important things?" he asked as if casually.

"More important to Polaris than they would be to another outfit. The little things count to beat the devil with us now."

The old man nodded and shot a long whiff of smoke.

"I understan'," he said, half absently. "Ay. . . . . Trouble is heavy on the Flynns." He sighed and stared through a window. "I've been thinkin', James lad, since last night, that I'm an old man at last. It's no fault o' yours, but what happened yester evenin', seein' a lad do what I could na do, impresses me wi' age. A yoonger man, takin' my fish. . . . . Hum!" He leaned back in his chair and drummed the arms with his fingers.

"I made mysel' a promise when I was yoong: that I'd accept old age easy and graceful. And here, it develops, I've been fightin' it off, shuttin' my eyes to 't! I've been blind to the years, to the load I've carried past my prime. . . . Ay, I'm old. And do ye s'pose, lad, that yer father's still in the notion of buyin' my timber?"

Steve's heart leaped into his throat. A hot flush swept his skin, and he kept himself from shouting out a reply only by conscious effort.

"Polaris would like it, Mr. McDonald. It— Matter of fact, it would save the operation. To get hold of this timber,"—playing boldly on this new favor he had established in the Laird's eyes,—"would do the thing that I came into this country to do. Otherwise, it looks like ruin ahead!"

The Scot nodded.

"A man's burdens are his own affairs," he said after a time. "A man dinna find contentment if he troobles his head wi' the troobles of others. It's why I came into the forest to stay. . . . .

"But the thing I come for is to disappear. The timber is to be cut. People will come; I'll be no longer alone, but possibly that will na be so bad. Age softens a man.

"It's been a burden, in a way, holdin' this. It might relieve an old heart to have his money oot on gude int'rest. . . . . I'm a-wonderin' if yer father'd be in a position to buy. He spoke of it once, but I'd ha' none of it then."

"I'm quite sure that Polaris can and will buy at any time, Mr. McDonald," Steve said calmly, though he wanted to leap and shout and caper in joy and relief.

"Well, it's a hard decision to make!"—with a twist of his head. "I wouldna sell't all. I'd sold a section or two for mysel'. But come out—let's look. It's no matter to decide on the turn of a moment!"

He led the way outside, out to the rear of the house and into a trail that threaded the great ranks of hardwood. Maple and beech and birch reared themselves high into the tranquil sunlight; here and there a lonely pine stood, majestic in its proportions. They passed through a clump of hemlock and dipped into a swale where great cedars grew. A deer bounded from their path. A grouse fluttered away from their feet, making a great disturbance, and they had glimpses of the chicks that scattered for hiding-places. A porcupine snuffled at them from a poplar on the edge of a small lake, and a muskrat dived at their approach. . . . .

But it was the timber only that Steve Drake saw, and as they went along slowly he was checking, against his memory, the stand with the cruiser's report on it which reposed in the safe at Good-by. Good stuff, as good as the Polaris hardwood, worth more, surely, than it was when that estimate had been made. Three hundred and twenty thousand, McNally had said was the price of old Jim Flynn's offer.

They left the trail and made a great circle and stopped here and there to rest and talk.

Again and again the Laird repeated: "Age sits heavy on old shoulders, James. Had I my investment in gude securities, now—"

Once he said:

"You're not alone in wantin' to buy. Young Franz, a faithful lad, has been wantin' it. Had he taken that grand troot, noo, it might be him I'd be talkin' wi' today. Mind, I'm not sayin' I'll sell to yer father yet. I'm considerin' it only. . . . .

"Franz! Ay, a faithful lad. He's passed many a long winter's night for me by comin' an' listenin' to my talk when the need to talk was strong. Had I encouraged him to hope, now, I might be under obligation to him. But I never have—no, never."

Over and over again: "Age sits heavy on old shoulders." And: "Gude securities for investments." Thrice more during that long, rambling walk he spoke of Franz, saying that, were it Franz instead of Steve who was present, now, he might be taking over the possibility of selling with him.

IT was mid-afternoon when they returned to the great log house, and the Laird dropped heavily into a chair, more wearied with the sense of age that had come to him than with the exertion. He listened to Steve while the lad told him frankly of the Polaris predicament. He was careful not to mention Franz in connection with the blocked railroad right-of-way, but he believed it good strategy to withhold nothing of the Flynn situation, feeling that, in this mellow mood, the Laird might finally yield to a feeling of sympathy—if for no other reason.

He knew, from what Kate had written, that the purchase of this timber could be financed; he knew, as well, that to possess it was the only way out for Polaris. So much hung in the balance that summer afternoon!

Suddenly the Laird sat erect, looking hard at young Jim.

"You're authorized to represent Polaris?" he asked.

Steve did not hesitate. "I *am* representing the company," he said.

"Three hundred and fifty thoosand dollars, then, me to hold out the section my buildin's stand on."

Drake stiffened, calculating quickly. It was thirty thousand more than old Jim Flynn had offered, and less a section. . . . . But that was two years ago. Values had moved up.

"That's your best offer?"

"Aye. The best! And the only offer, James!"

"And the terms?"

The old man's eyes narrowed. In them was a gleam of hardness; he was no longer in friendly, easy talk. He was a dealer now, a shrewd bargainer.

"I've told you how badly Polaris is pinched, sir. A heavy down payment might make it impossible to take you up."

The Laird nodded. "Twenty-five thoosand dollars doon; fifty thoosand in six months; fifty thoosand each six months, wi' interest at six per cent until the obligation is met."

"And how long before the twenty-five?"

The old man considered, and Steve could see that, finally determined to sell, he was thinking in strictly business terms.

"If ye want it," he said brusquely, "ye'll take it wi'out delay. If ye don't want it, others will. I've made up my mind to sell; I'll have no bickering, no waitin'. Ye must take it noo—in a week. Seven days! Aye. That's enough. That's final."

"A short-enough time," Steve protested; but he saw that the other was adamant. "You'll give an option now, surely, so I'll have something to go on?"

"That's no more than fair. An option. And th' doon payment must be here, in this room, in cash, and on time. . . . . Aye, to the hour."

He rose then and walked to the table, fumbling about for paper and pen.

"Age—" he mumbled. "Ah, a bonny troot he was. . . . . But age—"

STEVE sat in his chair, holding himself quiet. This was the one thing that would still Kate Flynn's fears for the company; this was the only loophole left to old Jim Flynn. But the Laird had proven himself a man of so many whims, such quick changes of front, that he feared the thought might occur, the incident happen, which would cause him to deviate from this course on which he was now evidently determined. . . . .

Slowly, laboriously, the pen commenced to scratch. Letter by letter, line by line, it inscribed that precious document. From a book the old man copied the descriptions, looking up to say: "We'll ha' it legal and regular . . . . and the doon payment must be here on the hour, lad; mind that!"

Again the scratching, the Laird muttering: "Seven days from—four P. M., this date." He eyed the pen and wiped it carefully on the blotter, hitching himself forward for more writing.

Down by the river voices sounded; and Steve, looking through the window, clamped his fingers on the chair-arms. Franz was there, sitting in his canoe, talking with one of McDonald's Indians. Franz! He was coming, now. Franz, of whom the old man here had spoken kindly during the day, suggesting that perhaps down in his heart he felt it unfair to sell to another when Franz had tried to buy before he had ever seen the man he believed to be young Jim Flynn!

Franz, getting out of his canoe, while the pen scratched on so slowly. Franz, looking up at the log house and asking a question of the Indian, an important question, as revealed by the forward thrust of his head. Franz, coming swiftly up the trail.

The scratching of the pen ceased. The Laird leaned back, reading what he had written, moving his lips on the words.

Steve rose and with a fine show of casualness, approached the old man's chair.

"And noo," the Laird said, dipping the pen again. "Noo fer the signature which binds it."

THE scuff of gravel sounded outside. A step fell on the veranda floor. Slowly the pen point traced the letters, and as the door opened, the blotter was pressed to the fresh ink.

Steve tried not to snatch the precious paper as Franz entered the room. He did not turn to look at him; McDonald gave no heed. The precious paper passed from the old man's hand to that of the younger, and Steve felt a great wave of exultation sweep him as his fingers closed on it.

"For due consideration," it began properly enough. . . . . He read on, down the lines of fine script, conscious that the Laird was shifting his gaze to the man who stood in the doorway, feeling as much as seeing from the corner of his eye, now, that look of faint bewilderment, perhaps of regret, which flickered on the old man's face.

"Ah, lad," he said gently, hitching his chair about. "Come here, lad. Ye know this man?"

They faced one another, Drake and Franz, and the latter's face betrayed not one vestige of anything that his heart must have held.

"Yes, we know each other," Steve said evenly.

"Sure! I know young Jim Flynn!" Franz said, and laughed.

"Well, lad, it's the fortunes of war that

'twas yon James instead of yoursel' who came today to catch me in my state of mind. I'm sellin' the timber to the Flynns."

A slight tightening of the mouth, perhaps the loss of some color in his cheeks, were the only indications that Franz gave of what this news meant to him. For a moment he did not speak. Then he asked, steadily enough:

"It's gone, you mean? The deal is closed?"

"Well, an option's bindin'. He has the option, with the ink scarce dry."

Franz swallowed; color returned to his face; and his eyes, turning to Steve glittered in a baleful promise.

"A sale isn't a sale until the transfer is made," he said, smiling at the Laird, but Steve caught the menace in his tone. "And perhaps something may happen that the Flynns don't take you up."

"Well said, Franz!" The Laird rose and put a hand on his shoulder. "Well said! 'Twould not becoom ye to sulk and be angered because luck was not wi ye. . . . . Noo, lads, we'll drink on't. . . . Drink, we will, in the dew of Scotland!"

He turned and left them alone.

As soon as the door turned behind him, Franz spoke.

"So young Jim Flynn—so-called—has won a heat, eh?"

"Heat and race, Franz."

The other shrugged and dark color flooded his face.

"Not yet, you haven't! Not yet, Mr. Whoever-you-are!"—advancing closer and Drake, letting his eyes run the length of the other saw the unmistakable outline of an automatic pistol in his trousers pocket. "Until a few hours ago you had me partly stopped. Now squawk all you damned please about set-guns and buttons!"

"What d'you mean by that?" Steve demanded.

"Never mind. Take my word for it. And just because you've beaten me to this option, don't think you've pulled Polaris up by its boot-straps. Not yet, you—"

HE did not finish, because the Laird just then opened the door, bearing in both hands the precious jug.

Steve thought for a moment that Franz would go on, might even accuse him of using another's name before their host, and he was prepared to meet any such tactics. But if the notion entered Franz's mind, it was quickly dismissed. He forced a smile and turned away until he had control of his expression.

They drank together. Then Steve folded the document he carried and slipped it into a shirt pocket, buttoning the flap.

"The time is none too long, Mr. McDonald," he said. "I'll have to be on my way, now."

"Aye, seven days, James. . . . . And 'twas a grand troot, a grand, bonny troot."

The old man did not rise as Steve picked up his hat. He sat there, slumped, as one will who has reached the end of a wearying trail; and Franz, standing to one side, turned on Drake a look that was laden with threat.

"I'll see you, I trust, on the seventh day, sir. My thanks for your hospitality, and everything else," said Steve.

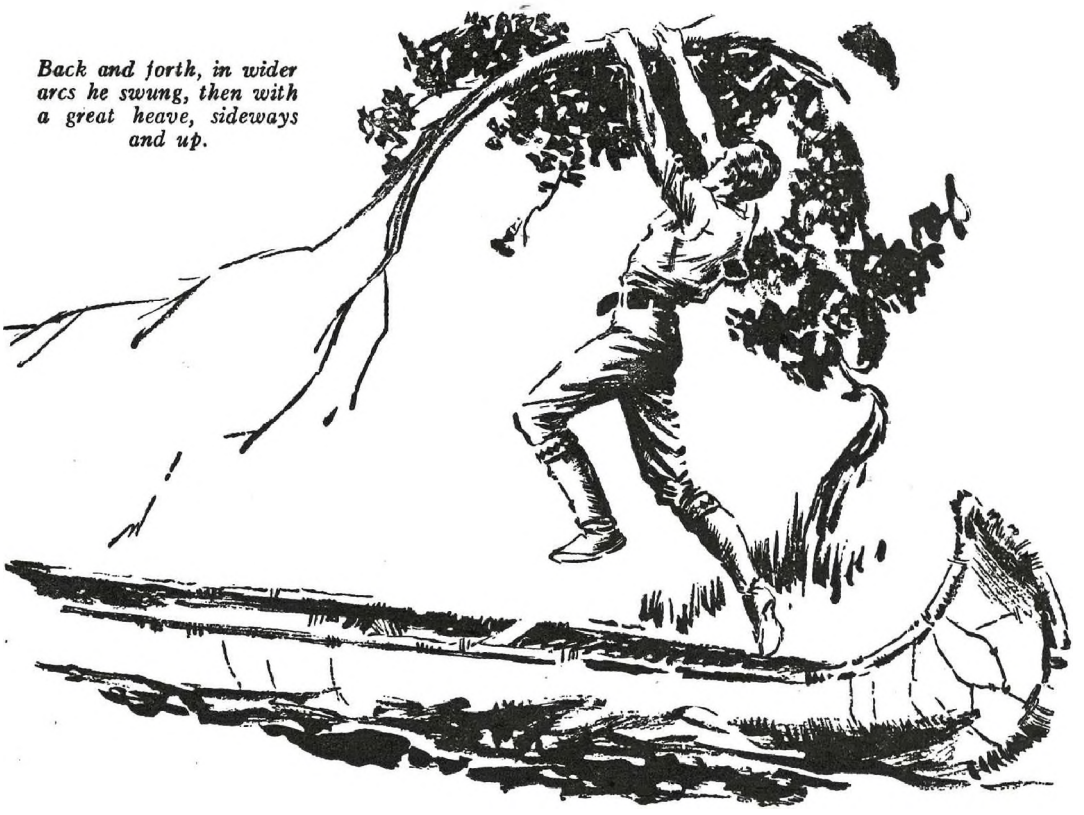
With no more farewell, he backed through the doorway, crossed the veranda and swung down the path to the river.

The option he carried seemed to be a warm, living weight against his breast, nestling there with Kate Flynn's photograph. His own canoe had been brought down from the big pool by McDonald's Indian. He picked it up and launched it. He shoved off, turning not upstream toward Good-by Lake, but downstream.

A strong man, was Steve Drake; a fearless man, he had proven himself to be since his coming to Good-by. But in that period, when he had been in danger, he alone had been concerned, his personal safety only had been at stake. And now he was experiencing that bitter taste of flight from danger!

Yes—the responsibility of holding the destinies of others in one's hands saps and sucks the courage from stanch hearts! That scrap of pen-marked paper in Steve Drake's shirt pocket meant all to an old man and a young girl. So long as it was in his keeping, it was only a scrap of paper; until it should be duly recorded it was, in reality, no more than scratches of ink on foolscap. But potentially it was of tremendous significance and if those potentials were to become actual, he must reach Shoestring with the option intact and safe!

Franz or any other might have threatened him the day before, the hour before, and he would only have laughed. But now, thinking back to the look on Franz's face, he felt weak, impotent, humble, because he realized how great a weight of the hopes of others hinged on his own well-being for the next few hours.



Back and forth, in wider arcs he swung, then with a great heave, sideways and up.

To reach Shoestring, now, was his one ambition; to reach it quickly, safely, for the sake of that which he bore!

WHAT transpired back there in the Laird's house, Steve was never to know. How Franz, without offending the old Scot, was to be gone without loss of time was an immaterial factor. He knew in his bones that the other would not tarry long.

He had a flash of the man's face at a window, watching him, as he set himself into the current and it was not the look of one who tranquilly or despairingly accepts defeat; it was the face of a pursuer, ruthless, determined. . . . .

But he did not hasten on his journey to town in that first stretch of river. He tried to give the appearance of assurance, of casualness to the one who might be watching. But when he had rounded the first bend he raised himself higher, bent further forward and his canoe leaped and weaved with the driving impulse he put against it.

Steve's eyes were narrowed a trifle, now, his lips parted as he planned. He knew the country, knew the trails; but so did Franz, more intimately than he. The landing place above Twenty Mile Rapid was the obvious place for one to take to his legs for transport. To run the white water, of course, would cut the distance, but the risk there was too great. Should he go that way and rocks rip the bottom of his canoe his chance of living to serve the Flynns further would be negligible. Their last spark of hope might be gone.

He reached a decision and commenced to smile a bit fiercely. He relaxed his paddling and chuckled and sat back, drifting.

Around a bend to the right and another to the left the current carried him. Now, in the evening quiet, he could hear the mutterings of that treacherous water below. He ran his canoe into a shallows where he was screened by overhanging alders and waited, looking backward.

Of course, Franz might not act as Steve had reasoned he would. But Drake knew desperation when he had encountered it. Franz would stop at nothing to forestall the filing of that option, would have delay in this transaction at any price.

Two ways were open to him: the first was to follow, the second to lie in wait. But two or three routes might be taken from the river to Shoestring and Franz would have no way of knowing which would be chosen unless he followed. The more he considered these factors, the better satisfied Steve was that his would not be the only canoe running down the Good-by from the Laird's in this hour.

"Right!" he muttered as a canoe shot around the bend behind him, coming fast in the quickening current.

He shoved off stoutly and bent to the paddle. The ash bent beneath the strain he put upon it; his canoe lurched and dipped and rolled under the driving. From the tail of his eye he saw the other sweep into full sight of him, and then he was around a bend, with the voice of shaggy old Twenty Mile loud in his ears.

To his right was the landing which was normally used when men made the trip partly by water and partly by land. He swept past it, making his best speed, exerting every muscle, every minute detail of his canoeing knowledge.

The rapid was roaring at him, now, challenging him, daring him. He entered the long, glassy slide which the water took in its final rush to the froth-torn cañon below. He looked over his shoulder just once. Franz had not rounded the bend, was not in sight. The leaning cedar from which he had first looked down the gorge was fifty feet below him. He rose to one foot and dropped his paddle to the canoe bottom, balancing there, bent forward and half erect.

He opened his arms wide, fingers spread. The first cedar twigs brushed his face. One hand closed on a stout, green branch, the other on a dead stub. He gave these holds his weight, lifted his feet and let the canoe shoot on. He dangled there above the stream, swinging back and forth; the dead stub cracked and gave and, wriggling, kicking mightily, he let it go and grasped living wood. Back and forth, back and forth in wider, wider arcs and then, with a great heave, swung himself sideways and up. His body over the trunk, he was wriggling higher, lying along the bole, panting as he drew branches up for concealment.

He watched his canoe as, tossing like a chip, it entered the first white water. It bounced and spun; it was half overturned as the current swept it against a rock. It caught, the bow rose, froth poured over the gunwale and then, whirling, it tore loose and went on, sucked into the midst of the torrent and disappeared around the first sharp bend.

SO much accomplished! Now, he turned his face upstream. Franz was coming. He was making in toward the landing at the trail with short, stout drives of his paddle. He rose to his knees and leaped out as the bow touched, but even as he stooped to grasp the thwarts and lift the canoe out he stopped all movement.

Steve chuckled: "No sign there, chum!" he muttered aloud.

Even at that distance he could detect Franz's bewilderment. The man stepped about carefully, bent over as he searched the wet earth for tracks. He went a brief distance up the trail and returned and stood staring down into the head of the rapid.

"Yeah—looks as if I took the hard but short way!" Steve chuckled.

Any other would have reasoned so. A moment before Franz had had Drake in sight. The only place he would have left the river was at that trail; leaving it, he could not have failed to leave sign. Easy!

Franz's face writhed as he stepped into his canoe again.

Steve pressed his body tightly against the trunk of the cedar, watching through the branches as the other came on. The man's jaws were clenched grimly as he swept into the slide. By the dropping of an arm to its length the watcher could have snatched the hat from the other's head as the canoe swept beneath the leaning tree. The instant it was past he was erect, working his way toward shore, running along the bank for the trail, feeling his breast pocket to be certain that the rustling sheet of paper was still there.

THE sun was sinking into the forest beyond La Fane's meager camp.

La Fane himself lounged beside the fire, smoking indolently. Young Jim Flynn sat with his back against a tree, glowering.

"Going to starve me next?" he asked gruffly.

The other shook his head. "Nope. Whatever is done to you, you do."

Flynn snorted contemptuously.

"Within limits, that is," La Fane added.

"Limits! When I wouldn't come in here you beat me up; when I started to leave, you started to do it again. Now, it's nothing but coffee for both of us. Enjoying it, are you?"

"A lot! Yes, a lot. You're sober, now; you've been sober most a week. You're ashamed of yourself because you can't force me to give you your head, which, if you hadn't made a fool of yourself for a long time, you could do.

"There's the little rifle, yonder. In that birch sits a grouse. If you weren't ashamed to show how shaky you are, you might try

to get him. When you are able to kill your meat, we'll feed. Not before. I can stand it longer than you can." After a time he added: "I'm glad that you're ashamed."

"Oh, go to hell!" the boy growled.

La Fane smoked on as evening came. A great owl booed at the first stars and the man rapped out his pipe.

"He was dependin' on you and you turned him down! Think of that! An old man, laid up in a hospital, with his back to the wall, and you turn him down! I recall how gentle he was with kids. . . . ."

"Shut up!" the boy said, and averted his face quickly.

"No. . . . . I'll keep reminding you of it, and of what you might have been able to do to me, and of what you can do for him and to me if you make up your mind to it. . . . . A fine man, your dad; not the kind of a man most men would turn down."

The boy winced sharply, and La Fane's eyes gleamed with satisfaction.

CHAPTER XIII

ON into the rushing maw of the river went Franz.

He knew that channel. He had run it thrice before in a spirit of bravado, but this was the first time he had risked it for a more material purpose. He kept to the swiftest water, working from one black patch to another where the stream ran deep.

All about him was a welter of sound. Hissings, slappings, boomings and roarings mingled in a great symphony of waters gone mad. The sharp, high cliffs which lined the stream caught these sounds and hurled them from one to the other, shutting them in, concentrating them, intensifying them.

Spray lashed his face, spume drifted in veils before his eyes. The canoe beneath his splendidly poised body bucked and reared like a living, frightened creature. He swept into hollows where it seemed that the river would close over him; and then rose sharply to frothing, licking crests.

He grazed a rock and although the touch was light the jolt it rendered all but upset him and he cried out sharply. He rounded the first bend in a smother of spray, leaning far out to the right and backing water desperately. He shot between two protruding boulders with scarcely a hand's-breadth to spare on either side and straightened out for the run down a stretch that was white from cliff to cliff.

The canoe ran like a doe, bounded like an antelope. Then, with a suddenness which sent the man pitching forward, it slowed. As though brakes had been applied, it was, and the bottom bulged where the smooth boulder pressed against it. Water licked over the stern. The grating bulge ran backward along the bottom. It pressed against the ribs beneath his knee. The current rolled up behind him, threatening immediate swamping and he rocked far to the left, freeing the craft of the drag and it leaped on as he swore in relief.

He passed that frothy decline and, at the bend below, worked frantically to keep himself in the shallows, because protruding rocks were so thick on the outside of the turn that no canoe could pass them unscathed.

Straightening out, he had black water ahead, black but flecked with angry foam, bulging here and there, eddying and swirling.

Beyond was a lodged tree-top, and Franz paddled madly to get outside of it. He shut his eyes as his canoe rasped through its outer branches and lifted his paddle high to avoid entangling the blade. Somehow, he got through without disaster but was crosswise of the current, being sucked stern foremost fatefully as the river hurtled him along.

For a long moment it seemed as though the pull of the stream would defy his efforts and his skill and that the craft surely must capsize. He backed water savagely, cursing in a hoarse voice as his eyes held down beyond and saw what they saw.

LIKE ancient teeth appeared those twin blackened, ragged rocks. A dozen feet apart, perhaps, and, had he been on his course, slipping between them would have been easy. But now, sweeping sidelong toward them, either bow or stern seemed certain to touch. About them great bulges of white water raged and roared and the current gripped the canoe, making it difficult to turn in any length of time, let alone in mere seconds.

But he shut his eyes and clamped his jaw and put into the paddle every shred of energy in the great body. The bow responded, swinging slowly . . . . swinging faster, threatening, by that spin, to bash the one rock with even a greater vigor than

the current along could have caused. But he won! He straightened out, he slipped past into that chute of racing waters.

A quirk of the paddle sent him veering to the left; a stroke, a drag of the blade, shot him too far to the right. Beyond was a great, tossing hummock of froth, veiling another cruel barrier and Franz rose to his knees, gasping as he bent low again to carry to its utmost that one stroke for which there was time. He shot clear, froth to the right as high as his shoulder, and he was through, riding a turbulent, dappled current, but a current withal which was not impossible!

He leaned on the gunwales, breathing quickly a moment while the river hurtled him along. He had other bends below, other places where delicate maneuvering would be necessary, but they were as nothing compared to what he had been through.

Franz straightened himself, resumed his paddling, rounded the next bend close in to where a big eddy circled monotonously—and turned shoreward with a start.

Black water, velvety, its darkness only accentuated by flecks of froth, swirled languidly against the high clay bank. And on its outer edge, against an accumulation of driftwood, half sunken, heavily listed, floated a canoe. . . . .

Quickly, Franz altered his course and worked into the eddy. He was rigid, eyes fixed on that derelict. He went alongside, placed his hand on its gunwale, saw the shattered bottom where a sharp rock had impaled the water-weighted craft and let a long breath slip through his teeth.

"So!" he said and laughed, a bit uncertainly. "So, young Jim Flynn! The old Twenty Mile got you, eh? And, with you, your damned option!"

He sat there a long interval, letting his breath subside to normal, and then he made a line fast to the wrecked canoe and started on downstream.

At the first possible landing he dragged both canoes out. Night was coming, then, and he stood for a time on the narrow shelf of river-bank staring out across the stream.

"With the old devil in a mood to let go," he said; and his smile was one of triumph.

MEANWHILE, along the trail that led through the timber out to the Shoestring road, Steve Drake was covering miles at a woodsman's swift pace. Thrice, early in that journey, he stopped and stood still to listen. He heard a crashing in the brush that might have been deer or moose or bear; a bird sang a plaintive evening song but otherwise the silence of the forest was unbroken. So he went on, touching now and again his breast pocket, his sense of security mounting.

He could not make such progress when darkness came. His pace slowed to no more than a stroll so he might be certain that he kept to the trail and it was late night when he emerged from the big timber, followed a wagon road through a chopping and came out on the twisting, well-traveled track which led to town.

A long walk, it was, and he had not eaten since morning. But he experienced neither hunger nor fatigue. He drank at a creek and smoked as he swung along with a sense of impending achievement riding high in his heart to make him heedless of physical discomforts.

At dawn he entered Shoestring and breakfasted at the one restaurant. When the courthouse opened he was there and presented his option for record. He lingered in the register's office until he saw that the entry had been made and then, drawing the first really long breath, it seemed, that he had enjoyed since he first stepped into the store at Good-by and picked up the gage hurled by old Jim Flynn's enemies, he left for the telegraph-office. Franz might not forget; Franz might pursue and try to take his vengeance. But all that he could do now would be to harm Steve Drake's body and that was a trifling matter!

"SLEEP well?" La Fane asked that morning.

"No!"—gruffly.

"I heard you rolling around. A kid in your shape, who's done to himself and to his father what you have done, shouldn't expect to sleep very—"

"For the love of God, La Fane, wont you please let up on that?"

The boy spread his arms wide in appeal. Tears showed on his lashes and his breath caught. Slowly his hands went to his sides, his head hung and his chest heaved.

For a long moment the other stood there, looking at him. Then he walked close. His great hands went to young Jim Flynn's shoulders, and he shook the boy slowly.

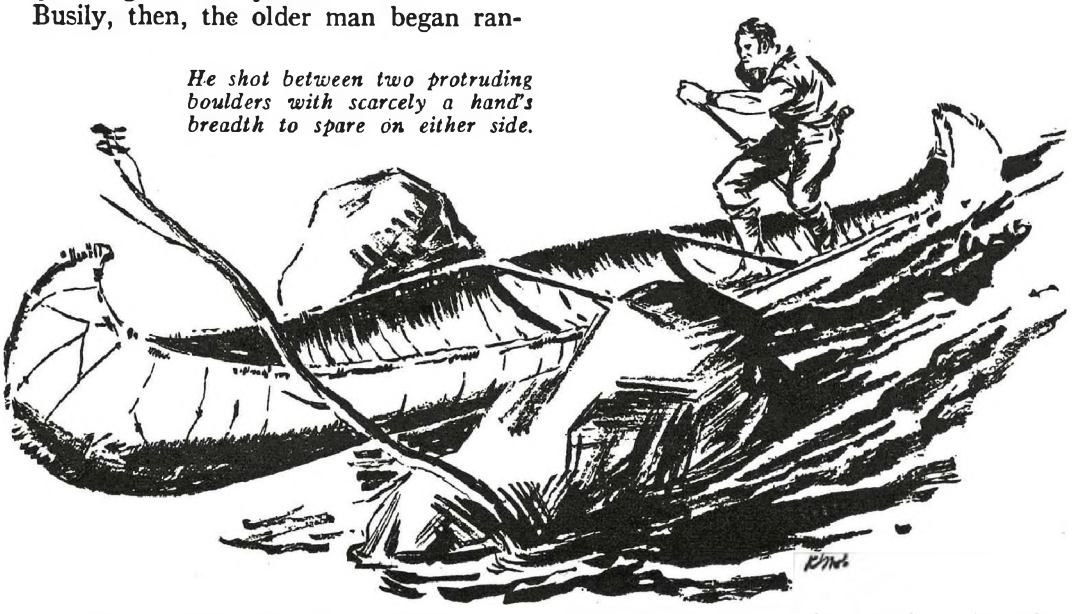
"Look at me, son," he said, and his gentle tone was husked. "Look at me. That's right! And listen to this: It was all you had left: your sense of the decent thing. But you've got it, and it's all a man needs.

If you hate me yet, I'm sorry. But we're on our way out, now. . . . . We're on our way as soon as the last shake is gone. The job waiting is not one for a man who isn't steady."

The boy looked away and his lip trembled once. Then, unashamed, he wiped his eyes with a palm.

"I don't hate you," he said in a pinched voice. "I don't hate you, La Fane. I'm only hating . . . . myself."

Busily, then, the older man began ran-



He shot between two protruding boulders with scarcely a hand's breadth to spare on either side.

sacking the grub-sack. He smiled as he cooked that breakfast of hearty food.

CHAPTER XIV

CAREFULLY Steve Drake reread the words he had written on a telegraph blank. He had told it all briefly, but left no word important to the proposed transaction unsaid.

The last words were:

THIS DEAL IS ONLY WAY OUT. MONEY MUST BE IN MCDONALD'S HANDS NEXT THURSDAY FOUR P.M.

To the operator he said: "Send that. And I'll sit down here with you until an answer comes."

BUTTER would not melt in Franz's mouth, at times, old McNally had said. And this day was one of those times. On a high point he stood beside the Laird and showed him where he had found Steve Drake's canoe.

He spoke in a hushed tone, as one speaks of tragedy. Slowly, he led the old man on down to where the wrecked canoe was beached and there McDonald stood with bowed head while tears ran down his wrinkled cheeks.

"Oh, a gude lad, he was!" he mourned. "A fine, gude lad! A grand angler. . . . . Why—oh, why'd he try the rapid?"

After a moment he lifted his face.

"Would ye think, lad, that 'twas havin' the option that drove him to the risk? That he wanted to get word to his father so quick he took the chance?"

Franz considered, and the old man could not see the reflection of crafty debate that went on within him.

"The queer part of it all, Mr. McDonald, is that this fellow was not young Jim Flynn."

"Eh? Not Flynn's son?"

Franz shook his head. "The real young Jim Flynn was drunk over on Moose Lake when this fellow showed up and passed himself off for the one they'd been expecting."

"What? Are ye *sure*, Franz?"

"As sure as I am that Twenty Mile took him. Why, he admitted it to me—but I said nothing about it. I didn't think it was any of my business."

"But who was he? What was he doin'?"

"I can't answer that. Who he was doesn't matter. What he was doing here I can only guess."

He said that significantly and the Laird looked at him in sharp query.

"My guess would be this: That old Jinx

had tried to buy from you and you wouldn't sell. That he knew his son was a worthless bum. That he found this fellow who makes a good appearance and who surely is a darned good fisherman, and sent him here deliberately to win your friendship."

The long fingers began to tremble.

"Ye think so? Ye think it, lad? I wonder—" An irate glare began to show in his eyes. "Queer happenin's—queer things! Ah, I'm sick of it all! Age rides heavy on th' shoulders! It's a great relief I felt when I signed his option but if he's gone it's gone with him and I've got the timber back again! If Jim Flynn's a smart trickster, no more will I have to do wi' him, but I've th' property back, noo, and just when I'd commenced to reckon other investments."

IT was Franz's opportunity—his hour. Cleverly he played his cards. Each word he spoke was well calculated. They walked back to the Laird's where the old man paced the great room while Franz listened in evident sympathy and waited—waited. . . . .

Darkness had come before Franz spoke the thing he had waited since last evening to say and then, with falsehood and deception and innuendo having made the ground fertile he made his suggestion. So, at dawn, he started for Shoestring himself, option in his possession, getting a lift in a settler's wagon at noon, catching an automobile townward-bound an hour later and finally ran up the courthouse steps, presented his document to the register of deeds and watched that worthy scratch his head as he read it.

"Well, that's the second option on this description!" he said, looking up.

"*Second!*" Franz's voice cracked with amazement.

"Sure, young Jim was in yesterday. He waited around town until this noon for a telegram."

"But—but—he couldn't. . . . . He's—"

He stopped his stammering with a grimace. Ghosts do not transact business! Evaded again! Thwarted!

"His was a seven-day option, wasn't it?" he asked.

"Yes. Dated Thursday."

"Record this, then. It's for fifteen."

He left and walked out to the edge of town, throwing himself down under a tree and lying there planning. Telegraphing, eh? Well, if a man could know what was in that wire, now—

Night came to Shoestring. For a time the main street glowed with lights but one by one they were turned off and one by one the stragglers disappeared.

Down at the railroad station, which was also the telegraph-office, a figure stood for long in the deep shadow of the building. No train was due until dawn, now, but this man waited for no train. After a time, seeing no one, hearing no one, he slipped an iron bar beneath the window sash, put his weight on it and heard the catch give with a snap and a tinkle. Slipping into the room, he closed the window carefully behind him.

It was a long job, searching out those files in the darkness, even though the telegraphic correspondence he sought had transpired within the last two days. He cursed himself for being without a flashlight and scratched matches hurriedly, standing in the darkness between-times and listening for any sounds of approach.

He found Steve's message, signed with the single word "Jim;" and after further searching, found the answer:

> GOD'S IN HIS HEAVEN, ALL'S WELL WITH THE WORLD. THE OPTION IS GRAND NEWS, BUT INDICATION OF WHAT YOU HAVE DONE WITH DAD'S TRUST BRINGS THE GREATEST HAPPINESS I EVER HAVE KNOWN. TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND CASH WILL BE DELIVERED TO GOOD-BY TUESDAY. HAVE TEAM AT SHOESTRING MONDAY NOON. —KATE.

Carefully Franz replaced the copy of the telegram in its place. Cautiously, he raised the window and departed, taking the road which led north, planning slowly but with care, and with ruthlessness. . . . .

And in the little camp beyond the Madwoman two men lay under the high stars and talked as they had talked for hours.

"You've got it to do," La Fane said again and again. "You *can* do it; you *must* do it. In less than a week you'll be fit as a fiddle. . . . . And you can and you must; you *can* and you *must!*"

The boy beside him trembled.

CHAPTER XV

AGAIN and again on the way back to camp and even after he had taken up the many matters that lay waiting for his decision, Steve re-read that telegram from Kate Flynn, and although one phase of her joy made his heart swell, one factor in the situation chilled him.

Elated as the girl was over the dawning of a new and well-founded hope for Polaris,

the thing which stirred her most was her belief that young Jim had finally found himself, had made an about-face and had become, in these few weeks, the true son of his father.

And the truth of the matter was that young Jim was somewhere out in the timber, being handled by a man as an outlaw dog would be handled! If La Fane failed, Kate's heart would be broken; if he were making progress Steve was in ignorance of it. Each day that was added to La Fane's absence reduced hope by just so much.

Drake felt that the time for his unmasking was not far distant, now. Beyond a doubt old Jim would send an attorney to close the deal with the Laird and the chances were that a lawyer or any other agent so trusted would have had dealings with Polaris in the past and, having had the experience, it was incredible that he should not know young Jim.

Yes, the masquerade was about over; it had only days to run. And if, at its finish, La Fane should not have come, successful in his errand, then Steve felt he would have failed to do the one thing that he might have done for Kate. . . . .

Kate! Always it was Kate he thought of, now. He had come to Good-by to help old Jim, but the hours he had spent reading Kate's intimate letters, the nights he had lain awake thinking of her, had relegated her father to a secondary place in his consideration.

On that first evening back in camp, after confiding to McNally the good news, after making inquiries, in a rather amused manner, about Franz—who had not been seen since the day Steve spent with the Laird—he sat for long, gazing at the photograph of the sweet-faced girl. It was crumpled and cracked, now, from the wear it had had in his pocket, but he treasured it most dearly of all his possessions.

"I've helped old Jim," he said aloud to the likeness. "Oh, Kate, if I can make a man of young Jim, I will! If La Fane fails, I'll try as I never worked on any other job in my life!"

He had enough to do! Pressing details confronted him and always, day and night, he was strung up, tense, expectant before the threat of forest fire.

It was on Saturday that McNally drove away with the supply team, ready to meet whoever might be sent with the money on Monday and taking his wife with him, because she was off on a visit in Duluth.

As a precaution, Steve had the old fellow take a shotgun along.

"I may be jumpy," he said, "but there's one renegade in this country. He's been crossed off a few times but he might try again. Besides, twenty-five thousand would be a temptation to lots of men."

Steve would have driven out to the railroad himself but the nights even had ceased bringing dew and, furthermore, he was hoping desperately that La Fane would come, either with young Jim or with word of him, and he wanted to be there to hear whatever was to be told.

But had Steve gone on into Shoestring himself, had he waited on the depot platform, he might have observed things that McNally did not observe.

For one item, he might have seen Franz within the building, face against a dusty window, watching as old Mac escorted the new arrival toward the waiting wagon. Franz was even close enough, as McNally looked down at the lifted briefcase, to hear him say:

"Oh, that's all right. We got a good, stout safe in th' store. It'll be safe as safe in there!"

After McNally drove away from the platform, up into the town to have his purchases loaded in, Franz hailed an automobile, parleyed with the driver and was whisked out of town on the Good-by road. The car could only take him a dozen miles before the route entered swamp country that could not be traversed except by teams. But it completed that stage of the journey before the team was well started. From there Franz went on afoot, headed toward Good-by, but not venturing down the eastern side of the lake. He swam the upper river and, at night, rolled himself in a blanket taken from a pack-sack cached beneath a well-concealed canoe. He slept but little. He was up before dawn.

STEVE was in the store when the team drove out of the timber, busy at the desk beside the safe, and gave the arrival no heed at all until Tim Todd, the lame old clerk, peering through the open door, said that he would be dusted.

Those were his words, "Well, I'm dusted!" spoken shrilly, as a man will in grand surprise.

Steve looked up, turning his head over his shoulder. He rose, then, and though he did not speak, he was as thoroughly dumfounded as the old cripple.

McNally was clambering down over the wagon wheel and, standing where she had risen from the place on the seat, stood a girl! Outlined there against the sky, she was a Diana! Her high laced pacs were trim; the riding breeches encased finely modeled legs. The gay shirt fitted well over her slender torso and square, boyish shoulders. Her throat rose in a fine column and her head, flung back, with the brisk, dry breeze blowing tendrils of fair hair about it, seemed a posture of fine defiance to the white bandage which covered her eyes.

Kate Flynn! Kate Flynn, holding in both hands, a worn briefcase as one would hold great treasure. Kate Flynn, coming herself as Polaris' saving messenger!

The strength seemed to trickle out of Steve's body through every pore. She was more fair to behold than he had even dreamed in all the dreams he had had of her fairness through these feverish weeks, and it was this beauty which weakened him, not thought that here was the person whom he could not deceive, that his pretense of being young Jim must end now.

That thought was to come next and, rising to his consciousness, it rocked him. He groaned and closed his eyes. She would demand young Jim—and she must be told.

Kate was leaning over, groping with one hand for McNally's help. She was talking a bit breathlessly, and laughing as one will in excitement and McNally, seeing Steve, called out:

"Jim! Oh, Jim! Here's Katie!"

