WAR IN HIS POCKET, A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL ★

BLUE BOOK

NOVEMBER 25 CENTS

A novelette by DONALD CHIDSEY

LELAND JAMIESON • FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT

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Two warriors uprose from the ground. They swarmed up the rope furiously, swiftly. (Drawn by John Richard Flanagan to illustrate "The Serpent-People," beginning page 18.)

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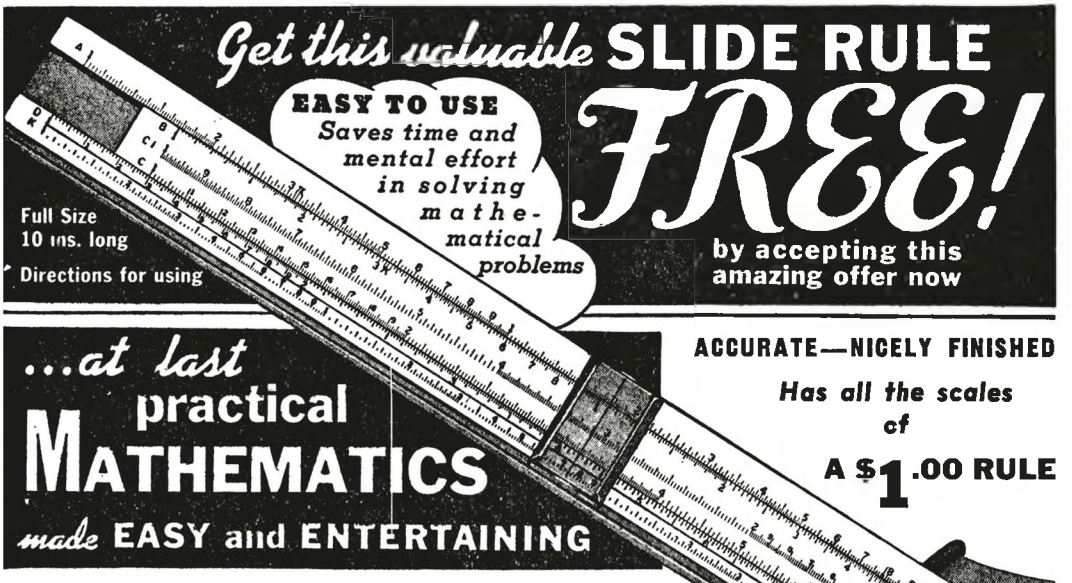

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BLUE BOOK

NOVEMBER, 1939 MAGAZINE VOL. 70, NO. 1

A Book-Length Novel

Seven Short Stories

A Novelette

A Serial Novel

Prize Stories of Real Experience

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

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THERE is material for a novel in every person's life, it has been said. Whether this is true or not, we do believe that in the lives of most of us some experience has occurred sufficiently exciting to merit description in print. With this idea in mind we shall be pleased to receive and to print true stories of real experience, running from one thousand to four thousand words each. For each of those accepted each month we will pay, according to our appraisal of its length and strength, an average price of $50.

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Why *Can't* You Write?

It's much simpler than you think!

SO many people with the "germ" of writing in them simply can't get started. They suffer from inertia. Or they set up imaginary barriers to taking the first step.

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Few realize that the great bulk of commercial writing is done by so-called "unknowns." Not only do these thousands of men and women produce most of the fiction published, but countless articles on business affairs, social matters, domestic science, etc., as well.

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Pioneer of Africa

By PETER RAINIER

INKOMAZI—who was the wife of the local witch-doctor, as well as tribal midwife—emerged from the tent in which my mother had just been confined. *"Ohe-e-e-e!"* Inkomazi cried, waving toward the sky the bundle that was my newborn body. "Guard him, ye birds; guard him, ye beasts; feed him with your flesh that his spear hand be strong and his feet swift in the homecoming after battle."

It was the common Swazi ritual after birth which old Inkomazi was practicing; and yet—*"homecoming after battle,"* that phrase seems to fit somehow, although it was spoken nearly fifty years ago by an ignorant old savage. I am back in Africa again, writing this in our Maadi home, with the wide lawns in front, the Nile flowing by, and the pyramids of Giza shimmering in the sun glare behind the white sails of the feluccas.

It has been a battle, the life I have lived. But it has been a full life. . . .

My father had been cutting timber on contract for the new Barberton mining field in the Transvaal at the time of my birth, but my first recollection is of ox-wagons, eleven of them, great clumsy affairs, loaded high with freight, all but the tented one in which we lived.

"What makes your wagon run so fast, *Rooibatje?"* asked an old Boer transport rider, who was coming up the hill with his wooden axles creaking in their wooden bushings, and his cowhide tires hanging in tatters from the sharp rocks of the Drakensberg passes. The Boers called all Englishmen *rooibatjes* in those days, because the British soldiers still wore red coats.

"My new iron axles and iron tires, of course," cried my father, from the high wagon-box which overlooked the long span of sixteen oxen in yoke as the bridge of a ship overlooks the foredeck.

"If the *Alamagtag* had meant us to use iron in our wagons, he would have caused iron trees to grow in the forests," reproved the old man, wagging his beard and cracking his forty-foot lash against the flank of one of his fore-oxen with a report like a pistol-shot.

I loved the roaming life of a transport rider. I slept with my mother on the cartel bed made of rawhide strips, or watched the country creeping by at the rate of two miles per hour from the open flap of the wagon tent, or sat proudly on the wagon-box beside my father, while he told me tales of the sea.

He liked the life too, when the eleven great lumbering wagons rolled ponderously across the gently heaving plain of the highveld, like a convoy of East Indiamen across a brown sea. I believe it reminded him of his life as a sailor, cut short when he jumped his ship in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, joined a wagon-train for the new Barberton gold strike, met my mother, and got married to her on the way by some old Boer *Predikant* in some little town in the Transvaal.

"Rainier is the name of a mountain in Oregon," an American prospector once remarked to my father.

"It's the same name," my father had replied. "Vancouver discovered the mountain and named it after a British admiral who was his friend. That admiral was my great-grandfather."

(Please turn to page 184)

What Strange Powers Did The Ancients Possess?

EVERY important discovery relating to mind power, sound thinking and cause and effect, as applied to self-advancement, was known centuries ago, before the masses could read and write.

Much has been written about the wise men of old. A popular fallacy has it that their secrets of personal power and successful living were lost to the world. Knowledge of nature's laws, accumulated through the ages, is never lost. At times the great truths possessed by the sages were hidden from unscrupulous men in high places, but never destroyed.

Why Were Their Secrets Closely Guarded?

Only recently, as time is measured; not more than twenty generations ago, less than 1/100th of 1% of the earth's people were thought capable of receiving basic knowledge about the laws of life, for it is an elementary truism that knowledge is power and that power cannot be entrusted to the ignorant and the unworthy. Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; nor recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs a multitude of details about things, but goes through life without ever knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the inner mind—that mysterious silent something which "whispers" to you from within.

Fundamental Laws of Nature

Your habits, accomplishments and weaknesses are the effects of causes. Your thoughts and actions are governed by fundamental laws. Example: The law of compensation is as fundamental as the laws of breathing, eating and sleeping. All fixed laws of nature are as fascinating to study as they are vital to understand for success in life.

You can learn to find and follow every basic law of life. You can begin at any time to discover a whole new world of interesting truths. You can start at once to awaken your inner powers of self-understanding and self-advancement. You can learn from one of the world's oldest institutions, first known in America in 1694. Enjoying the high regard of hundreds of leaders, thinkers and teachers, the order is known as the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. Its complete name is the "Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis," abbreviated by the initials "AMORC." The teachings of the Order are not sold, for it is not a commercial organization, nor is it a religious sect. It is a nonprofit fraternity, a brotherhood in the true sense.

Not For General Distribution

Sincere men and women, in search of the truth —those who wish to fit in with the ways of the world—are invited to write for complimentary copy of the sealed booklet, "The Secret Heritage." It tells how to contact the librarian of the archives of AMORC for this rare knowledge. This booklet is not intended for general distribution; nor is it sent without request. It is therefore suggested that you write for your copy to Scribe M. R. A.

The ROSICRUCIANS
[AMORC]
San Jose California

An authentic and moving story of air adventure, by a working pilot who is also an able writer.

THE DC-2 was cocked up on her ear in a stall, and I was testing the functioning of the propeller governors under different speeds, shouting the readings to the inspector who sat in the co-pilot's seat beside me, when I heard Ben Grant, the Miami radio operator, go on the air.

"Miami to Three thirty-four—Miami to Three thirty-four."

We were at four thousand feet over Biscayne Bay. I yelled at the inspector to watch the tachs, and reached for my microphone.

"Three thirty-four to Miami," I said. "Go ahead, Ben."

"Bill," Ben Grant said, "Charley found the Russians—I intercepted a message about it. He found 'em on an ice-floe four hundred miles north of Point Barrow, and picked 'em up."

I said: "Swell! Thanks for calling me!" I hung up my mike, and started reading the revvs to the inspector again.

But I wasn't thinking about the revvs. I was thinking about Charley—Charley Craig, my brother. I was happy and relieved, of course, and yet worried in a vague way. For more than a month Charley had been in Alaska, searching for the Russians who had gone down in an attempted flight from Moscow to Portland. And now he had found them, after days of exquisite excitement. There wasn't much basis for it, except my understanding of how restless Charley always had been; but now I was wondering how he would like the humdrum routine of a run on the air line again.

We got all the prop and engine data we needed, and I went down and landed. Lucy and Gretel were still waiting in the car where I had left them. Since Charley had been gone, Gretel had lived with Lucy and me more than in her own house; she liked people around her. She was a slender, brown-haired girl with ultramarine blue eyes and a sweet, piquant face;

By LELAND JAMIESON

every time I looked at her, I saw again why Charley had fallen in love with her the first time they had met. Not that my Lucy was any tramp, either. With a bright ribbon tied around her straw-colored hair, she looked incredibly young and fresh and beautiful. Getting into the car, I thought irrelevantly that it couldn't possibly be twelve years since we were married, but it was.

"Well, girls," I said, smug with my news, "Charley found his Russians today."

"Really?" Gretel exclaimed. A proud, happy glow came into her face. "Oh, that's wonderful! Is he all right? Where is he now? When will he be home?" Impulsively she grabbed Lucy and hugged her. "I can't wait to see him!"

Lucy curled her good-looking legs under her on the seat, grinning. "Knowing Charley as I do," she said lightly, "I don't know whether you'll ever see him. After all, a man with twenty-five thousand dollars can go a long way!"

Gretel laughed. She and Charley had been married a little more than a year, and they adored each other. "He better not spend that money!" she said. "We're going to buy a house with it." Then she added vivaciously: "Let's celebrate! I feel as if somebody had just lifted the world off my shoulders!"

So we celebrated. We went out to dinner, and then to a movie, and we all felt wonderful. For five weeks we had been under the strain of waiting for word that Charley was safe. Immediately after the Russians had been reported lost, he had taken leave from the air line and flown to Point Barrow: A rich explorer in New York had offered twenty-five thousand dollars and expenses to any pilot who found them; and Charley, having flown a good deal in Alaska before he took his job with the line, thought he knew where to look. So now, finally, he had succeeded, as he had succeeded eventually in everything he had ever attempted to do.

In a lot of ways, he was an extraordinary guy. From the time I could remember, he had been blessed—or cursed—with an insatiable craving for excitement, and an almost feverish ambition. He had started in aviation as a wing-walker and acrobat with a flying circus, at seventeen, and he had made himself what he was. Outwardly he was a hard-boiled, emotionless, cynical little bozo, but I knew that was only a pose.

It was because I thought so much of him and knew him so well that I was concerned about how he would like coming back to the line. I didn't say anything to Lucy or Gretel, but all the time we were waiting for Charley to get home, I was thinking about it.

It was during this period that I reached the top of the co-pilot list, and was being checked out for promotion. So I had a lot of other things on my mind too—instrument take-offs under a hood, and beam-orientation problems, and C.A.A. regulations. But I kept up with developments. Charley made a triumphal return to New York. He had not been a noted figure in aviation before, but now he was an international hero, with the Russians lionizing him and inviting him to Moscow, and the President having him down to the White House for lunch.

All the publicity and build-up seemed funny to Gretel and Lucy and me, because we knew Charley didn't care about personal fame: He had gone to Alaska after twenty-five thousand dollars, and he had got it. It was only because of the accident of placement and timing that he had become famous too.

Things like that seem to have a sort of self-energizing quality. For just at the height of Charley's acclaim, the young son of a high American diplomat in London got a blood-stream infection, and the doctors over there had given up hope, when in a laboratory in New York, some scientists discovered a new drug that would save him. It all came up almost overnight; it came up the night before Charley was supposed to leave New York and come home. The President himself called him and asked him if he could take that drug, and a laboratory technician, to London. *Bang!* "Can you fly to London tonight?"

GRETEL came over to tell us, at five in the morning; Charley had phoned her just before taking off. Sitting with Lucy and me over coffee at that unholy hour, she explained the whole thing.

"How much is he getting?" I said.

"Getting?" Gretel repeated. "Why, he's not getting anything."

"He's doing this for nothing?" I exclaimed. "He's using that Bolsheviki hunt money to fly medicine to a sick kid in London? Well, kitten, there goes your house. Aren't you sore?"

"No," Gretel said, in a tone that showed she had never once thought about being sore. "After all, he's trying to save somebody's life."

"Well," Lucy said, "I think it's nice of him. I think it's a sweet thing to do. And it's just like Charley to do it."

I didn't say anything. I just sat there, drinking my coffee, doing a whole lot of thinking. There was something here that didn't add up to give the right answer. Charley was a generous guy, all right, but he couldn't afford to go galloping across the Atlantic at his own expense, unless there was a chance to make something out of it. And there was no chance of that, doing favors for Government officials, even the President.

"Unless," I thought suddenly, "this is the beginning of—"

"What's the matter, Bill?" Lucy said abruptly.

"Nothing," I said. "Why?"

"There was the funniest look on your face," Lucy said.

"I guess I'm still asleep," I said.

But I wasn't still asleep. I had never been so wide awake in my life.

WELL, I got my promotion before Charley got back, and the first job they gave me was ferrying ships to Santa Monica for a factory overhaul. What a sweet detail that was! I'd take a crate out, and sit around twiddling my thumbs while it was overhauled, and then fly it back to Brownsville, where, at the end of one of our routes, I'd trade it for another crock that needed an overhaul—and then back to Santa Monica I'd go. That went on for almost three solid months, and I never got home. Believe me, when I did get home, I was in a mood to appreciate Lucy.

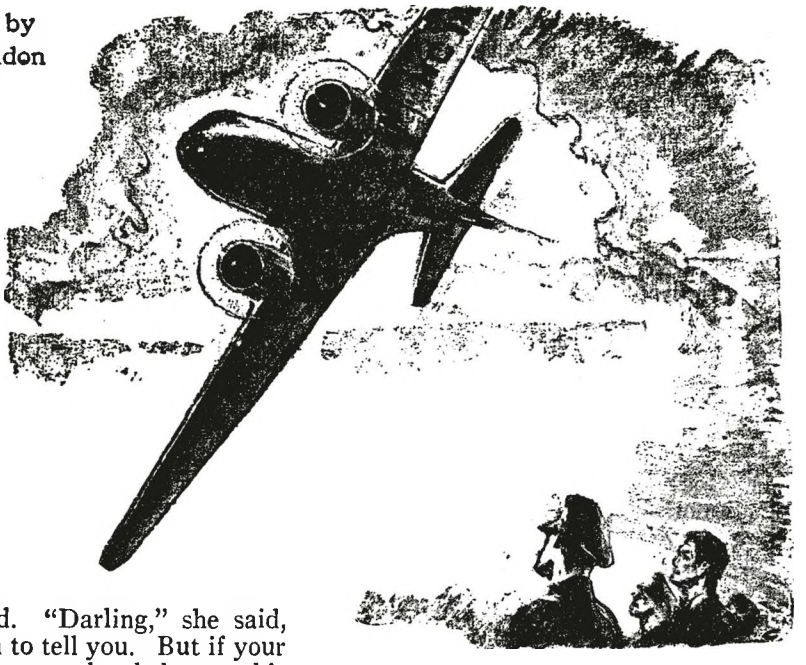
And when I got home, I got a terrific shock—because, three days before, Gretel had packed her things and walked out on Charley. When Lucy got through telling me that, she could have knocked me over with an eyelash.

"But why?" I said, when I got my breath.

"Wait till you see him," Lucy said.

"What's the matter with him?"

Illustrated by
Grattan Condon



He slammed the ship around . . . did a vertical bank off the ground.

Lucy shrugged. "Darling," she said, "I couldn't begin to tell you. But if your ego ever outgrows your head the way his has, it'll take an air-mail letter a week to reach *me!*"

"So that's it," I said. I sat down heavily, scrubbing some of the weariness out of my face; I had flown nineteen hundred miles since daylight, and it was only ten o'clock at night now. "I thought anything else might happen to him, but I never thought he'd get a swelled head."

"It's pretty terrible," Lucy said. "He's famous, now."

"Isn't that irony?" I said wryly. "He didn't start this. He started out to save five Russians' necks, and to get twenty-five thousand dollars so he could buy Gretel a house. It was an accident that he got famous."

"Not to hear him tell it, it wasn't," Lucy said.

I got up and went to the telephone. Nobody answered, when I called Charley's house. I thought I would call again in the morning, and go over and talk to him. He needed Gretel. I didn't know how I could help him, but I wanted to try. I had seen him once before in a situation like this, when he thought he had lost her, and I was afraid he would go off the deep end. He had quit drinking, when she married him—but now he would probably start again; and he and alcohol didn't get on well together. Thinking about it, I wondered if he realized how much Gretel had done for him. Without her, he might drift into the pathetic dissolution I had seen in so many pilots of his restless, unstable type.

But it turned out that I didn't see him the next morning. They called me to take Trip 6 to Newark, and of course I went. And then, coming back the next night, I was landing in a thin scum of ground fog at Charleston, and overshot just enough to have to ground-loop to keep from running out through a fence. I knocked off a wheel.

So for a few days I was automatically grounded, while the pilots' board met with the V.P. of operations and decided what should be done. The brakes had been bad on that plane, and so it wasn't altogether my fault. But just the same, they gave me a month "on the right side," and assigned me to ride with Charley.

Probably I had some punishment coming: a pilot's job is to get his airplane where it's going, and excuses don't pay repair bills. But I'd been so eager to prove to the brass-hats that I was competent to skipper one of the big crates. For four years I had been working toward my first command, and it didn't seem quite fair, after only three months of that command, to be tossed back on the right side for thirty interminable, mortified days, a co-pilot again. I felt heartsick and humiliated and sore as a raw burn.

But riding north on Trip 6 with Charley, I forgot all about that, in my amazement at seeing how he had changed. We had not flown together for nearly two years, and this was the first time I had

seen him since before he had gone to Alaska. And now he wasn't the same Charley I knew.

He didn't look any different. His compact face was still tanned and hard, his gray eyes still squinted and piercing; outwardly, at least, he still showed about as much emotion as a wing de-icer boot.

I had expected a little consolation from him about my mistake, but I didn't get any. He was in the cockpit, waiting for the dispatcher to "call" the trip, when I climbed into the plane. I held out my hand and said: "Hi! Long time no see. How the hell are you?"

He shook hands with me, and his face was a mask. He said in a clipped voice: "For God's sake, didn't I teach you enough not to overshoot a field as big as Charleston?"

"Well," I said, and I felt like crawling under the fire-extinguisher, "you see, it was foggy."

"Sure it was foggy. So what? A child could land one of these crates in fog, on a dime! And what do you do? You overshoot and knock a wheel off—you make a laughingstock out of me!"

I DIDN'T say anything, because I couldn't think of anything to say. His reasoning floored me. But I began to see what Lucy had meant. The famous Charley Craig—and I had disgraced him! I just sat staring at him. They got the passengers loaded, and Charley took off.

He had changed a lot, in his flying. He had always been as smooth as a piece of silk rolling out of its loom. But now he slammed the ship around viciously, taxying out, as if he hated it. He yanked it into the air, and did a vertical bank just off the ground. It frightened me, the way he did it. Not the flying, but the realization that he cared so little about his job and his pilot's certificate. Because you just don't toss the big crates around, loaded with passengers, and the air full of C.A.A. regulations. If you do, and persist, you get fired, or you get grounded. But Charley was tossing it around, sort of contemptuously, with a grim anger glinting hot in his eyes. I didn't have to look very far into the future to know what would happen, at this rate.

Well, it is painful for me to remember that trip, and the trips that followed it. In the air, Charley flew as if seventeen devils were chasing him. And on the ground—I don't like to do it, because it makes me ashamed, but I'll have to tell you what he did on the ground.

You see, he was famous now. At each stop, when he rolled up to the passenger station, he had his head stuck out of the cockpit window about a yard. There were always people lined up on the fence, waiting to catch a glimpse of the famous Charley Craig. In the daytime, there were a great many people. Even at night, there were a lot of people.

The first time it happened, when we stopped at Jacksonville, I said, "What the devil are you looking at?" when I saw him poke his head out the window.

If he had grinned, if he had said it with his old deprecating, caustic humor, it would have been all right. But he didn't. He was perfectly serious. He said: "At my public, punk." And then he said resentfully, "There ought to be more here than this!"

"You must be slipping!" I said acidly. "The great Charley Craig—and he's slipping!" I wanted to sting him. It had hurt me a lot, his response to my ground-looping that crate. I wanted to blast him. "What a jackass you turned out to be! No wonder Gretel walked out on you! I don't blame her a bit!"

He seemed to freeze. I had hurt him, all right, and I could have bitten my tongue off for what I had said.

"Where is she?" he said suddenly. His voice was taut and low.

"I don't know," I said.

"Lucy knows," he said accusingly.

I didn't say anything.

"I've written her letters—Lucy's sent her the letters. But I've got to talk to her! She's got to come back! I can't say what I mean, in a letter."

I took a slow breath, and I had a hard time getting the words out. "I don't know anything about it," I said.

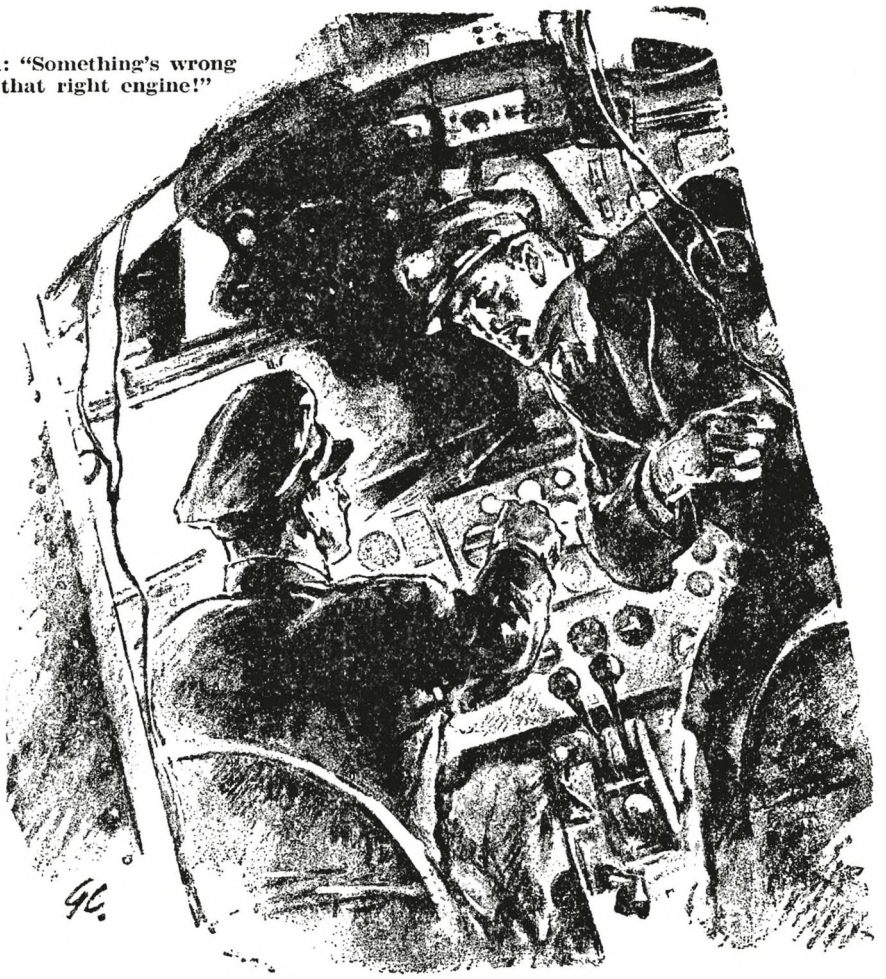
He sat there for a little while. Then, almost explosively, he said: "Well, she'll come back! She'll come back!"

"I hope so," I said. I did hope so. But I knew Charley would have to change, before she came back and stayed.

"WHEN I get through with the flight I'm going to make next month, she'll come crawling back," he said confidently. "I'm the greatest pilot who ever lived—and next month the world will know it. She'll come back!"

It was one of those things you don't want to say, but which you feel compelled to say. "Charley," I said, "the trouble is, you're too great now. You haven't got what Gretel wants—what any woman wants—any more."

I yelled: "Something's wrong with that right engine!"



"Nuts!" he said, and got up and went down the cabin aisle. I watched him walk into the passenger station. He was swaggering just a little with a jaunty cockiness, looking at all those people without seeming to see them.

During the next couple of weeks, I would have given anything if I could have been flying with somebody else. But I couldn't of course, because the V.P. of operations had assigned me to Charley. So I just sat up there with him, feeling ashamed of his display of bad taste and vanity before diminishing crowds, listening to him rail about the stupidity of pilots who stayed on the air line.

"Why," he said over and over, "I could fly this run fifty years, with one hand tied behind me! It's ridiculous for me to waste my time. When I get back from this next flight, I'll have enough money I can quit—and I'll quit!"

That sort of thing was bad enough, and Charley's flying was bad enough; his flying was really lousy, and it had already got him a warning from the V.P., I knew. But that didn't upset or frighten me nearly so much as his plans. Because now he was set on outdoing Wiley Post and Howard Hughes at one stroke: he was going on a round-the-world flight, solo, with a hammock strung up above the gas-tanks in the cabin, where he would sleep while the automatic pilot took him through the long jumps.

As soon as he told me, I had a hunch he'd never come back from that flight. After all, you can only stretch your luck so far before it runs out. I argued with him in desperation not to go, but he wouldn't listen. I told him I knew he was going to get killed, and he laughed. There was no use to argue; nobody could ever get anywhere arguing with him, and especially not now, when he was in such a state of mind over Gretel. He never said anything about her, but I knew that by some warped reasoning distilled from the misery of his mind, he was going on this flight in the hope of coaxing her back. It wouldn't coax her back, of course; and if he had not been so upset, he would have known that in an instant. But people in his mood can think strange things.

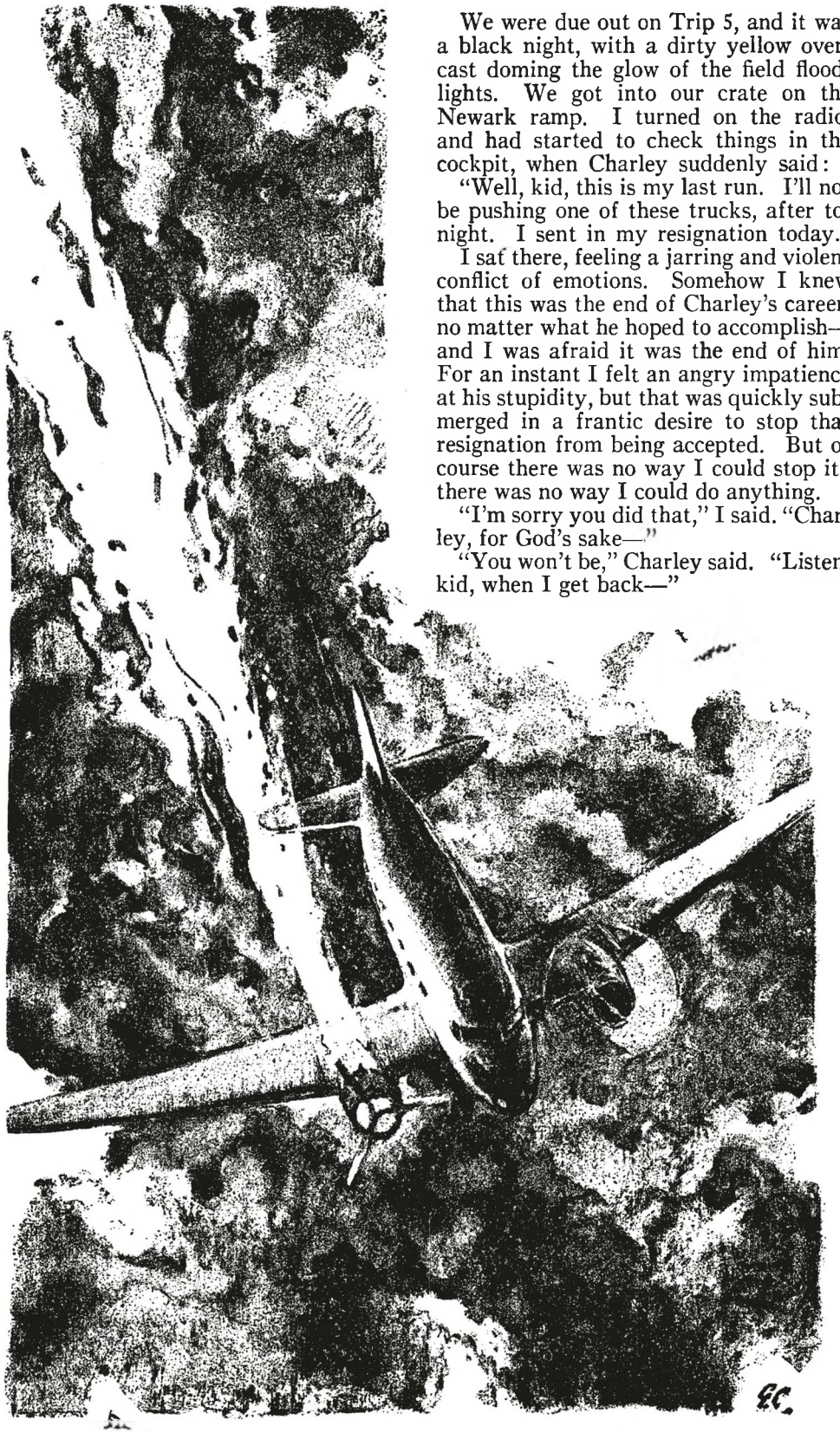
We were due out on Trip 5, and it was a black night, with a dirty yellow overcast doming the glow of the field floodlights. We got into our crate on the Newark ramp. I turned on the radio, and had started to check things in the cockpit, when Charley suddenly said:

"Well, kid, this is my last run. I'll not be pushing one of these trucks, after tonight. I sent in my resignation today."

I sat there, feeling a jarring and violent conflict of emotions. Somehow I knew that this was the end of Charley's career, no matter what he hoped to accomplish—and I was afraid it was the end of him. For an instant I felt an angry impatience at his stupidity, but that was quickly submerged in a frantic desire to stop that resignation from being accepted. But of course there was no way I could stop it; there was no way I could do anything.

"I'm sorry you did that," I said. "Charley, for God's sake—"

"You won't be," Charley said. "Listen, kid, when I get back—"



We were plunging to earth with a fiery comet streaking out.

Then he was off again, about how famous he would be, about how Gretel would have to come back to him because he was famous. But I didn't listen, really; I had heard it so much. I was thinking of all the years he and I had been together, and I was thinking that this was the end of something I treasured infinitely in spite of how he had changed. I could never get into a cockpit with him again on a night like this, and push down the line. I sat there, watching the clouds and the lights, and suddenly I wanted to burst into tears like a child.

When the passengers were aboard, I called W.R.E.E. for our clearance, and Charley taxied down to the end of the field and took off. We sliced up into the clouds at eleven hundred feet, and the wet black murk of them blotted out the lights of Elizabeth. There was mild turbulence, in the clouds.

IT was just after we had leveled off at two thousand feet that I felt a tremor pass through the plane—and it wasn't a bump we had hit. I glanced at Charley. He was sitting there, flying by instruments, his compact face unperturbed.

A moment later the thing came again, more strongly. I leaned over and yelled: "Did you feel that?"

He nodded. "Probably a fouled plug that hasn't had time to clear out," he said, and went on down the beam.

It could have been a fouled plug. I relaxed. Charley was doing a nice job on instruments, the best job of flying I had seen him do for some time. He was never so happy as when he was fighting a crate through bad weather.

But when the vibration struck through the ship once more, I knew it wasn't a plug.

I yelled: "Something's wrong with that right engine!"

Charley grinned. "Let 'er rip! When she quits, we'll go back!" For a moment he was the old Charley, that reckless glint in his eyes, and I admired him vastly. We roared on through the ink of those clouds. Whatever it was that was happening was not dangerous, I thought, because it was in only one engine; and if that engine did quit, we could go back on the other one. And the chances were, it would clear up pretty soon.

But it didn't clear up. It struck once more, and this time it was violent. The right engine bucked, and slowed, and bucked again. And then there was a dull *whap* that shook my seat under me.

Almost instantly, the mist that surrounded the ship was lighted up like a blast furnace. I snatched my side window open to look. A plume of flame was spurting back from the engine—back over the wing and out of sight under the tail. My blood froze in my veins.

"Fire!" I yelled at Charley. "The right engine's on fire!"

Charley said crisply: "We'll never make it back to the field!" And as the words came out, he was doing things faster than I ever saw any pilot do them before. He shoved the right mixture-control all the way open, cutting gas off from the burning engine. He closed both throttles. He turned the gas valve over to the left engine. He reached down and flipped the cover from the fire-extinguisher, snapped the lever to *"Right"* and pulled the valve. He clicked on the seat-belt sign. And all the time, he was flying the ship, nosing down—fast.

As soon as the fire-extinguisher gushed fluid, the flames began to diminish. We plunged toward the earth at fifteen hundred feet a minute. The only hope we had, I knew, was for that fire-extinguisher fluid, before it was exhausted, to beat out the flames. If it didn't—

The burning engine was still "windmilling" from the flow of air over the prop, and it was rough; every time it turned over, it shook the whole ship. I sat there, straining my eyes to see what was below us when we broke out of the clouds. I had my hand on the flare-cable handle to drop a flare as soon as we were under the ceiling. The thought seared through my mind that if the ceiling had lowered rapidly since we had shoved out of Newark, we were dead men right now.

But there was ceiling. We popped out at one thousand feet. I took a deep breath of thankfulness, when I saw we weren't over a town. We still had a bare chance, if we could hit in a field without trees.

"Yell, when you want a flare!" I said.

BUT I never pulled the flare. Because just then, with a dull explosion and a terrible wrench, the right engine tore itself out of its mount and fell away from the ship. The flames built up instantly. And as they built up, Charley was yelling at me in a hard yet steady voice: "Give me some help here! I can't hold her!"

I grabbed my controls, taking a quick glance at the instruments. The left wing was far down, from the loss of the weight of the right engine. We rolled the control wheels all the way around, until the flat

sides were on top instead of on the bottom. But with full right rudder and full aileron, the left wing continued to go down.

My thoughts were confused. I thought: "This is my time. My number's on this one, and it's already up." But I didn't feel anything, really, except a dull, bitter regret that there was nothing I could do to prevent it. And I thought: "This is going to be tough on Lucy and the kids."

All the time I was fighting, using all my strength. But all my strength and all Charley's together could not hold that wing up. I knew that in a moment we were going to end in a heap of twisted metal and spraying gasoline—and I hoped I'd go out in the crash instead of having to wait for the fire to finish me. You think things like that.

Charley yelled: "Kid, if we come through this one, we're good!"

I didn't answer. The altimeter showed five hundred feet; its needle was sweeping the dial. When it got down to zero—

Charley let go of his wheel with one hand, and gunned the left engine. Somehow I had forgotten entirely that we had a left engine. When he gunned it, I felt the controls taking hold.

"Down gear!" he yelled. "When the wheels are down, give me full flaps! Just as we hit, pull the gear up again!"

Even as busy as I was, I had time to think for an instant how wonderful the guy was. There we were, in for a crash—but he'd never admit it. He was giving orders in his old tone of battling challenge. And all the time we were plunging to earth with a fiery comet streaking out of the right nacelle, so bright it was blinding us until we couldn't even see when to start leveling off.

A COLD sweat was bathing me, acrid and strong in my nostrils—the odor of terror. I let go of the control wheel with one hand, and got the gear down. Then I got the flaps down. And then I waited to get the instrument-board back in my face.

Charley was gunning the left engine intermittently, just enough to hold that wing up. He started to level off. I couldn't see anything. I didn't see how he could possibly level off accurately. I thought of trees, and I thought of power lines—and I thought of Lucy and little Wild Bill and Gwen. I knew I'd never see them again.

In the glare of the fire I saw the ground, twenty feet below us, coming up fast.

And then, seeming to push up suddenly out of the ground, I saw a single tall tree, straight ahead.

"Look out!" I screamed, my lungs bursting.

The tree sliced back out of darkness. "Get that emergency hatch open, soon as we hit!" Charley bellowed. "But dump the gear—"

His words were carried away in the detonation, as that tree took off the right wing. It seemed to me that I was being hurled out of the cockpit, but somehow I stayed in my seat. We were on the ground, whirling around. I clung to the landing-gear valve, pulling it upward, feeling the wheels rolling over rough earth as they folded back into their nacelles and let the ship down on its belly.

WE rolled backward for a hundred feet, and stopped. The plane was tailed away from the mass of burning débris we had sprinkled over the ground. In a blank wonder, I realized that Charley had flown deliberately into that tree, to turn us around, so the cabin door would be away from the fire.

"Go up through the hatch, kid—and you'd better move fast!" Charley yelled. He jumped out of his seat. A tongue of red flame licked up between the panels of the companionway floor. He jumped over it, and ran back into the cabin. I heard his voice back there, saying with a calm yet thundering urgency: "Don't get excited—but get out of here—fast!"

And I knew we all had to be fast. We had left a lot of the fire when we got rid of the wing back there, but not all of it. And apparently the tree had fractured a gas tank that was still in the center-section. Already, flames were roaring up by the side of the fuselage, getting higher every second.

I got the cockpit emergency hatch open, and reached up and caught the rim and boosted myself out, feeling the searing blast from the pillaring flame six feet away. In the two seconds it took me to get out and jump to the ground, all the hair was singed off the back of my neck.

But I got out, and ran back and helped the passengers out. Then all of us moved to a safe distance and waited for the other tanks to blow up. The passengers were too stunned to say much, and Charley didn't say anything. Yet it was plain to everyone that the only reason we were all not still in that caldron of flame was because Charley had planned and executed this crash landing in exactly the way he

Charley did not make a scene. He recovered and said pleasantly: "I'm glad to see you."

had done. Standing there within that circle of garish light as the fire consumed the plane, and as farmers and motorists began to assemble from all sides, I thought no matter how good a pilot he himself believed he was, Charley was better than that. He was a whole lot better than that—and as far as I was concerned, he could brag all he wanted to. From now on, I would help him. . . .

Later, after the passengers and the company brass-hats had arranged a dinner in his honor,—where they planned to present him an award for his bravery and skill,—it occurred to me that if Gretel could only understand how wonderful he really was in most ways, she could tolerate that blatant egotism which had become his great fault.

So, because it seemed so tragic and so utterly needless that they had separated, and because he needed her, I wired Lucy to bring her to New York to that dinner. I was determined to try to make her see how great he was. Perhaps I should have told Charley, but I was afraid to.

He had no idea she was there, until we went in with Mr. Canton, the air-line's president, to sit down at the speakers' table. And there were Lucy and Gretel, waiting to meet us. The enormous dining-room was filled with big names of the aviation industry, and many reporters, and the passengers who had been on that plane; and there was a low, tumultous rumble of voices all around. Yet to me that sound seemed to dissolve into a silence filled with an infinite tension as Gretel and Charley came face to face.

"Hello, Charley," Gretel said. She glanced at me, and said, "Hello, Bill," and then looked back at him. Her blue eyes were level and appraising and very reserved, as if she were a little afraid Charley might make a scene; and I got the impression that she didn't really want to be here at all. I wondered how Lucy had prevailed on her to come, if that was true.

But Charley didn't make a scene. Seeing her, his face filled with a sort of startled pleasure and relief. He exclaimed, "Gretel!" and started to reach involuntarily to touch her, but checked the impulse self-consciously. He recovered quickly from the confusion of his surprise. "Well," he said pleasantly, but with an obvious effort to keep his voice casual, "I'm glad to see you!" It made my throat tighten, to see how glad and eager and happy he was.

They had only that moment to talk, because just then Mr. Canton came up, with Mr. Walters, who had been one of the passengers on the plane that night; and there were the introductions to Lucy and Gretel, and the business of getting seated at the semicircular table. Mr. Canton sat in the center, with Charley on his right, and Gretel next to Charley, and Mr. Walters next to her. I sat on Mr. Canton's left, with Lucy beside me.

From where I was sitting, I could see all the others. Mr. Canton was monopolizing Charley, and I heard him say: "I got your resignation, but I haven't had time to act on it yet. I'm sorry you're leaving the line."

Mr. Walters was giving Gretel all his attention. From occasional snatches of conversation I heard, I knew he was telling her what a wonderful job Charley had done, and what a fine pilot he was, and how everybody in this room was here to pay him honor. Gretel was listening, sweet and gracious enough; but I could see she didn't really feel any of it.

"Doesn't she realize what he's done?" I whispered to Lucy, and I must have sounded vehement about it. "He did something no pilot could be expected to do—he wasn't even human when it was happening—he sat there like a god that even fire and death couldn't frighten!"

"WHY, darling!" Lucy said, low—and she was smiling provocatively. "You're really poetical! Why, I love it!"

"Nuts!" I said. "I wanted her here so she could see what these people think of him. If she can realize how great he is, she can put up with his egotism."

Lucy said: "Didn't it ever occur to you that his greatness is what's been wrong all along? It was driving her crazy!"

"But damn her, if she doesn't come back to him now, he won't care what the hell happens! He may get killed just because—"

"If he really loves her, why can't he change—why can't he give her a little companionship—why can't he be human?" Lucy stopped abruptly. She squeezed my hand, under the table. "Darling, let's not fight about them! It's been a week since I've seen you. I'm so thankful you're safe! What happened?"

"A cylinder broke off at the base, and knocked the oil sump—"

"Could it happen again?" Lucy demanded quickly.

"No. As soon as they found out what caused it, the manufacturer designed new cylinders, and the company's changing them all. It won't happen again."

"I hope not!" Lucy said, and shivered.

Well, as soon as the dinner was over, Mr. Canton got up, and made a little speech about air transport; and he said a lot of nice things about Charley, and said he was sorry he couldn't persuade Charley to stay with the line, instead of resigning and making another big flight. Then Mr. Canton introduced Mr. Walters, who was the president of one of the largest steel companies in the country. Mr. Walters got up and made a short talk.

He said that no matter how much airplanes were improved in the future, they would still be machines, and would have little mishaps occasionally, and big mishaps once in a great while. He said it was the pilots of those planes who must determine whether big mishaps became tragedies or just exciting memories.

After that he told how Charley had come from a farm in Indiana as a boy, and how he had started to fly. He outlined Charley's flights to Alaska and London, and said that in a few weeks the world would be thrilling to new headlines as Charley circled the globe. Then he said it was because of Charley's great flights and what he had learned on them that he had been able to meet the emergency a few nights ago, and that while the passengers on the plane owed him for their lives, all aviation owed him a debt it could never forget nor repay. And finally he told just what Charley had done—his prompt decision to pick a field instead of trying to return to the airport, his amazingly quick thinking in hitting that tree to cut the wing off and turn the plane around so it would be tailed away from the fire. Mr. Walters knew all about it, because I had told him myself. He thought Charley was wonderful.

When he got through with that, he reached down on the table and picked up a small jeweled case, and opened it. There was a watch in the case—even from where I was sitting, I could see that it was the finest waterproof wrist-watch that could be bought anywhere.

"CHARLEY CRAIG," he said, and his voice had a profound emotion in it, "in behalf of the passengers who rode out of Newark with you that night last week, and in behalf of every man and woman in aviation, I present you this token of our esteem."

Charley got up slowly, and although there were two hundred people in that dining-room, there wasn't a sound. He glanced at the watch, and shook hands with Mr. Walters, and then looked down at Gretel. When he looked up again, his heart was shining in his eyes.

It got me by the throat, that look. Because I could see that he thought Gretel was here because she meant to come back to him. I knew she was here only because Lucy had practically dragged her. From what Lucy had told me, I knew

Gretel would never go back to him, until he changed.

And it was too late for him to change, now; henceforth, for his livelihood, he must work at being a hero, going on from feat to feat and banquet to banquet—until the quest for fame trapped him in death, or he faded into the quick limbo that swallows all pilots who follow the course he had chosen. Watching the proud, happy glow in his face as he drank the adulation of these two hundred people, I thought of how a shooting star blazes momentarily across the sky before it explodes into darkness. Charley was a star, dazzling everyone now, dazzling even himself. I felt a sudden frantic compulsion to shout at him not to be such a fool. But I couldn't, of course. I could only sit there, holding my breath, feeling my pulse in my ears.

FOR a minute he didn't say anything —he just stood there. And then, in a low yet distinct voice, he addressed Mr. Walters and the people in the room, and thanked them all very graciously.

This morning, in our hotel room—when he had had no idea Gretel would be here tonight—he had shown me his notes, written out on little cards which he intended to hold in the palm of one hand for quick reference. So I knew the gist of what he intended to say: how he had landed the plane, and how it was only what any other pilot would have done—which was a big concession from Charley in his frame of mind.

But something was wrong, now, I saw. He was reaching into his pocket—and his hand was coming out empty. I realized anxiously that he had mislaid the cards. He started to speak, and stopped, floundering over his words. I grew uncomfortable, suffering a sort of transmitted stage-fright.

But finally he regained his poise, and said quietly: "Ladies and gentlemen, I've never attended a banquet that affected me as this one has; and I've attended a good many. The others were given because I had done something for myself—this one was given because a few people thought I had done something for them. I wonder if any of you realize what a difference that can make."

He paused, and a sort of prickly heat was spreading over my spine. This wasn't anything like what he had intended to say.

"As I listened to Mr. Walters," he went on, "I realized all at once that I'm a farce. I've never really done anything for aviation—but aviation has done a lot for me. Sitting there, I suddenly wished I could do something and know in my heart that I deserved all the praise and flattery that Mr. Walters has given me tonight.

"But Mr. Walters has got things mixed up. It was my air-line training that enabled me to fly to Alaska and London. And the fact is, those flights didn't help on that landing—because I never saw the ground when we landed, and I didn't know we had hit a tree, until after it was all over." He grinned suddenly, a twisted, whimsical grin. "I leveled off by the altimeter; and then we went on—and if there had been a mountain there, or a forest, or open water, we would have had to hit just the same."

He paused, leaving an infinite hush tightening over the room.

"A pilot can imagine he's in command of every situation that can come up—it's so easy to think that, and when something does happen, to take credit for it. But I just realized, hearing Mr. Walters tell all about it, that I hadn't landed that plane at all. I suddenly realized that I was really only a passenger in the cockpit that night." His voice fell almost to a whisper: "God was the pilot."

You could have heard the folding of a napkin, just then; in all my life I have never heard such a profound, moving silence. Charley stood there, and I had a sense that his whole personality had changed in some strange way. It was as if, admitting to frailty, he liked himself and everyone else a lot better.

And Gretel must have felt the same thing, for just then she reached up and took his hand tightly, as if she never would let it go. There was a radiance in her face, and tears in her eyes.

Charley sat down suddenly, and turned to Mr. Canton. "I've just decided to call off that round-the-world flight," he said. "I'd like to postpone that resignation—about twenty years."

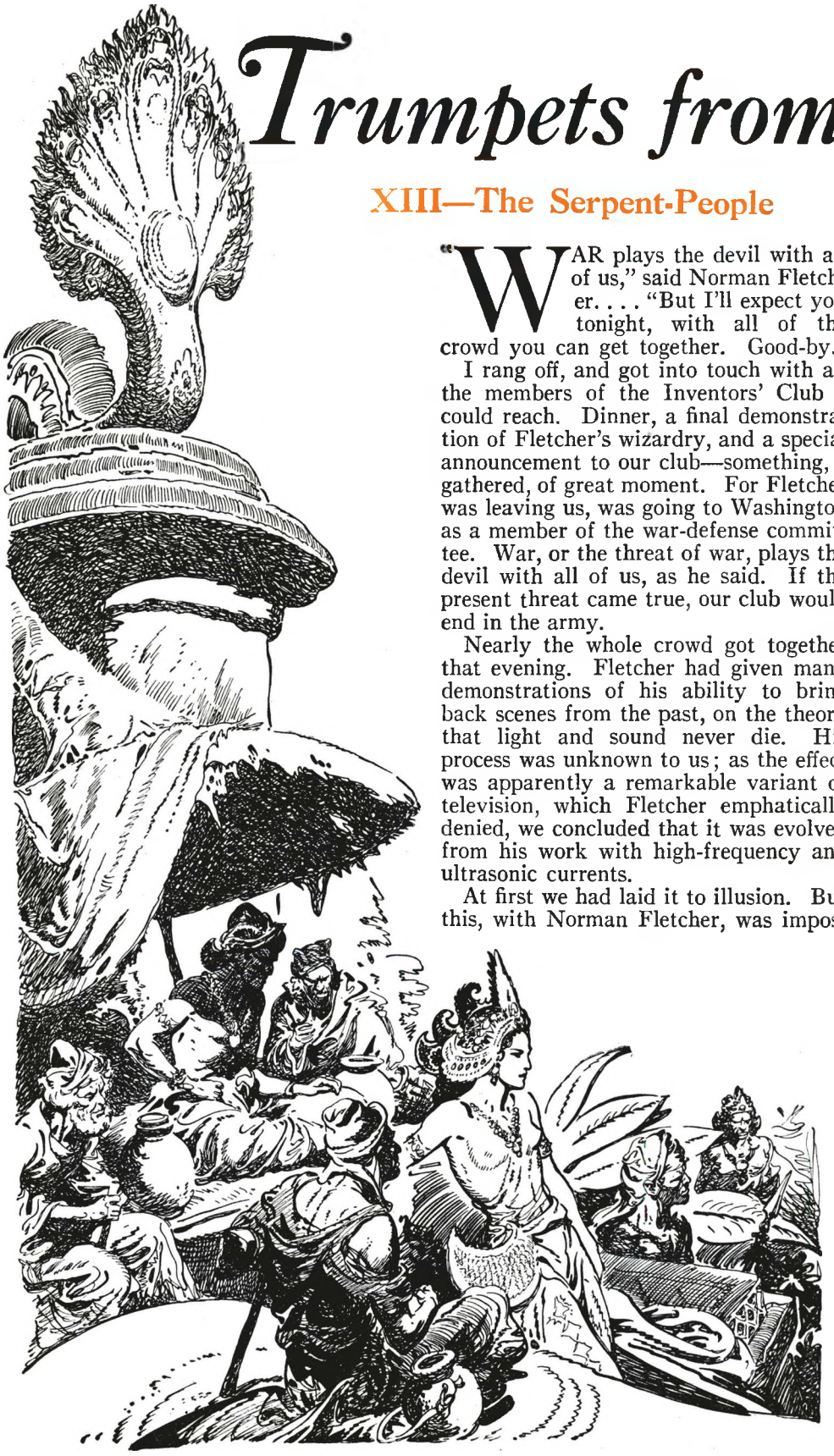
Mr. Canton nodded, looking quite pleased. He said heartily, "Fine, Charley. That's fine!"

THEN Charley reached into his coat pocket. He brought out that sheaf of little reference cards, and tossed them over to me. He was grinning, a glint in his eyes.

"Here, kid," he said. "Save these, and you'll know what to say at a shindig like this, when you're a famous hot-shot and get a kink in your brain."

Trumpets from

XIII—The Serpent-People



"WAR plays the devil with all of us," said Norman Fletcher. . . . "But I'll expect you tonight, with all of the crowd you can get together. Good-by."

I rang off, and got into touch with all the members of the Inventors' Club I could reach. Dinner, a final demonstration of Fletcher's wizardry, and a special announcement to our club—something, I gathered, of great moment. For Fletcher was leaving us, was going to Washington as a member of the war-defense committee. War, or the threat of war, plays the devil with all of us, as he said. If the present threat came true, our club would end in the army.

Nearly the whole crowd got together that evening. Fletcher had given many demonstrations of his ability to bring back scenes from the past, on the theory that light and sound never die. His process was unknown to us; as the effect was apparently a remarkable variant of television, which Fletcher emphatically denied, we concluded that it was evolved from his work with high-frequency and ultrasonic currents.

At first we had laid it to illusion. But this, with Norman Fletcher, was impos-

OBLIVION

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

sible. He ranked with the foremost electrical brains alive. His genius had made the Pan-American Corporation the greatest unit on earth. Now that it was turned to government service with the national defense program, predictions were freely made that any nation attempting to measure barbaric might against Yankee wits would get a shocking surprise; and this was no joke.

During the afternoon Hopkins, the president of the Inventors' Club, called me. Old Hop had been a professional

Pen drawings by John Richard Flanagan

magician before he retired on invention royalties; he had traveled widely, and had lived long in the Orient. He knew his stuff.

"You know," he said over the phone, "that Norman Fletcher has turned this apparently useless but fascinating invention of his, to the purpose of proving that all the legends and fables of mankind have some factual basis."

"He's done a good job of proving it," I answered.

"Sure. Well, he called me, asking that I suggest a subject for demonstration tonight. I gave him a lulu! It's the legend of snake-men or serpent-people."

"Never heard of it," I rejoined, more crossly than kindly.

"A legend deeply rooted in India, whence the Portuguese brought it; and it bulks large in Buddhist tradition. In Angkor and other ruined cities of Indo-China, the carvings show how widespread was the belief in Nagas, as they're called —a cobra, see? It's supposed that some original race in those parts had the name, and worshiped the cobra; and when the Khmer race came along and conquered that part of Asia, they took over the belief. But the Khmer race has vanished now, and who knows the truth? Might be interesting."

I assented mechanically and hung up, rather disgusted with old Hop for proposing so asinine a legend. Snakes did not appeal to me. I took occasion to look up the matter, however, and discovered that belief in snake people extended everywhere, even to American Indians, not to mention the Garden and Eve and the Serpent: People who could command snakes, people who could change into snakes, and so forth. There were a lot of variations there. . . .

Being a bachelor, Norman Fletcher lived at the Pan-American laboratories, where they had built him a gorgeous place of his own. A round dozen of us drove out from the city that evening, and Fletcher greeted us with his beaming hospitality.

The dinner was a rare one, and the wines were elaborate; it was, said Fletcher, a very special occasion. He had an announcement for us, but preferred to make it after the demonstration; he predicted that it would surprise us considerably.

The meal over, we lighted cigars and followed our host to the laboratory—his own private workshop, within high gaunt walls of stone. We took the easy-chairs facing one of those stone walls. Coffee and liqueurs were served, and we were left alone. Fletcher sat at his control-board, an instrument like an organ of many manuals, the keys of which controlled his lights and tubes. There was no other apparatus visible.

White-haired, urbane, genial, the old Yankee surveyed us with a twinkle in his eye.

"Invariably, you look around for apparatus," he observed amusedly. "Yet there is none. It's all here, here!"—tapping the keys under his fingers. "Here are the tubes, here's the magic, the illusion, the trickery you've sought so long and vainly to find!"

He was gently poking fun at us now. He went on more seriously:

"Mr. Hopkins, I believe you are a master magician. Did you ever see the most famous trick in the world—the rope trick of India?"

Hopkins laughed. "No; and no one has ever seen it. No reward has ever produced it on any stage, in any part of the world. It's one of those things talked about but never seen, like the sea-serpent. Every magician knows this. It's an impossibility."

"You're to see it this evening," said Fletcher softly. "You've asked for the origin of the legend of serpent-people. I've had great difficulty, I must admit, in getting the language of ancient Indo-China transcribed—for I need make no further mystery, gentlemen. When I recapture some scene from the past, by use of these tubes, I recapture the language as well. Sometimes it is an unknown tongue, and I must translate it as seems best, in making and synchronizing the sound track. So it happens now: You're to see the vast ancient cities of the Khmer race, or one of them; it takes us back a thousand years or more, when the land that is now all jungle was teeming with myriads of people. An Aryan race, brown and intelligent with the brains of more ancient India, but a race doomed to sudden death. The reason will appear. The rope-trick will appear. So will the origin of this singular legend, typified by the cobra, the serpent which expands its wide hood—"

HIS voice died out. The room lights had sunk to nothing, and on the stone wall before us was playing the yellowish radiance which we recognized. The section of wall on which this light played, gradually disintegrated. It dissolved be-

fore our eyes. We looked as through a window, not upon the exterior darkness, but upon a glowing sea of green, waving in sunlight and shadow—green trees lifting high crowns into the very heaven, incredibly tall, creating a sort of twilight below them.

Dwarfed by these enormous trees, an elephant padded along. A driver sat on his neck; a howdah of gold and scarlet was on his back, and in the howdah sat a young man whose dress flashed with gems. Now it was seen that the elephant followed a road of stone slabs, thirty feet wide and straight as an arrow. Water glimmered ahead; the road became a causeway and crossed it. A lake? No; merely a moat within stone walls—a moat a thousand feet wide that circled walls and vaguely enormous buildings lost within a leafy cover opposite. The young man leaned forward and spoke.

"Stop at the bridge! A chariot there, and those priests. Ask them."

The beast slowed. Ahead, at the end of the causeway, appeared a chariot and a group of priests, yellow-robed, with whom the driver was talking. Something else appeared, towering above them on either hand; this was the head of an enormous cobra carved in stone. On either side of the causeway lifted such a head, the body running along the causeway on either hand and upheld by stone figures of men, life-sized.

The soldier in the chariot, the priests, saluted the figure on the elephant.

"Greeting, Prince Varma!" cried the soldier in a lazy voice. Upon him, as upon the others, sat an air of listless indolence. The driver leaned far over.

"Where can we find the juggler Raswan, of whom all the people talk? The foreigner who came out of the jungle and does miracles?"

One of the priests made response. "I hear, lord, that he may be found at the old shrine of Siva, across town, where the priests have given him shelter."

The elephant moved on. Prince Varma looked at the uplifted cobra heads of stone, on either side, on a level with his eyes. Now it appeared that each head, representing a cobra with out-puffed hood, was composed of many smaller heads, perfect in each detail—a startling vision to one not accustomed to this form of art. Prince Varma merely glanced at them and looked on, across the moat, to the gigantic walls that rose amid palm-trees—the city of Ayuthia, where the king his father ruled the Khmer people.

Others appeared on the causeway, multitudes of people, who made room for the elephant. Some saluted, others did not. They were flower-decked, laughing, jesting, yet in all their faces lay the same listless expression. Prince Varma was one of the few who showed energy in his chiseled features and dark eyes.

A fragrance that was not of the forest flowers and jungle creepers drifted down the causeway; the elephant flung up his trunk to it, distastefully. It grew stronger. It was the fragrance that hung above Ayuthia and other Khmer cities, day and night. Prince Varma spoke to his driver.

"Will it be difficult to find them at that shrine?"

"That depends, lord," replied the other. "The old shrine is small; it will not have more than twenty thousand people around it—a third the number of those who live about the larger shrines and downtown temples. The priests will know, however; this juggler has become famous in the past two weeks."

The city gates appeared, open as always in these days, guarded by indolent archers. People crowded everywhere in masses—laughing, merry, lackluster people, always smiling. The gates had platforms of stone, the height of a howdah,

The girl shrank back, for the hooded head was rising! Varma pointed to an opening in the stone flooring.

for nobles and princes to disembark, but the elephant did not pause. The soldiers saluted the prince, wagged their heads after his frowning passage, and muttered. Prince Varma was highly unpopular; in fact, he was hated because he tried to enforce discipline and instill spirit into the troops. Who needed such things? Khmer ruled the world. The whole wealth of eastern Asia was poured into these cities, and chiefly into Ayuthia. It was fifty years since the legions had done any fighting, so terrible was the Khmer name to others.

But in those fifty years, a warrior race had drifted close under the jungle trees.

Within the city, the fragrance became more perceptible, permeating the very air. One scarcely noted it at first, for sheer amazement; this seemed a home of gods, rather than of men. The wide street showed straight ahead, for miles. To right and left lifted masses of carven stonework in fantastic shapes of pierced galleries, each tier smaller than the tier below—gigantic erections of stone. No one lived in these immense structures; they housed shrines, or religious devotees, or were monuments to dead kings. The people lived around them in slight bamboo structures; people by the thousand and ten thousand to each one. And as

the elephant advanced along the mighty stone street, whose slabs were rutted by the wheels of chariots across the centuries, the subtle fragrance in the air deepened ever.

Chariots, bodies of troops, laughing crowds filled the street and crowded the bazaars lining it. They all made free passage for the elephant; a good-natured people, it seemed, with laughter everywhere, and the clangor of bronze bells from the temples or clumping bamboo bells held by monks. Good-natured—why not? Everywhere towered coco palms, shutting out the sky; bananas, fruits of every kind, sprang profusely from the earth. Into Ayuthia poured tribute of riches from all countries, until gold was common as dirt, and precious gems were bartered for a pig, and artists used such things to decorate the carved walls. In Ayuthia was no crime, no care, no trouble; even life and death were of no account here.

For ten miles ran this street, amid uncounted multitudes of laughing listless folk, past temples that lifted enormous stone faces to the sky, past the huge central park of the palace, on toward the old shrine of Siva. And the subtle fragrance was everywhere. No one hurried.

AT the ancient shrine, where about the crumbling towering temple huddled twenty thousand attendants and priests and slaves and guests, in their flimsy bamboo structures, were two people, vastly different from the half-million in this city. They occupied a small guest-house of the temple; just the two of them, with a servant.

The juggler was powerful in build, a forceful but suave energy in every line of his strong golden-bronze features. He, Raswan, was of the Cham people—that fierce warrior folk who had come out of the northern hills to the verge of civilization, and whose mailed fist was beginning to close on this doomed race. His daughter Silva was a small, delicate creature, lovely as a flower, her skin like old ivory; she seemed rather some sprite of the forest than a girl, so fragile and beautiful she was.

"Bah!" said Raswan with scornful glance, at some question from her. "This city is a hell-hole; I shall cleanse it with fire and sword, I tell you! And sooner than you think, my girl. These people must be wiped out to the last person!"

"Why?" She turned to him, pity in her eyes. "They're a friendly, kindly people, father! They've made no war for two generations and more."

"No, they've lost the art of defending their wealth," said Raswan with thin mockery. "You've seen the temples, the passages, the wondrous carvings; in all of them, have you ever seen one hint of one indelicate subject?"

The girl frowned, lightly. "No; that's true. Never. Why?"

"Ask this reeking air about us," rasped her father, who seemed more warrior than juggler. "A decadent people, a plague on the earth! In the King's stables are elephants by the hundred, chariots by the thousand; a hundred thousand warriors garrison this place. Yet in one night, with a thousand of my men and four elephants, will I destroy this whole city and every soul in it."

"That doesn't answer my question, Father. About the carvings."

"Oh, that!" Raswan smiled grimly. "Opium. These people have lost all energy; look at their faces! They eat opium, burn opium, spend vast sums on the accursed drug. It's in their food; its incense is perpetually in their nostrils—temples, houses, men and women, babes at the breast, all are soaked in it from birth to death! If you and I didn't get out in the open jungle every sunrise, we'd sicken and die of the fumes around us."

"They're not all like that," murmured Silva. Her father laughed.

"Aye! That prince—Varma, was it? I grant you, he's of the old Khmer stock. Let me warn you, girl! I've brought you here and hidden you away, so that you'll see no more of him; take care! He's a degenerate like all of them, not a man. He may use fine words and have a hint of hot blood in him, but he'll go the way of —ah! What's this?"

He sat quiet, listening to sudden voices outside. The girl stared at him, rebellious yet shrinking, dominated by him. He dominated everything around, whether he wore the blue robe of a coolie, the saffron robe of a priest, or the jeweled robe of a king. His lean steely features were made for dominance. As a juggler, performing tricks for the temple crowd, he dominated that crowd completely. His character, his presence, was a force that was felt.

THE door opened. A priest entered, bringing another man with him.

"They are here, lord; there sits the man you seek."

Prince Varma dismissed the priest. He flung one swift glance at Silva, then fas-

tened his gaze on her father, and stepped forward. He was quite unflurried beneath that frowning, black-avised regard, and with a salute, seated himself, still meeting the steely eyes.

"I have found you," he said calmly.

"It is not by my desire," snapped Raswan. "You're a prince; my daughter is not for you. You have women by the thousand in your palaces. Go! Leave us in peace."

"That is impossible," the Prince rejoined lightly. "The memory of your daughter does not leave me in peace; during four days I've been quartering the jungle, the roads to the frontier, the river banks, the hills. I have talked with the Nagas, the cobra people. Do you know that my fathers who ruled this land were descendants of the Nagas? That is true."

"Are you drunk?" demanded Raswan.

The Prince smiled.

"Yes, when I look at the eyes of your daughter. But in your eyes I see a sword, and it is the royal sword of the Cham kings, hilted with ivory."

THE girl shrank suddenly, staring. The gaze of Raswan slitted keenly; in a trice, he wiped all expression from his face. The Prince still smiled, and waited. Suddenly, unexpectedly, it was he who dominated this room.

"What do you want here?" shot out Raswan.

"Food. A king does not poison the rice of a guest."

"Our food," rasped the juggler, "contains none of your accustomed drug."

"That is why I desire it; I never touch opium."

"Serve us," said Raswan to his daughter, and flung a sneer at the prince. "You're the only person in Ayuthia who can boast as much. Your father the king is a sodden wreck; your captains have never seen a battle; your soldiers, your very slaves, have no will or power. They drift like lotos leaves on a pond."

"That is true," murmured the Prince, his face setting hard. He watched Silva as she moved about with the servant, bringing rice and fruits. Raswan went on, harshly:

"You are in disgrace. Your people hate you because you try to stir them to work. Your soldiers hate you because you love discipline. Your very father and brothers detest you, because you try to make them govern the land."

"All true," said Prince Varma. "But I'm still descended from the Nagas."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Raswan sharply. The prince shook his head.

"You'll discover that too late, juggler; I have magic more powerful than yours."

Raswan eyed him scornfully. The food was set before them; they began to eat. Prince Varma presently lifted eyes of calm challenge.

"Do you juggle tonight?"

"In an hour. For the last time."

"The king of the Cham warriors, juggling for the pleasure of Ayuthia!"

"Well? Who told you I was a king?"

"Yourself; your words, your looks, your ways. Parties of your warriors are encamped in the hills and in the jungle; you have horsemen and elephants ready. You're here, disguised, a spy. Why?"

Death quivered in the room, in the gaze of Raswan.

"You fool!" he said softly. "Do you expect to leave here alive, to warn your people?"

Prince Varma shrugged lightly. "Oh, warnings would do them no good; they've had plenty! All you say is true. There aren't five hundred men in the garrison worth their rice. Some of the regiments of archers haven't strung a bow in a year or two—and in olden days the Khmer archers were the greatest in the world! No; no use giving them any warnings. It's you I'm warning."

Raswan stiffened. The Prince spoke on, easily, without heat.

"My people aren't worth fighting for or saving. Let them perish! Your warriors are barbarians; I've learned much about them, about you. You, a king without sons, with one daughter whom you love above all the world. You, a little king of a little hill race, who spy upon Ayuthia and dream of looting this city, crammed with all the wealth of Asia! Well, because I also love your daughter, and because she loves me, I shall let you go. Tomorrow noon, be out of the city or take the consequences."

RASWAN controlled himself, though lightnings sat in his eyes.

"I've gained what I came here to learn, Prince Varma," said he softly.

"Aye? One thing you don't know." The Prince tossed a rice-ball into his mouth. "Why the images of Nagas are everywhere about the city. Why the royal family of Ayuthia is said to be descended from the serpent-people. What it means."

"Suppose you tell me," said Raswan.

His daughter was intent upon the two of them.

"Why not?" Varma smiled. "Look! Long ago the world was young. My ancestors took for their emblem the cobra, the Naga of a hundred and one heads. The legend arose that they were descendants of a lovely princess of the Nagas, who took human form. They encouraged this legend. Time and again, it saved them in crisis; this story of the serpent-people who lived under the earth. Behind it all was a secret, held precious in the family, given from father to son. So I received it, though of late generations it has meant nothing to my family. To me, it means much."

"What is it?" demanded the other harshly. The Prince wiped his lips and shook his head.

"Not now." He stood up. "I give you until tomorrow noon before I tell any that you're in the city. It would not be wise if you were to try and kill me now."

"That will come in due time," said Raswan grimly. He cocked his head, listening. "Ah! The drums! The ceremonies will soon begin. I must juggle for your people, and do tricks."

"I shall be there," said the Prince, and flung a smile at Silva. "And I shall prove that my magic is greater than yours, spy and juggler and king!"

So, pleasantly, he took his leave. Raswan sat for a space like a man carved in stone; he wakened, abruptly, and crooked his finger at his daughter.

"Go, make everything ready. Ha! I shall trick this rascal yet. Go, I say!"

She departed. Raswan beckoned the servant, who was a sturdy, deep-chested Cham, and utterly devoted to him.

"You must drop everything and leave the city at once, and find our men."

"Lord, the gates are never closed, and the guards pay no heed to anyone."

"Good. You know where my brother and the Cham princes are encamped, six miles outside of the city. Go to them, now, at once. Instead of striking a few days hence, as we planned, they're to strike before dawn—and without fail! This very night."

The eyes of the Cham flashed. He gestured understanding.

"Here are the orders," went on Raswan. "One elephant to each gate; the gates are open, but the elephant must push down the gate-towers, which are old and ruinous. One party to each of the four gates; and each party must bring fire. Explain that this whole city is

built of flimsy bamboo, like this house; these structures form solid masses about the temples.

"Once inside the gates, set fire to the houses—quickly! Pause not to slay. Time enough for that later. Then rush down the four great streets to the palace in the center, and fire the stables. After that, nothing remains except to loot and kill. We have a thousand men close at hand. Send at once for another five thousand, who should reach here before tomorrow night—cavalry. Runners will take the word, from my brother. Understood?"

The Cham assented, and was gone from the room like a shadow.

UPON the night air, the sickly-sweet odor of opium lay heavy. This old shrine of Siva, one of the first structures built when the ancient city was new, had an enormous open court before its central portico. This portico was reached by two terraces. On the first terrace beside the steps stood two stone lions of monstrous size. On the second and upper terrace, before the temple entrance, were two of the enormous stone Nagas, amazingly carven. Each of those great uplifted cobra-hoods was composed of hundreds of tiny cobra figures, crested and puffed out and most intricately chiseled, like lacework: the bodies formed the frontal edge of the terrace.

Dancing girls and musicians were upon the terraces now, posturing silently to the low throb of drums. From inside the building, whose carven façade mounted into upper darkness, voices chorused the sacred texts, for worship and instruction went on ceaselessly. People were gathering in the open court, eternal smiles upon languid lips, flower-wreaths everywhere; flowers eked out the universal garb of both sexes—the sampot, a twisted length of silk, artfully arranged.

More people, ill and halt and maimed, were flocking in from the temple-hospital up the street—a larger, newer structure with some forty thousand permanent at-

tendants. The men and women flocked in serried masses, moving listlessly, floating rather than walking. There was no hurry, no pushing, no crowding. Life was like that in Ayuthia, drugged to the very soul. The air was heavy with opium incense.

Now, at a pause in the dancing, slaves set up an enormous candle on either side of the Nagas before the entry. These candles were huge cylinders of bamboo, stuffed with fats and incense; as they burned, the fragrance of opium drifted ever more heavily.

Gold and jewels were everywhere. While Britain, across the world, was still a Roman province, the wealth of all the Far East had been pouring into the cities of the Khmers, and now it still poured in uncounted. The temple dancers, in their stylized costumes, were coruscating with rare gems.

A harsh gong lifted brazen clamor to the shadowed balconies above. It was close to midnight. Raswan appeared suddenly between the two Nagas and the gigantic candles; he was naked except for a loin-cloth—a brawny, magnificent figure of muscular ease, at which the crowded people gaped curiously, and applauded with faint excitement. His daughter appeared beside him, a slim and delicate shape, sampot twisted about her body. She handed him a sampot of flowing silk, and stepped away.

Other lights were extinguished; the two huge drugged candles gave sufficient light on the spot where the juggler stood. All else merged into obscurity. A figure slipped out of the temple, came over to the towering Naga on the right, and stood in its shadow. Prince Varma stood lost to sight, unobserved, and watchful.

As a juggler, Raswan was exceptional. In deft silence, he began his tricks, and his personality dominated the scene immediately. When he smiled, the crowd broke into laughter. When he waited, tense, the crowd swayed in suspense. These people loved tricks of magic and juggling, and Ayuthia had seen the best on earth, but never a man such as this. Raswan performed none of the usual and simple feats; everything he did was extraordinary. When he retired and came back wearing a Chinese robe, and proceeded to the Chinese "production" tricks, the materialization of objects from thin air, applause swept the massed throngs.

FOR an hour or more he held them. The whole court and street behind was a sea of faces; the crowd was jammed thickly, impenetrably, yet the utmost good humor prevailed. In Ayuthia were no quarrels, no lost tempers.

Stripped again of his Chinese robe, Raswan knelt and prayed to the gods. He rose, and cast the silken sampot on the ground; he jerked it away, and in the lighted space was seen a coiled rope, a thick and heavy rope that lifted in air as though pulled by some invisible hand. It uncoiled and went up and up until it was lost in the shadowed carvings far above. Then it settled and became firm, like a rope of stone.

Raswan motioned his daughter. She went to the rope; her light, lithe shape swarmed up its pillared length with ease, became dim among the shadows above, and vanished. With one sudden fierce cry, Raswan flung down the sampot anew, and then jerked it away. Two men, two warriors, uprose from the ground, naked blades held between their teeth. They swarmed up furiously, swiftly.

They too were lost in the weaving shadows. From somewhere far above came a wailing shriek, a cry of agony. Even Varma, knowing it all to be a trick, thrilled and stiffened in sharp surmise. Something thudded on the ground—a hand, lopped off at the wrist. Something else fell, and a gasp went up as Raswan lifted and displayed it. The head of his daughter. Another hand, a foot. One by one, the portions of her body fell to earth. Women cried out and sickened. Men swayed with fear and dismay, but Raswan smiled and gestured reassuringly.

He collected all the portions of the girl's body, and over them spread the silken sampot. He waved his hand, and the rope unlimbered, began to descend; it came down and coiled as it came, until there was only a coil of rope on the ground. Then Raswan knelt again and prayed aloud to Siva, and stood up. With a momentary hesitation, he reached out to the sampot. Suddenly he caught it up and jerked it away.

Silva rose to her feet, unhurt, smiling. Quickly, Raswan flung the sampot over the coiled rope, and jerked it up. The rope was gone.

Applause burst forth. For once, the listless people were moved to real emotion. Flowers were thrown at the two. Masses of flowers fell about them. Jewels and ornaments showered around them.

Then, suddenly, a silence spread. A dread, incredulous silence. A woman shrieked out in wild horror. Raswan turned about, and took a step backward.

That enormous stone Naga on the right, the cobra's head composed of a thousand tiny heads, was moving!

The carven stone seemed to undulate. It moved upward as though the Naga had come to life and were lifting its head. Figures burst across the terrace—priests, shrieking out in horrible mad panic. What happened there beside the Naga, was hard to say; a dim shape moved, the daughter of the juggler screamed something. Then the great stone head moved again and settled into place, and the earth trembled to the movement.

RASWAN turned, peering about. His voice lifted; it lifted in alarm, in sharp terror. He had no answer, except from the frightened cries of the crowd. His daughter had disappeared. From the shrine behind him, a dozen archers appeared and closed up around him; they were smiling, and their officer was smiling, as he saluted the juggler.

"My daughter!" cried out Raswan. "Where is she?"

"I know not, lord," said the officer amiably. "But I have orders from Prince Varma to escort you home to your guesthouse, and to guard you there until noon tomorrow."

For one instant, the juggler was petrified. Then he broke into furious words, furious actions. Escape, he could not. There was something unearthly and horrible in the smiling refusal of the archers to answer force with force, in their refusal to heed him or his words. Only when he flew into a mad and insensate frenzy, when he produced a knife and stabbed at the officer—then they closed more tightly around him. Golden fetters were brought out and laid on his arms and legs. He screamed, shrieking wild words about death and destruction, attack by the Cham warriors—and ignoring him, smiling, unhurried, they forced him away and his hoarse desperation died out in the distance.

MEANWHILE, Silva felt herself carried; she was enveloped in a mantle that muffled her cries. When she heard the voice of Prince Varma at her ear, she fell silent. He pulled the mantle away from her head, and she perceived that he was carrying her along a corridor, which ended in lighted chambers where lamps burned softly. A gasp escaped her, for these chambers were of a magnificent luxury such as she had never glimpsed.

Laughing, Varma set her on her feet, dropped the mantle, and looked into her eyes.

"You're my captive, precious lady!" he exclaimed gayly. "You vanished from beneath the very eyes of your father—"

"What's happened? Where am I?" she exclaimed.

"In your kingdom, my princess! The kingdom of the Nagas, the serpent-people, under the ground."

He stood silent, waiting; watching her, admiring her, giving her time to drink in the wonders all around. In all Ayuthia, only certain members of the royal family knew of this subterranean retreat; and most of them had forgotten about it.

It was a marvel from the days when slaves by the hundred thousand carved and toiled and died for the conquering Khmer princes. Human labor and wealth beyond calculation had made this place, far underground.

The walls were lined with carven stone; and, like the walls of the high temples above, every inch was sculptured. Here were laughing, fantastic little figures scuttling along; smiling temple dancers performed slow posturings; animals and Nagas—everywhere Nagas. Screens of intricately worked marble closed a vista of other chambers beyond. In the stone, gold had been run, filling the carven spaces here and there or solidly encasing the pilasters of columns, and everywhere was a sparkle of gems.

In the center of this room was set a table, heaped with fruits and wines, glimmering with golden dishes. At either side

"The Naga people — the waters have rushed in upon them; and they are

of this table, from the profusion of rich stuffs that covered the floor, lifted great Naga heads to the height of a man. The hoods and heads were composed of countless smaller heads, each one standing out full-chiseled, yet the whole forming one glorious cobra with distended hood. The serpent scales were exquisitely carved, and the lines filled with gold, the eyes of each tiny head were of ruby, and a profusion of other gems glittered from the flowing stone.

"My father!" Suddenly alarmed, the girl turned, hands clasped.

"He's quite safe." Varma smiled. "Be at ease, my dear. I've had him taken to your guest-house, under guard, until tomorrow noon; then he'll be sent back to your own people." He took her hands and kissed them. "My dear, my dear! You don't detest me?"

"You know better." Her glowing eyes warmed, her delicate features were radiant. "You're not like other princes, other warriors; when I first saw you—I knew! But there's much to be explained and understood, dear Varma."

"Much." He drew her to him. "Come, then; you must be tired. Sit and eat, talk, rest! We are alone. No slaves could be trusted with this secret."

"But what happened? How did I get here?"

He seated her at the table, and went to one of the two Nagas, and put out his hand.

dead! The Nagas are the gods of the earth! Away from this accursed spot!"

"These are like the monster heads outside the shrine, Silva. They're not for ornament alone; watch!" Under his touch, the Naga moved. A cry broke from the girl; she shrank back, for that glorious hooded head was rising, undulating, rising! Then it stopped, and Varma pointed down, to an opening in the stone flooring.

"Even if this underground place were betrayed, or found and looted, there would remain the Khmer treasures, unfound—certain treasures stored away here in past ages. You see the boxes, here below? Gems and gold, safely packed away." He touched the stone head again, and it sank back into place. "So there's the secret for you!"

Her eyes drifted on the wonders around, as she sipped wine.

"But still I don't understand. There are no serpent-people, really?"

Varma laughed heartily. "Not even among the gods, my dear! More than once, my ancestors escaped war or revolution or sudden death, through such underground retreats as this. They fostered the legend of serpent-people. They conceived these wondrous Nagas. Two hundred years ago, the king who built the old shrine overhead, vanished during some struggle; he returned and recovered his throne, saying he had been among the serpent-folk. This place had saved him, you see. It's all symbolic, with a practical fund of wealth at hand, to boot."

She relaxed gradually, and her gaze rested upon his eager, alive features.

"You didn't know that my father was a king—at first?"

"No; but I knew you were the only woman I'd ever love," said Varma frankly. "Then I got reports from spies whom I keep on the frontier. I investigated. I took an elephant and went, myself. I got word of armed forces gathered, hidden, waiting. I found a man who knew the Cham king and described him minutely; then I knew who your father was. And I came back, as you know."

"What are you going to do about it?" she asked.

"Escort him from the city, and marry you. If he wishes to make war, let him do so!"

Anxiety glimmered in her eyes. "But you don't understand. He planned a great raid on Ayuthia, a few days from now! That's why the warriors are gathered, ready—"

"I guessed as much," said Varma, calmly. "I'll have a talk with him before he leaves. I can't help these people of mine, you know; to them, life is a dream. They have no ambition, no will, no energy. All has been sapped from them by opium. Do you know what my ambition is?"

"I'd love to know—if it concerns me," she said, radiant once more.

"By the gods, you're most of it!" he cried. "I'd like to leave here forever, put this whole land away from me; take you, take the wealth that belongs to me, take the two or three warriors who love me, and go. For ever. North to the land of China, perhaps; or west to hither India, or on to the greater India beyond—"

Upon this their minds met; she was in a delighted flame on the instant. They were alone with love, and the future opened out before them in a glorious sheen of achievement; ambition arose, shooting like arrows at half-glimpsed marks. They talked of the things they would do afar, of strange sights and the marvels of the world, of what they together would accomplish in new lands beyond the horizon.

So the hours fled away.

IN the guest-house King Raswan lay fettered in his golden chains, with anguish and terror increasing upon him. The archer guards smoked opium, or ate opium, and threw dice languidly, or gossiped. When his desperate voice beat at them, they merely smiled. When he offered gold and wealth if they would take messages quickly, they laughed and ignored his words. At last, he became silent—a baffled man upon whose brain beat the horrors of futility, with certain knowledge of what was coming.

AT dawn, the careless guards at each of the four great city gates saw the same thing happen:

Across the causeway bridging the enormous moat came an elephant silently padding along. He was a war elephant in full panoply, armored, with an armored howdah on his back. Behind him came a small following of men, dimly seen—not above a few hundred. Some party of royal hunters returning, the guards supposed. They paid but scant heed.

The elephant came to the gates, and there turned aside, and lowering his head, put it against the great guard-tower. Now the guards saw that the men on his back were Chams, and a trumpet blew alarm. Too late! The tower was groaning and shaking. It began to crumble, and with a roar collapsed in shattering ruin. The Chams drew great scarlet-lacquered bows, and their long black shafts drove afar, as the elephant charged across the ruins and the screaming guards. Behind came the little column of armored men and scattered quickly, fire-brands waving alight in their hands. The elephant charged on, on down the wide empty street of stone, and behind lifted the roaring crackle of flames and the thin screams of the dying.

On, on to the peaceful center of the far-flung city, where as yet no alarm reached. Here the elephants met, from each of the four streets. Their riders came to earth and scattered. A few sleepy guards appeared; the black shafts flew, the yell arose, the Khmer trumpets blared, drums began to throb upon the daylight.

Then the crackle of flames arose. In a flash, a sea of fire was sweeping across the enclosures around the palace, as though answering the ruddy light of fire in the north and south, east and west. Above the roar of flames, above the screams of men, above the drums and trumpets, lifted the frightful trumpeting of elephants in panic. They came bursting from the royal stables, huge towering shapes gone mad with fear—not a dozen nor a score, but a hundred or more lordly bulls, trumpeting terror, charging blindly away in all directions, trampling everything underfoot. Some went headlong into temple buildings and died amid the ruins, but most of them scattered out to avoid flames, met other flames and were

turned away, and in blind horror went careering on to destruction.

The whole city, for miles, was now a sea of fire and a tumult of frenzied sound, made up of innumerable human voices and the explosions of bamboo joints. The flimsy structures flared up everywhere, in a flame that consumed swiftly and flew on; there were no heavy structures to burn slowly. The rising bulk of the temples were of solid stone. To these the people fled by thousands, clinging everywhere like ants in a stricken ant-heap. Some one thought, here and there, to open the sluices that the waters of the moat might come in and flood the lower portions of the city. Multitudes who had escaped the flames, drowned here.

The sun rose upon a scene of smoking ruin, hideous death and destruction. The Chams, unhurried, slaughtered every living thing in the palace buildings, and then turned to the butchering of the hapless folk huddled in the high temples. Here and there elephants were careering about, some blinded, all of them gone mad; but the strangest thing of all was seen near the old shrine of Siva.

At this point the water was flooding in fast over the ground and stirring the litter of ruin and corpses which were piled high everywhere. An elephant, the mightiest bull of the royal stables, a gigantic beast with gold-tipped tusks, was stuck fast. His hind parts had broken through the earth, and he was trying frantically to pull himself free, his trunk upflung, scream upon scream trumpeting in frenzy.

The Cham captains gathered to look upon him, thinking he had fallen into some pit. As they looked, as the waters came rushing down more thickly, the gigantic beast, with a supremely agonized effort, pulled himself free. His hindquarters came up and out. As they did so, with a vast sucking sound, the water swirled and eddied and lowered; it seemed drawn into the very earth.

"LOOK, look!" shouted the Chams, pointing to the elephant. "Look!"

They saw that blood was dribbling from wounds in his belly and legs; these were not hurts, but wounds. The water was no longer being sucked down; it rolled over everything in a placid wash of dead bodies. The Cham captains looked one at another.

"The Naga people!" said one, and the others nodded. "The bull broke through into the dwellings of the serpent-people! It was the Nagas who wounded him, and now the waters have rushed in upon them all, and they are dead. The Nagas are the gods of the earth; away from this accursed spot! Away! Find King Raswan!"

But him they found not, then nor ever.

THE pall of smoke, the sweetish fragrance of opium, grew less; they all blurred and vanished, towering buildings and high trees. The lights of the room clicked on. We sat there, hardly realizing that it was ended, relaxing with some difficulty.

"By heavens!" blurted some one. "Then the two of 'em died, down there! Drowned like rats, they were!"

The earnest tension of the voice provoked a smile or two. Norman Fletcher left his controls and turned to face us, an envelope in his hand.

"My friends, you've seen the last demonstration of this invention that I shall give you," he said gravely, and we hushed to hear his words. "I'm off to Washington in the morning; when I shall return here is doubtful. We have witnessed many remarkable scenes from the past, thanks to this apparatus of mine, in company; I have enjoyed knowing you all, more than I can say.

"Here, Mr. Hopkins," and he handed the envelope to Old Hop, "is an attested copy of my will; I ask you to keep it. In the event of my death, I am bequeathing to the Inventors' Club this apparatus of mine, with full instructions for its use. If I live, as I expect to live, I shall some day bring the apparatus to better perfection and then hand it over to you gentlemen. But one never knows, in times like these; therefore, if anything should happen to me, I want you to have this invention as a token of friendship and esteem from one who valued highly his association with you all."

But I did not join in the outburst, as the others gathered around him. I was still thinking of those two caught down below, broken in upon and trapped, in the midst of love and dreams and golden ambitions, all lost and brought to naught.

Suddenly I found Norman Fletcher at my side, his hand on my shoulder.

"I know what's in your mind," he said gently. "Reflect on this, my friend: if there were no hell, what were the use of heaven? If we all gained our ambitions and brought our dreams to fruition—what good were dreams or ambitions? Good night."

Mr. Bedford-Jones begins a new and even more picturesque historical series in an early issue.

The Hands of

By EUSTACE

ARCHIE PAGE, the football captain-elect, came into the office on the third floor of Eastminster's old gymnasium and sat down on the corner of Matt Wood's desk. "Well," Archie Page said, "how does it look?"

Matt Wood scratched his gray head. "It looks like fall," he said.

Archie grunted.

"I was around some this summer," Matt Wood said. "We got some pretty good frosh comin' up. Maybe some we can use on the Varsity." He paused. "This will probably be the last year," he added, "that we'll have four-year eligibility."

"There's a guy rolled in today," Archie Page said. "I saw him over at the Administration Building. A big tall guy, nice shoulders. Got a sweet-lookin' roadster too," he added. "You dig him up?"

"What's his name?" asked Matt Wood.

"John Leland," Archie Page said.

"No," Matt Wood said. "I never heard of him." He got up, took a list from his drawer. "We ought to have thirty-five out, but unless we find something in the frosh, we are kind of short on backs."

"Moose Campbell's back," Archie Page said.

"He aint quints," Matt Wood said. He got up and walked over to the window. The Eastminster campus was still brown from the August heat, but the vines were faintly green on the buildings, and the curving drive was pretty. Matt watched the roadster pull up in front of the library, and he watched the boy get out of it and go into the building. He liked the way

John Leland

COCKRELL

the boy walked. Over his shoulder he motioned to Archie Page. "That his chariot?" he asked.

Archie Page came over and looked down. "Yeah," he said. They stood there then a moment, looking down. As they watched, the boy reappeared. With him was a girl. Archie Page grunted in surprise. "That's Midge," he said. "My sister."

Matt Wood nodded. "That Leland," he said approvingly, "has got a nice eye. I didn't know you had a sister."

Archie Page dismissed his sister. "She's a freshman," he said, then added: "The guy moves nice, doesn't he? Big, too."

Matt Wood frowned. "Yeah," he said. "You know," he went on, "there's something about that boy. If I haven't seen him before, I'm crazy."

And Archie Page from his four years' intimacy, said: "You probably haven't seen him before."

Matt Wood apparently didn't hear. He watched the roadster roll down the drive and out of sight. "Go out and see him tonight," he said.

Archie Page nodded. "What's Johnstown got?" he asked.

Matt Wood walked back and sat down at his desk. "I was wondering myself," Matt said. "They got a week on us in practice, though."

"Tomorrow's the day," Archie Page said, exultation in his voice.

"Yeah," Matt said. "Tomorrow's the day. Two-thirty on the old field. I hope we have a club."

"We'll have a club," Archie Page said. "It'll be good to get out there."

MATT WOOD watched the assistant coach putting his squad through calisthenics. His eye roved from one end of the long line to the other. When the exercises were over, he motioned to Archie Page.

"Well?" Matt Wood said.

"They look good," Archie said.

"Thirty-five," Matt Wood said. "They aint in bad shape. We may have a club yet."

Archie looked out where the candidates, clad this first day in shorts and cotton jerseys, were passing the ball around, punting, gamboling about in the sheer joy of wearing cleats again. "I like their looks," Archie said again.

Matt Wood didn't say anything for a moment. Finally he asked, casually: "See Leland?"

Archie Page's face darkened. "Yeah," he said. "I saw him. No soap. He gave me a song-and-dance about having promised some one he wouldn't go out for athletics—any athletics."

Matt walked over to a freshman and took the ball he had in his hands. "You can't take that extra step punting against a good line, son," he said. "Start on the other foot." Matt Wood demonstrated. Then he walked back to Archie.

"I talked to him half an hour," Archie said. "He's a panty-waist if ever I saw one; you ought to get a load of his lingo."

"Where's he live?" Matt Wood asked.

"Out on the River Road," Archie said. "Got a swell flat. But he won't come out for football."

"That's too bad," Matt said. "But if he's like you say, it's probably no loss."

Archie Page said grimly: "I told Midge to find another roadster to take the air in. I don't want my sister runnin' around with anybody like that." And Archie Page walked out on the field.

Matt Wood sighed. Then he too walked out on the field to start to work, and John Leland became only a vague annoyance far back in his mind.

ARCHIE PAGE came into the office, limping a little, and sat down on the corner of the coach's desk. "Six to nothing," he said bitterly. "We luck out on Johnstown six to nothing, and we outweigh 'em fifteen pounds to a man."

"They didn't make but two first downs," Matt said.

"Moose Campbell is a pretty good line-plunger," Archie Page said, "and he looks like a million backing up that line, but we got to have a break-away runner, somebody that can carry the mail. . . . Moose has got to have a *little* help."

"We may develop some one," Matt Wood said.

Archie snorted. "Yeah?" he said. "How you gonna develop a ball-carrier when we haven't got a man out for the backfield that can run a hundred in less'n eleven-three? I ask you, how are you gonna do it?"

Matt Wood sighed. "I don't know," he said.

Archie Page got down off the desk and walked around the desk. "I saw that big Leland," he said, "runnin' for a ten o'clock, and he came across that campus faster than anyone on the squad could. In street shoes, too." He scowled darkly. "He's still hangin' around Midge, too," he added.

Matt looked at the ceiling. "Tsk-tsk!" he said.

Archie Page stopped his pacing. "It's not so funny—" he began, and stopped.

John Leland stood in the open door.

PAGE muttered something and went out. John Leland came up to the desk and looked down at Matt Wood. Matt didn't say anything.

"What is the procedure," John Leland said, "when one wants to try for the eleven?"

"Why," Matt said, "you get the student manager to give you a suit, and then you get out there and try. It's very simple."

"I should like to try it," John Leland said, and he looked quite determined.

Matt stood up and walked around the desk with his hand held out. "I'm Matt Wood," he said. "You're John Leland?"

John Leland took his hand and bowed oddly from the hips.

"Sit down," Matt said, and he pointed to a chair. Then he went on: "I'm kind of in favor of people keeping their word," he said. "Archie told me you had promised not to go out for athletics."

"I'm twenty-one," John Leland said hotly. "I've told the person I promised that I was going out. They can't keep me from it."

"Who'd you promise?" Matt Wood asked. "Your mother?"

"I'm an orphan," John Leland said. "I didn't promise anyone who had any right to make me promise. I came to this school because it was small, and I thought I could be just a plain person in it. I liked its reputation—no insincere pretension to culture. I'm sick of culture."

Matt didn't smile. "No," he said slowly, "it's not much for culture. They'd rather have a new stadium any day than a new library." He paused a minute, and smiled a little ruefully. "But you can get sick of muscles too," he added.

"Where do I find the student manager?" John Leland asked.

"He'll be down in the locker-room from two to three," Matt Wood said, then added: "Ever play any football?"

Leland relaxed a little. "No," he said, and smiled for the first time. "I'll probably be awfully rotten."

"What makes you want to come out?"

Leland didn't say anything for a moment. Then he looked straight at Matt Wood. "It has come to the attention of some one I admire, that one isn't a man unless he plays football."

Matt Wood sat and looked at Leland for a long time. "Son," he said doubtfully, "haven't I seen you some place before?"

John Leland stiffened. "I've been in Europe a great deal the last few years," he said. "Perhaps there?"

Matt Wood sighed. "Nope," he said. "I aint been in Europe since '18, but it sure does seem to me that I've seen you some place before now."

John Leland bowed again, oddly, from the hips. "I shall see you," he said, "this afternoon, on the gridiron."

Matt Wood nodded, not smiling. "The alumni," he said, "have had me on the gridiron, off and on, for thirty years. Maybe you can help me get off for a while." He picked up some papers from his desk and did not look up again until he heard the door close. . . .

Moose Campbell and Archie Page were standing by Matt Wood, watching the scrimmage. "The guy's got rhythm," Moose Campbell said. "He moves like water, but fast."

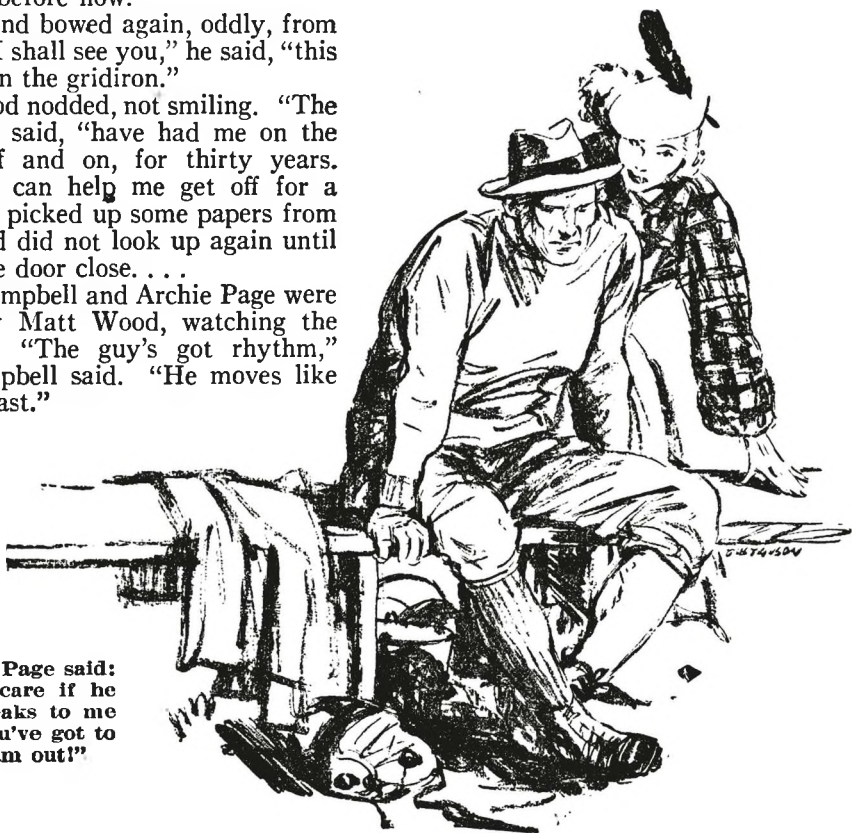
"I don't understand what's wrong with him," Archie said. "He's afraid to tackle. He acts as if he doesn't want to use his hands. He'd be all right if he'd play defense as if he wasn't wearin' gloves he didn't want to dirty."

LELAND had been out for football five weeks. Twice Matt had put him in a game, and twice he'd made long runs to score.

Matt Wood smiled uneasily, watching him now, in scrimmage. "I've seen that guy before," he said. "I know it." Then he paused and grinned, looking at Archie. "He aint a power-house on defense," he said. "But he's what you wanted. He's a break-away guy for fair."

Archie Page started to say something in reply, but just at that moment Leland, playing in the second-team backfield, took the ball on a direct pass from center and broke to the right on a long end run. Halfway across the field he went, fast, moving easily but like the wind; then suddenly he was running back, obliquely toward the line of scrimmage. The safety man ran him out of bounds.

"If he could tackle," Archie said, "I wouldn't care if Midge married him."



Margaret Page said: "I don't care if he never speaks to me again; you've got to take him out!"

"If he goes like that against State," Moose Campbell said, "I'll marry him myself."

"If we beat State," Archie said, "we won't lose *this* year."

ON the morning of the State game, Margaret Page came into Matt Wood's office. "Mr. Wood," she blurted out before Matt had a chance to say anything, "you mustn't let John play today."

Matt Wood stood up, sighing. "I don't believe I've had the pleasure," he said.

"I'm Margaret Page," the girl said. "Archie's sister."

"Oh," Matt said. "Why mustn't John play today?"

Margaret Page leaned over on the desk. "Do you like beauty, and art and music? Good things, lovely things?"

Matt Wood's jaw dropped for just a moment. "Well," he said finally, "I'm a kind of frustrated musician, and I like *some* pictures that I can understand."

"Then," the girl said finally, "you mustn't let John play."

"You mean," Matt said, "you've explained it all to me?"

Tears came to the girl's eyes. "I can't tell you any more," she said. "But please, please do as I ask. I have really broken my promise, coming to you at all."

Matt looked at her. His eyes were a little hard. "Your brother kind of egged you into needling John into going out for football in the first place, didn't he?"

"Oh, yes," the girl said desperately; "but I didn't know, then."

"You didn't know what?"

"I can't tell you. But you mustn't, you mustn't let him play."

"I don't quite understand this," Matt Wood said. "But I'm a football coach. I try to win games. I do everything I can to win games. I guess that about closes the interview." He walked over and looked out the window onto the little campus. "I guess, offhand, that your part in this little drama doesn't reflect to your credit. I'll thank you in the future to let me handle the football team, and you take care of the adolescent romance. We'll both be better off."

STATE had a good team—a very good team, big and with replacements three deep all the way across the line. They had two backfields you couldn't tell apart, and they were a bit contemptuous, playing down in this little stadium. Eastminster was a breather for them. Their big game was next week.

Matt Wood was talking to his squad in the dressing-room down under the stadium. "They're big, and good. They're in a better league than we are, really. But they can be beaten. And if they can be beaten, there's only one way for us to do it. They'll start a second team; even it'll be a better team than you've ever played against. They'll leave them in the first quarter if all goes well; then they'll put in the first team to smack over a couple of touchdowns, and then they'll pull the first team. Now what we've got to do is this: We've got to score, right off the bat. The first series of plays. I've drilled you all week on these plays. They are designed to shake Leland loose. We've got to score, and then it's a matter of defense. I'm starting Leland. I want you to use the plays I've given you, Moose, right off. Then if you score, you've got to hold 'em." Matt Wood paused.

"I could give you a lot of the 'Die for dear old Whoosis,' but I'm not going to. I expect you to die for dear old Eastminster without my asking you to." He stopped then, and read the starting lineup. "Okay," he said; "that's all."

John Leland dropped into step beside Matt as they walked out toward the field. "I—" he began. He tried again. "I haven't been playing my best," he said finally.

Matt looked up at him. "No?"

"I can tackle," John Leland said. "I can tackle, I think, as well as anyone. But I've been afraid to."

Matt remained silent.

"If I play well today," John Leland said, "on defense, will you leave me in?"

Matt Wood walked ten more steps. They were out in sight of the crowd, and a cheer was going up, and Matt could feel the old excitement tightening his heart. "You try it, son," he said, "and see."

State kicked off.

The ball came down in a long, slow, curving arc, and John Leland caught it, fumbled it, gathered it up, and following his interference, swept for the left. They brought him down on the twenty-yard line.

Then, lining up quickly, without signals, Eastminster ran another play. They ran it so fast, so unexpectedly, with such well-drilled precision, that the first real picture one got was that of John Leland, bursting off tackle, and going for the sidelines. Matt Wood leaned back. "It's a touchdown," he said. "They can't catch him now."

Moose helped him to his feet after he had cut down the big fullback. "Bud," Moose said, "I'm proud to play beside you."

Eleven men in colorful new jerseys swarmed on the field from the State sideline. They were grim. The score was seven to nothing against them in two plays. They elected to receive.

THEN the hammering started. Wide end runs and off-tackle smashes, short gains, cruel jolting men behind big fast men. State started their march. And John Leland, playing a defensive halfback, threw all caution to the wind and came up to back the line with Moose Campbell, and you couldn't say which one was the better.

Eastminster stopped State on their own thirty-yard line. They had disdained to punt, and had missed their first down by measured inches. Moose Campbell hit the line twice for Eastminster, picked up a lone yard, and kicked.

State started to march again. And as the big State fullback was brought down by a crashing tackle as he careened through a hole off tackle, a small hand tapped Matt Wood on the shoulder.

Margaret Page had come down from the stands, and by the guards, and the cheer leaders, and she was behind the center of the Eastminster bench; and she was leaning over, and she tapped Matt Wood on the shoulder. He didn't turn. She tapped him again, and he looked back, his face creased with anger.

"John Leland," Margaret Page said in a small thick voice, "is Jan Lewandowski."

Matt Wood grunted. It didn't go through to his mind for a moment, because Matt Wood was on the field with his mind, and he was making every tackle and he was planning every play. Then he straightened.

"Jan Lewandowski?" he said stupidly.

"There aren't five better in the world," Margaret Page said. "If you know anything about music, you know that. He'll play the piano for millions of people to hear, before he dies. He'll make people happy for years and years to come. He's a great genius. What if he breaks a hand?"

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

"He'll play for millions of people, before he dies. He'll make people happy for years to come."

Matt Wood looked out on the field, and it was coming to him, slowly. He'd seen John Leland, all right. He'd seen him on a concert stage in New York the winter before. And here was Jan Lewandowski trying to have one year as an average boy. The orphan from Brooklyn who'd been a genius! Matt Wood stood up. He barked a name, and a boy appeared before him. "Go in, Joe—" Then he stopped.

He turned to Margaret Page. "I promised him, practically," he said, "that if he played all out on defense, I'd leave him in." And Matt Wood looked down at the ground, afraid to watch the game.

BUT Jan Lewandowski was happy. He was not afraid, and was glorying in not being afraid; and Moose Campbell helped him to his feet after he had cut that big fullback down with a tackle you heard clear across the field.

"Bud," Moose Campbell had said, "I'm proud to play beside you."

They stopped State on the fifty; and this time the State quarterback punted.

But Eastminster didn't shake Leland loose this time. The State first team was in there now, and they were raging mad. They'd seen Leland go once before, and the greatest runners in the world can't gain if you can't get them in the open. Moose Campbell went back to punt from his own nine-yard line; and Archie Page, playing right end for Eastminster, dropped the State safety on Eastminster's forty-five, and State took up the march.

They didn't pass. They poured the power over the lighter line, and the Eastminster secondary came up to make the tackles, and it was bruising business. The State fullback weighed two ten, and he was going to be All-American this year; he ran like a train down grade, with his knees high and his head low; and tackling him was like tackling a rolling boulder on a steep hill; but Moose Campbell and Jan Lewandowski, backing up the line in a box-formation defense, kept his gains short.

Margaret Page said: "I don't care if he never speaks to me again, and I don't care whether Eastminster loses; you've got to take him out!"

"I don't know what to do," Matt Wood said. "I heard him once myself."

And it was that way at the half. . . .

In the dressing-room Matt Wood walked to each player, and he said something to him—some word of praise or of advice. The room was rank with liniment; and Moose Campbell on a rubbing table leaned over and patted Jan Lewandowski on the back, where Jan Lewandowski sat beneath him, looking at his hands. Archie Page came then, and stopped by Jan Lewandowski and said: "Mrs. Leland's little boy John is a hell of a football-player."

Matt Wood had made his rounds, and he was standing in front of Jan Lewandowski, and he was looking down at him; and of all the ones that had played in that first half, Jan was the only one to whom he didn't speak.

The time between the halves went quickly, and Matt Wood cleared his throat and read the starting line-up. John Leland's name was not in it.