THE girl stopped her talk as McNally, with these words, swung her to the ground. The narrow bandage covered her eyes, the windows of the heart's expression, but it could not wholly hide the fresh eagerness on her face. Red lips, parted, revealed her white teeth. She swayed forward, leading McNally toward the store, rather than being led.

"Jim!" she cried, and her voice was as lovely to the ear as her body was to the eye. "Duffer, I'm here! Duffer, I'm here and you've put it over!"

Steve had walked to the doorway, and stood in confusion, as she came close.

"Where are you, duffer?" she asked, and her voice trembled.

She withdrew her hands from McNally's as they entered the store. She spread them before her, groping.

"Jim? Jimmy, where are you?"

He put out his hands; then, taking her small ones in them. She clutched him convulsively, drawing herself close, touching his body with hers.

He went giddy with the aroma of her close presence. She was more lovely than he had ever dreamed women could become! She was freeing her hands from his, lifting her arms, letting them creep about his neck, trembling as she whispered to him:

"You did it, duffer! You're the old Dad's son!"

She drew his face to hers, offering her lips, and something snapped within Steve Drake's heart. He wrapped his arms about her with a moan; he kissed her on the mouth, a long, lingering kiss, unable to resist before the strength of her appeal. She responded as their lips touched and then he felt the breath rush from her lungs, warm on his face, felt her body stiffen as the ardor of his caress carried.

And then her one palm was on his chest, struggling to break his embrace which had gone tight about her. Her breath was quick and frightened.

"Jim!" she cried, bewildered. "Jim, why don't you say something to me? Speak to me, duffer!"

He moved his lips and let her go. His voice, he knew, would reveal his secret, confirm the suspicions that his caress had awakened. He groped for the word which would check her, would put her on the defensive, possibly send her into a panic.

And then, instead of his voice, McNally's rose.

"Fire!" he called. "Good God, Jimmy! Look!"

He stood in the doorway, pointing up the lake to its western side, where a great column of orange-gray smoke rose like a cumulus cloud, rolling up over the hills, borne along by the wind.

"Fire!" Tim Todd echoed. "In the slash! Hell's bust loose, Jimmy! Oh, hell's bust loose now!"

Almost roughly Steve put the girl aside and ran down to the beach through the screen of scattered trees to see better.

Fire for certain! But because of it, he would not, for this hour at least, be forced to unmask, and to tell this beautiful girl that her brother, so far as any man at Good-by knew, was still a wastrel, still bearing the shame of a trust betrayed!

The stirring climax of this memorable novel will appear in the next, the December, issue.

Ginger growled; Marie came running and dropped to her knees beside the old dog.

The Scent of Vengeance

By CHARLES V. BRERETON

The dramatic story of a California sheep-dog who watched well and fought hard.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

GINGER'S first impression of his master and mistress had been the time when slim brown fingers that seemed to him immeasurably harsher than the gentle nip of his mother's teeth had grasped him by the scruff of his woolly neck and lifted him from among his wriggling brothers and sisters. Ginger's infantile feelings were hurt; it was supper-time, and he was hungry. Also he was insulted by this indignity. In righteous anger he squalled like a young coyote as he clawed and squirmed, trying vainly to sink sharp little teeth into the hand which held him close to a pair of twinkling brown eyes.

"By gar!" old Victor Perret chuckled as he gently tweaked the puppy's tail. "Dat pup, he's got ginger in heem. I t'ink we keep heem an' geeve de rest away. Eh, Marie?"

The girl smiled assent as she bent her wrist away from the snapping little jaws.

"That is a good name for you, young fellow," she told the pup. "We'll call you Ginger, but we'll have to teach you better manners. Can't have you trying to bite your friends like that." She dropped the offended small dog back into the nest, stooping a moment to soothe old Queenie, who had been watching her offspring with anxious maternal eyes.

So, perhaps as much by reason of his own innate aggressiveness as any other, Ginger's destiny was settled. Just how or when it happened, he did not remember, but the rest of his whimpering relatives disappeared, and he found himself alone on the pile of old sheepskins in a little railed-off corner of the wool-shed. That, perhaps, was one of the reasons why Ginger's development was so rapid. At six months of age he was larger than his mother, big-boned and solid as a dog of twelve months; at a year he weighed nearly a hundred pounds, and the top of his sturdy shoulders was thirty inches from the ground.

Ginger's education as a sheep-dog began early. Marie, slim and boyish in overalls, was his instructor, though ably seconded by Ginger's own mother. At times the discipline seemed unreasonably strict to the gangling pup. The care of years had descended upon Queenie and made her sedate. She had no patience with canine frivolity.

Once, when chasing a frantic chipmunk, Ginger committed the unpardonable sin of breaking through the middle of the flock, the exasperated Queenie fell upon her wayward son and mauled him until he yelped for mercy. Ginger never repeated that offense. He knew now that sheep-dogs must always run around the flock, never through. And as the glorious weeks of the mountain springtime went by, Ginger became more and more adept in the profession that was to be his. Early, Marie taught the pup that he must eat nothing save what she or her father handed him.

"It is too easy for some enemy to poison a good dog," the girl said. "I'm going to train Ginger so that he will always be safe from that danger!"

ONCE only did Ginger forget that rule. Wandering aimlessly along the trail ahead of his mistress, he first scented, then saw an enticing piece of fresh liver lying beside a rock where human eyes would not have been apt to look. His training forgotten in the excitement of sniffing that delicious scent, Ginger made a grab at the tidbit, but Marie was quicker. The punishment she administered was the clincher in his training. Never again, when away from home, would the dog take food into his mouth unless it was handed him by master or mistress. But Marie, perhaps the more so because of her own fright, had been harsh. When Ginger had grabbed for that meat, his keen nostrils had detected on it the scent of the hand which had placed it beside the trail. And with every blow which his mistress rained upon him, the scent of that man had been driven into Ginger's memory. Henceforth, Ginger would hate that man.

That night Marie's face was anxious as she faced her father across the supper table.

"Some one is trying to poison our dogs," she said. "I found a piece of poisoned liver in the trail near the Buttes above Keno Creek. It was white with strychnine. I built a fire and burned it."

"By gar!" old Victor exploded. "Dose trouble she come now, I guess!"

"But didn't you say," Marie reminded, "that when this country was reserved there would be rangers, men like policemen, to see that the law was obeyed?"

"Law!" her father scoffed. "Dere is no law here except what de cattleman make. Still, I weesh dose ranger, she come soon."

The girl made a gesture of hopelessness; the meal was finished in silence. There was small need for further speech. Each knew that the crisis which they had dreaded for so long was swiftly approaching.

THIS range was Government land, free range—as much to be used by Victor Perret for his sheep as by anyone else. Years ago, when old Victor, in search of fresh pasture for his growing flock, had wandered nomad-like into the Keno Basin, his eyes had lighted with joy at the beauty of the spot, while his thrifty Gallic mind had envisioned his possibilities for profit. He had built his cabin by a crystal spring that watered a lush meadow and waited patiently for the time when surveyors would come, so that he might claim the land for his own. Mostly peace and happiness had been his portion, but sadness too had left its mark. On an oak-crowned knoll within sight of the house, where in the springtime the wild roses spread a velvet pall, Marie's mother slept beneath the sod. She had been a good helpmate. Old Victor's heartstrings were knotted to his mountain home.

But miles away, by a narrow timber-shaded trail that led to a little valley among the frowning mountains, was Karmac, a town of and for cattlemen. For decades these men had bought no land, built no fences, paid no taxes. They had turned their herds loose to graze at will on timbered range or grassy slope without fear of hindrance. And they had given but small attention to the Keno Basin—it was too small, too far away to arouse their greed. Beyond an occasional gibe at Victor when he made an infrequent appearance in Karmac, they ignored him and his. Time had passed with no thought of trouble, until of late old Victor and his daughter had garnered strange wisps of information from the few friendly men who rode through the high grass meadows of the Basin to partake of the Perrets' hospitality. That information had to do with the printed notices that were on trees in many places where Victor grazed his flock.

AT some far-off place called Washington, a man had set his name to a printed notice which had been posted on tree after tree by uncommunicative men in clothes of forest green, who had ridden for many days through this isolated region. And Marie, grateful for the few years schooling which was hers, had spelled out, word for word, the strange statement.

This region, all of it, she explained to her father, was to be included next year within a national forest—a reserve for timber. But all who grazed stock, whether sheep or cattle, would be allowed to remain within certain definite areas just so long as they paid to the Government certain fees. At this, old Victor's face clouded. Always, it seemed, there was a catch in anything which sounded like good fortune. But as the girl read aloud what those fees would be, the sheep-man mentally did some swift figuring. Then he gave a cry of delight.

"De cost is not'ing," he shouted. "Not'ing at all. De leetle homestead we 'ave now, dey do not take from us. De rest of de range we pay for. Lak rent, you see. An' dose ranger ees police, to make de cowman stay where she belong."

For many days after that the girl and her father had moved about their simple tasks in a glow of happiness. Good fortune had at last smiled upon them. Only a short time, and the range, little home and all, would be theirs to keep. Old Victor sighed happily and breathed a prayer of thankfulness to *le bon Dieu*.

BUT then the friendly riders began to warn of hurried conferences in smoky back rooms at Karmac, where booted and spurred men laid plans to retain this region for themselves. The notices had stated plainly that settlers who in good faith had taken land for their own would be allowed to keep it. Enough of the nearby Government land for the use of their small flocks and herds would be rented them. If there was conflict, the larger herds must suffer. As that understanding began to spread, the cattle-barons sent word to their henchmen that the settlers must go before the protecting hand of Federal law was laid upon the range land.

And in places the settlers had gone. Word, seeping by slow but sure ways in this land where the only travel was over narrow trails, had come of mysterious fires in the dead of night, of strangely stampeded flocks piled in a bleating, dying mass at the foot of granite cliffs—of settlers who returned from an absence to find their hogs, their only winter's meat-supply, ruthlessly slaughtered and piled contemptuously in front of the cabin. At first Victor had feared more for Marie than for himself; but as time went on his anxiety faded. Surely the Keno Basin was too far out of the way to incite the cupidity of the cow-men. He had herded his sheep, hoed his little garden and kept away from the cow-men's town.

IT was the day after his whipping that Ginger, returning to the flock from a prolonged chase after several stragglers, gazed in amazement at the curious antics of his mother. Queenie could not walk, but lay on her side, struggling wretchedly, while beside her was a half-eaten piece of fresh meat. A white froth came from her lips, and as Ginger sniffed it, he knew for the first time the odor of strychnine. At least, he knew that scent to be of the thing that was killing his mother. And on the meat, too, was the faint scent of a man—the man he had blamed for yesterday's whipping. Wherever he encountered that scent, there also would he encounter trouble. He would remember that.

Ginger growled, red hate suffusing the whites of his eyes as Marie came running and dropped to her knees beside the old dog, scalding tears streaming down her face. Queenie gave a last convulsive shudder and died. The girl picked up the rapidly stiffening body, and Ginger padded silently after her as she hurried down the homeward trail. Marie dug a little grave near the cabin, and had tamped down the last shovelful of earth when her father came home and saw what she had been doing.

"Eet mus' be dat Sam Bayliss who do dat," the sheep-man said, his face grave. "He ride among de sheep today, scatter dem everywhere. An' when I say: 'Please, Meester, you stop dat,' he curse me very mooch. He say dis climate bad for sheepman—some tam she die. Den he laugh."

"And you—what did you answer?"

"Not'ing." Old Victor shrugged apologetically. "Bayliss 'ave hees carbine drawn from de saddle boot when he come up to me, an' from one hand he 'ave drawn de glove. No, I say not'ing."

"You'll be careful, *mon père*," Marie whispered, her face now as pale as death itself. "You can't tell what he might do. You know what they say Bayliss is. He's not a cowboy. The cattle-men have hired him for nothing but killing."

But the old man laughed away any thought of danger to himself.

"I don't t'ink he shoot unless he can make eet look lak I shoot firs'," he answered. "Dem cattle-man mus' want de Keno Basin ver' bad before she do dat.

Bayliss maybe poison dogs, maybe try to gulch de sheep if he get de chance."

THE PERRETS could not know, any more than did Ginger, that in an elaborate office a thousand miles from the green slopes of that range, prosperous-appearing, hard-eyed men had conferred for hours over this new reserve and its probable effect on the great sums of money they had invested in cattle. And the decision of that conference was that the Keno Basin was the key to the most valuable range on the new forest. The politician whose office that was, stabbed the map before him with a stubby thumb.

"The outfit that is actually making use of that area to winter stock when the regulations go into effect," he said through the smoke of his expensive cigar, "will be sure of summer range for thousands of cattle. Its control is highly important, and once in your possession, it will take the bureau of forestry a mighty long time to enforce its childish rules against large herds. You men know, of course better than I, how to go about getting that control."

AS the days went by, Ginger knew that something troubled his master and mistress; and he too was affected by the atmosphere of gloom. Not often now did old Victor whistle about his daily tasks, and Marie's face was always grave. Because of this, and because since Queenie's death Ginger was overworked, he lost much of the enjoyment he had found in his job. As efficiently as ever he kept the silly sheep within bounds, watching that they did not straggle and become a prey to slinking coyote or stealthy bobcat; but his heart was not in his work. He had little patience now with recalcitrants, and he snapped harshly when the flock was slow to obey. His nerves were raw—there was trouble in the air.

So, one day in late summer when the sheep, stubbornly reluctant to leave the scanty green browse which yet remained in shady hollows or by the edges of half-dried ponds, objected to turning down the dusty trail toward the fold, Ginger charged among them angrily, determined to punish the leaders that defied him. Instantly the flock scattered, broken into groups that fled bleating in all directions. This would not do; frightened stragglers would surely be left to wander during the night, a prey to wild animals.

Marie hurried around the upper end of the scattered flock, her voice angry as she strove to get the sheep once more on the right path. Old Victor, wrathfully swearing, ordered the dog from among the sheep, and after a time succeeded in getting the leaders headed down the hill. But as Ginger, ashamed now of his loss of temper, paused beside his master, a strong scent was borne to his nostrils. It was that of smoke; he knew that, of course. But somehow this was not the smell of such a fire as burned each day in the cabin, nor yet of the tiny blaze which Marie and her father sometimes built out on the range to heat their coffee. There was something menacing about this smell—a new odor, terrifying in its threat. Ginger turned to face the wind which blew gently from the lower slopes, and as the odor stung his nostrils he barked sharply.

Victor turned to see what had caused the dog's alarm, and his eyes fixed upon the column of smoke which shot high into the air, the black underside of its ashy, mushrooming crown winking red and scarlet to the mad dance of flames below it.

"Fire!" the sheep-man shouted. "De house, she ees on fire!" In leaping strides he sprang down the hill, but as he caught sight of Marie running toward him, he yelled over his shoulder:

"Non! Non! You do not come, Marie. Stay weeth dose sheep. Eet maybe dat you 'ave to take dem away from de fire. I go see what I can do."

IN their excitement each forgot Ginger. Unforbidden, he loped after his master. Something was very wrong, he knew. But as the dog ran, he began to think of the sheep. He had never before left them alone on the range. In this moment of uncertainty, his pace slowed; his master was fifty feet ahead when the dog saw him pause in his stride as though his body had struck against some immovable barrier. For a lengthy moment the man stood upright, and then he toppled slowly, like a falling tree; and Victor Perret slid face downward along the hillside.

Ginger was almost upon the prone form of his master before he could stop, his own emotion more of amazement than anything else. The sharp crack of the rifle from somewhere down the hill had not registered with him because of the amazement; but now as he paused, the hated scent of that strange man came clearly to him on the

up-river wind. The stranger was not far away, and with his scent came that reeking effluvia of enmity which canine scent-nerves invariably interpret correctly. His nose pointing straight at that scent, the dog stepped near his master, growling. Then came a crash as though the world around him had collapsed, and he too fell. . . . .

Ginger struggled weakly as consciousness returned. From some great distance the faint voice of his master beat upon his eardrums, demanding, insisting

The dog saw his master pause as though his body had struck some immovable barrier.

that he do some certain thing. Ginger attempted to get to his feet, but his right front leg buckled under him, and he crashed miserably, a yelp of pain escaping him. Somehow he got the left leg under him and staggered upright, his right paw swinging queerly. Now his senses cleared. That reek of blood in his nostrils was of his own and his master's—the ground was spotted and streaked with it. Victor had propped himself on an elbow, and in his weak tones there was the voice of authority.

"Marie," the sheepman was saying over and over again. "Go to Marie, Ginger. Find Marie. Hours we lay here, *mon vieux*, you and I. De sheep 'ave not come. Oh, my little Marie, *ma pauvre petite*. Find Marie, Ginger!"

THAT was familiar. From puppyhood Ginger had known what those three words meant. He turned his pain-racked head up the trail, stopping after a limping hop or two, to rub his blood-clotted eyes against a friendly bush. He could see better now—he felt stronger, though the pain was excruciating as the fluttering rag which was his foreleg swung to and fro. High up in his shoulder was a hole which bled afresh as he moved. But he could not stop to lick the wound now. First he must obey that command: "Find Marie."

The day was far advanced. The sunset glow from behind Winnibulli's granite crags cast an eerie glow over the landscape as the sun's last rays peered through the smoke haze in the cañon. Night birds in the tangled willows beside a spring began their tentative tuning for the evening concert; a cock quail and his hen, the day's foraging over, marshaled their immature brood to the safety of a tall cottonwood. With never a backward glance at the man who watched the dog's slow progress for anguished moments before he dropped supine, Ginger made his painful way back up the ridge.

The sheep were scattered, grazing in little bunches, though long ago they should have been on their way to the fold. With vacant yellow eyes they stared at the dog, their dumb curiosity aroused by his queer gait. But Ginger ignored them as he limped, three-legged, through the flock. He would go first, as is the manner of his kind, to where he had last seen Marie—from there would be tracks. Pain racked him everywhere; his brain near burst with it,

submerging for the time all functions but those of loyalty and obedience. The dog's tongue lolled—dry, tasting horribly of salt. He encountered a mud seep, much trampled by tiny hoofs, and lapped long at the befouled water, thereby gaining a measure of strength.

He learned how to travel so as to cause a minimum of pain to the lacerated shoulder. He did not know that the leg was beginning to swell and so to stiffen and become numb. Now he was at his first objective. It was here, at the edge of the brush which bordered the glade, that he had last seen the girl angrily striving to turn the stubborn sheep. Ginger sniffed at the ground—her tracks were there. He sniffed again, and rage surged anew.

Beside the tracks of the girl were also those of that hated stranger. On grass and rock and bush—wherever his odor yet clung—was also that other sub-scent which reveals to the canine trailer the intent of him who made the trail. Sometimes that telltale scent is faint, illusive, as if the human were not certain of himself or what he should do. Fear, also, may be there. Thus it seems that dogs can so quickly tell friend from foe.

BUT now as Ginger, his pain for the moment forgotten, worked over the trampled ground, he knew that this stranger had held no fear in his evil heart. There was sureness about this fellow, a confidence, a deadly purpose that the dog could understand. But there also was a something more fleeting, more intangible, that he did not try to fathom—exultation at the successful accomplishment of an evil deed, a human would have known it to be. But in the scent his mistress had left Ginger detected the fear—a paralyzing, crushing fear such as he had never known her to possess. Ginger growled and mouthed in rage as he circled over the tangled threads of scent. The girl had fought desperately, impotently. Trampled stems of dry grass and particles of bark that heavy-soled shoes had torn from bruised saplings told that. Once she had fallen prone, limp as though just dead. Here the fear scent was terrific. And there was also apathy, defeat. The blow which had stricken Marie had for the time wilted her despairing defense.

From there the dog, red murder in his eyes, red hate for this man in his heart, trailed them back into the thicket. The man's trail was plain, that curious sub-scent of confidence stronger than ever. The girl's scent was dim, faintly noticeable on brush or drooping bough where Ginger had difficulty in tracing it. Having no experience of this, he could not know that thus far the man had carried the limp form of the unconscious girl. Here he had tied his horse before that stealthy attack.

FOR a time Ginger was puzzled again. The girl had resumed her fight—had nearly got away. Near by the ground was torn up where the nervous horse had pitched and plunged as the struggle raged beside him. Somehow, Marie had prevented the man from forcing her into the saddle—the animal's tracks made off at topmost speed straight down the mountain. Again Ginger unraveled the maze of scented tracks. On foot, the girl in the lead, the two humans had turned up the mountainside, over a steep slide of brush-covered boulders. Ginger stopped long enough to sniff at a piece of broken bridle-rein which hung from a limb, then grimly resumed his trailing.

The sinuous trail of scent wound up the forested mountain side that lays between the range land and Winnibulli's hoary summit. Marie and her captor were not so very far ahead, the dog knew. Ordinarily his rangy limbs, powered by sinewy muscles, would have rapidly lessened the distance between him and his mistress. But now his injury held him back. He stumbled often, his sound front leg slipping from pitiless boulders—clumps of wickedly armed buckthorn thrust clutching fingers to bar his way. More than once a half-suppressed whine of pain and misery escaped the dog, yet in his fevered brain there was no thought of abandoning his quest. He had been told to find Marie. While yet there was life in his veins and the power to move in his muscles he would carry on. What happened after that was not to be thought of now.

Night had drawn its sable pall over the mountains. No ray from the myriad stars that spangled the infinite vault above could penetrate that black forest where the weary, pain-racked dog stumbled and crawled, trailing now by scent alone. But the distance between quarry and relentless, silent pursuer was decreasing. With renewed courage Ginger forced his numbed muscles to obey his indomitable will.

Yard by yard and rod by rod, his nose never lifted from the trail, he gained at last

The cursing man did not know when Marie stooped swiftly and snatched his gun from its holster.

a jagged ridge, a spiny rib of the mountain that stretched from utmost peak to river-washed base and long had marked the limit of the Keno Range. Below the dog lay the gorge of Keno Creek, a forested cañon whence came the tinkle of water falling from mossy ledges. And now also, borne on a vagrant, friendly current of the night air, came clearly the body scent of the two he sought.

Luckily for the dog there was no longer need to follow the trail Marie and her abductor had left on that slope. The breeze-borne scent was clear—all he need do was to keep his nose upwind. But downhill travel is the very climax of agony for an animal with an injured foreleg. In a nightmare of pain Ginger wormed and twisted his way down that bleak declivity, the length of each tack he was forced to make across the slope determined by the comparative ease with which he yet detected the scent.

AT last the dog gained the level floor of the cañon—the damp moss was cool beneath his aching feet. For a time he stood there, poised, searching with every canny sense for the exact location of the loved mistress he knew must be near. And then as his nostrils caught again the scent of Marie and that strange man, eyes and ears as well flashed their messages to his brain. Scarce fifty yards from the dog, a gigantic boulder was suddenly outlined against the glow of a tiny hidden fire. There was the sound of snapping sticks, the voice of a man. Ginger knew it to be the voice of the man he hated—the man he had been trailing.

With hackles erect from neck to tail, the dog hopped silently toward the fire. Once he would have bounded joyously toward his beloved mistress, barking gleefully at the reunion. Now he paused cautiously in the shadows, his bloodshot eyes surveying that circle of yellow light. It was not anything resembling reason that led the dog to pause like a slinking cougar in the blackness beyond the feeble firelight. Training, experience, affection—all urged him to cast his weary body at the feet of the girl who sat there, helpless before that armed man, her bowed head in her hands.

But something far stronger than all these —some instinct that had persisted as a thread of heritage down through the ages since the sheep-dog's forebears had stalked the hairy marsh-dwellers at the edge of the ancient Baltic Sea, came now to Ginger's aid and guided him in this, his first deadly conflict with man. And to that instinct was added an experience of man and man's resources that made him far more dangerous than any beast of the wild.

After one look at his stricken mistress, the hidden watcher's eyes were all for this man he hated. this human he meant to kill if

he could. But Ginger knew, as all wounded animals know, that his usual strength was not his to command. This gave him a deadly patience, one which out-wolved the wolves from which his breed had sprung. He backed a little into the shadow as his enemy, sharply watching the silent girl, edged away from the fire in search of more wood. Shivering as with the ague, Ginger crouched, his hurts forgotten. Somehow he knew that his first savage leap of vengeance would also be his last. His jaws must clamp and hold. . . . .

Men, since told of this fight in the Keno Cañon, have said that what the dog did was accidental—that he could not have known beforehand the grip his jaws secured on the man was the single one which would enable him to gain the end he desired. Perhaps it was accidental; who can say? But as the man, his eyes for the moment turned toward Marie, reached into the shadows for a stick lying there, a hundredweight of snarling death shot out of the darkness upon him—his arm was seized as though by the steel jaws of a bear-trap.

The fellow yelled—as much in fright as in pain. His left hand vainly attempted to reach the low-holstered gun at his right side, but the effort threw him from his balance. A tumbling, snarling, screaming mass, man and dog rolled and thrashed in the firelight amid an upflung storm of leaves.

"Ginger! Oh, thank God!"

WITH the exclamation, Marie sprang to her feet. A girl of the mountains, she too would fight so long as life was left. She shot a swift glance around the encircling wall of darkness and knew the dog was alone—saw, also, the bloodstained, useless foreleg. Then, crouching, she bent over the combatants. The cursing man, his right arm held fast in that vengeful vise, strove with his left to break the dog's grip. He did not know when Marie stooped swiftly and snatched his gun from its holster. But the man was strong. Unmindful of his own pain, he lifted the dog high and dashed Ginger against the ground. A yelp escaped the dog as his broken shoulder crashed against a stone, his jaws opened and the man sprang free.

"You damn' cur!" he raged. "This time you wont get away!"

But as the man's hand, empty, came away from his side, his face went gray with fear. He knew what had happened. Like the rattler he was, he turned and lunged at Marie, to meet a pencil of orange flame that seared the front of his shirt amid a crash of sound. He fell as does a tossed sack—crumpled, inert. With eyes that were blazing fires, Marie stepped over the body, ready. She had heard what he said to the dog. But there was no need. The killer, whose evil work had always been done for hire, had failed on his last job because of a dog's unswerving loyalty.

GINGER crept to his mistress' feet, whining, and she knelt beside him, hugging his scarred and battered head as she crooned over his hurts. But as she knelt there, a clear call, the voice of a stranger, came out of the darkness. Then two shots, closely spaced.

"Some one searching for us, Ginger," Marie breathed. "They may be friends or enemies. It makes little difference now."

She turned the gun upward, and twice its muzzle spat red flame into the night—the answering signal of the mountains. Once more the yell echoed up the cañon and both listeners knew that voice was friendly.

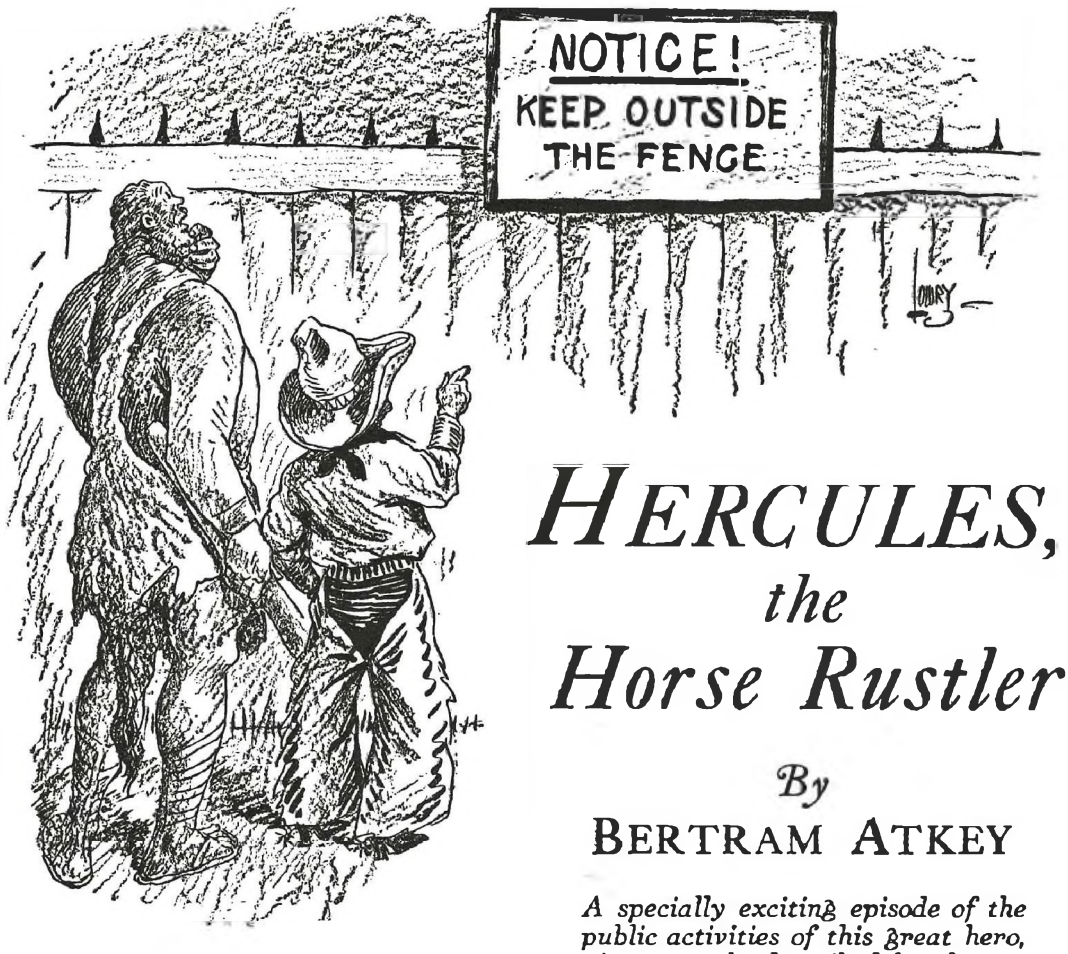
But Marie pulled the dog back into the shadows and crouched beside him. "Be still, Ginger," she cautioned him. "We'll wait and see who they are when they come into the firelight."

Brush crashed before the advance of hurrying bodies; twigs snapped beneath the tread of heavy boots; and two men who wore the forest green stepped into the light. Instantly Marie stepped forward, and Ginger knew these men must be friends.

"We heard the shot from the ridge," one explained. "We'd been looking for you for hours. We put the fire out before it did much damage, and then we found your father. He'll get well. One of our fellows went back after a doctor. But your father told us what he was afraid had happened to you. After we found where the fellow's horse had gotten away from him, we were sure he couldn't have taken you far."

As Marie sank sobbing to the ground, the ranger stepped over to the crumpled form by the fire.

"Killer Bayliss," he said contemptuously to his companion. "It's a good thing Headquarters warned us in time what was intended here. Tomorrow we'll tell that cattle outfit where their gunman is. Let them figure out what happened to him the best way they can. The law is here now, and there'll be no more of this."



"Certainly he gives you fair warning, what?" said Hercules.

HERCULES, the Horse Rustler

By

BERTRAM ATKEY

A specially exciting episode of the public activities of this great hero, picturesquely described by the author of "The Easy Street Experts."

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

MORE nonsense has been written about Hercules than about any other character in history (observes Mr. Atkey). The person mainly responsible is Homer. But Homer has been dead for well over a couple of thousand years and it would ill beseem the present writer to say one word against a man who cannot answer for himself. Nevertheless, some one must defend the reputation of Hercules, and from no one can such defense come more gracefully than from a relative of this fine old Greek—viz., the present writer.

For the Atkeys are descended in a more or less direct line from Hercules, and thanks to the recent discovery of certain ancient documents in the family archives, Bertram of the clan is able to throw new light upon the life of the great Greek hero.

The facts in the case of Hercules, it now appears, are as follows: His godfather, a very influential party named Zeus, apparently being under some obligation to the father of King Eurystheus of Mycenæ, entered into a contract that the boy Hercules, when he grew up, should enter Eurystheus' service for a period of twelve years.

Herc was straight. When he grew up, and was some eight feet tall, he went to King Eurystheus and placed himself at the King's disposal. . . . . The services which Hercules rendered the King are fully described in these stories. You have read of how he killed the Nemean lion, of how he descended into Hades and came back with the three-headed dog Cerberus, of how he cleaned up the Augean stables, of how he captured the mad bull of Crete and of how he fetched the girdle of the Amazonian queen as a gift for the spouse of King Eurystheus. Here follows the first really authentic account of how Hercules, with the assistance of a cowboy Red Bill, captured the man-eating horses of Diomedes.

TRIUMPHANT though the return of Hercules with the girdle proved to be,—for the Queen was quite charming about it,

—nevertheless he found that it was high time he returned.

For things at the country-house had not prospered during his absence. Within ten minutes of arriving there with King Eurystheus, Hercules perceived that his labors were by no means finished. Almost in tears, Eurystheus described how the stables had been devastated by a curious epidemic resembling glanders, which had quietly but swiftly killed off all the hunters, including Hercules' favorite weight-carrier, Pegasus.

"You've got everything right with the Queen, old man—that girdle will keep her quiet for weeks; but what we're going to do for a bit of huntin', I don't know. I'd give a lot for a good run, and you must be crazy for a gallop. It's getting serious!" grumbled Eurystheus. "Here's me, King of Mycenæ—and I haven't got so much as a jackass in my stables or a chalcus in my privy purse. I'm not going to stand it. Look here, am I His Majesty the King of Mycenæ, or am I not? If I'm king, then why haven't I got a few decent hunters for myself and some for a friend?"

And he shouted for the keeper of the privy purse.

"Back me up, Hercules, old man," he said hurriedly, as Stefanopoulos entered.

"Your Majesty desired my attendance?"

"I did," said the King coldly. "I desire you to go with the Master of the Royal Horse and buy twelve of the best hunters you can find. Let it be seen to at once." And he waved his hand in a royal gesture of dismissal.

THE jaw of the keeper of the privy purse fell with an almost audible click. His eyes protruded considerably, also.

"But Your Majesty," he said, "the privy purse is empty."

Eurystheus whirled on him.

"Well, whose fault is that?" he shouted. "Yours or mine? Am I keeper of the privy purse, or you? Always the same cry—'Your Majesty, the privy purse is empty!'—to everything I say. By Zeus! I'll order one of the mariners to bring back a parrot from foreign lands, and make it keeper of the purse. It could answer me as well as you can—for less money. Do you think I pay you a salary of—of—er—how much do I pay you a year? I've forgotten."

"Nothing, Your Majesty," said Stefanopoulos apologetically.

"What's that? How much do I pay the keeper of the privy purse a year out of my civil list?"

"Nothing, Your Majesty," repeated Stefanopoulos mildly.

Eurystheus looked a little staggered.

"Well, how much ought I to pay?"

"Five thousand drachmæ per annum, Your Majesty."

"Well, you'd better charge it in the account," said the King rather feebly.

"Thank you, Your Majesty. That is what I have been doing for the last five years," sadly replied Stefanopoulos.

EURYSTHEUS, a good-hearted man, melted. "Poor Steve! It's awful, isn't it?" he said. "What do you live on, Steve?"

"Credit," said Steve.

"Too bad—yes, it's too bad. I'm sorry, Steve. Still, I do the same. I'll give you a medal, Steve, as soon as I can get a new case in. Do you think you could get a horse or two on credit?"

"Am I to answer frankly,—as a sportsman,—Your Majesty?"

"Certainly, Steve. I waive ceremony. We are three sportsmen together—without one hunter between us."

"Well, Your Majesty, I don't believe there's a horse-dealer within twenty miles that would let us know he owned a horse, much less sell us one on credit. And that, Y'r Majesty, is the stone-cold truth," said Steve flatly. "We owe for such a lot of horses already."

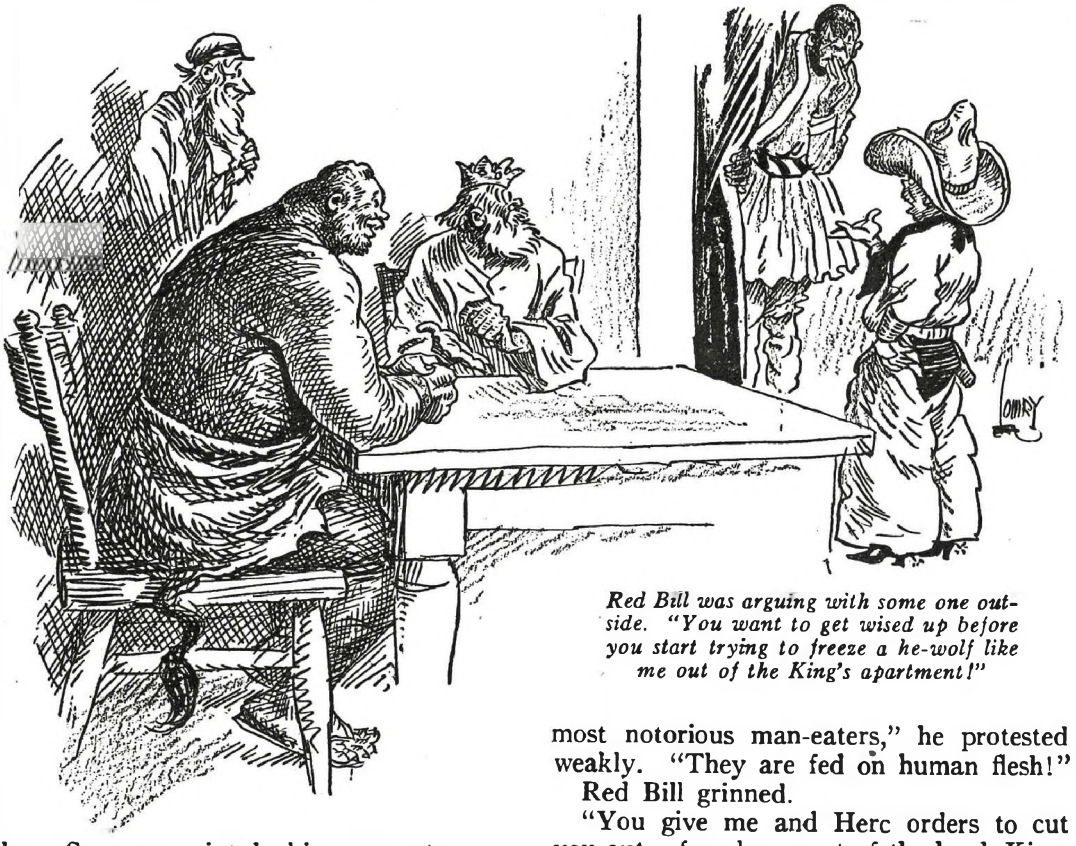
Eurystheus looked helplessly at Hercules, but before he could find an answer to this remarkably crisp presentation of the facts, a little disturbance was heard outside, the door of the apartment was suddenly opened, and there entered no less a person than Red Bill, who was still arguing over his shoulder with some one outside.

"Persona grata, as Lord Hercules puts it, bo'. That's me. You want to get wised up on your Latin, old man, before you start in trying to freeze a he-wolf from back of the ranges, like me, out of the King's apartment. You're too fresh, son!" And so saying, the cowboy turned to greet Hercules and Eurystheus.

"Why, hello, King—hello, Herc—howdy! I'm plumb glad to set eyes on you again," he said breezily, shaking hands violently.

"I've quit Augeas. I was shore weary of that old rattler. I've stood for his gold bricks right along, but when it come to settin' the cow-hands on to diggin' foundations for a new dam to take the place of

that one you broke up on him, Herc, I shore kicked. 'No sir,' I says, 'I aint no mud-hoppin' granger. I'm foreman of the cow-hands. Me for Mycenæ and my pal Herc, and a king that is some king!' So I draws down a fistful of back money, calls up my little paint-horse, and hits the trail away from that ranch *pronto*. And hyar I



Red Bill was arguing with some one outside. "You want to get wised up before you start trying to freeze a he-wolf like me out of the King's apartment!"

be. Say, you aint looking none too gay yourselves. What's bitin' you?"

They told him, briefly. He listened to the end in silence, his clear gray eyes twinkling. Then he laughed.

"Well, that all is shore most evil luck for two *caballeros* like you," he decided. "Can't you rustle a cayuse nohow? No? Then, say, what's the matter with Herc and me attendin' to it? Aint you never heard of them broncos of King Diomedes, up in the Thrace country? I guess you'd have to go a long journey to find better broncos, once they was broke to this hyar fox-huntin'. I aint never saw them myself, but there was an *hombre* working on the Elis ranch had; and say, that feller was plumb loco about them animiles! You'd better let Herc and me get away up to Diomedes' range, King, and stampede a few of them bronc's over here!"

He thrust his lean, brown, weather-bitten face close to that of Eurystheus.

"Is it a go, King?" he demanded.

"By Zeus, he's right, what?" said Hercules, throwing off his languor at the prospect of excitement.

Eurystheus hesitated.