He sat beside Matt Wood out on the bench for all the third quarter; and luck and fumbles twice cheated State from touchdowns. But then, in the fourth quarter, like lightning, the first team, rested now, poured in; and they scored twice.

There were eight minutes left of the last quarter, and State had not converted either time—and the score stood twelve to seven.

FOR the fiftieth time Jan Lewandowski pleaded: "Please, Mr. Wood, please let me go back in. You said you wouldn't take me out if I played well defensively—and I played my best."

Matt sat there. He didn't say anything; he didn't answer. But finally he made reply: "I know who you are, son."

Jan Lewandowski didn't say anything for a long moment. Then finally he said: "I see. He had no thought of me, and of the thing that it has done to me, to be unselfish and with no thought of myself, to be unselfish and brave just once. You are interested in music. In preserving," —and his voice crackled with scorn,— "my hands, so that I can play." He paused, and then went on: "My answer, to you and all the world, is this: I am, in ten seconds, going to get up from this bench and walk out on that field and take my place with that team, with those boys who respect me as a football-player; and I am going to play my position until this game is over." Jan Lewandowski's voice was low and hard, but Matt Wood heard each word with peculiar clarity. "Or," Jan Lewandowski said, "I'll never touch a piano again as long as I live." And he got up and walked out on the field.

Matt Wood didn't know; but he was happy, as one brave man is always happy to watch another.

Eastminster had the ball, and it was on their own forty-yard line. State was coasting with their lead and Eastminster's men were tired.

Jan Lewandowski called time out; and in the huddle this is what he said: "They will watch me. They will never let me get away; but Moose Campbell is a line-plunger as good as that one over there." And he pointed to the big State fullback. "So I think the thing to do is drive. Drive now with Moose, and throw a pass or two to keep their secondary back. And I have the tune I want you to play to." And Jan whistled then a lilting waltz. "Listen to me," he said to the Eastminster center, "and pass the ball back on the down beat." And Eastminster went into their huddle and came out of it; and Jan Lewandowski whistled all the time.

They moved. They moved eight yards on the first play, and the State secondary came up to plug the gaps, and Moose Campbell tossed a short pass to Archie Page, and Archie pulled it down on the State forty-yard line.

Then Moose hit the line again. Four long yards, and the line was charging like one man. Three yards then, and Moose wiped the blood off his mouth as he got up and said: "Why, lads, it's like the bloody Junior Prom." And the Eastminster team laughed immoderately at this, and laughing, tapped that last reserve of strength they didn't know they had; and Moose Campbell made it a first down on the State twenty-five.

Then it happened. Jan Lewandowski, leading interference on a short end run, took a long flying block at the defensive half, and something snapped. It snapped loud enough for you to hear it, and Jan Lewandowski didn't get up, and Matt Wood was running out on the field. Jan Lewandowski, lying there with a cleanly broken ankle, held up both his hands as Matt Wood bent over him and Matt Wood smiled a smile of sheer relief.

They carried Jan Lewandowski off the field; and as he went, he whistled his tune, and Moose Campbell scored through the center of the line three plays later, running like an enraged bull, with the line charging in front of him as one man.

ARCHIE PAGE came into the office and sat down on the corner of the desk. "Well," he said, "the guy was good, wasn't he? He was terrific. He whistled old Moose forty yards up the field, and he whistled him right over for a touchdown. He's good, all right."

Matt looked up, and his face had a dreamy look on it. "You should hear him play," said Matt Wood, frustrated musician.

"Play!" Archie said. "He had me and Midge and Moose out for supper last night, and he's got a piano as big as all outdoors; and me and Moose tried him on everything we could think of: 'Jeepers Creepers,' 'St. Louis Blues,' 'Tiger Rag,' —and he didn't know any of 'em. What's the use of bein' able to play, if you don't know any pieces?" Archie Page paused then a moment, and looked at the ceiling. "But he can sure play that football," he added reverently.

Last Message

By FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT

IT was a morning in late February, and the wind was raw on the Texas prairies when the man called Natchez came riding up the road from San Antonio. The thickets in the Guadalupe river bottom were tinged with pale green; he saw the ferry waiting for him under the bank, and Bertha standing at the windlass in the bow.

She watched him approaching through the checkered light and shade: his coat was in tatters; one leg of his breeches was split to the knee, and his unshaven face was blue with cold. That nickname of his had come from the roaring town under the bluff beside the Mississippi, where flatboat men and river pirates gathered to drink and gamble; it had followed him through two filibustering expeditions into Mexico and the first three months of the Texas Revolution. This latter project had looked like a good bet, and he had thought to make his fortune from the free lands which were promised to the soldiers; but a few weeks of begging for his living like a tramp and listening to the growls of his unpaid companions had cured him of the idea. So he had traded off his Kentucky rifle for two quarts of mescal, and when the carouse was over, he had ridden away from San Antonio, where a ragged handful of troops now awaited Santa Anna's thousands.

The gale which was ruffling the placid surface of the river whipped Bertha's coarse skirt to her body, revealing lines which were altogether too generous. Her big face was reddened by harsh weather, and her hands were calloused by the windlass crank. She had listened to many rough jests from men, but never a soft word. Her large eyes were filled with longing; there was something bovine in their softness.

By the time the ferry was halfway across the river, he was standing beside her with one arm around her ample waist while she toiled at the windlass. In the little log cabin on the eastern bank, she fed him cornbread, wild honey and a stew of jerked venison. Her father was down Goliad way with Fannin's ill-fated companies; her mother was buried in a mesquite thicket beside the Brazos. Natchez lingered about the place until the next morning; and when he left, he did not tell her his intention to resume his journey eastward: it would have meant farewell caresses, and he was weary of those bovine eyes.

The raw little town of Gonzales lay just beyond the summit of the low bluff: two stores, a blacksmith shop, and some thirty-odd log houses, several of which possessed glass windows. He was riding down its only street when the thing which we call the Irony of Fate overtook him.

Occasionally in those pioneer days, a girl's good looks survived through her young womanhood. Nancy Tuttle's prettiness was heightened by a delicacy of coloring which was exotic in these windy reaches. She was standing in the open doorway of the largest store; and when Natchez saw her, he rode straight to the nearest hitching-rack.

She had disappeared within the store by the time he dismounted. He took his stand before the doorway and waited for a good half-hour; but when she came out, she passed him without knowing that he existed. And all that afternoon, while Bertha was watching the road down in the river bottom, trying to make herself believe that he would come back to her, he hung about the village like a lost dog that looks up at every footfall, hoping to see its owner. That is how he happened to be on hand when Albert Martin rode up the hill with the setting sun behind him, bringing the news that Santa Anna and the Mexican troops had arrived in San Antonio.

A RAW-BONED man, Albert Martin; his weatherstained face was lean as an Indian's; his buckskin breeches and hunting shirt were stained with the sweat of

"Thermopylæ had its messenger of defeat. The Alamo had none."

Illustrated by
Jeremy Cannon

hard riding. He was standing beside his jaded horse with a dozen men around him when Natchez joined the group and heard him say:

"Our boys have crossed the river, and they're holding down one of those Spanish missions that Jim Bowie and Old Ben Milam took last fall when they drove the greasers back acrost the Rio Grande. It's the one they call the Alamo. Santa Anna's got a thousand regulars surrounding the place, and there's three thousand more coming on the Laredo road."

And there were, Natchez was thinking, less than two hundred Texans.

"This revolution's going to end before it has begun," he told himself.

"I fetched a letter—" Albert Martin thrust his hand beneath his hunting shirt, and produced a crumpled paper. "Bowie's sick; he broke his laig and got took down with lung fever. Travis is in command now, and he wrote this to the governor and council, asking for reinforcements. I'm sticking here. Somebody's got to take it on."

"And all the good it'll do," a voice announced, "is to start the governor and council calling each other more names."

The laughter that followed that sally held no mirth. There were nearly twenty men in the crowd now, and a few women hovering around the edges. Albert Martin unfolded the paper and his voice grew louder as he read:

"'To the People of Texas and all Americans in the World—'"

Natchez listened to the plea for help which young William Barret Travis had sent through Santa Anna's lines, and he cursed himself for having lingered here.

"You better pull out before these fools ask you to go and get killed with them." So his thoughts ran, and he was edging away toward the fringes of the little audience when he came face to face with Nancy Tuttle. She was looking straight into his eyes, and her eyes were inquiring. He halted in his tracks.

"I'm going to recruit a company," Albert Martin was saying. "Who'll go back with me to take their chances with Travis and Davy Crockett and Bowie and the boys?"

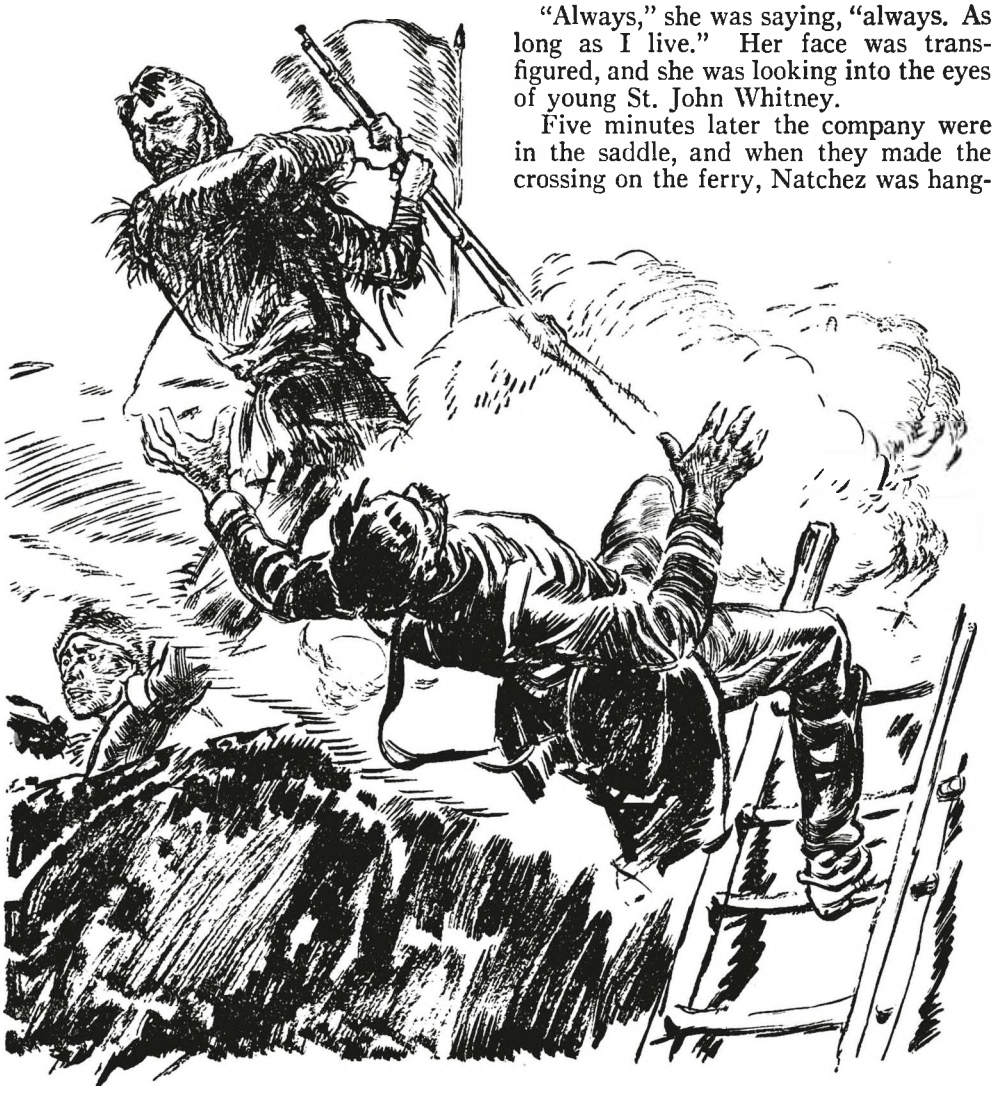
And then Natchez heard his own voice as if it were another's, as he answered loudly: "You can count me in."

Nancy smiled at him, and her eyes had grown soft; he marveled at his own contentment in that moment.

It took Albert Martin a week to finish his recruiting: and on the third day two more riders arrived from the Alamo; one of them lingered only long enough to change horses before he pressed on for the capital at Austin; the other stayed: a boy

The Mexicans made the assault at dawn. . . . It took them more than an hour to get inside.

in his early twenties, his hair was as black as a crow's wing, his face as smooth as a girl's. His name was St. John Whitney, and he had ridden westward from some Louisiana parish the previous fall to cast his lot with Texas. When Natchez looked at that young face, he did not know how badly Fate was treating him.



As a matter of fact, his only concern now was Nancy. He managed to maneuver it so that he ran across her nearly every day, and she stopped to speak with him three times: not long, just a few words in passing; but every meeting left him shaken to the bone....

It was coming on a Norther, the morning when Albert Martin's little company of thirty-two men set forth. The women gathered around them and the murmur of soft voices filled the brief street. Natchez was standing at one end of the thin line; the bitter wind went right through his ragged coat, and he was rubbing his hands against the neck of his horse to drive away the numbness; but he was warmed within by the hope that Nancy might come to bid him good-by.

He heard her voice behind him, and he whirled on his heel.

"Always," she was saying, "always. As long as I live." Her face was transfigured, and she was looking into the eyes of young St. John Whitney.

Five minutes later the company were in the saddle, and when they made the crossing on the ferry, Natchez was hanging in the rear. So Bertha did not see him until he rode by the windlass in the bows as they were disembarking, and waved his hand at her.

They made the line of bluffs east of San Antonio late in the second afternoon, and they lay on their bellies looking down into the valley where four thousand Mexican regulars, foot, horse and artillery, encircled the ruined chapel and the three-acre enclosure within whose stone walls the men of Texas were waiting to

show the world something new in heroism.

The thin notes of a bugle floated to the watchers, faint with distance; a puff of white smoke blossomed above the mesquite thickets by the edge of the town across the river, and the dull boom of a cannon followed. The flat-roofed houses of San Antonio looked like children's blocks, and a banner that hung above the plaza church was a fleck of scarlet against the pale sky. The son of the Gonzales blacksmith was lying beside Natchez; he pointed at the red flag.

"What's that mean?" he asked, and Natchez said:

"It means that after the greasers have licked us, they're going to cut the throats of everyone who's left alive." He watched the beardless face change color, and the lips go tight, and he smiled unpleasantly.

IT was near midnight when they slipped through the Mexican lines, and it happened that young St. John Whitney was at his side. They stole down the hill on foot, leading their horses; and when they were within a hundred yards of the sentries, they swung into the saddles. The final dash was in the nature of an anti-climax, for there weren't a half-dozen shots fired. After the heavy gate in the south wall had closed behind them, the youth clapped Natchez on the back.

"We've made it!" he shouted; and Natchez laughed harshly.

"Why not?" he asked. "Santa Anna knows nobody's coming to help us out."

And as he looked into the handsome face, the thought came to him: how he could, just as well, have stayed behind with Nancy Tuttle when this successful rival had gone forth to die.

The days dragged by. Every morning the Mexican artillery began a lazy bombardment; occasionally a cannon-ball knocked a few rocks from the wall, and in the evening the ragged garrison mended the damage. The sentries watched the eastern skyline where the road to the Texan settlements disappeared; but the reinforcements which they were seeking never showed. Every night they heard the dull clank of caissons and the tramp of marching troops; and when dawn came, they picked out the spots where the enemy's lines had drawn a little closer.

It would need one thousand men to defend this place against any kind of a force: two convent yards surrounded by eight-foot walls of limestone, and three rows of stone buildings lining the inner sides of these walls; in the southwest corner the roofless chapel. There were one hundred and eighty-three in the garrison, the tattered, undisciplined companies who had quarreled among themselves in San Antonio until Natchez had deserted in disgust.

But since they had entered this place, a change had come. Natchez saw privates who had cursed the officers to their faces, leaping to the orders of these same officers in silent obedience.

One morning he saw four hard-eyed ex-filibusterers whom he had known in Mazatlan, carrying a sick man on a cot out of a low building by the south wall. When they set down the cot in a patch of pale spring sunshine, he drifted over to the group who gathered around it, and he listened to the quavering voice of the sick man: it was so faint that he had to cup his hand to his ear to catch the words:

"I want you men to remember this—and tell it to all the boys that came with me—Travis is your commander now. Stick with him."

Natchez pushed his way into the group and got a glimpse of the waxen face on the cot. The last time he had seen those features, they had been flushed with anger, and the voice had rung strong that afternoon when James Bowie released a half-dozen prisoners whom Lieutenant-Colonel Travis had sent to the guard-house in San Antonio.

THERE was an evening when Natchez sat among a crowd of ragged privates in a room of the two-story convent building while old David Crockett, who had been a member of Congress and almost as much of a celebrity as President Andrew Jackson, fiddled and told stories, and Sergeant John MacGregor played his leaky bagpipes until the two of them were so weary that they fell asleep.

And another evening when he was on his way to sentry duty at the gun-emplacement in the ruined chapel, he heard soft voices in the shadows, and looked through a doorless arch into a room where several women were sitting on pallet beds, the wives of officers who had chosen to remain here with their husbands instead of fleeing to the Texas settlements.

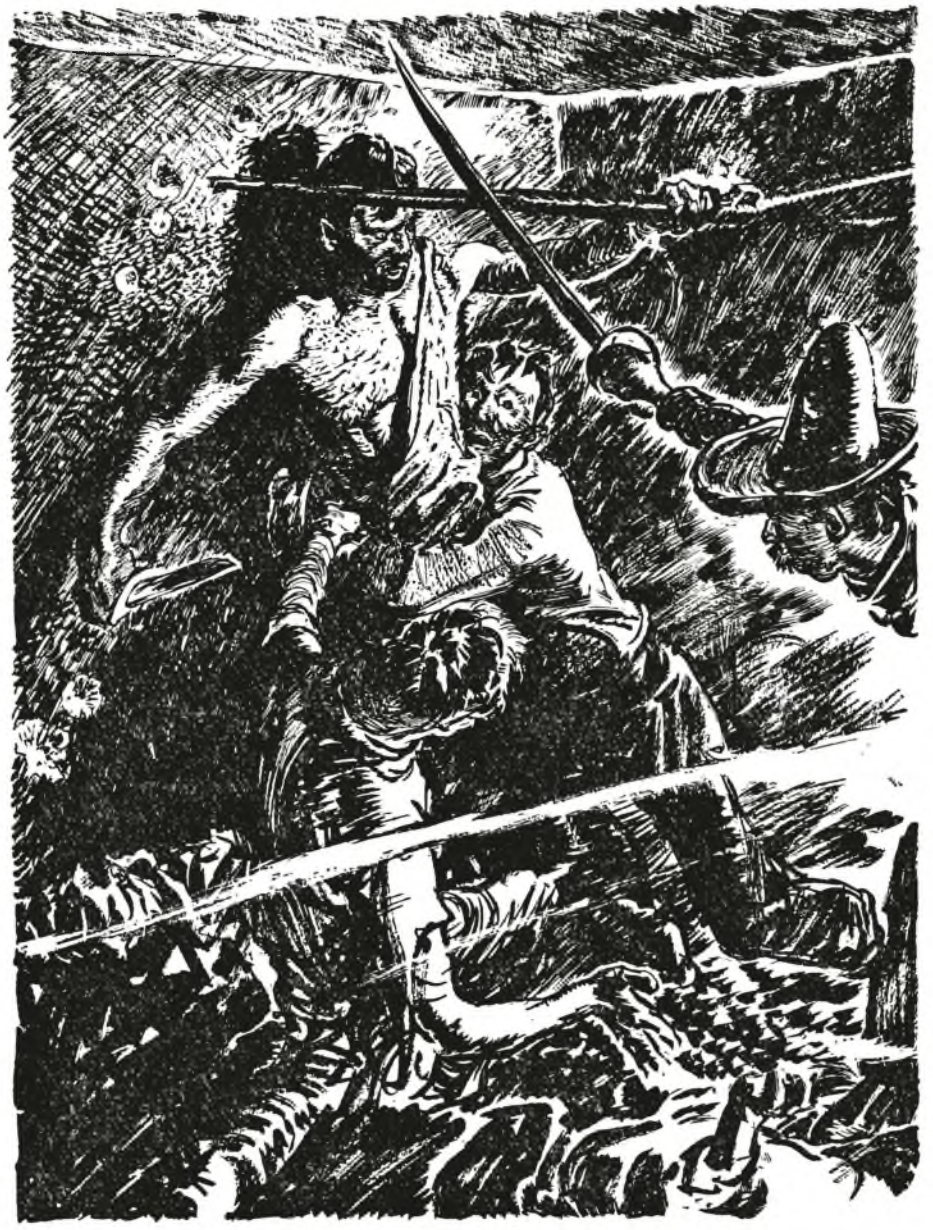
He saw these things and many others: the drunkards were sober now, the brawlers were at peace; the grumblers had forgotten their old grievances; and men who had not been on speaking terms two weeks ago, traded salty jests concerning

Natchez handed her a folded slip of cartridge-paper. "I'll take it," she said, "if the Mexicans let me through."

General Antonio de Lopez de Santa Anna's private habits, while they were building breastworks of rammed earth in the doorways of the two-story convent building where they planned to make their final stand after the Mexicans had scaled the outer walls.

Something had happened here. It was as if these who knew that they were going to die were setting their houses in order.

There was a breach in the north wall which the Texans had made last fall when they drove the Mexican troops back across the Rio Grande; and Natchez was standing behind it on the fourth evening after his arrival; he was looking out into the night, and he was thinking how easily this handful of defenders could slip away through the enemy's lines; he was marveling at the quixotic folly which held them here. For that was the way he saw it. Then his



The men of Texas retreated to the rooms where black-robed nuns had told their

mind went back, as it did so often during these days and nights, to Nancy Tuttle; and he was cursing himself for having come here, when a soldier appeared out of the shadows and touched him on the arm.

"Colonel Travis has sent for you," the man said.

He was still seeing Nancy Tuttle's face as he had seen it that morning when she looked up into St. John Whitney's eyes, as he went to the little room in the stone convent building where Travis had established his headquarters. There were two candles guttering in sconces on the wall; there were five men lined up within the doorway, and St. John Whitney was among them.

Travis was standing behind a table at the other end of the room; the light of the candles rippled on his auburn hair; it made his handsome face as red as fire. Natchez gave him the sloppiest of salutes and took his place in the line.

Travis said: "I'm sending one more courier to Austin tonight. I want a man to go with him, who can answer if he's challenged. It's got to be some one who

beads in kinder years. . . . There the man Natchez died, his slain before him.

can speak Spanish like a Mexican, and he must know the road from having been over it. All of you answer those requirements." He paused for just a moment, and he smiled. "There's no use asking for volunteers to go out; I've tried it before, and no one answers." He drew a deck of cards from his pocket and laid it on the table. "You'll cut for it. High man gets the job."

He singled them out, one by one, with his long forefinger. Each man stepped forward and drew in silence; he laid his card face upward on the table; and the chance that orders this sort of thing willed it that St. John Whitney was next to the last, and that Natchez followed him.

Two treys, a five and a seven were showing on the table when St. John Whitney made his draw: it was a ten.

Natchez said: "I'm feeling lucky tonight."

He picked up the deck and shuffled it, and he threw down the eight of spades. His eyes were like two stones. . . .

On the next night, which was the last, a woman sat within the room beside the

gaping doorway of the roofless chapel, holding a baby in her arms. One candle on the wall cast a small circle of radiance around her; the limits of the circle widened and shrank; the faces of the sleepers around her appeared and vanished with the vagaries of the small flame —the dark faces of Mexican wives whom members of the garrison had wed in San Antonio during other years, and of the children whom these had borne in days of peace. She was the only American woman among them. Her name was Mrs. Almaron Dickerson, and she had followed her husband from Gonzales when he went to San Antonio with old Ben Milam's men last fall.

She was sitting on the edge of her pallet bed, soothing her baby, while the members of Albert Martin's company slipped in out of the darkness, one by one, bringing her letters and keepsakes for the women whom they had left behind. It was getting on toward midnight when Natchez appeared and handed her a folded slip of cartridge-paper.

He said:

"Will yo' take this to Gonzales when yo' go out, ma'am?"

And she answered: "I'll take it if the Mexicans let me through."

The shadows were thick, but she could see that he was smiling; it was a queer smile; she did not understand it; and when she read the name on the rough cartridge-paper, her eyes widened in wonderment. . . .

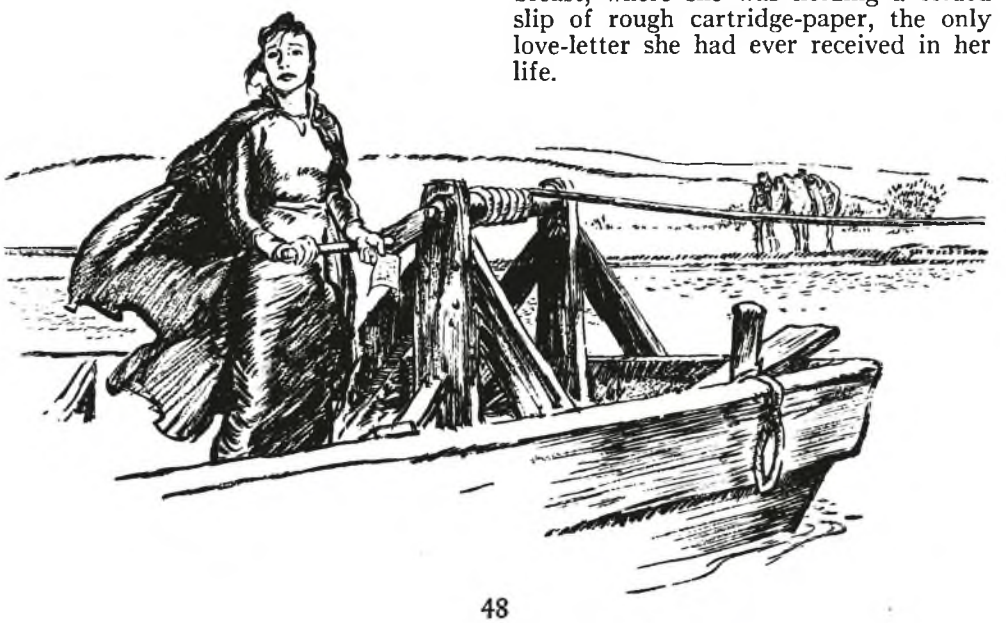
The Mexicans made the assault at the crack of dawn. A bugle shrieked. A band down by the river struck up march music: a savage tune that had come down from the days when the Spaniards were fighting the Moors—the "Deguello" which means *No Quarter*. It took them more than an hour to get inside the stone walls of the convent yards, and their dead lay in heaps. Then the men of the little army of Texas retreated to the rooms where black-robed nuns had told their beads in kinder years, and they took such ghastly toll of the attackers that Santa Anna's officers afterward described them as being possessed by demons. It was in one of these close rooms that the man called Natchez died, among the last, with his own pile of slain before him.

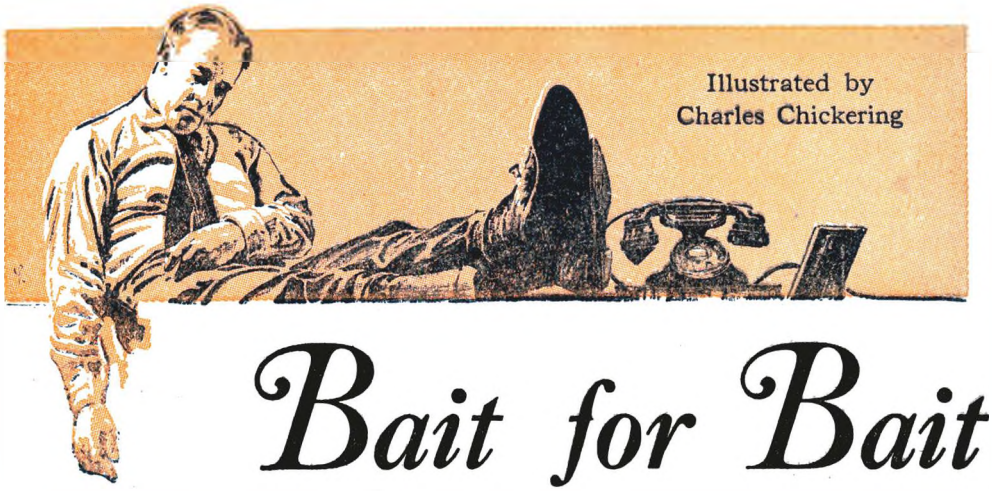
There was none who knew that, in the roaring town under the bluff beside the Mississippi, where he had gotten his nickname, he was the most adept of the whole crew of gamblers at manipulating the cards. It was said, that if you let him pick up a deck and shuffle it, he could deal you whatever card he chose.

He carried that secret and another with him.

A WEEK later Mrs. Dickerson brought his letter to Gonzales, and joined the straggling procession of fugitives who were on their way to the Eastern settlements. She saw young St. John Whitney riding beside Nancy Tuttle, but she did not know, and neither did they, that he owed his life to a man who had never any liking for him.

And she saw Bertha, the ferry girl, pressing one calloused hand against her breast, where she was holding a folded slip of rough cartridge-paper, the only love-letter she had ever received in her life.





Illustrated by
Charles Chickering

Bait for Bait

A lively story of Tiny David and the State police.

By ROBERT R. MILL

MAX PAYTON, top-sergeant of the Black Horse Troop, —New York State Police,— knocked smartly upon the door of the private office of Captain Charles Field, the commanding officer. There was a pause, during which Mr. Payton listened intently. No sound was audible.

Mr. Payton knocked again, this time with more force. He was rewarded in due time by the creaking of a swivel chair. There was a muffled clump, that might have been caused by a large and heavy foot leaving the surface of the desk for the more secure support of the floor. The top-sergeant also heard a deep sigh, almost a groan, and then a deep voice told him:

"Come in!"

Mr. Payton entered, and confronted Lieutenant Edward David, better known as Tiny, who, because Captain Field was attending a conference in Albany, was acting as commanding officer.

Mr. David stared at Mr. Payton with all the composure possible for a man just awakened from a sound sleep. Mr. Payton stared back.

"Sorry to disturb the lieutenant."

"What's that?" demanded Mr. David. "I—I was thinking."

"Yes sir. Sorry I had to barge in when the lieutenant was—was thinking."

Mr. David studied Mr. Payton's face intently, but could find no cause for action.

"You are in now," was his rather obvious comment. "What's on what you jokingly call your mind?"

"My mind," said Mr. Payton, "is as empty as a lieut—as a lieutenant's income-tax blank."

Mr. David gave this recovery grudging and silent approval.

"The reporters are here," Mr. Payton continued.

"Show them in," Mr. David directed.

Soon three young men entered, and took chairs.

"This," said one of them, "is a very dull day."

"Good day for sleeping," volunteered a second.

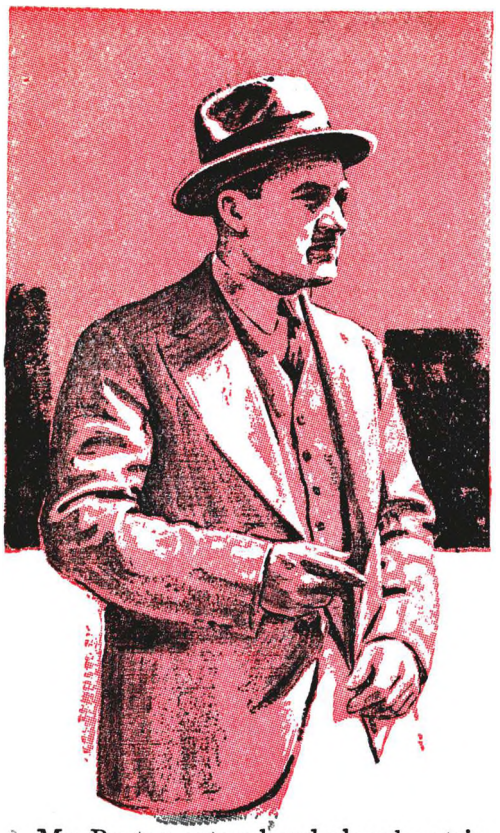
"And how!" said Mr. Payton, then closed the door behind him.

"Now that we are rid of certain untoward elements—" observed Mr. David. He attacked a stack of complaint-slips. "Let's see what we have to offer. . . . Hum. Mrs. Sarah Barnes reports that her lawn has been ruined by the dog of a neighbor. A gentleman reports the loss of one license-plate. One Maltese cat also is missing. Why don't you boys just call it a day?"

"We," said one of the reporters, placing considerable emphasis on the pronoun, "have to work for our money."

Mr. David did not choose to find anything personal in the remark.

"Good thing for the young to keep occupied," he declared. "I can remember when—"



Mr. Payton entered and placed a strip of paper torn from a teletype machine before Mr. David.

"Something from Hyde Park, Sergeant?" asked Mr. David. He turned to the reporters with a bland smile. "While this third-term agitation is on, they have asked me to keep in close touch."

"This," said Sergeant Payton, "comes from Deerville. Hardly worth the lieutenant's attention. Just a hold-up."

THE reporters sat up in their chairs. "What is it, Max?" asked one.

Mr. Payton allowed his left eyelid to droop a trifle.

Mr. David consulted the paper:

"One Gus Tetro reports that he was driving south on the Syrchester road below Deerville. Struck tacks that obviously had been placed in the road. When he stopped to fix a flat, a masked, armed man stepped out of the woods. Robbed him of eighteen hundred dollars. Sergeant Linton is investigating."

"How come Gus Tetro was carrying eighteen hundred dollars?" asked a reporter.

"Tetro," said Tiny David, consulting the paper, "is a collector for the Skill and Patience Amusement Company."

"That's the pinball-game outfit, isn't it?"

"Yes. If we had to have a robbery, I can't think of anybody more eligible than one Gus Tetro."

"How does that case stand, Tiny?"

"They got an injunction restraining us from touching the machines until a learned judge decides whether they are games of chance or games of skill. A judge may decide it takes skill to pull a lever, but we know they are a gyp, designed to take nickels from kids."

A reporter grinned.

"Evidently somebody has taken a few nickels from Mr. Tetro."

"Yes," said Tiny David; "and it is our job to try and get them back for him." He turned to Payton. "Max, tell Jim Crosby to get out his kiddie-car. He will have some passengers." He looked at the reporters, who nodded assent. He hesitated, then ignored the fact he should remain in barracks, and cast his lot where excitement beckoned. "Four passengers," he added.

Mr. Crosby accepted the load without enthusiasm or protest.

"You three birds,"—he indicated the reporters in the back seat—"will take the place of sandbags." His thumb indicated Mr. David, who was draping himself in the front seat. "But how can he get away? There might be another crisis in Europe."

"Secretary Hull," replied Mr. David with considerable dignity, "knows where he can get in touch with me."

"In that case," declared Mr. Crosby, "he is one up on the laundryman. He had no luck yesterday, or the day before. It seems there is an item of two dollars and eighteen cents. He has been carrying it in his head for a week, and it is beginning to ache."

"I'll knock it out tomorrow," Mr. David promised.

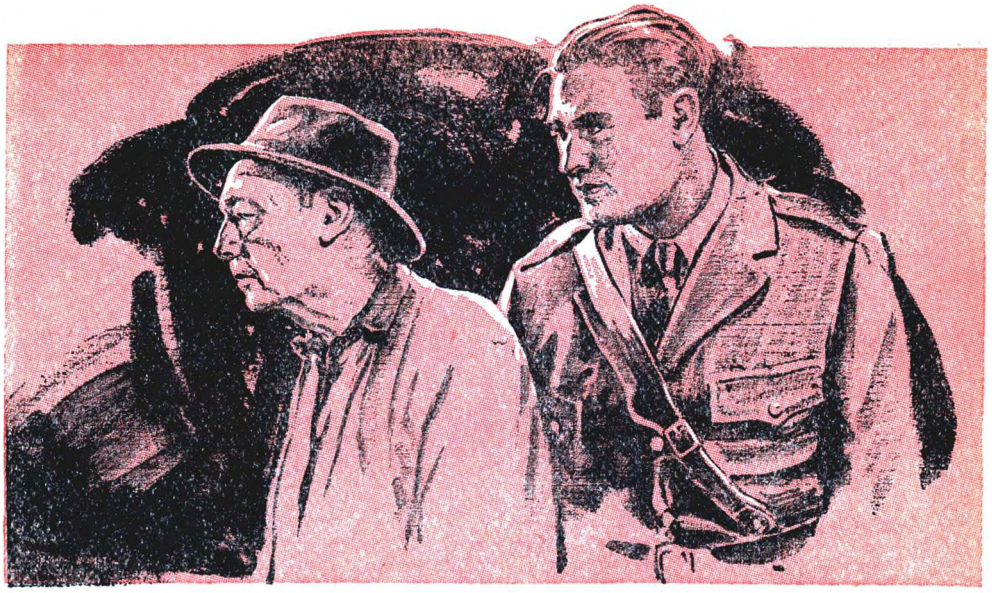
The trip to Deerville was enlivened by an argument regarding Mr. Crosby's ability as a driver. Mr. Crosby summed up his case by slipping the car into a very small parking-space along the main street of Deerville.

"How's that?" he demanded.

"Fair," Mr. David admitted. "But why stop here?"

Mr. Crosby was very patient.

"See that building? It has a sign on it. The sign reads, *'Restaurant.'* My watch says that it is twelve, just noon. Mrs. Crosby taught her boys to eat at noon."



"That's him!" cried Tetro. "I can swear to it!"

They found seats at the counter, with Tiny David on one end. Next to him sat a middle-aged man who wore a gray coat and dark trousers. His clothing was worn but neat and clean. He looked up as the five entered, and a smile crossed his face as he recognized the trooper.

"Hello, Lieutenant." He extended his hand. "How is it going?"

"Middling," Tiny David declared. "What brings you over here?"

"Heard of a job." He smiled wryly. "I was too late." He squared his shoulders in a determined manner. "But I'll keep trying." He accepted his check from the counter-man. "And don't think I've forgotten all you've done for me."

Tiny David flushed. "Forget it," he growled.

When the man had left the restaurant, Mr. Crosby said:

"That bird's face seems familiar. . . . No, don't prompt me. Ah, I have it." He turned to the reporters. "Just some of our pal's Watch and Ward Society work."

"What does he mean, Tiny?" asked a reporter.

"Nothing," said Tiny David. "Just a guy who made a mistake. Had to help send him away. So when he came out, after he had learned his lesson, I looked him up and gave him a hand."

"Just a Boy Scout," said Mr. Crosby.

Then they devoted their attention to soup, roast beef, three vegetables, a salad and double orders of pie.

Mr. Crosby sighed as they returned to the car.

"As Uncle Elmer used to say: 'Thank God for that little snack; many a fool would call it a square meal.'"

NEXT stop was the Deerville substation, where they found Sergeant Henry Linton in charge, and reasonably calm.

"How you doing?" asked Mr. David.

"So-so," Mr. Linton admitted. "General alarm, and all that. Routine check on all suspicious characters. Searched the woods where Mr. Tetro parted with his jack. No luck. But all these things are the least of my worries."

"Outside of your mental condition, what worries you most?" asked Mr. Crosby.

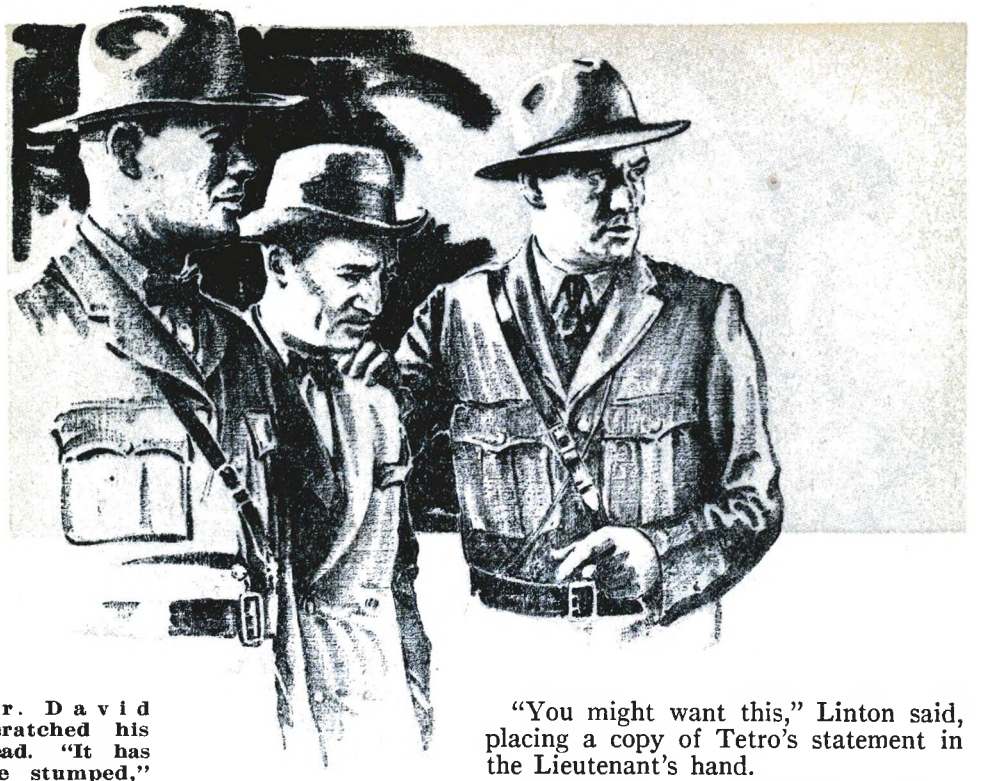
"Past tense on that," declared Mr. Linton. "Mr. Tetro did worry me. But no more." He waved a hamlike hand in a gesture of surrender. "Bigger and better minds have arrived. They can take care of everything—in this case meaning Tetro."

"What's his chief trouble?" asked Mr. David.

"It is a mixed verdict," Mr. Linton explained. "He has no complaint about the service he received along the road. He says it was a very professional job."

"He should know," said Mr. David.

"Them is my sentiments," Mr. Linton admitted. "But until I get a note from the Governor to the effect that I can skip all robberies in which the victim is a louse, I'll have to carry on in my feeble way. And it's my feeble way that Mr. Tetro objects to."



Mr. David scratched his head. "It has me stumped," he admitted.

"What's his chief objection?" asked Tiny David.

Mr. Linton replied by pointing to the clock.

"Why not get your complaints from the source? He is due here in ten minutes."

Mr. Crosby, who had spent some weeks on the pinball-game investigation, doubled his fists in pleased anticipation.

"Skip that until he gets his money back," Mr. David ordered. "More fun to work on a guy who has eighteen hundred dollars in his pockets."

"That," Mr. Crosby admitted, "is a thought."

SOON Mr. Tetro arrived, and he wasted no time.

"Any action?" he asked Mr. Linton.

"No," came the prompt reply.

Mr. Crosby was next to be favored. "Hello, Cossack."

Mr. Crosby contented himself with, "Hello, Drizzlepuss."

Mr. Tetro turned to Mr. David. "You in charge here?"

"More or less," came the admission.

"How about a place where we can talk—alone?"

"There is the back office," Tiny David suggested.

"You might want this," Linton said, placing a copy of Tetro's statement in the Lieutenant's hand.

Tetro seated himself with care, adjusting the creases of his narrow trousers. "We might as well have a showdown," he declared. "Just because your outfit and me has got a legal matter pending aint no reason why I aint entitled to protection on the roads. I pay taxes, too. And that monkey out there—"

"There is no monkey out there—now," said Mr. David.

"Wise guy?" growled Mr. Tetro. "All right. But you can't laugh this off; This stick-up was a professional job. It wasn't pulled by no yokel, unless it was a yokel what has trained with a smart mob; maybe a guy what has done time and got wised up."

Tiny David glanced up from the report. "It reads like a professional job," he admitted.

"Okay. Then why don't that monk—that guy—out there, pull in the guys in this district what has done time? He knows them. I could at least give 'em the once-over. The guy wore a mask, but—"

"We may get around to that," Tiny David asserted.

"Say, do you know that I know Senator Zenim?"

Mr. David showed signs of interest.

"Do you? Wish you knew Myrna Loy. I keep hoping I'll meet somebody who knows her, so that I can—"

"When I want comedy," declared Mr. Tetro, "I'll turn on the radio."

"Why not look in the mirror?" demanded Mr. David.

MR. TETRO stood up.

"Do I get service? I'll get it here, or I'll get it in Albany. You can write the ticket, wise guy."

"You'll get service here," Tiny David told him, "just as soon as you stop telling me how to run my job, and start being helpful."

"Such as—"

Tiny David examined the report. "You say here that the bandit wore rough clothing. What do you mean by that?"

"In the city, that's English. It was cheap stuff."

"Coat and pants?"

"Yeah. Sure."

"Did they match?"

"Say, I aint no tailor."

"I mean in color?"

"Wait a minute. I was busy right then. But come to think of it, I don't think they did."

"Probably one light, and the other dark?"

"Yeah. Sure. That was the way it was."

"Which was which?"

"Wait a minute. Like I said, I was busy and—"

"Take your time," Tiny David directed. "It's important."

Mr. Tetro was deep in thought.

"Maybe I can refresh your memory a bit," Tiny David suggested. "On the way over here I ran across a guy we have on our books. He would be eligible for a job like this. He was wearing gray trousers and a dark coat. Mean anything to you?"

Mr. Tetro's deep thought continued.

"Yes, it does," he said. "I waited because I didn't want to call a strike on a guy unless the ball was across the plate. But now that you give the old memory a jog, it comes to me that when this guy reaches for the jack, his sleeve is dark-colored."

"That's what I would call it," Tiny David admitted.

"His trousers," Mr. Tetro continued, "was a darker shade of gray."

"That's right," declared Tiny David with obvious pleasure.

Thus encouraged, Mr. Tetro expanded:

"I couldn't tell much about his face, on account of his mask, but he was a guy

of about medium height and build. Does that help?"

"Lots," said Tiny David. "I have a little errand to do. It shouldn't take long. You might stick around, because I think I will have something for you."

Mr. Tetro registered approval.

"You know your way around," he declared. "You aint like them other mon—them other cops."

Tiny David, walking through the outer office, called over his shoulder, "I'll be back soon," and made his way to the car.

"What does that mean?" asked a reporter.

"Mystery," said Mr. Crosby. "Heavy mystery." He raised his voice. "Hey, you! Secretary Hull won't like it if you are out of reach by telephone. Suppose they have trouble in Tokio?"

"Deerville comes first," declared Mr. David, as he started the car.

THERE was no protest from Mr. Hull as the minutes increased. But as the hour-mark was passed, Mr. Tetro became restless.

"He said to wait," he ventured.

"In that case," said Mr. Crosby, "you wait. If your mind isn't clear about that, I'll be glad to straighten it out for you."

The next interruption was furnished by the telephone. Mr. Linton answered it, but quickly surrendered to Mr. Crosby, smirking his relief as he did so.

Mr. Crosby's part in the conversation, and it was a minor part, went like this:

"Yes, Captain, I am in Deerville. . . . Yes, Captain, David is here too. . . . Yes sir, I think he knows he was left in charge at the barracks. . . . No sir, he is not here now. . . . He didn't say, sir. . . . Yes sir, we know the Captain went to Albany to see the Major and the attorney general, and that they are trying to keep these pinball-game racketeers from taking over the territory lock, stock and barrel. . . . No sir, we haven't turned out the whole troop for a bunch of lousy racketeers. We are just—"

Mr. Crosby returned the instrument to its cradle. He attempted a smile.

"He hung up," he explained.

"Oh," said Mr. Linton. "I thought it was a gun I heard."

"A rough day on the ocean," ventured a reporter.

Mr. Crosby wiped sweat from his brow.

"One of the roughest passages encountered during my fifty-four years at sea," he admitted. "However, the ship behaved admirably. You may quote me as—"

Mr. Tetro gloated, openly but silently.

"You may quote me," continued Mr. Crosby, "as saying that in addition to my knowledge of navigation, I practice plastic surgery. If the smirk doesn't fade from a certain puss, I'll be glad to show you how to remove it scientifically."

The smirk faded. Mr. Tetro glanced at his watch.

THEN Tiny David was back, and with him was the man they had encountered in the restaurant. The man wore gray trousers and a dark coat. One of the reporters looked up with surprise, and began:

"Why, he has cha—"

"Stow the conversation," Tiny David ordered. "We have work to do." His face was grim. He turned to Crosby. "Let's keep this legal. Make out a slip: 'Horace Geevon. Held for investigation.'" He herded the man into the back office. "Come in here, Tetro."

The door closed.

"Give him the once-over," Lieutenant David ordered.

Tetro obeyed at length.

"The clothes is right. Make him rub his sleeve acrost my face."

Tiny David seized an unresisting arm, and drew it none too gently over Mr. Tetro's face.

"Feels like the same stuff; he brushed me when he was lifting my poke."

"How about his face?" asked Tiny David.

"Couldn't see his face. But make him walk."

"Walk," Tiny David ordered.

Horace Geevon obeyed.

Tetro nodded with satisfaction.

"Make him talk. Make him say, 'Heist 'em!'"

"Say it," Tiny David ordered.

The man obeyed.

"That's him!" cried Tetro. "I can swear to it!"

"That," declared Tiny David, "clears up things a bit."

"How about my jack?" demanded Mr. Tetro.

"He says he doesn't have it," said Tiny David.

"Say, what the—"

At this point there was an interruption out front.

Sergeant Henry Schermerhorn drove up, accompanied by an unwilling passenger—a sullen, shifty-eyed individual.

"What you got?" asked Mr. Crosby.

"Found it in the railroad station at Woodvale," Mr. Schermerhorn explained. "Had a ticket for Syrchester. I am allergic to his face. In addition to that, he had more than his share of the country's wealth. Little over eighteen hundred bucks, to be exact."

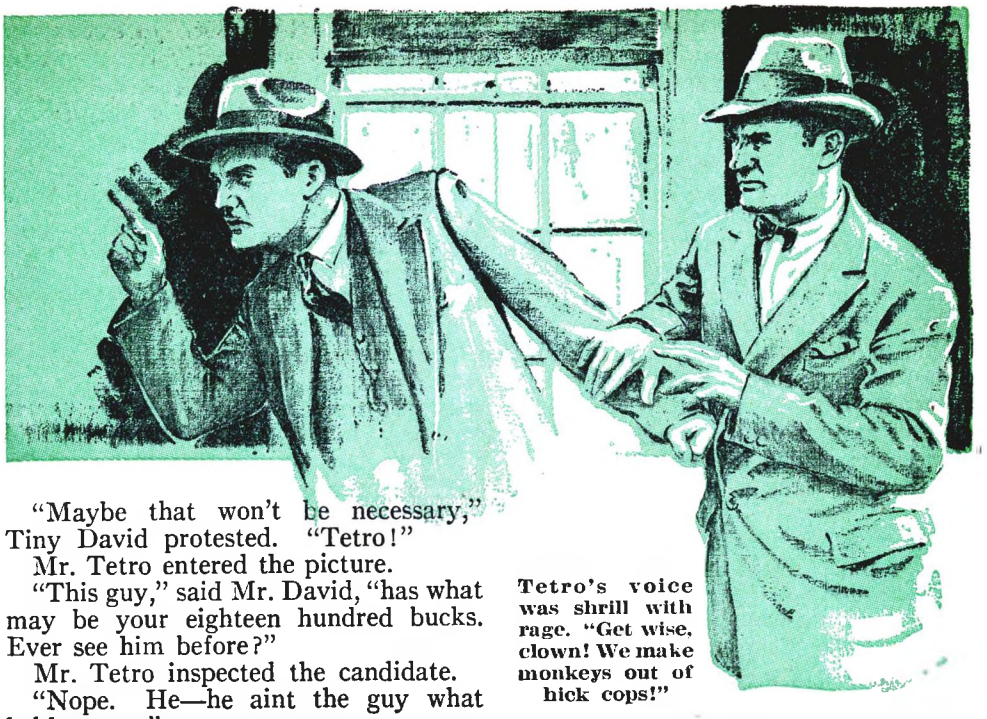
"Tiny!" Mr. Crosby bawled. "Here is a guy with eighteen hundred bucks."

Mr. David appeared in the doorway.

"How come?" he demanded.

"His statement," said Mr. Schermerhorn, "is brief and to the point: Quote. 'I aint saying nothing.' Unquote."

"Hum," said Mr. Crosby, thoughtfully. "Bring me my medicine kit, somebody. What he needs is a few drops from the little brown bottle."



Tetro's voice was shrill with rage. "Get wise, clown! We make monkeys out of hick cops!"

"Maybe that won't be necessary," Tiny David protested. "Tetro!"

Mr. Tetro entered the picture.

"This guy," said Mr. David, "has what may be your eighteen hundred bucks. Ever see him before?"

Mr. Tetro inspected the candidate.

"Nope. He—he aint the guy what held me up."

MR. DAVID scratched his head, ignoring Mr. Crosby's warning regarding the danger of splinters.

"That's funny. Geevon!"

Geevon answered the summons.

"Ever see this guy before?"

"No sir," said Geevon.

Mr. David went back to his head-scratching. Mr. Crosby cited what he believed was a Biblical quotation regarding the futility of plowing in barren ground. Then Mr. David addressed Mr. Schermerhorn's victim. "Ever see this guy before?" His thumb indicated Horace Geevon.

"I aint sayin' nothing."

"Unquote," added Mr. Schermerhorn.

Mr. David addressed Mr. Tetro.

"It has me stumped," he admitted. "You say Geevon stuck you up, but he hasn't your jack. This other guy apparently has the jack. You didn't see two guys, did you?"

Mr. Tetro pondered.

"Nope. It looked like a one-man job." He hesitated. "He would have been a sap to pull it that way if he had a pal."

"That's the way I doped it out," Tiny David admitted. "And I have been watching Geevon. When he denied the robbery, I knew he was making a liar out of himself. But when he said he didn't know that guy, I figured he was on the level."

Mr. Tetro admitted he shared that impression.

Mr. David beckoned Mr. Tetro aside.

"I dope it out like this: Geevon stuck you up. He is wise. He knows he has a record, and might be picked up, so he hid the jack. This other guy either happened to see him, or stumbled on the money—could've happened either way."

"Yeah," Mr. Tetro admitted. "It could. But what does that get us?"

"Not much," Tiny David admitted. "But it is a place to start." His face lighted up. "Here is a thought: We will take this guy in the back room. I'll leave you alone with him, because he doesn't like cops. You put it up to him cold turkey. Tell him you know he has your jack. Proposition him that if he will make a statement telling where he found it, you won't prosecute, and then he will be in the clear." Tiny David paused. "It would be a swell break if he saw Geevon hiding that jack. That would sew the case up tight. But you can't have everything. Any kind of a statement from that guy will make us able to go to bat, you will get your jack back, and everybody will be happy."

Tetro hesitated. "Say, suppose that bird goes to work on me?"

"I'll be right outside," Tiny David promised. "Sing out, and I'll come on the run."

"Okay," said Tetro.

Tetro and the suspect entered the rear office. The door closed.

The troopers, the reporters and Geevon sat in the front office.

"How does it look?" asked a reporter.

"Tough for Geevon," said Tiny David.

"And not so hot for us, if anybody should ride up and ask you," added Mr. Crosby. "There was no word from Secretary Hull, but the skipper called up from Albany, while you were out touring."

"Leave any message?"

"You might call it that," Mr. Crosby admitted, "but there are other words that would describe it better. Nothing that you haven't heard before, though."

A reporter leaned forward.

"I thought Geevon was one of your pals."

Tiny David's face clouded.

"I did too. But I haven't any pals when hold-ups start happening."

Geevon sat staring at the floor.

There was a long, awkward silence. Then the door opened, and Tetro beckoned to Tiny David, who entered the rear office. Mr. Tetro was smiling.

"Your hunch was good, copper. This guy has come clean."

"So?" Tiny David brightened visibly as he faced the third man in the room. "What's your name?"

"Herb Dalm."

"Where do you live?"

"Syrchester."

"All right. Let's have your story."

"Well, I was walkin' along in the woods near the Syrchester Road, takin' a shortcut, when I sees a guy coming along with his fist full of jack. I steps behind a tree. This guy doesn't see me. He walks on a way until he comes to a rock. He rolls it over, puts the jack down, and rolls the rock back on it."

Mr. Dalm paused for inspiration.

"He says he thinks he can take you to the rock," Mr. Tetro volunteered.

"GET on with the story," Tiny David directed.

"Well, after the guy is gone, I get the jack. I dope it out there is something phony, and I might as well have it in my pocket. The trooper picks me up at the station, and brings me here. After I has a talk with Tet—with this guy here—I sees the jack is his. He says he has no yen to hang a rap on me, so I comes clean. That's on the up and up, isn't it? About him not putting the finger on me?"

"Sure," Tiny David told him. "I am sure Mr. Tetro won't prosecute. And you have helped us a lot. Just one more thing: could you identify the man you saw hide the money?"

Dalm grinned. "That's easy, Cap. He is the bird in the other office."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure. I seen his face. And I seen his clothes. Dark coat and gray trousers. Couldn't miss him. Pick him out of a hundred."

Tiny David called: "Geevon!"

Geevon entered.

"Leave the door open a little," Tiny David directed. "It's hot in here, and it may get worse." Briefly, Tiny David outlined Dalm's story. "What do you think of that, Geevon?"

"Not very much, Lieutenant."

"Neither do I," said Tiny David. "They could have improved it a lot by using a hollow tree instead of a stone."

DALM had a puzzled expression on his face. Tetro was on his feet, sputtering angrily, and waving his arms.

"Shut up!" Tiny David barked. "You had a long session as a fiction-artist, and you were a flop. Now it's my turn."

He stood close to Tetro.

"Listen, rat! Your hold-up story was lousy. Tacks on the road! Lot of traffic there. How would the bandit know he would get somebody with money?"

Tiny David paused for breath.

"Only a fool would pull that job in that section without a get-away car. You said the bandit came out of the woods, and you made no mention of a car. There were other things—plenty of them.

"You tossed me bait about looking for a man with a record. I tossed it back to you in the form of a man wearing a dark coat and gray trousers. You took it, hook, line and sinker. You were perfectly willing to let Geevon take a rap to back up your phony."

Tiny David's big hand rested on Tetro's shoulder.

"Get this, rat! In the first place, Geevon has an alibi for the time you say the robbery took place. Also, at that time he was wearing a gray coat and dark trousers. After I picked him up, I dressed him to match the bait you had swallowed."

"You are crazy! Why would I pull a phony?" Tetro cried.

"That's easy," Tiny David cut in. "For eighteen hundred dollars. Money that wasn't yours, but had to be shared with other rats. You flashed it around

before you started, so witnesses would be able to say it was known you carried a large sum of money. Then you turned it over to your pal Dalm."

"I never seen him before in my—"

Tiny David laughed aloud.

"He started to call you by name, but just caught himself. It will take checking in the city to prove you are old pals, but we can do it. The rest is easy. Sergeant Schermerhorn gummed up the bum rap you were hanging on Geevon, when he brought in Dalm with the money. You were in the fog."

Tiny David grinned.

"I felt sorry for you. I gave you some more bait: The yarn about Geevon hiding the money, and Dalm finding it. I gave you a chance to sell that to Dalm, and you did. But you disappointed me. I was counting on a hollow tree. The best you came up with was a stone."

"So what?" Tetro demanded. "What does it get you?"

"Just a routine case solved," Tiny David admitted. "But it gets you and Dalm a rap for grand larceny."

"Not a chance," Tetro snarled. "The guys I am hooked up with won't press no charges against me."

Tiny David's grin was broader.

"In that case, they make themselves liable for compounding a felony. But even if they stick, you boys aren't in the clear. There is a charge of conspiring to defeat justice, and if that goes boom on us, there is always the good old reliable disorderly conduct. You and Brother Dalm will be busy boys."

Tetro's voice was shrill with rage.

"Get wise, clown! You are tangling with a big outfit. We make monkeys out of hick cops." Mr. Tetro waxed expansive. "You're off the tracks all along the line. Take that rap on the games. It is coming up in Syrchester, aint it?"

"Yes," Tiny David admitted.

Tetro's laugh was derisive.

"Sure it is, and before a judge we own. And prosecuted by an assistant attorney general what we keep tied up in our vest pocket. Facts is facts. That is why I say you would be wise if you keep—"

THE telephone-bell rang. Mr. Crosby answered the call.

"Yes sir. He is here. I'll call him, Captain. —Oh, Tiny."

Mr. David walked to the telephone. There was a long one-sided conversation. Tiny David, who was on the receiving end, contented himself with an occasional, "Yes sir," as he listened to a recital of his faults, the faults of his parents and dire predictions regarding his future. Then Captain Field asked:

"How about the hold-up?"

"All cleared, sir. Tetro robbed himself."

"Hurmph! Maybe you have managed to slam Tetro into jail, but that is no excuse for you chasing out of barracks when you were left in charge. Besides, bagging Tetro is small game. Major Harner, the attorney general and I have done our best, but we know when we are licked. That outfit is going to hang crape on us when their case comes up in Syrchester, and we can't do a thing."

"Yes, Captain," said Tiny David. "That's what Tetro told me. He says they have a judge and an assistant attorney general right in their pockets."

"WHAT'S that?" roared Captain Field. "Who else heard him say it?"

"Well," Tiny David began, "there was Lieutenant Crosby, Sergeant Linton, Sergeant Schermerhorn and three reporters. They were in the next room, but I left the door open in case Mr. Tetro dropped any pearls of wisdom."

Captain Field was shouting:

"That puts us in the clear! We can get the case shifted to another court. And any judge will think twice before he hands down a verdict for the sort of mob we will show this up to be. But get affidavits. Get them right away—"

"Yes, Captain." There was a note of patient resignation in Tiny David's voice. "I was starting on the affidavits when the Captain called up to say that I would wind up as the worst case in the ward for the worst cases in a hospital for incurable— Sir? . . . Yes, Captain, things like that have been poured on me before, and they rolled off, but they always pain me. . . . Very well, sir. I'll take a week's leave when I get this case cleared up. But there is one thing before I go:

"You will remember that the Captain told me to look out for a good stonemason to take charge of the work on the new garage and other jobs at the barracks? I have just the man. Put him on the pay-roll, as of this morning. The name is Geevon. Found him right here in Deerville. You see, Captain, I never leave the barracks except on busi— Sir? . . . No sir, I am not using my big mouth to crowd my luck right off the road. I'll hang up, Captain."

One Was Loaded

"IF he is here," the Commissaire said slowly, "he will be under the protection of Lan Ah."

"Your professional concealer?"

"Our professional almost-everything in a criminal way, monsieur. Saigon is not big enough to support specialists, but Lan Ah makes a very good income controlling our underworld. He has a finger in every crook's pie. He is absolute king of Chalon, where his countrymen tremble at the sound of his name. I know that he is exacting more and more tribute from Saigon itself. He has even been extending his activities into Gia-Dinh, where the Annamites live. In many respects, monsieur, he is like one of your American racketeers."

I smiled a little. It would have seemed strange to travel halfway around the world to find an Oriental Al Capone! But I didn't believe it.

"You, monsieur, are a private investigator. How is it that you have come so far in search of L'Araignée?"

"He stole a basin from a client of mine."

The Commissaire's gray eyebrows rose. He was a worldly-wise little man, and this was the first time I had seen him show amazement.

"A Bernard Palissy ewer," I explained. "My client had just paid four million francs for it. It's worth far more than that to him. It exactly completed and made perfect his collection of Sixteenth Century French porcelain, which he keeps at home in the States, and which is undoubtedly the best of its kind. The robbery took place in Paris, before my client had a chance to take the ewer back."

"Ah." The Commissaire sipped his *aperitif*. Yet he seemed puzzled. "But perhaps this is not the same L'Araignée of whom I have heard? It is a popular name among the Apaches of Paris, monsieur. L'Araignée—how would you say it in English?"

"The Spider."

"Ah! The Spider. Perhaps this is not the same one. His name is Gaston Collot?"

"Gaston Collot," I confirmed.

"But I had been informed from Paris that he was wanted for murder."

"Your information was correct. You see, when he stole this ewer from my client's apartment in Paris, he held up two of my client's servants at the point of a pistol. At least, we suppose that he did. We know that he tied them to chairs, a valet and a maid, and then cut their throats. It must be that his mask had slipped and they had seen him. But he was careless, or nervous. He left a fingerprint."

The Commissaire said "Ah!" again. He liked to say that, and he could pack a world of meaning into it.

"So that you policemen want him for murder. But *I* want him for one thing only—and that is to recover that ewer. If I can toss him into your arms after that, *tant mieux*. But all I'm really hired for is to get that ewer back."

The Commissaire took another sip of his *aperitif* and replaced it on the café table, staring at it. He moved his fingers up and down over the glass.

"And what makes you think that he is in Indo-China, monsieur?"

"I've been on his trail," I answered, "for more than seven months. I won't go into the details now, but it was hard work. The reason I was picked for it was because of my knowledge of your language."

"You speak it excellently, monsieur," the Commissaire murmured.

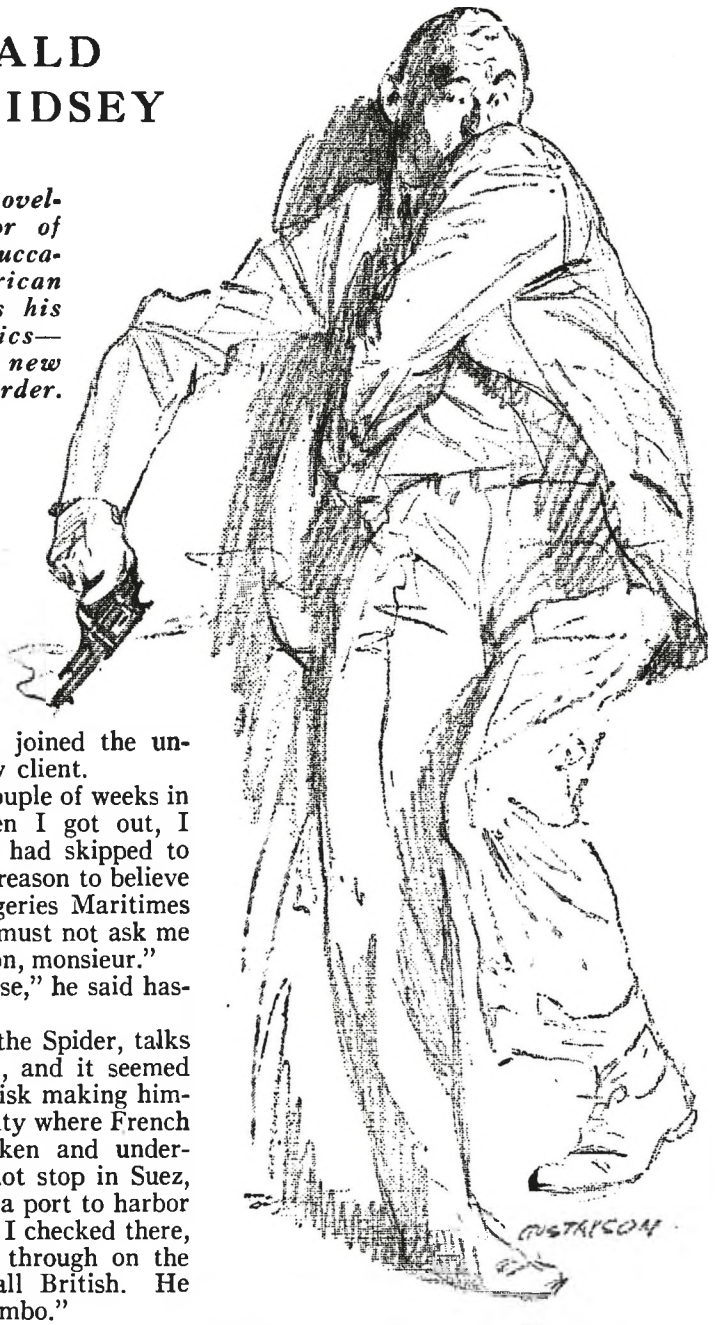
"I traced him to Marseilles. Then I heard that he was in Alexandria. I missed him there by only two days, and after a while I learned that he had gone to Cairo, and was hiding out with some old Apache friends in the Fish Market. You know that district, monsieur."

He gave a wry smile, nodding.

"It meant another long search, and this time I almost saw him. I have never really seen L'Araignée, monsieur, though in a dark room in the Fish Market district I came face to face with him. But what light there was was behind him; his face was shadowed." And involuntarily I inhaled deeply, feeling once more the remnant of pain in my right side. "He is very quick with his knife, it seems. But he must have thought that there were others behind me. He must have been frightened, and hurried away. Otherwise

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

In this colorful novelette by the author of "Blade of the Buccaneers," an American detective pursues his man to the tropics—and encounters new techniques of murder.



I fired at him, catching him on the side so that he slammed back against the wall.

I should certainly have joined the unfortunate servants of my client.

"As it was, I spent a couple of weeks in a Cairo hospital. When I got out, I learned that L'Araignée had skipped to Port Saïd, where I have reason to believe that he caught a Messageries Maritimes ship for the East. You must not ask me how I got this information, monsieur."

"I understand, of course," he said hastily.

"Now Gaston Collot, the Spider, talks no language but French, and it seemed unlikely that he would risk making himself conspicuous in any city where French was not commonly spoken and understood. The vessel did not stop in Suez, and Djibouti is too tiny a port to harbor a man like that—though I checked there, of course, when I went through on the next ship. Colombo's all British. He wouldn't drop off in Colombo."

"Singapore?"

"I thought of Singapore, naturally. In fact, I've spent the past month there. But while it's a big place and about as cosmopolitan as any city could possibly be, I have pretty well convinced myself that L'Araignée is not in it. He might possibly have gone on to Hongkong or Shanghai or Kobe, but it seems much more likely that he came here." I finished my drink. "So if you'll take me to this man Lan Ah, I'd be vastly obliged."

The Commissaire also finished his drink, but he made no move to rise. We were in the sidewalk café of the Continental Palace Hotel, and he slouched in his chair, gazing across the Place du Theâtre.

"It is odd, monsieur. You search for Gaston Collot, 'L'Araignée,' yet you have never seen him, only his pictures and the copies of his fingerprints. *Alors*, I have not seen even *that* much of Lan Ah."

"Oh."

"I would give a great deal to see him. For I feel his presence all the time, and he has stirred up such crime as our fine little city here has never known before.

Like L'Araignée,—if L'Araignée is truly here,—Lan Ah came as a fugitive. From Singapore. He is something of a genius, you comprehend, monsieur. In Singapore he had organized among his countrymen a revival of the Thit Kuan, the secret Iron Society, and he was well started toward making a fortune—when he had to flee. Oh, it was not the police! I know little for certain, getting only scraps of information here and there, obliquely, in whispers; but I do know that it was not the police, for they never came close to him in all their searching. No, it was internal trouble in the society which caused Lan Ah to think he would be safer here. How he got here I do not know. But for the past six months I have never felt myself safe or at ease in what I used to consider a charming city. Lan Ah is everywhere. The biggest merchant on the Rue Catinat pays him something every week, indirectly; and so does the humblest rickshaw-puller."

The Commissaire glanced around. With a spotless handkerchief he touched the lips under his trig mustache. A military man with a splendid record, decorated four times for conspicuous bravery in the World War, he was now—I saw it as I looked at him—he was now frightened. Bullets he would face with a sneer; but the machinations of an unseen and utterly unscrupulous Chinese plucked like a ghost at the sleeve of his courage; though he held himself erect and his dignity was irreproachable, he looked like a man who had aged pitifully in the past few months.

"I am afraid," he admitted, replacing the handkerchief. His voice was calm. "I am afraid even now. Not for myself, but for you. We should not have come to so public a place to have our little talk. I am watched at all hours. Hereafter perhaps you too will be watched."

I smiled. After all, I was a lot younger, and I hadn't had any experience with Chinese. The sea trip had done me good. I was in fine condition, and except when I drew a very deep breath, I was no longer conscious of that wound in my side. Besides, I had a hunch that I had run L'Araignée to earth at last. Maybe this wasn't altogether reasonable, but I was convinced that L'Araignée was somewhere near at hand. And I never questioned my ability to find him.

THOUGHT of being in physical danger in Saigon amused me, then. Saigon is smaller than Singapore, and cleaner, neater, gayer. Singapore is a confused smelly smear of nationalities; but Saigon the dapper, though like Singapore it is hot and flat and Oriental, has a charm all its own. Less than eight per cent of the population is white; yet the place is as French as the Champs Elysées. It is bright, polished, prosperous. If it is sophisticated, at the same time it's quaint. There is something toylike about it.

I ROSE. The Commissaire rose. We shook hands. I thanked him for providing my pistol-permit.

"I could assign a guard to you—"

"Please don't," I said quickly. "It is not that I question the efficiency of your service, monsieur; but I have my own methods, and I prefer to go about my work without attracting attention."

He nodded gravely, and we shook hands again—the French are great for shaking hands—and I stepped into a rickshaw.

A rickshaw is the way to see such a town. If you have never been in one, you cannot understand. During my stay in Singapore I had learned to love them. You sit there feeling like a lord; and the coolie, on bare feet, pad-pads ahead of you. The motion is gentle, almost soothing; there are no sudden starts and stops, no dizzy turns, no noise. You just go rolling along. And if the puller seldom takes you to the place you want to get to until he's made at least three tries—well, there's plenty of time in the tropics.

Rickshaw-pullers are not remarkable for linguistic achievements. The best way to get one to go in a given direction is to shout at him or kick his shoulder until he turns, and then point. In Singapore, that island into which are crammed the Lord know how many nationalities, each of them speaking a separate language—in Singapore most of the rickshaw-pullers go them one better, being the so-called Straits-born Chinese who speak no known tongue at all. Long before coming to Saigon I had ceased to try to make myself understood to a puller by any other medium than a jabbed forefinger.

To this one, at first, I gave his head, not really caring where I went. He was a little fellow, and seemed tired. He did not jog along jauntily, like so many of the others, chin up, elbows out, his dirty bare heels kicking high behind. He plugged, his head down. Yet he went fast enough, and smoothly. When he had taken me around the Cathedral Square and out through the zoölogical gardens, I decided I'd had enough sightseeing for the day.

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

As I fell out of the rickshaw, there was a sound behind me as of a hundred thousand match-boxes being crushed.

I was registered at the Metropole Hotel on the Quay le Myre de Vilers, and I had made up my mind to start looking for L'Araignée immediately.

I had told the Commissaire, rather cockily, that I had my own methods. As a matter of fact, I didn't know what I was going to do. I had no friends in Indo-China, no secret sources of information. My only hope, as I saw it, was just to knock around and get to know the town, keeping my mouth shut and my eyes and ears open. You couldn't really call that a method, though I've known it to work wonders.

Saigon being a port, the waterfront seemed the best place to start.

The rickshaw-puller thought otherwise. When I shouted at him, he did not turn his head for directions: he only bent lower, so that I could see under the rim of his conical straw hat. On the back of his neck was a curious little red half-moon which looked like a birthmark. I kicked his right shoulder. Still he didn't turn his head, but he swung to the right. "Deaf," I thought, and leaned back. I had wanted to go over the Arroyo Chinois, anyway.

The next turn he made was of his own volition. He swung right again off the Boulevard Bonnard into some small side-street. Well, the city map in the folder I held told me that he was still heading toward the Rue Guynemer bridge; so I let him alone. In fact, I had ceased to think about him—when the crash came.

At a narrow street intersection, with no warning, he swung half up on the sidewalk, then wheeled sidewise, turning between the shafts, his head low, his face hidden by the hat; and instead of *pulling* the vehicle any farther, he *pushed* it.

He pushed it right back into the street.

The shafts rose as he released them, and I sprang forward in an effort to keep myself from tipping over backward. It was only this that saved me, nothing else; for I had not seen the car dashing out of the cross-street. . . . As I fell right out of the rickshaw between the shafts, and sprawled on hands and knees, there was a sound behind me as of a hundred thousand match-boxes being crushed.

I sat down, turning, and blinking in my astonishment. The car was gone—I'd never had a good look at it; and so was the coolie. The rickshaw was in splinters. People were running toward me.

A MOMENT before, that spot had been practically deserted. Now it was crowded, with everybody talking at once. Slipping away—for I did not wish to attract attention to myself—was easy. I walked to the hotel, where I changed clothes. I had been jolted a bit, and the heels of my hands were cut and bruised, but nothing more serious.

An accident? It could have been, I suppose; but it didn't seem so. I decided, as I sallied forth that night to explore the Saigon waterfront, that maybe this town wasn't as toylike as it seemed. It would be a good idea, I decided, for me to watch my step.

And I was right—for all the good it did me. . . .

There is nothing crowded about the waterfront at Saigon. The French have laid it out carefully and well, confident that the city is going to keep growing until it rivals ports like Hongkong, Singapore, Shanghai, Yokohama. It is most un-Oriental in that it is not jammed together, and there's room to turn around. Saigon is not on the sea, but some fifty miles up the winding Saigon and Dong-Nai rivers, and in consequence the air holds no sniff of brine. Back of the docks along the river is a great wide space for trucks, customs-sheds, warehouses and the like; and this is guarded by a tall iron fence. On the other side of the avenue from this fence are the cafés, strung out along several miles. At any time, but especially at night, it is unlike an ordinary waterfront. Less noisy, less smelly, less confusing. Indeed, the only thing nautical about it at night is the fact that most of the drinkers are seamen.

Now the French sailor on shore, unlike his British or American cousin, does not feel the need to engage in three or four fights a night on general principles. Just as boisterous, he is a lot less belligerent. All the same, he can often be as tough as they come; and I saw plenty of faces that night I wouldn't care to encounter again in a dark alley. Fists were seldom clenched; but I had a strong hunch that if the customers of any given café were suddenly stripped naked, a most amazing quantity of keen-edged cutlery would be discovered.

I went from joint to joint, in one rickshaw after another, and at each I sat in a corner quietly sipping beer and listening. The talk was almost all French, though occasionally there would be some Chinese, of which I understood nothing, or some Malay, of which I had picked up a little in Singapore. I heard nothing about L'Araignée or about Lan Ah.

It was in a dump called Aux Pauvres Diables, one of the last along the line, that hell broke loose. The place was crowded, mostly with Frenchmen, though there were a few half-castes. No preliminary snarling, no pushing back and forth, announced the imminent outbreak of hostilities. Nobody even raised his voice. One moment everything was ordinary barroom babble; the next moment everything was turmoil.

It started very near me, at the end of the bar. A French sailor suddenly pushed a half-Chinese against my table, cursing him in a shrill voice. The Chink's right hand went behind his back—he was actually sitting on my table at the time—and he snicked out a long ugly butcher-knife.

Now all this was none of my business, even though it was practically taking place in my lap, but I still think I did the most natural thing in the world when I reached out and grabbed that Chink's wrist. He squealed, turning. Somebody punched or pushed somebody else, who staggered against me, almost knocking me out of my chair as I started to get up. Somebody screamed something about somebody else being his friend—and a gun exploded twice.

I NEVER saw who held that gun; nor did I wait to find out. I *do* know it went off within a few feet of me, and that only too obviously the bullets were intended to put me out of the argument.

Well, they did. But not because either of them touched me. Of course I had a gun of my own, and what's more, I had permission to carry it; but I had no desire for a shooting match in a place where I didn't know who was against me, nor

why. If I was going to find Gaston Collot, the Spider, I would certainly have to remain as inconspicuous as possible.

So I shoved the half-caste around in front of me, ducked, and twisted into the crowd. Head down, I slugged my way to the street.

YES, I ran! Why not? I wasn't in Indo-China for the purpose of demonstrating that I could lick my weight in natives with a few dozen *matelots* chucked in. I had something better to do. And I don't care so much for fighting that I indulge in it without having some good reason to do so.

The clustered rickshaw-pullers outside had reached for their shafts at the first bang; and when I tumbled clear of the crowd and into the street, they were scattering like birds. The one I caught up to must have been a trifle slow on the getaway, and even that one I had to chase. I caught it on the fly, jerking myself up into the seat. The puller turned his head, though without slackening his speed, and yammered at me. His words sounded like a stick pulled along a picket fence.

"You *run*—that's all you need to do," I yelled.

He ran. And to give him credit, once he got going, he was plenty fast! We had passed two other rickshaws when the next shots came. They came from behind us, from the direction of the café, and I ducked my head, hearing the sickish *whee-ee-ee* of lead very close at hand. The puller ducked his head too—but he kept running. He didn't slow up until we reached the bridge. I gave him three piastres, almost a whole American dollar, about thirty times what the ride would have been worth in ordinary circumstances; but he was so excited that he didn't bow and scrape, or even look at the money, but just stood there panting, staring at me as though he thought I was going to eat him.

I walked the rest of the way to the hotel. I was thinking about that fight, realizing for the first time, now that I had a chance to catch my breath, that there had been something very strange about it. Why shoot at *me?* I could understand a jumpy gunman who was maybe a bit hopped up anyway, letting fly a couple of times in the café, not knowing at whom or why. But why run out into the street and send a couple more slugs after me?

I was wondering about the "accident" that afternoon, too. . . .

It was almost midnight, and in the hotel I showered and got into pajamas. There was only a sheet to cover me on the bed, which was enough, for the night was hot; and just as I was about to snap out the light, it seemed to me I saw something move underneath that sheet. I took a corner of the thing and yanked it off the bed.

Two little stripes of gold, suddenly in motion, glittered brilliantly against the white of linen as they squirmed this way and that, blinded. They were beautiful things to look at, very small and very bright, but not at all the sort of chums you'd pick as bed companions.

I didn't go near them. I pushed the bell-button instead—and I pushed it and pushed it for some time, before I realized that the bell was not working. The wire had been cut. So I stuck my head out into the corridor and yelled at the top of my lungs.

The manageress was a large hawk-eyed woman who should not have gone anywhere without a cash register in front of her. The only conceivable way to get her excited would be to try to short-change her. She eyed the little snakes coldly.

"But monsieur should not have brought these without telling me. There is an extra charge for animals in the rooms. And these—they are dangerous. I assume their fangs have been removed, monsieur?"

"I doubt it."

It took a lot of arguing to convince her that I'd never seen the lovely reptiles before, and would be very happy if I never saw them again.

"But they could not crawl all the way in from the jungle—all the way here to the center of Saigon! *Non, non, non, non!* It is not possible!"

"You're absolutely right," I said. "What are they?"

"The *kongrang hô.* The most dangerous of all in L'Indo-Chine. They bite—*zing!*—they kill. Like that. Monsieur will permit the boys to carry them out before he retires, eh?"

"That's a great idea. Only I don't think I'll sleep here, anyway. I think I'll call on a friend of mine."

THE Commissaire of Police, in a black-and-gold dressing-robe, black silk pajamas and shiny yellow leather slippers, was as polite as ever. The fact that I had got him out of bed did not seem to make any difference. He did not look sleepy. But he was worried.

The man swore, partly in French; he called that filler a *poisse*.

"You should have permitted me to give you a bodyguard, monsieur. I do not believe you take this man Lan Ah seriously enough."

"I'm beginning to!"

"The snakes were put there, of course. I am acquainted with the management of the hotel, which is above suspicion; but it will be difficult to learn anything from the servants, who are all Annamites. I have not been informed of the shooting at Aux Pauvres Diables, so we may assume that nobody was hurt; but from what you tell me, it must have been arranged. As for the smashing of the rickshaw, I knew of that, and I had been wondering if the European who disappeared afterward was you."

He looked at me with grave eyes.

"You wonder that I should have had reported to me a mere traffic accident? It is true that they would not ordinarily trouble me with such. But in this case the rickshaw had been stolen. They are all licensed, of course; and the proper puller of the one that was wrecked was not the man who pulled you."

"How do you know?"

"Because at the time of the 'accident,' monsieur, the coolie licensed to pull that particular rickshaw was five miles away, lying bound in a cellar in Chalon. He was found only a few minutes after the crash, by a native policeman who heard his groans. He had been badly beaten, but he either does not know or will not tell who it was who beat him and made off with his rickshaw."

I GAVE a little whistle. Clearly, I reflected, all of the modern racketeering brains were not confined to the United States. Here was a man who could give tips to any American gang chief. Less than an hour after I landed in Indo-China, I had been spotted talking to the Commissaire; a rickshaw had been stolen by violence several miles away, and brought to Saigon with another puller, presumably by automobile; and when the Commissaire and I had finished our conversation in the café, that rickshaw and no other —out of the swarm of them—had been maneuvered into such a position that I took it naturally, as you do take rickshaws, without glancing at the puller. There's organization for you!

"We will of course question all pullers in the vicinity of the Place du Théâtre, but I doubt that we'll learn anything.

I lay there, taking a drag now and then, but not really inhaling.

They'll know that Lan Ah is behind the business, and they'll be afraid to talk. In the meanwhile—a cigarette, monsieur?—in the meanwhile you had best agree that a detective follow you everywhere."

I shook my head. I can be a stubborn cuss sometimes.

"No. I'll admit I don't like to have people trying to slaughter me wherever I go, but if they really mean to get me, a bodyguard wouldn't help. All he'd do is make the riffraff scared of me—in other words, cut out whatever chance I had of getting some information about the boys higher up. And even if it isn't much fun being shot at and having venomous reptiles left in your bed and so forth, at least it proves one thing: that L'Araignée is here. It must be this Lan Ah doing all this—"

"Oh, assuredly, monsieur."

"And why should he take so much trouble to try to eliminate me unless L'Araignée was back of him? No," I said, "I'm going to stay. And if I can only get a decent night's sleep, I'm going to take a good look around Chalon tomorrow, alone."

I slept that night in a room in the Commissaire's own house, on the second floor. It was a large room, plainly furnished, and not the sort of place you'd expect to find in the tropics. The door was heavy, and there was no transom. The ceiling was high, but there were only two small windows, each protected by steel bars, and these were high too. Neither window was overlooked by any other house or any tree.

"It may be rather hot, monsieur," the Commissaire pointed out, as he placed a cold-water thermos next to the glass on the bedside table, "but certainly it should be safe!"

He begged me to lock the door from the inside, and even stood out in the hall and listened while I threw the heavy latch. He was pretty badly rattled, that man. I was beginning to understand why.

WHEN I woke up, it must have been eight o'clock and it was getting hot. This was March, still the season of the northeast monsoon, so that there were no rains. Being in Saigon at night was like being in an oven with the heat turned fairly low; but in the daytime the place was like a red-hot stove, so that you felt you had to keep stepping or your shoes would be burned off. Sunlight blazed up-

on the pavements and the buildings, which threw it back.

Despite a languid electric fan in the center of the ceiling, the room in which I had slept was Turkish-bathy, and I was drenched in sweat. My mouth was dry, my eyes sticky, and it was hard to get awake. I reached for the water-glass.

Now, the last thing I had seen, for no particular reason, before turning out the light, was that water-glass; and it was the first thing I saw when I woke up. It was on a small table opposite my left shoulder, and the light from the windows, like the light from the electric bulb the previous night, shone upon it obliquely. It was an ordinary-looking water-glass, and perfectly plain. The reason I stared so at it, this morning, was the fingerprints.

Because of that oblique light they were utterly clear. Four on the side near me, and as I saw when I examined the other side, one was there. It was the natural way to pick up a glass—thumb, and four fingers There is nothing, of course, that will take and hold fingerprints better than ordinary glass. They may not always be visible to the naked eye, but they're usually present.

There were two reasons why I stared at these particular prints. One was because they were astonishingly small, as though they had been made by a child. The other was because I did not think they had been there when I turned out the light. If they had been there then, I would have noticed and remembered them, they were so very small.

It was not as though whoever touched the glass had done so very lightly, leaving the impression only of the central pattern of his fingerprints. More than the bulbs were showing. In fact, the prints of the four fingers were there down almost to the lowest joint.

I LAY frowning at them. A midget? The patterns were quite clear, three simple arches, including the thumb, and two ulnar loops, not defaced by any scars, and not smeared.

I had begun to think that perhaps they *had* been there when I went to bed after all, that possibly they'd been made by a small child of one of the Commissaire's servants—when I noticed something else.

The glass was half filled with water.

I was absolutely sure that there had been nothing in it when I went to bed. There wouldn't be, naturally. It would get warm during the night. That was the whole purpose of the thermos.

In my bag I had a little precipitated chalk and a brush, and I powdered the glass to bring out the prints more clearly. I learned nothing new this way. I powdered the handle of the thermos pitcher too, but it was covered with prints of several sorts so superimposed one upon the other that I couldn't tell whether they included tiny ones.

I sniffed at the stuff in the glass. No odor. I touched my tongue to it. Water? Certainly it had a bitter flavor. I touched my tongue also to the liquid in the thermos: it was cold and absolutely tasteless.

The bolt on my door was still in place. It could not have been moved from the other side by the cleverest of burglars, at least not without making some noise; and I am a very light sleeper. I got up on a chair and tried the bars at the two little windows. They were solid and strong, and set so close together that even a baby would have had difficulty wriggling between two of them, assuming that a baby could have climbed up the side of the wall in the first place.

AT last I dressed and went down to breakfast. But before I did this, I poured the stuff in the water-glass into a small bottle, and stoppered this carefully. I wanted to find out what it was.

"You slept well, monsieur?" the Commissaire greeted me.

"Excellently. I'm all set now to tackle Chalon."

"Chalon is a strange place, and a dangerous one, monsieur. Lan Ah has lately taken to planting bombs in the shops whose proprietors fail to pay him. Do you think he would hesitate to kill a foreigner without friends here?"

I said crisply: "No indeed. But don't worry about me for a while yet. I work best at night. I won't start for Chalon until after dark. Meanwhile I think I'll do a little sightseeing. Any suggestions?"

He recommended a trip out to the Trian Rapids by way of Bienhoa—said it could be made easily in one day with plenty of time for lunch and a siesta.

"Though it would be wise, monsieur, since I know the city so much better, if you permitted me to pick the motorcar and the chauffeur."

"Nothing," I assured him, "would suit me better."

The coffee had brought about a vague suspicion that perhaps I might be nuts about those fingerprints after all. Maybe this is why I did not mention the matter to the Commissaire. However, I did

take the trouble before leaving Saigon to leave the contents of that water-glass with an analytical chemist, who promised some sort of report by nightfall.

WELL, I enjoyed myself. I forgot all about golden snakes and Palissy ewers and wall-climbing infants, and was just a tourist in a fascinating place. The chauffeur could speak a little French, so I sat in front with him and asked dumb questions. I got back at about six o'clock, when the sidewalk cafés were crowded and Saigon looked its smartest and most amiable. Nothing bad, I told myself, could happen in such a charming place. I'd been a little goofy about the whole business, impressed in spite of myself by the Commissaire's fears, or perhaps a bit touched by the sun.

It hardly seemed worth while to go to the analyst for a report on that liquid in the water-glass. But I did.

He gave me a strange look.

"I think that perhaps I should call in the police, monsieur."

"Go ahead. Call the Commissaire himself. Why? What did you find?"

"It will take at least a week to be certain, perhaps longer. I am out of hydrobromic acid, and it is possible that I cannot get any here now. The fluid is an alkaloid. I am certain that it is not cocaine or morphine or any morphine derivative; nor is it strychnine. I thought that it might be atropine, and when I neutralized a few drops of it and placed it in the eyes of my cat, it produced mydriasis. But since then I have applied Vitali's test with interesting results, and I wish to apply Wormley's test so that I may—"

"All this doesn't mean anything to me," I cried. "What do you think the stuff *is?*"

"Either hyoscyamine or hyoscine. Probably hyoscine."

"Poisonous?"

"Deadly poisonous. But very difficult to obtain, even in small amounts. Outside of Egypt," he added, still giving me that funny look, "I can think of only one case in which hyoscine was used for criminal purposes, and that was the famous Crippen case in England. Dr. Crippen, who murdered his wife with hyoscine, was of course a physician, and he was employed at different times by various wholesale drug firms."

"Outside of Egypt, you say? It is obtainable there?"

"*Hyoscyamus muticus* and several varieties of *Datura* grow wild in Egypt, and the seeds of *Hyoscyamus niger* are frequently imported from India. I would not say that hyoscine is a common poison, even in Egypt, but at least it is known there to some extent by laymen of the underworld."

"I see."

"What do you see?" he asked sharply.

I took a deep breath, and felt a throb of pain in my right side, low.

"I see that a certain friend of mine knows how to profit by his travels," I replied. "Thank you, monsieur. I shall be interested to learn the final result of your tests—if I'm still alive then."

That night I went to Chalon.

Statistically it's Saigon's Brooklyn; for though the map shows it as a suburb, it has a greater population than the home town. But to call it Brooklyn would give you the wrong impression. It is said Brooklyn is where New York sleeps. Well, Chalon is where Saigon sleeps *and* plays. Chalon is a hot place.

Think of it as at night. Think of it only with its bewildered necklace of electric bulbs, dirty, bad as Saigon itself doesn't get bad, the spot where even Frenchmen blush. You wend your way from dump to dump. Women? Yes. And your choice of complexions. Liquor? Yes! Dope? All you can use, and you don't have to go finger-tapping at dark doors, or whispering, or giving passwords, to get it. Chalon has its reputation, and doggoned if it doesn't live up to it.

I won't go into details. It would only make you dizzy. But I will say this for myself: I kept my mind on business. This client of mine, whose name I would not tell the Commissaire and won't tell you, is a man so rich and so important that working for him is sort of like being an angel. In spite of yourself you feel the responsibility.

Just a guy wandering around; that was all I was. I'd drift into this place, gulp a little beer, drift out. I'd amble into that place, side-step a few souses, finish another glass of beer, listening; and then I'd amble out.

SOUNDS silly? Maybe it was. But I had all the time in the world, and my client trusted me. Like Chalon, I had a reputation, and I was determined to live up to it. Straightforward methods wouldn't get Gaston Collot, who was known in the Paris underworld as L'Araignée, the Spider. Cops had tried to nab him, and missed. Systems fell apart when they encountered him. *Granted*

All this was none of my business, but I did the most natural thing when I grabbed that Chink's wrist.

that the man had been lucky. Admitted that sooner or later he would miss his step, losing. Meanwhile there was that ewer a guy named Bernard Palissy had made some four hundred years ago, which my client wanted. How long would it be before L'Araignée crashed? And what would happen to the ewer before this event? It was, as I figured it, up to a lucky devil like me to catch the Spider and recover the ewer. Because I am lucky. I'm a fatalist, that way. I believe in my luck. I believed that I was luckier than Gaston Collot, and that's why I went to Chalon.

Sticking the old bean into the lion's mouth? All right. If they were going to get me, they were going to get me. That's the way I felt about it.

I'LL not go into details. What with one thing and another, it was quite a night. The break came sometime early in the morning, when I was stretched out on a carved wooden table with a carved wooden pillow under my head and a bamboo pipe in my hand. Whiff it? Of course I did! Do you think I was going to attract attention by abstaining? I'll confess I didn't like the stuff. It made me sick. But I held my stomach down and ordered *chandu* every time I thought somebody was fixing me with a fishy eye.

The room was long and narrow, and the ceiling was low. As dens out there go, it was swank. There was one filler for every three bunks, which is a lot of service. It stank, of course. Opium always does. But I insist that the dump was swagger.

The filler stocked me up, lighted the little gumlike business on the end of the wire, and held it to my pipe. I inhaled, reluctantly. I had to inhale because he was right there. He backed away, smirking; and in backing away, he jogged the elbow of the man lying in the next bunk. This man swore. He was Chinese, and he swore mostly in Chinese, which of course I could not get, but partly in French, which of course I could.

I have mentioned that I got this assignment chiefly because of my knowledge of the French language. I'm as American as they can be found, but I do happen to know French. *Really* know it. I'm not boasting now, but this must be explained. Because one of the things the Chinaman in the next bunk called that filler was a *poisse.*

Now that's not only French, it's Parisian. It's not only Parisian, it's 'way-down underworld Parisian. It's Apache, in other words. There is not a closer, more self-centered slang in this world. We Americans, getting sore, can call

somebody else a louse or a punk—and every other American and some foreigners too understand what we mean. But when one Frenchman calls another Frenchman a *poisse,* it means that the first Frenchman hangs out with a certain crowd and that's all there is to it. He couldn't use the word unless he knew that particular crowd. He wouldn't have heard it. *We* throw our slang in all directions, and give it to the universe by means of the radio and talkies and so forth. The French, and notably Parisian Apaches, guard theirs.

How did it happen that a Chinaman called another Chinaman a *poisse?*

OF course I didn't do anything. I simply lay there, taking a drag at my pipe now and then, but not really inhaling, since nobody was looking at me that close.

After a while the Chink got up. He had a monkey with him, a bad-tempered little beast who kept staring at me as though it thought I shouldn't be there. The Chink himself was young, smooth, small and very well dressed, and he looked as though he knew everything that could possibly be known by anybody. He paid for his pipes, lifted the monkey to his shoulder and went out.

I paid for my pipes and went out.

There was the usual conglomeration of rickshaws, and pullers shrieked imploringly from all sides; but I'd taken the precaution to hire a car, and for a change the chauffeur wasn't asleep. Luck again. If that chauffeur had been asleep, as he usually was, I wouldn't have had time to keep sight of the Chink, who also had a car. Chalon at night is a crowded place, and very confusing. You couldn't find a better place in which to get lost.

We went for some time before I realized that we were rolling along the Avenue Gallieni and heading right back for Saigon. I guess that opium had grogged me a bit. I'd shake my head, and swallow, and try hard to think; but things were not steady. I'd breathe huge masses of air suddenly. Thank God the chauffeur had got the idea, and for the moment there wasn't any need for me to do anything but recover.

When we rolled on through the Place Eugene Cuniac and then swung left, I began to snap out of it. We were making for the tonier residential section. I forget the name of it. The car ahead turned abruptly into a private drive, and my chauffeur had sense enough to go right on without slackening speed. I tipped him ten piastres on the strength of that, when I stopped him and got out a couple of hundred yards along the line.

When the ruby of the tail-light had been erased by blackness, I strolled over to the house where the other car had stopped. It was a nice place. In the darkness it was like some pleasant American suburban house, neat, trim, with a hedge, grass, flower-beds. Blobs of light oozed out of several windows.

I didn't sneak. I walked right up the drive as though I owned it. Which probably explains why the Annamite, when he stepped in front of me and shoved a pistol at my tummy, didn't raise an outcry, *tout de suite.* He had come from behind a hibiscus.

He was not sure of himself, and of course neither was I. But *I* acted as though I were.

"What's the matter with you, *poisse?*" I snarled.

He hesitated. He took the gun out of my midriff, but kept it pointed my way. He did not know what to do.

"You go inside, monsieur?"

"Of course I go inside!"

"I—I will tell them first."

"Suit yourself," I said shrugging.

Then he did a foolish thing. The gun he was holding was an automatic, and he reached up with his thumb and pushed the safety catch on. Maybe he meant it as a sort of apology. I didn't know. I didn't care. The only thing that concerned me was that fact that I could reach his chin before he could get that safety catch off again. And I did. I did just as hard as I could, with feeling in it from the heels right clear to the knuckles.

It hurt my hand. I don't suppose it hurt him at all. I don't suppose he ever knew what happened. He went over backward, stiff, like a pole. He did not move after that. But just to make sure of things I took the automatic out of his hand and clouted him over the right ear with it. A dirty trick, yes, but it's a tough game I'm in, and there are times when you have to be disagreeable.

Nobody got in my way after that, and I took my pick of windows.

THERE was the smooth young Chink from the next bunk, and there was his monkey, and Gaston Collot, and three Annamites who stood against the wall looking respectful. The Chink and monkey were in one chair, the monkey being on the man's right shoulder; and

L'Araignée was in the other chair. The Annamites were not doing anything, just standing there.

It's hard to tell you what a terrific wallop inside the sight of Gaston Collot gave me. Try to remember that I had been after him for more than seven months, and I'm a guy who takes his work seriously. For more than seven months I had eaten, drank, breathed, *lived* Gaston Collot, whom they called L'Araignée, the Spider. Everything about him that could be learned, I knew. I could recite his fingerprint classifications, Henry, Battley, Moran, Jorgensen, like a well-recalled thirty-days-hath-September jingle. His face I had studied in profile, three-quarters, one-quarter, full. In case I should ever forget him, there was a reminder on my right side, low, whenever I drew a deep breath. Yet this was the first time I had actually seen the man.

He was not much to look at—short, plump, discontented. He had eyes and a mouth that told of deadly cruelty; and you knew, seeing him, that as a boy he had probably pulled the wings off captured flies and with stones pounded the life out of kittens. You would not have liked Gaston Collot. Nobody did. His own associates in Paris hated him—and feared him. It was natural to fear him. At a glance insignificant, a dumpy, rather pompous middle-class Frenchman; but when you knew what I knew about him, and when you took an honest-to-goodness gaze at those eyes and that full fat mouth, things that were cold and fingery slithered up and down your spine. I've been in some tough spots from time to time, and I know what it is to go all jelly inside; but I don't think I was ever so scared in my life as when I first peered through that window and saw L'Araignée.

"HE was in Leng's tonight," the Chink was saying, "and he was at the very next place to me."

"Did he smoke?"

"Yes, he smoked." The Chink flicked lint from a sleeve. "He did not know I was watching him, of course."

"He could have followed you here."

"No—not even if he had known who I was. To keep up appearances, he smoked too much. He tried not to, but he did. When I paid for my pipes and went out, he was sick with opium. He is not accustomed to it."

"Please be informed that he is not stupid," L'Araignée said coldly. "I know this, for he has followed me a great distance. He has learned things in what way I do not know. He is lucky," L'Araignée said, and placed a thick forefinger on the table. "I am lucky too, but he is very lucky. Why is he not dead?"

The Chink shrugged.

"Monsieur said it only now. He is lucky."

"He must be dead," said L'Araignée. "I am not safe in this world until he is dead. Damn you for *canaille!* Why do you not kill him? Would he live as long as this in Paris, do you think, if L'Araignée were there?"

THE young Chink looked like a sulky spoiled boy, a millionaire's son resenting interruption. He shrugged again; and the monkey, disturbed, climbed down from his shoulder and started to mosey around the room.

"L'Araignée is not in Paris but in Saigon," he pointed out. "And we would be very happy to have you go away."

"I am sure of it," said L'Araignée. "But I cannot go until he is dead. I dare not. I am afraid of him, yes. And I hate him. *Mon Dieu,* how I hate him!"

He crooked his hands, and smiled a very slow smile.

"If only," he said dreamily, "I had him here now."

I found that I had my gun in my hand. I must have taken it out instinctively, for I remember nothing of this. But I had it. The window was open. I put the barrel of the gun on the sill and stared along the sights right smack at L'Araignée's heart. I was trying to get up the courage to kill him then and there. In cold blood. Just kill him.

He would have done it to *me!* But it's one thing to tell about, and another to perform. I got watery. I sagged. For the very life of me, I could not squeeze the trigger. I knew I had to stand up and walk into that room.

"If I had him here—"

The muzzle of the gun went down, and a shrill jabbering sound broke out. It startled me so that I fired. In fact, I fired twice before I realized that that damned monkey had grabbed the barrel of the gun and was pulling it down.

The monkey squealed and let go. It burned a bit, I suppose. L'Araignée slid off his chair and went flat on the floor, and there was an automatic in his hand now. What happened to the Chink I can't say. I was watching L'Araignée.

It must have been the three Annamites who blasted. One pistol could not possi-

bly have made all that noise. The whole house, the grounds and all, seemed shattered.

I had a feeling of being pushed. Nothing hurt me: it was just as though I had been pushed. I knew I was going away from the window, and going backward, fast.

The monkey was scrabbling at my face, jabbering, chattering, fiendishly and hysterically excited. It had swung up on my arm as I backed away, I suppose. Anyway, it was on my shoulder, beating me and scratching my face, and making a hell of a fuss about it.

A tree slapped my shoulderblades; and an Annamite was in the window, perfectly silhouetted, and I let him have it. He went away like one of those targets in a shooting-gallery, leaving the window free and clear. Which was more than I was, what with the monk.

There were two other Annamites in the doorway.

I kept dropping my gun. I couldn't seem to hold it. I'd pick it up, get my forefinger hooked onto the trigger—and drop the thing again.

I knew that somebody else was shooting, somebody behind me. I knew that the Annamites had disappeared. I knew that the monkey, squealing hideously, was making a wreck of what never really had been a handsome face. I knew that the grass was very smirchy against my nose, and had a nice clean vegetable-like smell, fresh and sweet. These are about all the details I can give you. The memory of that party, you see, is not very clear. Various things blurred it, such as the opium and a lot of lead bullets.

MY story takes up again when I found myself in a hospital, and it seems this was two days later.

The Commissaire, who visited me regularly, explained the unexpected support. It seems he had assigned a couple of detectives to follow me anyway, in spite of my protests. I could not feel really sore about it—and he was very apologetic—because after all, they had saved my life.

Apparently they had not done much more than that. They had blasted in at the right time, and accounted for one Annamite dead and one badly wounded but not talking. The third Annamite was dead too. He must have been the one who popped up in the window and then popped away again. But the well-dressed young Chink was not among those present when people started to count; and neither was Gaston Collot with his cold blue eyes.

"Could the Chinaman be Lan Ah?"

"I do not know, monsieur. Nobody knows who Lan Ah is. You could identify that one?"

"Naturally. But I wish your men had made a dash for it and finished off L'Araignée while they were there."

"I am sorry, monsieur."

"Hell, it's not your fault." I was being disagreeable, and really the Commissaire was very nice about things. I suppose I was a bit delirious. "Hell," I said sheepishly, feeling ashamed of myself, "after all, I only followed a hunch."

"YOU went on one chance word, monsieur?"

"It was a very queer word to hear a Chinaman use. He could have picked it up from practically any Apache who happened to come here; but I figured that not many Apaches *do* come here."

"We are very careful."

"Or he could have picked it up from L'Araignée. It was worth the chance."

He gave me a long look, not knowing I was aware of it. To his logical mind I was goofy. I don't blame him. He had all sense and organization behind him, and I was nothing but a wild private dick from the States who had a streak of luck. What he had tried to reason his way toward, I'd fallen into. Where angels fear to tread, and all that.

"I am annoying you," he murmured, edging toward the door.

"They find anything in the house?"

"No, monsieur. It was rented by a *fonctionnaire* who sublet it to a Chinese merchant; and the merchant says that he knows nothing about anybody living there. He lies, of course, but he will not budge from that lie, and there is nothing we can do. The merchant too—he fears Lan Ah."