"But those horses of Diomedes are the most notorious man-eaters," he protested weakly. "They are fed on human flesh!"

Red Bill grinned.

"You give me and Herc orders to cut you out a few dozen out of the herd, King, and we'll get 'em to where they'll eat chicken-feed outer your hand in three or four days. That goes, Herc, don't it?"

"Certainly," said Hercules. "I wonder we never thought of it before, what? If only we had your brains, Red, we shouldn't have to go short of a bit of hunting. By Zeus, but those horses will be grand weight-carriers—grand!"

Eurystheus' face brightened.

"Very well, have your own way, you boys. Grab as many of them as you can. It's one of the scandals of Europe, the number of horses that man Diomedes keeps. Take a goblet off the sideboard, Red Bill, and you too, Steve, and we'll wish them luck. You'll be able to raise a trifle for their traveling-expenses while in Thrace, eh, Steve? The navy will supply the necessary ships to get them there and back."

"I'll do my utmost, Your Majesty," said Steve, and hung fire, hesitating.

"What is it?" asked Eurystheus.

"Well, Your Majesty, I was wondering if there was a possibility of Mr. Red Bill or Lord Hercules being able to get a couple of—er—nags for me. My old screw died this morning."

"Why, shore, Steve—shore," chimed in Red Bill. "We'll cut you out a pair of good 'uns, hey, Herc?"

"Stout fellows! Steve, make a note that I have appointed Red Bill to be Chief Cow-puncher to the King!" said Eurystheus; and he headed the procession to the wine-tank.

PRECISELY one month later, Hercules and Red Bill were to be seen approaching a notice-board erected just inside a tall fence running an enormous distance to the right and left of them, and which marked the boundary of what Red Bill referred to as King Diomedes' "range."

NOTICE
KEEP OUTSIDE THE FENCE
ANY PERSON FOUND INSIDE
THE FENCE OR DOING DAMAGE
TO THE RANGE WILL BE
PROSECUTED WITH THE UTMOST
RIGOUR OF THE LAW, SHOULD
THEY ESCAPE BEING EATEN
BY THE HORSES ON THE
RANGE, WHICH IS UNLIKELY.
By Order,
Hy. Jno. Smithopoulos,
Master of the Royal Herd.

Both men were mounted—Hercules upon a huge, powerful, upstanding roan horse which he had won as the result of a wrestling match with a local amateur wrestler at the port, who probably possessed more horses than skill; and Red Bill, as usual, was on his piebald cow-pony—his "little paint-hoss," as he was wont to term it.

They dismounted and drew nearer to the sign-board, studying it with interest.

"Say, Herc, Hy. Jno. is shore candid in his conversation, aint he?" commented Red Bill dryly.

Hercules laughed.

"Certainly he gives you fair warning, what?" he said. "There's another sign-board farther down the line. Let's move along and see what else the good Smithopoulos has to talk about."

Mounting again, they cantered down to the second board.

If the Master of the Royal Herd had been frank in his warning to the public generally on the first board, the composer of the second was franker still. He was, indeed, deliberately insulting.

Hercules read it aloud—as follows:

" 'Reward: One thousand drachmæ will be paid to any person giving information which leads to the arrest or capture, alive, dead or half-dead, of the following two outlaws:

" 'One. Alcides, alias Alcæus, alias Heracles, alias Hercules, an Apache, highway-robber, jewel-thief, cattle-rustler, and horse-stealer from Mycenæ. Height about eight feet, breadth about four feet. Features, fierce. Probably dressed in lion-skin. He is usually accompanied by a three-headed, barb-tail dog, answering to name of Cerberus, Cerb or Cerby.

" 'Two. A party passing under the name of Red Bill, recently of the State of Elis. Was once a cowboy in employment of King Augeas, but being discharged for petty theft, became a noted horse-thief. Usually mounted on piebald pony, and carries a lariat, which he terms his "rope." Unprepossessing in appearance. A dangerous character. Probably will be found in company of aforesaid Hercules.

" 'Whereas information has been received that these two outlaws have landed in the country of the Bistones for the purpose of stealing horses from the Royal Herd, know all ye and forget it not that all loyal citizens are called upon to detain, arrest, destroy, or slay at first sight either or both of the hereinbefore described depredators. No further authority is needed, and the production of the heads of the outlaws will be accepted as proofs, after a short police investigation, of their demise.

" 'By Order of the King.
" 'Jos. Ed. Joppemopoulos,
" 'Chief of Police.' "

THE partners in adventure looked grimly at each other. To say that they were annoyed would be feebleness—they were, for a few moments, "plumb, hopping, crazy-mad," to borrow Red Bill's somewhat redundant phrase.

" 'Apache—highway-robber—jewel-thief—cattle-rustler and horse-stealer!' " Hercules said savagely. "I shall want an explanation of this, Red, before I start back to Mycenæ!"

"Me too, Herc—me likewise."

Hercules calmed himself with a very violent effort, and stared at the board.

"Just a moment, Red," he said, and

As an exhibition of club-work it was magnificent: Hercules never missed—never killed the horse he meant to stun, nor stunned the horse he meant to kill.

measuring the distance, planted a neat overhead swing in the middle of the board, utterly and eternally wrecking it.

"And that's—"

He stopped short as a sudden thunder of hoofs broke in the silence.

"Something's stampeded some of the bronc's," said Red Bill quickly. "Mebbe you battering up the sign-board done it."

They hoisted themselves on to the fence and looked over.

Red Bill was right. Some fifty or so of the man-eating horses were thundering toward them. Red watched the brutes with a critical and approving eye.

"Some bronc's, Herc, believe me—some bronc's, though there aint a paint-hoss among 'em!"

The beasts halted sharply at the edge of a wide, deep stream which ran along on the inside of the fence, and throwing up their heads so that their red, flaring nostrils seemed enormous, neighed at Hercules and Red Bill—a dreadful neighing that was more akin to shrieking. There was in that terrible noise something uncanny. Every horse was black as ebony, and though heavier and much more powerfully built than any Arab, was distinctly Arab in type. A better description, perhaps, would be to write that they appeared to possess the bone and sheer strength of a very high-class weight-carrying English hunter, with the look of breed and the promise of speed of a first-rate Arab. But there any resemblance ended.

This herd of glaring, white-eyed, snapping, flat-eared, shrieking wild beasts—not one of which but could show half a dozen scars of old bites and plenty of new ones—was like a herd of runaway horses in an evil nightmare.

"Some bronc's, Herc," repeated Red Bill seriously. "There's shore goin' to be some rough work before any saddle is cinched up on them black wildcats!"

But Hercules' eyes were eager.

"Look at them, Red. Did you ever see horses more suitable for a man of my build? I've seen a lot of nags in my time, but never such a lot as this. Look at the bone there—and as much alike as peas in a bally pod, what? I tell you frankly, Red, that I don't leave this country without a cargo of these chaps on board!"

"What you say goes with me, Herc—it always did," replied Red Bill. "Do we sail in now?"

"No, no," said Hercules hastily. "We've

got to find a quiet camp and proceed strategically. We shall have to tame these brutes as we catch them. And when we've got them on to a vegetarian diet, and a trifle tamer than they are now, we shall have to arrange about getting them aboard. It is going to be a long business, this, Red—but worth while, nevertheless."

Then the leader of the troop—a huge, raging, foaming demon, half-wheeled, rearing and snuffing. In an instant the whole herd were doing the same. Then, suddenly, like a pack of wolves, they plunged forward, and galloping furiously across the range, disappeared, evidently on the track of something of which the wind had brought them the scent.

The partners watched them until they vanished, and then, leaving their seats on the fence, mounted their own horses and proceeded toward a series of wooded hills in the distance, where they hoped to find a suitable site for headquarters.

"Apart from hunting, with those horses practically every race at every race meeting in Greece is ours, Red," said Hercules.

"Shore!" replied the cowboy. "If they don't eat their jockeys!"

BEFORE the partners had sojourned in the country of the Bistones a fortnight, they knew practically everything worth knowing about the herd of man-eaters which they were planning to deplete. They had discovered, well inside the mountains bordering the west side of the range, an abandoned hut, in an extremely secluded spot. Probably it had been built many years before by some hermit, or possibly a wandering prospector. This they had joyfully taken over, mended the holes in the roof, chased out the rats and snakes, cleaned it up and made it habitable.

This done, they spent a few days in cautiously reconnoitering the district, selecting the best and quickest route to the coast, establishing communication with the Mycenæan ships that were cruising about awaiting them, and most important of all, in getting into touch with the horsemen on the range.

They discovered a saloon down in a village between the range and the mountains, much favored by the range-riders, the proprietor of which, a Greek of a singularly cutthroat appearance, was himself an ex-boundary-rider for Diomedes, only resigning his position when one of the black demons had snapped off his ear.

The saloon was, not inappropriately, named "The Black Horse Hotel," and the adventurers lost no time in visiting it, slightly disguised.

Hercules decided to go in the character of a detective, specially imported from Athens, for the purpose of tracking down the desperadoes referred to on Jos. Ed's sign-board; while Red Bill's very sound notion was to pass himself off as a traveling dentist, for which purpose he procured, one night, from the doctor of the flagship, a few quarts of ether and chloral and a set of very terrifying tools, the mere sight of which was likely to convince anybody that the cowboy was indeed what he purposed claiming to be.

THEY paid their first visit to the saloon one evening at about seven o'clock. Red Bill was to arrive first, about half an hour before Hercules. They intended posing as strangers to each other.

As they planned them, so things befell. Hercules, arriving promptly on time, found Red Bill surrounded by a profoundly interested ring of slightly inebriated horsemen, who were watching the cowboy making his simple preparations to extract the aching tooth of one of their comrades. He was, indeed, on the point of wedging open the horseman's jaws wider than the man desired—much to the hilarity of the company—as Hercules entered.

Nobody except the one-eared proprietor at the bar noticed Hercules, which was precisely what Hercules desired. He crossed to the bar and dashed down a gold-piece.

"Wine for the crowd," he said tersely. "Let me know when that's knocked down. Set 'em up!"

The burly saloon-keeper grinned, and biting the coin, bowed with true Grecian grace.

"Assuredly, sir," said he, and proceeded to "set 'em up."

Hercules leaned across the counter.

"And look here, What's Your-Name—"

"Karkovokoulageorgeopoulos," murmured the Greek.

"All right, I'll call you 'Kark,' for short. Do you know what this is?" He opened his palm, and showed the little silver model of a polecat, which was the badge of the Athens Detective Corps.

Evidently Kark did, for he paled slightly, and his hand dropped to the knife at his belt.

"All right, all right, Kark, old man. I'm

The charger went down with a shriek, and the man-eater, seizing the King, shook him as a terrier does a rat.

not after you—this time. I just wanted you to know who I am. I'm here for that great Mycenæan stiff Hercules, and his horse-stealing friend, and later on I want a quiet talk with you."

Kark, quite reassured, was intimating that he could give quite a lot of valuable information, when a long, inexpressibly anguished howl from behind, drew Hercules' attention to the fact that Red Bill was evidently on the point of concluding his dental operations. He turned abruptly as the cowboy staggered back toward the bar holding an immense molar in his forceps, while the patient, a huge person with an extensive vocabulary, expressed his opinion of the art of dentistry in a loud and penetrating voice.

Then the whole company surged to the bar. Noting their surprise at the sight of Hercules, Kark hastened to introduce him.

"Boys, shake hands with my cousin, Mr. Peloponnesus MacImbros, straight from Athens—where he runs one of the slickest little gamblin' halls, with a free-lunch buffet, just back of the Theater of Dionysus, as you'd meet with between here and Hades! He's been promising to visit me this five years—now he's here. And say, you boys, he brought along some of that there Athens dough,"—here Kark rang the gold coin on the counter—"and his first words was: 'Set 'em up for the crowd.' He's white all through, is Pel MacImbros—he always was. Pass him your lists, and shake!"

It was a rough-and-ready introduction, no doubt, but it served its turn. Hercules was certainly the most popular man in the bar from then onward. Nor did the subsequent extravagant squandering of much of the money scraped together by the harassed Steve diminish the good impression.

RED BILL, playing up like a little man, entered into a friendly competition in the dispensation of hospitality, vastly to the approval of the recipients. As is usual at these functions, it gradually accelerated itself into a truly wild and woolly evening—reminiscent, as Red Bill said later, of the evenings they used to have back in the Elis cow-country before Augeas "put every dollar in the country into the refrigerator."

Just before midnight Red Bill and Her-

cules seized an opportunity to consult each other.

The cowboy, it appeared, had an idea.

"Say, Herc, these range-riding guys is shore easy. I don't see no reason why we kain't get busy with their flocks and herds right now. What's the matter with having old Kark brew up a bowl o' punch, me dropping in a ladle or two of chloral. Then, when they're poundin' their ears, includin' Kark, you and me steals forth and cuts out a few of the herd. There's a shiny old moon, and we ought to get some haul—as many as we can manage. Mebbe we can stampede all we want right away down to the coast."

Hercules hesitated.

"But supposing the chloral finishes these toughs off entirely, what?" he demurred.

"Well, that wouldn't be such a bad finish, either," said Red Bill calmly. "For a crowd of vultures that earn their living in feeding them man-eaters with men, they would be shore merciful disposed of, Herc. Aint that right?"

Hercules saw the force of the cowboy's logic without difficulty, and agreed without hesitation.

"Very well, Red—carry on!" he said, and shouted an order to Kark to produce the materials for the punch which, as an acknowledged expert from Athens, he proposed to mix himself.

The thing worked like a charm, without a hitch, and though Red Bill was more merciful with his knock-out drops than his original dire proposal had suggested, nevertheless, within the next fifteen minutes, the range-riders and Kark, very sound asleep, were arranged in neat rows on the saloon floor, and left to their dreams, while Hercules and Red Bill fared forth into the moonlight to deal with the man-eaters.

But neither had noticed a man who, earlier in the evening, after one close scrutiny of them both, had quietly slipped out —and had not returned.

THE adventurers had not far to go to find their herd. Having recovered their weapons, they merely went along the big fence until they came to a gate and a narrow bridge leading across the inner stream. They had already settled their plan of campaign against the "broncos."

Breaking the lock off the gate, Red Bill entered the range, and standing on the bridge, proceeded to utter a series of singularly discordant wailings.

"Those black beasts will think it's some victims being delivered by the keepers," he explained. And he was right. Hardly had the last wail died away before the thunder of flying hoofs grew far across the range. Within two minutes they could see, in that brilliant moonlight, a big drove of the man-eaters galloping toward them.

"Ready with the bat, Herc? Right! Here they come," said Red Bill, and stepped to the safe side of the gate, which he wedged open just far enough to allow of the exit of one horse at a time. Then, seizing a short, strong strip of rawhide from a bundle of similar strips, he stood back and waited, while Hercules fell into position just outside the gate, his club at "the ready."

The mob of man-eaters swept up, shrieking, crowding together to cross the footbridge. There was room only for one at a time, so that dozens were jostled into the water, and the banks being too high to climb, were swept downstream.

A big black stallion, which appeared to be the troop leader, was first across, and seeing the gap through the gate, with Hercules standing just beyond it, tore through with a maniacal scream. He leaped straight into a claymore swing from Hercules' club that spread him as senseless and safe as a feather-bed at Red Bill's feet. In an instant the cowboy bridled him with a rawhide, and muzzled him by the simple process of taking a few turns round the beast's nose and lower jaw. Then he passed the rawhide twice round the neck and knotted the end to the drawn-up foreleg at the fetlock. He worked with extraordinary speed, but he could not keep pace with Hercules. They had, however, arranged for this, and every second man-eater received a shot which put him out of action for ever.

They came streaming through the gap toward Hercules, who was working rhythmically, counting as he worked.

"One for Bill," he crooned, and *bing* came his club from right to left, spread-eagling a man-eater unconscious, at Red Bill's feet.

"One for the birds!" and *wallop* would come the gigantic club, swinging back from left to right, batting a second man-eater, stone-dead, to the right, out of the way.

As an exhibition of club-work it was magnificent—Hercules never missed, never killed the horse he meant to stun, never merely stunned the horse he meant to kill. Even for the admitted club champion of Greece, it was wonderful work.

"One for Bill!" *Thud!*
"One for the birds!" *Bat!*
"One for Bill!" *Wop!*
"One for the birds!" *Brump!*

He sang it steadily, quietly, calmly putting the emphasis in the right place and keeping astonishingly good time.

Not until the last rawhide was used did Red Bill pause. Then he shouted, "Done!"

Hercules, with a yell, charged through the gate at the few remaining man-eaters.

It was all over in two minutes. Only four of the drove recrossed the bridge—and they recrossed it at full speed, with Hercules well after them. The remainder were sprawling about in various quaint attitudes of unconsciousness.

Hercules stopped and slowly returned. He closed the gate and rejoined Red Bill.

"How many did we get, Red?"

"Twenty-four, Herc—just the couple dozen. There they are—on the left. And twenty-four plumb dead—on the right."

He faced Hercules, his eyes gleaming in the moonlight.

"And Herc, I got to say right here that you shore are the star batter in the team. Yes sir. You done right thar, Herc—what I should have shore swore was jest naturally impossible. Shake, pardner! The finest little old bung-starter expert in the world—that's you, Herc!"

And there in the moonlight these two simple children of nature shook hands.

Hercules was wild with delight.

"Twenty-four, eh? By Bacchus! Reddy, that's not half-bad business, what? Eight for the King, seven for me, six for you and, say, three for Steve. How does that strike you, Red?"

"What you says shore goes with me, Herc," replied the cowboy.

THEN their undivided attention was called for by the horses, who were beginning to return to consciousness. After a moment the first gained its feet, with some difficulty, and without pausing to take stock of the situation in which it found itself, lunged savagely at Red Bill. It merely succeeded in wrenching its lower face sharply, half-choking itself, and bringing its forehoof sharply against its jaw.

Two more attempts, with precisely similar results, convinced it that it was getting no adequate return for its labor, and so it desisted. Each of the others went through the same process, and arrived at the same conclusion, within the next twenty minutes.

And then Hercules and Red Bill started them off on their slow be-hobbled march to the coast.

All went well. The Admiral was on the look-out for them; the tide was right; and the men were willing; so that by dawn all but one of the horses were aboard.

It was at this moment that Red Bill, who was struggling with the last horse—none other than the big black savage stallion which had been troop leader—in four feet of water, perceived a crowd of troopers galloping along the beach toward them. One man, mounted on a magnificent animal, was well ahead of the others. Though they knew it not, this was the work of the person who had slipped out of the saloon to warn the King.

For a moment Hercules, who was in a smallboat near Red Bill, stared at the advancing horsemen.

Then he said: "Reddy, here comes King Diomedes and some of his troops. Cut this brute loose, and see what happens!"

Red Bill grinned, and swiftly cut away the rawhides from the neck and jaws of the big stallion. Hercules turned the beast to the shore with a horny-handed clip between the eyes, and as the big killer plunged for the land, he and Red Bill steadied the boat and watched.

The crazy brute shook itself once as it left the water, and then, screaming, charged the solitary horseman who had outridden the squadron—King Diomedes.

The tamed charger never had a chance with the raging devil just out of the sea. The stallion raced to it, checked it, and rearing, struck out its fore-legs like flying bars of iron. The charger went down with a shriek; and the man-eater, seizing the King, raised him, shook him as a terrier does a rat, and then galloped inland, carrying with it the dangling body of Diomedes. For a moment they all stared in silence.

Then Red Bill spoke.

"Finish of an *hombre* who is being handed what he has shore handed to a good many others. Aint that right, Herc?"

"Plumb right, Reddy," said Hercules absently.

And so they rowed back to the ships, en route for what Red Bill, later, was often heard to describe as "a spell of the roughest rough-riding he ever rode."

Another astonishing exploit of Hercules will be described by his descendant Mr. Atkey in an early issue.

The Paths of GLORY

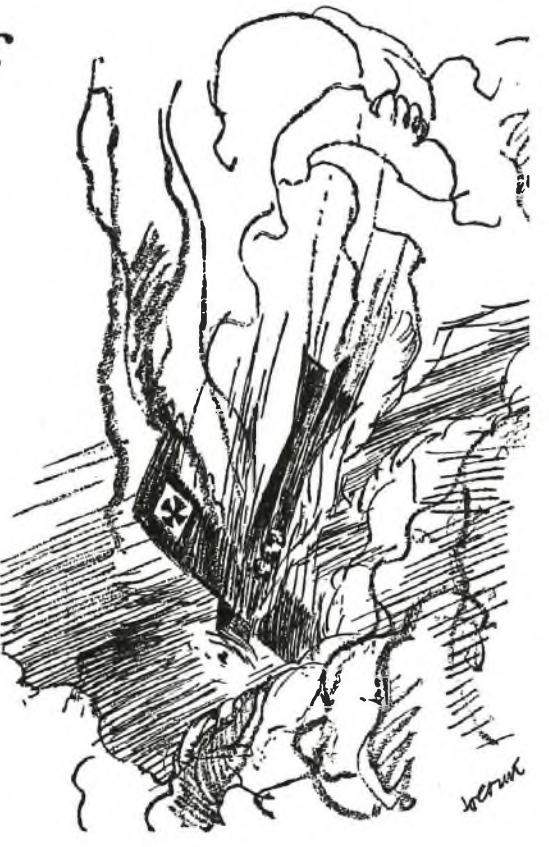
By

BOGART ROGERS

The eventful story of one of the war's most extraordinary figures—a man who won fifty-seven aërial duels.

II—Jimmy McCudden

Illustrated by
William Molt



JAMES THOMAS BYFORD MCCUDDEN was a man who used perfume. He was also fond of fragrant toilet soaps, pomades, brilliantines, talcums and hair lotions. He carried his handkerchief in his sleeve. Women adored him. And he disliked physical violence.

Wait a minute! Don't jump at conclusions. These characteristics are entirely misleading.

This Jimmy McCudden was one of the greatest of the World War flying aces. In number of aërial victories he ranked sixth.

Fifty-seven adversaries fell before the withering fire of his twin machine-guns. Twice he destroyed four opponents in a day; twice he sent three enemy planes crashing to earth between dawn and darkness, a feat that was never equaled. For half a year he consistently averaged two victories a week. A hundred thousand German bullets could not kill him; but—he killed himself in most puzzling fashion.

All of which constitutes more of a record than you might expect from a young man who used perfume.

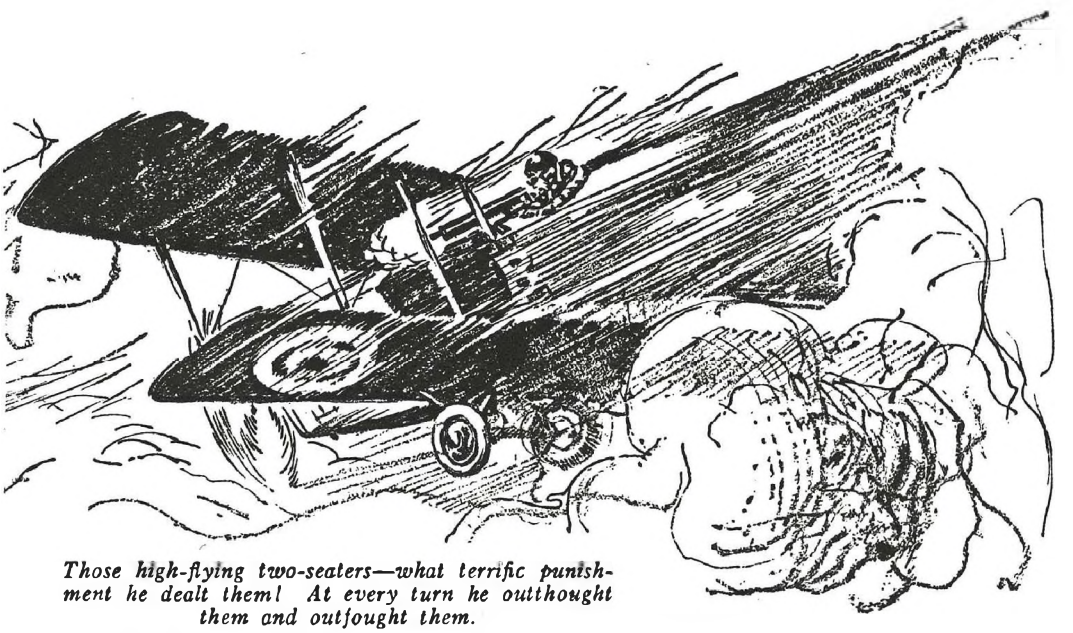
McCudden, who was successively air-mechanic, corporal, sergeant, lieutenant, captain and major in the British Royal Flying Corps, was the greatest hunter who ever cruised the skies, the war's most scientific stalker and killer of human flying prey.

His hunting ground was the "ceiling," the silent, freezing, invisible altitudes four miles or more above the battlefields. His victims, for the most part, were the German observation and photographic planes that crossed the lines at these extreme heights to avoid the allied fighting planes, which seldom flew so high. It was to the everlasting regret of many that they failed to avoid McCudden.

He had the patience of Job and the perseverance of an insurance salesman. While countless other war planes cruised below, McCudden prowled through the air far above them, stalking his prey like an Indian, hiding in clouds or the blinding rays of the sun or against the limpid blue sky, then springing forth to kill.

THEY were strange, eerie battles, McCudden's. High out of sight and sound, he and his enemy whirled in a death-dance to the lethal music of cackling machine-guns.

He was a solitary fighter. His greatest work was done alone. He needed no help and wished none. He could take care of himself and his opponent. He never met his master in the air.



Those high-flying two-seaters—what terrific punishment he dealt them! At every turn he outthought them and outfought them.

To the material detriment of his own fame, Jimmy McCudden was such an amazingly efficient fighting man, such a great and capable ace, that he seemed quite colorless. He was so clever at destroying his enemies that he made the thrilling and hazardous job look foolishly simple and safe. He was never wounded, seldom in trouble. His fights were spectacular, but most of them nobody saw—nobody but McCudden and his victims. The aviators followed his astonishing career with awe and admiration; the rest of the world scarcely knew he existed.

The first time I met Jimmy McCudden was at the School of Aërial Fighting, at Ayr, Scotland, where the pick of the student flyers were sent for a post-graduate course in aërobatics.

You could usually scent him before you saw him. He smelled rather nice, too, like a large and prosperous barber-shop. Some said he reeked of perfume, but that was scarcely true. He was just conspicuously aromatic.

I was standing on the broad grass terrace that had been, in peace times, the enclosure of a race-track. The track itself, which had once echoed to the hoof-beats of galloping thoroughbreds, was covered with buzzing, sputtering airplanes and busy mechanics. The spacious grandstand was occupied by a solitary old man who dozed in the sun.

The door to what had been the jockeys' weighing-room—it was beneath the judge's stand—opened. The aroma of countless flowers permeated the breeze. A young man stepped briskly forth.

And what a young man!

He was about twenty-three, and handsome, with sharp, regular features and keen blue eyes, the tiny crow's-feet of the veteran airman tugging at the corners. He walked and looked like a soldier rather than a civilian who had joined the army. His uniform, a regulation service tunic, breeches and a pair of disreputable flying-boots, was spotted and streaked with oil. His sleeves carried the double braid and triple "pips" of a captain. But it was the two broad bright rows of gaudy ribbons on his left breast that marked him as some one of excessive importance.

In the top row were the rich solid purple of the Victoria Cross, the blue and red of the Distinguished Service Order and the purple and white bars of the Military Cross. Beneath were the red and blue stripes of the Military Medal, the rainbowed red, white and blue of the Mons Star, and the green and red of the French Croix de Guerre. Spread protectingly above them were the silk-embroidered wings of the flying corps.

"Who is it?" I whispered.

"McCudden," some one replied.

McCudden! The one and only—the great and glorious! I had seen him with my own eyes—England's leading ace! I could have almost touched him!

I was thrilled to the very tips of my toes.

BEFORE I left Ayr for overseas I came to know Jimmy McCudden rather well. He was then chief instructor at the School of Aërial Fighting, and the star performer

of a training personnel that included many famous airmen. I learned a great deal about aërial warfare from this good-natured Irish lad, who probably had a more intelligent grasp of that difficult science than any other man who ever lived, and in learning I struck up more than a casual personal acquaintance.

The history of Jimmy McCudden's career is virtually the history of the war in the air. He was in the flying corps a year before the war started, and remained an active and important participant almost to the end—almost, but not quite.

He was born to wear khaki. His father and brothers were soldiers. Young Jimmy left school at thirteen, and at fifteen became a bugler in the army. In 1913—he was just eighteen—he joined the infant Royal Flying Corps as an air mechanic, 3d class—the very bottom rung of the ladder.

When McCudden cast his lot with the flyers, the corps could muster, in a pinch, a full strength of thirteen oddly assorted planes.

His first flight, as a passenger, was made a year before the war. This aërial initiation took place after sundown, as it was considered too hazardous to risk these flimsy aircraft off the ground in the turbulent zephyrs of midday, and pilots preferred to await the calm air of evening.

Inside of six months he had completed more than a hundred hours aloft—always as a passenger. He was profoundly impressed with the difficulties of piloting, which were numerous in 1913. Only the most skillful handling kept planes from tumbling to earth at the slightest provocation.

When war was declared, McCudden immediately was sent to France with his squadron, Number Three.

Those pioneer flying squadrons had plenty of excitement. Every flight was an experiment. There were no aërial bombs, no wireless equipment, no machine-guns, no cameras. The pilots flew out over the advancing enemy, saw what they could see, and returned to report their observations.

Jimmy McCudden went through it all. Day and night he labored over engines. He slept under planes and in them—and didn't have a bath for seven weeks. He saw the first flying casualty of the war pulled from his damaged plane—Sergeant-major Jillings, who was wounded by a bullet fired by a German aviator. He saw the first German anti-aircraft guns bombarding a British plane. He helped improvise bombs which the pilots tossed overboard on the enemy, with no apparent results. Armed with a rifle, he guarded temporary airdromes through the night against Uhlans who never appeared.

In July, 1915, after he had been in France for eleven months, working days, nights and Sundays, he became an observer.

It was in this capacity that Jimmy McCudden got the idea that two years later was to bring him fame and medals. His duty was to fly across the lines with the officer pilots of the squadron. They did the flying and most of the observing. The observer, so called, spent his time on the lookout for enemy planes.

During this period, about September, 1915, the German Immelmann, the first of the great aces, appeared. British airmen began to encounter him frequently. He flew alone in a fast little Fokker monoplane and took a steadily mounting toll of Allied aviators. His plane was armed with a machine-gun which fired forward through the propeller, a distinct and deadly innovation. Antony Fokker, who now builds huge passenger planes in his factory in New Jersey, was the inventor of Immelmann's synchronized gun-gear, the first to be used in war. The idea was suggested by German flyers; and Fokker, locking himself in his room, worked out complete plans for the device in less than twelve hours.

McCudden and Immelmann soon became air acquaintances. They exchanged bullets more than once, but neither could win a decision. McCudden was deeply impressed by the methods of this solitary fighter who scouted the skies alone and pounced on unsuspecting adversaries. Here was an idea with great possibilities. He tucked it away in a corner of his active young brain for future reference.

EARLY in 1916 McCudden was sent back to England to learn to fly. Just before his departure he was decorated with his first medal, for "conspicuous gallantry in action," the French Croix de Guerre, which was pinned to his breast by Marshal Joffre.

Learning to fly was a simple matter for McCudden. He knew the feel of the air. In April he qualified for his wings and was sent to the famous Central Flying School for training as a scout pilot.

In July he was promoted to flight-sergeant and sent back to France.

His first few months as a pilot were un-

eventful, but on September 16th he destroyed his first foe, a German two-seater that he shot down from fourteen thousand feet above the blood-soaked road that ran from Ypres to Menin. Even in those early days Jimmy McCudden was a high flyer.

"I always liked to fly alone," he told me one day at Ayr. "I figured I could reduce aërial hunting to a science, and if I studied their habits carefully enough, I could eventually knock over every two-seater I met. I made dozens of mistakes at first, but I stored up a lot of valuable experience that finally enabled me to do rather well."

Attaining the rank of England's leading ace, which he was at the time, was Jimmy McCudden's idea of "doing rather well."

One of the reasons why he made such a scientific study of fighting was that he disliked being shot at. He knew bullets were dangerous. He didn't shrink from danger, but he preferred to avoid it if possible. He wanted victory with a minimum risk—not a very romantic attitude, but a highly practical one.

"I never took any risk in fighting two-seaters," he said. "After I got the hang of the thing, I don't think I was ever in the slightest danger of being hit. My tactics were safe but effective."

Of course he did take risks, tremendous ones; he was constantly in danger from a chance shot, and from the accidents necessarily incident to handling the relatively crude planes of the period; but compared with the dozens of other great aces who flew to fame through veritable rainstorms of steel, McCudden was an exceedingly cautious young man.

There was a long gap between Jimmy McCudden's first victim and his second—nearly five months. During that time he was commissioned a second lieutenant, had dozens of fights and added hugely to his store of experience.

Early in February he shared a victory with his commanding officer, Major Grattan-Bellew; and before the end of the month he had run his total score up to eight. The French would have called him an ace. To the British he was just another good fighting pilot.

In March, 1917, he was sent back to England to become a fighting instructor.

For three months he toured the airdromes of southeastern England, teaching student aviators the tricks of the aërial trade. One of his pupils was a chap named "Mick" Mannock. McCudden said this Mannock was a promising flyer who, with a little luck and a lot of hard work, ought to amount to something. Mannock outlived McCudden, to become England's second greatest ace and one of the most romantic and colorful figures of the war.

Jimmy McCudden didn't confine his flying activities to the airdromes. He scored some notable achievements in that popular pastime of the airmen known as "night flying." He was as well known in the night-clubs and cafés of London's West End as he was on the airdromes of Kent and Sussex.

Wherever he went he attracted attention—not deliberately or ostentatiously, but because he was a distinctive young man whom people noticed. Later, when he had become truly great, he was known and fêted and admired wherever he went.

He believed in having a good time, this Jimmy McCudden. Pretty girls and music and bright lights and wine. They helped him forget the past—and the future. He knew what the future would inevitably bring. Only a handful of the men he had accompanied to France in 1914 were still alive. He had seen too many good comrades go west not to know that sooner or later his time would come.

He was the same in France. It was a dull squadron guest-night when Jimmy McCudden wasn't the life of the party.

IN June, 1917, McCudden became a captain.

A month later, while he was stationed at Joyce Green, Dartford, which bordered the banks of the Thames, he showed his admiring pupils how a veteran fighting-man of twenty-two should conduct himself in action against the enemy.

The huge German Gothas had started to raid England by daylight. Flying at great height across the North Sea from Belgium, they boldly dropped their bombs on London and the East Coast cities.

McCudden was prepared for these Gotha raids. He fitted a little Sopwith "pup" with a machine-gun and kept it always ready for instant action. In fact, he used to spend long hours three miles or more above the Thames, vainly hoping that the raiders would fly in from the sea. That the chance of his being up when they arrived was very remote bothered him but little. The opportunity of shooting down a Gotha over England was worth any effort.

A chap who was at Joyce Green during

the Gotha raids told me about Jimmy McCudden.

"We were on the airdrome one morning," he said, "when the alarm sounded. The Gothas were coming. A number of planes took off immediately, and started climbing furiously. McCudden had ridden into a near-by town on his motorcycle. There he heard the first alarm and started back to the airdrome at breakneck speed.

"He came careening up the road at sixty miles an hour, skidded into the hangar that housed his plane and shouted for mechanics. He leaped into the cockpit without stopping for goggles or helmet, and the mechanics swung the propeller. A few yards in front of the hangar door stood a row of planes. McCudden shoved the throttle wide open, was almost flying before he reached the door, pulled up in a hair-raising zoom that cleared the nearest plane by inches, and was away after the Gothas."

He was too late to engage them that time, but he had another chance at the invaders later and gave an amazing exhibition of his coolness and courage under fire.

When the first alarm sounded, he left the ground and climbed to fifteen thousand feet, where he spotted the Germans west of him. They had unloaded their bombs on London and were fleeing toward the coast. McCudden dived to attack and came so close to one of the Gothas on the first swoop that he had to pull up violently to avoid collision. The force of the maneuver broke his seat-bearers. Wallowing around in the wreckage of the broken seat, he fired the three drums of ammunition he carried—without results.

"I was most awfully annoyed," he told me later. "Like a silly ass I was only carrying three drums for my Lewis gun, when I might have had ten."

Did he break off the fight because he was out of ammunition? If you think he did, you don't know Jimmy McCudden.

Other British planes were zooming and diving to attack. He decided he'd draw the fire of the Gotha gunners and distract their attention from his comrades who still had ammunition.

"I couldn't do anything but fly along and make faces at them," he said, "so I flew abreast of the last Gotha at about two hundred yards, in such a position that I didn't think the gunner could hit me. I was going to amuse the enemy gunners so some of our chaps could sneak up and shoot them while they were looking at me.

"I escorted this Gotha for twenty-five minutes at two hundred yards' range and hadn't a shot to fire at him. You can imagine my feelings, particularly when I got careless and he put a burst of bullets through my wind-screen not a foot from my nose."

When he landed, it was discovered that the German gunners had put bursts of bullets through a number of places. McCudden's plane had been the target for many guns and was literally in ribbons.

During another raid he followed the Cothas twenty miles to sea in a hopeless effort to overtake them.

WHILE he was still in England, in July, McCudden fell in love with the squadron in which he was soon to achieve his greatest triumphs. It was the Fifty-sixth Squadron, to which the great Captain Albert Ball had belonged when he was killed. It had been brought back to England from France to help check the Gotha raids. Apparently the Germans knew it had joined the Home Defense, for there were no raids while it was stationed in England. The day it returned to France, the invasions started anew, a coincidence, perhaps, but more likely the result of clever German intelligence.

Fifty-six had a splendid commanding officer, as fine a lot of pilots as ever set foot in France, and a record second to none. In the first five and a third months after its arrival at the front, its pilots had accounted for two hundred enemy planes, a record never surpassed by any war flying unit.

It had an excellent fifteen-piece orchestra composed of mechanics who had been selected because of their musical as well as their mechanical skill, an ice-cream freezer which was the envy of the corps, and some of the finest ping-pong players in France, a distinction in itself.

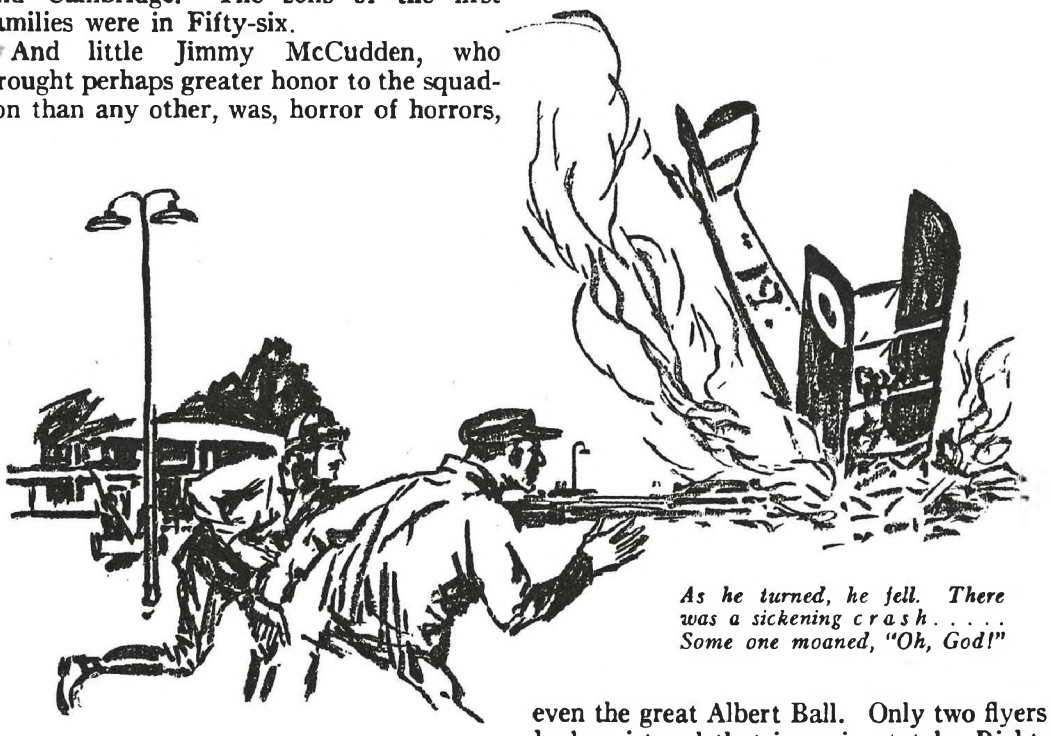
Jimmy McCudden decided that when he returned to France it would be as a member of Fifty-six, if there was any possible way to arrange it. Fifty-six made the same decision. The squadron wanted good flying officers, and McCudden assuredly came under that heading.