I mentioned something that could be done to Lan Ah; and before the Commissaire could get quite out of the door I asked what had happened to the monkey.

"It was found on your head, monsieur. You were unconscious, and the monkey was clawing at your hair."

"Vindictive little beast! Is it arrested as a material witness or anything?"

"I do not understand, monsieur."

"Well, I mean have you still got it? You didn't let it go, did you?"

He could not make sense of this at all, but he was so polite that he answered me anyway.

"It bites everything, and it scratches. I believe it is at the bureau now. Why does monsieur ask?"

"Well," I said, and stretched a little, making my legs ache, "I'm thinking of going on a vacation. Dalat maybe. I hear it's a nice place."

"A very pleasant place, monsieur. It is high. The air there should be good for you, when you can leave the hospital."

"And I want to take the monkey with me," I added.

"Monsieur is not serious, of course?"

"Monsieur is very serious indeed. What could be better company than a nice monkey?"

"But it is treacherous! It fights all the time! It will make friends with nobody!"

"I didn't come here looking for friends."

"But surely monsieur cannot—"

"Monsieur still wants the monkey. Save it for me, huh? *Au revoir.*"

WHEN I went to Dalat, I took up golf, just to pass the time. I had always meant to learn the game; and though my left shoulder gave me some trouble (they'd kept it in a plaster cast in that hospital in Saigon for more than two weeks), I was able, with Clarissa's help, to get a lot of fun out of it. I never really tried to hit the ball hard, and I never cared what my score was—in fact, I didn't keep score—but it was nice to mooch around, taking things easy, not worrying. Clarissa did not like it when I drove or used a brassie, because I simply couldn't let her stay on my shoulder when I did that. She resented those shots. I think she resented the ball, too. Jealous. She thought I was paying too much attention to that ball. When she could find it first, in the rough, where it usually was, she used to try to hide it; and once I caught her trying to swallow it.

If you have never owned a monkey, you won't understand. The only things they don't do are the things you expect them to do. Clarissa was probably the most ornery beast that ever came out of the jungles of Cambodia. She had more wickedness packed into her wizened little body than you'd find in a drove of Satan's pet fiends.

She was so bad, at first, that she could not believe that I was being nice to her. The poor animal was instinctively suspicious. Kindness was something she evidently had never known, and she figured that there must be a catch in it somewhere. She was like some dirty little kid from the slums, inherently and defensively tough, believing that there was no goodness anywhere. It took a long while to persuade her that I meant well.

But once she began to get the idea, she turned out to be a good sport. When I fed her, she looked at the food as though she was sure it had been poisoned; and when I'd reprimand her gently after she stuck a finger in my eye or knocked a cigarette out of my mouth, she would cock her head and gaze at me with cautious beady eyes, wondering, obviously, when the kind words would stop and the blows would begin. But she got over this.

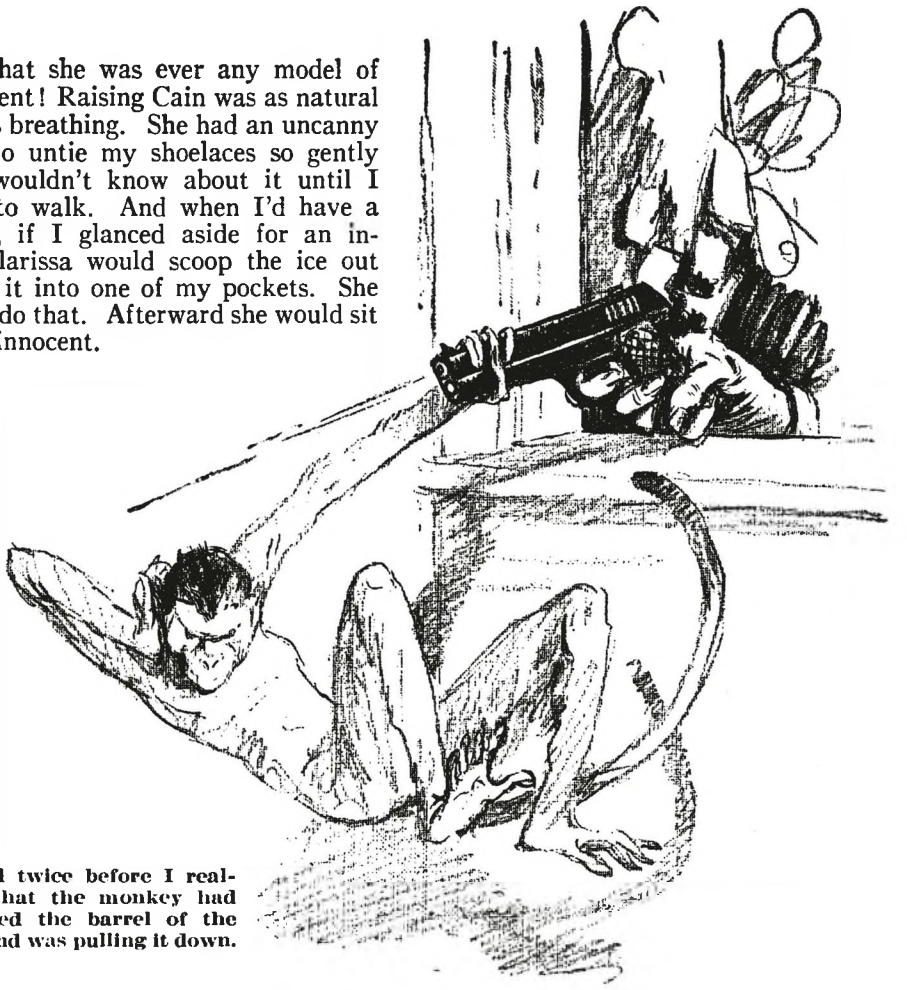
I didn't like the men I was hunting, but it was not until I had got acquainted with Clarissa that I really started hating them. What they had done to her I don't know, but it couldn't have been pleasant. No wonder she was such a suspicious little beast, and so hard-boiled—she had never had a chance to be anything else!

She was intelligent as all outside. More brains than the average human being. And what she once learned, she never forgot. When I took her fingerprints (the right hand showed three simple arches and two ulnar loops), she resisted, thinking at first that it was some new form of torture. But as soon as she saw that it was not going to hurt her, she deliberately made fingerprints all over the place. She would get hold of a piece of paper and some ink and lay them out in the proper order, right hand on top, thumb under thumb, forefinger under forefinger and so forth; and then she'd bring me the paper, solemnly looking up for my approval. I always praised her when she did that.

Once on the terrace of the hotel I handed her a bottle of iodine and pointed to the window of my room, which was on the second floor. Clarissa went up that wall like a lizard. She was back again in no time, and the bottle was empty. When I returned to my room, I found, as I'd expected, the iodine in the water-glass on my bedside table. Clarissa never forgot.

HER maliciousness wore off. All she'd ever needed was half a break. Treat her right, and she'd treat you right; and underneath that what-are-you-going-to-do-about-it exterior, she was as sweet a critter as you could find. I had brought her out to Dalat for a specific purpose, but I got to like her for herself alone. Maybe I'm getting a trifle maudlin when I tell about Clarissa, but I'm a guy who never has had much time for companionship, and Clarissa was as new to me as I was to her, and swell company.

Not that she was ever any model of deportment! Raising Cain was as natural to her as breathing. She had an uncanny ability to untie my shoelaces so gently that, I wouldn't know about it until I started to walk. And when I'd have a highball, if I glanced aside for an instant, Clarissa would scoop the ice out and put it into one of my pockets. She loved to do that. Afterward she would sit looking innocent.



I fired twice before I realized that the monkey had grabbed the barrel of the gun and was pulling it down.

Yes, there were times when I felt like beating hell out of her, but I never did do that; and in spite of everything I couldn't help liking her. She certainly kept a guy from getting into a rut.

By the time we went back to Saigon (most of the way Clarissa made things interesting for the driver and me by trying to burn us with the cigarette-lighter from the instrument-board), we were the best friends in the world.

I was not altogether out of touch with events in the city, for the Commissaire had written me twice and twice visited me with suspects who might have been the Chink I'd seen in Gaston Collot's company, but who, as it turned out, weren't. He showed me a lot of rogues' gallery pictures too, but I couldn't identify any of them. Lan Ah, it seems, had been quiet —no more beatings, no more bombings. Leng's, the hot spot where I'd sucked in opium fumes, had been visited and all employees closely questioned, but nobody would admit knowing the small smooth well-dressed young Chinese. I had of course supplied a good description of that Chinese, but for all the cops could learn, he might have evaporated. However, they were reasonably sure that like Gaston Collot himself, he had not escaped from Saigon-Chalon. All outgoing ships were searched with the greatest care. Police at Pnom-Penh, Siemreap, Kampong Thom and other towns along the line clear to Aranya Pradeda on the frontier, had been notified to watch for these two men in case they tried to slip over into Siam. They could not get down into the Malay States or over into Burma without going through Siam. The war situation in southern China was such that it did not seem possible that they could escape by way of the north.

"Chalon again, monsieur?" asked the Commissaire.

"Chalon again. But not until at least midnight. I'm not anxious to attract attention, and that's why I still insist on no bodyguard. But I will promise you one thing: if I find the place where L'Araignée and Lan Ah are hanging out, I won't try any one-man raid. I haven't the slightest desire to be a hero. If I find that place,

I'll back away to the nearest public telephone and give you a ring."

"Ah, if you would do that, monsieur, it would make me very happy!"

"You stand by with a squad," I instructed. "I have the greatest confidence in Clarissa."

Puzzled, he said: "Clarissa—you have found an informer, monsieur?"

"Now, now! Let's not have such harsh names. I've found a pal."

IT may seem like a dirty trick, at first, this business of trying to persuade the monkey to squeal on her former friends. But I did not look at it that way. I was seeking men who were rats in the last analysis as in the first; and *they* were seeking *me,* too! They were going to take the first chance they could find to bump me off; and the bullet or knife or what-have-you wouldn't come from the front.

Clarissa had been mistreated by that smooth young Chinese I'd trailed out of Leng's *fumoir*. She'd been beaten and tortured. There were marks on her body to prove this; but even better proof was her attitude toward me and all the rest of the world when I first got her. She had been trained to kill, not knowing what she was doing; and she had been trained by cruelty, violence. She owed no obligation to that Chink, who might or might not have been Lan Ah, but who if he wasn't, was certainly close to that personage. On the contrary, I think she'd be glad of the chance to get back at him. I think she saw it that way and understood why I was taking her to Chalon late at night. You may think I'm giving her credit for more brains than any monkey ever possessed, but you have not spent three weeks in a hill station with Clarissa as your sole companion.

The idea of starting out after midnight, of course, was because even Chalon slows up a bit at that hour. Clarissa, for all her one-time air of toughness, was nervous and high-strung. I did not want her missed by inches by rickshaws which rolled past without a sound, deafened by mechanical pianos in the honky-tonks, or kicked by drunken or hop-headed pedestrians.

For Clarissa was going to lead me to the place I wanted to go. It would be somewhere near the feverish heart of Chalon. It had to be. The activities of Lan Ah and his underlings had repeatedly pointed to the existence of such a headquarters there; and the merchant's house in Saigon no doubt had been only a temporary expedient, a place for the hiding out of Gaston Collot, who now conceivably might be concealed in the general headquarters Clarissa would find.

I did not know how she was going to find it, whether by smell, which was possible, or by memory. She had a keen nose, and she never forgot anything at all. She would not forget, for instance, the way that Chink had treated her; and maybe she would balk before a place where she knew he might be found. Or on the other hand, maybe she really did understand what I was trying to get her to do for me, and with the idea of helping me would go in anywhere.

Either way was the same to me—whether she balked or entered. Either way she would point out the place; and I only wanted to know where it was.

In a quiet side-street I let her down gently. I had bought a little red chest-harness for her, and a long leather leash.

"How about it, kid? Show me the way to go home, huh?"

I think she knew where she was, from the very beginning. As I say, she never forgot anything, and undoubtedly she had been along this way before. But she took her time; she smelled around; she investigated things; she climbed up the sides of buildings. She kept moving, it's true, but with apparent aimlessness. Up one street and down another. Plenty of spots were still open, but Clarissa did not seem concerned with them; rather, she circled around them, skirting the gutter, disturbed perhaps by the blare of lights or the music. She seemed to be having a swell time, back here in her old stamping-ground.

I was patient. I trusted her. The sights and sounds and smells of Chalon might stir old memories, I figured, but those memories were not pleasant ones. Besides, I was confident that she knew what I wanted. She was only stringing me along, now. She would not obey me directly. That would be too easy.

SHE fooled me when she ducked under the swinging doors. In shape and size, though made of bamboo, they were like the swinging doors of a pre-Prohibition American saloon. But no blast of light came from behind them, no clatter of voices or clink of glasses.

Clarissa went under them so abruptly that she jerked the leash out of my hand.

I went after her, calling in a low urgent voice. I found myself in a dim hallway,

at the far end of which, but sidewise to me so that I could not see inside, was a screen door. Clarissa was halfway down to that screen door and had turned as though losing courage; but when she saw me, and saw that I wanted to recover the end of the leash, she scampered gayly away. This would be fun, she evidently thought: having a little chase.

She opened the screen door easily and pranced inside, and half a moment later I was after her.

THE place was a dance-hall, but no dancing was going on. Except for a fantan table in one corner under the balcony which ran around all four sides of the floor, it was blank and deserted. There were no musicians, no hostesses, no customers. Eight men sat around the fantan, and not one of them glanced up as I entered. Near by was a small bar, and against this bar leaned a thin young Chinaman who really did have an inscrutable face. I mention this because most Chinese, in my experience, *don't* have. But this one did. He smiled at me as I entered, but his eyes were unlit. He did not wear a barman's apron, and looked rather to be the manager.

"Monsieur would like to play?" he asked ingratiatingly.

I shook my head. But I didn't want to leave until I'd caught Clarissa, and I could think of only one way to do that in a hurry.

"No play tonight. Too busy drinking tonight. You got a highball?"

It was not a real bar, only a sort of service bar; but there was an electric icebox back there, and the inscrutable Chink mixed me a whisky-soda with two cubes of ice in it. That was the reason I'd ordered it. That was the come-on for Clarissa. She never could resist trying her trick with the highball. Ice fascinated her, and she was convinced that the proper place for it was in one of my pockets.

I saw her cock her head now and look at me with beady eyes. I pretended to pay no attention, and in order to keep up that pretense, I chatted with the Chink.

"You don't happen to know of a man named Lan Ah?"

"Around here, monsieur," he said, and grinned knowingly, "it's best not even to mention Lan Ah."

Still grinning, he called something in Chinese to the men at the fan-tan table. Immediately five of those men got up, pocketed their winnings or paid their losings, and went out into the hall. One came back an instant later and locked the door from the inside. The others stood around the table, not looking at me, not looking at anything in particular. Their hands were in their sleeves, and it wasn't because those hands were cold.

I began to wish I hadn't come. I didn't like this business. It had been too deliberately done.

"Well—" I started.

It was then that Clarissa went into her act. Even I had never seen her move so fast. She started from the floor about seven or eight feet from where I stood. She jumped to the bar, which she scarcely touched, seeming rather to bounce off it as though on fine steel springs, landed on my right shoulder, and in the same instant her paw, fast as light, was dipped into and out of my highball.

She got the ice. But she was not swift enough to get it and drop it into my pocket and still escape. For I'd been expecting this: I was set for it.

I missed the leash by half an inch; and the ice, which Clarissa did not even attempt to pop into my pocket, clattered harmlessly into a large black ugly China bowl on the bar, where the two cubes rocked back and forth a moment before coming to rest.

CLARISSA, yammering in excitement, pranced to the middle of the floor.

The Chink laughed, forcing it.

"It is mischievous, that monkey," he said. He turned. "I'll get you another piece of ice."

I said, "Don't bother," and my hand went on the butt of my pistol underneath my coat.

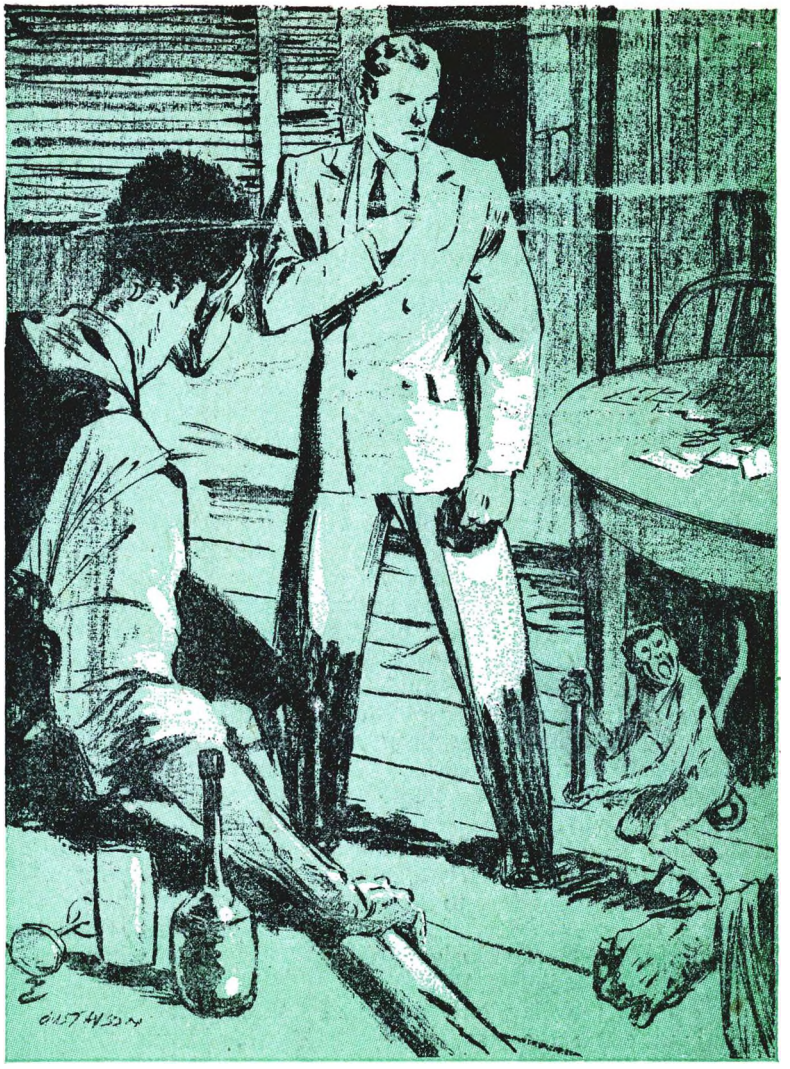
I had seen the little half-moon of a birthmark on the back of his neck. When he turned back to me and saw the look on my face, he simulated amazement; but not for long. I suppose he saw that there wasn't any more sense bluffing.

"You'd better tell those babies around the table," I said, "that if any of them tries to smoke up, it's you that will get the first chunk of lead."

The Chink said nothing. I couldn't tell whether he was scared. The need for acting being over, he was utterly deadpan again.

"Come on, Clarissa," I called, backing away from the bar.

I depended on the urgency in my voice. She was full of hell, of course; but when I spoke to her that way, she usually got the idea and did what I asked. She came



I said "I suppose that's what is in that apparatus the monkey has?"

toward me now: I could hear her pattering across the floor and could hear the leash dragging. I did not dare look at her. My Chinese friend the other side of the bar, I supposed, was not far from artillery himself.

Then Clarissa stopped. She gave a little squeal of terror, and started to back away; and in spite of myself, I threw a glance in that direction.

A door had been opened on the other side of the room, just under the balcony, and we were joined by the smooth and well-dressed young Chinese with the petulant expression, and by Gaston Collot.

It was the Chinese whom Clarissa was afraid of, though he never glanced at her.

L'Araignée looked at me, his pudgy red lips set, his eyes dull with hate. Like me, he held his right hand under his coat.

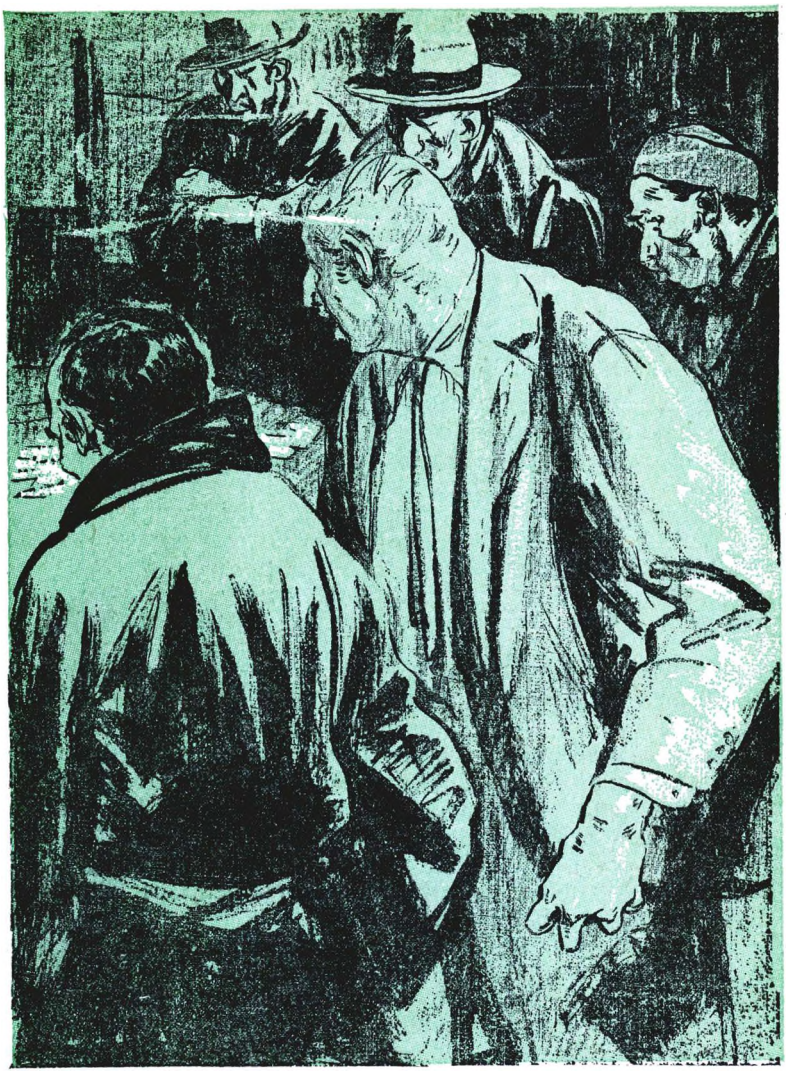
I didn't have a chance. The barman was on one side of me, the four gamblers on the other side—obviously the other gamblers had departed because they didn't want to see what was going to happen. In front of me was Gaston Collot and the young Chinese. Behind me? Just a wall. No windows, no door.

Clarissa disappeared somewhere in the vicinity of the far end of the bar. I lost track of her.

"So you are Lan Ah, after all?" I said.

The smooth young Chink smiled a little and even bowed. He was very pleased with himself. But he was no bagful of hot air! He might smirk, but his hand was steady. His gaze never left my face.

"It was good of you to come," he said in a very low voice, in French. "We had made plans to go and see you tonight, at



"If she ever knocks that pin on the floor—" Lan Ah muttered tensely.

the Commissaire's house, but you have come here and saved us the trouble."

"You'd never have got at me in that room in the Commissaire's house," I said scornfully. I was stalling for time, of course. "Not even if you had another trained monkey."

"We had thought of that. We are not too fond of the Commissaire himself, and perhaps with both of you removed— It would be dangerous and would make a great scandal; but my friend Monsieur Collot, here, insisted upon it."

"Dynamite, eh?"

"Ethylene glycol dinitrate," he corrected in his quiet precise voice, prim, sort of sissy-like, "gelatinized with nitrocellulose. We were not sure you would occupy the same room tonight, so we had made plans to remove the whole house."

I had been holding my drink in my left hand. I tipped it to my mouth deliberately now, finishing half of it, warm though it was. It was not that I wanted that drink. I hadn't wanted it in the first place. But some such gesture was needed. L'Araignée would not be impressed, nor would Lan Ah; but the Chink behind the bar, who was already a bit afraid of me perhaps, and the four Chinks who stood at the fan-tan table, their hands in their sleeves, were uneasy. They were professional gunmen, no doubt; but they were accustomed to doing their work in dark alleys: to sighting upon a space between the shoulderblades of a victim who didn't know of their presence, and the prospect of blazing it out in an open room, even with the odds overwhelmingly in their favor, had them troubled.

My taking the drink helped that feeling along.

"Let us shoot this man," said Gaston Collot. "We talk too much."

"Monsieur," Lan Ah addressed me, "will you be kind enough to step back into my office, where perhaps we can discuss this matter?"

"I'll do no such thing," I snapped. "You don't want the shooting to be heard out in the street—isn't that the idea? Well, I don't know any other way you're going to get rid of me."

If I had to take it, I figured, I might as well take it standing up. The hand that rested on the butt of my gun was very wet. I shifted my feet, taking a better stance. That was one of the first things I had learned about pistol-shooting: that to get good results, you must be in the firmest and most natural position possible. Though I would need more than results this time—I'd need a miracle!

"Let us kill him now," mumbled L'Araignée.

Lan Ah shrugged.

"It would seem that it must be so," he said, nodding sadly.

I said quickly: "Ethylene glycol dinitrate gelatinized with nitrocellulose, eh? Very interesting. I suppose that's what is in that apparatus the monkey has?"

FOR Clarissa had returned to our midst, out of what I now saw was a small door,—probably the door of a closet,—at the end of the bar. With that eternal busyness of a monkey, pushing aside her fear of a moment before, she had found something new to play with. She was going to show off. Any monkey is a born clown, and Clarissa was something more than any monkey.

She was almost in the center of the floor before any of us saw her. She stood on her hind legs, and held the thing in her front paws, one paw capped over each end, and shook it.

"*Jesu, Marie et Josef!*" murmured L'Araignée.

He was always pale, that sewer rat who lived in dark places and was afraid of the light of day, but now he went dead white. And I knew that my guess had been good.

Lan Ah said nothing, but his lips were trembling. The others I did not see. I did not dare to glance at them.

The object Clarissa held was black and cylindrical. It might have been a section of iron pipe about seven inches long, wrapped in heavy black adhesive tape. There was a shiny steel button at one end.

"If that pin is jarred—" whispered Lan Ah.

Clarissa was feeling swell. Her act, she realized, was going over big. She had everybody's attention, and this delighted her. She shook the thing again; and as she did so, she rolled her eyes ceilingward.

I GOT, then, what she was doing. More than once in the barroom of the hotel in Dalat, she had sat on my shoulder and watched the barman shake a cocktail. It had fascinated her. No doubt she had been looking for something approximately that general shape and size.

She actually *looked* like that barman. Brilliant little mimic that she was, she had his jerky choppy motion down pat, and she tilted high her chin with that same scornful, pained air of boredom.

"If she ever knocks that pin on the floor—" Lan Ah muttered tensely.

I called very gently, coaxingly: "Bring it here, Clarissa. That's a good gal."

She looked at me, a trifle annoyed, I think, at the interruption to her act. She kept shaking the bomb.

When she looked at me, of course she was looking away from Lan Ah and the Spider. The Chinese thought fast, and acted that way too, and with more courage than L'Araignée showed. Unhesitatingly he started for the middle of the floor, his toes pointed, his hands outstretched.

I said nothing, but Clarissa, gazing at me, must have used my face as a mirror. She was marvelously sensitive, that monkey.

She turned. She saw Lan Ah approaching, arms extended. She squealed a little, for she hated and feared this man. She dropped the bomb and ran behind me.

The thing fell not on either end but on its side, striking the floor with a dull *clunk*. Before that *clunk* sounded, the greater part of Lan Ah's Oriental reserves quit the field. The fellow behind the bar, the one with the half-moon birthmark who had pushed me in front of a speeding automobile, simply emitted a thin screech and slid into a faint. Three of those at the table ran for the hall door (as though that would have done them any good had the bomb exploded!) and unlocked it and dashed out. The fourth threw himself flat on his face and covered his head with his arms.

Lan Ah dived head-first for the bomb, and I shot him in the shoulder, bringing him down out of midair as though he'd been hit by a club.

Gaston Collot, screaming, fired twice at me. I fired once at him, catching him across the ribs on the right side so that he slammed back against the wall. But he still held his gun up. He fired again, and this time I couldn't take any more chances. I wanted him alive—but I also wanted to stay alive myself. This time I shot him directly between the eyes.

The silence thundered and crashed; and suddenly I found myself with shaky knees and a chest tight as a drum. I knew that it was all over, but that did not keep me from being scared. The entrance door was open, and there was not a sound from the hall. Those three Chink hatchetmen, I knew, would not stop running for some time, but surely the shots would be heard and somebody would heave into sight soon. I went over to the fan-tan player, who lay flat on his face. I took a large automatic out of his left sleeve. I took Lan Ah's automatic too. Lan Ah was moaning faintly.

The chump behind the bar gave no trouble at all. He was in a daze. He might have been hit over the head with a sledge-hammer. It turned out that he didn't have a gun on him, anyway, though I took a small rubber truncheon out of one of his coat pockets.

CLARISSA, whimpering, not knowing what it all meant, and terrified by the noise, clung to the loose of my trousers as I went to the middle of the room and picked up the bomb. I placed it carefully on the bar. Then I picked up the half-highball I'd left there. I needed that drink. It was warm, of course, and I remembered that Clarissa had dropped the two ice cubes it originally held into that ugly black bowl on the bar. I reached into the bowl, but it was a warm night and the cubes had already melted, leaving a little pool of water. Cursing, I withdrew my hand. The fingers were black. Black as though from black ink, or black paint.

"Well, I'll be—"

I swished the water around, and felt with my fingers. I had first taken the thing to be a sort of master ash-tray, a catch-all; but I was wrong. They don't make ash-trays with such lovely raised figures as my fingertips found. And the black stuff kept coming off, displaying magnificent colors.

"Clarissa, you little devil," I cried, "I'm damned if you haven't recovered that Bernard Palissy ewer!"

Clarissa paid no attention; and looking up, I saw with a start that she was busy again with the bomb which she'd taken from the bar. She was shaking it as before. She tossed it into the air, imitating that Dalat barman when he too was showing off. I yelled—and she looked at me.

The bomb went through her paws, struck the edge of the bar, fell to the floor, landing on the button end.

Nothing happened.

WHEN I picked the bomb up again, there was sweat rolling down the back of my hand, and sweat just falling off my face in great salty drops.

I took it over to Lan Ah. He was conscious now, lying on his side. When he moved, his facial muscles would jump in pain; so he lay still. He was looking up at me.

"It wasn't loaded," I said stupidly, accusatively, wondering.

"No, monsieur. One was loaded, one not, and they had been left together. I did not know which it was the monkey had. I did not dare to behave as though it was the empty one." He forced a smile. That shoulder was hurting him plenty. "I saw what happened just now, monsieur, and I was praying that this was the loaded one. But it was not. You are very lucky, monsieur."

With that he fainted dead away....

I did not get that nice cold drink I needed until dawn. It was at the Commissaire's house, and all preliminary reports had been cleaned up, and we were having a whisky-soda to celebrate.

"I propose," proposed the Commissaire, as neat and natty as ever in spite of the fact that he had been up all night, "that we drink to the real heroine of the occasion. Monsieur, shall we drink to your monkey?"

He raised his glass, and ice clinked in it.

I rose from my chair, took a step forward—and almost fell on my face. It seems that my shoelaces were untied.

"With all my heart and soul," I cried.

I raised my glass too. No ice clinked in it. And at that moment precisely I felt something cold and wet in my left-hand coat pocket.

I looked at Clarissa, seated on the other side of the room. She looked at me, blinking innocently.

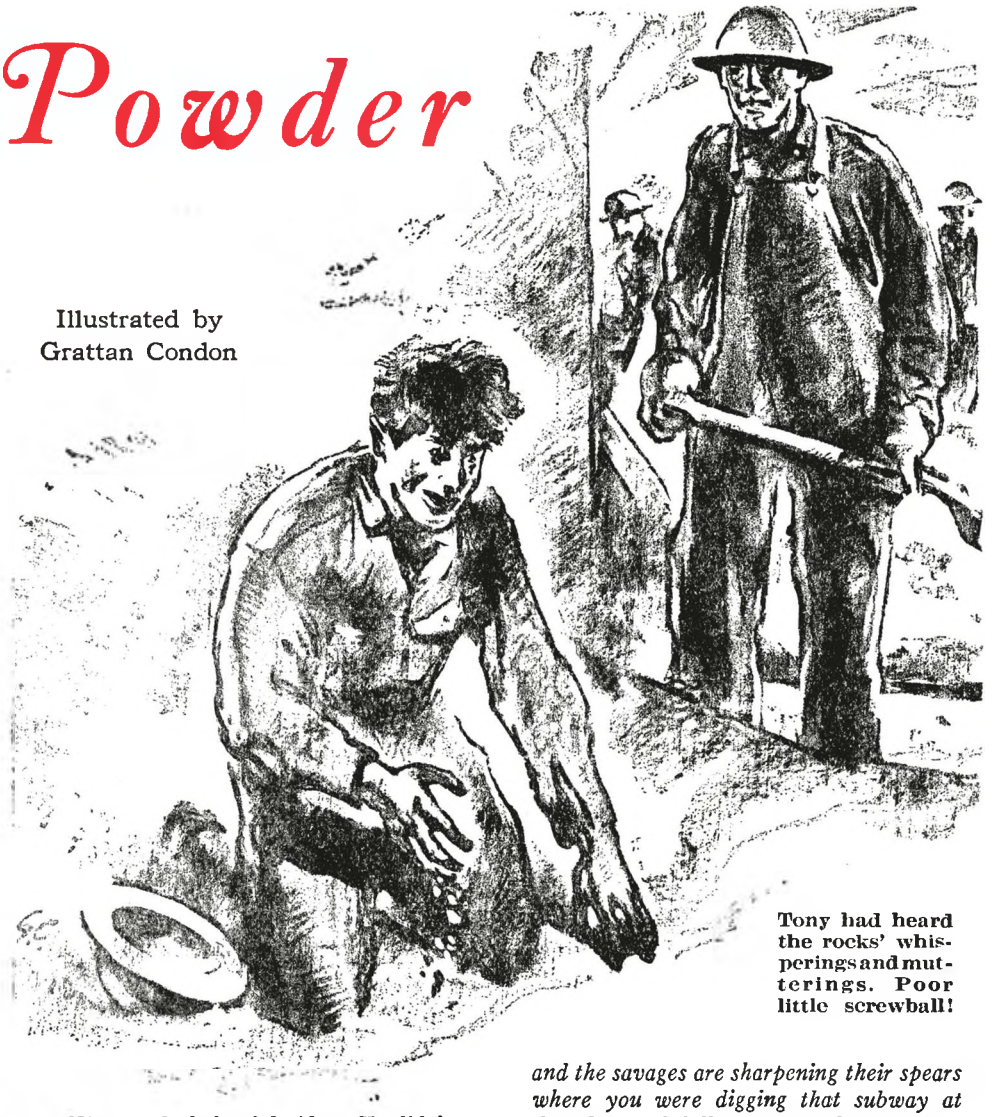
"Well, what the hell. To Clarissa, anyway!"

"To Clarissa!" he repeated.

Another spirited story by Mr. Chidsey will appear in an early issue.

Powder

Illustrated by
Grattan Condon



Tony had heard the rocks' whisperings and mutterings. Poor little screwball!

ONE poet had the right idea. He didn't write about the birds and the bees and the light in his lady's eyes. Instead he wrote about a bar of steel:

"A bar of steel sleeps and looks slant-eyed on the pearl cobwebs, the pools of moonshine. . . . The wind never bothers . . . a bar of steel."

But he didn't write about the laughter of steel.... This story tells something of that. You find out about such things when you dig a subway under your Big City, down there in the earth. If you listen, maybe you can hear them laughing—the steel girders, and the rocks. Mostly you're afraid to listen to them, because the joke is on you. No matter what you do, you can't do anything about them. They still go on being.

You can blast them and drill them and fight them with picks; but in the next millennium, when your Big City is dust and the savages are sharpening their spears where you were digging that subway at five thousand dollars a foot, the rocks and maybe the girders too will still be there. And still laughing.

Hard, metallic laughter of steel. Brittle snicker of the rocks. Jelly-bellied chortle of the muck and the sludge. Get down off your high horse, Little Man, and pay attention to the laughter, because it won't be so long now.

THINGS might have gone along all right down in Section Nine if old Tim Brophy hadn't died on his job and become a saint. The digging was at about sixty-five feet under—and maybe you know how it is with a new subway: They had to shore up the foundation of the big Fitchman Building, and they had to pull their blasting shots right where the shuttle of the Interurban crosses over them and the big city water-supply tunnel runs under-

neath. If anything goes wrong, you can imagine what can happen up on top with the building crashing down, not to mention the other subway and the fifty or more men working down there.

But old Tim Brophy was a grand old man, and he remembered. Even while he died, he remembered. He must have felt it coming on. He must have heard the Angel of Death whispering in his ear, because what he did when he felt the old heart going back on him, was to sit down on the catwalk and hang on to the armful of sixty-per-cent dynamite he was carrying, so it wouldn't drop. They found him like that, sitting up straight against the timber facing, with his lapful of the stuff held tight.

So they made him a saint, and it would be pretty hard for anybody to take his place—much less a queer little wop like this Tony Pucci. . . .

It was a cold day, and John Saunders, the super, happened to see this little wop Pucci standing in line, waiting for any old job. He went over to the line, and laid his hand on the wop's shoulder and he said:

"Tony? Aren't you Tony Pucci?"

The wizened body tried to straighten up. It was pathetic to see how he tried and couldn't. But the grimy hand went up to his forehead in a weak salute, and the wop said:

Monkey

A memorable story of the hard-rock men.

By FULTON GRANT

"Aie, aie, Lieutena' John-a, Lieutena' John-a! So glad I am for see youse-a face! All-time I t'ink you is kill-a. Wot you do, Lieutena' John-a? Watsa matter you here?"

Pointed ears, pointed eyebrows, a great broad mouth turning up into points at the corners as though they were trying to whisper into his little ears. Not a lovely figure, this little wop; but John Saunders had a memory. . . .

That war was long past now, but he could remember. There was a nasty business in the Saint-Quentin sector when the engineers had tunneled under a mess of broken plaster buildings and an ancient Gothic church, cutting a way into one of the German communication trenches. A bad business, because somebody must have made a mistake. Even army engineers make mistakes. And when the raid was pulled off, somebody dropped a Mills bomb, and that started the slide. In a few seconds the earth and the rock foundation of the church, and the broken little hamlet that had one time been called Aigres-la Fère, had tumbled in on a company of men who were trusting to the omnipotence of their officers. Maybe the engineer who made the mistake got caught in it. John Saunders hoped he had. But it had been this little wop Tony Pucci, and a latter-day miracle, that had saved Lieutenant John Saunders of the Engineers.

Miners and sappers—they don't sing songs about them. They aren't given D.S.O's and citations for bravery. All they do is handle picks and shovels and high-explosive gelatin, and dig tunnels and trenches and shafts to satisfy the whim of some staff major who thinks he has a trick up his sleeve. But when they die, usually, they don't need a shovel of dirt in their face, and they don't have benefit of clergy. Are they, you might wonder, moles or men?

John Saunders would never forget that day:

"It's-a no safe, Lieutena' John. Alla time I leesten. Alla time I hear. Alla time it's-a laugh an' laugh an' laugh. Dose rock, dey is laugh. When Tony, he make-a da blast, dey is laugh like hell. . . . . Somet'ing is happen, maybe."

That's what sapper-private Tony Pucci said that day. And Lieutenant Saunders, tense and nervous and irritable from suspense and two days underground, had said:

"Shut up, you crazy wop. This is war, or didn't you know?"

And then came the mistake with the grenade, and the slide; and it was the strong hands of Private Pucci who pulled his lieutenant out from under. Pulled him, when his own back was nearly broken. Pulled him when strong, hard men were screaming like agonizing babies, and when the heavy blocks of church limestone, had trapped them and stifled them and killed them.

No, Saunders wouldn't forget that.

THEN there were years after the war. John Saunders got a commission in the regular establishment, but he didn't make a very good officer. He didn't want to play polo. He didn't care a damn about tea at Mrs. Major Whosis' or bridge-night at the Colonel's.

So he resigned, and he felt better.

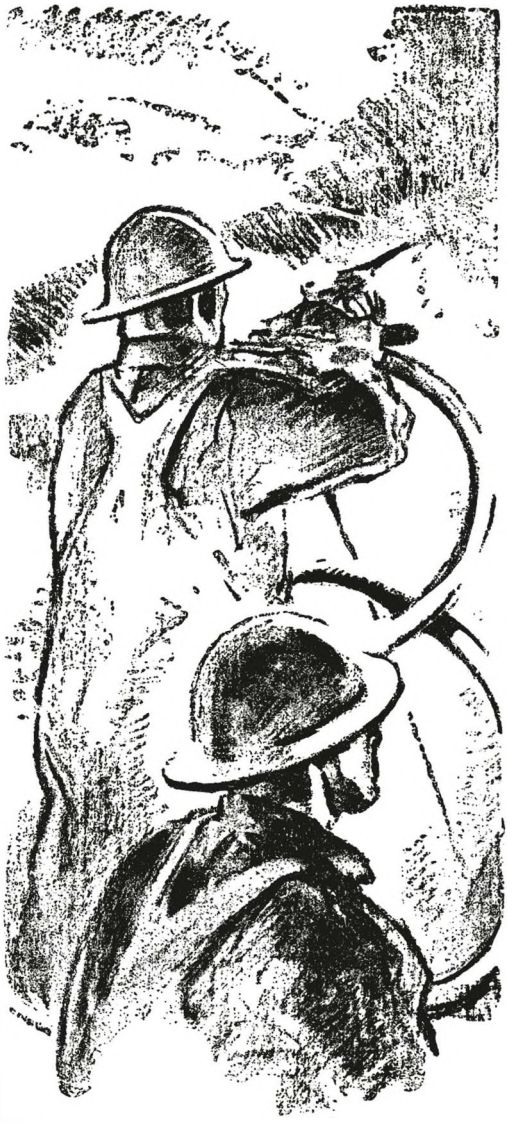
Years passed—years underground. Why is it that a man never gets away from the earth, when he once gets his feet in it? A grim business, and you know you're going to lose, but still you play it. John Saunders, C.E.—John Saunders, Public Works Engineer. John Saunders, Bureau of Explosives. John Saunders, General Superintendent. John Saunders, with a college education and the heart of a sandhog. . . .

And now today—

"No, Tony," he said, "I didn't get killed. . . . God knows why. I hear they sent you back into the Argonne."

"Oh, sure, Lieutena' John—Tony, he go back. But da back, she is bad. So da Cap', he keek Tony out. And dose war, she is feeneesh so queek, an' Tony mus' come back. Wot you t'ink, hey? Me, I gotta paper says Tony is a beeg-a blaster man, see? But how you t'ink I getta da job?"

A sad little story, in its way. Not very different. There must be many like Tony Pucci. Honorable discharge; blaster's license from the Bureau of Combustibles.



Suddenly Tony shouted: "Wait-a, wait-

Deep knowledge of earth and rocks and inexplicable things which books cannot contain. Knowledge out of warfare. But four ribs broken short against his spine, vertebræ cracked and twisted, displacement of nerves.

So John Saunders called him out of line and marched with him over to the office shed. Iron Jo Belcher was the contractor. For ten years, Iron Jo Belcher and his sandhogs had dug half the Big City jobs. A hard man, Iron Jo, but a man whom you had to respect. John Saunders had an idea.

"Hello, Jo. Crisp morning, eh?"

"Too damned cold, Mr. Saunders. What's on your mind? We're slowed up on Section Nine, but I'll fix that. You can't drive sandhogs like—"

a! You no wanna deeg dis-a place!"

"I want to ask a favor. You need a powder-monkey on Section Nine. I want you to take on this lad Pucci in the job."

"What the hell, Mr. Saunders! You can't put a lousy little runt of a wop in with them Irishers. They'll kill him. Besides, who the devil is he? How do I know he can do a job? A powder-monkey's gotta have experience, on this job!"

"Sure, I know, Jo. But—well, this little feller saved my life once. That was in the war. Used to be in my company. He's a great little guy. And don't worry about what he knows. He's got a full blaster's license."

"The hell you say! We don't want no blaster, Mr. Saunders. We want a powder-monkey who can— Besides, I don't ast no favors of the city."

"I know. This is personal, Jo. I'd appreciate it a lot."

Well, this Saunders egg was a super, wasn't he? You can't blame Jo Belcher, favor or no favor.

"Okay, if you say so, Mr. Saunders. Only—they'll kill him down there, sure as hell. Don't say I didn't warn yez."

"I don't," said Saunders, "believe they will."

And that's the way Tony Pucci got his job.

Powder-monkey! He was a queer fish, too, this Pucci. He didn't stand up over five feet three, and he was twisted like a stirbug's lifeline. He didn't know much English, and you couldn't curse him out the way you could the other monkeys, because he wouldn't know what you were

talking about. What did Iron Jo want to put a wop in old Tim's job for, anyhow? Wasn't there a hundred he could get? Didn't the union have a list a mile long? Get an Irishman for an Irishman's job!

They didn't like Pucci's face, either.

"An' did yez see the ears he's got on him? Pointed, they are, like the devil's right hoof. And the eyebrows, too—begod, they'd make the start of a fine pair o' horns, so they would."

And somebody else: "Sure, an' the laugh' he's got, too. Holy Mother, did yez listen at it? 'Tis Satan himself is pullin' the throat-strings of 'im when he cackles, an' none other."

Then there was that time Tom Feary, the blaster, got hurt. Tom was a good man; they don't come any better. Tom Feary could tell you the difference between a bench round and a bottom heading and what you needed. Tom Feary could tell you when to sink a lifter, and when ammonia gelatin is a better job than straight dynamite. And Tom Feary was known on every job as a careful man. He never took a chance in his life. Not with Mary and the kids waiting home for him.

Never took a chance; but he got hurt, and you can't say he didn't have a warning. Sure it was a warning, even if it was queer. It came when he ordered his explosives and that little wop Pucci came down with them, chattering and babbling the way he always did.

"Mist' Feary, Mist' Feary, you leesten-a me now!"

But Feary didn't listen to crazy wops.

"You get to hell outa here an' gimme that stuff." He said that, and he didn't listen. Everybody knew the wop was crazy. Hell, what was all this he was yapping about? Screwy, cuckoo, that's what he was. Talking wild about the rocks and the chunk of granite he was blasting out. Saying "she tell-a me dis-a," and "she tell-a me dat-a." Poor little screwball of a wop, going around thinking he can hear the rocks talking to him! Says they whisper to him. Says they growl at him. Says the rocks get sore. Says we better wait awhile. Says, "You make-a da blast now, you go boom." What a lot of bug-dust!

SO Tom Feary, not listening at all, gave little Tony a shove and kicked him out. And then he loaded his bores and set his caps and tamped his charges—only, he was careful, the way he always was. You have to be careful; you always test your blasting machine; you always test your circuit. So Tom took an electric squib and tested his circuit. How was he going to know that there was a current leak from somewhere? That's the trouble with those things: you work near a high-tension line overhead somewhere, and you never know if there's a stray current leaking into your wires.

And so the squib went off in Tom's hand, and Tom went to the hospital, hurt pretty bad, and lucky he didn't lose more than four fingers.

"That damn' little wop," Tom was saying when they carried him out. "I betcha he was foolin' around with that squib."

THAT'S the way he talked. It didn't make any sense, because nobody can "fool around" with an electric squib, and because the trouble was a current leak; but when a man is hurt bad, he doesn't make any sense. And then there was that crazy wop, talking about what the rocks had told him. Imagine it, now—as if the rocks could talk!

Things like that happen. Impressions, they are. Hysterical impressions. No truth in it, just impressions. But people have been murdered on account of impressions. Juries have convicted on account of impressions. Lawyers trade on them. . . . And it was a bad business for Tony Pucci.

That was bad, but it didn't stop there. They got another blaster on Tom Feary's job, a good man too, named Pat Reilly. Things were going pretty well, and it was just about time to crack through and run into the digging of Section Eight, and this Pat Reilly took over.

It was late in the afternoon that day when this little Pucci came running into the office shed yelling like mad, waving his arms and looking wild. He started yelling for Iron Jo Belcher. He rushed past the four-eyed boy who is supposed to keep people out of the office, and he crashed into the little room where Jo was dictating a letter.

"Mist' Belcher, Mist' Belcher!"

Iron Jo was busy. Iron Jo was having a hard time. Sandhog contractors aren't long on writing letters. And people don't come busting into Jo Belcher's office when he's busy, not and stay happy about it. Besides, Jo didn't even recognize the wop. Why would a contractor who only comes down on the job once a day get to know his powder-monkeys?

"Who the hell let that in here? Miss Barclay, didn't I tell you I want to be

"He jumps me—I thought he was gonna kill me on account I fired him. Then the whole works came down."

alone in this joint when I come down? Where's that boy? By God, I won't—"

"But leesten-a, Mist' Belcher, she's crack-a. Everyt'ing, she's crack-a. . . . All-a time I tell 'em she's crack-a. You no let 'em make-a da boom. Dose rock, she's mad. You make-a da boom, dot place she go all to hell."

What was "crack-a?" He tried hard, but he couldn't make it clear. It wasn't the tunnel. Jo would have known that. What was this wop trying to say? Some crazy gag about the "rocks, she tell-a me she is crack-a." Maybe he'd better go down and look-see. You never know—there might be something.

So Jo Belcher went down.

Everything was quiet down there. You could see the men working. You could hear the drills chattering. You could see this Pat Reilly examining his bores and getting ready for the shot that would put Section Nine through. Nothing seemed wrong. Jo talked to his blaster.

"What's this monkey handing me, Pat? Any trouble? He says something is cracked up."

"Hell no, there wasn't any trouble. That crazy wop is always yelling about something. Sure, he was giving me some kind of guff, only I don't pay no attention. Say, Jo, you better get another monkey, see? This wop, he's bughouse."

So they just laughed it off. . . . But they didn't get through to Section Eight that afternoon.

IT was when the water started bubbling up from underneath that they found it out. There was a "crack-a" that

went down maybe twenty feet into the rock where the deep city aqueduct ran under the new subway. It wasn't very bad then, but it could be. It could get bad. It could flood the new tunnel. It could flood the Interurban shuttle. It could maybe drown ten thousand people going to work and reading their papers in the shuttle while they went across the city. And it would cost the city plenty to fix that fissure. Looked as if they had been using too much power. Maybe the dynamite ought to be cut down. Maybe they ought to change the charges. Maybe there was one of those queer rock structures—you never can tell—that transmit the vibrations in a way you can't figure. Maybe, maybe, maybe. . . .

And how the devil would this screwy wop know about that? It was hours before the crack that he had come running into the shed, yelling like that. There must be something wrong. Maybe he was trying to wreck the works. Maybe he was a communist. Maybe he was an anarchist. Maybe he was fooling around with something. It didn't make sense, but that's the way people do. Nobody stopped to think that a man couldn't sabotage the tunnel. All a powder-monkey could do would be to carry down the wrong blasting charges or else set off a blast on his own; but everybody would have known about that. No, Tony Pucci couldn't have done anything wrong; but when you get worked up over things you don't understand—

SO Iron Jo was going to fire this powder-monkey.

"You finish the week, wop, see? You get your pay and don't come back, see?"

And poor Tony Pucci had heard this one before.

"Lieutena' John-a, Lieutena' John-a, wots you know, I lose-a da job!"

He was like a bewildered boy. He came to the only man who had shown him decent friendship, who had tried to understand him, and he babbled out an incoherent story. Couldn't they see? Couldn't they believe him? All his life, since his childhood in the mines at Caltanisetta, he had been fostered in the soil, in the black depths of man-drilled rocks. His father had died there; his mother had given birth there. The feel of rock was in his touch, the sense of rock in his soul. As the savage communes with the green of nature, so he communed with the ores and the deep basalt and the volcanic fissures born in a forgotten past.

And the rocks had spoken. This was their day. Puny man's little powders, little ineffectual puffs of smoke, could not win against the rocks on this day.

Oh, he had told them all. Deep, far deep under the tunnel, the rocks had laid their snare. He had heard their whispering and their mutterings. He knew, he alone knew. Why didn't the men believe him? Why should he lie?

IT was hard for John Saunders, for he too was rock-born, earth-nurtured. And he owed a lot to little Tony. The least he could do was to talk to Jo Belcher. Maybe he could make him see.

But he couldn't make Iron Jo see anything.

Besides, all the sandhogs quit work that day, and they insisted it was Tony Pucci's fault. It wasn't, but they said it was. Hysterical impressions again.

"Jinx," they said. "He's a damn' jinx. He's a screwball, and he's got a bee on the woiks. Ya never know what'll happen with a guy wot's bughouse on the job."

So they quit, and you can't really blame them.

They quit because they found a stiff. Sandhogs don't want stiffs around. Dig up a stiff, and sandhogs will quit work.

They fixed the fissure over the water tunnel. They reinforced with cement, and they went on with the job. Time was short. The city needed a new subway. Work had to go on in a hurry. So the blaster Pat Reilly and the others had things set for the finish of the section.