I wish I could say that Fifty-six loved Jimmy McCudden as greatly as he loved it—but that wasn't so. Even when he was the most sensational flyer in France, Fifty-six never quite gave its heart to McCudden.

The reason was this: the young man trod the paths to glory in the shadow of a cloud

that never drifted away. He was a victim of the class distinction that rules the British Army as it rules no other military force on earth. Fifty-six, while a truly great squadron with unusual *ésprit de corps*, was inclined to be what is currently known as a trifle "ritzy" or "high-hat." Its roll of officers included many university men, Oxford and Cambridge. The sons of the first families were in Fifty-six.

And little Jimmy McCudden, who brought perhaps greater honor to the squadron than any other, was, horror of horrors,



As he turned, he fell. There was a sickening crash. . . . . Some one moaned, "Oh, God!"

the son of a sergeant-major in the regular army! Not only that, but he had risen to his captaincy from the very bottom of the ranks. That he was an officer and a very excellent one nobody denied, but a few were sure that under the circumstances he could never be a gentleman in the British sense of the term. . . . . Fifty-six liked McCudden, admired him, was immensely proud of him—but never quite loved him.

IN August, 1917, following a brief visit to the front and a brief return to England, he was posted for active service, and to his great delight, went out to France as a flight commander in Fifty-six.

Four days later Jimmy McCudden destroyed his ninth German plane, a single-seated Albatross which he knocked down in a general mêlée while leading the squadron on an offensive patrol.

His comrades were jubilant. At breakfast they congratulated him.

"That's the stuff to give 'em, Jimmy," they said. "Now go out and get forty-nine more of the blighters. That's what we want you to do before you leave the squadron—knock down an even fifty."

They were kidding him, of course—exaggerating their hopes and good wishes. No man had ever destroyed fifty enemy planes during one stretch in France, not even the great Albert Ball. Only two flyers had registered that imposing total. Richthofen's record was fifty-eight in a year; Guynemer, the great Frenchman, had bowled over fifty-three in two years of effort. Bishop was close to the fifty mark, and Ball had died when but three victories short of that number. McCudden's pals hoped he would get a lot, but they never expected him to get fifty. And he didn't.

He missed the optimistic goal his comrades had set by a single victory. In the six months that Jimmy McCudden was with Fifty-six, he rolled up the most amazing record in the history of war flying. Between August 18, 1917, and February 25, 1918, forty-nine adversaries fell before his blazing guns, most of them two-seaters, and a large percentage of them behind his own lines. This record was particularly noteworthy for two reasons:

The British flyers were so aggressive that the bulk of the fighting took place far over German territory. It was therefore unusual for stricken planes to fall behind the British lines. Most of McCudden's did.

He scored most heavily during the periods of least aërial activity—the winter months that were dull for the aviators. Bad weather kept planes on the ground at least half of the time. Richthofen, for instance, was not at the front at all during December, January and February, because he knew there would be little activity; yet it was during this identical period that McCudden achieved his greatest triumphs.

B Flight of Fifty-six Squadron, which McCudden commanded, was probably as fine an aërial fighting unit as was ever assembled in France. Lieutenant Rhys-Davids, who was second in command, was everywhere heralded as another Albert Ball, a daring and resourceful flyer who might have been the world's greatest ace had he lived. Among his many victims were two of Germany's most famous aviators—Voss and Schaefer. Voss was considered by many to be superior to Richthofen, and Schaefer was credited with thirty victories when he fell before Rhys-Davids' guns. Lieutenants Barlow, Murpratt, Coote and Cronyn were the other members of the flight when McCudden took command, all experienced and capable fighters, the first two in particular. The personnel changed, of course, but always Jimmy McCudden's flight was a highly efficient fighting unit.

BECAUSE McCudden was a flight commander, he led his comrades on regular patrols once, twice, occasionally three times a day. But when he had brought them safely home, he would take the air himself, and it was while flying alone four miles up in the blue that he did his greatest destruction.

Those high-flying two-seaters—what terrific punishment he dealt them! How carefully he had studied their habits! How well he understood the psychology of the men who flew them! Their weakness and strength were an open book. He knew exactly what they would do under any circumstances. At every turn he outthought them and outfought them.

He hunted in no definite area. One day you might find him hovering high above the sea over Ostend, and the next stalking a Rumpler over the French lines fifty miles to the south. He always knew where to look for these two-seaters, just as an old hunter knows where he can find rabbits. Three years of experience had taught him they would be at certain places over the lines at certain times of the day. While other aviators came home grumbling that there wasn't a German in the sky, Jimmy McCudden would be waiting at some spot high in the heavens where he knew one would appear—and it nearly always did.

Shooting down two-seaters was no child's play. A good one, handled by a capable pilot and a straight-shooting observer, was a most formidable opponent. I've seen them in fights where they were more than a match for two or three attacking pursuit planes. The pilot would pepper anyone who got in front, and the observer would pump bullets at any plane that ventured within range to the rear.

I never knew how great Jimmy McCudden really was until I tried to copy his methods. I had my fling at the game of going to great heights in quest of two-seaters, and found it a very precarious business. The danger was incidental compared to the monotony and the intense suffering from the cold and altitude.

It took me what seemed like hours to climb to twenty-one thousand feet, and it was cruelly cold when I got there. The moisture of my breath froze in my nostrils. My hands and feet became senseless lumps. I panted for oxygen in the rarefied air, and had to nurse my engine like a baby. We had no oxygen-tanks then, and no electrically heated clothing. We took our high flying as it came and became hardened to it as best we could.

I cruised up and down the lines—and froze, and talked to myself, and beat my hands against my knees, and scanned the horizon for German Rumplers, and was strangely oppressed by a feeling of monotony and lonesomeness. If I saw a Rumpler, which I frequently did, I had to maneuver carefully to surprise him if I could and to reach a favorable position for attack. A faulty turn in that thin air, and in the snap of a finger you'd drop a thousand feet before you could regain control.

And how I suffered coming down! I've cried like a child from the pain of thawing hands and feet. The increasing air-pressure hurt my ears, and I always landed with a splitting headache until I got used to it, which I never quite did.

Day after day Jimmy McCudden went through that monotonous and painful procedure of climbing and waiting and freezing. No man who flew in France stood so much of it—or was so successful. Perhaps he got used to the suffering and monotony, but I doubt it. I think he just endured it.

He wanted results and would go through anything to attain them. . . . .

It was not until the last of November that McCudden really became a sensation. Until then he had been a very skillful and courageous flyer. For three months thereafter he was the most spectacular airman of the war.

On November 23, 1917, he scored his twentieth victory. A week later he destroyed a pair of two-seaters. In the following seven days he crashed three more two-seaters, all on his own side of the lines and all from tremendous heights. In the next three weeks he fattened his score with eleven more two-seaters, nine of which fell within the British lines.

During this period he first performed the "hat trick," which, in flying-corps parlance, meant destroying three enemy planes in a single day. Two days before Christmas, McCudden performed this unusual feat of arms, with an extra victory to spare. Of the four two-seaters that broke apart before his guns, three fell on his own side of the lines.

He repeated again in less than a week, bringing down three German planes in thirty minutes, all behind the British lines. On the same flight he drove another German down out of control. Nobody on the ground saw the battles. They just saw the shattered planes come tumbling down from nowhere, and knew that far up out of sight and sound McCudden was at work.

There was an interlude of two weeks in which he had many fights, none of which was decisive.

During the last three weeks of January he ran his total from thirty-eight to forty-six, again staging "the hat trick" for three of his victims.

In February, or until the 25th of that month, when he downed his last German plane, he scored eleven more victories, nine of them two-seaters, four of them falling to earth in a single day. His final score with the squadron was forty-nine—fifty-seven in all. He wanted to get one more to make it an even fifty for his record in the squadron, but the doctors stopped him. He was sick, exhausted nervously from the terrific strain to which he had subjected himself. In that condition one more flight might have been his last, and they forbade him to take the chance.

And there, but for the strange circumstance of his death, the history of the great little Jimmy McCudden ends.

HE returned to England to instruct. He visited Buckingham Palace, where the King bestowed the Victoria Cross, which was awarded to less than a score of the hundreds of flyers who fought in France and to but very few who lived to receive it. He spent his time here and there, teaching war to the fledglings, and not neglecting the music and gayety of Piccadilly. He was a great hero, a national idol, and he made the best of it.

Among other thipgs, he lectured to the student flyers on many subjects. But there was one thing he repeated over and over. He seemed never able to complete a lecture without mentioning it.

"If you are taking off the ground, and your motor cuts out, for God's sake don't try to turn and get back to the field. If you do, you'll spin into the ground and kill yourself as sure as fate. Hit a brick wall if you must, crash into a house if you have to, but don't ever turn with a dead engine."

If I've heard Jimmy McCudden say that once, I've heard him say it a hundred times. It was an obsession. He emphasized it with vivid tales of friends who had died attempting that dangerous maneuver.

IN June he became a major. In July he was sent to France to take command of a squadron.

A squadron commander! The Victoria Cross! England's greatest ace!

Every ambition that little Jimmy McCudden, 3d class air-mechanic, might have had when he joined the corps, was assuredly realized.

He flew across the Channel and landed to visit some friends for lunch. It was a gala occasion. Jimmy was back in France —God help those Heinie two-seaters. They'd need help now. In a day or two he'd be back at the old game, knocking them down out of nowhere, ripping them apart, blasting them to pieces.

Shortly after lunch he climbed into his machine to fly to his final destination. A crowd assembled to see him off, patting him on the back, wishing him good luck.

The mechanics swung the propeller; the engine roared; and for a second Jimmy McCudden sat there, proud and happy, keen and alive, glad to be back at the game he loved. Then, with a wave and a "Cheerio!" he was gone.

Straight across the field he thundered. His tail came off the ground, then his

wheels—and he pulled up in a steep zoom to clear a row of poplars that lay ahead.

Suddenly the roaring motor sputtered, choked—and was horribly silent!

The crowd stood paralyzed while Jimmy McCudden hung there a hundred feet in the air—hung there for what seemed like hours.

And then—oh, God forbid!—he turned—turned to get back into the field he had just left! Turned and did the very thing he had said ten thousand times a flyer must never do!

And as he turned, he fell. His nose dropped with a jerk—he slipped and partly spun. There was a sickening crash—that awful ripping, cracking sound that only a breaking airplane can make. From the spot where he struck, a cloud of dust arose and floated away on the breeze.

Some one moaned, "Oh, God!"

THEY ran across the field to where Jimmy McCudden had fallen. They frantically pulled away wires and shattered wood and torn fabric and tenderly lifted England's greatest ace from the wreckage. There was no need for haste. He was dead before they reached him.

They laid him on a little patch of green turf and stood looking sorrowfully at the crumpled form of a very great young man. And as they looked, as a last reminder of the Jimmy McCudden who had been, there arose through the petrol and blood and dirt that smeared his clothes, the faint fragrance of perfume.

The enemy failed to kill Jimmy McCudden. Perhaps he never could have been killed in combat. But the destiny that controls flyers ordained that he had lived his span in the hazardous business of war. His time came—and he went. They all went in time, one way or another. . . . .

Why did he do the very thing he had warned so many others never to attempt? We argued that question for weeks—and never found the answer. Perhaps it was his ego. Perhaps he thought he was good enough to accomplish a trick that would be fatal to others. Perhaps—

But what difference did it make now?

There was one thing the flyers knew for sure: when you were alive, you had better make the best of it.

And nobody will deny that Jimmy McCudden crammed a lot of excitement, adventure and glory into his brief span of twenty-three years.

The Dedham Mansion Case

By LEMUEL DE BRA

This mystery story is in the best vein of the favorite Blue Book Magazine writer who gave us "A Thunderin' Thriller" and "The Best Little Racket."

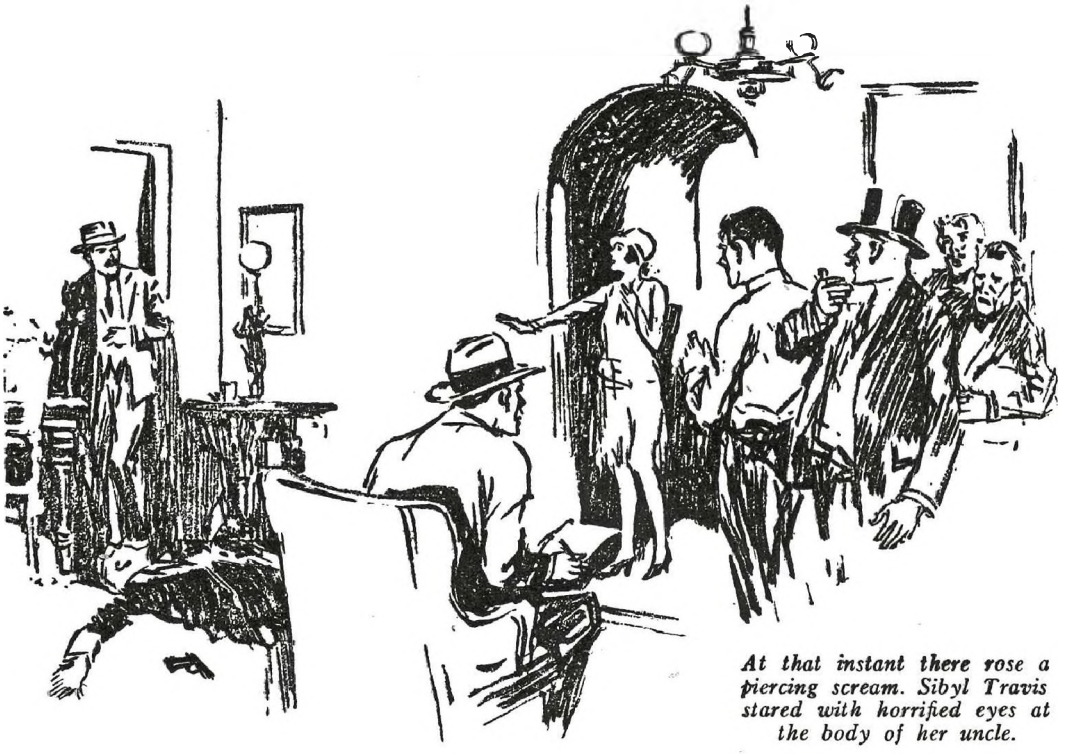
Illustrated by
William Molt

FOR days I had been oppressed with the feeling that something was wrong at the house of Ford Dedham. Over the gloomy, rambling mansion shrinking back in its setting of dark pines there seemed to hover an air of mystery, of tragedy.

For days, too, I had gone earlier than usual to the front window of my bachelor cottage to watch for Sibyl Travis. Sibyl was Ford Dedham's niece. After the death of both parents during the flu epidemic she had come to live with her Uncle Ford. She was four years younger than I—nineteen, with wistful brown eyes and a sweet, sincere manner that made everyone love her. That she would some day fall heir to half the Dedham fortune had not spoiled her in the least; but it had kept me from telling her—what she already knew—that I had loved her ever since we were kids.

I remember I was thinking that morning that Sibyl would be late getting to college when, just as the big College Avenue car came crashing down the steep hill, I saw her hurry across the veranda and down the front steps. There she hesitated, half turning as if to go back for something; then she went tripping down the flower-bordered walk. With its usual deafening screech and groan of brakes the car came to a stop. Sibyl got on. The car went roaring on down the hill.

It could not have been more than a min-



At that instant there rose a piercing scream. Sibyl Travis stared with horrified eyes at the body of her uncle.

ute later, as I was about to leave the window that some premonition prompted me to look around at the Dedham mansion. Burt Dedham was hurrying across the unfenced yards toward my cottage. Something in his manner sent me flying to the front door to meet him.

Burt Dedham was old Ford Dedham's only nephew. His parents had died years ago, and Burt had lived ever since at the Dedham mansion. He was about forty. Like his uncle he was slender, tall, stiffly erect, and always immaculately dressed. He was a queer sort, cold and reserved. He seldom went out, and then only to the library or a book-store to get some scientific work. He spent less money in a year than I spent each month on cigarettes. That he would some day have half the Dedham fortune seemed to concern him no more than the fact that he had no friends.

AS he looked up at me that morning from the lower step of the porch there was a faint tinge of color in his usually pale face, an unaccustomed gleam in his cold eyes. Nevertheless, he spoke in his usual calm and precise manner.

"Good morning, Weeks. Would you come over to the house with me a moment? I am worried about Uncle Ford. He was restless all night. In fact, as you perhaps have observed, he hasn't been himself for several days. Just after Miss Travis left I went to Uncle Ford's room to speak to him. He is pacing the floor, muttering to himself. The door is locked, and he wont open it. Neither will he answer me. I am afraid—"

Abruptly Burt Dedham broke off. From the Dedham mansion had come a dull, muffled report.

Burt Dedham jerked around. For an instant the two of us stood motionless, staring at the house. Ford Dedham's bedroom was on the second story at the front; his study, where he spent most of his time, connected with the bedroom and was on the side facing my cottage. I remember thinking that the sound of that shot had come, not from the bedroom, but from old Dedham's study.

"My God!" groaned Burt Dedham. "He's done what I was afraid he'd do! Come on, Weeks!"

We ran swiftly across the lawn to the side door that Burt Dedham had left unlocked, turned toward the front of the house, then turned again and mounted the wide, deep-carpeted stairs.

Just as we reached the second floor I saw, or thought I saw, in the gloom far down the hall by the rear stairs, a dark face, the gleam of eyes. Then—they were gone. Not sure that I had seen anything, I said nothing to Dedham.

For an instant we paused at the head of the stairs. At the end of the hall toward

the front of the house was the door to Ford Dedham's bedroom; just before us was the door to his study.

"He was in his bedroom when I left," said Burt Dedham; "but that shot—"

He stepped to the study door, turned the knob, shook the door, pounded on it. "Uncle Ford!" he called out. "Uncle Ford! What's wrong?"

There was no answer.

I LEANED over and looked in the keyhole; but the key was inside. Stepping back, I glanced around. The house was old-fashioned, with an opaque transom over each door. The transom over the bedroom door was closed; the one over the study door was almost halfway open.

As if he had read my thoughts, Burt Dedham ran down the hall to his own room and came back with a chair.

"You look," he said. "I—" His voice died away in a shudder.

I stepped up onto the chair. Under the lower edge of the transom I could see the opposite wall of the study, the windows that looked out on the lawn between the Dedham mansion and my cottage. Looking past the one end of the transom I could see the door that opened into Ford Dedham's bedroom. It was standing ajar.

Then—I looked past the other end.

Ford Dedham lay on the floor by his writing-desk. His head was toward me, the white face upturned, blood oozing from a ghastly hole in his right temple.

On the rug, as if it had fallen from his right hand, lay an automatic pistol.

"He's shot himself!" I cried, getting down off the chair. "You'll have to call the police! And a doctor! And we'd better notify Sibyl!"

Burt Dedham raised a shaking hand and pointed to the telephone extension just back of the stairway.

"Please do it for me, Weeks," he said huskily. "Call Dr. Etcheson. The number is Merrivale 404. You know where Sibyl is. And call the police—if you think that it is necessary."

Burt Dedham stood beside me while I telephoned, his eyes staring at the floor, his long white fingers twitching nervously. He followed me when I left the phone and went down the hall to the bedroom door. I tried the knob, but the door was locked, as I had expected. Looking in the keyhole, I saw that the key was on the inside the same as in the study door.

We walked back to the study door.

"Is there no way to get into your uncle's rooms except through one of these two doors?" I asked.

Burt Dedham shook his head. He pointed to a door on the left of the hall.

"That's the door to Sibyl's room. Her bedroom adjoins, but does not connect with, Uncle Ford's bedroom. My room"—he pointed down the hall toward the rear—"adjoins Uncle Ford's study, but there is no connecting door. We'll have to break the lock—or get some boy to climb over the transom and unlock the door."

"Better wait for the police," I said. "They'll know what to do."

And they did. Detective Sergeant Morris tried both doors, snapped out a few questions, then stepped to the study door and got out a pair of long steel pincers. He inserted this in the keyhole, got a grip on the key, and after several attempts turned the lock. Throwing the door open, Morris and his assistant stepped in.

BEFORE we could follow them, Dr. Etcheson came up the stairs.

"Mr. Dedham, you and Mr. Weeks please stay by the door," Sergeant Morris directed. "Doc, this looks bad! See if you can do anything!"

Dr. Etcheson made a swift examination. He shook his head.

"He's dead, Sergeant. But only a few minutes." He straightened, shaking his head again. "Too bad!" he muttered. "But—I'm not surprised."

"You mean that he has threatened to do this?" demanded the detective.

"N-o. Not exactly. But he's the kind that does."

"What kind is that?"

Through his thick glasses the doctor stared resentfully at the detective.

"I never discuss my patients with outsiders. You can see that this is a plain case of suicide. Why he did it, I don't know. If I did, I wouldn't tell you."

Sergeant Morris scowled, glanced at his assistant, then turned to Burt Dedham.

"Where were you when this happened?"

"I was over there"—Burt Dedham pointed out the window at my cottage—"talking with Mr. Weeks. I was worried about Uncle Ford. He had been restless all night and—"

"How do you know he was?"

"Why, I—I could hear him, Sergeant. That's my room, you know, adjoining."

The detective swung around. His gaze swept over the wall as if seeking a connecting door, then came back to Burt Dedham's face.

"Go on!" he snapped.

"I—I was telling Mr. Weeks that Uncle had been restless all night and that he would not speak to me when I called to him from the hall; and I had just asked Mr. Weeks if he would come over here with me when we heard a shot. Then—"

"You heard the shot?" Sergeant Morris broke in, looking at me.

I told him I had heard it, and added what else I knew about the affair. It did not occur to me at the time to mention that face I had seen by the rear stairs.

SERGEANT MORRIS scowled down at the automatic. He stepped closer to the dead body and looked down into the white, upturned face.

"Mr. Dedham," he said, more kindly, "when did you last see your uncle alive?"

"Yesterday evening—at dinner-time. I came up to speak to him. He opened the door, growled at me, and slammed the door in my face."

"Did he treat you that way—often?"

"Never before! And that is why I was so worried. I could see that something was wrong."

The detective nodded. "Who else lives in the house, Mr. Dedham?"

"Just my cousin, Sibyl Travis. She attends college and had just left when I went to call Mr. Weeks. We have sent for her."

"You keep servants, of course?"

Burt Dedham nodded.

"Well, how many? And where were they when this happened?"

"Why, I suppose they were all in the kitchen—on the lower floor at the rear. But they know nothing about this. Absolutely nothing."

An odd expression came over Sergeant Morris' florid face as he turned quickly to the other detective:

"Get your stuff, Edwards! You know just what to do!"

Edwards, who looked more like a young doctor than a detective, nodded and left.

"Mr. Dedham," said Sergeant Morris, "I don't want you to misunderstand me. I'm not making any accusations. Nor casting any insinuations. Merely doing my duty by trying to get at all the facts. The plain facts—and those that are not so plain. As Dr. Etcheson says, this looks like suicide. But, damn it, man! Half the murders we have are framed to look like suicides!"

Slowly, Burt Dedham nodded.

"I think I understand, Sergeant. And I'll help you all I can, of course. You wish to question the servants?"

"I certainly do! But first tell me about them—all about them."

"My uncle kept three servants," Burt Dedham said. "Perhaps you've heard that Mr. Dedham made his fortune in Mexican opal mines—fire opals. He—"

"I've heard that. And I've heard a lot about that big 'Bleeding Sun' opal. Been several attempts to steal that, eh?" Morris stared hard at Burt Dedham.

"Not lately. But about the servants: when Uncle Ford retired and came home here to settle down he brought with him three Mexican-Indians who had served him in Queretaro—Ricardo Fernandez, his wife Rosa, and their daughter Eulalia.

"Ricardo serves as gardener and man-of-all-work; his wife, Rosa, is the cook; while Eulalia serves as general maid. You will notice that they are not particularly bright, but my uncle always considered them good servants. And as for them hearing that shot, even if they heard it, it wouldn't have made any particular impression on them."

At that juncture, the other detective returned, carrying two bags. Opening one, he got out an ink-pad, several stiff white papers, and a vial of powder. With the expertness—and indifference—of one accustomed to such work, he began to take a set of the dead man's fingerprints.

I watched him, curious and puzzled; but all the time a question kept prying at the back of my mind. I knew those Mexican-Indian servants, of course, although I had seen little of them. Eulalia was believed to be—well, slightly queer. She had a way of slipping about the house, in and out of the gloomy halls and corners, like a ghostly shadow. So I wondered: that dark face, those gleaming eyes, in the gloom by the rear stairs—was that Eulalia I had seen?

"Come on!" Sergeant Morris spoke up abruptly. "Mr. Dedham, we'll get those servants up here and question them."

THEY left. Dr. Etcheson and I turned to watch the assistant. I was still wondering what possible motive he could have in taking the dead man's prints; but when I saw him dust a little powder over the pistol, then get out his fingerprint camera, I began to understand.

A moment later Sergeant Morris was unceremoniously herding the three servants into the room. Taking a position beside the dead body, he turned to watch their faces.

I too was eager to know how it would affect them to see their master, lying dead on the floor by that pool of blood.

Ricardo, a withered old man with muddy eyes, stood nearest me. I saw him stiffen and shrink back, horror in his face. His wife, Rosa, a dumpy, unemotional woman, showed the same startled agitation.

Then, quickly, I looked at Eulalia—and found her gazing calmly—not at the dead body—but at me!

Eulalia Fernandez was about twenty, slender, with raven-black hair and sullen black eyes. Had it not been for that sullen look in her eyes and her saffron skin, she would have been more than pretty.

As I met her gaze, Eulalia turned indifferently and looked down at the dead body—without the slightest emotion.

Sergeant Morris must have observed that; for, suddenly, he caught the girl by the arm, pointed to the gun lying by the dead man's hand.

"You've seen that gun before, eh?"

The girl did not look up, merely nodded.

"Where?"

Silently, Eulalia pointed to the writing-desk.

Burt Dedham spoke up quickly: "It's his gun, sergeant. He always kept it in that desk—loaded."

Sergeant Morris appeared not to hear him. He was staring hard at the girl.

"You heard that shot a moment ago?" he demanded sharply.

Eulalia shook her head.

"Why not? Haven't you been on this floor this morning?"

"Senor," spoke up old Ricardo excitedly, "she know not'ing about thees trouble. Me an' Rosa—all morning we work in kitchen. Eulalia, she help us, an' sweep lower hall. She know not'ing about thees. *Madre di Dios,* I swear it!"

As the old man finished, his voice ringing through the room, he raised a trembling hand and made the sign of the cross. I saw Sergeant Morris staring hard at him; and I remember wondering if the same thought was in the detective's mind—that old Ricardo seemed suspiciously eager to have us believe him.

Then, before more could be said, the assistant called to Morris. For a moment the two officers stood by the window conversing in low whispers.

Presently the sergeant turned.

"Mr. Dedham," he said, his tone friendly, "what reason would you give for your uncle committing suicide?"

Burt Dedham hesitated, looked down at the dead body, then up at Morris.

"That's a hard question to answer. I am not at all surprised that he has done it; yet it's difficult to explain why I have been afraid he would—do this."

"Not been sick, has he?"

Again Burt Dedham hesitated. "Well, not physically."

"Ah! Failing mentally, eh?"

"N-o. Not exactly that. Yet he has been acting queerly. He has talked a great deal lately about opals; been reading all the books he could get hold of that dealt with the history and romance of opals. He has talked to me for hours at a time on the subject. You know there is a belief that opals are unlucky—that is, that they bring misfortune to the one possessing them. Well, Uncle Ford kept trying to convince me that they are not—while all the time it was clear that it was his own fears he was trying to argue away. Like a boy whistles in the dark. You understand?"

Sergeant Morris nodded; but the look on his face belied the nod. For a moment he frowned down at the dead man.

"Well," he said finally, "we've done all we can do for the present. I'll have to ask that all of you—you, too, Mr. Weeks—be ready to testify at the inquest. The evidence seems to indicate that this is a simple case of suicide; but the law requires—"

AT that instant there rose, just behind me, a shrill, piercing scream. I jumped around. Sibyl Travis stood in the doorway, her hands pressed to her cheeks, her tense body swaying as she stared with horrified eyes at the dead body of her uncle.

Just in time, I caught her in my arms.

"Take her to her room, Weeks," said Burt Dedham with a cool indifference that made me long to punch his white face.

With Dr. Etcheson preceding me, I carried Sibyl to her room. As I gently laid her on her bed, she opened her eyes.

"She's not the fainting kind," muttered Dr. Etcheson. He took one of Sibyl's hands in his. "Never saw you do that before, little girl! All right now, eh?"

Quickly, almost angrily, Sibyl withdrew her hand, but she said nothing.

"I'm sorry, Sibyl," I spoke up. "I intended to meet you at the front door and prepare you for—that. Now—"

"Jim," Sibyl broke in quietly, staring at the ceiling, "tell me just what has happened—everything."

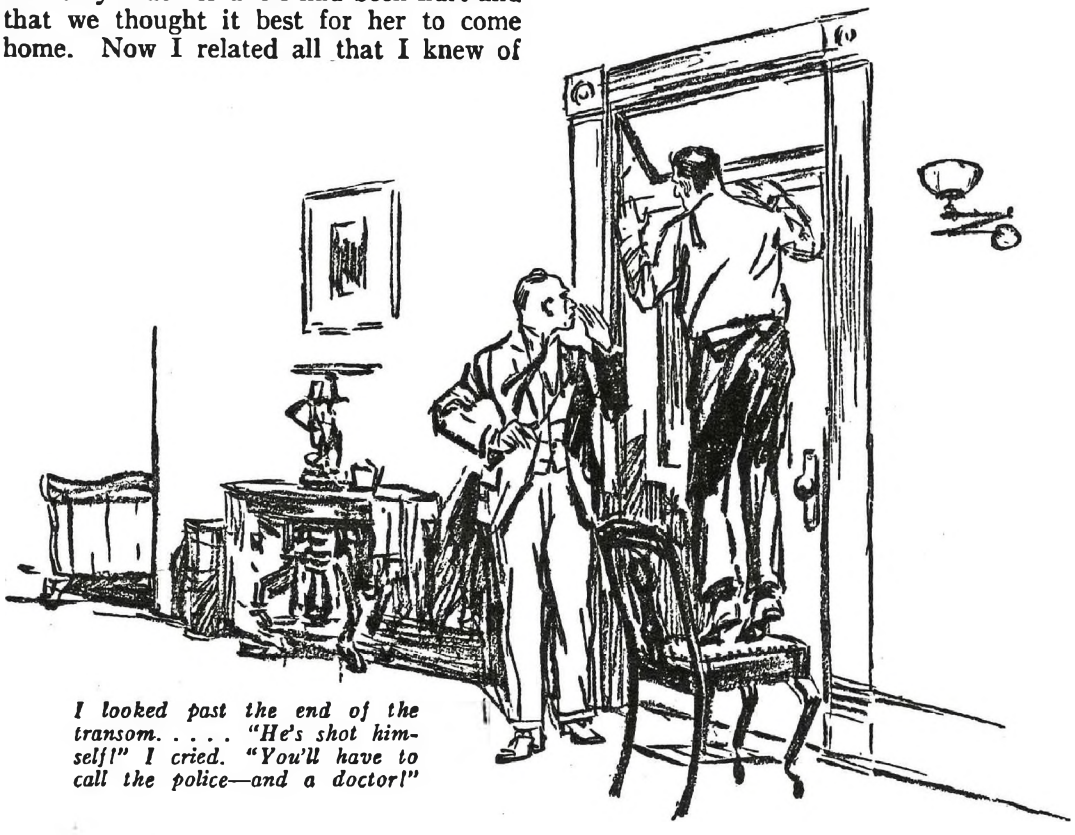
I told her. Over the telephone I had said only that her uncle had been hurt and that we thought it best for her to come home. Now I related all that I knew of the affair. Sibyl broke in with a few questions, which I answered as best I could.

When I had finished, Sibyl continued to stare at the ceiling for a moment; then, slowly, her eyes closed. A tremor ran through her body.

"Guess I'd better fix her a little stimulant," muttered Dr. Etcheson.

He hastened out. And no sooner had he left the room than Sibyl sprang to her feet.

"Jim!" she whispered. "Stand by that door a minute! No, don't stare at me that way! Do as I say—quickly!"



I looked past the end of the transom. . . . . "He's shot himself!" I cried. "You'll have to call the police—and a doctor!"

MYSTIFIED, and not a little alarmed, I got to the door. Sibyl glided across the room to an old *vargueño*, a typical Spanish cabinet mounted on an elaborately carved stand and richly inlaid with ivory and silver. From a recess at the back of the carved stand she took a key, unlocked the cabinet and let down the heavy door.

"Here, Jim—quickly!" she whispered, thrusting her hand far back in one of the pigeonholes.

I hastened to her side—just as she turned from the desk, one hand outstretched toward me. In her open palm was some round object wrapped in white tissue paper.

"Keep this for me, Jim!" she whispered. "Yes, it's that cursed opal—the *Bleeding Sun!* But don't ask questions now. And, for heaven's sake, don't leave me alone. I'm afraid that—"

She broke off, staring past me with startled, angry gaze.

I turned quickly, slipping the opal in my pocket. In the doorway, that same unconcerned, almost stupid, expression on her saffron face, stood Eulalia. How she had got there so quickly was a mystery to me. She was nowhere in sight just a second before when I left the doorway to join Sibyl at the cabinet.

"Can I do anything for you, señorita?" the girl asked in excellent English.

"No!" Sibyl said sharply. Then, of a sudden, the anger vanished from her eyes and in its place came a worried, troubled

look. "Yes, Eulalia," she said softly. "Come in. And close the door."

Eulalia stepped in; but before she could close the door, Dr. Etcheson came in from the hall, carrying his medicine-case. He gave Sibyl a look of mingled surprise and displeasure.

"I'm quite all right, Dr. Etcheson," Sibyl said, a bit coldly, I thought. "Eulalia—and Mr. Weeks—will remain with me."

Through his thick glasses the big doctor flashed me a look of hostile suspicion. Then, his lips curling, he bowed and turned away.

Eulalia closed the door.

"Jim!" Sibyl turned to me quickly. "I must trust some one. And I know I can trust you. Did—"

"Sibyl!" There must have been a world of meaning in my tone, for a warm light sprang into her eyes and she drew back from my half-raised arms.

"No, Jim, let me talk, now! There is something wrong, something very mysterious here. My uncle may have committed suicide, as I heard that detective say. But I—I am afraid it is something worse than that. Jim, did they find out that the opal had been stolen—"

"Señorita!" Eulalia broke in in a warning whisper, pointed toward the hall.

SIBYL nodded her thanks and moved away from the vicinity of the door. I followed her.

"Nothing was said about the opal being stolen," I told her. "Sergeant Morris mentioned the Bleeding Sun, and said that there had been several attempts to steal it. Burt said there hadn't been lately. From his tone I got the impression that he was anxious to stay off that subject."

"He would be! About a week ago Uncle Ford missed the opal and accused Burt of stealing it. They quarreled bitterly—and have quarreled every day and night since. Uncle was unjust because—" Sibyl paused, looking quickly at Eulalia. "Eulalia," she said kindly, "I am still your friend; but the truth must come out now. You had better wait outside."

Eulalia, her saffron face expressionless, bowed and left, closing the door softly behind her.

"Sibyl," I spoke up quickly, "it seems so plain to me that your uncle committed suicide. Before you tell me anything else, tell me why you think he didn't. Dr. Etcheson said he was—that kind."

"Did Dr. Etcheson say that?" Sibyl stared at me, amazed.

"He did, Sibyl. But he refused to tell Sergeant Morris why he believed that your uncle had killed himself."

FOR a moment Sibyl continued to stare at me, amazement, fear, unbelief mirrored in her brown eyes.

"Jim," she said presently, "you must help me think. First I will tell you that Uncle Ford has never once acted as if dissatisfied with his life. Why, he has talked with me by the hour of his plans for traveling. He has told me repeatedly that just as soon as he could wind up his affairs and place everything in a trust fund, he intended to spend the rest of his life having a good time.

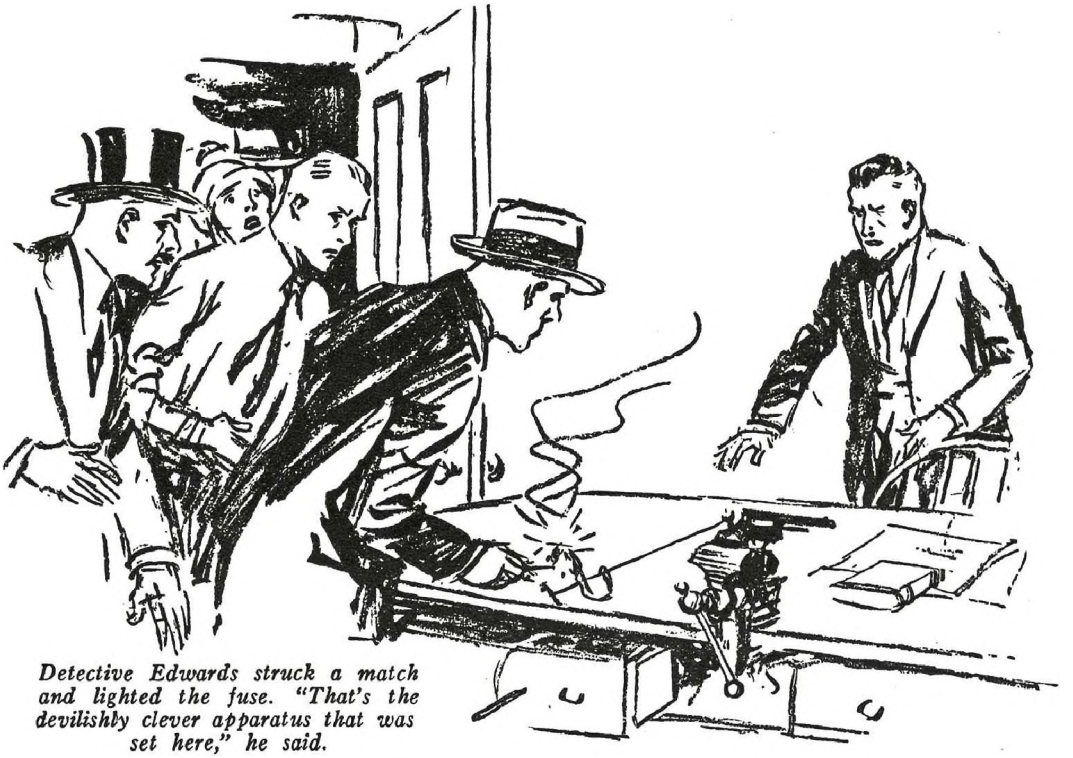
"As for Dr. Etcheson, I have never liked him, never trusted him; and I don't believe that he was the real friend that my uncle thought he was. They knew each other in Mexico, years ago; and since they came here, Uncle Ford has loaned him, or given him, large sums of money. Moreover, not two weeks ago, Uncle Ford added a codicil to his will giving Dr. Etcheson a life income of a thousand dollars a month. That codicil also says that Dr. Etcheson is to be given, outright, the Bleeding Sun opal. . . . . Jim, Dr. Etcheson had a strange power over my uncle. If my uncle did kill himself, then I believe Dr. Etcheson put the thought in his mind and is guilty of murder!

"But wait! I haven't told you all yet. One night about ten days ago, Uncle Ford was showing the Bleeding Sun again to Dr. Etcheson. Then they got into a discussion over mental diseases, and Uncle Ford forgot to put the opal back in the safe. He left the house early the next morning and did not think of the opal again until he returned that evening. Then, when he looked for it, the stone was gone.

"Yesterday afternoon, after quarreling for a week with Burt over the opal, Uncle Ford sent for Ricardo, told him the opal was missing, and accused Eulalia. Ricardo was furious. They called Eulalia and charged her with the theft. Eulalia denied it.

"Then Uncle Ford lost his temper. He swore that he would send Eulalia to prison, and would ship her mother and father back to Mexico. Ricardo cursed and said: *"No, you wont. I'll kill you first!"*

"This morning, just as I was ready to



Detective Edwards struck a match and lighted the fuse. "That's the devilishly clever apparatus that was set here," he said.

leave for college, Eulalia brought me the opal. She had seen it on Uncle's desk, and had taken it. In some ways she is very shrewd, but mostly she has the mind of a child. She told me everything that had passed between her father and Uncle Ford and begged me to return the opal and to intercede for her before her father could carry out his mad threat. I agreed to help her, of course; but since I didn't take Ricardo's threat seriously, I merely put the opal away and told Eulalia that I'd see my uncle at noon.

"AND now," Sibyl finished, again pressing her hands to her cheeks, "I come home and find that Uncle Ford has been killed. Do you wonder that I want you to help me think?"

"I certainly don't wonder!" I told her; and as I looked at Sibyl's tense, white face my sympathy went out to the plucky girl holding up so well under that tragedy. "I wish I could help; but it looks so much like plain suicide. Have you forgotten that your uncle was killed with his own gun—and that both doors to his rooms were locked on the inside?"

"No; and I haven't forgotten that the transom over the study door was half open. Some one could have stolen—or borrowed—Uncle Ford's gun, shot him over the transom, then tossed the gun into the room. Remember the gun wasn't *in* his hand. And as for the door being locked, I understand there are several ways to lock a door and leave the key inside. Dr. Etcheson is clever enough to do it. By the way, was he at his office when you telephoned?"

"No. His nurse said he was making a call in this neighborhood and that she expected him to phone in any minute."

"In this neighborhood!" Sibyl looked at me strangely. "Jim, when I left the house, for all I know, Dr. Etcheson could have been in Uncle Ford's study. How did Ricardo act when he saw my uncle lying dead on the floor?"

"He was startled, horrified. So was Rosa."

Sibyl nodded. "They are stupid, but also they are good actors. What about Eulalia? I doubt if even that scene stirred her to show any emotion."

"It didn't. She acted just as if she knew all about it."

"Which, in Eulalia's case, means nothing. Jim,"—Sibyl turned her troubled eyes to me—"don't you see what a tangle it is? We can eliminate Burt because he was with you when that shot was fired; but all the others—"

There came a sharp, imperative rap on the door.

Sibyl, as if sensing some impending disaster, drew close to me, her trembling hand clinging to my arm. "Come in," she said, huskily.

The door was shoved open. Into the room strode Sergeant Morris.

"Miss Travis," he said kindly, "you have had quite a shock today. I am very sorry that I have to add to your troubles; but I am obliged to tell you that your uncle did not commit suicide. He was—murdered. . . . . And we have arrested the murderer."

I FELT Sibyl's body tense, heard the breath catch in her throat. Before either of us could speak, Sergeant Morris went on:

"You knew about the stolen opal? . . . . Well, that's who killed your uncle. Will you come with me, please? And you, Mr. Weeks."

Sergeant Morris turned on his heel and strode out. Sibyl stood motionless, staring at the detective's broad back. Not until I spoke to her and took her trembling hand in mine did she seem able to move.

We crossed the hall back into Ford Dedham's study. The body, the automatic, lay just as we had seen them last. In the room were Dr. Etcheson, Burt Dedham, Detective Edwards, and Eulalia. Eulalia stood near Dr. Etcheson, her head up, her sullen black eyes blazing defiance.

As I drew up a chair for Sibyl, Sergeant Morris closed the hall door. "All right, Edwards!" he said.

"Very simple case," Detective Edwards began briskly. "Man shooting himself in temple holds gun in most natural position. Bullet ranges upward and slightly to front. Deceased was killed by thirty-eight bullet that ranged toward back of head, and downward — very unnatural, almost impossible, position.

"Moreover, suicides invariably press the muzzle of the gun against skin. Exploding powder blackens skin, penetrates wound. No such wound on deceased's temple. Therefore, gun was held at a distance. How far? Well, a thirty-eight flashes about seven inches. Hold a gun more than seven inches from your head and try to shoot yourself as deceased was shot. Can't be done! Can't be done!

"Two conclusions from that: maybe the murderer intended to hold the gun closer but victim shrank back. More likely the murderer used a silencer. Well, I looked for a silencer, and found it. Careless work, Mr. Dedham."

Dedham! I started violently, as did Sibyl. Burt Dedham's face was like white marble, his cold eyes held a snaky glitter as he stared fixedly at the murdered man.

"See here, Sergeant!" I protested, scarcely realizing what I was doing; "are you accusing Burt Dedham? Why—he was with me, *on my porch*, when that shot was fired!"

"Precisely!" said Dr. Edwards, rubbing his hands like a man well pleased with his work. "And that's the only clever thing about his crime. But, to get back to what I was about to say when interrupted: Fingerprints on the gun were those of the deceased. From that I knew that the murderer was intelligent, well-read, and had planned carefully to make the murder look like a simple suicide.

"Having concluded that it was murder, I began seeking the motive. Dr. Etcheson furnished me that. He and the deceased were old friends. Just recently have put up a half-million each to found hospital and clinic for study and treatment of mental diseases. Deceased thought a lot of Dr. Etcheson and said he was going to leave him the Bleeding Sun opal.

"Huh! Very next morning the opal is stolen. Ford Dedham accuses his nephew. They quarrel for a week, and deceased finally tells Burt Dedham that he's going to make a new will and disinherit him, leaving everything to Miss Travis.

"Next morning, before he can make that new will, Ford Dedham is murdered.

"Huh! Looks bad for nephew! I tell Sergeant Morris to clear everybody out so I can search Burt Dedham's room for the opal. I don't find the opal; but I find enough! Let's go, Sergeant!"

WE filed out, down the hall to Burt Dedham's room. Hazily, I realized that it was a large room fitted up more as a laboratory than as a living-room.

Against the left wall, the one adjoining Ford Dedham's study, was a long worktable with retorts, glass tubes, jars, and a litter of other apparatus. Detective Edwards led us to this table, pointed to several objects: a pencil with a long piece of string tied to one end; an oil-stained handkerchief; an apparatus like a miniature muffler that I learned soon was a silencer; and a revolver.

"Burt Dedham," said Detective Edwards sharply, "you watched at your door this morning and saw Miss Travis leave. You saw Eulalia go down the rear stairs. Then you went to your uncle's study,

rapped, and was admitted. Your uncle sat down at his desk. Right before his eyes, you picked up his automatic and fitted on that silencer. Just when that car was crashing down the hill, stopping for Miss Travis, just as your uncle, alarmed by your actions, started to rise—you shot him! The roar of the car drowned what little noise escaped the silencer.

"Then,"—pointing to the handkerchief, —"you removed the silencer and carefully wiped off your fingerprints, then put the gun in your victim's hand so his own prints would show. Rather clever of you, then, to leave the gun a few inches away so it would look as if the gun had fallen from his hand.

"Next you opened the transom, slipped your pencil through the hole in the key and tossed the other end of the string over the transom. Simple matter then, with the door closed, for you to stand in the hall, pull on the string, turn the key, then draw the pencil over the transom. Most kids know that trick.

"Now comes the stunt that strikes me as really clever! I admit I didn't get a clue to it until I made that girl"—pointing to Eulalia—"tell the truth. I made her confess that she *had* come back to that upper hall, that she was standing just opposite that study door when that shot was fired—not the shot that killed Ford Dedham, but the second shot, the one that Mr. Weeks heard. Eulalia heard that shot, but *she didn't hear the body fall.*

"Huh!" With that characteristic grunt, Detective Edwards picked up the revolver. From a box on the table he took a blank cartridge. Breaking the revolver, he put the blank in, snapped the gun shut, then stepped to one side of the table where I now perceived a small vise. Locking the gun in the vise, he took a piece of string, tied one end to a nail in the table, and looped the other end over the hammer so as to hold the hammer almost fully cocked. Then he picked up a short piece of fuse, twisted one end over the string, struck a match and lighted the other end.

"That's the devilishly clever apparatus that was set here when Burt Dedham hurried back into this room," he said. "He threw the pencil and string on the table, shoved the silencer beneath papers in that table drawer, lighted his fuse, and skipped out, locking his door. He had crossed the lawn and was planting the suspicion of suicide in Mr. Weeks' mind when—"

AT that instant the sputtering fuse burned out to the string. The string snapped. There was a deafening roar as the released trigger exploded the blank cartridge. Sibyl stifled a scream.

"When you ran to your room to get a chair for Mr. Weeks to look over that transom," Detective Edwards went on calmly, "you took the revolver out of the vise and hid it. Not having any idea that this room would ever be searched, you didn't hide anything carefully.

"One thing more: Mr. Dedham, this is a case of cold-blooded, first-degree murder. You didn't kill your uncle because he accused you of stealing that opal, or because he threatened to disinherit you. That silencer, and this other apparatus, shows that for a long time you've had murder in your mind. I'm convinced that you killed him because—"

Suddenly, savagely, Burt Dedham whirled on the speaker. "I killed him because I hated him!" he cried. "He stood between me and everything I wanted in life! He deserved killing; and I'm glad—" He broke off. "Well," he went on, a bitter smile on his white lips, "you're damned clever; but you've overlooked one thing. Let me show you!" He went quickly across the room to a small wall cabinet.

I heard Sergeant Morris shout something, then all was confusion. A moment later the odor of bitter almonds was strong in the room, a shattered vial lay on the floor —and beside it lay the crumpled figure of Burt Dedham.

"Dead!" muttered Dr. Etcheson. "Hydrocyanic acid!"

WELL, all that is now long ago and far away. We never told who actually took the opal; but we gave the thing to our good friend Dr. Etcheson, who sold it and used the proceeds in converting the old Dedham mansion into a hospital.

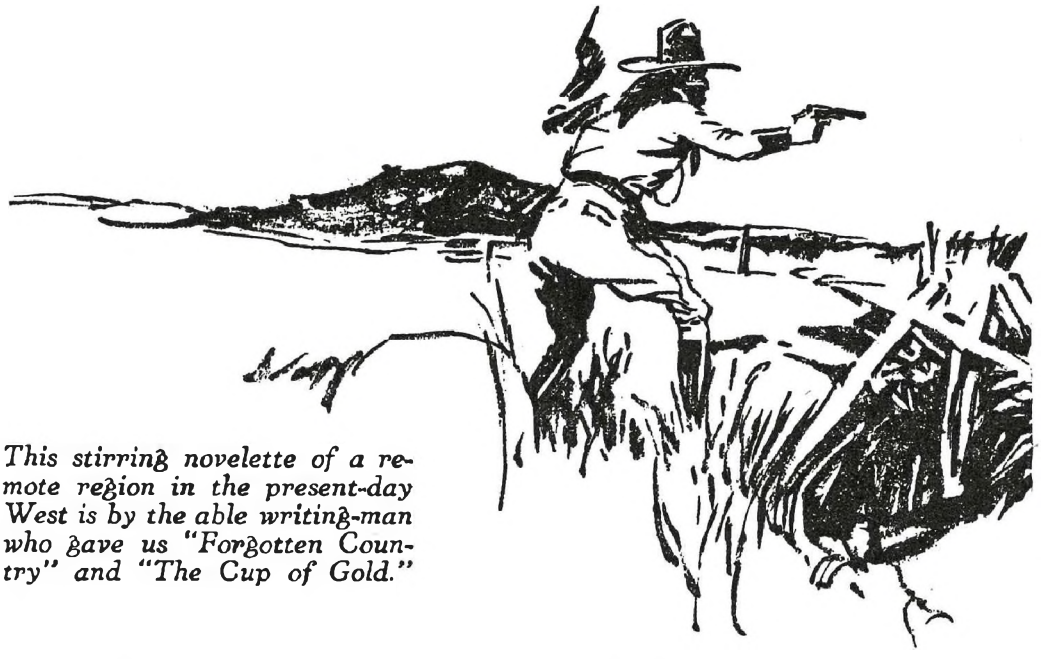
During the months just following the tragedy I spent a great deal of time with Sibyl, but somehow I just couldn't muster up the courage to tell her what was on my mind.

Then, one evening, we were sitting in a secluded nook in the park. "Jim," she said, "do you remember that time I fainted—and you caught me in your arms?"

"I sure do!" I told her.

"Well, Jim," she said, sighing, "I—I guess I'll have to faint again!"

Gosh! That was plain enough, wasn't it?



This stirring novelette of a remote region in the present-day West is by the able writing-man who gave us "Forgotten Country" and "The Cup of Gold."

Mountain Mystery

By ROLLIN BROWN

Illustrated by William Molt

A SCREAM of brakes echoed through the cañon, and the driver swung the wheel with all his youthful strength. The big seven-passenger machine skidded across the narrow road—bounced wildly, slowly. The right front wheel seemed almost to halt, then dropped on into the collapsed culvert that the driver had noted too late, burying itself. With this final jolt the big car was still.

A cloud of white road-dust rolled up about the machine. Out of the dust at the side of the road, suddenly, a sharp, high-pitched voice said:

"Put up your hands, gentlemen! Get 'em up high! Quick!"

The driver had a stunning flash of insight into this whole business. No accident accounted for the collapsed road culvert that had ditched the machine. This was the Rawlins and Charity Basin stage.

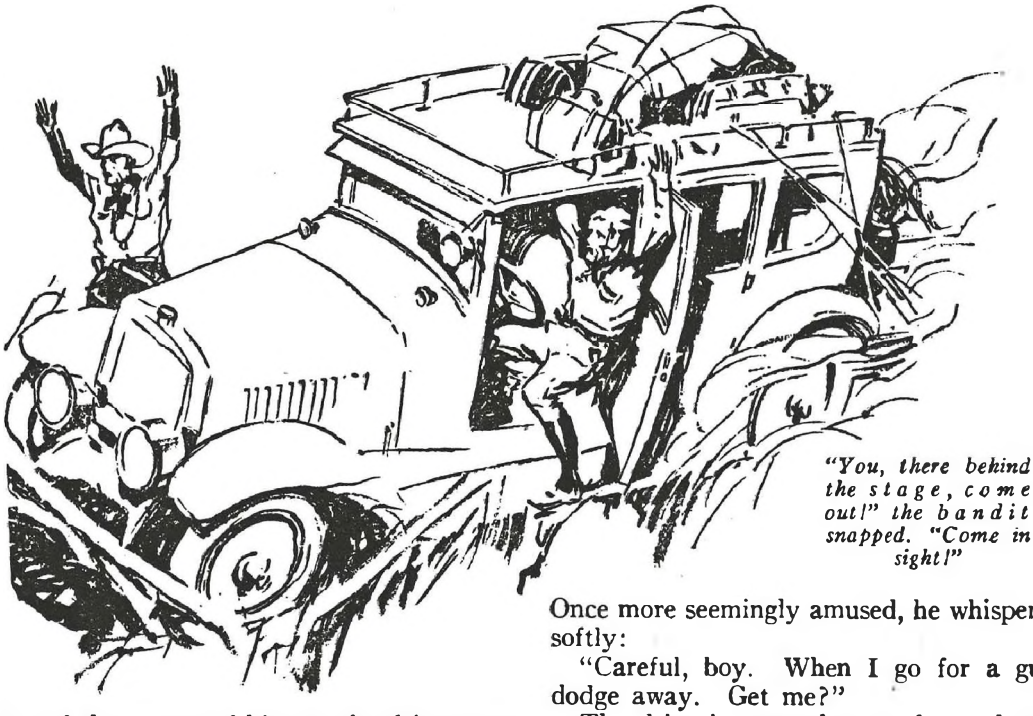
"Climb out now! Hands way up! Careful!"

The driver gave a second violent start of surprise. The bandit at the side of the road had a voice like a woman! A woman's voice, high, slightly falsetto! The driver suddenly remembered certain rumors current in Charity Basin. A woman! . . . . He threw his feet over the side door and climbed out into the road, hands high.

He saw the woman then. She stood ten or fifteen feet away, at the side of the road. The dust was settling. She wore a short, fringed riding skirt. A red bandana mask covered her features up to the eyes—eyes blue in color. From under her light sombrero a strand of straw-yellow hair had fallen. It reached almost to her shoulder. She appeared youthful. In her hand was a steely blue revolver.

The stage driver had forgotten his two passengers. He remembered them suddenly now. One, an uncommunicative, silent man of middle age, had been in the seat beside him. At Rawlins, that morning, this man had insisted that he bring into the seat with him the small black satchel he carried. He put it between his two feet. The other passenger, younger, a stranger, had been in the rear.

THE woman made a gesture with her gun. The young stranger from the rear seat, a smile on his face as though this whole thing amused him, lifted his hands. But



"You, there behind the stage, come out!" the bandit snapped. "Come in sight!"

out of the corner of his eye the driver now noted that the middle-aged man with the black satchel had disappeared.

"You, there behind the stage, come out!" the woman's voice snapped. "Come in sight—with your hands up!"

The middle-aged man appeared at the rear of the stage. A gun in his hand cracked once—twice! The second shot spattered dust just before his own toes. He pitched forward, the gun falling. Stomached in the dust, he groaned.

The woman bandit hadn't fired. There had been no sound through the cañon, except that from the middle-aged man's own automatic. It was as if a bolt from the blue had struck him down. . . . . The stranger at the driver's side had turned his head, able to scan the far side of the cañon. There was no longer an amused look to his smile. Perhaps fifty yards away, above a small clump of juniper on the far wall, there seemed to be a clinging little drift of haze like a waft of powder-smoke.

The driver shivered internally. He was twenty years old, a good mechanic and driver, and he had never before been in a hold-up. He didn't like it. He looked at the fallen man, who lay at the rear of the stage.

"Now, if you two remaining gentlemen will walk forward!" the woman snapped. "Up the road! Steady! That's right. . . . . Now, stop there, backs this way, hands up! 'Way up!"

The stranger stood beside the driver. Once more seemingly amused, he whispered softly:

"Careful, boy. When I go for a gun, dodge away. Get me?"

The driver's stomach turned to a heavy ball of ice within him. He had no choice in the matter, but it seemed to him that quite enough had happened already. Split seconds seemed like hours. It seemed as if half a life-time passed while he stood there beside the man with the amused smile. It wasn't actually over ten seconds.

The stranger whirled, a lightning gesture. One hand whipped his coat apart. The other shot inside. A flash of blue-black metal in his hand—the little recoil jump of the revolver—twice. . . . . Echoes! The woman at the stage, just lifting the fallen man's black satchel under her left arm, threw up her right hand. The gun she had held fell from her fingers. But she had nerve. She whirled and ran. The black satchel was still under her arm.

The stranger's gun pivoted across the cañon, peppering the juniper clump. He was dodging for cover, back to the tilted side of the car.

GOGGLE-EYED, the driver stared. His hands on fixed arms still reached and clutched at the pure mountain air over his head. The stranger didn't shoot after the running woman. He crouched low under the near side of the slanting stage, sheltered. The driver didn't understand. He wondered why. Then he saw a little strip of the stage's top rip noiselessly up. He saw a bit of the upholstery fly loose and take wing. Just as the driver got the idea, the windshield shattered with a good

bit of noise. Tiny puffs of bluish smoke now popped silently from the vivid green of the juniper clump across cañon.

The youthful driver turned and ran in the opposite direction as fast as his legs would carry him.

HE didn't return for some time, and then very cautiously. He wondered if what he had seen had actually happened, or if he was mad. He found it real enough.

Perhaps a quarter of an hour had passed. The stranger now had the wounded man stretched out in the road beside the stage, and he had found the first-aid kit that was carried under the rear seat. He shouted for the driver to hurry up, and see if they could get the machine back on the road.

This took more time. The broken culvert had to be filled in. Finally, with the aid of a short-handled shovel from the rack behind, the two had the stage righted. The wounded man was lifted in behind, his head bolstered up with a coat, and the stranger stayed beside him. Just this had happened:

On the Box Springs Cañon road, the Rawlins and Charity Basin stage, which had been making this run on a tri-weekly schedule for the last year, had been ditched for the purpose of robbery. A woman had attempted the actual hold-up, with a confederate across-cañon in the juniper bush, a rifle equipped with a silencer in his hands. It was a cool, desperate piece of work. The woman, her weapon shot from her hand by the stranger's sudden gun-play, had run on with the black satchel and escaped. The wounded, middle-aged man now admitted that his satchel had held the pay-roll for the Esperanza Mines, at Charity Basin.

The driver pressed the throttle of the stage to the floorboards. While he hadn't been particularly courageous at the time of the hold-up, driving was his business. He took the curves like mad.

"Shaking us up too much," objected the stranger behind, who held the wounded man in the seat.

The driver reluctantly slowed.

"What do you know about this — a woman bandit?" asked the stranger after a time. "Ever hear of her before?"

"Yeah. But nothin' ever before like this, though!" The driver whistled between his teeth. "Nothin' like this, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Deen. John Deen," the man supplied.

"Well, Mr. Deen, there has been rumors, maybe more'n rumors. F'instance, she was supposed to have stole some hundred head, or more, of prime stock off the Bar W Bar Ranch—run 'em south, got away. That was two-three months ago. But nothin', nothin' like this before. No bloodshed!"

"Uh-huh," considered John Deen. "What else?"

"Well, four or five weeks ago, one night, it's said she raided the Bar W Bar ranch-house an' got away with some little sum of money. How much, I don't know. Seems ol' Abel Wetherby didn't like to tell. Y'see —well, y'see, she is supposed to be his own niece."

"You don't say?"

"Yeah. His own niece! It seems Wetherby wouldn't bring a charge against her for that reason. An' he was the only one concerned. But what's happened today will put a posse on her trail, you bet."

John Deen nodded thoughtfully. "I'd judge it might," he considered. "Our friend here says there was about five thousand dollars in the satchel. He is guard and paymaster for the Esperanza Mines."

"Whew! That's nerve for you! The girl aint a year over twenty, they say. Don't look it, either. I got a mighty plain look at her."

"You did?" said Deen. "I didn't."

"What I mean is that I'd know her again anywhere. No mistakin'."

"Oh. . . . . Charity Basin got a pretty good law-force these days?" asked Deen.

"Right fair, I guess. Old Spaniard named Pedro Arguello. He's city marshal. Then there's Shard, his paid deputy. Shard, I reckon, is the brains—"

"Shard!" echoed the smiling man behind. His face turned suddenly expressionless, as cold, immobile and passionless as so much carved marble.

"Yeah—Shard. Happen to know him, do you?"

DEEN'S eyes flickered. "Yes. Shard," he said precisely. "Mark Shard."

"Uh-huh. You been round here before, then?" questioned the driver.

"Not recently. In fact, a long, long time ago. Twelve years ago."

"Oh. . . . . Say, some ol'-timer at Rawlins was tellin' me the story. But you aint that Deen, I reckon. Not the Deen that located all that Esperanza land, then let it slip through his fingers?"

"My father," corrected John Deen. "He located the claim."

"Whew! What luck!" exclaimed the youth. "Five millions has come out of that

property in the last nine or ten years, they say."

Deen gave no heed. "There's a mine hospital in town, I suppose. Know where it is?" he asked.

"Sure."

"I'll stay with you there. Want to see how this man comes out. Then I'll be at the Basin House. One voice should be enough to inform the Marshal of what's happened. You can tell him where to find me."

John Deen leaned over the wounded man, the Esperanza guard, speaking in his ear. He called the man by name.

"Hold tight, Ames. We'll have you quiet in a mighty short time now."

CHAPTER II

JOHN DEEN expected change in the town of Charity Basin. Twelve years and the development of so rich a property as the Esperanza had proved, was bound to bring it. The town that he had known had been a huddle of a single store and two saloons on a mountain crossroads, surviving as best it could on chance travelers, prospectors, 'breeds and Mexicans, and the few scattered cow-men from the surrounding country. Deen saw now a long main street fronted by single and occasional two-story buildings; stores, restaurants, dwelling-houses intermixed; a boom town that had grown up in jumbled, unpainted magic beside the Esperanza mills and dumps, and continued to live as it was without regret.

The lobby of the Basin House was small and poorly lighted through unclean windows. Deen walked across to the desk. Behind sat a chunky, middle-aged man in vest and shirt-sleeves. His head was as bald as an egg. Under a ragged mustache he mumbled a greeting. Eventually, carrying his own bag, Deen followed the man to one of the overhead front rooms.

"By the way," he asked as the man was leaving, "who owns the livery stable here in town, or is there such a thing?"

"Me—I own it," said the bald man, his eyes brightening. "I'm Weef Hartman. What d'you want?"

"Saddle-horse, a good one. Outfit. I'll buy. But it's got to be good."

Weef Hartman became cheerful. "I got a big cream-colored gelding," he said. "A four-year-old, last spring—a Bar W Bar raised horse. Fine animal."

Deen smiled pleasantly. "No," he said, "I don't like the color. Cream is too close to white. White is too—conspicuous. My taste is modest."

The bald man opened his eyes, half closing them again. He nodded thoughtfully.

"I'll see what I can do."

When the door was closed, Deen took off his coat and the shoulder-holster underneath. Very carefully he cleaned the gun, a .38 on a .45 frame. He split open a fresh box of shells and put it in his coat pocket. He adjusted the holster on his shoulder, took it off and eased the back strap a notch. Putting the gun on once more, he felt the weight, shaking his shoulders loosely. For several minutes thereafter, his coat on, the gun empty, he stood before the cracked washstand mirror. His move was a flash, the gun drawn. Again and again. He stood at different angles, different positions before the mirror, but always with the same mark before him, his own swift-moving image in the glass.

"Devilish slow this morning!" he muttered once. "You can't get by like that, John Deen. The shoulder draw must be fast!"

But while his muscles did one thing with a definite, accurate precision, young John Deen's mind was upon another. It centered back twelve years and more. In his mind he saw the Charity Basin of the past. He saw his father also, real as life—a man broken in the prime of his years by too-great labor, hardship and misfortune. Alone and unaided, Joseph Deen had sunk hundreds of feet of exploration shaft and tunnel into the Esperanza hill, maintaining to the end his faith in the then unproved claim. As the stage-driver had heard somewhere, the property had slipped through his fingers finally. True enough. Through John Deen's fingers also. Mark Shard, in fact, had stolen it.

IT was all very vivid to John Deen's mind. The beginning of the end had come suddenly one late afternoon, like a blow. The elder Deen, returning from the shafts, collapsed as he entered the one-room shack they lived in. Months of illness followed. There were little provisions, less money, no dynamite to carry on the work at the Esperanza claim, which must be done in yearly amounts if prospector's title to the Government land ore-deposit was to be maintained.

At about this time Mark Shard first ap-

peared in Charity Basin with a small son at his heels. Shard had a little money and claimed to be a mining man. In desperation the elder Deen finally bargained with Shard. The agreement was to be a fourth interest in the claim if Shard would accomplish the legal amount of work that must be done that year to hold title. It was done. The elder Deen trusted Shard. A few months later he died.

John Deen, fifteen then, found a job with the Wetherby ranch, the Bar W Bar—chore work at first, then a saddle. He regularly contributed his small wages to Shard for the mine's upkeep. More than a year passed. With utter amazement, one day, he found that the Esperanza was about to be sold. Shard, doing the legally stipulated assessment work necessary to hold possession of the claim, had credited it on the county records to his own name alone. No mention of any Deen entered into the thing. Shard, in fact, had found himself thus able in two years' time to take sole possession of the property that another man had spent the best of a life time in developing. It had suddenly proved rich.

John Deen, sixteen years old then, doing a man's work on the Bar W Bar, went briefly berserk. He tried to beat up the large, laughing Shard. A gun had come under his fingers. He fired—missed—fled.

Later he heard that Shard had actually not made a big thing of the mine, rich as it had turned out; and he heard that Shard had drifted on soon, down into Box Springs Cañon for a time, then disappeared. Dean knew no further details. That had all been years ago.

IT belonged to youth, the long past, John Deen considered now. Rage had never again mastered him. It was a lesson, a terrible lesson in its way. John Deen today was steel cool, smiling, twenty-eight years old, a man accustomed to bring to success the things he undertook. The full emotional side of his nature never showed on the exterior. And Shard, Mark Shard, had evidently returned to Charity Basin now, and was deputy under this City Marshal Arguello. So the stage-driver had said. . . . .

There was a gentle and insistent knock on Deen's door. He expected it. Dropping the gun carefully into the top of his open bag, Deen crossed the room and swung the door wide.

A tall, slender, white-mustached man, bronzed of skin and upright in bearing, stood in the hall outside. Under a side of his coat, against the vest, there glinted a little star point of metal. Deen smiled slightly. Deputy Shard had evidently not chosen to accompany his superior officer here. Shard undoubtedly remembered the name of Deen well enough.

"You are Mistaire Deen?" the man in the doorway asked courteously.

"Yes. Come in. And I take it you are Marshal Arguello?"

CITY MARSHAL Pedro Arguello—Don Pedro, he liked to be called—nodded. He stepped lightly into the room. The Marshal boasted a pure-blooded ancestry back to Spain on the paternal side; his mother had been English. And at one time it was said that the Arguello land-grant embraced what was now a whole county, a very fertile, agriculturally rich county, at that, not desert. Yet Pedro Arguello since early manhood had lived in the desert, or the mountainous edge of it. He had lived a hard life, rancher, cow-man, officer of the law; and withal he was a gentleman such as his father had been, and penniless but for what his own hands labored to gain and hold, which had not been the case with his more fortunate father.

Marshal Arguello nodded again. "He is me—called Don Pedro, however," he said; and because he had learned Spanish before English, there was just a touch of accent to the words. "It is necessary to talk with you, Mistaire Deen. There was trouble this morning, which you saw. The stage-driver has told his story. Five thousan' dollars—*pouf!*—gone! An' the Esperanza guard shot ver', ver' bad!"

"Yes."

The Marshal continued sadly: "It is hard to believe, since I know this young lady ver' well. Imposs-ee-bul! I say that, almost."

"Uh-huh," considered John Deen. "But this is not the young lady's first crime, I understand."

"In a way, no. But there has been no charge. This young lady's uncle, Abel Wetherby, he makes no complaint to me. Therefore, what reason?" Don Pedro spread his hands in an expressive, troubled gesture. "It is said her uncle lost some hundred head of steers; some money again, one night not long ago. But to me he says nothing. Now, I do not wish to gather one large posse an' chase this poor leetle girl

unless I am made to. . . . . You can see. Ridiculous! It is to laugh. One leetle girl an' a beeg, ferocious posse!"

"The man who was shot this morning," Deen considered, "probably isn't laughing."

"No, no—you misunderstand. That is no laugh, this last! . . . . The stage-driver, too, he gives me good description of the young lady. Yellow hair, blue eyes; not ver' big in body, slender, an'—ah, active. She is pretty, yes."

To intimidate the boy Mark Shard had drawn a gun, but the sudden attack wrenched the weapon from his fingers.

"This stage driver is a romanticist," said Deen. "The young lady's eyes might be green, for instance. Her face from the bridge of the nose down was covered. She might have a harelip; she might have protruding teeth. Her hair, even, might be bleached."

"No," said Don Pedro morosely, "it is true. She is ver' pretty. Do I not say I know her ver', ver' well? Many times she rides here, talks with me sometimes, before—before there was this trouble."

"Which trouble are you speaking of now?" asked Deen.

"The start of all this. Not long ago, early las' fall, she has trouble with her uncle. Like one small hot-head, she leaves —rides! She takes with her a Mexican girl from the Bar W Bar Ranch an' one top-hand vaquero, the girl's husband. They ride fast. Everyone laughs loudly when they hear. You see, this Abel Wetherby, her uncle, he is not a popular man with those who know him. He gives chase, and everyone laughs still more, because this small girl is not to be caught and brought back by her uncle. She rides swifter an' with more—ah, cunning, than he can follow. An' mind you, my frien', scarce a few months has she been in Charity Basin before that time."

"So? I'd gathered that she was old Seth Wetherby's daughter. Dolora, the girl's name was."

Marshal Arguello scrutinized Deen thoughtfully. "Yes — Dolora. But her father, Seth Wetherby, has been dead long now. I never knew him. An' until a short time ago the girl has lived in the East, sent there to school by this uncle, Abel Wetherby, Seth's brothaire, who took charge of the Bar W Bar property. . . . . But you, my frien', I take it you have been in Charity Basin before, then?"

"Yes. Some years ago. I once worked for Seth Wetherby on the Bar W Bar. My father had the original claim on the Esperanza."

"So? It seems I have heard the name of Deen before, yes. Now will you tell me just what happened this morning?"

DEEN explained with what detail he could. . . . . "You understand," he ended. "The girl undoubtedly showed herself something of a novice at the hold-up business. She'd have had my gun otherwise, searched me when I stood right before her. Whether she was rattled, fright-

ened, didn't want to get too close, or took it for granted that neither the driver or myself was armed, I don't know. She didn't approach within ten or fifteen feet of us at any time. Maybe she depended on her partner across cañon to stop any gun-play, as he had for the guard. All told, it was nevertheless a cold-blooded, desperate piece of work."

The easy-going, courteous Marshal's head had dropped. There was almost physical pain, suffering, in his glance as he finally lifted slow eyes.

"My frien'," he said, "do you realize what this all means? No, you cannot quite. I will tell you. This girl, this ver' nice girl, has trouble with her uncle and runs away. It is a prank, do you see? She likes excitement, fun, a horse under her, and the wind in her face, an' she does not like this uncle, Abel Wetherby. She steals what is really her own, because he is only guardian of her own property. More of a prank, more excitement. Everyone laughs, ver' amused. . . . . Then this! *And more—*"

"More?" asked John Deen. "More than this? In just what way?"

The Marshal dropped anguished eyes. The words seemed almost forced from his lips. "I mean close to seventy thousand dollars. Gold bullion from the Esperanza, ten thousand dollars of it in cash, a robbery of the strong-room eight weeks ago. . . . . It was kept quiet. There were no clues to be found except one small, woman's glove. Yet no one, even then, suspected Dolora Wetherby, this girl. Imposs-ee-bul! A small girl like that! But now—you see! And the fault, too late, I know is mine. I should have given chase, brought her back at first. From a beginning prank she went on unchecked. She has met criminal accomplices—then turned criminal herself. This last may be murder, the guard who was shot! See, now?"

It was as though Pedro Arguello had found it necessary to unburden his mind. He shook his head with a slow finality of gesture, then rose and moved toward the door. He thanked Deen for what information he had given.

IN the street below, a small well-mounted posse had been collecting as the Marshal talked to Deen. Looking down from his window a moment later, Deen saw Arguello mount. No time had been wasted. It was an unusual sort of efficiency under the easy, deliberate, courteous manner that characterized the Marshal.

For a long time after the posse had gone, Deen stood looking down from the window, deep in thought. He remembered Dolora Wetherby as a child seven or eight years of age. He remembered Seth Wetherby, her father, who had given him his first job on the Bar W Bar, remembered him very well indeed. Of this uncle, Abel Wetherby, who had come to manage the property at Seth's death, Deen knew nothing. The whole thing that had happened now was an extraordinary story. Had he not seen the girl that morning, shot the gun from her hand, in fact, Deen realized that he wouldn't have believed it. But Deen whistled softly to himself now. Seventy thousand dollars was involved in this previous robbery of the Esperanza strong-room! That was a lot of money. Ten thousand dollars in cash; the rest in bullion.

For perhaps half an hour Deen stood looking down into the street. At length his gaze centered on a figure coming hurriedly down the far walk.

The man crossed the street, came directly before the hotel. The second-story window of the hotel was low; for seconds Deen looked almost directly down into the man's face. His eyes held riveted to that face; they held riveted to the man's back as he passed. Something in John Deen's mind clicked. Twelve years vanished. In imagination he stood again before Mark Shard, desperately accusing him of the meanest sort of treachery and theft, and Mark Shard grinned. To intimidate the boy, he drew a gun. The desperateness of the boy's sudden attack wrenched the weapon from his fingers. A shot! It still echoed in John Deen's brain after twelve years. . . . .

A sardonic flicker of icy smile on his lips, Deen turned from the window. He drew the revolver from his bag and carefully, very carefully, put it into the holster under his arm. For a long time he stood without motion. Then, finally, he plucked the gun and again dropped it into the bag.

"I wont take a chance," he told himself. "This is my own private score. Fists will have to answer."

Yet the Shard that Deen had seen had changed almost beyond recognition. A waving, iron-gray beard covered his lower face and fell half down his chest. He moved with a ponderous sort of dignity. To the casual eye there would have been something almost patriarchal in his bearing.

Tall, sturdy of muscle, big, he was. And actually, now that the man was out of his sight, Deen could not have given an accurate description of him. Deen, living over that single, terrible moment of his boyhood, saw only the Shard underneath, not the mask of change that twelve years had inevitably put on him. To Deen's eyes the mask wasn't there.

CHAPTER III

YET it was a part of John Deen's steeled philosophy never to rush into things. In this moment when his burning anger prompted one thing, his will demanded another. It forbade that he see Shard until he was cool, controlled in every gesture. Since the deputy hadn't gone with the posse, as obviously he hadn't, Deen knew where to find him.

Downstairs, in the dingy lobby, Deen paused and finally turned into the dining-room, a place as dimly lighted and dirty as the rest of the hotel. He ordered a meal so scant that the single waitress of the place questioned him twice over. Perhaps ten minutes later, as he finished, Weef Hartman waddlingly appeared and dropped into one of the empty chairs at his side.

"You were on the stage this mornin', huh?" he began. "Well, for another innocent girl's prank, this mornin's work was pretty smart, I'd say."

Deen merely nodded.

"Still wantin' that inconspicuous-colored hoss?" asked Weef casually after a moment, too casually to sound quite right.

"Yes," said Deen.

"Uh-huh. Well, I got somethin' of the sort lined up. Big, rangy blue roan; sound as a dollar, six year old, an' raised in the rough country. A fast hoss, Mister—fast! Sound right?"

"Good enough," said Deen. "I'll see. What's the price?"

"The price, Mister, is three hundred round dollars even, with outfit."

Deen whistled. "Does this horse have gold fillings in his teeth?"

Weef shook his head. "Gold shoes, he wears. They kick the ground behind, Mister, fast, mighty fast. An' a blue roan color goes well against a background of sage-brush, huh? These things are bound to make a hoss valuable to the right man. In case you'd want this roan *pronto*, I have a boy bringin' him up to the stable now."

"Oh," said Deen without surprise.

"An' you know," continued Weef Hartman, gently massaging his round bald skull, "there is folks hereabouts that think one girl couldn't quite get away with all that's been done. Yeh, they do think that. Certain things, f'instance, bear the mark of a good bit of skill. Maybe one-two bang-up smart gents is with her, huh? Or maybe we better say she's with 'em. Anyhow, a good bit of care was used in bringin' that pay-roll in this mornin'—care not to let the fact be known, I mean. Now it's even said that an accomplice might have been watchin' that Esperanza guard an' the stage; even rode with the stage, to signal, 'All's aboard!' just before Box Springs Cañon was entered. Time enough. Somehow the roll was known to be on the stage, an' that's a fact hard to get at the bottom of. You didn't happen to notice a suspicious-lookin' passenger, now, did you?"

Deen, swallowing a last mouthful of food, turned, to squarely look into Weef Hartman's colorless eyes.

"No," he said. "I was the only passenger except the guard."

"Oh, excuse. No suspicion could be attached to you, o' course, because you shot at the girl. Did you break her arm, do you think, or was it a shoulder shot? Or maybe the posse will find this female bandit dead down the road, huh?"

Deen rose and said pleasantly and distinctly: "Hartman, you're indiscreet, if you understand. You talk too much; and that, Hartman, is—not wise. Get me?"

Hartman slowly nodded. "Silence is golden, huh? All right. Or let me put it another way: Gold is silence. The price of that roan, Mister, is three hundred dollars, gold. Silence. He'll be ready any time you want him. I wont mention my ideas to others then."

Leaving the room and Hartman, the amused smile flickered on Deen's lips. Then, just outside, he almost bumped into the stage-driver, and the youth looked the other way swiftly, attempting not to notice him. Deen smiled briefly again. Somebody had been very busy talking, no doubt of that. Deen nodded. But if the town would just be patient now for five minutes longer, he would give them something to gossip about.

THERE was no trouble in locating the Marshal's office, an unpainted, square-faced structure fronting the main street.

To the rear, Deen saw, was a connecting addition of low, thick 'dobe walls and barred windows—the jail, evidently. He paused for a moment in the street, then entered the already open door of the office.

A slight, slender, dapper young man of twenty-four or -five years rose from behind a corner desk to meet him. The young man wore a conspicuously displayed deputy's star; and evidently he had recently had an accident of some sort, for his right arm was bandaged and hung in a triangle sling from his neck. He nodded to Deen, by way of greeting, and with his left hand tilted a soft new sombrero with an ornate band back from his forehead.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

"I'm John Deen."

The young man nodded. "Yes. Glad you dropped in. I intended to send for you. Excuse the lack of handshake, Mr. Deen; a bronc spilled with me this morning and damaged this wrist a bit—"

"I want to speak with Mark Shard," Deen cut in. "Alone, if you please."