It was the middle of the afternoon when Pat Reilly called for the charge that would move twenty tons of hardrock in neatly cut slabs from the farthest end of the section. Hardrock, all of it, except that sandstone vein that crossed down below the foundation of the Fitchman Building. It called for clever drilling and clever blasting. Careful work. Just the right pressure. Just the right charges. Pat was a proud man, proud of his job, of his knowledge. Proud to be taking old Tom Feary's place.

Pat called for his stuff, and it was Tony Pucci who brought the cartridges down. The little wop hung around, watching Pat and acting queer. He snooped and he nosed and he poked around. He nosed around the drillers, too; and after he watched them at work in the soft rock for a while, he seemed to get excited. Like an overwrought puppy he ran back and forth,

ignoring their curses and irritated looks, nearly putting his queer little head into the very bores they were putting down, until they literally kicked him away.

Suddenly he shouted:

"Wait-a, wait-a! You no wanna deeg dis-a place!"

He waved his arms and babbled away in his incomprehensible lingo. He jostled them and pushed them, unafraid and determined, until one of the drillers lost every shred of temper and unceremoniously laid violent hold on the little man, and sent him staggering along the catwalk with an emphatic kick.

They thought it was funny! They all thought it was funny to kick the little wop; but when they finished their cuts and when Pat Reilly set off his charges and the huge slices of rock shifted out and the sandstone crumbled into sludge, it wasn't so funny.

Because there, deep under the pavement on top, where millions of men walked in the sunlight, was the earth-bound skeleton of what had once been a man. Not much of a skeleton, either. Just a sack of bones, and the metal visor of an old cap. But the fingers of that forgotten man, buried deep in the earth, were entwined around a rusted chunk of steel. And it didn't take much time for the men to figure out what that was—the bit of an old drill. These bones had once been full of life—like themselves. Had once been, like themselves, a driller of rock. Ten, twenty, maybe fifty years ago. And the imponderable, unpredictable vengeance of the rocks had caught him in their slow, pitiless retaliation—had caught him and had crushed him.

Sandhogs don't like things like that. It might have been one of themselves. They quit, and some of them remembered the babbling excitement of this little Tony Pucci.

"It's that dirty little monkey," they grumbled. "He's got the bee on us. Jo, you get that wop outa here, see, an' we go back to woik. We aint gonna woik wit' no jinx."

BELCHER understood. He told them, sure, he'd fire the wop.

"Already I told him to get his time. He aint comin' back, see? You boys go back to woik. He won't bother you no more after tomorrow."

No, he wouldn't bother them—after tomorrow.

Poor John Saunders, he tried hard. There was sincerity in his trying—plain good will, honest feeling, human decency. But Iron Jo Belcher had made up his mind. A practical man, Iron Jo.

"Listen, Mr. Saunders, I know. I'm sorry, an' all that, see? But I gotta keep my men woikin', don't I? You done plenty a'ready for that little wop, Mr. Saunders. An' now he's put a bee on the woiks. He's gotta go."

And that's the way it was.

NEXT day was the last for Tony Pucci. He knew it, and they knew it. Everybody knew it. So they just pretended he wasn't there. Nobody used him. When Pat Reilly wanted his blasting materials, it wasn't Tony Pucci he called. Nobody wanted to see the little wop around. They didn't even yell and curse at him.

It was pathetic, in a way. If anybody had noticed it, they could have seen tragedy walking around with a pair of old dirty corduroy pants on. Tragedy in a tin hat. Tragedy with a twisted body and pointed ears. Sure it was tragedy, because what else can you call it, when a deep-rooted plant is pulled out of its soil? Take the moss out of its rocks, and it will die. Take the Tony Puccis away from the rocks, and ditto. Treat a man as though he isn't there, make him a ghost before his time, and you've hurt him more than a stab in the back.

That's the way they hurt Tony Pucci. But nobody knew and nobody cared and nobody tried to guess—except maybe the super, John Saunders, and he kept away because somehow, as though it were his fault, he was ashamed.

So Tony Pucci didn't even have John Saunders to talk to.

He just went around. He just hung around. He didn't even get underfoot, the way he usually did—just stayed off in corners and looked. Sometimes the muckers would see his dwarfed, twisted little body like an amorphous shadow, moving along the dark, dank, moist tunnel wall with his head down as though he were listening to the echoes of his black thoughts. Sometimes the drill men would see him slink away from a shaded recess where the electric bulbs cast only a shadow, not saying a word, not even looking at them.

"Yah! The crazy little wop, he'd give a man the creeps!"

And about two in the afternoon when Iron Jo Belcher came down into the diggings to check up on the progress and to figure what new stuff they would need when they cut through to Section Eight,

he saw this little wop stumping along the catwalk behind him, like his own sad shadow, maybe, or like his own conscience taking on a vague shape and wanting to trouble him.

"Ah, the hell with him," Jo told himself. Maybe he ought to kick him out. Still, this was the last day.

THERE was a part of Section Nine where they had dug a pioneer tunnel alongside the main shaft in order to clear out the muck easy. It was where they cut through hardrock. And the pioneer was connected with the main by a crosscut which gave ventilation and gave them a chance to shovel the muck out of the main tunnel quicker and easier.

Jo Belcher on his little walk of inspection wanted to look into the crosscut. Jo always took a good look around. You never know what you might stumble onto. You have to keep your eyes open when you're a big contractor. Every day you look around, and you learn things and get new ideas. So Jo Belcher stepped out of the main shaft and ducked his head to get into the crosscut, holding his flashlight and never thinking there might be any trouble.

But trouble hit him. Trouble crept up behind him and hit him on the back of the head with a rock. . . .

Trouble was a flitting shadow, a crooked little shadow. When Iron Jo stepped off the catwalk and lost himself in the gloom of the cut, this trouble-shadow ceased to be a flat thing against the facing and materialized into a thing that moved a little awkwardly but silently. When Jo's flashlight beam made the underworld black behind him, the shadow was there—just at his elbow. The shadow's arm moved with quick power, and the rock caught Jo at the base of the skull. Iron Jo was a big man, but he crumpled. He crumpled and slid down into the muck. He never even knew how the shadow danced over him there in the dark, how the shadow kicked him and screamed almost voicelessly at him, calling him names in a language which Jo could never have understood even had he been conscious.

And then the shadow crept away, and it was very still down there. So was Iron Jo.

Pat Reilly had set his charges and tamped his bores, and he was testing his circuit with a meter. It didn't matter to Pat if the little wop hung around. It didn't matter to Pat if that screwy little ex-powder-monkey scrambled around down there looking more like a crooked spider than a man. To hell with the wop—he was out, he was through! Only for the super, Jo would have kicked him out of here anyhow. A man can't get in wrong with the super.

Blaster Reilly was only human. Sometimes you forget, and sometimes you postpone. This time he postponed. He waited until he looked at one of the bores farther down the tunnel before he rigged up his blasting machine, plugged in his wires and locked the box-handle. Only when he locked it, he shoved the key into his pocket, the way he always did, and he stepped back and stumbled over this Tony Pucci, who was always fumbling around where he shouldn't be.

"Get the hell outa here, ya damn' little wop!"

Practically a quotation, that was. He hardly knew he said it. He hardly remembered he kicked the little monkey out of the way. Those things get to be a habit. But he kicked him in the pants and never paid any attention to his crazy yelling and screaming and cursing in wop jargon, but went on about his own very careful business.

It wasn't much later when Pat was ready. Ready with his machine in front of him, giving the four whistles to warn the men, four whistles to send them all up while he followed with his box. They came running. They came scurrying. They came chattering and kidding and getting their cigarettes ready for a couple of drags while the shot was fired and the gas had a chance to clean out.

PAT shoved on the handle of his box to set off the charge—and nothing happened. It was locked. He had forgotten. Hell, a man can forget. So he dug in his pocket for the key to the safety lock—and there wasn't any key.

That's a bad business. Blasters don't lose their keys. A blaster's key is like the safety on a gun. The lives of maybe a hundred men depend on that key. Sure, Pat knew that; but still, the key was gone. He had put it in his pocket. Hell, maybe there was a hole in his pocket. But there was no hole. Now, how could that key have got out of his pocket?

A bad business, but things do happen. He was pretty sore when the men began to kid him. He was pretty sore when he thought how they could raise hell with him. He was pretty ashamed inside.

He was straining weakly, bracing himself. "Lieutena' John-a! You make-a leeft!"

But you can always get another blasting machine. You have to fire your shots. The job has to go on. You have to go and requisition another box, and that makes you plenty mad. Where was Iron Jo Belcher? He had been around down there for a while. If Iron Jo found out about his losing the key—

But Iron Jo did not find out, for Iron Jo was not in a position to find out. Iron Jo's position was strictly horizontal at the time.

So they rigged another blasting machine and they gave four whistles again, and this time it meant business. Here was the super coming down from the office shed. Here was the super, wanting to know where Iron Jo Belcher was.

"I dunno, Mr. Saunders; he was around here a while back. He musta gone uptown."

"Yeah, I seen him awhile ago—he was talkin' with Pat."

"He was down; he musta come up."

"Didn't you see him in the office?"

No, Mr. Saunders hadn't seen Jo. That was funny—he was always on the tunnel job about this time. In the office they said he had gone on down. Funny, it was—Super Saunders wishing he could find Iron Jo. Super Saunders, wanting to make one last try about Tony Pucci. John Saunders having more conscience trouble.

Then the blast went. They could feel it in their shoes. Down there some nitric acid and cellulose and cornstarch or whatever they use, was blowing up the rock. The rocks were taking their licking. Or were they? Who knows? Man was asserting himself. Strutting with dynamite. Natural superiority; whoever heard of the soul of a rock? Dynes and ergs. How many ergs has a soul? How many dynes? How long is life in kilowatt-hours?

The blast went, and they knew it. They waited, all huddling around the explosives shack, chewing the fat and smoking. They watched the clock, too. Pretty soon the muckers could go down and clear. The gas would be gone thin enough.

Then the time was up, and they all began to go down.

"Hey, didja hear somebody yellin'? Who the hell would be down there yellin' like that, Mr. Saunders? Gee, do yuh suppose—"

No, they didn't suppose. How would they suppose? Nobody but a damned fool would have stayed down after the whistles went. A damned fool, or maybe this Pucci. Where was Pucci? Not that they cared much, only—

But there was somebody yelling. Yelling till it hurt. Screaming. A man can scream as well as a woman. Somebody was down there. *It was somebody caught down there.* Hurry, hurry, hurry. . . .

There wasn't anybody down there. They couldn't see anybody. It was a nice shot, that blast. A nice clean shot. This man Pat Reilly knew his job. Look at that nice bench he had cut.

There's that scream again. It slithered like a snake out of the darkness. It gushed along the catwalk. It came, and it billowed and surged and told a terror-story of anguish. It didn't come from around the bench cut. It came from down there by the crosscut, where it went through into the pioneer tunnel. Hell, that was funny. Who would be down there? Hurry, hurry, hurry!

John Saunders running. Pat Reilly running. Everybody running.

Then, in the murk of the crosscut they found it.

"Gawd, it's the wop!"

Sure, it was the wop, but that wasn't all. They could see what had happened. It wasn't much of a cave-in. It wasn't deep, and it wasn't bad, but there was maybe a ton of stuff had tumbled down on the poor runt of a little wop where the timber facing had broken away and piled onto him. He was there, belly down, straining weakly with his big square hands in the muck, bracing himself, arching his back against the imponderable. Sand and rocks and limestone. Only for the timbers, they would have made him into spaghetti paste.

"Lieutena' John-a, Lieutena' John-a. . . . You make-a leeft! *Aie—"*

They went to work. God, how they went to work!

"We're working on it, Tony. Keep your chin up, boy." That was the conscience of John Saunders talking for him.

"It's-a no for me. Da boss, he is catch-a—*aie!"*

The boss? Iron Jo Belcher caught? How would Iron Jo get himself caught?

BUT caught he was. They pulled off the timbers, and they threw the dirt away with their shovels, and they got their hands on the little wop. And when they dragged him away, they got an eyeful. An eyeful of Iron Jo Belcher.

Iron Jo, just breathing. Still able to swear a little, feeling pretty bad. Iron Jo, with a broken arm and maybe a broken leg and certainly a broken head, fighting to get his thoughts together, fighting to get conscious, trying to talk.

"That damned little wop, he saved my life, he did."

That's what Iron Jo thought.

"I was down checking over the crosscut, trying to figure on filling in after we cut through to Section Eight, and all of a sudden the works fell in on me."

Jo hadn't seen the shadow and the rock. To him it was "the works" which had hit him.

"I musta laid there half an hour. I was comin' out of it, sorta, when the whistles went, see, and then I hear the little wop runnin'. He yells out: 'Mist' Belcher, Mist' Belcher, dey make-a da blast!' And then, by God, he jumps me. He jumps me, see? And I thought he was gonna kill me on account I fired him. Well, the shots went off, and the whole damn' works came down then. Only for him, I woulda—"

They knew. They all knew. Only for the little wop, Iron Jo Belcher would have been mashed into the dirt for the muckers to dig out. If they could.

Concussion, that was it. Concussion, the mysterious conductance of earth. Earth inanimate. Earth terrible. Unpredictable earth and stone, waging a war of retaliation against man.

So much for Iron Jo Belcher and the earth. Jo wouldn't die. The Jo Belchers of the world never die. They go on, somehow.

But what about Tony Pucci? That wasn't quite so good. That wasn't good at all. You could see it when you looked at his twisted neck and his broken body. Sandhogs have seen a lot of broken bodies; they know. They have to know.

And when they looked at what remained of Tony Pucci, they remembered

how they socked him and cursed him and kicked him for a lousy little wop.

Somebody said:

"Hear what the super said, now?"

"Yeah? What did he say?"

"They was puttin' the poor wop into the ambulance, see? An' the super, he was talkin' with him in wop lingo, see? Imagine a guy like the super knowin' wop! Well, the super he says the crazy little wop knew somebody was down there in the cross-cut, see? An' he says he knew somepin' was gonna bust. Says he could *hear* a weak spot in the facing —now, whaddya know, hey?"

"Them wops is all nuts."

"Well, he was a pretty good little guy."

"Sure he was; didn't I always say so?"

People are like that.

AND when the ambulance came and took Tony Pucci away to the hospital, it was John Saunders who rode beside him, sitting on the floor next to the little white cot, with his hand on the little wop's shoulder. What was this he was trying to say, now? You could hardly hear his voice. The poor devil, the poor little devil, what a way for a man to die!

"Lieutena' John-a—"

"Yes, Tony?"

"He is-a no die, da boss?"

"No, Tony. You saved him, Tony. Remember? You knew he was there. You went down to pull him out, remember? And you knew the facing would fall. You got on top of him and let it fall on you. Remember, Tony? That's what you did. Better not talk now. You'll start bleeding again."

"Dot's-a all right, Lieutena' John-a, I gotta talk. You leesten? I tella da trut', you no tella da boss?"

"Of course not, Tony. What is it?"

"Wots you say I tell you I keel-a da boss?"

"You killed him? But he's not dead, Tony. You saved him. If you hadn't been on top of him when the facing went—"

"Sure, I know. But I keel-a heem, too."

"You better get some rest, Tony. You're pretty sick, feller."

"I getta da rest prett' soon. But first I keel-a da boss, I get so mad because he make-a me go. I lose-a da job."

Poor devil, he must be out of his head. But maybe he did have some crazy idea like that. He wanted that job pretty bad.

"When I hit da boss, I get much-a sorry. Maybe if I stoppa da blast, he no is die. So I stoppa da blast, Lieutena' John-a."

Better humor him, poor devil. Out of his head. It won't be long, now. "Yes, Tony."

"So I stoppa da blast, like I say. But da blast, she is go justa same. I try leefta da boss, but he is beeg-a man. Then da blast-a, she go boom. You say he is no die, da boss?"

"No, Tony, he'll be all right. Now you better go to sleep."

There is a smile of peace on his face. There is a deep sigh, a relaxing of those torn and twisted features under the bandages.

Then: "Lieutena' John-a?"

"Yes, Tony?"

"You putta da hand in da pock', you find-a somet'ing."

"In your pocket?"

The eyes nodded, not the head. Queer little eyes nodding, and maybe laughing a little too. John Saunders put his hand in the grimy pocket. And there, among the old sacks of tobacco, among the nails and the little chunks of rock, among the few coppers and nickels and wads of indescribable paper, was a thin, carefully carved, carefully fitted key.

"I stoppa da blast, Lieutena' John. I make-a da steal da key. You no tell-a da boss?"

Not John Saunders, he wouldn't.

THREE men sat at a village wineshop table. Above them towered the Alps.

"War and war and war!" said the village mayor gloomily. "Where will it end? Now the whole world is in upheaval, battle and death and starvation everywhere! And now the African hordes move up the Rhone to bring us fire and sword! Why should this storm burst upon us?"

Mancinus shrugged. "Why, you ask, this unwanted war? Because the earth is too full of people. Perhaps the gods seek to thin out the race of men, and the time appointed is at hand. . . . There arise insensate waves of struggle, a generation or two apart, when whole nations rush to conquest and slaughter; a mass hysteria seizes them and they're drunk with dreams of glory and loot. They're led to it by the magnetic character of some great leader. Hannibal is such a man, from all accounts."

The Truth About

By JAMES EDWIN BAUM

Who wrote "Savage Abyssinia" and "Spears in the Sun."

The Story Thus Far:

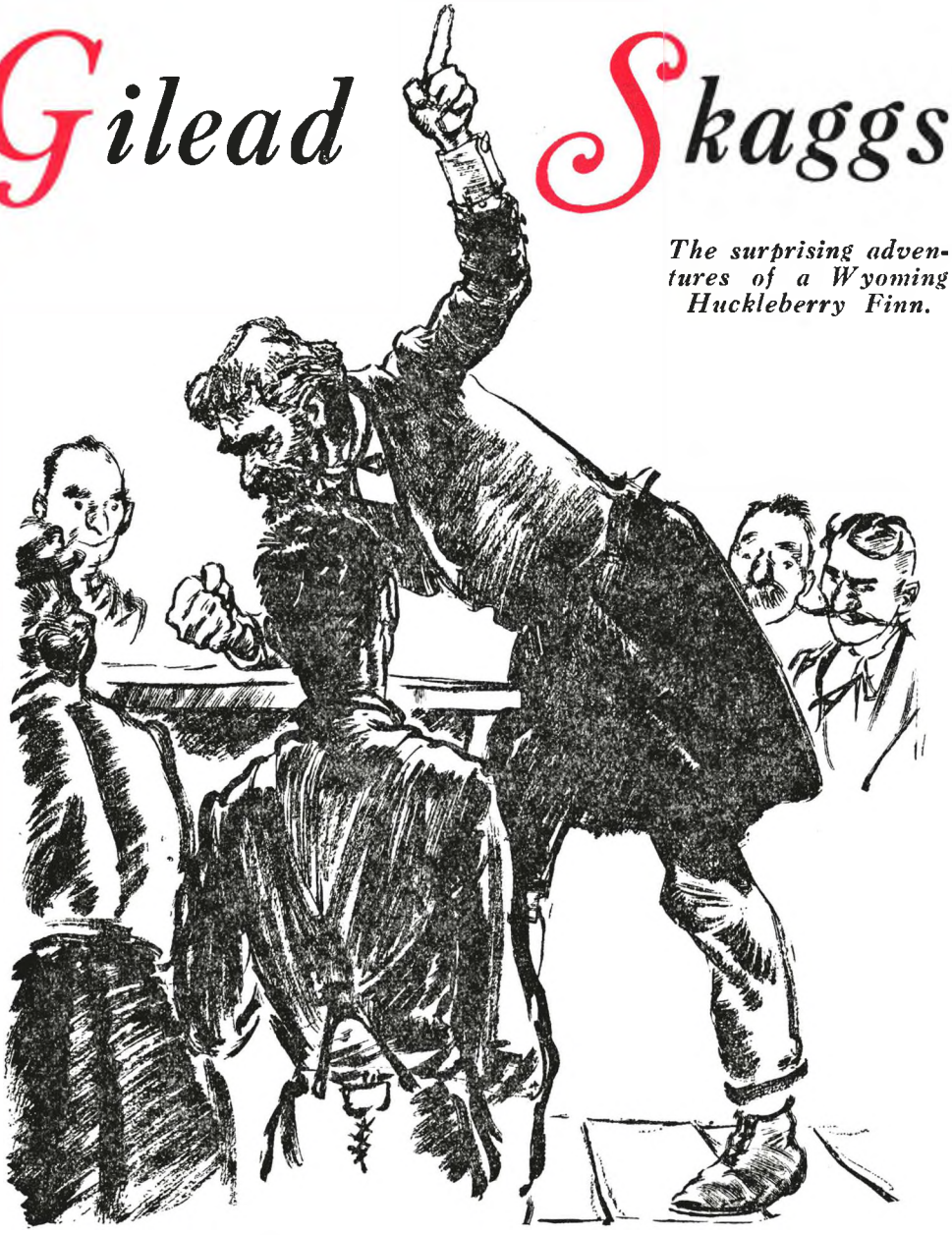
YOU remember I told you about when I was riding on a train with my father, and at a little station in Wyoming two men named Mr. Marshal and Mr. Law came up to us, and arrested Pa, and took him off the train.

Pretty soon a tall man, a ranchman, came and sat down by me, and talked to me, and said wouldn't I like to come with him and live at the U Cross and learn to be a cowboy. That sounded pretty good; once before when Pa and Limpy Joe and Weasel had got into trouble, I'd been taken to an Orphan's Home, and I hadn't liked it.

Well, it was just about perfect at the U Cross. I had my own pony Sinful to ride; and Aunt Emmy—that was Sam's wife—was powerful good to me. Lester Touch-the-Clouds the educated Indian cowboy taught me sign-talk; and Beaver-tooth told me the gaudiest lies; and old Stan and Bignose George and Lester won

Gilead Skaggs

The surprising adventures of a Wyoming Huckleberry Finn.



a horse-race against a ringer race-horse the town folks had, by staking out a tame bear in the brush so that the smell of him got the town horse spooked up.

But something one of the race-horse men said about blood-lines and sons always taking after sires worried me a whole lot, for it made me realize that I was bound to take after my dad and be a criminal—maybe a murderer, and bring down trouble on these folks who had been so good to me. And about this time the feeling between the cattle-men and the sheep-men came to a head, and one night Lester came in wounded; some men had bush-whacked him, and he'd shot one of them. It was thought best for Lester to hide out for a while with his Indian cousin Bird's Nest; and Sam give it out that Lester had been killed. And I got so scared about growing up to be a criminal and maybe murdering Beavertooth or old Stan that I run off and hid out with Lester and Bird's Nest.

Well, we rode a long ways, and then one night I rode into town to trade skins for grub, and I stopped at a tent where a revival meeting was going on, and—*the evangelist was my father! (The story continues in detail:)*

THE last time I had saw the old man he was jerked off the train by the two detectives which he called Mr. Law and

Mr. Marshal. But now he weren't nothing like I remembered him. In them days he never talked much except after he had drunk about a half a bottle. Then him and Limpy George and Weasel jawed each other, and maybe ended up in a fight, or took to hurling empty bottles at me if I didn't duck fast enough to suit 'em. You hardly ever got a good look at his eyes in the old days; he was always looking somewhere else. And when he talked, the words most always come out of the side of his mouth.

Well, now he had a black beard with a few white hairs in it, and his hair was turned plumb white and rumpled up, and his eyes just burned in his head. He walked back and forth across that platform like he owned the world; and he talked straight out and not sideways. When I looked up at him, he was still a-hammering it into the Devil, his arms a-waving and his beard a-bristling; you knowed if the Devil had been loafing around in that tent at first, he weren't there no more. Nobody could stand up and face the old man the way he looked now.

I had made up my mind a long time ago that I didn't want nothing more to do with him. I was Sam's now; and when I see for sure who it was on that platform, I tried to ease out of there in a hurry. From what I knowed of him, I thought this might be a dodge to get money out of people. But I was wedged in the crowd so tight I couldn't move quick, and I *had* to stay. But I knowed in another minute that this weren't no dodge; nobody couldn't put it on like this and not mean every word of it! So then I didn't know just what to do. I thought maybe I ought to stay and speak to him. But I didn't get a chance to make up my mind what I would do.

HE was stomping up and down behind a pine table, and once in a while he would come down, *bam!* with his fist and almost split that table wide open. He was daring the Devil to come here and just *try* to snatch a single one of these repented souls away from God! His black eyes was a-glaring and the swet was a-rolling down into his eyes, and you knowed if *he* couldn't whip the Devil with one hand then, it weren't no use for nobody else to try with both hands and a club.

Well, his right arm was raised, pointing straight over his head, showing everybody the way to heaven; and he had just doubled up his right fist to bang the table again, when he looked down and seen me. He froze, plumb still, with that fist over his head! He stood there hanging fire maybe a minute. The crowd seen that something had happened and quit hollering, "Hallelujah!" It got so still in the tent that if a little runty rat had sneaked across the platform just then, it would of sounded like a team of galloping horses.

I RECKON at first the old man thought he saw a ghost, but when he knowed it was me, his face seemed to melt and go all soft; it looked like somebody had took a lantern and lit it and opened a door in the back of his neck and shoved that lantern inside and let her stay there and glow. He swarmed down off the platform and lifted me up in front of everybody. I didn't know what to say to him, but I didn't have a chance to say nothing. He stood me on the platform and clumb back beside me and held up a hand, slow and dead solemn, and started in to talk in his natural voice for the first time. And of all the complimunts ever I heard handed out to God,—or anybody,—he done it the best right then!

The crowd gawked up at him and then at me, and at each other. The old man didn't say nothing about me, yet. He told the crowd that a great revelation, a miracle, had come to pass right there in that tent! And if everybody would listen careful, he would prove it. So then, he started at the beginning and told all about his own life. Well, you bet I never expected him to drag in the truth about *that*. But he done it—and didn't pinch down and slide over even the *worst* parts of it.

He said his father was a preacher and had brung him up in the faith that rolls back the sea and levels the mountains. And his father had took him on his knee and learned him all the Psalms of David by heart before he was eight years old. And his father had give him the blessed name Hosanna, and started him in the True Path. Oh, he had all the chances anybody ever had, he said, and was a pretty good boy, only maybe a little orneryer than he had any business to be with such a triumphunt name, and his extra good chances, and knowing all the Psalms of David by heart. But he growed up in the Faith, and the Lord sent a regular angel of a woman to be his wife and give him a baby son. Well, he enjoyed all these blessings, until the Almighty decided it was time to test him, and find out

if his faith was the gilt-edge kind that rolled back the sea, or was just bogus-faith. So Jehovah sent down and took away his wife.

The old man stopped for maybe a whole minute. You couldn't hear nothing in that tent but people breathing. Then he cut loose and ripped into himself like he had ripped into the Devil.

He told how Lucifer come a-sneaking around and tempted him with soft words and how he set still and listened, like a bird does when a snake charms it with soft hisses. The snake part of it was so creepy that three or four people in front sneaked a look behind 'em. I did too.

Then he told how he eat of the Devil's fruit, and fell, and took to the rosiest kind of dissipation. And he described it, and it sounded amazing gay and lively. But he switched away from the rosy part pretty quick and told how that snaky old Lucifer was always a-catfooting around and grinning behind his back; it didn't sound so gay, then. Well, the Devil led him lower and lower until he had him bogged hub-deep in the mire of sin. It was about then that he met up with two evil companions, (he meant Limpy George and Weasel), and they learnt him everything from the book of crime that he didn't already know. And the three of 'em done everything in the book, short of murder. He even told how they used to throw empty bottles at his own son and thought nothing of it, they was sunk so low down.

But when he had hit bottom, the Lord decided He had tested him enough. So Jehovah planned it all out and sent two detectives to take him off a train when he was on his way to another city to pull off some more crimes. And they yanked him off and slapped him into a jail where he said he belonged. Well, he told about that jail, and how at first he wanted to get out so he could go back and waller some more in his crimes. But pretty soon he seen the Light and heard the Call, right there in jail! Night after night he rassled with Satan in his cell, till one night he got a strangle-hold and throwed the Devil out of his life forevermore, amen. And when he had served his sentence, he was a changed man. Now he had orders to go forth and carry the light, and pluck brands from the burning, and never let up fighting Lucifer till he had him stampeded plumb off God's green earth.

After he got through that part of it he says: "And now, brethren, a miracle has come to pass! Friends, when the Lord decreed that I should be took from that train, I lost my boy. From that day to this I have never laid eyes upon him. Night and day have I prayed that my only child would be give back to me to cherish. Today that prayer was answered. *This* is my lost son!" And he put his hand on my head.

Well, if you could of saw—and heard—that crowd! They milled around in there yelling and whooping like a band of buck Injuns. They busted loose in a hymn, and you couldn't hear yourself think for the hallelujahs. But when the noise died down and most everybody was crying soft and happy, a big farmer standing down in front snickered and says:

"Shucks! Old Hosey had the kid with him all the time. It was part of his act. You can't tell *me* no different! Why! Looky here—" But he never got no further! The old man come a-boiling off that platform like a rock-slide—like the Rock of Ages rolling down a mountain! And the way he tore into that big farmer would make grizzly bears and mountain-lions look meek as tabby-cats! Three or four men started to help him fight, but the old man hurled 'em back. At the first crack he rocked that farmer's head with a straight left and hollered: "Hallelujah!" And next he set him back on his heels with another and yelled: "Yea, Lord!" But the big farmer come right back at him. He give the old man a belt on the ear that made him grunt. And he follered it with a right swing that made the old man teeter on his pins. The farmer landed a couple more, too, and I was beginning to think the old man would be whipped. But shucks! He weren't even warmed up yet. He could of whipped a dozen men, and all bigger than him, the way he felt that night!

WELL, he backed that big hay-rassler up agin the tent wall and rocked him a half a dozen times with rights and lefts, a-singing out each time, "Yea, Lord!" And a few more hallelujahs! And the first thing I knowed, he had a hold of the farmer by the neck and the seat of his pants. And the way he hurled him through the side of that tent was wonderful to see! I heard a ripping sound, and couldn't tell at first if it was the tent ripping or the farmer's pants. But it was the tent, and the farmer went through it head first!

The old man come a-charging back to the platform, dusting off his hands, and

flopped down on his knees and asked the Lord to forgive him for fighting in God's house, even if it was only a old tent! After he finished that prayer, he slid easy and graceful into another, and I'm a Chinaman if he didn't ask the Lord to forgive "the pore Doubting Thomas, who was egged on and misled by Lucifer to afflict Thy meek and lowly servant, Lord, with sundry lasserations and bodily chastisements." He wound up by promising he would hunt out and shepherd that lost lamb back into the fold before he left that town. He says:

"Thy meek and humble servant, Lord, will go forth, and garner in that lost sheep and make him a Child of God—if Thy servant has to *appear* to him and smite him hip and thigh with the jawbone of an ass, as the Filistines was smit; Yea, Lord, even if Thy servant has to knock all the powers and principalities of Gehenna out of him!"

I thought he was just a-slinging it on for the crowd when he made that promise. But the old man was a heap sight different now since he had got the call. I hadn't hardly *begun* to know him yet.

Well, this was the last night of the Fair and Bean Festival, and the revival was over too. The way the people moaned and cried and swarmed up and got converted and wrung the old man's hand, and made that old tent rock with hymns and hallelujahs—why, you wouldn't believe it! We didn't get away from there till midnight. But after everything was over, me and the old man went to a house where he had a room. He told me to get into bed, which I done. Then he prayed, just average feverish, over me for a spell. And after he finished, he got up from his knees and says:

"Now Gilead, you slide off easy to sleep. I can finish the Lord's business in this town without you." And his jaw stuck out and made his beard curl up. "I'll be back when I get it done, and not before!" And he went out and shut the door.

I WAS just about played-out and fell asleep right away. But I woke up when he came back awhile later. He lit the lamp and went to bathing his eye in the wash-basin. It was almost morning by that time. His clothes was tore and pretty muddy, and a handful of his beard had been yanked out by the roots, and I see that his upper lip was swole. I thought maybe he had been run over by a wagon or tromped by a team of shod horses. I set up in bed:

"What happened, Pa? Was you in a runaway?"

He was dreadful bruised and pretty grim, but I could see he was feeling awful good inside. He quit swabbing his eye, and in spite of being swole and scuffed and hammered, his face glowed, like that light was still shining behind it.

"No indeed, Gilead. Unless you call it a runaway when Satan let go all holts and went a-streaking it for hell, head up and tail over the dashboard. Your pa has had a hard night, Gilead: Lucifer had a bulldog grip on one of the most stubbornest and mulish souls ever put into a man. And no ordinery measures wouldn't shake neither one loose from the other. I promised to save that lamb, and I *done* it! It took time, and the laying on of hands, and—suffering. But in my own weak and blund'ring way—I got it *done!* Now go back to sleep, and in the morning we'll talk and make our plans. Your pa is wore to a frazzle and needs a little sleep." And he got down and prayed once more and told the Lord he had done that chore which he had promised to do, and garnered in the strayed lamb. Then he blowed out the lamp and come to bed.

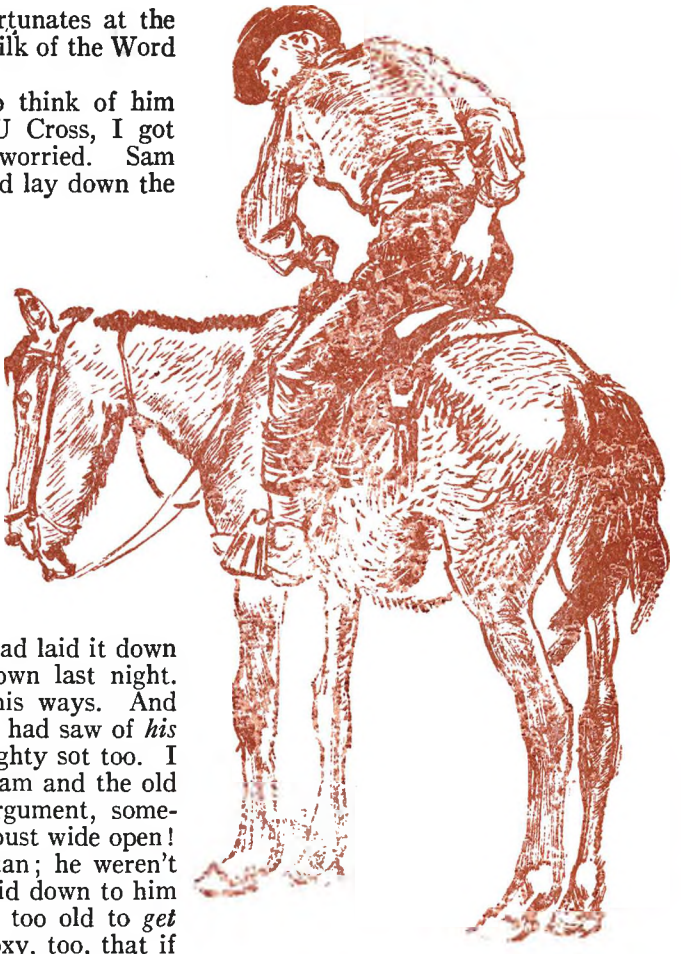
WE slept late that morning and took it easy and laid in bed a long time and talked. There was considerable blood on the old man's piller where his lip and eye had leaked in the night. But he didn't mind, and said there was plenty more where that come from, ready to be shed and poured forth like water, any time, on Jehovah's business.

He wanted to know everything I had done since he was took off that train by the two detectives God sent. So I told him about Sam and the U Cross, and about Lester and Bird's Nest and how they was camped in the hills waiting for me now. I told him the truth, too. I couldn't see no reason, then, to lie about nothing.

When I told how Sam had took me off the train and give me a home at the U Cross, and how decent they all was to me, the old man's eyes got watery and overflowed and irrigated his beard, and he blowed his nose a couple of times. He muttered something about "mysterious ways," and "wonders to perform." Then he said we would go forth into the wilderness, straight to the U Cross, to see Sam and rejoice with him and give thanks. And he said maybe he could repay Sam by showing him the way to Grace and

by saving the other unfortunates at the ranch, "cut off from the milk of the Word in the wilderness."

Well, when I begun to think of him swooping down on the U Cross, I got powerful uneasy and worried. Sam weren't the kind you could lay down the law to, like the old man had laid it down to the farmers in this town last night. Sam was pretty sot in his ways. And the old man, from what I had saw of *his* ways last night, was almighty sot too. I knowed for sure that if Sam and the old man tangled up in a argument, something would just *have* to bust wide open!



"I done wrong when I left Satan a clear field at that farmhouse. If the Lord decrees that my nether parts shall chafe and distress me, who am I to crawl out of His just punishments?"

Then there was Old Stan; he weren't used to having the law laid down to him by nobody. And he was too old to *get* used to it. He was so foxy, too, that if anybody tried it on him, I knowed *something* was bound to happen. And I thought to myself: the sperits aint had no chance yet to get even for the arrow pointing at you that time when Tom Hands rode in. Maybe this is the way they're a-going after you for it.

Well, after I had told everything, I got an idea! I remembered what Tom Hands had said about the sheep and cattle war going on full blast; so I grabbed on to that; I thought I could make it sound so risky the old man would shy off.

"We can't go to the U Cross now," I says. "A sheep and cattle war has busted loose. Nobody knows how many men has cashed in already. A stranger, Tom Hands, stopped at our camp and told how the sheep-men and the cow-men is butchering each other right and left. The dead ones is laying out in the hills stacked up like cordwood! No, Pa, we don't dast to go back there now. Why, there is plenty of men around that country, profeshnal killers and bushwhackers, who don't think nothing of shooting down folks just to see which way they'll fall."

But like I said before—I didn't *know* the old man since he had got the Call! I was a fool a-wasting time trying to *scare* him! He says:

"We'll start today, Gilead. This very minute! Many a time have I asked the Lord to point me the way to the most abysmallest sinkhole of Creation where Lucifer rares around and rages. The howling wilderness around the U Cross is the place, undoubted! In such dank jungles of sin the meek servants of the Lord can best show what they can do."

Well, I see I had done it! There weren't no use trying to steer him away from the U Cross now. Sam and Old Stan—everybody—would just have to look out for themselves when we landed. And then I thought about Lester and Bird's Nest and wondered what would happen when we got to their camp; I couldn't find the way to the ranch alone. They would have to take us, and on the way we would all live together in the tepee.

This made me think about Bird's Nest specially, and I remembered how much

he knowed about the sperit rules and how hard he had worked to get Lester back in strong with sperits. I had a feeling that the old man wouldn't take kindly to the sperit rules or live up to 'em any too graceful. He might even lay down a set of rules of his own and try to make *us* live up to *them,* and so bring down enough bad luck to wreck everything. Oh, there was no end of things that might happen. I got awful worried thinking about it, and when the old man told me to get my pony and hurry back and be ready to start, I went off to the livery-barn after Sinful; and my feet was almighty heavy.

WELL, when I got back to the house, the old man had bought himself a crowbait of a horse and somebody had give him a ratty old saddle and a pair of blankets which he tied behind his saddle after he had wrapped some extra clothes and his Bible in them. I didn't know what he had done with the revival tent.

We rode down the street and through the lane out of town pretty slow. The old man weren't used to horses much; and after we had rode a ways he said that he reckoned saddles, like horsehair shirts, was sent down here on earth to chasten us pore sinners and keep us prodded up and chafed so we wouldn't get too soft and lazy and forget about God's business.

Pretty soon we come to Hank Hopple's farm. I didn't want the old man to get mixed up with Hank, no way. So I was a-hurrying past. But he said he was thirsty and reckoned he'd ride in and ask for a swig of cold water. I was afraid Hank would be drunk and the old man would try to reform him. I knowed that would take a year or two and wouldn't amount to nothing but a waste of time. So I says:

"Let's go on to the next farm, Pa. This one is kind of tumble-down and maybe the water aint no good." But he shook his head.

"No, Gilead. I have already said I would go in here. Vassilation and changing your mind gives the Devil a handhold and you can't tell where it will end."

I still had a plenty to learn about the old man, but even now I knowed him better than to argue about anything. Well, we rode up to the back door and he knocked; he said we hadn't no right to *touch* that pump-handle without asking. Mrs. Hopple come to the door, and he took off his hat and says:

"Sister, would you kindly allow two humble servants of the Lord, wayfarers in the wilderness, to partake of your pump-water?"

"Well," she says, pretty spry and a little sharp, "we don't call this valley much of a wilderness no more; we reckon we've got it fairly well tamed and settled up. But go ahead. Help yourselves."

She didn't know me. I reckon she was so busy yesterday with Hank she hardly noticed me. And I hoped we could have our drink and get away without Hank or no other trouble showing up. But when the old man give the pump-handle a shove, old Hank cut loose somewhere inside with a hell-awful screech that come near tearing the shingles off the roof. The old man dropped the pump-handle and whirled on Mrs. Hopple:

"What was that, sister? A lost soul struggling in the talons of Lucifer? If there is sin rampant here, if the Devil holds some pore sinner in his clutches—"

"No," she says, pretty brisk, "it aint nothing as complicated as that, Mister—what did you say your name was?"

"Hosanna Skaggs. An unworthy toiler in the Lord's vineyard."

"No, Brother Skaggs, that was only my husband, Hank. The lordie-goddies is a-nibbling at him as usual, after an overdose of that rocky whisky they call catamount's-milk. I can handle him easy enough. After twenty years of it, I reckon I *ought* to be able to handle him!"

When the old man learned it was whisky a-gnawing on Hank—that settled it! You couldn't of kept him out of there if you had hauled off and knocked him to his knees with a ellum club. The old man marched straight to that door.

AFTER one look at his face Mrs. Hopple knowed enough not to argue, and he marched in like him and God owned the place. Hank let out another crack-of-doom screech, and while I was tying the horses, I heard a terrible scuffling and thrashing-around in the house, and I thought maybe for once the old man had caught the Devil at it and run in under his guard and got his holts. Mrs. Hopple hurried inside, and I tied the horses as quick as I could; I didn't want to miss none of it.

Hank was on the bed and the old man was holding him. And the way that fat, blubbery, baldheaded old drunkard was tearing things up and frothing, beat anything I ever see. The old man was talking smooth and trying to sooth him down but weren't having no luck. Hank was cussing to beat four-of-a-kind, but he

weren't so good at it as three or four men I had heard before. Tom Hands, for one, could cuss rings around Hank and never bother to raise his voice.

Mrs. Hopple slid into another room. Through the open door I see her take a glass and pour out a small dose of whisky from a bottle. She brung it back and handed it to the old man and says:

"Give him his medicine, Brother Skaggs. It'll quiet him."

THE old man took the glass before he knowed what it was, and held out the whisky to Hank. Hank took the glass and gulped the drink in a hurry, like a fish; his hand was shaky, but I noticed he didn't spill none of it. He laid back after that and took things easier. His eyes weren't so wild now, and he quit cussing. The old man let go of him, and I reckon the Devil let up on him too, for a spell. He blinked and pointed at the old man.

"Who, or what, is this—uh—*object*—Mirandy? Or am I just a-seein' 'em again?"

"No, Hank," she says, soft and comforting, "this is Brother Skaggs, a traveling evangelist. He stopped in for water, and kindly offered to give me a hand when you had one of your spells."

"A preacher!" He roared it out like a bull. "So you've rung in the preachers on me? Well, herd him out o' here before I take him apart! Git him out o' here and bring me that bottle!"

"You've just had your whisky. One drink each hour for the first day is all you get. Then we cut it down some more tomorrow, and the next day you'll be yourself again." There was a ring in her voice that let you know he couldn't bulldoze her one inch beyond that system!

The old man was setting on the edge of the bed, and when he heard her say it was whisky she had handed him in that glass—when he knowed that he, *himself*, had fed it to Hank—he jumped up and he looked eight foot four inches tall! He glared at Mrs. Hopple like a cross between Holy Moses and a mountain lion. Why lightning didn't strike that house, right then, and snuff out everybody in it, I don't know.

"Madam! Did you hand me *whisky* to feed this sinner? Did you mislead me to poison this man still further by calling it *medicine?* If you done such a thing, madam, then—like Jezebel, you have become a hand-maiden of Lucifer and pushed this strayed soul one step nearer eternal fire! Hand over that bottle!"

But Mrs. Hopple weren't one mite scared of him:

"Bosh, Brother Skaggs! You can't cut the poor man off too sudden. And there aint no use a-dragging God and the angels into this—no, nor Lucifer and Jezebel and any of *that* bunch, neither. I *won't* give you that bottle to break! And if I've helped to drag my husband to your eternal fire—then *I'll* answer for it!" By jings! Her eyes was snapping, her chin was up and the droop I had saw before in her shoulders weren't there no more. She even looked amazing pretty. She didn't let up then:

"Now, don't waste no more time here, Brother Skaggs. I can handle Hank if I'm left alone. And I won't take orders from *nobody!*"

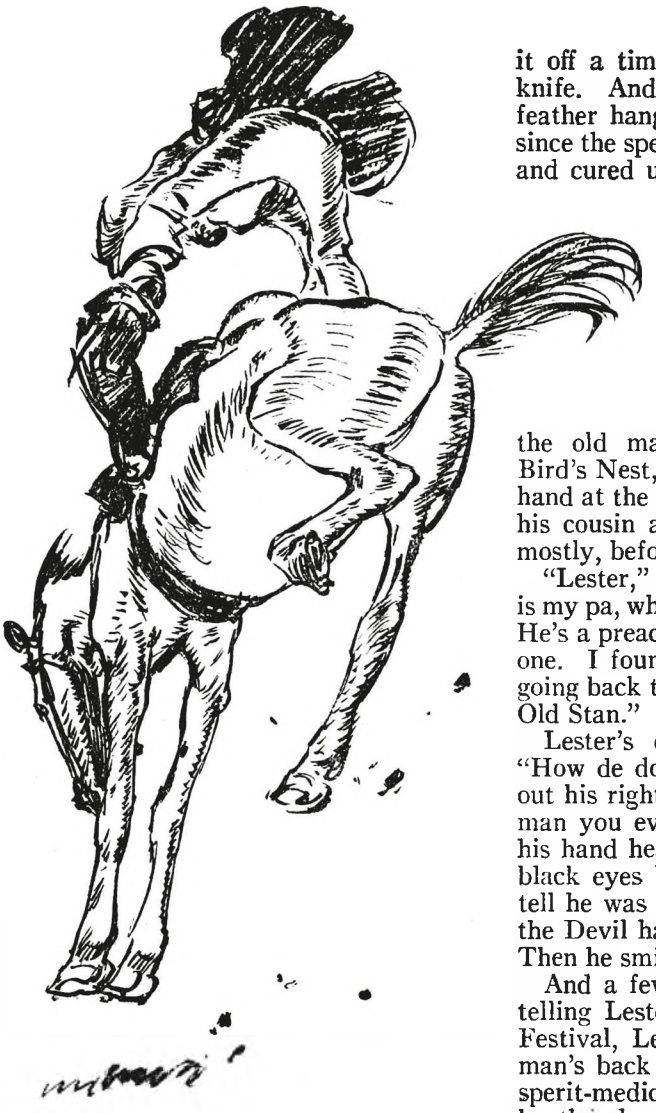
Then Hank began cussing the old man again, and done a better job than he done before. Mrs. Hopple went over close to the old man and whispered him something and laid her hand on his arm and kept it there. Anybody could see the old man was a-struggling, inside, between what he reckoned was his duty and wanting to please her. But it was a terrible hard fight a-raging inside him, and I bet nobody but Mrs. Hopple couldn't of got him to leave. In a minute he lifted his head and looked at the ceiling and prayed, not for Hank but for *Mrs.* Hopple! It was more than average long, too; and after he wound it up she thanked him, and shook his hand, and picked up his hat from the floor and give it to him. And I see her eyes was a-watering.

The old man never said another word but marched straight out, and I follered, and we got on our horses and rode away. He forgot his drink of cold water and never thought of it again. After we had rode maybe three miles, he spoke for the first time.

"Gilead," he says, and his eyes had a far-away, moony look, like Bird's Nest's did the time his heart was bad and he took to blowing on his home-made flute, "Gilead, you have just saw one of God's most noblest creatures, a woman with a heart of melted gold."

PRETTY soon he got powerful uneasy in the saddle, and I knowed he must be chafed almost raw by this time, not being used to it. So I says:

"Pa, why don't you get down and walk a ways? It will rest you some, and you won't get so sore." He pulled in and was about to do it, but after he thought a minute:



The old man's crowbait wheeled and popped down his head—and of all the sunfishing and worm-fence bucking! It was the loco a-working.

"No," he says, "I won't dodge it or try to ease it. I done wrong, Gilead, when I left Satan a clear field at that benighted farmhouse. If the Lord decrees that my nether parts shall chafe and distress me, who am I to crawl out of His just punishments?"

In another hour we was close to the timber where the tepee was hid. And pretty soon a horseback rider come jogging out of the trees, and when he got closer I see it was Lester. So I says:

"Well, if here aint Lester Touch-the-Clouds himself! He's the Injun I was telling you about, Pa, camped in the hills with his cousin Bird's Nest, waiting for me to bring back the grub from town."

Lester was dressed like a white man, as he always was: boots and spurs and overalls and a black shirt and his wide hat; but his hair had growed pretty long and ragged now since Bird's Nest had hacked it off a time or two with his skinning-knife. And he always wore that eagle-feather hanging down over his hat-brim since the sperits had whirled in so prompt and cured up his wound. I hadn't told the old man much about Lester and Bird's Nest, except that Lester was a top hand at the U Cross, and Bird's Nest was his cousin and lived at the Reservation mostly, before we took to the hills.

"Lester," I says, when he rode up, "this is my pa, which I aint saw for a long time. He's a preacher now, and a bang-up good one. I found him in town, and we're a-going back to the U Cross to see Sam and Old Stan."

Lester's eyes studied the old man. "How de do, sir?" he says, and reached out his right hand as polite as any white man you ever see. The old man shook his hand hearty. And from the way his black eyes bored into Lester, you could tell he was a-searching his face to see if the Devil had left any hoof-marks on it. Then he smiled; he liked Lester right off.

And a few minutes later, while I was telling Lester about the Fair and Bean Festival, Lester nodded toward the old man's back and made the sign for "big-sperit-medicine." I reckon he could tell by the gleam in the old man's eyes that he had the Call almighty strong and wouldn't back down for nothing.

Pretty soon the old man lagged behind where he couldn't hear us talking. Lester warned me to go easy and be dead careful after we got to camp. The old man and Bird's Nest living in the same tepee, he said, would be like a mountain lion and a grizzly bear in the same pen.

"Both will be working the same range but riding for different sperit outfits. And you know how it is, Gillie, with *cow*-outfits running different brands on the same range; trouble is bound to poke up its head. And it's a heap sight worse with medicine-men! Suppose your old man gets the idea that Bird's Nest is ghost-dancing around and swinging a wide loop and aiming to cut you out of the herd your old man is a-rounding up to ship to the white man's heaven? If you think that won't cause trouble, then it's because

you're too young to know what trouble is! And suppose Bird's Nest thinks he sees me trying to break back from the Injun herd *he* aims to deliver to the Happy Hunting Ground? If you think that wouldn't cause a three-star brand of trouble, then you don't know medicine-men! Why, it would prize-up hell by the roots and put a chunk under it!"

I says: "I reckon medicine-men or preachers working for different sperit-brands is a lot like cow-men and sheep-men on the same range; there can't be no peace between 'em."

"That's it, Gillie, that's it exac'ly!"

It weren't long before we rode up the cañon where the tepee was pitched and saw Bird's Nest standing, still as a rock, in front of it. Bird's Nest come and held the old man's horse while Lester helped him ease out of the saddle.

Lester said something in Injun, and Bird's Nest says, "How!" And him and the old man shook hands—and it was the last time they ever *did* shake hands! While they stood there facing each other, there was something, I couldn't tell what, that seemed to come out of their eyes and meet in the middle with a *clash!*

Lester held open the door-flap, and the old man went into the tepee. And of course, the first thing he done was to turn to the left! That botched-up things right at the start; something was bound to hit us now! Bird's Nest never said a word out loud. But he looked at Lester like he meant to say: "See, that's what we get because you and Gillie didn't have better sense than to lug along a white man. We're in for it now!" And he reached for the white-sage and brushed out the tepee, bearing down hard on the old man's tracks in the dirt.

CHAPTER XII

THE fire was already going in the tepee because Bird's Nest had saw us coming a long way off. The old man flopped down on a blanket and give off a deep, shaking sigh, and that was the nearest thing to a whimper we heard out of him. He was frightful sore and raw where he had set in the saddle—around the places where the Lord had punished him for listening to Mrs. Hopple. If the Lord had took a rough file, and a day off, and scraped him from sunup to dark, it couldn't of been much worse.

We had plenty of grub now with the stuff I had brung from town, and Lester cooked a meal and set the kettle and frying-pan in front of the old man. The steaming kettle with everything stewed up together in a mulligan was a mighty nice-looking mess. It made you hungry just to look at that meal. But the old man bowed his head over it and told the Lord that we was ever so much obliged for this feed which had fell down before us from heaven, like the stuff which dropped down to the Iseralites in another wilderness a long time ago.

ME and Lester didn't mind that prayer except for the long time it took. But Bird's Nest, who had already reached into the kettle and snaked out a hunk of jerky and was gnawing at it, weren't so broad-minded. He had opened his mouth wide to get a extra good chew when the prayer started. He stopped with his mouth open. And a kind of horrified look spread over his face. He listened about one second, then gouged in with a finger and shot the big mouthful clean across the tepee. It hit the ground, kerflop! And Bird's Nest jumped up like he was bit by a striped bee and stalked out without a word.