"I'm Mark Shard," said the young man. He tilted the sombrero still farther back from his forehead. His hair, thick and crinkly, was a muddy chestnut color. He shifted his small, dapperly booted feet with a nervous gesture. "I'm Mark Shard," he repeated distinctly, as though Deen had not caught the words. "The only man of such name, at least, in Charity Basin."

"You—are—Mark Shard!" The words cracked between Deen's lips.

The young man nodded, looking intently at Deen, a puzzled expression on his face.

IT came back to Deen suddenly in a hazy memory. This young man must be the son who had clung like a shadow at his father's heels twelve years before. This was that youth grown to maturity. Deen had practically forgotten his existence.

"Mark Shard, Junior?" he asked finally.

The young man nodded. "Well—yes."

"It's Mark Shard, Senior, that I want to see."

The young deputy turned half away; his face was shadowed. "That, Deen, is impossible. You evidently aren't familiar with the circumstances, or you wouldn't ask such a thing. My father died nine—no, ten years ago this spring. He was thrown from his horse down in Box Springs Cañon, where we lived at the time. A foot caught in the stirrup; he was dragged to death. We found the horse miles south two days later and—his body, almost unrecognizable." The young man was suddenly silent. His shadowed eyes had a drawn, far-away look in them. "You'll understand," he continued slowly. "I don't wish to talk about it. Had it not been for the later kindness of Abel Wetherby in taking me in, out at the Bar W Bar—"

Suddenly smiling again, cool, calm, Deen asked: "How old were you at the time your father was killed?"

Shard looked up swiftly. "Fifteen, I think," he said in a suddenly changed voice.

"Uh-huh. Old enough to remember your father quite well, it would seem. I was just a year older than that when I left Charity Basin."

"What are you driving at?" snapped Shard. His sharp, small eyes narrowed.

Deen paused for an instant. "At the fact," he said, "that I saw Mark Shard, Senior, your father, on the street not an hour ago. In—ah, perfect health. You must know the man!"

Young Shard drew a long intake of breath, straightening to his full slender height. His narrowed eyes met Deen's. He quivered.

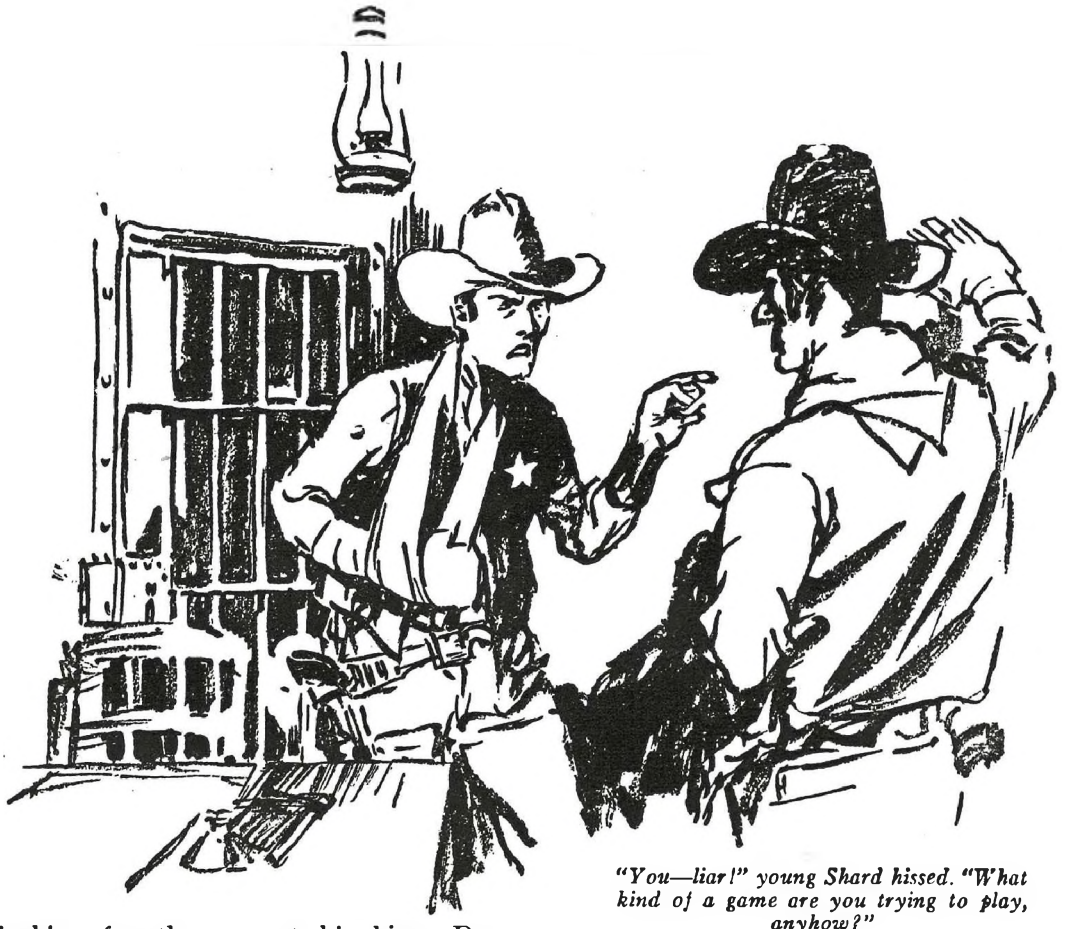
"You—liar!" he hissed. "What—what kind of a game are you trying to play, anyhow? Words wont bring a man dead ten years to life again."

"They don't have to," said Deen.

"You're crazy!" muttered Mark Shard. By visible effort he got control of himself. His short, nervous body trembled. "Listen, Deen, or whatever your name is! Listen, if you want something to talk about. That robbery this morning was no chance thing. Get me? This office and just one other person, the guard himself, knew that the money was coming today. The stage-driver has confessed that you asked him to halt the stage just before you entered the cañon. Some signal at that point, or before, would have told those above that the money was with you. The driver says that later your every gesture was that of a gunman—and yet you missed!"

Deen nodded. "As I told Marshal Arguello, this driver is a romantically minded chap. Also obliging. When he stopped the stage, I wanted a drink—hot morning, and the canteen was in the rack behind. And Shard, I didn't miss! Neither did I shoot to kill. I didn't intend to, if that's of interest. I'm not in the habit, in fact, of drawing a gun on women."

Shard, with his left hand, was stealthily



"You—liar!" young Shard hissed. "What kind of a game are you trying to play, anyhow?"

inching for the gun at his hip. Deen smiled. His eyes saw only that hand now. Instinctively his body was suddenly like a taut, bent wire ready to spring. It was a posture of poised action, a thing repeated and practiced countless times until the body was a machine. The right hand was a stiff claw that in fraction-second speed could leap under the coat-wing and out. The shoulder-draw is not as fast as the hip; a man of guns must be swift, to use it and still live.

For a long, tense second Shard looked at Deen.

"No, I wouldn't," advised Deen. "Now, Shard, not a sound. I regret it if I'm making a mistake. But just step ahead, get the keys and lead on to one of these rooms behind. I judge there'll be at least one without a window. That's the room we want."

After it was all over, after Deen had drawn Shard's gun and tossed it onto the desk in the office, after he had locked the young officer in the cell behind, he remembered that his own weapon was in the bag in the upper room of the Basin House. Deen chuckled to himself, hurrying down the street. The stage-driver had evidently made a great story of the whole business that morning; he had evidently given Deen a reputation for lightning-swift gunplay—so to bluff a young deputy now with a gesture!

FOR a few brief seconds Deen doubted—doubted himself and the identity of the man he had seen. Twelve years had made great changes in the elder Shard; Deen remembered that without being able to tell himself just what those changes were. But he was certain that he hadn't been wrong in the identity of the man who had passed so close below him in the street. He needed to know more now—swiftly.

Weef Hartman, his egg-bald head resting down on a shirt-sleeve, dozing in the early afternoon heat, was behind the desk in the Basin House lobby. Deen woke him with a thump on the desk. Weef's eyes lazily came open.

"Uh!" he grunted. "Uh! Well, returnin' for that roan?"

"Yes. Get somebody to bring the animal around here. Then, Hartman, come up to my room. I want to talk to you."

Hartman watched Deen disappear up the

stairs. Then he hurriedly got to his feet and went out through the dining-room to the kitchen. A boy of seventeen or eighteen years was washing dishes at the greasy sink. Weef went close to him, whispering:

"You run down to the stable an' bring that roan up. Hurry, see? Then hike over to the Marshal's office an' tell Shard the stranger's leavin'. He'll know what he wants to do. But bring the roan up first; I want to sell that hoss first. Need the money. Run now!"

The boy ran, and Weef slowly climbed the stairs to the stranger's room. Without knocking, he entered and found Deen burning a little pile of papers in the washstand basin. Deen patted his pockets reflectively; went through the bag again, to see that nothing of importance had been overlooked. His shoes were replaced with a pair of worn and unshined high-heeled boots. Weef Hartman, as Deen bent over, did not miss the significant bulge under the left armpit.

"Keep this bag," Deen told him. "I'll be back for it one of these days. Here's the three hundred. Right?"

"Right, yeah," Hartman mumbled.

"Now, Hartman," Deen continued, "I want you to tell me something about this young Shard at the Marshal's office."

Weef Hartman started guiltily. He had also been thinking about Shard, wondering how soon the deputy would be here.

"What about him?" Weef asked.

"Several things. I understand his father died some nine or ten years ago. Accident, down in Box Springs Cañon."

"Yeah," Weef replied, puzzled about what all this was leading to. "Before my time, though. When I come here seven year ago, followin' the big boom of the town, young Shard was livin' out with Abel Wetherby on the Bar W Bar. Wetherby had been kind of lookin' out for him, it seems. Shard did one thing an' another, an' finally Wetherby made him sort of foreman. It was about a year ago that Arguello give Shard the deputy job."

"Shard must know quite a bit about Dolora Wetherby, then," said Deen after a moment. "They must be well acquainted."

HARTMAN wondered what all this was leading to. He wondered what reason the stranger had in trying to connect Shard and the Wetherby girl so obviously. Was he trying to crawl out himself under such a thin blanket? But Weef answered the question, nodding.

"Yeah. Knows her, o'course. Some says he had quite a likin' for her—that was in the two or three months before she took to pranks an' ridin'. But Wetherby put his foot down there, it's said. Reckon he wishes he hadn't now."

"Uh-huh." Deen was looking out the window. In fact, as he talked, his eyes continually scanned the street. He paused. "This the roan coming now?" he asked.

Weef stood up. "Yeah. Nice animal, huh?" Hartman watched the boy tie the horse to the little-used hitching rack before the hotel and hurry away. He tried to take Deen's attention off the street. "I'll make out a bill-of-sale, if you're satisfied with him," he said.

DEEN merely nodded. Hartman slowly began to write on the hotel paper that he modernly boasted in each of his rooms. He questioned Deen, to get him away from the window. But no sooner had Hartman finished writing than a half-dozen evenly spaced shots, muffled within a building, or with distance, echoed dully to his ears. Weef started.

"Wha's that?" he muttered. In fact, it was Shard shooting out the cell lock, because the youth could find the deputy's gun but not the keys.

"I'd like to know myself," said Deen. "Now, there's one more question, Hartman—" And Deen gave the best verbal picture he could of the elder Shard as he had seen him. "I'd like to know who that man is, what name he travels under. I judge you know only one Mark Shard; that's young Shard, the deputy."

Weef whistled softly and nodded. "But that's an order," he said. "If there's one man in this town that would answer your description, there's half a dozen. There's Charley Comstock, Gormon, Jess Greeley, Wetherby, even th' Esperanza superintendent, Ed Morton. Did this feller wear workin' clothes?"

"I couldn't say."

"Wearing minin' boots or shoes?"

"I didn't notice."

"Pshaw!" said Weef. "I can't tell you who he is. Wha's it all about, anyhow?"

He never received an answer. Deen whirled on him.

"I told you, Hartman," he said softly, "that it was unwise to talk too much. It is! Now I want to know exactly what that roan and outfit in the street are worth. The truth!"

WEEF didn't quite know what had happened; but after all, the sale was made. He decided to treat the thing as a joke. He laughed gruffly.

"Worth what the seller can get, I reckon."

"That's not the answer. What did you pay?"

"One-fifty."

"Hartman, you didn't keep the rest of your bargain," said Deen softly. Steel, living spring steel, was in the taut grace of his body. "I saw your boy go after Shard. You owe me the difference. Hartman, I'd pay up—quick!"

Weef Hartman suddenly trembled, looking at the man above him. A weak protest died in his throat, because he suddenly understood that this was no time for protest. As though obeying muscles apart from his own body, Weef's pudgy, shaking fingers began to do what they were told.

"Who the hell are you?" Weef asked shakily.

Deen had not drawn a gun. His lips, in fact, smiled.

"Thank you," he said.

At fifty yards, running down the street, Shard fired as Deen appeared from the lobby door. The bullet broke a small lamp-globe that lighted that Basin House entrance after nightfall, a shot that Shard could never have duplicated with such intention, shooting right-handedly, at his best. Marshal Arguello could have done it three times out of five, say; but never Shard. The deputy heard a bullet sing by his head and stopped uncertainly in the street. At his heels the single man he had found to accompany him on the moment, a miner off shift, also halted. The miner fired twice. Then Shard, some terrible determination overmastering the fear in his features, started on. He fired wildly with his left hand, praying to chance. The right arm was stiff in the bandage and sling.

Deen had mounted. He saw Hartman's face appear at an upper window, saw the flash of a gun below. He fired, and the window glass shattered above Hartman's face. Weef looked surprised; his head more than ever resembled a big round egg.

Under Deen the roan whirled. Before the animal had leaped ten paces up the road, Deen knew that he rode a trained cow-horse. The animal had a neck sensitive as fluid to the touch of the rein; he was fast as a cat on his feet. Deen wondered if he had actually cheated Weef Hartman. He swayed the swift, beautifully reined animal up the street in the path of a snake.

Heads appeared at doors, wondering. They looked back down the street at Deputy Shard and his single slow-footed aid, and disappeared—swiftly. A bullet ricocheted from a store-front with a shrill, vibrant whine. No one knew what it was about. Before they knew, Deen had gone.

Deen glanced down. One of the deputy's bullets had nicked the saddle he rode in.

CHAPTER IV

NORTH from Charity Basin for some seventy miles, as a crow would fly, lie the cut-up, serried ranges of the Rocas Blancas—so named, perhaps, from the giant outcroppings here and there across the pinnacled summits, a white sandstone that stretches in huge creeping strata, like monstrous, inert pythons, across the sweep of the country. Dust-white valleys, twisting with the snake-like contour of the ranges, flat of bottoms, steep of sides, as the rule, weave between. Water is scarce; yet the land is not desert. The desert lies beyond, and to the west also, in its miles of stark desolation.

To the south of Charity Basin is a more fertile country. In fact, Rawlins, the county seat, has a railroad, and a checkering of farm lands about it.

It had been in Rawlins that the Esperanza guard, Ames, while waiting for the semi-quarterly pay-roll to arrive, the day before, had seen and recognized John Deen on the street. He had immediately caught up with him, extending a hand.

"Well, Deen, where did you drop from?" he greeted. "Haven't seen you since Nevada City days, all of four or five years ago. How are you? Still at the old game?"

"Yes—and no," Deen answered, taking the extended hand in a warm grasp. "Good to see you, Ames."

"The same. Stickin' around here long? Where you bound for?"

"Charity Basin. Tomorrow morning's stage probably."

"You don't say! Likely I'll be on that stage myself," Ames told him. "We'll have a chat about old times."

Deen's face clouded. "Ames, I'm sorry," he said slowly. "But I'd rather not. You're working for the Esperanza, of course. I can't explain now, Ames. But I'll consider it a personal favor if you'll just fail to

recognize me tomorrow and say nothing about—well, Nevada City days. Will you do that, Ames?"

"Why, sure. Sure thing, but—"

"Thanks, Ames. Thanks a lot."

NOW, in the late afternoon, in the hospital maintained by the Esperanza on its grounds at Charity Basin, the wounded guard drearily related this matter to Deputy Shard. Outside the drab room in which Ames lay, the sun was setting, throwing into black relief the westerly mill sheds and the triangular spreading dump of Incline Number Three, which stood out on the hillside like some swollen scar.

"He knew you were the guard, knew beforehand when you were leaving!" said Shard. "With the secrecy that was used, he was the only man outside of ourselves to know this. That robbery this morning was no chance hold-up, Ames."

Ames nodded weakly. "I know it now."

"Why would Deen ask you to keep quiet about him?" Shard wondered.

Ames had no idea. "I used to know him pretty well in Nevada City a few years ago. Thought he was O.K. as gold," he explained.

"Hell!" barked Shard. "O.K. as hell! We want this Mr. Deen mighty bad, I'm thinking. I tell you, Ames, there's a bandit gang at work in this country, and they're clever as so many foxes."

"You don't think the girl has so much to do with it, huh?" muttered Ames.

"Little enough! They're using her; that's all. And yesterday it might have been possible to clear her; today it isn't. Ames, that's about as hard a thing as I can imagine. The knowledge that she might be in on it is what has more or less held all of us off. It's made a fool of Arguello, in fact. Person'ly, I feel like resigning tonight."

"Well, that o'course is your own business," said Ames, knowing how local gossip had linked the names of Dolora Wetherby and Shard a few months before. "Nobody could blame you," he said.

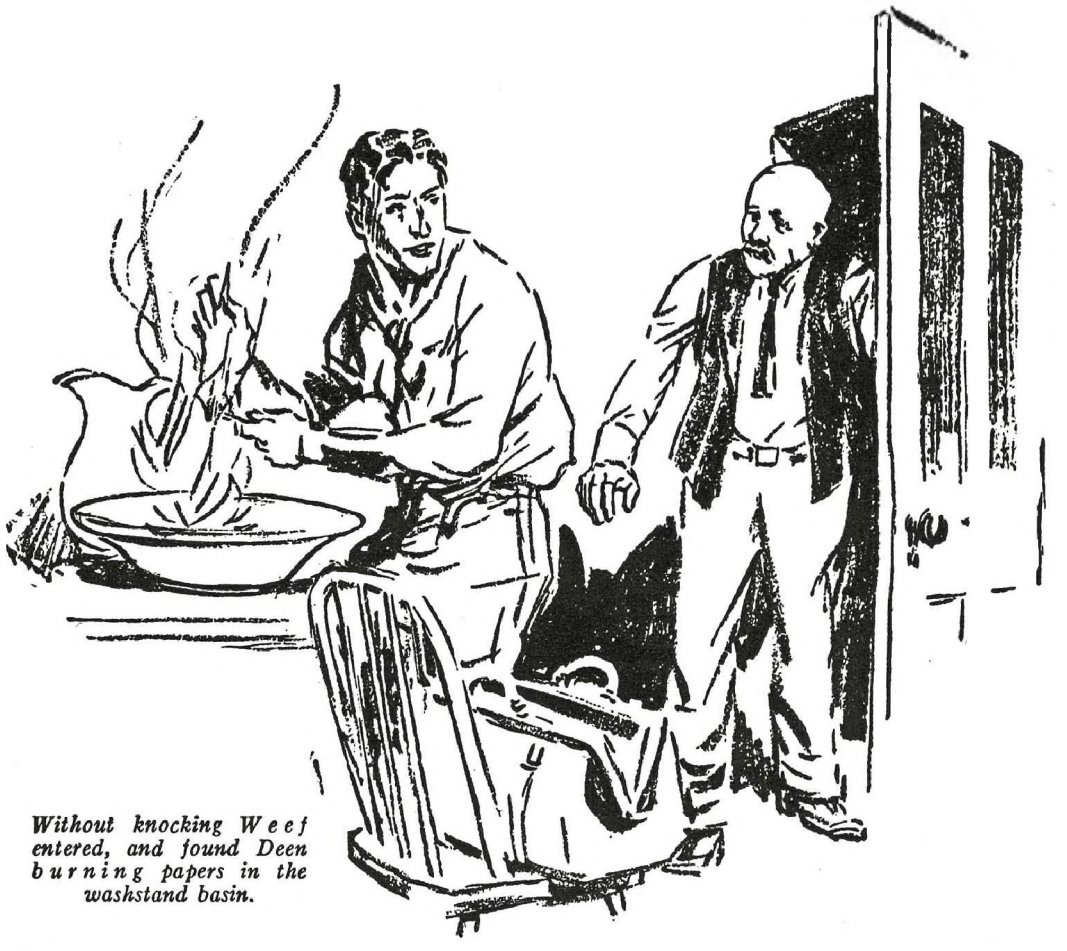
SHARD, however, didn't resign that evening. With two men at his heels he took after Deen next morning in earnest. The fact that Deen had fled, so Shard explained, made guilt evident from what before had been only a string of linked suspicion, developing from the sureness of the hold-up work, the secrecy of the shipment and a knowledge that unknown persons were likely concerned. The deputy gave his two men orders to shoot, to take no chance. Deen was a dangerous man.

But at the same time there still remained ample reason for keeping the previous robbery of the Esperanza strong-room secret from the general public. For one thing, the populace of Charity Basin would be of no help. A second reason was of larger importance. The Esperanza, subsidiary of a corporation active in three States, had put a new sale of stocks on the Eastern market. These would finance, on the Esperanza's own, a costly contemplated drop of shafts to lower levels, extensive general repair work and new milling machinery that was needed. The stocks were good. But at this moment, with the first sale appearing, any newspaper comment that might reach the East, concerning loss on the Esperanza in any form, would be highly detrimental. The loss, which was now increased to seventy-five thousand, was, in fact, no small thing; but the effect such news might have on a reading public expected to buy this stock might be much greater. The Esperanza would sooner have taken the loss without a word than have such happen. At the same time it was not in the habit of closing its eyes to even small theft.

The superintendent of the Esperanza had a short talk with Marshal Arguello some forty-eight hours after that afternoon when Deen had ridden from town. Dust still on his clothing, his sun-bronzed face drawn and haggard from many continuous hours in the saddle, Don Pedro quietly listened.

"Arguello," decided Morton, the Esperanza superintendent, "there's no reason in this round world why the right sort of a posse can't bring that girl in. The thing is ridiculous, in fact."

"None," said Don Pedro, with an expressive gesture of his slender hands, "except that she left no trail behind. We have searched Box Springs Cañon, north, south, west—miles from the point of the robbery. There are no tracks going from there except those made by Shard. The afternoon of the day before the robbery, he had left, to go down to that old place of his father's in the cañon and bring back a fresh horse. Shard was gone overnight. With the posse at my heels the next noon, the day of the robbery, I met Shard returning. He was riding the fresh mount and leading the animal he'd ridden down. He'd been thrown, hurt a bit; and I told him to get on into town—"



Without knocking Weef entered, and found Deen burning papers in the washstand basin.

"I'm speaking of the girl," Morton cut in. "Don't bother to pick up a trail from the point of the robbery. That's not necessary. She was seen, recognized beyond doubt. What more do you want? Get the right sort of a posse, Arguello, go into the Rocas Blancas and bring her out. She's there somewhere. Stay until you get her!"

"Yes," said Marshal Don Pedro Arguello, "it can be done."

"Sure it can be done! Let the rest go; get her, and we'll see that she talks. I'll put up a reward, in fact—five hundred dollars, on the basis of this last robbery. Understand? There'll be no mention of the bullion and currency loss that preceded it. Get me?"

Don Pedro nodded. "It is for you to say. And this Mistaire Deen, do you wish to include him?"

"Let this Deen go," snapped the Esperanza superintendent. "Shard has the fellow on the brain too. Let him go, but get the girl. When she talks, we'll know who else we want."

The Marshal nodded; then thoughtfully, slowly, he left Morton's office.

The following dawn he headed a posse of six picked men and his deputy north, driving as many remounts before them, as well as provision-and-water pack-animals. Five hundred dollars was on Dolora Wetherby's head, for her capture. Uneasily, at Arguello's side, rode Shard. The fall that had hurt his arm had not been serious. The wrist had been sprained; and the sling changed to a stiff bandage now kept it from further injury. The fingers were flexible.

Don Pedro, at last, had every intention of carrying out Morton's advice. In fact, that was all that was left to an honorable gentleman, pledged before any promptings of his own to uphold the letter of the law.

THEN, within an hour's ride from town, on the Bar W Bar road, a thing happened over which he had no control. Nose to nose, at a distance of two or three hundred yards where a mesquite thicket opened into a flat, the posse suddenly met Deen. He was recognized on the instant, even before the roan whirled as though sprung from a catapult and beat a retreat down the edge of the thicket.

Shard, instantly in the lead, began to shoot. The posse swung in at his heels, bul-

lets peppering about the figure far ahead. Then Deen zigzagged into the mesquite. The posse spread out in several directions, watching for him to reappear. Finally the sound of Shard's gun reassembled them. Deen had come out at the rear and was already a quarter of a mile in the distance. The posse, eager as a pack of hounds, freshly mounted that morning, gave chase.

They returned in the small morning hours of the next day, to collect a scattered band of remounts and wandering pack-stock, to re-cinch pack-saddles that had been rolled upon and broken open. But Marshal Don Pedro Arguello had a will of iron. By starlight the posse went forward once more with no halt—a column of bobbing black dots under a spreading cloud of night-gray dust that slowly settled to earth behind—a column, like a file of persistent night ants, weaving toward the immensity of the Rocas Blancas beyond, Don Pedro in the lead. Even Shard grumbled.

BUT the thing had marked a sudden and vital turning point for John Deen. He sought a man, the elder Mark Shard. He wanted to know where that man lived and under what alias. This had grown vitally important to his mind, for a double reason. Once he had risked going back into the town of Charity Basin after nightfall, to watch the streets, hid in a shadow between two buildings. The result had been nothing. So had the visits he had made to the outlying ranches, hovels for the most part, housing Mexican and Indian families. All this time the unsuccessful chase led by young Deputy Shard had been in progress behind him. At last, so thorough a description of Deen had been broadcast that he found it exceedingly dangerous to approach any habitation or man upon the roads. That dawn, just before the chase set in, some one at the Bar W Bar had opened fire at sight.

Under such circumstance, to remain in the vicinity of Charity Basin was both foolhardy and futile. Deen determined on a swift change. Finally losing the newly formed posse an hour or so before sunset, he swung straight and swift north. At midnight he made dry camp. At dawn he continued. Toward noon of that day a change became evidenced in his progress. Some sixty weaving, dust-thick miles behind, Deen no longer pushed the roan, but he strove to leave no visible trail across the country he rode.

This was a thing accomplished with a certain amount of ease. Long, dry rocky washes, occasional valley bottoms dried hard as stone, boulder patches, and lastly the giant, flat-topped, white outcroppings of the Rocas Blancas favored the careful rider. Deen knew the country. He was surprised, once in it, to find how vividly memories came back. The days when he had worked for Seth Wetherby, the Bar W Bar, were not marked hard and cameo-like as the single image when he had stood before Shard, but they were not lost.

Deen found Dolora Wetherby continually in his mind. She had been a child seven or eight years old in those days of the past, beneath the notice of a rider of sixteen drawing a man's wages and doing a man's work, but he remembered her. A child of straw-gold hair and wistful large blue eyes who was eternally asking questions. Deen wondered. His life had been singularly free of companionship with the opposite sex. He knew that girls today often enough carried into action deeds the very thought of which would have stunned their mothers. Today there were criminals among women also, as there had been in all generations. But Deen wondered if any thirst for adventure, action, excitement, could lead a young woman so swiftly into the pass of cool, case-hard banditry that he had seen in the woman of the hold-up.

There was a very plain answer to his question, once he could see Dolora Wetherby again. Deen had shot the gun from her hand, flash-aiming at the forearm. He had seen by the way her gun had dropped that he had hit.

By late afternoon Deen had gained the point he wished, the crest of one of the great white sandstone outcroppings. Mile upon mile was visible in any direction. Roughly, he was near the north edge of the semi-desert, chopped stretch called the Rocas Blancas. Here Deen halted and kept steady watch on the back country, south, until after sundown. Not until then, with the light fading, did he begin to feel his way down, again to the north.

HALF a mile below, he paused, turning reluctantly after a time to the east. He continued for a mile perhaps, slowly working along at an even level. Then he climbed higher and retraced the mile. Again he dropped down, lower than before. Finally, sensing a definite eagerness in the roan, Deen gave the animal its head. Within

twenty minutes after that the roan had its muzzle thrust deep into the coolness of a tiny rock-sided spring. Below the spring a seepage spread out in a little hollow, nourishing a thick growth of *cienaga* grass. Thin, translucent early starlight lay over the scene.

Deen was satisfied. Seth Wetherby, Dolora's father, who, living, knew this country as no other man, had once pointed out the crest of the great rock ridge to Deen from the south, and told him of the spring on the slope beyond. Deen unsaddled and tethered the roan, and from behind the saddle cantle took a thin burlap-covered roll which held a scant store of provisions. He slept the sleep of both exhaustion and security that night.

But at dawn, waking chilled and stiff, the sense of security was suddenly gone. Deen saw almost with his first waking glance that the grass of the *cienaga* was trampled, grazed here and there in small rough-appearing patches. Swiftly Deen moved across the hollow, pondering the visible bits of evidence. Four or five head of saddle-stock, all well shod, had been in the *cienaga* not later than a week before. The soft ooze just below the spring still bore the imprints of boot-heels. Searching on, Deen found where the cooking fire had been laid, sheltered deep within a split crevice of a rock shelf. The place was almost a cave, with a cracked, open fissure above as skylight. A water-pail and two fire-black pots had been left behind; they were upturned, dished upon each other and clean. For several moments Deen scrutinized the heap of burnt-out black fire-embers before him.

AND before sunup he had retraced his way to the summit of the barren sandstone crest above. Here he kept a stoical watch. In the middle afternoon his patience was rewarded. Far to the west, down the sweep of a valley that headed under the south wall of the slope, he saw a tiny, rising speck of dust. In the gigantic scale of the landscape it appeared not to move; yet before daylight was gone, Deen could distinguish the miniature dots of black that rode below. He knew the water-hole they were headed for.

A definite plan was Deen's. For four days, patiently, nightly returning to the little *cienaga* and water, he watched the play of Arguello's pawns through the immense landscape spread under his gaze. He saw the splitting of the posse almost below him, saw one faction head north into the country that flattened beyond into true desert. These men, three in number, were lost for forty-eight hours, appearing again in the west, striking for the valley water-hole. At one time Arguello himself rode the ridge of Deen's watching, coming almost within shouting distance. Deen waited, ready to ride, but Arguello moved slowly on.

Then for the passing of one afternoon and the next day, Deen lost all sign of movement below him. The riders seemed to have disappeared. Perhaps they had accomplished their purpose—and ended Deen's with the same move. His provisions were gone; he had to risk the noise of his gun that evening, to bowl over two young jackrabbits on the edge of the *cienaga*.

At dawn he saddled the roan, preparing to ride if nothing appeared through the morning. But no sooner had he breasted the now familiar wall than a dust-head below him, east, caught his eye. Fairly under the coming sun, half an hour behind, a second could be made out. The chase was on. Perhaps it had been going on for hours past—Deen had no way of knowing. But at last it had come directly under his eye. The roan again had work to do. It would have been impossible for Deen, alone and unaided, to have scoured the vast stretches of this country for the quarry that Arguello had now flushed. This much of his purpose was accomplished for him.

For moments Deen looked on. The leading dust-head was all of three miles away, but it appeared near in the gigantic surroundings, in the dry, crystal-clear morning atmosphere. Deen swung west, dropping down the southerly slope. Rough country, and he moved slowly. Then, before he had made the bottoms in his angled course, he saw that the pursued had swung abruptly south. Whether they had seen him or not, Deen never knew; it would have taken sharp eyes. His only course was to swing south also. This meant openly crossing the bottoms. Deen risked it.

FULL two hours later, from the summit of the next lateral range south, lower by a thousand feet than the point he had left, Deen could find no trace of the fore-riders. For thirty minutes he waited for them to appear somewhere in the country beyond. They never did. Suddenly careful for the tracks of his own mount, Deen turned still west along this summit. In the valley behind, he saw that two members of the posse

had eased their pace and were continuing west, heading for the valley water-hole, Deen surmised. He considered the significance of this. It meant, probably, that Arguello, flushing his quarry, definitely locating it at last, now moved to guard the scattered water-holes and springs with one hand, while the other continued the direct chase. With this, also, Arguello prepared to relay his men, as chance would make such possible. It was a move both crafty and subtle, worthy of the Marshal.

Deen finally discovered a fragment of the posse beating down the far slopes to the south. Apparently the men were riding blindly. Toward noon riders were in the valley bottoms to either side, attempting to pick up the trail that surely now was lost. What their success was, Deen didn't know. Eventually both bands disappeared; and fully realizing Arguello's skill, Deen had lingered too long to chance an open ride for himself before the coming of dusk. By some foxlike turn in the trail the quarry—which in all probability meant Dolora Wetherby—had brought things to a temporary standstill, from which there was no telling how the scene would shift and open at the next daybreak.

As dusk settled, Deen moved into the valley that he had crossed that morning, heading again for the great sandstone ridge beyond. He meant to have feed and water for the roan once more at the spring on the far side that night, and at dawn again take his old position on the summits, until he could see how things were working out. His brief hours in the chase that morning had netted him just what Arguello's longer hours had brought—nothing! So much had been failure. And at such time as Arguello actually succeeded in cutting off all available source of water, if that was his plan, Deen knew that, without provisions also, the next twenty-four hours would force him into some camp and unconditional surrender, or back to Charity Basin.

As the night thickened, the roan knew where it was bound, and was eager.

FROM the great, sandstone-capped ridge Deen turned down the north slope with a slow, feeling care. The roan was restless under him, tugging gently at the bit, anxious to get on to the feed and water just below. Deen paused from time to time, listening into the starlight night. It was within easy chance that the spring was already under Arguello's guard. Finally he halted just above the little hollow. His nostrils caught the freshness of the tiny *cienaga* below, lush-growing grass, fresh water. The roan fretted. As Deen waited, still cautious, some slight veering of the night breeze brought a new odor—and it was smoke!

A fire somewhere had evidently just been lighted. Yet there was no spot of glow or reflection to the sides of the small hollow. The pungent odor of mesquite-root smoke grew momentarily stronger, slightly acrid to the nostrils. A horse whinnied softly in the night beyond. Deen suddenly dismounted and had the nostrils of his own mount under his hand. He tightened the *boscel* so that the animal could not answer. Softly in the stillness, then, there came the sound of a laugh, lilting, rising note. It came from a woman's throat!

Deen mounted, turned swiftly on soft ground. A hundred yards away, he tied the roan with a short rope. He came back afoot, gaining the shelf rocks above. Carefully, lithe in movement as one of the big mountain cats that had undoubtedly stalked prey here in the same manner, he dropped onto the little ledge back of the spring. He saw a broad strip of soft reddish fire-glow open before him then. He could trace the weaving curls of smoke that rose from the rock crevice, faintly lighted, reddish from the under-flames. Deen stepped softly on. He knew now who had used the little meadow and spring so shortly before his own coming.

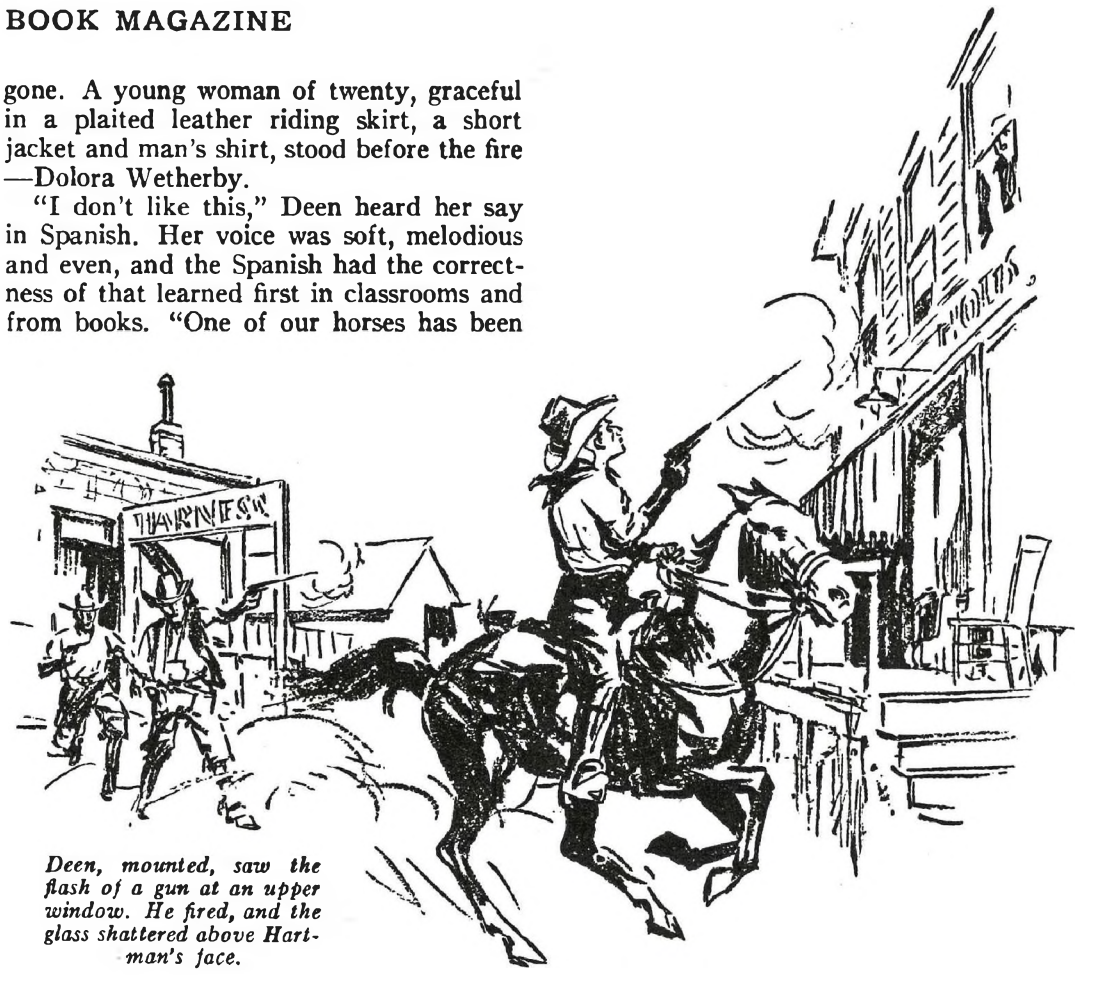
Ten feet below him, in the spreading crevice, the fire lighted what might have been a tiny room with walls of living rock and a floor of sand. A slender young Mexican bent over the fire, feeding it with small fuel. At his side was a girl of the same race. She was busily preparing food. They chatted in Spanish. A short thirty-thirty carbine rested, butt in the sand, against one wall. A heap of saddle- and pack-gear had been thrown inside the twisting entrance to the crevice, and the fire-glow played across this in leaping shadow and light, glinting from the silver inlay and ornament of bits and headstalls in reflected tiny highlights.

The Mexican girl turned after a while and called softly over her shoulder. Deen didn't catch the words.

From just inside the shadowed entrance a third figure appeared. Deen saw the sea-blue eyes that he remembered, the mass of straw-gold hair, as she came near to the fire. But with this all semblance to the questioning child of Bar W Bar days was

gone. A young woman of twenty, graceful in a plaited leather riding skirt, a short jacket and man's shirt, stood before the fire —Dolora Wetherby.

"I don't like this," Deen heard her say in Spanish. Her voice was soft, melodious and even, and the Spanish had the correctness of that learned first in classrooms and from books. "One of our horses has been



Deen, mounted, saw the flash of a gun at an upper window. He fired, and the glass shattered above Hartman's face.

whinnying. They are restless all of a sudden. A moment ago I thought I heard hoofs above, somewhere."

The young Mexican smiled reassuringly. "This spring, it is safe. We have hid here before, señorita," he reminded her.

"This is not the same," she said. "There was shooting this morning, José."

"Señorita, I do not forget."

"I believe Arguello is behind," the girl continued. "He knows this country like a book. He'll come onto this spring sooner or later. Something that I don't understand is wrong. Something has happened!"

Dolora Wetherby slowly lifted the sleeve of her right arm, gazing fixedly down at it. And Deen suddenly saw that the forearm was bandaged with white! He smiled a bit grimly into the night.

On the instant a short halloo sounded near at hand, from the edge of the meadow. The young Mexican reached for the rifle. Deen, catlike, dropped flat on the rock above. There was sudden darkness below as the Mexican girl upturned a pail of water over the fire. . . . .

But it turned out to be young Deputy Shard, riding alone. He laughed as the Mexican youth, José, rekindled the fire.