Everything in camp was so new to the old man, and Injun ways was such a mystery to him that he never knowed what was a-bothering Bird's Nest; I reckon he thought maybe his teeth hit a bone, or he choked. Through the open door-hole I see Bird's Nest build himself a little fire of twigs. When he got it going, he come back and reached down a handful of sacred white-sage from a lodgepole and took his medicine-pouch and stalked outside again to his own private fire. And he held his medicine in the smoke to purify it.

Well, me and Lester and the old man et our supper together, but Bird's Nest wouldn't take chances with us. When we finished, he come and got the frying-pan and took it out to his fire. And after he had brushed the pan with white-sage, he cooked himself a mess of jerky and et it alone.

Well, after Bird's Nest finished his supper outside, he clumb a little hill and begun his regular evening chant of praise and complimunts to the sun. And after a while the old man stepped outside for a minute and seen Bird's Nest up there on the hill bending and straightening his knees in time with his song.

When the old man come a-marching back, he looked taller than he did that time he tried to lay down the law to Mrs.

Hopple and make her give up that bottle of whisky! He slammed a look at Lester and fixed his eye on him and held it there, steady as a rock church. You could see he smelt a whole herd of rats.

"Would you be good enough to explain to me, sir," he rumbled in his beard, "just what your cousin is a-doing on that hilltop? Can it be possible in this day and age that any human wretch could bow down to some strange and outlandish fetish, or indulge himself in blasfemous worship of the sun? Because if he is, I and my son Gilead will leave this camp at once—tonight! I have no time to waste in exhortation with a lone heathen while the U Cross and all its murdering countryside languishes in the grip of Lucifer."

Lester says:

"My cousin is worshiping the Almighty on that hilltop." (He meant the almighty sun.) "He tells me that he feels in closer touch when standing on a hill. Is it true, sir, that churches is sometimes built on hilltops because of that very reason? Or am I mistook about this?"

For a person who didn't know *how* to lie, or who, for some reason never *did* lie, Lester done mighty well. And right afterward Lester come out with a few more words that saved me from being drug off into the mountains alone with the old man and maybe starved to death. It fixed things so he was satisfied to go along with Lester and Bird's Nest.

"It's a turrible pity, Mr. Skaggs, that my cousin talks nothing but Injun." Of course, Bird's Nest could talk pretty good white-man talk. These lies tonight was the first real out-and-out lies I had ever heard Lester tell. And to anyone who was missing Beavertooth's lies as bad as I was, it was mighty encouraging.

I remembered then that it was Lester who had thought up the scheme to lug in the tame bear and chain him in the willers behind the barn to scare Steeldust. All Injuns is foxy, but Lester had anybody beat, white or red, that ever I see—unless maybe it was Old Stan. If the old man thought Bird's Nest couldn't understand a word he said, why, there weren't no chance for 'em to tangle, arguing about whose medicine was strongest. I can tell you, I was proud of Lester!

BIRD'S NEST come back into the tepee after the sun went down and Lester talked some to him in Injun. Maybe he told Bird's Nest how to act and what to do around the old man, and above all not to let on that he knowed one word of white-man talk. Anyway, Bird's Nest hung up his medicine-pouch and shield and quiver again on the tripod at the head of his blanket and set down. But his little black eyes was a-smoldering in his head, a good deal like the old man's.

HE had got wilder and wilder-looking since we had been out in the hills. He had quit wearing his white-man's hat, and kept a eagle-feather in his hair instead. And once or twice, a few weeks ago, when Lester had offered to cut his hair with his skinning-knife, Bird's Nest wouldn't stand for it. He said if the sperits wanted his hair to be short, they would make it grow short; that nobody else didn't have no business to monkey with it. Well, that seemed reasonable. But I said to him, one time:

"Bird's Nest, if you dasn't chop off your hair and change it from the way the sperits make it grow, then what right have you got to wear that eagle-feather in it? If the sperits wanted a eagle-feather in your hair, they would make it *grow* there, wouldn't they? They could do it easy enough."

Bird's Nest said that weren't the same thing at all, and everybody, from the first Injuns down, knowed that feathers was good luck, specially eagle feathers. And since the sperits had arranged things so he could kill a eagle—if they had gone to that much trouble for him—and he was so mossback he wouldn't wear a single one of that eagle's feathers, why, you couldn't blame the sperits if they got plumb disgusted, and quit him cold.

Well, I got to thinking about all this tonight when I looked across the fire at Bird's Nest and seen the eagle-feather in his long hair. And pretty soon the old man's beard, where the Lost Lamb yanked out a handful, began to itch him, and he rubbed and scratched it a good deal. So I says;

"Pa, why don't you cut off your beard? It wouldn't itch you then hardly at all."

"No," he says, "it wouldn't. And I suppose it aint exactly a sin to go without a beard. There have been plenty of God-fearing men without beards, that is sure. But still—it seems to my pore way of thinking that if the good Lord had wanted me to appear before the world beardless, He is fully capable of arranging that no beard shall grow upon the chin of His most lowly servant."

I remembered Bird's Nest and his hair, just then, and it made me think a lot, and pretty deep, too; but you can bet I

knowed better than to blab what I thought. We was already due for trouble enough, and only a sheep-wit would jump out and stir things up at a time like this. Pretty soon the old man unwrapped the bundle of clothes he had brung rolled in his blankets, and took out his Bible and thumbed it over and read some to himself.

When Bird's Nest seen the Book, he got up, kind of careless, and moseyed over to the lodgepole where he kept the sacred white-sage handy. He fingered it some as if he weren't thinking of nothing, and broke off a spray. But I see that his eyes was gleaming, and he was watching that Bible mighty close. When he set down, he broke the white-sage into four pieces and laid 'em on the ground around him, one facing each Entrance-to-the-World; east, south, west and north. That made him feel a lot better. He was safe now, even if the Book did offend our good-medicine sperits out there at the edge of the world on guard for us night and day.

When I crawled into my blanket that night and tried to go to sleep, I got to worrying about the dangerousness of everything the old man had already done, and was likely to do. I added it all up in my mind, and a whole raft of things come a-crowding in on me and swooping down, and I got downright shivery. I couldn't of been worse scared if he had hauled off and cussed-out every single sperit in the air and even the outlaw ones under the earth.

WELL, I laid there shivering, and pretty soon a hoot-owl begun away off in the timber. That is always a dangerous sign, because you can't tell if it is a bronco sperit letting on to *be* a owl. But pretty soon a coyote tuned up and the spooky *"who-o-o-o—who, who,"* quit. So I was sure it was just a owl; a coyote can't make a sperit quit anything. But I laid there in my blanket and wished this trip was over and we was all at the U Cross safe and sound. After a long time the old man begun to fidget and toss. He bucked around in his blankets some, and mumbled and talked in his sleep. And once he set up and ripped-out, pleasant as could be, with a string of good old-fashioned cusswords. I reckon he was dreaming about the gay and lively times when Lucifer led him into all that rosy dissipation.

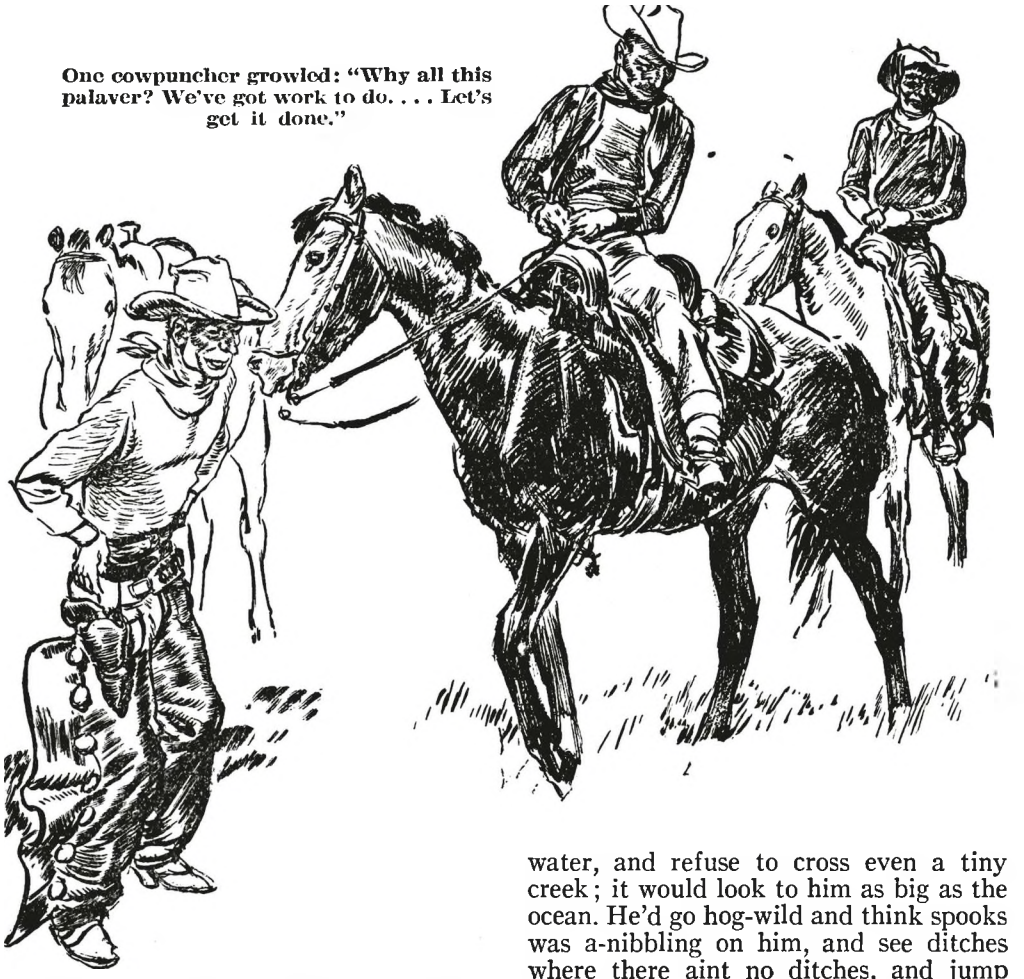
Then I begun to think back, and I remembered why I had left the U Cross; I had kind of forgot it lately. And I see now there weren't no reason for me to leave. The old man, at the revival, had told about his life, how he done everything in the book but murder. And now, of course, since he had reformed, and never killed nobody anyway, there weren't no danger of his blood a-hounding and prodding me to jump out and butcher folks. So I knowed I could go back to the U Cross without putting the bee on Sam and Aunt Emmy by massacreeing the neighbors. That took a big load off my mind. And as soon as I knowed I could go back there without danger to nobody, I was almighty anxious to *get* there. But the next day the old man was still so sore, where God had punished him, that Lester said we had better wait another day before we started. So we laid around camp, and the old man didn't try to talk to Bird's Nest, and Bird's Nest seemed to be satisfied right down to the ground. Anybody could see he reckoned the less him and the old man had to do with each other, the better the sperits would like it. And you can bet I weren't such a fool as to let the old man see me talking white-man to Bird's Nest.

LESTER says to me next morning: "Gillie, I can see from the signs and signal-smokes it won't be no simple chore to get your old man to the U Cross all in one piece. And when we *do* get him there—well, I reckon me and Bird's Nest better not go *quite* all the way with you. We'll just drift back to the mountains, but we won't leave you till you're so close to the ranch you can't get lost.

"You can see yourself, Gillie, it wouldn't do for me to be seen around the U Cross so soon after shooting that bush-whacker. And then, there aint no telling what Sam and Old Stan will do about your old man. Sam and Old Stan can get pretty violent if you push 'em too far. You can't tell *what* might happen if your old man goes at 'em wrong. And you can't tell what they might do to me for bringing him there. *You* aint taking no chances. You're safe, being so young."

"Well, we aint there yet by no means," I says, "and maybe we can tame him down by that time."

"No," Lester says, powerful sure, "that is one thing we won't *never* be able to do, even with all the luck in the world! The only thing we can do is to be careful and not argue with him, and try to keep him and Bird's Nest from tangling. Then when we deliver him at the ranch—him and Old Stan and Sam will have to work



One cowpuncher growled: "Why all this palaver? We've got work to do. . . . Let's get it done."

it out between 'em. And my advices to you is—stand from under and be ready to duck!"

Lester looked up and seen the old man out where the horses was grazing. He had a bunch of leaves in his hand and was petting his old crowbait and offering him the leaves to eat. Lester says:

"Run over there, Gillie, and see what he's a-feeding that cayuse."

I went in a hurry, and you can drownd me if he hadn't found a bunch of loco-weed! But the horse, like most horses, had sense enough, so far, not to touch it. The old man says:

"Gilead, my horse don't seem to know what kindness is. He refuses to eat this lovely plant. He is a doubter, and I have named him Thomas, after the Doubting Thomas at the revival." And he went on coaxing him to eat it.

The horse reached out and nudged the loco-weed with his lips, so I snatched it in a hurry, and says:

"You almost done it then, Pa! That pretty weed aint nothing but loco! And if he had et it, he'd go plumb crazy and be scared almost to death at the sight of water, and refuse to cross even a tiny creek; it would look to him as big as the ocean. He'd go hog-wild and think spooks was a-nibbling on him, and see ditches where there aint no ditches, and jump over them spook-ditches, and get worse and we'd have to shoot him. You ask Lester—*he'll* tell you!"

"Hand me back that plant, Gilead!" He looked so stern that I done it before I thought, like a fool. Then he says:

"Yes, I have no doubt that Lester Touch-the-Clouds and his cousin Bird's Nest, or whatever his heathen name is, would both say the same thing. It might be part of their old Devil-worshiping superstitions. The blasfemous idea that God would create such a lovely plant, and then poison it and make it grow here in His wilderness to poison dumb animals, is in line with other idolatrous beliefs of savages." And he shoved that loco toward the horse again, and told him to have faith and eat it. I was afraid to argue with him, and in a minute it was too late anyway—the horse grabbed it and munched it up and swallered the whole thing. The old man smiled, satisfied.

"See, Gilead? Thomas is no longer a doubter. He has Faith at last, like his namesake in town. And while we are on the subject of things speritual, Gilead, I

"If you mean to call me a liar, then step off your horses. There is times when the Lord permits his humble servants to scourge the unbelievers!"

would like to point a moral for you to ponder." And he give me a long sermon about the creek-bank that caved and doused him in the water earlier that morning. He said it looked harmless, just a-coaxing somebody to walk on it, like Lucifer coaxes you to foller along the rosy path that leads straight to Gehenna. He said the whole thing was a valuable warning to him; only his *body* was doused this time, but it was a reminder that his soul, or anybody's soul, could be doused into the Pit just as easy. He told me to think it over and ponder and be mighty awful careful.

I had saw that crumbly creek-bank with no grass-roots to hold the dirt. It was bound to cave. And I thought if the Devil come after *me* and weren't no foxier than that when he laid out his traps, I could dodge *him* all right. But you bet I didn't say what I thought. Anyway, I was too scared about that loco to say anything.

WE set out next morning at daylight. Most of the day the old man kept pretty busy shifting around to find a soft place in his saddle. But he branched out a few times and asked Lester what they had learned him about God at the Injun school; and he told Lester some mighty important things which he said weren't generally known about the Flood. But every time he got started on something like that, Lester had to hurry ahead and look over the country for a trail, or study

some old horse-tracks, or tighten the pack. But once, when the old man asked if his tribe didn't have a old story, which he called a "legend," telling how Noah wrangled all the animals into the ark and saved 'em from drownding, Lester come near wrecking everything. He answered before he thought. He says:

"No indeed. The Thunder Bird took care of all that—" But he seen the old man straighten in his saddle, and Lester says, quick as anything:

"You see, Mr. Skaggs, my people believe—that is, *used* to believe, before the white-man brung the True Word—that a Angel put all the animals on earth for the use of the Injun tribes. Oh, yes, they called that angel a bird, the Thunder Bird, because they didn't have no word for *angel* in the Injun tongues. But anybody can see they meant *angel,* all right."

THE old man was interested as could be and studied a minute. Then he says:

"That might be the Angel of the Flaming Sword who is often pictured in the midst of thunder and lightning. No doubt he revealed himself to the patriarks of your people. Now, if they had been God-fearing men like the old profits, they would of knowed who he was and wouldn't of mixed him up with a mere bird. And the rest of your people ever after would of been spared the awful—" But just then Lester seen that the pack needed to be straightened, and rode back in a hurry to fix it.

Another time that day the old man told us about something he called, "original sin." He was almighty feverish and sot about it; and from what I heard him say, this one is a thundering big and gloomy sin with no fun to it like dissipation. It is a jolt of the awfullest worst luck you can think of, slapped on to you and cinched tight like a doublerig saddle by somebody, the Devil, I reckon, the very first second you're born, long before your eyes are open. Well, there aint no possible way for you to dodge *this* sin; you aint got a Chinaman's chance to duck it. All you can do is to take it and don't argue about it, and don't think for a minute that maybe it has missed *you*. Because it *can't* miss you. It can't miss nobody. Everybody has it. So then, what you have to do for the rest of your life—if you want to get into heaven at the end—is to try and make up for it, and repent, and wish to goodness you didn't have it.

It sounded reasonable as could be, because when I knowed the Devil had me wrapped up in sin right from the start—why, it explained a lot of things; I could understand now why trouble was always just a-waiting its chance to light on me—like a few times when Sinful had fell and scuffed me up some; and Sam and Aunt Emmy coming at me with all them schoolbooks; and now me picked ahead of everybody else in the world to bring the old man to the U Cross and load Sam and Old Stan with more trouble when they was already snarled up in a sheep and cattle war. It *explained* a lot of things, but it didn't *worry* me, because I weren't trying to sneak into heaven. And in the Happy Hunting Ground they don't give a rip about a thing like original sin; they wouldn't even know you had it.

We didn't have no more excitement for a long time; and then, quite a while after he et the loco-weed, the old man's horse begun to stray off from the others and keep to himself when they was grazing. He was a-looking everywhere for more of that loco. I only hoped he wouldn't find enough of it to send him plumb crazy before we got to the U Cross. Well, he did! And even a chicken-brain could see that what made the old man feed it to him in the first place was either that old original sin, or else the sperits prodded him to do it to get even for everything he done agin them; I couldn't be sure which.

We was traveling through a cow-country, and considerable cattle was scattered around on the hills, and a few bands of range horses. We was still a long way from the U Cross, but things had been going pretty smooth, a heap too smooth, which is always a dangerous sign. When things is booming along the smoothest, the sperits, and the Devil too, I reckon, get restless and begin to bunch up, and make plans, and lay out plots agin you.

ONE morning we packed up as usual and started. Bird's Nest was leading the pack-horse; me and Lester and the old man was riding ahead. We come to a little seep of a water-hole. Sinful and Lester's horse splashed across and never give it a thought. But the old man's crowbait let out a snort as long as a lass-rope, and wheeled and popped down his head, and of all the sunfishing and worm-fence bucking ever you see, he done it! It was the loco a-working, and I reckon that trickle of water looked to him as big as the ocean. The old man made one grab for the saddle-horn and missed it by three feet, and the way that locoed pony stepped out from under him was al-

mighty pretty. Well, that would of been all right if the sperits had been reasonable, and satisfied to see him throwed and some hide scuffed off. But I reckon he had made 'em too thumping mad to let him off that easy.

WHEN he hit the ground and his horse took another jump, I see his foot was hung in the stirrup! And that locoed horse, a-squealing and pitching, snaked him along the ground, a-kicking and lamming away at him! My insides seemed to quit me. It made me sick as a cat, desperate sick. And like a shot it come over me that this was *my* old man, my own pa, and I never knowed till that minute how much I liked him. I heard a shot beside me, and then another; and that crazy, locoed horse went down to his knees and rolled over on his side. He shivered a couple of times and laid still, dead as a wolf. Lester had jerked his thirty-thirty from the scabbard and shot twice almost before the horse could get really started. It was wonderful fast work.

Lester and Bird's Nest was over to the old man before I got there. I reckon it took me a minute to get back my lights and livers which had quit me at the start. The old man was pretty groggy, and when they pried his foot loose from the stirrup, the first thing he done after he gave thanks, was to thank Lester too, mighty fine. He said Lester was the insterment sent to deliver him in the hour of need. He was bruised up pretty bad, and his clothes was mostly tore off, and he was so shook up he couldn't ride no more that day if he had a horse. So we unpacked and made camp by the water-hole. After Lester boiled up some tallow and juniper leaves and sneaked some white-sage in it to keep the bronco sperits off and put that salve on the bruised places, the old man says to me:

"Gilead, you can see from what happened to me just now what a offensif sin it was when I harkened to the Delilah-voice of the misguided handmaiden Mrs. Hopple. I must leave no stones unturned to make up for it; I must bring the Light at all costs to the unfortunates dragging out their miserable existences at the U Cross. And when I have showed *them* the Way—I must return to the dismal Hopple farm and lead that bewildered woman to Grace."

I says:

"I reckon maybe, Pa, it might be a better plan if you made a grab for Mrs. Hopple first. You said yourself she's a-teetering along close to the brink and might topple over into the Pit any minute. Now the U Cross sinners is sunk so deep in the mire, and there is so many of 'em, it will take a long time to round them up and garner *them* in. And if you was to get butchered in that tough country, then you wouldn't have no chance to exhort with Mrs. Hopple; old Lucifer would reach out and nab her sure."

"No, Gilead," he says, "I have started for the U Cross. It is true my horse has been offered up, a sacrifice to my neglect of duties at the Hopple farm,"—he never mentioned the loco-weed again,—"but I have made up my mind; I will go to the worst place, the U Cross, first. And I will walk if necessary, as I deserve to do."

That was the last time I wasted any wind trying to steer him away from Sam. And when I told Lester, Lester says:

"Gillie, your old man has sure got his points. He can't ride a horse no better than a fish can dance; he couldn't ride in a covered wagon with side-boards and not fall out. But that don't mean he aint a *man!* But shucks! Nobody walks, in a country over-run with horses. It aint sensible. It's a long way yet to the U Cross. Me and Bird's Nest can rope a broke range-horse using around this water-hole. When we get to the ranch, we can turn it loose. It'll come straight back to its home range."

This plan beat walking forty ways, but we both knowed better than to tell the old man we was just "borrowing" a horse. He would rear up and call it horse-stealing. It would be too risky to go to a ranch and dicker for a horse, and be seen, and maybe have a posse sent after us. So in the afternoon Lester and Bird's Nest saddled up, and Lester told the old man they had saw a ranch and would ride over and borrow a horse. The old man says:

"If the good ranch people are sure they can spare me a horse, I will be most grateful." And he laid back and slept awhile.

Well, when Lester and Bird's Nest got back after dark, leading a gentle, old, sleepy sorrel, I thought for sure the sperits had let up on us. But I was about as far wrong as ever I was in my life!

CHAPTER XIII

NEXT morning the old man was in a swet to get started. I reckon after he was bucked off and punished so hard for leaving the Devil a clear field at the

Hopple farm, he was just a-burning to get to the U Cross and whirl in and show the Lord what he could do.

He didn't look nearly so good now as he did when I first seen him in the Revival tent. His eye and his upper lip, where the Lost Lamb landed a couple, weren't altogether healed yet. The black was gone from his eye; it was now a sickly canary yeller with a border of blue, the color of bluebottle flies. And his upper lip still stuck out in front like a cowcatcher on a engine, or a rabbit's lip when he reaches for a leaf. Then, there was a layer of scratches, where the sagebrush gouged him when he was drug, crisscrossing his face every whichaway. One ear had bounced on a rock and it was off-center and looked like it was listening to Voices, and his beard, where the Lamb tore out a handful, looked like calves had been browsing on it. From his looks now, you'd never know he was a favorite toiler in the Vineyard.

Well, the new horse Lester roped at the water-hole was gentle enough. And while the old man never said a word about feeding the loco to his other horse, I watched him close, and he didn't feed *nothing* to *this* one. He liked his new horse and didn't have much trouble staying on, and he said he would write a long letter to its generous owner, when we sent the horse back, and thank him, and maybe add a text and tell how bread cast upon the waters is dead sure to come a-galloping home like this horse. If he had thought, even for a minute, that Lester just roped this cayuse and said nothing to nobody—why, he would of swarmed off so quick it would make your head ake!

THE third morning we packed up and set out, Bird's Nest leading the pack-horse, and me and Lester and the old man riding ahead. We rode on until Lester seen a bunch of elk. We was pretty low on fresh meat, so he said he would take Bird's Nest and the pack-horse and foller the elk.

"Keep straight on through this basin," Lester says. "Don't cross no divides, and you can't go wrong. We'll butcher a elk and catch up in the afternoon."

So Lester and Bird's Nest and the pack-horse went off through the timber. Me and the old man talked about all kinds of things as we rode along together. He seemed to know almost everything. He told me about Adam, and how lonesome he got in the Garden. And he told how Jehovah, when He seen how lonesome Adam was, hauled off and yanked out a skinning-knife or something he had handy and whacked off one of Adam's ribs. He took that rib and done something with it, but the old man didn't say just what. I reckon he made some thundering powerful medicine over it, because lo, in about two shakes there was Eve, all created and everything! And then he explained mighty careful and exact how the world was made in six days and what a turrible big job it was. I didn't tell him that Bird's Nest's sperits could do it in one day and not hurry neither, as they had proved when they done it to give the Thunder Bird a place to light and rest.

WE rode along maybe ten or fifteen miles after Lester and Bird's Nest left us. The old man was explaining why Samson's long hair give him all that hell-awful strength, and I had made up my mind to let my hair grow and see how it worked on me, when I looked back and seen six cowpunchers coming at a lope.

They rode up, spurs a-jingling and bridle-bits a-tinkling and saddles creaking—music you don't hear nowhere but on the cow-range. They was a business-like outfit if ever I see one! Every puncher had a rifle in the scabbard and a six-shooter on his hip, which showed they was a-looking for something or somebody besides cattle. Cowpunchers don't clutter up their saddles with rifles unless they're on business mixed up with outlaws of some kind.

Their faces was kind of set, and rocky-looking, like they weren't on no picnic. They pulled in beside us and looked the old man over. And as I said before, he didn't look very good now.

The old man spoke up cheerful as meadowlarks. I reckon he was interested in cowpunchers:

"How-de-do?" he says. "You men seem to be in a hurry this fine day."

One of the bunch give a short laugh:

"No, I reckon we aint in a hurry no *more*. Be we, boys?"

Another says: "No, no more need to hurry." And another throwed a leg over his saddle-horn and took out the makin's and begun rolling himself a smoke. He says, slow and drawly:

"We can get it done and get back to the round-up wagon long before sundown. There's one good thing about this foothill country; you never have to go far to find a tree—when you need one."

Another says: "Down on the plains, now, it might be a long drill to timber,

That creek-bank looked harmless . . . the whole thing was a valuable warning: only his body was doused—but his soul could be doused into the Pit just as easy.

anyway to a tree *big* enough. But here everything is handy."

Like the awfullest sheepwit, I didn't know yet what they was a-driving at. Then one, who seemed to be a straw-boss or a wagon-boss, looked hard at me:

"Boy, what are you a-doing with this *hombre?*" And he jerked his thumb toward the old man.

"He's my pa. We're on our way to the U Cross, Sam Bowman's ranch, and—"

But the old man spoke up, still as cheerful as catbirds:

"Gentlemen, this is my son Gilead. My name is Skaggs, Hosanna Skaggs, a toiler in the Lord's vineyard—one of the humblest, I might add."

Well, if you could of saw their faces! One puncher laughed till he rocked in the saddle. Two or three others laughed and the straw-boss grinned, wide as a catfish.

The first puncher slapped the leg of his chaps with his open hand:

"Well if that don't beat hell!"

At that, another let go with that old whiskery joke:

"Sure. That's what any preacher is out to do—to beat hell!" I reckon they had never heard it before, because they laughed pretty hard. But the straw-boss weren't laughing. And he says:

"If it won't be a-both'ring you too much, Reverunt, mebbe you can exhort and uplift us enough so we'll know where at you promoted that sorrel hoss you're a-forkin'."

Then it all come over me in a rush! These punchers was out after horse-thieves, and here was the old man setting up there on a "borrowed" horse, a horse roped at a water-hole and nothing said to nobody about it, with a "hatchet" brand as big as your hat on its left flank, a brand they surely knowed only too well! When I remembered how quick punchers string up horse-thieves, I got weak, so weak I couldn't hardly set on Sinful. I see in a flash we was in the worst jackpot anybody *could* be in! And I see now what they meant by "trees handy," and a tree "big enough." Everything inside of me sunk right down, clear down to my knees, until I felt so rickety that if Sinful had stumbled, I would of fell off and died in my tracks!

The old man answered, chipper as could be, his face still a-beaming: "We borrowed this horse three days ago at a ranch. The good people generously loaned him to us."

"*Borrowed* him, eh?" says the straw-boss.

Then the old man began to get the drift of things. He drawed himself up in the saddle, and his beard begun to curl.

"Do you mean to insinerate that this horse was *stole?*" The way he spoke the last word would of withered up most anybody.

But the straw-boss says, slow and drawly: "Perhaps you can tell us who loaned you that hoss, Reverunt?"

"Why, no," says the old man, "I can't. If Lester Touch-the-Clouds, a Injun of our party, was here, he could give you the name of the generous owner. But Lester and his cousin Bird's Nest, another Injun, are off hunting for meat. They will catch up with us a little later. If you men care to ride with us until then—"

One cowpuncher growled to the straw-boss:

"Why all this palaver, Ben? Here's this old hoss-thief a-setting there guilty as hell on a stolen hoss, a-stringin' us along. We've got work to do, and a long ride back to the wagon. Let's fly at it and get it done."

The old man got mad then, and I'm a Chinaman if he didn't swarm off his horse and start a-rolling up his sleeves.

"If you mean to call me a liar, then step off your horses, one at a time or two at a time, it don't make no difference! I am a humble worker in the Lord's vineyard, but there is times when the Lord permits His humble servants to scourge the unbelievers, even as Jesus drove the money-changers from the temple."

Well, in about two shakes one puncher took down his rope, shook out a loop, throwed it over the old man's shoulders, took his dallies and jumped his horse ahead. He jerked the old man off his feet and drug him a short ways. The straw-boss and one other jumped down, and the way they hog-tied him showed they weren't no slouches when it come to tying steers on the range. By this time I had woke up and piled off too, and before they knowed what I was up to, I had cut that saddle rope with my pocket-knife. If you want to find out sometime what makes a cowpuncher fighting mad the quickest—just cut his rope. The man who owned it give me the worst cussing I almost ever heard up to that time, and you bet I went back at him and give him one almost as good! Well, then I had my insides back in place, and I went up to the straw-boss and told him how we got that horse, and how we never told the old man that we just took it at the water-hole, and how it weren't his fault. And that he really was a preacher going to the U Cross on God's business.

BUT the only thing the boss says after all my talk was:

"Boy, when it's over, you'll come to the wagon with us. If this old buzzard really is your paw, then you'll be well rid of him. And if he aint, you'll be well rid of him too."

They tied the old man's arms again behind his back with the cut rope, and two others throwed him back in the saddle. They picked up his reins and started for the nearest patch of timber, leading his horse. Oh, they knowed just what they was doing, and nobody said a word. By that time I was almost wild, begging the straw-boss to listen to me. But he rode straight ahead like he was deef. They all acted like they didn't hear one word I said. It was the awfulest helpless feeling to be talking and yelling and blubbering at 'em, and to have every man in the outfit act like he was deef and dumb. You couldn't get nowhere agin that!

THE old man knowed now what they was figgering on, and for a minute he was kind of dazed. But in another minute, he come out of his dazed spell and lifted his head. And you could see he weren't one bit scared!

Well, when we got to the timber, two or three punchers went ahead looking for a tree with a strong limb the right height, and pretty soon somebody called that he had found one. They led the old man's horse under the limb. The straw-boss took down his rope and dropped the loop over the old man's neck, while two punchers held his horse. The boss says:

"You bein' a preacher,"—and he grinned that same catfish grin again,—"maybe you'd like to let off a few prayers. If you do, turn your wolf loose and fly at it. It's your last chance."

The old man see there weren't no use wasting talk; they wouldn't listen, and there weren't nothing he could do now. He set still on his horse with his arms bound tight behind him and that lariat around his neck, and the other end slung over the limb. And you can drownd me if his face didn't look like he was plumb *contented* with everything, like he weren't even sorry they was going to string him up! It beat anything ever I see! The straw-boss watched him, kind of puzzled. I reckon he thought anybody about to be swung off would bawl and yell and plead and take-on. But the old man says, as calm as ever he said anything in his life:

"It's all clear to me now. I thought they borrowed this horse, but from what my son has told you, I see they *stole* it. That is a sin *somebody* must pay for. If the Lord has selected me, even as Jehovah selected the scapegoat to be sent forth into the wilderness, then I am ready. Take my boy away until this is over, and afterward see that he gets to the

U Cross. Do this, and I am willing to atone for that black sin."

"Sure," says the straw-boss, looking into his face curious as could be, "we'll do that much, anyway."

I had quit blubbering by that time. I reckon there weren't another blubber in me. But now it was my turn to go into a daze. It had happened so quick it didn't seem real, and I thought maybe I was sound asleep and dreaming. Then a puncher lifted me off Sinful and started to lead me away where I couldn't see it. But the old man called me, and I run to him and hung on to his leg. He give me a pretty strict sermon and told me to foller in the True Path. But I couldn't hear much of it, I was howling too loud. At last he quit trying to make me listen, and nodded to the puncher waiting to lead me away, and says to the straw-boss:

"I will not delay you further."

As I said, the boss had been watching the old man's face; and now, when he seen how calm and satisfied it looked, at the very last minute—why, he just couldn't figger it out. And when the puncher led me away again and everything was whirling around, and my brains was numb as a lump of rock in my head, and I couldn't hardly see the sunshine and the trees, the straw-boss reached up and throwed that lariat off the old man's neck.

"Boys," he says, like his mind was made up, "this won't do. There is some mistake here. No hoss-thief this side of hell could set up there and take it like this old buzzard; it just aint in the cards! We'll wait for them Injuns and see if he might be telling the truth."

ONE or two rared-up and argued with him, but most said he was dead right. So I come running back and they untied the old man's arms, and we all set down under the trees. The old man and the straw-boss walked off together and set under another tree and talked, while me and the cowpunchers got friendly.

They had heard of the sheep and cattle war on the other side of the mountains around the U Cross, and asked me about it. But I couldn't tell nothing of that, I had been away so long. But I told about Sam and Old Stan and Beavertooth, everybody at the U Cross. They said that the sheep and cattle war had got worse, and it didn't look like there would be any end to it. I told about Tom Hands, the hired killer, and how he come to our camp, and how Lester got the drop on him and took away his catridges and almost *kicked* him out of camp with his empty guns. One puncher says:

"I've heard tell of that Tom Hands. They say he's the toughest and lowdownest skunk that ever forked a cayuse."

WELL, we set there a time talking and gassing, waiting for Lester and Bird's Nest to come along through the basin. The straw-boss and the old man had been talking quiet a little way off, but now they begun to get feverish and het-up and talked louder, and I see the old man come down with his fist on the ground and heard him say:

"The Doctrine of Original Sin is as plain and sure as A. B. C. And if you can't see it and understand it, sir, then so much the worse for your immortal soul! I could show you where it says in Holy Writ—but the Book is on the pack-horse—I can show you in so many words, set down there plain as the nose on your face—"

"I don't give two whoops in hell *what* it says! You can't tell me that a sin is cinched onto innocent babies the minute they're whelped, because somebody, ten thousand year ago—"

"How dare you let your tongue utter such blasfemy when you know—after I tell you I can *prove* it and show you where it's writ down, when that pack-horse gets here? It's only God's mercy you don't wither in your tracks, sir!" The old man's face looked now a good deal like it did when he was a-hammering it into the Devil at the revival.

"Wither or no wither, you can't make me believe no such a nightmare as that, now or never!" And the boss got up, mad as a wolf.

The old man stood up too, and they glared at each other. Me and the punchers quit talking and watched 'em. The old man whanged his right fist down into his open left hand with a thump.

"But I tell you it is written—"

"Boys," the straw-boss called to the punchers, "I reckon we better string up this hidebound old pulpit-buster after all, just for luck. Hoss-thief or no hoss-thief, any Messiah-whooper who lays it down cold that babies is double-crossed from the jump, and bound to pay up for what some dog-robber pulled off ten thousand year ago—any bird-head who makes such plumb outrageous claims needs hangin' as bad as ary hoss-thief who ever throwed a leg over a lifted cayuse on a moonlight night!"

Even then the old man wouldn't quit arguing. I reckon he thought it was his duty again. He stood there with his hair a-blowing in the wind and his beard a-curling. He roared:

"Any man who would go agin the Book deliberate, agin the words of the old Patriarcks handed down—"

"Hey, Pokey! Bring that rope!" The straw-boss was so thundering mad the rest begun to get mad too—getting mad is catching, like smallpox. One or two jumped for a rope, and they would of strung him up, then and there for sure, if one hadn't called out and pointed to a dust-cloud coming up the basin. They stopped when they see it, and set down. But the boss told the old man to shut up. He said he wouldn't listen another minute to no such ornery low-flung sheepdip as that original-sin business. But the old man kept on arguing even after the boss up and walked away on him.

PRETTY soon I see it was Lester and Bird's Nest coming, leading the pack-horse with a load of fresh meat. A puncher rode out and brung them to the timber. Lester and the straw-boss walked away together and talked for a long time. When they come back, the boss says:

"Boys, everything is all right. Lester Touch-the-Clouds packs a straight tongue in his head." And he told 'em what Lester must of told him—how the old man was bucked off and drug, and how Lester shot his horse. He said it was plain Lester *had* to rope this horse so we could get the old man to the U Cross—the very things I had been a-trying to tell them.

The cowpunchers shook hands with Lester. They knowed a top hand when they seen one, and I had told 'em a lot about him. They was pretty much interested in Tom Hands, too, and asked Lester about *him*. One says:

"It looks to me like you left some unfinished business, Lester, when you didn't beef that Hands while you had a chance. Your trails are sure to cross, and from what I hear of Tom Hands, he won't give you nothing like an even break if he can help it."

"Yes," Lester says, "I reckon maybe I should of done it. But you can't butcher a man with his hands up." Which shows how they had put ideas in Lester's head at that college. Any Injun who hadn't been spoilt by colleges, could of done it, you bet, and never give it a thought.

Well, they talked awhile and the outfit got ready to leave for the round-up wagon. The straw-boss shook hands with Lester and says:

"So-long, and good luck when you and Tom Hands tangle." And he turned to me:

"Gillie, can you write?"

"Easy enough. Sam learned me."

"Well then, Gillie, after you get home, and Lester and Tom Hands mix it up—as they will, you mark my words! You just set yourself down and write me all about it, will you? Lester is mighty apt to be too dead to write." And he give me his name, and told me where to send the letter.

They swung aboard their horses, and the straw-boss rode over to the old man and reached down and shook his hand.

"Old-timer," he says, friendly as could be, "let's me and you bury the war-ax. There aint no sign of a yeller streak in you. If there was, you would be a-swingin' from that limb over yonder this very now! But you're dead wrong about that original-sin business, and you'd better get it out of your system before you hit the U Cross, that's all I've got to say. So long." And he gouged his horse's ribs with the spurs, and they was off.

The old man called after him to come back; he hollered that now the pack-horse was here, he could show him where it was written. But the straw-boss never looked back.

Bird's Nest said our good-medicine sperits had done all this to scare the old man and show him what they could do if they was a mind to. But he was afraid the old man wouldn't pay no attention to it and would go teetering along offending the sperits like he always done.

CHAPTER XIV

THE old man had two more warnings before we got to the U Cross; he weren't hurt by them warnings, but they come so near snuffing him out that it almost worried the daylights out of Bird's Nest. He told me that in all his experience he never seen the sperits warn any man so much and so often without getting sick of it and winding him up for good.

The last time the sperits warned the old man happened when he built himself a little fire to get warm while the rest of us was skinning a deer Lester shot. He lit that fire smack in the middle of some dry grass. The grass caught, and the wind hurled the fire straight to the dry pine timber in about two shakes! The

old man run in front and beat it with his coat, but shucks, you might as well wave a broom at a stampede of wild cattle! His clothes caught fire and that dazzled him, and he let out a yell and run like a antelope.

Lester grabbed the wet deer-hide and caught him and rolled him in it and put out the fire in his clothes before he was burnt very bad. But he was singed a-plenty. He lost his eyebrows and some of his beard and a sizable hunk of hair. It was too bad, because in the last few days he had begun to look a lot better. His lip and eye, where the Lost Lamb landed, had got well. And his beard, where the Lamb snatched out a handful, had growed back pretty thick. But now, after the fire, he was a sight all over again.

His burnt eyebrows give him a black, glowering look, and his ragged beard and singed hair made you think he might of crawled headfirst down a badger hole, and got stuck, and had to be snaked out feet first, agin the grain. His coat was burnt to a cinder, and the tails of his shirt was gone. But he weren't really hurt.

Well, late the next afternoon we rode over a high ridge and seen a band of sheep feeding on a hillside. A sheep-wagon was on another hill with smoke coming out its stovepipe. We was now pretty close to the U Cross, and Lester said we must make a big circle around this sheep-camp; that you couldn't tell what might happen, with the sheep and cattle war going on. So we started to go round, when a man and two dogs come out of the covered wagon. He sent the dogs skallyhooting after the sheep to gather 'em for the night. They was the two smart dogs I had saw when me and Sam and Old Stan stopped at Snoozer Jim's sheep-camp the first night I come to the country. When I told Lester whose dogs they was, he says:

"If that's old Snoozer's camp, we'll camp with him! They don't make 'em any better than old Jim. If Snoozer and his kind had their way, you wouldn't see no sheep and cattle wars a-busting out! There aint nobody peacefuler than Jim."

Old Snoozer stood at the tail of his wagon, shading his eyes with his hand agin the low sun, as he watched us coming. Even with a range-war going on, he weren't afraid of visiters. He knowed all the cow-men and knowed they liked him and wouldn't bother him. He didn't even have a rifle or a six-shooter handy as we rode up. He was almighty pleased when he seen who it was, and told us to light and camp with him; he knowed Lester well, and shook hands with Bird's Nest. He remembered me too, and come over and picked me off Sinful as easy as if I weren't nothing but a baby.

LESTER made him acquainted with the old man, and told him that Pa was a preacher. Snoozer Jim says:

"Reverunt Skaggs, I'm afeared you've come to this country at the wrong time. Just now she's some tore up by a sheep and cattle war. Men who is usually as good-hearted as you'll find anywhere under the sun, is made savage by all this fighting and killing." Then Jim brightened up:

"But people always come to their senses after a time. I only hope it happens soon." Snoozer Jim was one of the best and reasonablest men I ever knowed, even if he was a sheep-herder!

"Amen," says the old man.

Jim went on: "It aint so much the sheep-men and the cow-men any more. They'd be ready to make peace and quit if they was left alone. But both sides has run in hired killers; with some thundering tough ones among 'em. Them hired butchers is a-doing all they can to keep this war booming right along. They get big money. I ought to warn you, Mr. Skaggs, them hired killers don't respect nothing or nobody; they'd just as leave line up their sights on a man of God as a pore sheep-herder. Be plumb careful of *them!*"

I watched the old man's face to see if this scared him. But his eyes got blacker, and you could see this news only made him glad he had come.

But that weren't the only news Jim had. He told Lester the best news we had heard since we left the U Cross. Him and Lester had a long talk that night, and Lester come out frank and asked Jim if he had heard anything about him being on the dodge and wanted by the Law. Snoozer Jim laughed fit to bust:

"*You* wanted by the Law! That's all bosh! Why, Lester, don't you know that you up and died off at the U Cross? You was shot, and you come home and petered, and they buried you, and you went a-whooping to the Happy Hunting Ground! Don't you know that?" And old Snoozer laughed again, and slapped Lester a crack on the back.

WELL, this was the first Lester had heard of his funeral, and of course he wanted to know all about it. So Snoozer told how Beavertooth come riding up to his camp one day, not long after we left the U Cross. And Snoozer says to him:

"Beavertooth, what's all this talk going around the country that Lester was rubbed out and you planted him at the U Cross?"

Beavertooth says: "Yep. She's gospel true, every word. And we give poor old Lester one of the gaudiest funerals ever pulled off in this or any country, if I do say it as shouldn't. It's sure fine weather these days, aint it, Snoozer? How many bleaters have you got ruining these green hillsides now? And how is them two smart dogs of yourn?"

When Beavertooth wouldn't loosen up about Lester's funeral and went to asking fool questions about sheep, and the weather, and dogs, and laughed and joked, cheerful as could be, Snoozer said he knowed Lester weren't snuffed out at all. So he said:

"Beavertooth, you're a bandy-legged liar! Swarm down off that cayuse before I pull you off! Supper is almost ready. Light and help me pack her away and let me in on this Lester business. You waddies at the U Cross has been dabbling in crime again, like the time you rung in the tame bear to win the hoss-race for you. Oh, I heerd about that! Now I want to know what you're up to about Lester—and I want it *straight!*"

So Beavertooth got down and et supper and told about buying the flag to wrap Lester's body in and spreading the news that Lester was dead and buried at the U Cross. And Beavertooth went on to say that all the trouble they took about the funeral was wasted, because they found out later that Lester hadn't killed nobody; and the two men who wounded him weren't neighbor cow-men but cow-thieves, and they was caught later and strung up. So nobody weren't out after Lester, at all. And Jim said that Sam learned at the Reservation that me and Bird's Nest was with Lester on the dodge. They would of come after us and brung us back if they had knowed where to find us. And anyway, Sam thought a summer in the mountains with Lester would be good for me; and they knowed we would both come back after a while. So they didn't hunt for us much.

Well, as I said, this was the awfullest best news we had heard since we left the ranch. Lester was so glad he could go back to the U Cross that he took a prime beaver-skin he had trapped and walked off in the brush with it. I knowed, all right, he would hang that beaver pelt on a bush as a offering of thanks to the sun for all this good luck he had sent down to us. Bird's Nest took six arrows and tied them together with a buckskin thong and follered. They knowed that old Snoozer wouldn't touch them things; he would leave 'em hang there on the bushes, waving in the wind, for ten years. Jim was that kind.

THE old man was in the sheep-wagon resting on Snoozer's bed. It was dark now, but he seen Lester and Bird's Nest take the offerings out in the brush and come back without nothing. He had been uncommon restless lately anyway, specially at a good many things Bird's Nest done; and now he come a-boiling from the wagon and pointed a finger at Lester and accused him right out, of "blasfemous heathenish rites." But Lester knowed by that time how to smooth him down. He held his hand over his own mouth and says "Sh!" and pointed at Snoozer Jim. Then he took the old man aside and whispered that him and Bird's Nest wanted to give Jim some presents. He said Snoozer wouldn't think of accepting presents if you offered 'em right out; he was too proud. So, he said, they tied those presents on a bush where Snoozer would find 'em after we left.

The old man was still pretty sniffy and doubtful, and says:

"He can use the beaver-skin all right. But what will he do with Injun arrows?"

Lester told him that Jim was collecting Injun stuff to ship back East to his folks, where Injun weepons was rated high as gold-dust to hang on the wall and look at.

That brung the old man around, and he thought it was a generous and noble idea. And the old man decided that *he* wanted to leave a present for Jim too. Lester done the best he could to talk him out of it, but the old man wouldn't listen; so Lester had to let him hang up his best blanket with the other offerings to the sun. Bird's Nest told me that the blanket wouldn't bring us no luck, because it weren't *meant* for a offering.

Well, it was only one day's ride to the U Cross and everything looked so smooth and easy from now on, it seemed like the whole world was level. We slept mighty comfortable in Jim's camp that night, and got up pretty early in the morning. Jim and Lester cooked breakfast while me and Bird's Nest wrangled the hobbled horses. Jim's dogs, Dolly and Buster, got behind the sheep and drove 'em a little way from camp. All Snoozer had to do was to wave his arm and show the dogs what direction he wanted the sheep took. When the dogs drove 'em far enough, old Jim give a long "Hi—eeee—ah!" Dolly and Buster quit the sheep when they heard that yell, and let 'em scatter out and go to feeding. The dogs come trotting back with their tongues lolling out, proud as could be. They laid down beside the wagon and never took their eyes off Jim. All the fun they wanted in the world was to run and do what Jim told 'em, or just lay there and look at him.

AFTER breakfast we saddled up, and Lester throwed a diamond hitch over the pack, and we was ready to start. Of course Jim wanted us to stay a day or two longer; most all sheep-herders like company at their lonesome camps, and Jim thought a lot of Lester anyway. And I could see he was kind of interested in the old man, too.

Well, we set out for the U Cross, and after we had gone maybe three miles, the old man remembered he had left his Bible in Jim's wagon where he had been reading it in the evening. Lester took the lead-rope of the pack-horse from Bird's Nest and told him in Injun to ride back and fetch it. I see Bird's Nest give a shiver; I knowed he would rather fondle a rattlesnake than handle that Book. So I says:

"Let me ride back for it, Lester. I'll catch up with you in a hour or two."

When I started, Bird's Nest give me the thankfulest look I ever see come over his face. And I knowed if there was anything he owned that I ever wanted, I would only have to ask for it.

The trail was rocky and steep in places, and I couldn't ride fast. But at last I come to a ridge and looked down on Jim's camp. A grove of quaking-asp trees hid me, but I could see old Snoozer pottering around the ashes of the burnt-out fire, and Dolly and Buster laying beside the sheep-wagon a-watching and doting on Jim like they always done. I was about to sing out and let Snoozer know I was coming, when the dogs barked and run into the sagebrush.

I looked to see what stirred 'em up, and a man on a buckskin horse was jogging up the hill toward the wagon. Jim stood up and shaded his eyes and looked at the stranger while he called his dogs. They quit barking at the first word from Jim, and trotted back and laid down beside the wagon; they was the best dogs to mind I ever see.

The stranger rode straight to the camp and stopped his horse across the dead fire from Jim. I see Snoozer make a motion with his hand inviting the rider to light. I couldn't hear what he said, but I knowed old Jim would be asking him to get down and eat, or visit awhile anyway. But the stranger stayed on his horse. I pulled my hat-brim down to shade my eyes, and all at once I knowed I had saw that horse before. "Yes," I says to myself, "I know that crop-eared buckskin horse. Why, that's Tom Hands' horse. And I know them chaps, too. That's Tom Hands, the hired killer! *Tom Hands himself!*"

NOW I see for sure who it was, it come over me in a flash that maybe he had come here to kill Snoozer Jim! Something inside me said so! I opened my mouth to let out a yell and warn Jim. But before I could let go with the first word, I see that killer's right hand go back to his hip, smooth and graceful, and come to the front again all in one motion with his heavy six-shooter. Oh, you can bet he had practiced that motion for years; all killers practice a smooth and quick draw. But Tom Hands didn't hurry this time; he could see that Jim weren't armed. Snoozer's rifle always hung over his bed in the sheep-wagon.

When I see that six-shooter come out so smooth and business-like, my insides dropped down on me again and left me so weak that when Sinful stomped at a fly-bite, I had to grab the saddle-horn. It was too late to yell and warn him now. I knowed Tom Hands would kill poor old Snoozer. And I didn't want to watch it

—but I couldn't stop looking! I tried to turn my head around, but I just couldn't make my neck work. And I couldn't shut my eyes. I *had* to watch it. If I had had Lester's thirty-thirty, I could of shot Tom Hands. And I would of done it! But maybe I couldn't of lifted a gun, I was so weak, and sick, and scared.

Tom Hands held that six-shooter dead still for a minute or two. When he didn't shoot right away, I thought maybe even a hired killer couldn't shoot down a unarmed man in cold blood, even if that man was a sheep-herder. And I reckon that was partly true—but only partly.

Snoozer Jim faced that gun and talked right back at Tom Hands, but I couldn't hear what they said. Jim's head was held higher than it was mostly, and if there was the least scare inside of him, he never showed it on the outside! Yes, I reckon Tom Hands found, when it come right down to it, that even *he* couldn't butcher a unarmed man who faced him as brave as Jim done.

Snoozer was on one side of the burnt-out fire, and Tom Hands was setting his horse on the other, twenty feet away. And now Hands seen Jim's two dogs a-laying beside the wagon. He hardly seemed to glance at them dogs when he swung the six-shooter that way and shot twice, so fast it sounded almost like one shot! Dolly give a little yelp, and that was all; both dogs keeled over and kicked a few times and was still.

It took maybe two seconds before Jim reelized that Tom Hands had shot the best friends he had in the world. Then he give a cry that weren't hardly human. It was more of a screech—I wish I could forget that cry! It was so full of pain and downright—despair, I reckon—that I won't never forget it if I live to be a million. Jim made one almighty desperate jump, straight for Tom Hands' throat! But poor old Snoozer lived only long enough for that one jump. Tom Hands throwed the gun on him easy and careless, like he weren't in the least hurry, although Jim was only one jump from him now. When he shot, Jim's knees caved, limp as water, and he sprawled face down in the ashes of the dead fire. He never give a quiver that I could see.

The concluding installment of Mr. Baum's novel will appear, of course, in our forthcoming December issue—the same number in which we start Gordon Keyne's remarkable story of Hannibal, "In the Likeness of a God."