"Well, this is what you might call luck," he said with a futile attempt at geniality. "But not so much luck as it might seem on the face. I knew you must have headed back this way. When Arguello wanted a man to come on to this spring, I volunteered."

"What," Dolora asked uncertainly, "do you intend to do, Mark?"

"Intend?" Shard laughed again. "I've had only one intention since the start of this thing. That's to help you get away. Does that sound right?"

"Yes, yes; but what has happened? Why this posse under Arguello?"

"Plenty. Plenty has happened," Shard said sharply. "It all means you've got to ride, ride out of this country for good, for once and for all. Wilt Young and a couple of men report that there's water in Skeleton Wells, north. That will make it fairly easy. You hit out through there, hit the desert straight north. See? You'll have maybe a

week before Arguello will give up here, and by that time, Dolora, with luck you can be on the Coast, Los Angeles or San Francisco. I'd advise a good-sized city."

"But—Mark! But I can't do that! There's really no reason—"

The young deputy smiled in the increasing firelight. He was two or three inches taller than Dolora, standing beside her, yet almost as slenderly formed. He made a nervous, impatient gesture.

"Dolora, you're not of age yet, you know," he said. "Not in this State. What you've taken from the Bar W Bar may belong to you by right, but it's still in trust with your uncle Abel Wetherby, legally so. You've stolen from him, from the property he's legally guardian of. It would make a unique case in court, I'll admit—but you'd better not allow it to get there."

"No?" The girl's face flushed angrily. "He's stealing from me. He's ruining the ranch and investing the profits on his own. By the time I'm of age, six months from now, there'll be just about half of my birthright left for me."

Shard gave a quick nod. "Like enough," he agreed. "But by the terms of your father's will, all profits apart from actual sale of the land go to your uncle, as administrator. You can't do a thing. Your father put too much trust in his brother's honor, that's all."

"Sometimes I think he's not my uncle," cried the girl, "—that he couldn't be! Mark, I once talked with Don Pedro about it all, about what I saw happening. Do you know what he advised?"

Shard shook his head.

"Just about what I've done," the girl told him. "It was a thing that could be done."

The deputy whistled softly under his breath. Deen, bellied close against the rock above, smiled thinly to himself, thoughtfully. Small wonder, then, that Marshal Don Pedro Arguello rode with leaden stirrups and a heavy heart!

"But I wont run out of the country!" the girl continued. "I wont sneak off like some criminal about to be hanged. This has been a game, good sport, and I'll see it through. With a fight! I'd like to hear just what any jury would say, hearing the facts—"

SHARD took a couple of paces away, turned hesitantly.

"Listen!" he exclaimed suddenly, dramatically. "They'd say that you were an accomplice in highway robbery! That you are a thief to the extent of some seventy-five thousand dollars!"

The girl stared at him, speechless, for a full moment.

"Mark!" she finally cried. "Mark, what—what's happened?"

"Send the Mexes away. I'll tell you."

Dolora gave orders for José to go down to the meadow, to see that the horses were all right for the night, and to take the girl with him.

"Now—" said Shard. He paused suddenly. "Say, what's the matter? What's wrong with your arm there?" he asked.

"Some of the posse shot at us this morning. A spent bullet hit my arm."

Shard scowled thoughtfully. He uttered some low exclamation. Then, prompted by the girl, he continued with the story of the Box Springs hold-up. Dolora Wetherby's face turned white as death as she listened. She seemed stunned, as though her mind would not accept the facts in his words. Shard repeated:

"It was on the Box Springs road. The Esperanza guard and the stage-driver both identified you. This stranger, Deen, shot—and his bullet knocked the gun from your right hand. Do you understand? *Your right hand!*"

"But—but," began the girl weakly, "they don't believe that! Nobody would believe that of me!"

"They do," snapped Shard irritably. "I said you were identified. Isn't that enough? And in the strong-room robbery—bullion, and ten thousand dollars in cash—a woman's glove was left behind. Your Uncle Abel has finally confessed that this glove is your size, the kind you usually wore. Now do you understand? Do you understand now what it will mean if you are caught? On top of that—with a bullet wound in your right arm!"

The girl's eyes were steely in the deathly white of her features. She merely nodded.

"Listen, Dolora!" Shard went on. "Trust me. I can fix it so you'll get away. You know I've always cared for you. Four or five months from now, I'll be able to leave here without suspicion and meet you somewhere on the Coast. I can get to Arguello's camp in three hours tonight, and before dawn have him riding south. By a little care, with a little luck, it'll be a week before he'll actually know you're gone. Skeleton Wells, north—in that week you'll be gone clean."

"Are you making terms with me, Mark?" asked the girl quietly. "Are you telling me what you'll do for a price, for the price of my meeting you later?"

Shard hesitated. "Well, don't put it quite that way," he said. "I want to help you. You know that."

"And if I wont pay the price, if I refuse?" she questioned lowly.

"I'll be forced to wash my hands of you," he told her bluntly. His voice rose in a shrill whine. "What else can I do, Dolora? The evidence is there. I can't contradict it. The law will take its own course. Dolora, this has got to be a showdown."

"A showdown," she repeated. "I can chose my way—you, or the law! Is that what it amounts to?"

Shard bit his lips. After a moment he answered thickly in a single word:

"Yes."

"Very well," she said instantly, "I'll choose. It isn't you, Mark! I've told you that before, that it never would be."

Shard's face flushed. "You're not thinking what you're saying," he told her. "You're not thinking what the inside of a prison will look like!"

"Perhaps not."

"A word will block Skeleton Wells so that you'll never get out," he threatened.

She nodded. "I've told you, Mark; it will never be you."

Still he continued: "I can get Arguello south. I'll manage it. You'll have plenty of time. Think this over. Wouldn't it be better to hit out of here, never come back, than to do ten years in prison? That's what it means—prison for you! Think what you're saying." Shard's face was flushed. "Arguello's in here now to take you back—to prison! Ten years—twenty! Think!" A new suspicion crossed his reddening face. "Do you believe I'm lying to you? Lying about what evidence there is against you?"

The girl shook her head. "No. You're in a position to know what it is. I believe you. But it's false evidence! False—no matter what it is, no matter what anyone believes!"

"I—wash my hands of you!" snapped Shard. "I've given you a chance!"

He turned away, then swung back suddenly. His face was livid. He mumbled something, and with swift arm reached out and caught her shoulders.

"I'll show you—"

"Señor," interrupted José's soft voice from the shadow of the entrance, "señor, be careful!"

The firelight glinted on the blunt short barrel of José's thirty-thirty. Deen, on the rock above, carefully holstered his own revolver and relaxed.

Shard swung away, strode swiftly past José in the entrance. In the darkness beyond he halted. He asked, after a moment, attempting to control the thickness in his voice:

"That's your choice? I'm giving you a last chance."

"You've had my answer," said the girl.

Before a short moment had elapsed, Deen heard Shard's mount striking swiftly through the rocks above, the clatter of iron-shod hoofs on stone. A horse in the meadow neighed after him.

Deen carefully stood up, stretching the stiffness from his body. He stood on the edge of the crevice, then softly dropped down. Landing, he stood almost before Dolora Wetherby, his face lighted by the full glow of the fire. A motion halted the gun again lifting in José's hand.

FOR a full moment the girl looked into his face, silent. Then she said, almost as though speaking to herself:

"Deen! John Deen—I should have recognized the name. So you're the man who shot the gun from my hand in the hold-up?"

"I doubt it," said Deen. "In fact, I'm certain I didn't! If I'm a judge, you heard of the thing for the first time tonight. Shard told it to you that way. Very strange!"

She smiled suddenly. "It's—why, it's twelve years since you were on the Bar W Bar. It's that long ago! But you don't seem to have changed so much."

"Do you still ask questions?" asked John Deen. "You used to."

She laughed. Her eyes were the wistful, sparkling blue that Deen remembered. José set the rifle against the rock. Then suddenly Dolora Wetherby's smile was gone.

"I do," she said slowly and seriously. "Here's one: John Deen, how would it come that we found ten thousand dollars, even, in currency, hidden in my uncle's bedroom at the ranch?"

"That was the night you plundered the Bar W Bar a few weeks ago?"

"Yes. I thought it was from some Bar W Bar sale of stock. I took part of it, but I couldn't imagine where so much money

had come from, unless my uncle had sold all the stock on the ranch."

"Uh-huh," considered John Deen. "That's a strange coincidence, isn't it? The Esperanza robbery concerned bullion in the bulk, but there was just ten thousand dollars in currency. Huh! In the light of that, now, just what does this Uncle Abel of yours look like, may I ask? I've never seen him. Is it possible that he could pass for you in a hold-up, say, with a bandana mask and a yellow wig?"

"Utterly impossible. Don't be ridiculous, John Deen. He weighs almost two hundred; his shoulders are like mountains. And unless he's shaved, his beard hangs down to the middle of his chest. He's not —well, effeminate in the least."

"So? That might almost fit the description of a man I saw in Charity Basin the other day. This man interested me. He bore a remarkable resemblance in my eyes to Mark Shard, the elder, as he might look after—well, after twelve years of time."

The girl nodded sympathetically. "I haven't forgotten. It all left a strong impression on my mind. Father, I remember, said Shard deserved killing. Later, Father tried to find where you had gone, to bring you back, and couldn't. But Shard didn't make much on the mine after all, and he died two or three years later. He was thrown, down in Box Springs Cañon; a foot caught in the stirrup; he was dragged to death. I never remember seeing him."

"This—you don't hold what you remember against young Mark, the son?" asked Deen thoughtfully.

"No. I believe I'm fairer-minded than that. Mark, as I first remember him, was a poor starved kid about the Charity Basin, which at that time was too hurried to bother with him or anyone else. The fact that my uncle gave the boy a home at the Bar W Bar is one of his few creditable actions. I was sent East shortly after that."

DEEN was thoughtfully silent for a moment; then he pushed the whole past behind with a gesture.

"But we're concerned with you and the present now, Miss Wetherby. What is your idea? Will Shard immediately lead Arguello back here tonight?"

"I don't know," she answered. "I don't think so."

"All right. We'll give our mounts as much time to rest and freshen up as possible then. But at dawn we ride."

"North?" she asked, as though she intended to obey unquestioningly.

"South," he told her. "You can consider that you are my prisoner. That you have surrendered and are in—well, in the hands of the law. Just what the law will do, I don't know, but—well, something."

THEY didn't ride south. A thing rare in Deen's experience happened that night. He woke four or five hours later, sleep instantly gone. Another man would have called it a hunch. Dawn was still several hours distant. Deen roused José, not pausing to consider a reason for his action.

"Get the stock saddled. Get packs on."

The Mexican girl—José's wife—and Dolora soon had a little breakfast fire burning. A horse began to whinny insistently in the *cienaga*. With a single motion Deen doused the fire.

"Get in the saddle. Let the last pack go."

Mounted, they turned down across the little *cienaga* in the pale late starlight, driving a pack and two loose horses before them. The stock went through a patch of rocks below, shod hoofs ringing. A deep, husky voice suddenly shouted from above:

"Halt, down there! Stop!"

Deen and José began to lash the loose stock ahead. A little pin-point dot of flame sputtered suddenly behind. A rifle cut in from the right. Resounding echoes filled the hollow—crashed and rattled with thunderous peals against the ledge faces above. The loose stock headed down the slope, north, in panic. The little cavalcade rode.

By dawn, miles had passed. They were deep in a strip of barranca land that flattened gradually into the wastes of desert country north; and the pursuit, at least temporarily, was gone. José, by some expert piece of rope-work, had caught the single pack-animal ahead, but the two loose horses were lost in the wild ride. The four slowed their mounts now, anticipating the many miles that must lie ahead.

Deen still did not want to go north. He had some thought of surrender, thinking of Dolora Wetherby and the peril to her in another brush of gunfire, but this as a last resort. He began to head east, in the hope of cutting back sometime in the morning. With that in view, at sunrise, the skill of Arguello again manifested itself.

Losing the quarry on the rough north slope, in the night, Arguello had evidently split his men into a three- or four-fingered

fan. Arguello himself, a single man at his side, suddenly appeared now on a ridge to the right. The two charged down, but there was no shooting.

The renewed chase again went north, down the winding course of a rough, low-walled cañon. The four were held back by the slowest of their mounts, the Mexican girl's. Arguello gained, moving ahead of his companion.

Perhaps a mile passed. Arguello began to shoot, aiming carefully low at the stock ahead. The Mexican girl's mount sharply stumbled, wounded, then regained its legs.

José, before Deen comprehended his purpose, slid his mount to a halt. In an instant he had dismounted, throwing the thirty-thirty to his shoulder. The rifle boomed, a single shot. Arguello slipped slowly forward in the saddle. His mount, frightened, leaped sidewise. Arguello fell. With the momentum, his body turned twice over, loose-jointedly, then lay in a still, dusty heap.

His spur-mad, frightened horse came charging on. José swerved back, caught the animal by a rein.

Ten minutes later, at a point where the cañon opened, the four halted. The man behind Arguello had stayed with his fallen chief. Deen found no words. José, as though acting in a compelling daze, was mounting his wife on Arguello's horse. Her own animal was finally down.

"José will have to head north now," Deen finally told Dolora. "He and his wife must keep going. We'll take what we can each carry on a saddle from the pack; they'll need the rest."

It was done. José was terrified now, as he slowly comprehended his act. After he and the girl had gone, Deen turned to Dolora.

"When Arguello fell, Dolora," he said, "I think you lost your best friend in Charity Basin."

The posse suddenly met Deen. The roan wheeled as Shard, in the lead, began to shoot.

CHAPTER V

THE posses split, five men heading north after a brief, half-understandable story from Arguello's lips and the words of the man behind. At midday these followed the well-defined tracks of three animals, riding hard on a trail that was pointing like a finger now for Skeleton Wells. They knew then that, Deen added to its list, the quarry had split on them; but with the tracks so fresh ahead, all five continued. The remaining two, Shard and the man who had stayed with Arguello, rode back, brought up remounts from the valley water-hole and constructed a litter between two animals, to carry the Marshal south to Charity Basin, a doctor and a hospital.

Some time elapsed before this could be accomplished by slow night march. Arguello could not lie on the litter with the full sunlight blazing down on him; neither could he stand the jolt of even a trot pace. The Marshal was hotly feverish as it was, and in occasional periods of delirium he told of strange things. The ride was a nightmare to Shard, who returned at Arguello's order to lead a new posse north. Twice the two who rode beside the litter

thought it was all over and Don Pedro dead, but each time he roused from the burning, dull lethargy. Crude first-aid had been applied to his wound. The bullet had gone clean, and it appeared that the wound was draining as it should.

Then suddenly, in the last hours of the ride, the Marshal opened clear eyes. Almost as swiftly the fever lessened. But when the litter riders at last entered Charity Basin, it was an early morning three days after Arguello's fall.

THE town was in an uproar. They found the Rawlins and Charity Basin stage-driver in the focus of attention once more. He had again been held up on the Box Springs road, just leaving town this time, on the return trip. A masked woman, as before, and a man had done the business, seating themselves in the rear of the stage and commanding the driver to continue. At Rawlins, that late afternoon which was now a part of yesterday, the armed woman had held the driver on the outskirts of town, while the man, apparently, had sought the County Clerk's office. Anyhow, a marriage license had been written, because that night the ceremony was performed. The youthful stage driver had even been a forced witness, with a gun under the man's coat against his ribs.

Those were the details. Still with a gun behind him, the youth had returned the couple to about the point where they had first held him up. He had recognized them both, heard both names. The man was the stranger who had been a passenger of the stage in the former hold-up—Deen, by name; the girl was Dolora Wetherby. Arguello, hearing, seemed to smile for the first time on his cot at the Esperanza's hospital.

But Charity Basin, if there had been doubt before in any detail, now needed no further proof, despite the certain strangeness of the incident. On top of this, Morton, the Esperanza superintendent, suddenly gave out public information of the previous strong-room loss. It was like a bomb-shell. The town gasped. In mass those citizens accustomed to the feel of guns began to present themselves to Shard. He made a large and swift choice. Men were sent to get mounts from Weef Hartman's fenced half-section of pasture, just outside town. Already the middle of the morning had passed.

Shard in moments seemed to change. It might have been fear in his sharp face; it might have been only some deadly anger, or it might have been both. He gave this speech in public:

"Charity Basin, I reckon, don't need outside help in this. It's our business. I'll inform the County Sheriff, at Rawlins, to that effect. Scatter out now, men, and see if you can pick up this last trail. It'll head out from Box Springs Cañon somewhere. When any of you pick it up, send the news in to me fast. I'll bring up the rest of the men and join you. Understand? If it comes to shooting in the end, shoot—and shoot to kill! Don't forget Arguello and the Esperanza guard! Don't forget that this Deen is as dangerous and daring as a lobo wolf, or a rattler about to strike."

The metaphors appealed to Charity Basin, surging inwardly with excitement and wishing more. Then Shard, the leader whom men so fully and suddenly appreciated, swiftly made his way over to the Basin House.

Weef Hartman, his bald head shining from behind the hotel desk, had apparently been untouched by the mob commotion. He looked at Shard with his greedy piggish eyes, a man ready and willing to undertake anything not physically dangerous for a price. There was a certain bond of fellow feeling between these two. That was why Shard instinctively came to Hartman now.

"Somethin' wrong, Depitty?" Hartman asked carelessly.

"Weef, get that old wreck of a car you use. I want you to take me out to the Bar W Bar—fast!"

SHARD might have commandeered any car from the streets; but inexplicably, he chose not to. It was seven miles out to the Bar W Bar and a fair road, the only road to the northward rim of the basin where first stretches of the barren Rocas Blancas lifted. While Shard waited in the Basin House entry, below the curved stem of the unreplaced light globe which his own bullet had shattered, Ed Morton, superintendent of the Esperanza, hurried up to him.

"Shard, I've got a bit of information for you personally. If you have a minute, I want to talk to you."

Shard was busy with his own thoughts. Weef came to a squeaking halt in the street before him.

"Later, Mr. Morton. Sometime later. I'm leaving now. Important."

"Where are you bound?"

"North. Bar W Bar road. I'll talk to you later, Mr. Morton."

Ed Morton was at Shard's heels. "Oh, well," he said, "if there's such a rush, I'll come along. Talk to you on the road."

Shard made a motion almost as though to push the Esperanza superintendent away from the rear seat of the car, but Morton was already climbing in. The deputy's face turned livid.

"I tell you I'm busy," he fairly shouted. "Hell of a hurry!"

"Well, climb in," said Morton with unruffled commonsense. "Climb in and we're off. What's the matter with you?"

WITH a sudden helplessness Shard took a seat at Weef's side. They shot out through town. Shard did not turn back in the seat. Finally Morton touched him on the shoulder.

"It's about this fellow Deen," Morton said. "He came here in the employ of the Esperanza. I'd have told you before only —well, I had orders to the contrary."

Instantly Shard knew that a vital piece of information was coming to his ears, information which in his hurry he would have cast behind. He whirled about, his sharp face inches from Morton's.

"What's that?" he cried. "What d'you say?"

"This Deen came here in the employ of the Esperanza," Morton repeated concisely. "For the past five years he's been working for one of the companies north. Nevada City. In short, he had the reputation for a cool head, a fast gun if necessary and—well, the ability to see things. He knew the country here from boyhood. So, after the strong-room robbery, it was decided to send Deen down here on the quiet. He had the proper authority. I was informed and told to watch for him. No one else was to know his connection."

"Yes," breathed Shard. "Yes, go on."

"For that reason I didn't inform you or Arguello. But I intimated to Arguello once that he needn't bother about Deen. Now, with the several turns things have taken, I'm giving you the facts. I should have done so before."

Shard breathed in short gasps. His body was rigid as metal. His sharp mind shot back and forth, seeking expression, some loophole. In fact, he did not understand Morton, or Morton's purpose. The sudden vitalness of the dénouement to his own plans stunned Shard. Finally he put an idea into words:

"That's all very well, Morton—very good! But after what's happened, this Deen is going to be brought in. Unless he surrenders, I'll give the posse orders to shoot. It's all I can do."

Morton showed his surprise. "Of course, of course! What else are you thinking of, man? I'm not trying to clear Deen. He's in on the thing undoubtedly now. His throwing in with the girl shows that. I have my own opinion of what happened."

"What's that?" asked Deputy Shard rather breathlessly.

"He saw the girl that morning of the Box Springs hold-up, then took after her, meaning probably to bring her in by some roundabout method of his own figuring. All square and above-board, Shard. But when he found the girl, it turned into that old story of a pretty face being the stronger, or maybe it was the money. You see? Anyhow, this identified marriage proves where he stands, beyond doubt. Nothing could speak louder! He's with the girl to ride free with her now—and later help her spend the spoils. There's no other explanation!"

"That's it!" exclaimed Shard. "That's the explanation to a hair's-breadth!"

Weef Hartman was surprised to hear Shard whistling the breath of a little tune later, while the deputy still urged a wild rate of speed over the rutty, ungraded road.

NERVOUSNESS returned to Shard as they approached the Bar W Bar. Morton had to be kept outside, Weef Hartman too. He had to talk with Abel Wetherby alone, had to make it fast.

"Wait here," Shard commanded, as the car swung into the yards. He was hurrying in long strides toward the rear door of the old low-roofed adobe house before Weef had brought the machine to a full halt. Weef settled back easily in the driver's seat, sighing under his ragged mustache. Ed Morton leaned restlessly forward. Neither spoke.

Shard kicked the kitchen door open before him with a single blow. With a stride he was in the room. A table littered with past meals on a dirty red tablecloth stood before him. Beyond were shelves holding rows of thick dishes, a rack of cooking-pots and pans, a cupboard. Bright-colored curtains that Dolora had once made in a futile attempt to cheer up the house, just

after her return from the East, hung dusty and unwashed in the windows.

Abel Wetherby, in the midst of cooking an early noon meal for himself, stood before the heavy iron stove, behind him a kettle that issued white steam. Hearing the car come into the yards, Wetherby had evidently taken steps against uncertain surprise. There was no window to that side of the room. A long, shiny-barreled rifle was in Wetherby's hands. He looked more than ever like a middle-aged patriarch valiantly ready now to give fight for his own. A thin smile twisted Deputy Shard's lips.

"All ready against surprise, huh?" he snapped. With the same breath he asked, "Anybody here?"

"No. Do I usually keep somebody here?"

"Thought maybe one of the boys—"

"The boys have their own bunkhouse when they're here."

To the left were two doors, opening into the main part of the house. Nervously Shard crossed the room, past the table, threw the first door open, then closed it sharply. He stepped on to the second. A scowl was on Wetherby's watching face.

"That next door's locked," he growled. "There's no use for the room since Dolora left. I keep it locked. I know what's in my own house."

Shard, so close, nevertheless gave the knob a quick turn. He remembered that Dolora had kept a key which she'd used, raiding the ranch-house that night five or six weeks before. Wetherby had told him. Shard swung back. The deputy expected something in the nature of a scene now.

"You've heard the news?"

"What news?"

"This Deen has married Dolora."

HAD Abel Wetherby been struck a blow from behind his expression would not have been more dumfounded. Agonized surprise was on his features for seconds. Then it turned into a blind anger.

"Where were you all the while?" he bellowed loudly. "Where were you?"

Shard spread his hands in a quick gesture "What could I do, Father?"

"*Father?*" echoed Wetherby. "You fool, you brainless fool! If I hear you breathe that word again, I'll kill you where you stand!"

Shard was seemingly not impressed, as he looked up into the big man's face. "Excuse the slip," he said, half-smiling. "Listen! Deen came here for the Esperanza. I've found that out—"

IT was a second invisible blow to Wetherby. But it left him silent. His only move was an instinctive tightening of fingers on the rifle. Shard smiled thinly again, as though vaguely enjoying the discomfort he was able to give the other. Nevertheless he continued swiftly:

"Listen! Deen can't know anything yet. The fact that he's fled again proves it. The town is convinced, one way or another, that he's in on the robberies. And the town is mine this morning! Morton spilled the strong-room theft story, including the glove clue we left behind. Arguello's shot."

"And," said Wetherby in a suddenly shaking whisper, "suppose Deen is caught, brought in? I can't keep in hiding if a trial comes off. Deen will recognize me. Suppose he an' the girl put two an' two together finally? Suppose—"

"Suppose," interrupted Shard, "that Deen never sees a trial. I tell you this town is mine this morning. They'll shoot on the slightest excuse. There's not a chance. But to block even a chance we two are riding as soon as a trail is picked up. Come on, get a move! That's what I came here for—for you!"

"I—I don't see," muttered Wetherby.

"We two are going to be there to shoot," snapped Shard. "We're going to be there to see that Deen is never captured alive. You're Dolora's enraged uncle. Do you forget? Grab a hat. Hartman's waiting."

Slowly Wetherby nodded, a vicious cunning spreading into his eyes. "And the girl?" he asked softly.

Shard's face was hard. "I've washed my hands of her. Washed them clean. She had her choice—she made it, and more. She can take the consequences."

Wetherby still hesitated.

"Get your hat," snapped Shard. "What're you waiting for?"

Wetherby leaned down close and whispered: "That bullion. It didn't seem safe where it was. I moved it two-three nights ago. Tore up the closet floor in Dolora's room, buried it underneath. I'm goin' to take a look, see if things look all right. Then I'll come."

Shard was impatient. "I tell you every minute counts! We got to ride with the first man who brings news that they've struck a trail."

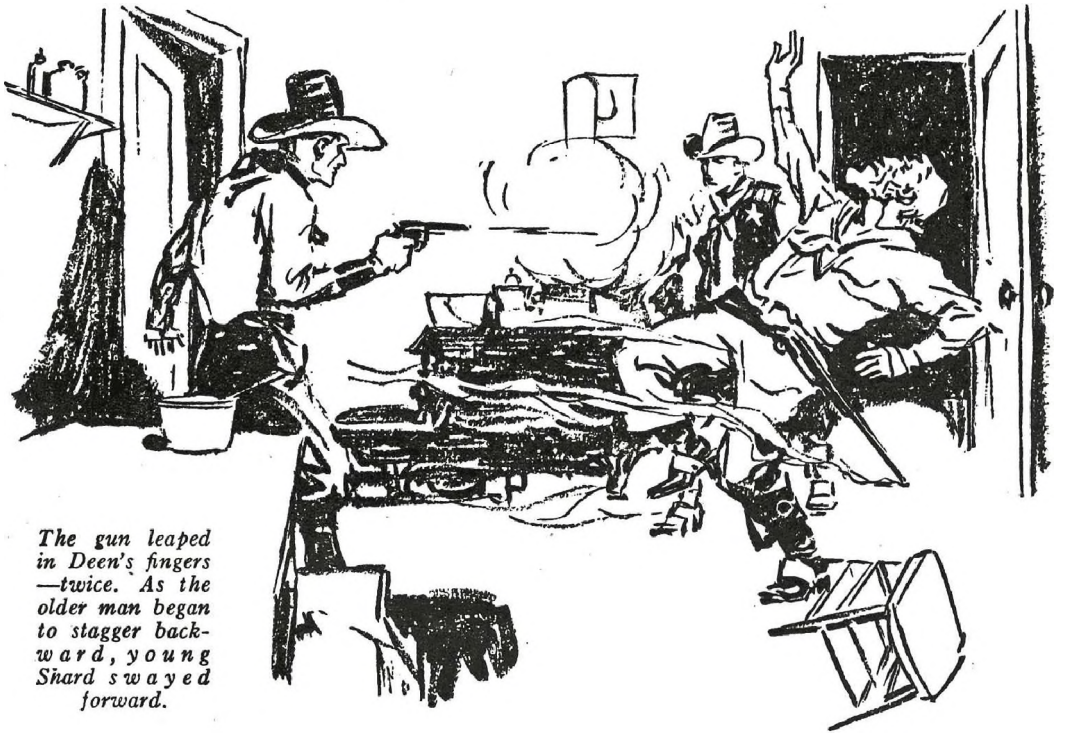
"All right. All—" Wetherby's voice died. An uncontrollable impulse seemed to lift his right finger from the stock of the rifle. It lifted two or three inches, to point at the second door across the kitchen, the door that was kept locked because Dolora's room was never used these days—and because of what was buried under the closet floor.

what're you goin' to do about it? Now what?" he asked. John Deen, sixteen years old, went berserk. . . . .

In actuality John Deen fought the same blinding rage from his eyes now. He conquered. His stiff lips said:

"You two have the privilege of surrender—to me!"

Those words ended the battle of John



The gun leaped in Deen's fingers —twice. As the older man began to stagger backward, young Shard swayed forward.

For an instant the young deputy, his back to the door, merely stared up into the face of this big man he had called father. Then as though stung by a whiplash, he whirled, his right hand with the same movement dropping to his hip.

THE icy smile across his face, John Deen stood in the opened doorway. There was a tigerish grace in the tenseness of his body. The right hand, half lifted, fingers spread a tiny bit, was like a balanced claw of spring steel, ready for a hair-gesture to release it in action. The smile was a frozen thing. . . . . To John Deen's eyes the flimsy disguise of beard, the added flesh of the years, a studied dignity, were gone from the elder man's big figure. He saw in this man the Mark Shard he could never forget. He seemed to hear the man laugh. He heard words taunting him. Shard moved for a gun, laughing. "Now

Deen with himself. When they were spoken, he had victory over himself.

To the watching eyes nothing of this was apparent. They saw only a steeled, tigerish man before them. He had no gun in his hand. Yet both saw death in that man. Deputy Shard, his hand on the gun at his belt, the forefinger hooked on the trigger, still had not drawn.

As though from far off, from a world that had nothing to do with them, each heard the honk of Weef's motor horn. Weef had come the miles here at what he considered break-neck speed, and half-humorously he was inclined to remind the deputy of the fact. Down in Box Springs Cañon twenty determined men searched for the trail, that a chase to the end might be under way. Before the door of the room that had been Dolora Wetherby's, Deen stood waiting.

The span of time measured in the passing of four or five seconds was gone, not more.

"You two can surrender to me!"

A whispered oath was in the elder Shard's throat. This oath was a prayer. He had more courage than his son. The muzzle of the rifle tilted up.

The spring-steel coil had sprung. A flash movement—a turn. . . . . The gun leaped in Deen's fingers—twice! Thunderous noise in the confines of the room. The third shot was from the elder Shard's rifle. The bullet shattered a window-pane at Deen's back.

Before the older man had begun to topple, young Shard had spun aside. Two shots followed as one. The elder Shard's rifle, falling from his grasping fingers, had just hit the floor. As the older man began to stagger backward, in a grotesque race in which his collapsing legs tried to hold up the body, young Shard swayed forward. He fell face down, limp, the gun thrown, spinning, from his hand. . . . .

John Deen wiped slow fingers that trembled now across expressionless, icy features. In weaving, bluish threads gun-smoke seeped up and spread in a haze across the ceiling of the kitchen.

AS it happened, Weef Hartman was armed—not, however, for the reason that he expected trouble. Morton was not, because it was not his habit to carry a weapon. The two ran toward the rear of the house. The volley within had come to an end before either had been able to get from the car.

Hartman was in the lead. At the kitchen door, he paused. Morton, more courageous, perhaps less guileful, pushed past him and swung the door wide.

"Hartman, drop that gun!"

Weef suddenly recognized the voice, the icy timbre of it. A little involuntary chill went through him. His flabby fingers drew away from the gun as though it had turned loathsome in his grasp. He was momentarily speechless. Yet some compelling curiosity, or perhaps a sensed command that had not been given words, drew him into the room at Morton's heels.

Before them, in a half-sitting position against the wall, the elder Mark Shard groaned to himself. His left hand, in an unconscious gesture, was holding his right shoulder. They saw that the man's shoulder was bleeding. But his expression was not that which accompanies fatal hurt.

They looked at Deen.

"I gave them both the chance to surrender," Deen said, as though speaking to himself. "Neither wanted it!"

CHAPTER VI

IT was late afternoon before City Marshal Don Pedro Arguello was allowed to hear the story, his bronzed, delicately formed face against the white of hospital linen. By that time several details had been cleared up. The flax-colored wig that young Shard had worn in the Box Springs hold-up, the skirt and hat, were found in a neat sealed package in the Marshal's own safe. The bullion-bars, buried under the closet floor of what had been Dolora Wetherby's room, had already been returned to the Esperanza strong-room. The spoil of the stage hold-up was also found, and with it a rifle equipped with the illegal silencer.

Don Pedro smiled, hearing.

"This Deen," he said feelingly, "is one ver', ver' clever young man. Under the enemy's nose, like that! *Pouf!* Who would think to look at the Bar W Bar for this Deen and,"—here Don Pedro permitted himself a gentle smile,—"and his wife! Who?"

"Yes, that was part of it," said Morton. "But Deen explained it like this to me: 'Since I have no home of my own,' he said, 'I had to take my wife back to hers. She had keys to the house.'" Morton smiled and explained: "They got in while Wetherby—I mean, Shard—was doing the morning chores. It seems Dolora had unearthed ten thousand dollars that night she raided the Bar W Bar. As we all know now, of course, that was the currency from the strong-room robbery. But Deen had already put two and two together, and wanted to search the Bar W Bar premises thoroughly, in the hope of unearthing the bullion. The ranch-house was the place to wait for this chance, as it might come at any time, might last only for moments. Then, Deen had seen the elder Shard on the street here one day. He knew that Shard wasn't living under his own name. From the description Dolora was able to give him of her uncle, he already more than suspected Abel Wetherby's actual identity."

"An' you say it is confessed?" questioned Don Pedro. "Abel Wetherby confesses that he is this Mark Shard, young Shard's father?"

"Yes. I was there." Morton's expression was grim. "Shard, or Wetherby,

whichever we call him, wasn't badly hurt. He was sitting against one wall of the room. He saw us well enough; but Deen, after we'd come in, didn't even seem to know we were there. He answered my questions in a mechanical sort of way. But the story came out right enough. After that there was just one big question left. If Shard had passed himself off as Abel Wetherby all these years, where was the real Wetherby—what had become of him?

"Shard himself told us. He was living down in Box Springs Cañon at the time, ten years or so ago. Dolora's father had died a few weeks before. Abel Wetherby, Seth's brother, as we know, and a sole relative, was expected to appear and take charge of the property.

"Then one morning, riding down the cañon, Shard found the man. He'd been thrown from his horse, while on the road into Charity Basin; his head had struck a rock and he'd been killed instantly by the accident. Papers identified him to Shard. . . . . Shard had a flash of inspiration. Here in his own hand suddenly were the papers that would turn the trick. There were personal letters. If he could pass this dead man off for himself, he in turn could disappear for a few months and return as Abel Wetherby, and the Bar W Bar would be as good as his own for years to come. Everything favored the idea. Dolora was a child; she'd never even seen her uncle. No one in Charity Basin knew Abel Wetherby. The town was changing every moment; new people were coming, the old leaving.

"SO, in short, Arguello," Morton concluded, "the thing was done; we both know with what success. Now, as Dolora was coming of age, Shard wanted to get all he could from the property. Dolora was no fool; she saw this. That was the cause of their quarrel. She took things into her own hands, rode. The two Shards had already been planning the strong-room robbery. And the Box Springs Cañon hold-up was merely a bolder piece of work, if less profitable."

Don Pedro nodded. "Ver' smart," he said. "This Deen he saw—what shall we say?—shadows of light!"

"As far as the Esperanza and its allied companies are concerned," Morton continued, "this is another distinct success for Deen, probably his greatest. Six hours ago I couldn't have been made to believe it. But—that's Deen! And with this, we lose him. It's greatly to be regretted."

DON PEDRO nodded again ever so slightly, then lay silent for awhile. Finally he said:

"Will you tell this company doctaire that I feel strong now, like an ox? Will you tell him I want two more visitors *inmediatamente?* I have fatherly advice in plenty. And I am one officer of law who gets what he goes after, even when he is on a sickbed. You tell that doctaire."

Morton went out. Very shortly the door opened. Don Pedro smiled wanly. The mass of her gold hair was drawn back in smooth waves from Dolora Wetherby's face. Rippled highlights from the window at Don Pedro's head glinted on it. She was dressed now in a slim, tailored suit; sheerest of silk stockings below, slender bronze oxfords.

"You come in," said Don Pedro. "Bring that fellow behind, too. . . . . Now, outlaw, what have you to say for yourself? What is it, an' speak quick!"

"Oh, Don Pedro, I'm so sorry! So sorry!"

"Sorry?" questioned Don Pedro. "Ah, that is too bad. A tragedy. A tragic marriage forced upon you! So young, too, an' a whole life to live. Tragic!"

"No! No! You do not understand!"

"So? So then it is not tragic? Do you love this young man?"

"Yes, yes; of course. That is why I married him."

"So? An' you, young man?" questioned Don Pedro.

"I do," said John Deen, for the second time in twenty-four hours.

"Uh-huh. Then why are we sorry?"

"I mean you," cried the girl. "I am sorry you are hurt."

"Huh! It is nothing!" Don Pedro blew away a bubble. *"Pouf!* In two weeks I will be up, strong enough to give you the spanking you need. The doctaire himself says so. What more proof could one want? . . . . . But to advice, ver', ver' good fatherly advice:

"Young man, there was five hundred dollars on this young lady's head, for her capture. You go see this Morton an' make him pay up in full. Then you spend that money on much foolishness for your wife. I been married one long, long while. I know good advice. . . . . *Adios!*"

THE END

Ghost Ships

By
John Colohan

A feud between radio operators settled with the logical weapon.

SOMETIME after the ending of the Great War, a group of articles appeared under the general heading, "Now It Can Be Told." It's been a long time since the war, but I am not sure, even yet, that the story I wish to tell can be told—with safety. So let us call the ship the *Osborne*, which wasn't her name, and say for her that she was one of the destroyers engaged in convoy duty in that happy hunting-ground of German submarines, the North Atlantic.

I was a radio operator on the *Osborne*. There were three others, Henderson, Landry and Tucker. These, of course, are not the actual names under which they were enlisted.

Henderson, chief petty officer in charge of the radio force, was a dry, precise little man serving his second enlistment. Landry, tall, blond, with a first-class rating, had crossed in the early days of '17, and had been in the war practically from the beginning. Tucker was a black-eyed, black-haired chap who had served his apprenticeship on the old *Pueblo*.

From the very beginning, from the day, in Brest, when Landry came aboard with his bag and hammock, he and Henderson failed to hit it off. Why this was so I shall not pretend to say. It was one of those curious cases of men antagonistic on sight, of men who simply did not click. With Landry the feeling seemed to be hardly more than one of carelessly concealed indifference; but with Henderson it went deeper, was more virulent, a dislike amounting to actual enmity. It was there from the start, from the moment the two men met; for a time it merely smoldered.

I have forgotten the argument which fanned it into flame. It was some trifling thing connected with the technicalities of radio. At any rate, they disagreed. One hot word led to another. Suddenly Henderson leaped to his feet, and I thought that he intended to take a swing at Landry. Instead, he shook his fist in the operator's face.

"You're too wise," he shouted. "Too damned wise! I'm going to run you off this packet!"

A silence, and then Landry laughed carelessly.

"Fine," said he. "I'll watch you do it."

AT the time none of us considered Henderson's threat to be anything more than the rash statement of an angry man; but within the week we were undeceived. Henderson meant it; he was coolly determined to get Landry, to run him off the ship. By every means open to an utterly unscrupulous man, he used his position to make things miserable for Landry. There was between the two only the difference of

a single chevron, a single step in promotion; but in matters of discipline the gap is no wider between the admiral of the fleet, and the newest recruit on deck. Henderson was the man in charge.

A month went by—six weeks; and all the disagreeable work which came up aboard the ship, all the unpleasant details which Henderson could invent, were put off on Landry. The manner in which he stood his watch was criticized, the manner in which he kept his log; and these criticisms were made the more unfair by reason of the fact that Landry, despite his careless attitude, was one of the crack operators of the fleet. It was a form of steady, persistent nagging which would have driven many another man frantic.

Landry bore it all with a most commendable stoicism. He flared up once. He was on duty at the time, and Henderson began one of his tirades. The operator waited courteously until Henderson had finished, then he arose, picked the chief petty officer up bodily, and threw him out of the radio shack.

For that bit of insubordination, promptly reported by Henderson, the blond operator drew a deck court-martial, and was broken —reduced in rating—to the rank of second class.

Nothing serious, that; nothing, perhaps, to get excited over. A black mark on the record, a few dollars' difference in pay. Landry did not seem to mind it greatly, seemed willing, even, to forget the whole matter. But Henderson would not have it so. Daily he grew worse, until it became apparent that for Landry there could be but one of two solutions: he could transfer from the ship; or he could await a favorable opportunity and throw Henderson overboard.

I USED to wonder why Landry did not end the whole matter by transferring to some other ship. I asked him about it one day. We were both off watch at the time, and he was fooling with the radio compass in the auxiliary shack. A destroyer has two wireless rooms, the big main one forward, and a tiny auxiliary shack aft, for use only in emergencies. Landry spent much of his spare time experimenting with the various pieces of apparatus in the auxiliary shack.

I asked him why he did not transfer to another ship, since it was clear that the best he was going to get aboard the *Osborne* was the worst of it. He looked up at me, his blue eyes unfathomable; then he shook his head.

"I'll stick a bit longer," was all he said.

It was somewhere about that time that I began to notice a change in Henderson. He made several queer mistakes, one or two of which were discovered by the Communications Officer. He took to drinking heavily on his shore leaves. He was still grimly determined to run Landry off the ship; but with it he seemed gloomy, irritable, forgetful—a man troubled in mind.

ONE night I stumbled across him in a café in St. Nazaire. He was seated alone at a table. He waved me to a chair, and beckoned the waitress. It was apparent that he was just about coming down the home-stretch on a magnificent drunk. He ordered his glass refilled, a glass for me.

He looked up. His eyes were reddened from the liquor, but his words, when he spoke, were calm enough.

"Red," he said abruptly, "did you ever get a call from a ghost-ship?"

"A ghost-ship!" I repeated, in surprise.

He nodded.

"I got one last week," he went on, speaking with a kind of nervous haste. "On the eight to twelve last Sunday night I heard some ship calling us—calling so faintly I could barely make out the letters. I answered. They sent a message. Not in code—in English. It said, *'We are waiting for you.'* I grabbed the book, and looked up the call letters." He lifted his eyes, and stared fixedly at me. "It was the *Briarle.*"

"The *Briarle!*" I began. "Why, man, the *Briarle*—"

"I know," he said, in a curiously flat voice. "Sunk—sunk a month ago—in mid-ocean."

I started to laugh it off.

"You balled the call letters up," I told him. "That's all there is to that. You made a mistake."

"No," he said, in the same dead voice, "I didn't make any mistake. It was the *Briarle*, all right. Three times last week, on night watches, I heard her calling us again. Faint, you understand, but clear as a bell. I didn't answer her."

He was looking at me appealingly. "Do you suppose—" he began; but the question trailed off, and he turned to the glass of cognac lying forgotten by his elbow. Frankly, I was glad that he had not called

upon me to answer the question which I had read in his fear-stricken eyes.

I had heard before of operators who, sitting hour after hour on watch, with every faculty alert to catch the slightest sound, the faintest call, had cracked under the strain, until they began to hear calls where no call existed. It was apparent that Henderson was drifting into dangerous waters.

I worried quite a bit during the next few days over the discovery I had made. If Henderson had reached a point where he was hearing calls from sunken ships, it was obvious that he was not a safe man to be on duty in the wireless room of a destroyer in wartime. I debated the desirability of bringing the facts to the attention of the captain. But I hesitated, disliking to take the step; and in a few days the decision was removed from my hands.

WE were sailing, in company with another destroyer, the *Greer*, upon a sea placid as a mill-pool. Henderson was on watch; Tucker and I were loafing in the shack. I saw Henderson, slouched over in his seat, snap to alertness, saw him switch the motor-generator on mechanically, and turn to the typewriter. Something of importance evidently was coming through the air. Then he swung about in his seat, threw the send-receive switch over, and began sending.

"S.O.S. S.O.S. S.O.S."—he rapped the letters out, and then he tacked on our call letters and the code signal *"Stand by."*

He reached for the speaking-tube. "An S.O.S.," he shouted, to the officer on duty. "Missed the call letters, but the position is O.K."

I grabbed the message, and ran for the bridge. On the way I looked it over hastily. It was brief enough. An S.O.S., followed by the four S's which signified *"Torpedoed,"* the position of the ship in degrees and minutes of latitude and longitude, the single eloquent word *"Sinking."* That was all.

I hurried back to the shack. As I reached it, I saw Henderson turn to the key again, and start calling, using the letters S.O.S. to take the place of the call letters he had missed.

Again he called, and again. Slow minutes dragged, while we waited, tense and silent. I looked up at last. The Skipper was standing in the doorway. He looked at Henderson.

"Any more dope?"

"No sir. I can't seem to get them again."

"You missed their call letters?"

"Yes sir. They were blurred by the operator."

"But you are sure of the position?"

"Quite sure, sir. They repeated it twice."

"Um," said the Old Man. His face was a mask, inscrutable. "Mr. Clark and myself charted the position of that vessel. It would seem that it is sinking somewhere in the neighborhood of Bern, Switzerland. Very likely in one of those small lakes for which that country is famous." A moment the Old Man stood there silently; then—"Tucker," he said, "take over the watch."

The exchange was made. Henderson began a protest, but the Skipper cut him off.

"Henderson," he said grimly, "I took the trouble to signal the *Greer* from the bridge. They heard no S.O.S. Apparently you have a sense of humor which is a quite unnecessary addition to the hardships of war. I am transferring you back to the States. You will leave the ship immediately we make port. That is all."

He was as good as his word. We made port that night, and Henderson left the ship the next morning.

THERE is, of course, a sequel. I was sitting on watch a few nights later, when I heard the general call letters "ALLO," which preceded all submarine warnings, go out. I turned to the typewriter.

"ALLO," the message ran, *"Submarine sighted in St. Lawrence River. Submarine reported in Great Salt Lake."* I looked at the words of that fantastic message. What monkey-doodle business was this? But the message was still coming, and I copied on. *"Two submarines reported sighted on Broadway"*—and then, in an even, rippling "fist" I could not fail to recognize: *"What a chump old Henderson was, eh, Red?"*

Later Landry showed me how it had been done. He had hooked a buzzer set, such as wireless operators use for practicing, directly into the antenna circuit, locating his key in the auxiliary shack back aft. He had regulated the strength of his signal by changing the adjustment of the buzzer; and so, by merely throwing a switch, he had been able to sit in the little auxiliary shack and send wireless messages, by wire, to the big wireless room up forward.

The Anesthetic Panther

He took a job to capture a cougar alive—and found his hands very full.

By
Tom Richards

SOME few years ago, when the moving-picture companies were vying with each other in producing thrillers, a director of one of the companies required a full-grown panther to use in one of his films, and in casting about for a place to secure one of the big cats, the director's eyes lit on Vancouver Island, which is in several spots a paradise for panthers.

Vancouver Island is the home of many good hunters, and the director was soon in communication with one of the best of these—Craig Cross by name.

Craig was credited with having taken over fifty of the cats, but to date none of them had been alive, with the exception of a few cubs; so the director's request seemed a strange one.

I will tell the rest as Craig told it to me.

I TOLD him that I would get him as many dead ones as he wanted, but he wanted only a live one. The price he offered made me think twice, too. He had come prepared with a nice new cage to take the little pet away. Well, I got to thinking, and all of a sudden a scheme entered my head. I knew I could get one treed all right, but to get him down alive was another thing. Then I got the idea of giving it a shot of ether. My idea was to have the dogs get one safely up a tree, then for me to push a long pole, with a wad of cloth, soaked with ether, on the end of it, up underneath the limb he was on, and try and put him to sleep. I told the director to leave the cage with me and I would give it a try. Then I got everything ready, and let the ranchers near know I was after another cat.

It was some time before word came that one of the big fellows had been seen. Old Bill Wilson up River Road sent his boy down one morning to tell me that one of his lambs had gone, and that the panther-tracks were fresh. Off I started with my queer hunting apparatus, consisting of a large bottle of ether, some cloth and a few poles of different lengths. Of course I took the old rifle in case of accident. A truck followed with the cage.

When we got to Wilson's, I told young Sam Ritchie, who was to help me, to wait while I went into the bush with the dogs.

I knew the panther could not be far away, as he would likely be full of lamb, and resting in a thicket. I told Sam that when he heard the dogs barking he was to bring the poles and ether; also I left word with Wilson to get the cage as near to us as he could. When I entered the bush I let the dogs precede me a little way. They

knew their business, and with noses snuffling at the fresh tracks of the panther, they quietly forged ahead. About six hundred yards in, old Don, who was in the lead, suddenly stopped and gave a low growl. Quickly I told them: "Go get him, boys!" —and barking furiously, both dogs made for a thicket a little to our left.

There was a commotion in the heart of the thicket; then amidst a flurry of ferns and branches the long form of the panther appeared, and in a few gigantic bounds he was at the foot of a big fir. Up this he quickly went and stretched out in a fork of the tree, about forty feet above the ground. So far so good, I thought, but it sure looked like a man-sized job to get the big fellow into the cage safely, and alive. There he was, gazing down on the dogs—which were still barking savagely—his teeth bared in an angry snarl, while his long tail switched angrily against the trunk of the tree.

Presently Sam appeared with the poles and a length of strong rope. Then I began my preparations. I took the longest pole and made a big pad on the end with the cloth, tying it securely while the rope I cut in lengths of about six feet. Now I was ready. I soaked the wad on the pole with a good dose of ether, then gingerly began to raise the pole. Closer and closer I lifted the pole toward the panther, until at last I had it directly under the limb; then I moved it slowly along the limb until it was right under the nose of the animal. Then came the ticklish part—I took a firmer grip on the pole as I edged the wad around toward the panther's head.

BUT as the pole came around the limb, something happened I had not bargained for. Mr. Panther, knowing that something out of the ordinary was going on below him, was on the alert, and as the big wad came toward him, he suddenly made a healthy swipe at it with one of his huge paws. The pole broke off just below the ether-soaked wad, and he hit it with such force that I was sent sprawling. Then, even as I lay on the ground gazing up, I was held speechless at what I saw. Evidently thinking that the cloth he had in his paws had something to do with his predicament, the panther began to chew savagely at the cloth. For some moments nothing happened as he gnawed the ether-soaked rag; then I could see a slowing of the big jaws, and presently they stopped altogether—the ether was taking effect! His paws began slipping on the limb, and showers of bark descended as he tried to get a firmer grip. We watched spellbound as his movements gradually ceased.

I YELLED to Sam to stand ready with the rope, then took another pole and putting it against the panther's body, gave it a push, and the senseless body dropped at our feet. Seizing a length of rope, I told Sam to tie the hindlegs while I held them. Sam had barely knotted the rope, when the two legs we had just tied suddenly kicked back and missing me by inches, caught Sam in the middle and hurled him into a dense thicket, where he lay gasping and groaning—it was more of a push than a blow. But just then I was too busy myself with the panther to go to Sam's aid. Evidently the effect of the drug was not so deep as I had thought, for the big fellow showed decided signs of life; he was still more than half-drugged, but some smoldering instinct made him use his limbs, and he was propelling himself around on one side with his powerful hindlegs, which were still securely trussed.

Near by lay the bottle of ether; I quickly poured the contents on my big handkerchief, and tried between the panther's lunges to give him another dose. My first attempt nearly ended in disaster, as one of his blindly threshing front paws caught my left arm just above the elbow and ripped my sleeve to shreds; my arm was deeply scratched where his claws had ripped. But by carefully watching my chance, I thrust the drug-soaked rag against his nose and held it tight, taking care to avoid those tearing claws. Gradually his struggles ceased, but I continued to hold the ether against his nostrils so there would be no repetition of not giving him enough. Sam cautiously approached and together we finished the job of tying the big fellow.

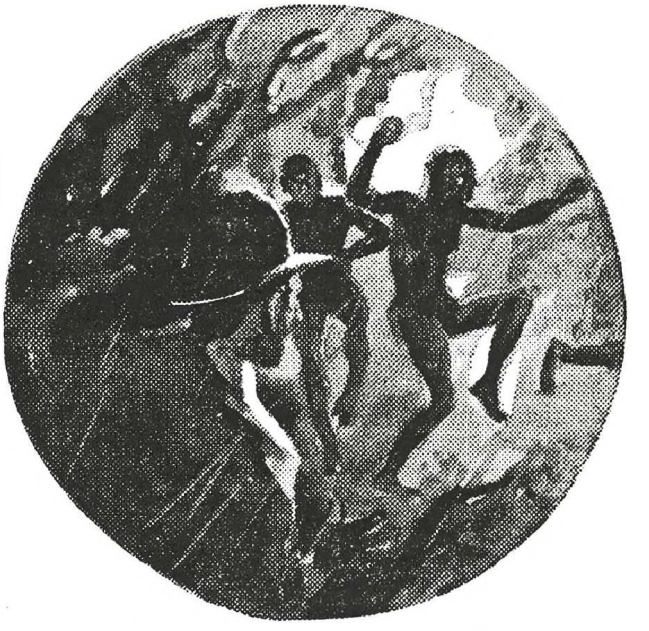
AFTER considerable trouble we got him out to old Wilson's field, and into the cage. We presented a sorry spectacle, but were proud of the job we had done. Our pride lasted about an hour, until I went into the cage to see if the panther was coming back to consciousness, only to find that the big fellow was dead—probably I had given him too much ether.

It was the first time—and the last—that I went after a panther with a bottle of ether and a pole; I would rather use an ounce of lead than a tank of ether!

Voodoo

By

O. R. Roderick



A perilous and amazing experience in the Florida swamps, vividly narrated.

APART of the following story would seem to have a more fitting setting in the darkest part of Africa; nevertheless the incidents here related occurred in one of our own civilized states, namely Florida.

On an evening in December, 1927, I left my camp in what is known by the natives as the "Big Scrub," in central Florida, with the intention of walking to a water-hole about one mile from my camp, hoping to get a shot at a deer. This small pond which I had discovered some days previously and the one near which I had pitched my camp seemed to be about the only water in a radius of ten or twelve miles, and as the deer had not been coming to Squaw Pond since I had taken up my residence there, I of course decided that they were watering at the other pond.

This section known as the Big Scrub is a rather desolate region comprising an area of approximately fifty thousand acres and is a semi-arid section, though surrounded by lakes and ponds on every side. It is covered with scrub pine and thick brush, affording an ideal cover for deer. I had been surveying in this section for several days, but as yet had not killed a deer. On this certain evening something seemed to tell me that I would have luck.

WHEN I reached the water-hole, the sun was sinking in the west; the steep bank and edge of the pond on the side of my approach was in deep shadow. I sank down in a clump of rosemary bushes with my rifle across my knees to wait for a deer to come down to drink. I had just settled myself comfortably when I heard a sound resembling a groan coming from just in front of me and seemingly just over the edge of the bank. I listened intently, and again I heard the sound, this time unmistakably a groan. I made my way quickly down the bank, and there near the water's edge I saw a human form sprawled in the soft muck. When I reached the prostrate figure, I saw that it was a negro, and clamped on his left ankle was a large steel trap which had evidently been set there for a deer.

The negro was conscious but was very weak and unable to help me in removing the trap. By compressing one spring and tying it down with my belt, I was able to compress the other spring and remove the man's imprisoned foot, which had swollen considerably.

Somehow I helped him get back to my camp, and after having eaten heartily, he was sufficiently recovered to tell me of his experience. He had been working on the East coast with a contracting company and had decided to go to the Gulf coast to visit some of his relatives, and in the numerous sand roads of the Big Scrub he had become lost. Stumbling onto the pond two days before, he had gone down to the water to drink and there he had stepped in the trap. Fearing that he would die of starvation before anyone found him, he had fought the trap until he was exhausted. The only name he gave was Jim, and I did not question him further. He was a tall, strongly built man with pleasant features except for

a jagged grayish scar which extended from his nose clear to his ear on the left side of his face.

SEVERAL days later the negro's foot was sufficiently improved to enable him to walk, and after giving him two or three days' supply of provisions, I set him on the right road and watched him plod out of sight. The incident was soon driven from my mind by other things and I had no idea of ever seeing the negro again.

Several months later I was surveying in a district many miles from the Big Scrub and in a region of lakes and streams with many impenetrable swamps. On a particularly hot evening I was traveling by compass through a dense swamp of titi bushes many miles from camp. Not a breath of air was stirring, and a steam seemed to be rising from the dank ground. Coming to an open spot, I could see a dark bank of clouds low in the southeast, and low rumblings of thunder could be heard in the far distance.

Anyone who is familiar with Florida's storms, which usually include rain, wind and lightning, will agree that it is anything but a pleasant experience to be exposed to one; and needless to say, I decided to strike for the nearest shelter. On consulting my map of the district, I found that I was within four or five miles of a turpentine camp, or still, as they are called. I decided to strike out in that direction, as there are usually one or more families of white people living at the stills and a shelter for the night was sure. Before going far, I came to a shallow stream flowing in the general direction of the still, and knowing that this would afford the easiest means of getting out of the swamp, with much better walking, I stepped into the stream, which barely rose over my ankles, and started wading. Darkness had fallen, and a hot wind was rising from the direction of the storm clouds.

I HAD not waded more than a quarter mile when I heard faintly a muffled booming noise, not unlike a drum being beat slowly with measured stroke. I waded on, and presently I could make out another sound, mingling with the booming noise. The latter sound I soon could tell was human voices raised in a sort of sing-song chant. The approaching storm was forgotten, and my curiosity impelled me to investigate such an unusual sound. As the stream seemed to lead in the direction of the sound, I kept to the water, wading more cautiously now and keeping a sharp lookout ahead. Coming around a bend in the stream, I could see the glow of a fire illumining a small glade or open place in the swamp, about one-half acre in extent. The noises were issuing from this open space and the sounds now were such as almost to cause my hair to stand.

Leaving the stream above the open space, I worked my way through the tangle of brush and vines to the edge of the glade near the top of a fallen cypress. The cypress had at one time stood some way inside the open space, and in falling, the roots had carried up a large amount of earth, making an ideal place for concealment from the center of the glade. I crawled through the high grass to the root of the fallen giant and rose up behind the protecting wall of earth and roots.

THE sight that met my eyes I shall not soon forget. In the center of the glade stood a rude hut constructed of round juniper poles and thatched with the fronds of palmetto palms. Before the hut a fire was burning, and in a circle around the fire thirty or forty negroes were performing some sort of weird dance, leaping, screaming and waving their arms. The fire glistened on their naked bodies as they swayed and leaped, chanting their unintelligible song. Not only men but women and girls were taking part. Inside the circle and near the fire was another group, and I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw what they were doing. These negroes, all old men, were roasting snakes, and the dancers eating them, or pretending to eat them. The reptiles were taken from a box, a wire placed around their wriggling bodies, and they were then held in the flames. When they were considered sufficiently done, I suppose, they were taken from the fire, cut in pieces, and the pieces were tossed to the dancers. With the negro's inherent fear of snakes, I wonder yet what terrible power could induce them to handle those rattlers as they were doing.

ANOTHER figure near the fire drew my attention, evidently the chief or medicine man, as he alone of all the horrible gang wore any apparel. Around his body was wrapped some kind of fur robe resembling a bearskin. On his head and face was some sort of devil's mask with a long

sharp horn protruding on either side of his head. He was beating a kind of tom-tom which produced the noise I had first heard, and performing a shivery dance of his own. Altogether it was a scene not likely to prove a tonic for nerves. I had often read of the voodooism practised by some of the savage tribes of Africa, and I now knew that I was viewing one of their terrible dances, a scene few white men are ever privileged to see.

I had decided that it was time for me to be leaving that place, and started to turn and crawl back to the edge of the bushes, when something struck me on the back of the head and I at once lost consciousness. When I regained my senses, I was strung up on the front of that hut in the glade. A rope was looped around my hands and tied to the ridgepole of the hut. My toes were only touching the grass, and my entire weight was on the rope snared around my wrists. Before me was that gang of mad negroes, and near me stood one with a chipper—a long-handled steel hook used in chipping the trees for turpentine. Evidently this one was a guard and had detected me watching. Being so absorbed in looking at the horrible dance, I had not heard his stealthy approach and he had struck me on the head with the chipper.

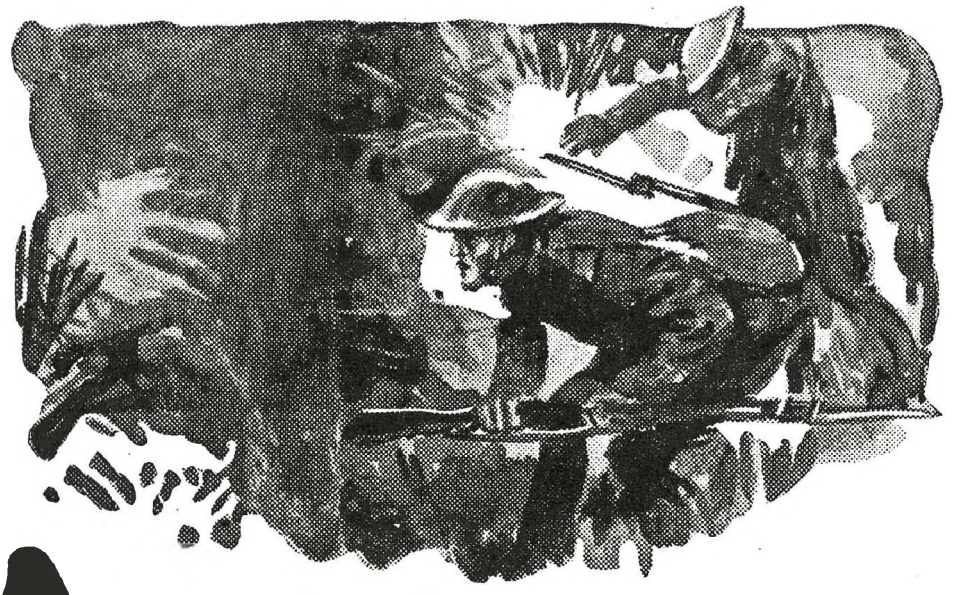
EVIDENTLY my fate was already decided, for lust to kill was in every eye. I was not kept long in suspense. When they saw I had regained consciousness, two of the men started toward me. I kicked out for all I was worth and succeeded in striking one of them a good blow, but two others grasped my legs, and I was helpless. Then the negro with the devil's headdress strode forward. In his hand he held a bottle partly filled with greenish-colored liquid. He placed the bottle to my lips and tried to force me to drink from it. I locked my teeth and rolled my head, fighting to keep from swallowing any of the liquid. I succeeded, but some of it touched my lips and face, and it seemed like liquid fire. My lips seemed paralyzed instantly.

THEN something happened which surprised me as much if not more than the negroes. From somewhere in the crowd a figure sprang toward me with an unearthly yell. In one hand the negro held a long knife, in the other hand a double-barreled shotgun. He struck the big negro holding the bottle and knocked it from his hand. With one sweep of the long knife he cut the rope holding me, and as I dropped to my feet, he thrust the shotgun into my hands. This negro looked as crazy as any of the others; his body was naked as the others' were, but in the short second of time he stood before me I saw reaching across his left cheek a jagged grayish scar. Then he was gone.

While this was happening, the other negroes stood as if paralyzed; the two who had held my legs had released me as they saw the negro coming with the gun. When the rope which held my hands was cut, it dropped from my hands as it was only snared around my wrists; and although my hands were numb and stiff, somehow I managed to fire that gun. I don't know which one I shot at, or whether I aimed at any of them, but the shot had the desired effect. They scattered like so many sheep, and in the space of a second I was alone. . . . .

I have little memory of the balance of that terrible night. I know the storm struck with a howl of wind and deluge of rain, and somewhere in that jungle of swamp I found a sheltered spot where I spent the remainder of the night, and next day I arrived at my camp.

Those faces in memory look just as hideous as they did that night, but I cannot forget one negro who paid a debt of gratitude.



Argonne

By **W. Wagner**

One of a company that pushed too far ahead in this great battle tells what happened.

SOMEWHERE in France was my mailing address at the time of this episode. After taking part in the opening chorus of the St. Mihiel drive and holding down a slice of that territory for about a week, we were gathered together and started for the Argonne sector as reserve troops. We arrived back of the line October 2, about a week after the drive had started. It was our luck to dig in right alongside the camp of an artillery outfit.

The artillerymen did not bother to dig in; in fact they didn't even try to camouflage their activities, in spite of the fact that several German scout planes circled overhead during the afternoon. About eleven P. M. that night Jerry gave a shower for their benefit with our outfit in the rôle of innocent bystander. The shower consisted of a miscellaneous assortment of high explosive, mustard and chlorine gas shells, and this continued the rest of the night. By morning the artillery outfit was almost completely wiped out, and while our bunch did not suffer very heavily from shell fire, everyone was more or less severely gassed. More than half of Co. H had good sense and reported to first-aid station and were sent to the hospital; the rest of us stuck around in spite of our condition.

Two days later, at daybreak, the remnants of our outfit went into action, relieving a badly battered outfit which had been in the thick of it for several days.

Our calling-cards must have been sent in advance, for Jerry met us with everything he had. After about three hours of fighting, all of the commissioned officers in Co. H were casualties, and a second looey from Co. F was given command of what was left of our company, numbering about twenty-five men.

This lieutenant drove ahead as rapidly as possible and made no attempt whatever to establish a *liaison* or contact with the outfits on our two flanks. The natural result was that we were soon far ahead of the rest of the regiment with a deadly hail of machine-gun bullets pouring into us from the woods on each side where the Germans had not yet been molested.

We would get to our feet and push forword until the machine-gun fire got so heavy that it was humanly impossible to advance against it; then at a given signal we would flop to the ground and crouch behind our tin hats until the firing died down somewhat; then we would be up and away again.

And by the way, that trench helmet of mine had a remarkable quality of expanding and contracting which I have never seen equaled by any other piece of metal.

Back in the rear of the lines it would feel as big as a washtub and give me a headache, but on the skirmish line when I tried to hide behind it, it felt like a plugged nickel pasted to the exact center of the top of my head.

ABOUT two or three o'clock in the afternoon we were halfway across a level clearing a mile and a half long and three-quarters of a mile wide, with a hill at each end and thick woods along each side. These woods were literally honeycombed with enemy machine-guns, and the gunners must have been working piece-work, judging by the intensity of the fire! We had been stretched at full length on the ground for some time—in fact, so long that I became curious and raised up to take a look around. What I saw was not reassuring.

I was the sixth man from the right-hand end of the skirmish line, and with the exception of one man on my left, we had the whole country to ourselves. We had a clear view for three-quarters of a mile to the front and rear, and in all that space there was not a sign of a single live doughboy except ourselves.

Then one of our little group called attention to about two hundred Germans who were forming for a counter-attack on the hill in front of us. Most of the men, including the lieutenant, started for the rear when they saw what was up, but the man on my left had his face buried so deep in the ground he didn't see the play.

WELL, we seven got together and consulted ways and means. In the meantime the enemy had come down off the hill and were temporarily hidden from our view.

We scouted around and found a shallow trench the Germans had hastily dug while making a short stand earlier in the day. It was less than knee deep, only about a foot wide, with the dirt embanked on the wrong side to offer protection from the approaching enemy, and it ran straight across the clearing instead of back toward our lines. We decided to follow it in the hope of finding a traverse leading in the right direction, but in about two hundred yards it came to a dead end.

This called for another conference, and while we were in session, one of the fellows with more curiosity than caution climbed up on a slight elevation to take a look around. He immediately climbed down again with a hole in the front of his helmet and a groove underneath his scalp where a bullet had plowed along it. I took his first-aid kit and hastily bandaged up his head.

While I was doing this we were both standing up, facing each other—a very careless thing to do in that neighborhood, as I quickly found out.

I had the bandage applied and was preparing to fasten it, at the same time congratulating myself on a very workmanlike job for an amateur, when—a bullet whizzed past my face and through his temple. It was useless to bandage *that* hole!

Looking up, we saw what appeared to be the whole German army coming up over a rise of ground on a dead run, and firing as fast as they could work the magazines of their rifles.

THE narrow shallow trench we were standing in offered no protection whatever, and I flopped over the top of the dirt embankment to the other side. The others followed suit, but two were killed before they could get over, and two more were wounded, leaving only myself and one other uninjured. For the next few minutes we pumped bullets until our rifles got so hot they jammed.

And then the other man got his. . . . .

I do not wish to cast any reflection on the courage of this comrade; for earlier in the day he had performed a feat of exceptional bravery under heavy fire. But now he shouted out that it was all off and we had better surrender, and rising up on his knees, he took off his helmet and began waving it. No sooner had he removed the helmet than a bullet from behind us caught him squarely in the back of the head. Without a sound he fell forward on his face, and died instantly.

By that time the advancing Germans had dropped to the ground about two or three hundred yards away, and I had time to look after the two injured men. One of them was struck on the knee and his whole knee had been torn off. I removed his pack, straightened the leg to a more comfortable position, made a compress of his belt and bandaged the knee as well as I could while lying flat on the ground, for we were still getting it hot and heavy from the German machine-guns in the woods, and one of our own machine-gun battalions stationed on the hill in the rear, while holding the Germans at bay, were also raking us. I was

not able entirely to stop the bleeding, and this man died in a few hours.

After bandaging the other injured man, who had three slight flesh-wounds, I must have fallen asleep, exhausted, in spite of the noise and excitement.

When I awoke sometime later, darkness was falling and I saw a party of twenty-five or thirty Jerries going toward our lines about a hundred yards away from us. They didn't stop to visit us, and I didn't urge them to.

BY the time it was pitch-dark I was in the mood for a change of scenery, so I discarded my pack and rifle and even my gas mask, took a .45 from the fellow who got himself shot in the head, and fared forth along with the other man who was still alive, with nothing to guide us except the flashes of our big guns in the rear. We had hardly started when we became separated, and I never did see him again. It was black as pitch except at intervals of two or three minutes when the Germans would send up flares which would light up all the surrounding country for almost a minute. At such times I dropped to the ground if I had time. If not, I could only stand perfectly still in whatever position the flare caught me until it was dark again. Twice during the trip I wandered so close to German machine-gun crews that I could hear them talking. However, I did not stop to pass the time of day with them but faded away as rapidly as possible.

Finally I heard a party of men coming directly toward me. I ducked into a shell-hole and waited, wondering absently if there were any cartridges in my gun, as I had not taken time to look when I removed it from its former owner. Then—

"Any of you guys from the Twenty-sixth over there?"

I recognized the voice as that of my platoon sergeant, Hand-grenade Smith, and I informed him that here was one guy from the Sixteenth.

"Who is it?" asked Smith.

I told him who I was.

"Good," he said. "Here are five men. I want you to establish an outpost here for the night. The outfit is dug in right back of the hill there."

When I pleaded lack of equipment, he obligingly told me where to find two fully equipped dead doughboys just a short distance away. . . . .

Sherman was right!

A Desperate Chase

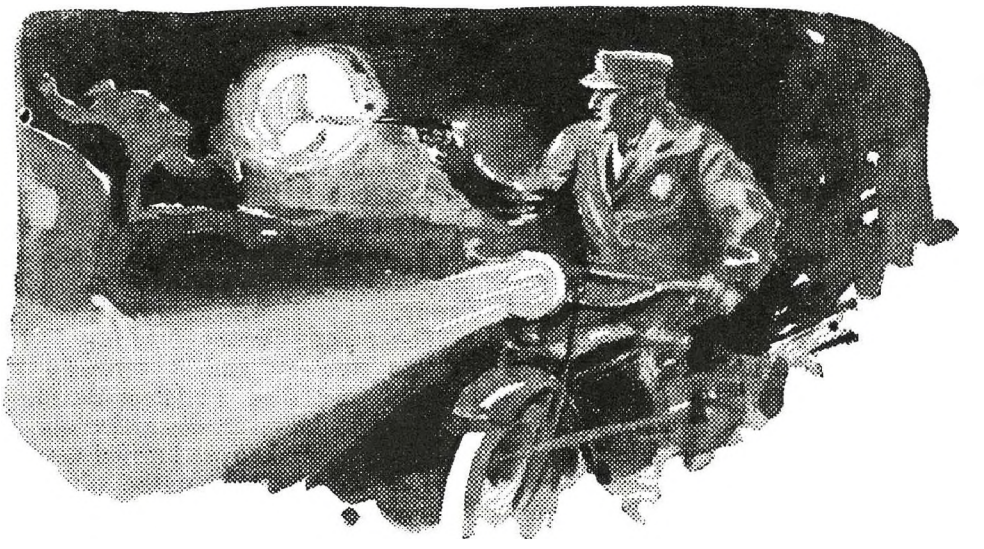
By Lytle Deming

A traffic officer tells of a breath-taking chase after reckless criminals in a speeding car.

IT was about four years ago on the Boston Post Road in an Eastern State. I was employed by the State Highway Department engaged in regulating traffic at a four-way corner, one way being closed to traffic, and cars being detoured at that point. It was a job that demanded my attention twelve hours a day, and on this day, I had been held overtime by the crowd returning from a football game at the Yale Bowl. Three State policemen had been there all day with me, alternately patroling the east-bound and west-bound detours.

As traffic diminished about ten in the evening, two officers returned to their barracks, leaving Fred—the State policeman—and me in control of the situation. We were to stay there until it was definitely established that the rush was over for the night. I had been standing all day with a tally-register in either hand, counting the passing cars as well as directing the traffic on the corner. Naturally, I was tired and anxious to get to bed, and was on the point of leaving when a motorcycle officer from a near-by town rode up. He reported that four men in a touring car had held up five filling-stations some twelve miles down the line, escaping with cash, cigarettes and candy. He gave us the license number as reported by a witness, and informed us that he would patrol the road to the north, the only other direct road through the town, if we would watch the Post Road.

This provided a new and more exciting reason for remaining on the corner, and all my thoughts of sleep disappeared. How-



ever, we were not to be immediately satisfied in our desire for excitement. The night dragged on, and the traveling public seemed unusually peaceful — apparently even the usual tough-looking characters had disappeared from the drivers' seats of the passing cars. We waited an hour—long enough for the bandits to have traversed four times the distance if they were heading our way. So we decided to call it a night and go home. The red lanterns needed adjustment in some cases, and it was about ten minutes later that we got under way.

I usually rode on the carrier of the officer's motorcycle on my trips home. I lived about half a mile east near the Post Road, and it was convenient to ride home each day. My seat on the motorcycle, composed of stout cross bars with no cushion, was not built for comfort. As a rule, if one of the saddle-bags was empty, I would turn it up and over the carrier and thus form a pillow. I did so on this occasion, and was slightly more comfortable, though I was seated so high that the center of gravity of the machine was dangerously raised, calling for much more than ordinary skill on the part of the driver.

WE had almost reached my corner when a machine answering the description of the bandit car passed us. It was traveling at a moderate pace, but as its license tallied within one figure of the one that had been furnished us, the officer decided to pursue it. This was not my intention by any means, as I was not looking forward to any speed greater than about twenty-five miles an hour on the back of that motorcycle. But by the time that I decided to get off, we were traveling faster and rapidly approaching the touring car. They were not to be caught so easily, though, and soon showed their guilt by speeding up to about sixty miles per hour.

We followed, I holding on for dear life and momentarily expecting the motorcycle to ride right out from under me. We didn't slow down for the first town, nor for the second, both deserted at midnight. The speed was so great that my eyes felt as if they were being pushed right into my skull, and the tears were streaming so fast that I could see next to nothing. I suddenly heard Fred yell: "I hope that oil-pump lasts." And then I remembered the trouble that he had had with it. It had been out of order for a week and had only been temporarily repaired that morning pending arrival of a new gear from the factory. I prayed that it would last, thinking that it would only be a question of a few minutes at most before we crashed into something.

A FEW seconds later we came to some more road construction work and soon realized that a two-wheeled machine was no match on the rough road for the touring car, which was still able to maintain a fast pace though its rear wheels left the ground frequently. It was truly hitting only the high spots, and we were fast being left behind. The torn-up portion of the road fortunately was only about a half mile in length, and we emerged about a quarter-mile behind the automobile, but unable to see it because of the clouds of dust in its wake.

One covers distance quickly at seventy miles an hour, however, and it soon was

in sight again, and the distance between us rapidly diminishing. My hands felt numb; and my ears, nose and eyes seemed to have disappeared altogether, as I only heard the swish of the wind and saw nothing but a diminutive red light ahead.

During this time, though we did not know it, the oil-pump had come to the end of its usefulness, and the motor was red-hot for lack of oil. The automobile had just disappeared over the brow of a long, steep hill with a sharp turn at the bottom—famous for its death-toll. Fred turned his head slightly yelling, "—never make it." And it didn't. Nor did we. As we went over the top of the hill we saw the touring-car swerve on the turn below and then turn over rolling until it mounted the sidewalk. On the first roll, one of the occupants pitched straight out through the cloth top of the car, landing in the roadway in time to be crushed by it as it continued rolling. Two others fell in opposite directions, one in the roadway, the other on a plot of grass.

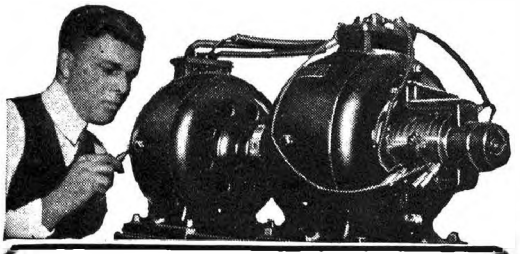
At that moment the motor of the motorcycle had reached its zenith, and the pistons froze solid in their cylinders. The connecting-rods snapped, emerging through the sides of the cylinders and badly gashing Fred's leg, even penetrating through the heavy leather of his puttee. Half a second later, probably less, the motorcycle slipped completely out from under us, and we were thrown into the air, making two as perfect landings as was possible under the circumstances, on a friendly grass-plot. I rolled some distance, coming to a stop a moment after Fred, who only slid.

WE were only about twenty-five yards from the wrecked car and saw one of the bandits running away from it as fast as he was able to do with a lame leg. Fred rolled over on his stomach and took two shots at him, one striking that same leg and dropping him.

We stood up to find ourselves with no broken bones, but with my clothing and Fred's uniform badly torn. We had multiple bruises, and Fred's leg had a long ugly-looking cut in it that was bleeding freely.

The motorcycle was some fifty feet away in the roadway and it certainly looked as if it had died a violent death. The automobile, however, demanded our immediate attention, and we hurried down to it. The driver was behind the wheel, badly hurt and unconscious. The one that had been crushed by the car was dead and his features completely obliterated. The third man was lying in the roadway with a fractured skull and his left leg broken; it was gathered up under him in an unnatural position. He was surrounded with cartons of cigarettes, boxes of candy and loose change, including some bills. The fourth member of the ill-fated party was crawling away as best he could with the bullet in his leg and did not resist capture. In his pockets were two glass pistols, one broken, which explained why we had not been halted in our chase by a well-aimed bullet—a fact which we had not been able to reconcile with the rest of their daring.

They were all only young men, in fact only slightly older than I, who was only seventeen. Needless to say, the remaining three who lived received prison terms. As for me, I had been riding where I had no business, according to regulations of the State police, and I assured myself of not marring the praise destined for Fred by patching up my clothes the best I could and quickly disappearing, getting a more comfortable though infinitely slower ride home with a passing motorist.



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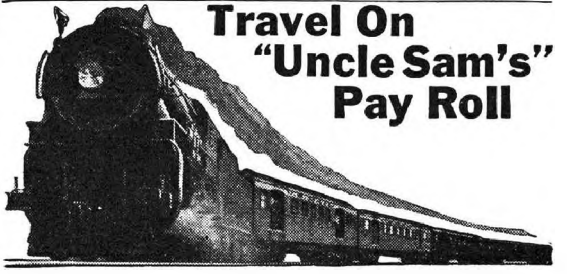

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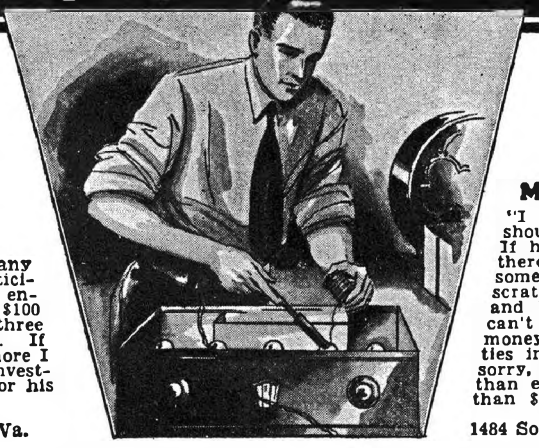

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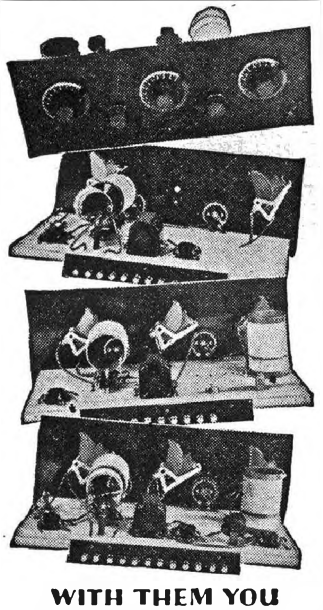

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