Tramps

CAP'N HERRICK sat in the Liverpool headquarters of Lorrins & Co., swallowing a bitter pill. The general manager was a supercilious London cockney, acid-tongued, who joyed in humbling the once proud master of clipper ships.

"Mind you, 'Errick," said he, "we're signing you on only because we must. You're known for a drunken dreamer. You laid the *Morning Star* ashore, and should never 'ave another berth by rights, but this is emergency."

"I'd like to talk with the owner," said Herrick, a spark in his eye.

"I represent 'im," rejoined the other importantly. "As a matter o' fact, 'e aint abaht much. Just inherited the line, 'e did, and 'as other interests. Mr. Lorrins leaves the business to me, so to speak. First of the year, 'e tykes active charge himself. Now let's see abaht the papers and so forth."

Herrick settled back in his chair, shoulders sagging. He was a man of fifty, sturdy, rugged of face, with a hard but somewhat wistful eye.

"Before I lost the *Star* and was lied out of a berth by those rascally officers, I never drank," said he. "Since then, I have. Now—not again."

The cockney sneered. "Like enough. Mr. Lorrins 'as no use for drinking men, 'Errick, and you're being taken on because we can't get better."

Herrick listened, a grimly sardonic twist to his lips. Up and down the Mersey docks, he was known for his prophecies of what the commerce of the seas was coming to; and here, by a stroke of luck, he saw the truth of them fulfilled, in a small way. For the propeller had come in at last; the steam-propeller, whose invention would do away with paddle-wheels. . . .

The Lorrins Line was old, solid; the Lorrins barques and square-riggers had run for generations between English ports and those of Spain and the Mediterranean. The last owner, now dead, had grudgingly invested in one of the new steam-propeller colliers, to haul coals from the Welsh ports to London.

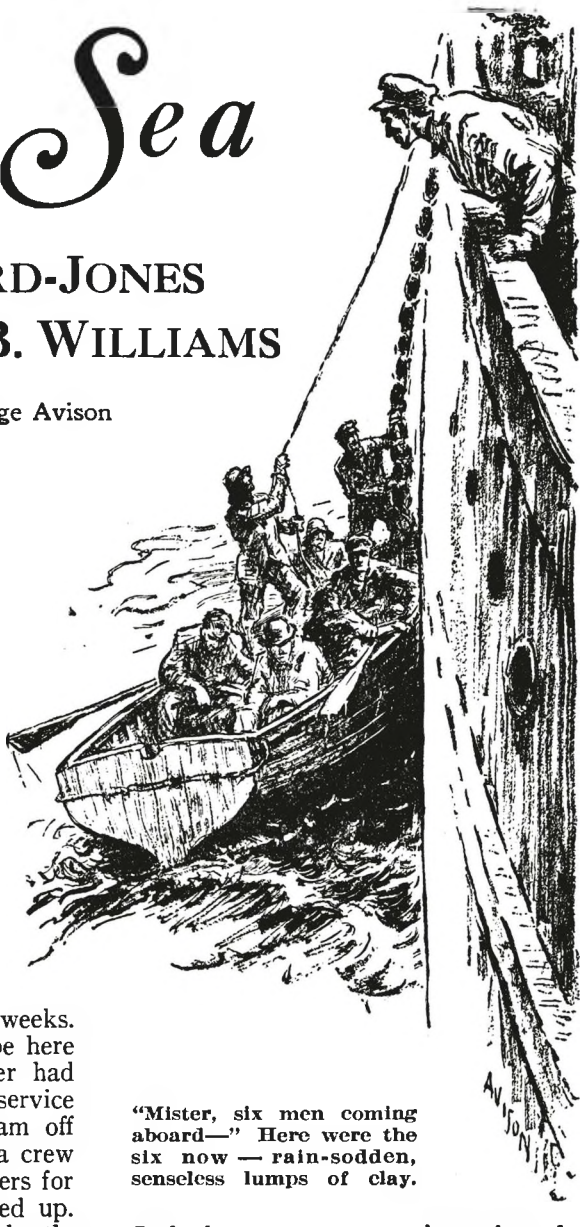
With an emergency cargo of machinery and small stuff for Bilbao, the towering three-master to carry it had caught fire;

of the Sea

By H. BEDFORD-JONES
and CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS

Illustrated by George Avison

THIS fine story concludes for the present this much-discussed series of "Ships and Men," which has followed the development of ships from the primitive dugout to this age of steam. . . . It will be followed by a group of noteworthy modern sea-stories, by various able writers.



"Mister, six men coming aboard—" Here were the six now — rain-sodden, senseless lumps of clay.

the damage would lay her up for weeks. Not another Lorrins keel would be here for more weeks. The new owner had ordered the collier pressed into service for the run. She was downstream off Bootle docks, loaded and ready; a crew had to be found in haste, and officers for a steamship were not easily picked up. Hence, Captain Herrick gained a berth.

"Papers all clear? Aye. Off wi' the morning tide," said Herrick, fumbling over the papers. "Half a dozen more men needed, eh? I'll have 'em aboard tonight. Trust me."

"We'll trust you not to drink on duty," said the London cockney with asperity. Herrick flung him a snarl and walked out.

"It's come true, this proves it!" he muttered, pausing out in the wet street. "And no reaching that lunkhead of an owner to make him see it. Hm! I'll pay my debts, get my duffle, and catch a coach to Bootle this evening."

He found that a coach to Bootle, Waterloo, and beyond, would leave at seven, booked a place, and went about his own affairs.

It had come true, yes, but after the fashion of many a dream—not at all in the way he had imagined it. He talked about it that evening, bitterly enough, as a sort of grousing farewell to British soil.

THE coach to Bootle was late, a horse was lame, there was only one other passenger inside, the rain pitched down in torrents. The other passenger was a man of thirty, all in gray—gray eye, gray gloves and suit and greatcoat. Herrick surveyed him, in the passing dim gaslights, with a somewhat jaundiced eye.

"Nice send-off for Al Gorta!" he said. "I'm taking out a damned Lorrins Line tub."

"Where, may I inquire, is Al Gorta?" asked the other, a bit condescendingly.

"Port o' Bilbao. You're no seaman, I take it."

"I am not," said the other curtly.

Herrick grunted, and lit his pipe.

"Might do you good. Time was when Englishmen were in the front of everything to do wi' the sea; not any more. Now every shipping firm hears me out and shows me the door. 'Good day to you, Cap'n Herrick, and we'll think it over.' Arrgh! And this damned Lorrins Line—the wind blows opportunity into their lap, and they don't know it! The owner's some jackanapes who's fallen heir to the line. I offer him a fortune, and he won't take it."

"Are you, perhaps, the shipmaster they call Tramp Herrick?" asked the other.

"I am, and proud of the name!"

"I've heard of you, it seems. A singular and rather amusing prediction—that all sailing vessels will be swept off the seas, that the commerce and trade of England will pass to tramps—isn't that your word for it? An odd term for ships, I must say."

HERRICK puffed his pipe, while the coach rattled on over wet cobbles.

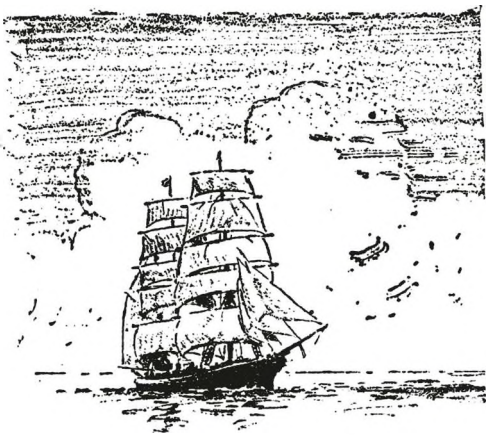
"An appropriate term," he rejoined. "A ship—in the seaman's sense of square-rigger—follows the winds and currents, makes a voyage to a certain definite port and back again. I hold that the time's at hand when this will be changed. The steam propeller will do it; a proven success, it's going to cast a tremendous influence. The whole world's commerce and trade will be altered, in another ten or twenty years."

"What has that to do with the odd appellation of 'tramps' to ships?"

"A steamer that's like an aimless tramp wandering the lanes—the coming carrier of commerce. She can cruise anywhere, vagrant; to one port, on to another, picking up cargo here, cargo there. The telegraph, that magnificent invention, will assist her. None of the slow voyages, delays, accidents, that impede a sailing vessel."

"An impractical vision, sir," said the other. "I know something of trade. The commerce of the world is adjusted to the sailing ship. It would have to be completely readjusted for your journeying tramps. It would be thrown off balance entirely by your petty notion-cart peddling wares from port to port. You command a Lorrins Line ship, sir?"

"A collier, a steamship, the *Limerick;* switched to a Bilbao run to do what no



"Craft like that are doomed—the day will come when canvas will be a rarity."

sailing ship can do—a quick run across Biscay in stormy weather. Notion-cart, eh?" Herrick grunted again. "A shipping firm is in business to make money, isn't it? Aye. This run will make quicker money in a fortnight for Lorrins than a square-rigger would make in two months. Will they see the light? Not much. Same old way—it's good enough. Commerce would be thrown off balance—of course it would! And high time it was. The world changes. Why, I can see where, twenty years from now, these notion-carts, these commerce tramps, will be going up and down the world, the trade of the Seven Seas readjusted and balanced again to suit; and who'll profit? Not our stodgy English firms, content to do as their grandfathers did, but the French and Americans and Germans, who have vision!"

"Truly, you speak as a dreamer," said the other man slowly. "But a shipowner must have a care. Innovations are dangerous. He must be guided by experience. Stout oak ships are Britain's walls; they're the backbone of commerce and wealth."

"Bah! They're building better ships of iron right now," retorted Herrick. "This collier is one. But you talk like all the other Liverpool merchants. Not a damned one of you knows the sea; have a care, says you! That's just it. Any man who breaks old chains must fling caution overboard. I was brought up in canvas: Bully Waterman, Martin, Forbes—I've sailed rings around 'em. But I know steam's got the future by the neck, and I'm for it. Lost my ship, aye; juniors ganged up and lied, to make me a scapegoat. And now I'm taking the *Limerick*

to Bilbao for fools who won't see the fortune in their hand!"

"Perhaps your dream is not concrete enough," commented the other.

"Bosh! Details are simple. The first shipping firm to put a dozen screw steamers into this business will make a fortune. First contacts are the most important; prestige means a lot to Latin and Levantine and Greek merchants. Drop off a cargo agent at every big port, and the thing is done; look where there's a telegraph line, and use it. That's all."

The other was silent for a space.

"I fear, sir, you're lost in dream," said he at last, as though with regret. "The consensus in the shipping world is that these iron steamers are very good for coastal work, but for nothing else. Merchants will fear to ship goods in them. Once away from home, they could not be repaired in case of breakdown. Above all, there's the irregularity of their schedule."

"Which could be very regular. Like everyone else who knows nothing about the sea," declared Cap'n Herrick, "you're a fool."

Which, not unnaturally, put an end to the conversation.

ARRIVED at Bootle, then a town to itself, the two passengers alighted. Herrick left his companion without a farewell, and sought a certain boarding-house proprietor. He wanted six men aboard the *Limerick,* which was laden and ready to be off.

"Have 'em aboard before three," said he. "I sail wi' the tide at four."

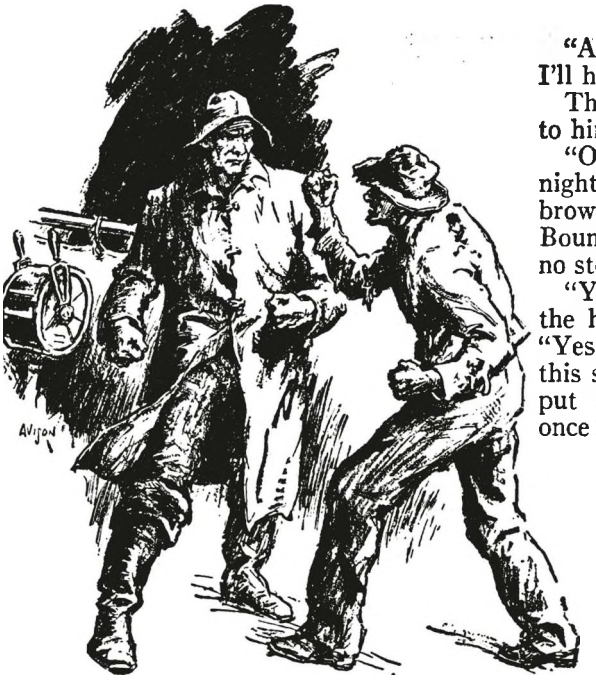
The crimp grinned. "You'll have 'em long ere that, Cap'n, though there's not many folks abroad this dirty night."

Herrick shrugged and went his way. Crimps, and a drop of dope or even a bash over the head, and the law be damned! It was the custom, and the bad luck of those on the short end. Crimps had been known to ship a corpse, now and then; or perhaps the persuader was too heavy for a thin skull.

A boat took Herrick out to the *Limerick.* All was clear; he got acquainted with the chief officer and the second, and heard the surprising information that the owner, Lorrins, was coming aboard to see them off that evening. So, at least, said the chief engineer, the only soul aboard to have had a glimpse of the owner.

"Show up on a night like this? Not likely," growled Cap'n Herrick. "If he's aboard by eight bells, midnight, rouse me up to meet him. If not, to hell with him! Tide's on ebb and we're off, at eight bells sharp. Mister, six men coming aboard—"

A hail from the water. Here were the six now, and the runner to collect his



"Ashore, I say!" he repeated. "Or I'll have you in jail!"

The bosun appeared. Herrick turned to him. "Who's this man?"

"One o' the hands come aboard last night, sir." The bosun knuckled his brow. "Had a time of it rousin' him, sir. Bound to speak to the cap'n, says he, and no stoppin' of him."

"You're Captain Herrick?" cried out the hapless wretch, lips blue with cold. "Yes, I recognize you. I'm the owner of this ship, do you hear? I want the ship put about at once for Liverpool. At once! I demand you do it!"

"I demand you put me ashore!" cried the hapless wretch. "I'm the owner of this ship—I want the ship put about at once for Liverpool!"

money. The mate attended to it, and had the six rain-sodden, senseless lumps of clay handed below to get over their liquor, dope or bumps by morning. No questions asked, none wanted.

No Lorrins showed up. Eight bells; in a squall of rain, the *Limerick* headed down Crosby Channel, and the Rock Light was lost behind. In the gray dawn, she smashed through heavy seas, making dirty weather of it with her flush decks; but Herrick was delighted by her speed and handling.

Hand-lines were rigged and a canvas dodger, for the bridge was low in those days and the storm-apron was needed. Herrick, booted and oilskinned, was staring intently into the wrack when he caught a gasping voice beside him, and took it to be the mate.

"What's the meaning of this?"

"I changed course a point to the sou'ard. She rides better heading into 'em." He glanced around, then straightened. "Hello! Who are you? Get your oilskins if you're the wheel relief—"

"I demand you put me ashore!" broke in the other, shivering and gasping.

Herrick stared.

THE man was coatless, in rags, and green with seasickness; over his head was jammed a broken, shapeless hat, wild hair sticking out from beneath it. A trickle of blood had run down over one cheek, he had a black eye to boot, and a pair of cut and puffed lips.

"Oh, ye do!" Herrick slipped the grinning bosun a wink. "So you're the owner, are you? You look the sort of ragpicker would be a Liverpool shipowner—"

"Confound your impudence!" screamed out the man, coming closer and shaking a fist under Herrick's nose. "Lorrins is my name, d'ye hear? You know me well enough! Put this ship about and get back to Liverpool—"

Herrick's fist took him squarely between wind and water, and doubled him up.

"Take him for'ard, bosun, and teach him his place."

The bosun obeyed promptly. But, as the man was hustled away, his voice came back on the wind in a gasping cry:

"Jail for this! You know me. I was in the coach with you!"

Cap'n Herrick squinted into the scud and wrack again, a cold chill running down his backbone. The man from the coach! And Lorrins had not shown up. Could that man have been Lorrins, the owner? A sudden gusty oath broke on Herrick's lips.

"By the Lord Harry! If it was, then he let me talk on about Lorrins and the Line, and never peeped—a damned dirty trick! Knew who I was, and kept a tight tongue. The blasted desk-warmer! He deserves nothing from me; he'll get nothing."

Presently he went below, located the chief engineer, and talked earnestly with

him for a time. The chief scratched his nose doubtfully, but finally gave in.

"Ah weel, ye ha' the richt of it, nae doot! I'll not recognize the lad if I see him."

After which, encountering the bosun, Herrick stopped him and asked about the man.

"Jem Carlock, sir, is his name on the articles. He made a bit o' trouble."

"Is he still pricked by that fool notion about being the owner?"

"I think he's forgot it, sir. I gave him some good advice with my boot; he's been bad beat up, sir. Probably addled his head."

"If he makes more trouble, haze him. Better haze him anyway, after he has a chance to get his sea legs."

AS for Jem Carlock, he lay retching on his thin straw mat with the rest of the larboard watch, most of them dead to the world and the others wishing they were likewise.

Jem Carlock! The name was drilled into his brain; he was Jem Carlock, nothing else. The bosun's advice had been imperative and brutal. Being actually a man of intelligence, Jem Carlock saw clearly that if he claimed to be anyone else, he would be met by jeers and taunts and disbelief. He had taken one look at his face in a broken mirror, and it lent sickening disillusion. No wonder the captain disbelieved him.

Shanghaied! He knew what it meant; he had been a fool to come down to Bootle after dark and alone. Now, to the tossing of the *Limerick*, he was utterly sick of body and mind alike, appalled and hopeless by the filth and brutality surrounding him. The fury of the gale grew. The sea smote the little vessel in a series of violent surges that set her groaning; sea water seeped into the fo'c's'le through the hawse-holes, as it swept the flush decks.

Men wedged in their bunks, seasick, groaning, cursing. The ship was pounding down the Irish Sea. He slept or dozed fitfully, with fever and wetness and pain goading him, until the hatch opened to admit a burst of spray, and a man who yelled:

"Larboard watch! On deck, watch!"

Those who could not, did; by boot and fist they got to the deck. Jem Carlock went with the others, at peril of being washed clean off the flush deck, to the little galley. A copper kettle was in a rack, holding steaming liquid. The men, securing hook-pots, ladled out some of the stuff.

"Arf!" exploded one, spewing a mouthful on the greasy deck. "Rank poison!"

"Bilge, it is," growled another. "B. & H.—*bilge water and holystones*—that's what ye get in a Lorrins packet. We were a pack o' fools."

"Not me!" cried another in profane rage. "Shanghaied, me and Bill were! Warn't we, Bill? Bloody shanghaied! I've sailed in B. & H. ships o' this bloody Line afore now. Lorrins knows how to starve a crew without actual murder; that's how they make money, blast 'em! I'd like to have me hands on this here Lorrins!"

"D'ye know him?" asked Jem Carlock, managing to down some of the slime from the kettle.

"Do I! Toff, that's what he is. Fine bloody gentleman. And a proper belly-robber, too. Skin a louse for its taller, he would!"

Salty conversation flowed over the hook-pots, unthinkable curses and filthy speech, and if ever the owner of the Lorrins Line was blasted in words, it was here. Jem Carlock listened and learned many things not taught in schools or city trade. Because he had intelligence, he kept his mouth tight; and because he kept his mouth tight and was so obviously a poor devil of a landsman knocked on the head and shipped by the crimps, a brawny big Donegal man took a liking to him, with rough kindness.

The talk fell on Captain Herrick.

"He's a proper little bully," observed the Donegal man, "but a grand master, and fair with the hands. No danger of him getting walked on, neither, afloat nor ashore! He takes care of his hands, mind you; nobody walks over Tom Herrick's crew."

"Aw, he's crazy," said somebody. "No secret. Lost his ship and took to liquor, and now he's a ravin' madman."

"Tell him so," said the Donegal man, with a grin.

EIGHT bells struck. The men went out, stokers dodging down the fiddley, seamen making oilskins fast. The Donegal man got oilskins for Jem Carlock from the slop-chest, and took him to the wind-swept bridge, proclaiming that they were watchmates.

"I'm bridge lookout and lee helmsman. Your first wheel, matey."

Carlock went to the wheel, with only a hazy idea of what he was doing, and

the man there gave over with a snort of relief.

"Sou'-sou'east, and nothing to the east. She's steerin' main 'ard, too."

The vessel climbed a giant comber, and Jem Carlock, knowing little or nothing of what he was about, was off his course on the instant. He was knocked sprawling, kicked to his feet; boots and fists thudded into him right and left, while the Donegal man was put at the wheel. Brutality, sickening him, leaving him spent and gasping and bruised to stand watch; the fury and everything else knocked slam out of him, with only the will to live still in his heart.

He glared at Captain Herrick, who glanced at him and ignored him, obviously with no recognition whatever. He thought of himself as he had been last night, passed a hand over his beard-sprouting, bruised face, and kept his mouth shut.

The hours passed, the mate came to take over. Carlock heard them talking.

"This blow will be over before we reach the Scillys, but we'll hit it again in the bay," said Herrick. "How are the engineers making it, mister?"

"Tired out from throttle watches," the mate said. "Trouble with the coal; chief says they must clean fires twice a watch to keep the grates clear. Damned Lorrins stinginess; coal's no better'n slag, they say. The new owner pocketing his money and us slaving for him."

"That's what owners are for," said Herrick grimly. "Maybe he knows nothing. That blasted cockney office-manager pockets the swag—grafts on grub and coal and all else. What d'ye expect from a louse of an owner who keeps his chair warm and never sees the ocean?"

THE watch changed, and Jem Carlock dragged himself below, fell on the sodden straw, and slept for two hours till somebody fell against him and sent pain through his aching body.

He struggled up and got on deck. No one noticed him. At the galley, a cup of alleged tea gave him heart, and he descended the fiddley. Here was warmth; for a time he watched the sweating stokers bailing coal into the fireboxes. Then, with an air of determination, he went into the engine-room.

He stared around, marveling that men could move and work with any safety amid the complicated mechanisms. By the vague light of smoky lanterns, the greasy, half naked figures slipped between the steampipes of copper that wound like vast serpents around and above them. The greasers, with their swabs of grease, dodged the giant side-levers of the engine. At the throttle stood the assistant engineer, feeding steam when the ship squattered, easing the engines when she took a dive. He had just relieved the chief, who was turning to go above.

Jem Carlock halted him, hand to sleeve, under a lantern.

"Mr. McLeod! You'll remember me. We met in the Line office last Monday; you wanted special grease for the engines, if you mind."

FOR a long moment the chief stared him in the face blankly, then vented an oath.

"Oot o' my way, ye crazy loon! I'm at wor-r-rk, not raising blisters in an office chair. Oot o' here! On deck where ye belong!"

A heavy boot gave the words emphasis. Jem Carlock recovered balance, face contorted with pain, dodged a second kick, and went on deck with agility. He ran slap into Captain Herrick, and started back.

"Oh, it's you!" he burst out. "You'll suffer for this, Cap'n Herrick! By God, sir, you can maltreat and torture me as you will, while you have the chance; but my turn will come soon. This is your last voyage, understand? Your last! I'll not only have you in jail, but I'll see to it that you never get another berth—never!"

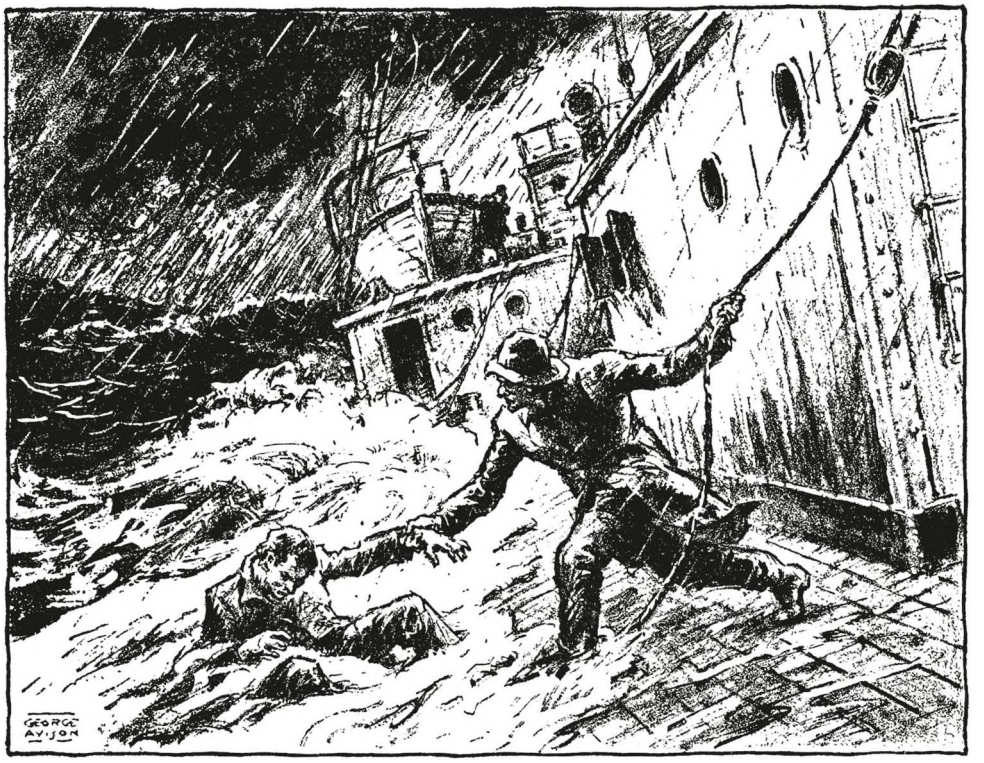
"Oh! You're the fellow with delusions." Herrick looked hard at him. "Haven't come to your senses yet, eh?"

"Have your joke while you may," cried Jem Carlock, bitter hatred in his eyes. "Your last voyage, Tramp Herrick; that's a promise! Your last—"

The bosun appeared, and Jem Carlock fled, dribbling oaths on the wind. After that, he labored on the brass-work, while the wind died to a whisper as they neared the Scillys. Land's End behind, they shaped a course for Ushant, off the coast of France, then southeastward toward Bilbao.

The mate was the one person to whom Cap'n Herrick could talk freely. A disappointed and therefore understanding soul, the mate showed a certain grasp of the possibilities, and was naturally agreeable to whatever the captain said was so.

Paying no heed whatever to the deck hand scouring away on the brasses, Cap'n Herrick unbosomed himself.



Jem Carlock, caught by a smashing billow, was going overboard when a powerful hand jerked him back. Then— "You! Should ha' let you go," said the skipper.

"They've all laughed at me, Mister; these pursy city shipowners nowadays take the advice of their clerks, instead of knocking about the world and doing things—but look how this voyage proves all I've claimed! It'll take us four days, maybe five against weather, to Bilbao. How long would a square-rigger be beating and tacking about? Two weeks or three, wi' twice the crew and double expense. Coal's dirt cheap, and will be cheap for years to come. I'll put this craft against the proudest ship in the Lorrins Line, and deliver freights in a fourth of the time, at a third o' the cost —aye, less! Quick ships will produce quick cargoes, with short runs, port to port."

"It do stand to reason, sir," acknowledged the mate. "Why won't they see it?"

"They'll not listen," the captain said bitterly. "They won't listen, damn 'em! Ten years from now, the Yankees will have us off the seas, unless they do listen. Canvas is all very well for transatlantic work, for the wool trade, for the China trade; long runs and costly cargoes. But it's sheer waste for runs like this."

"Aye, sir," said the mate dutifully.

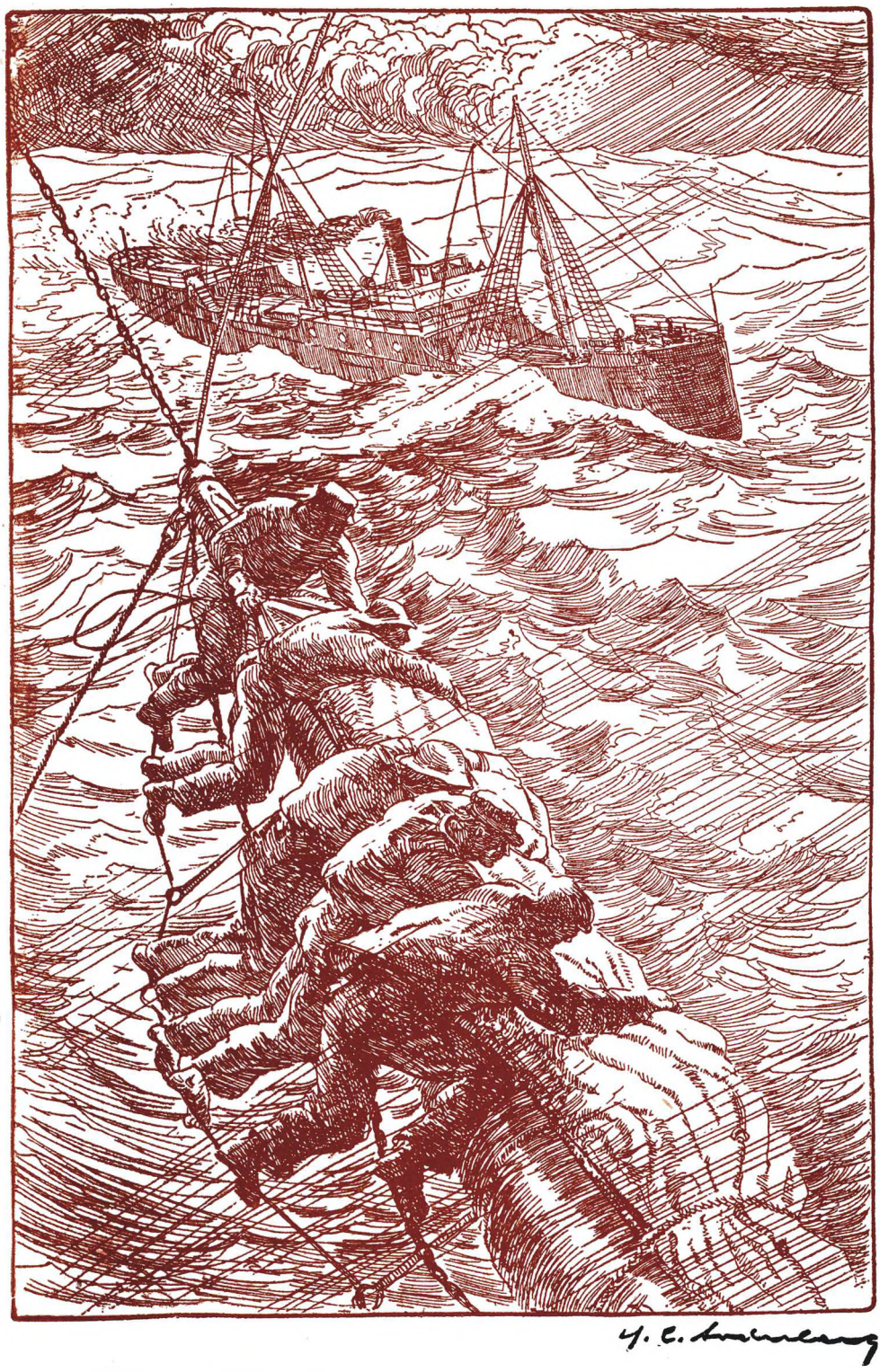
Toward eight bells of the afternoon, with Bilbao due in the morning, the skipper was at it again. The *Limerick* was churning along under a gray and threatening sky. The mate, with change of watches about due, sucked an empty pipe and listened. Jem Carlock, on an endless task of scrubbing and polishing, had to hear whether he liked or not.

"I'm surprised, sir," the mate said, with one eye on a Bristol barque that headed north against the horizon, "that you could get no one to listen."

"I'd like to throttle a few owners and make 'em listen!" Herrick said grimly. "And especially the city prig who's owner of this line now. Ye'd think such men would have foresight, breadth of vision, daring! But no. They sit on their hams in carpeted rooms and count their siller, and never had the feel of a ship in their fat lives. Look!"

He flung out a hand at the barque making for Bristol.

"Craft like that are doomed. Wines from Spain for Bristol cellars—they'll come cheaper and in a fraction of the time they come now. If I had my way and a fortune, I'd contract to deliver wines from Lisbon and Cadiz to Mar-



"Little ships going up and down the Seven Seas like vagrant tramps in English lanes, replacing the towering canvas of the square riggers and clippers."

seilles, Leghorn, Corinth, Alexandria; this craft under us would make the round trip with freights in every port, while yonder barque was outward bound!

"Doomed, aye," he went on. "The day will come when canvas will be a rarity. Ye needn't smile, Mister; you'll see the day, and die in some old sailors' home for lack of a berth, unless you stick to steam. And all up and down the seas, commerce tramps will carry the heavy freights of the world—I can vision it as though it were now!"

He turned and strode away. The second officer came to the bridge.

"Old Man ranting again?" said he.

The mate nodded gloomily.

"Worse'n a fishwife," he stated, sucking at his pipe.

"Crazy as ever?" asked the junior, with a grin.

"No-o, not by half," the mate delivered slow-considered judgment. "If you ask me, he's got more sense than any of 'em. It's natural he can't get his mind off'n them tramp ships he talks about, but by gorry, what he says makes sense; more he talks, the harder sense it makes. A seaman can see it. These blokes ashore can't. And when it comes to that, nobody ever sailed with a better seaman than him."

"That's true enough," agreed the second mate.

Jem Carlock straightened up his weary back, staring at them.

Eight bells struck. He was free, and went. The mate went also.

Twenty minutes later, Cap'n Herrick came up to the bridge on the jump.

"Glass is down to twenty-seven!" he exclaimed. "We're in for it—"

A lightning-bolt split the sky and sea, drowning his voice. Biscay had struck. With a roar, the wind hit them; the ship went over almost on her beam ends. Herrick sprang to aid the helmsman; he was cool, able, unflurried. With full speed ahead, the ship gradually righted, heading into the wind, answering the frantic propeller at last.

AFTER that first flurried moment, the fight began. Herrick was everywhere, seeing to everything, yet leaving the bridge only briefly. When the boats stove, he was there and then back to the bridge; when men were hurt, he saw to them and was back aloft to keep control of everything.

Jem Carlock, caught on that perilous flush deck by a smashing green billow, was going overboard when a powerful hand jerked him back and held him. The water drained, and he blinked into the savage features of Herrick.

"You! Should ha' let you go," said the skipper. "Keep to the hand-lines after this."

The Donegal man came along and took Carlock in charge, chuckling.

"All's well, matey! Every block and tackle, so to speak, running smooth; but Gawd help us wi' some skippers I know! Get along for'ard."

THE afternoon wore on into black night; the night dragged toward dawn. With the morning watch, Jem Carlock and the Donegal man took the thrashing wheel; Cap'n Herrick was there—red of eye, face crusted with salt rime, but still cool. The mate spoke, and the skipper nodded.

"Take a sounding. We've made sternway and have probably drifted into the bight. Bear a hand wi' that sounding!"

The mate returned, presently, reporting eight fathom.

"Both anchors!" roared Herrick. "Let go when you're ready!"

To Carlock, it seemed rank madness, but the Donegal man explained, by fits and starts:

Between Villano Island and Rabanal Point, thirteen miles to the westward, the coast formed a bight four miles deep, with Bilbao in the middle. In that dangerous bight with an onshore wind, a ship was lost—unless the anchors held. And they certainly would not hold—nothing would hold, if anything happened to the engines.

The engines held. The ship labored heavily, continually taking seas over the bows, all boats stove or swept away; but, with the engines to ease the strain on the anchors, she continued her wild pitching and budged not.

"One weak link in the anchor-chain, and we're done," said the Donegal man to Jem Carlock, as the day passed and the night came. "D'ye mind, second day out, how the Old Man inspected them cables, and half the watch cussing him for a fool? Proper seaman, he is. One weak link—that's the sea, matey. Weak foot-rope on a r'yal yard, weak link in a cable; that's death. Master walks the deck and takes his salute; but if he's a proper seaman, he does a lot more. That's the differ' between a wise man and a fool, matey."

Toward midnight, the wind had died down to fitful squalls.

With morning, Jem Carlock wakened. He was stiff and sore and bearded, but he was ravenous. The ship was moving; a pilot was aboard and she was making for the quay at Portugalete, six miles below Bilbao. Most of the crew were still dead to the world, but Jem Carlock drank great gulps of the morning air into his lungs, and knew he was alive.

He swigged tea at the galley, and smacked his lips heartily over it. Some one said the agent of the Line had come aboard with the pilot. Jem Carlock grimly headed for the chartroom.

The door was ajar, and he paused there, unobserved. Captain Herrick, red-eyed, salt-rimed and unshaven, was talking with the Spaniard who looked after the affairs of the Lorrins Line.

"The cargo's all in good shape: machinery, cotton and woolen goods. Not a parcel shifted; my first officer's good at stowage."

"You did wonders, Captain, to get here so well," said the sleek Spaniard. "It is too bad you go back to England. We have much cargo; a cargo of pig-iron, flour, wine and skins for Marseilles. A Todd Line three-master should take it, but the telegraph says she put back to Bordeaux because of the gale."

A harsh burst of laughter, quite mirthless, came from Herrick.

"If I had my way, we'd take it. Ten years from now, we'd take it. But no; our confounded owner would have a fit if I made money for him. Sorry."

HE glanced up, saw the figure in the doorway, and rose.

"So, it's you!"

"I suppose," said Jem Carlock, coming forward, "you'll not attempt to prevent me going ashore here?"

"I will not," Cap'n Herrick said grimly. "I could, but I will not. My last voyage, eh? All right. You can pay me off here, and ship another master, and be damned to you and yours! I've done one thing anyhow—damned well made you listen to me!"

The Spanish agent stared from the Captain to the ragged scarecrow.

"Who is this man?" he asked in surprise.

"This," said Cap'n Herrick, elaborately sardonic, "is Mr. Lorrins, owner of the Line, by his own say; he shipped aboard us this voyage, to get a taste of the sea. And by God, he got it!"

"Quite so," said Jem Carlock, who was now Lorrins. "I'll establish my identity very easily, once ashore. So, Cap'n Herrick, you still have your vision of the sailing ships swept off the sea and doomed, and the cargoes of the world carried hither and yon in commerce tramps —tramp ships, like tramp men, vagrant from port to port?"

"I have," Captain Herrick said defiantly. "And the likes of you will know in days to come that it's a true vision!"

LORRINS eyed him coldly. "How soon can you get off this ship, sir?"

"At once," snapped Herrick, a flame in his eye. "At once! The sooner, the better."

"I agree with you. This is your last voyage, sir."

Herrick scowled.

"You needn't remind me of it."

"I think it's necessary. You'll arrange with our agent, here, to ship the cargo for Marseilles; the *Limerick* will go on, with the first officer as acting master. I believe he's competent, and fully acquainted with the procedure. You'll join me ashore at the hotel. After a bit of sleep, we'll have much to talk over and arrange, before getting under way for Liverpool."

"Eh? *We?*" said Herrick, his brows beetling as he stared.

"Certainly. I did a good job of listening, Cap'n Herrick. The Lorrins Line is going to sell its canvas ships while prices are good, and is going in for commerce tramps, as you call them. Not a bad name at all. You, by the way, will be general manager of the Line, with *carte blanche* to handle matters as your experience suggests. We'll arrange details of salary and so forth over dinner and a bottle of wine this evening. Good day to you, gentlemen."

The sun glinted upon Bilbao and the long docks; and they faded, faded into a vista of little ships like the *Limerick*—little ships with steam propellers, scuttling from port to port. Little ships with no lordly cargoes of Ind and Cathay, but with loads of machinery and the less romantic things of life, readjusting the commerce of the world; little ships going up and down the Seven Seas like vagrant tramps in English lanes, replacing the towering canvas of the square-riggers and clippers with the smoke of cheap coal—the humdrum and prosaic symbols of progress, with all the business of the earth under their hatches.

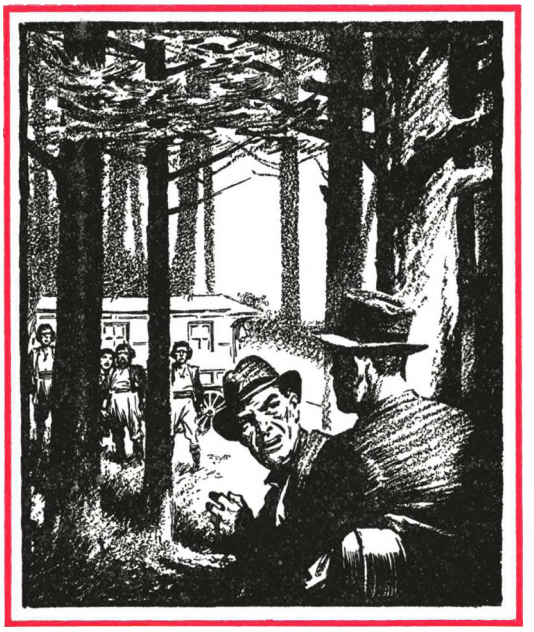
And there, in a thousand ports, was the last voyage of Cap'n Herrick written.

A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL—ABOUT 50,000 WORDS

WAR IN HIS POCKET

By CHARLES BENNETT

Who wrote "Midnight" and "Blackmail."



Illustrations by PERCY LEASON

AN AMERICAN NEWS-REEL PHOTOGRAPHER GETS A LUCKY SHOT OF THE ASSASSINATION OF A DICTATOR—AND THE PICTURE SHOWS THE FACE OF THE ASSASSIN, WHO ESCAPES. . . . THE SUBSEQUENT ADVENTURES OF FILM AND PHOTOGRAPHER MAKE A NOVEL EXCITING INDEED.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

A black object hurtling. . . . Then the explosion. . . . Soldiers reeling. . . . Utter chaos.

WAR In His Pocket

By CHARLES BENNETT

Author of "Midnight" and "Blackmail."

IT all began that fateful day at the Renzburg offices of the British and American Travel and Express Company, Ltd.; Renzburg, of course, being the capital of the South Danubian state of Austro-Serbania, created out of the Great War. Mike Lester had arrived with his assistant in tow and with his newsreel camera tucked beneath his arm, shouting above the approaching uproar that Kohner was on his way to the Rathaus, and that they wanted to get a down shot of the procession from the balcony.

Jane Lovat, desperately shepherding a bunch of bewildered British and American tourists on what the travel bureau folder described as "a trouble-free tour across Europe," hadn't heard his words. In fact, it wasn't until after the banners and the near-riot and the wildly cheering crowd had passed on toward the shadow of the cathedral, and after Jane herself had managed to convince Mr. Grosset of Arkansas and his co-travelers that the provisional government's promise would be kept, and that all stranded foreigners would be evacuated from Renzburg within a few hours following New Dictator Franz Heilbrun's triumphal entry on the morrow, that she even noticed the young man.

Mike, having secured his shot, had glanced approvingly at the girl's perkily turned up nose, at her tight blonde curls, at her neat tweeds and at the "guide" badge displayed on her neatly tailored jacket lapel. . .

"I'm Mike Lester, Cosmographic Newsreel Service," he had said. "When you've finished herding your sheep, why not slip away and take a look around the town with us?"

Jane hadn't liked the tone; the note of assurance which betokened the kind of young man who would never expect no to be the answer. She had replied primly with chilly emphasis: "I've seen this town once every three months for the last two years. Thank you all the same."

But Mike's assistant had interjected sharply: "You've never seen it as it'll be tonight!"

And something in the man's voice had caught Jane's attention. She glanced at him, and then was glad she had. Very different, this, to the Adonis-like Mike. Older at least—big, plain and cumbersome, but with friendly eyes full of eagerness. Mike, though, had put an end to all hopes of a peaceful settlement.

"This is Danny Boyd, my stable companion. And Danny's right, too. This night of all nights you'll be needing an escort."

That brash self-assurance again! Jane turned a withering glance on the young man's complacently handsome face.

"I was around Vienna the night before Mr. Hitler marched in. I don't seem to remember being a victim of either kidnaping or murder," she said, and returned to her charges by the counter; though even as she went, she was conscious of the disappointment written on that friendly homely face of Camera Assistant Danny Boyd.

THIS was in the afternoon. Early in the evening Jane's street-car was held up by an overturned limousine, and rather than wait, she disembarked—only to be caught in the crush in the Renzstrasse. Green- and brown-shirted young men were swaggeringly parading the

sidewalks. The boulevard cafés were reaping a harvest, but sustaining a superabundance of smashed tables and chairs in the process. Impromptu street dancing was jamming the traffic. Outside Die Kronen Café, there was a fracas around the overturned automobile; and Jane was already realizing her mistake in having left the street-car at all. A brass band was blaring before a vividly illuminated sidewalk café. A line of half-drunk, rip-roaring young men was forming a serpentine, threading through the closely-packed dancing couples. And suddenly the leader had spotted the pertly attractive Jane. Ecstatic yodelling. The serpentine was encircling her. A blond youth kissed her on the ear.

She fled, heading for the marooned street-car again. But now the overturned limousine had been righted, and the street-car had gone clangingly on its way. She was alone in the crowd.

And suddenly the world started to reel.

Almost before Jane was aware of it, a dangerously yelling mob seemed to be enveloping her. She had a fleeting glimpse of a man and woman running, of two terrified faces. The woman seemed to twist in her tracks, vanishing among the startled dancers. But the man had been caught, the hands of brawny, brown and green-shirted young men closing about his arms, his waist, his neck, ripping his shirt. And Jane was right beside him.

The whole thing was a matter of moments, but to Jane Lovat time seemed to have come to an abrupt stop. For what was obviously an eternity the girl was aware of the angry passionately fanatical faces around her—nostrils dilated, eyes full of hate. She was aware, too, of the face of the victim. The old face of a young man. Dead pale—paralyzed with fear. A thin-lipped mouth which worked convulsively. A scar, livid blue with nerves, streaked across the forehead.

AT that moment a fist struck the man's cheek—such a blow that the cheek seemed crushed under the impact. Jane covered her eyes, only to feel her small hands wrenched asunder. For the first time she was aware that the cruel young faces were turned toward her.

"That's the woman," accused a green-shirted ringleader, and Jane felt her arm twisted sharply behind her; then a hand struck her across the mouth.

And again the world seemed to reel. A sudden scurry of blows. A piercing whistle. Shouts. The face of the ringleader suddenly splotched with blood. Then she saw the handsome Mike Lester and the homely Danny Boyd, backed by some half-dozen determined policemen, laying about them vigorously.

"Fools! She's an American!" Mike's voice was shouting.

Time was standing still again. In what seemed like utter slow motion she saw three young green-shirts fall on the lanky Mike. She saw his fists whirling, but whirling, it seemed, dead slowly. He tottered before a stinging blow over the eye.

And then—still in slow motion—she saw the face of the original quarry. He was swaying before Mike, while looking straight into the young man's eyes.

Then time took a violent leap forward. The man ducked—swiftly. The mob, swinging like a pendulum, seemed to swallow him. A policeman's arm shot wildly past her face.

JANE awoke to find a stiff brandy being poured between her teeth. The world still seemed to be swinging. It steadied and came to an uncertain stop. Jane looked up—into the eyes of the green-shirted ringleader.

But the face was no longer cruel. It was young, friendly, grinning. The boy was speaking, utterly apologetic.

"I can never forgive myself. Such a foolish mistake. The man had a woman with him. She gave us the slip. For the moment we thought you were she."

Jane's eyes came from the fresh young face, taking in her surroundings. They were in the comparatively deserted rear portion of a café. Still from the street beyond came the roar of the crowds—the blare of the brass band.

And Mike's cleanly cut features obtruded itself into her line of vision.

"We told you not to go out alone tonight," he was murmuring. And then she became aware of Danny Boyd's comforting physiognomy. Danny, it seemed, had been sitting beside her, letting his shoulder pillow her head.

Jane sat up. "I'm all right," she said. She drained the brandy-glass. She shook her head, running her fingers through her blonde curls. And suddenly she shuddered. The memory of that deathly pale face was still with her. The livid scar . . . and then the bruised cheek as the hard strong knuckles struck home. She looked up at the green-shirted ringleader.

"That man you were after—what had he done?"

The youth grinned. "He was a Slavonian," he said. "The Slavonians do not agree with our new form of government."

Mike glanced at the youth sharply. He knew the Austro-Serbanian hatred for her northern neighbor Slavonia. He spoke steadily. "So the Austro-Serbanians beat up all the Slavonians they can find," he said.

Jane's eyes came to Mike's face. She was beginning to revise her opinion of this young man. Conceited, yes, but he seemed to have the right ideas.

The green-shirted youth was replying: "The man is a spy. Many of us have suspected it for years. Now we are convinced. Only a spy would run instead of facing the music."

Jane spoke quietly. "Is he facing the music now?"

The young man shook his head. "He escaped. Perhaps a little thanks to my own foolishness. But we will find him. I think before the evening is past."

The pleasantly friendly grin had gone. The eyes were suddenly cold, narrowed. And again before Jane's vision swam the remembrance of that purpling cheek, of that livid scar in a face deathly white with fear.

She got to her feet a little unsteadily, addressing Mike and Danny.

"I'm bored with this. Let's go, shall we?" They went out together.

MIDNIGHT found the three on the terrace of an open air café perched high on the St. Theresa Rock. They had ascended the narrow, windingly cobbled streets in a taxi which had threatened in turn either to boil or to fall to pieces finally. Somehow it had made the height and now they sat at a table beside the rail, with the whole city spread like a map at their feet. The wide river reflected the twinkling lights of the left bank hotels. Passenger steamers turned in midstream. Danny was speaking with a queerly exultant note in his voice.

"Those steamers go down to the Black Sea, with Constantinople only a stone's-throw beyond. You can think of those steamers as a stepping-stone to the oldest corners of the old world." He glanced at the others. "It's queer. We're nigh onto five thousand miles from home, we three, and Constantinople's only an overnight journey away. And yet to me New York seems only just around the

corner, somehow, and Constantinople the other end of the earth."

Neither Mike nor Jane replied, but their silence was in sympathy with the mood. They looked out over the city. A rising moon threw the tapering cathedral spire into coldly hard silhouette, a silhouette killed at its base by the glare from the Kirchplatz and Renzstrasse. Even at this distance the roar of the crowds could be heard, but as a pleasant murmuring, rather like rustling leaves.

The café orchestra started to play again, its accordions somehow not out of keeping with the ancient city below. Mike rose, Jane joining him. They danced without a word, but Jane knew she was happy, that this young man danced divinely, that she was vaguely excited without knowing just why.

The dance band stopped, the two returning to the table. The gypsy orchestra commenced, plaintive fiddles and the strokingly soothing notes of the zimbal. The orchestra leader approached the table, playing caressingly.

And suddenly—it seemed the most utterly natural thing in the world—Danny was singing; and singing, Jane told herself, like an angel. His voice rose and fell with the gypsy fiddles. His face seemed to be no longer plain.

Presently the great cathedral bell was booming out for three o'clock. And Jane was saying: "I'm taking my gang back to Belgrade tomorrow night. Will you two be coming my way?"

Mike shook his head. "Not for a day or so. But maybe we'll catch up with you in Paris."

Danny glanced sharply across the table, mentally praying that this should not be the case. For in Paris, he knew, he would be even more out of the picture than he was here; with Mike on the town in that perfectly tailored tuxedo, showing Jane around as only Mike knew how. The gypsy fiddles were sobbing a heart-broken farewell as they entered their waiting taxi on the wall of the St. Theresa Rock. And so down to Renzburg. The streets were quiet at last. Tomorrow Dictator Heilbrun would enter Renzburg in state.

CHAPTER II

MIKE LESTER ran the razor lightly down his cheek. He paused to view the result, meditatively stroking his fingers across his chin. He nodded at his own reflection. "Hm! I liked that girl," he murmured, and knew in this moment that this was the answer to the problem that was perplexing him.

Soon after ten Mike and Danny left the hotel. As they went, Mike hovered before the bureau clerk, speaking somewhat diffidently:

"I've written a note to—er—to Miss Lovat. I'd like it delivered to her room before she goes out."

The clerk shook his head. "I fear she has gone out already, sir—with some half-dozen of her ladies and gentlemen."

Mike's face fell; he turned away, flushing as he saw Danny's gentle eyes fixed on the note. The two struck out through the beflagged streets and the delirious crowds toward the railroad terminus.

Delirious was the word. Even with the help of police and press passes, reaching the Bahnhof St. Theresa was rather more difficult than attaining the portals of heaven. Once inside the station, the impression was one of frenzied crowds and bayonets.

Bayonets! Walls of bayonets. Hundreds of them. Serried lines of bayonets. Herr Heilbrun was to have a welcome worthy of the blood and iron with which his speeches had been so full.

A built-up rostrum had been erected for the use of the newsreel men. Lee and Seymour, of a rival newsreel service, were already present. A loud-speaker announced the triumphal progress of the Dictator's special train. It had passed Scerged, twenty miles away. It should be into Renzburg on time.

Half an hour of waiting while the crowds surged and billowed. Then it was known the train was entering the suburbs.

AND it was at this stage of the proceedings that Mike saw Jane, away toward the ticket barriers, trimly shepherding a group of her conducted tourists across the rear of the seething crowd. Her professional manner was a model of neat efficiency.

"I'll be back," he suddenly barked, and dropped off the platform into the crowd, his camera still slung around his neck.

"The train'll be here," yelled Danny.

"I'll be back," repeated Mike, and struck out toward the last point at which he had seen Jane.

But the loud-speaker was announcing the approach of Herr Heilbrun's train. The crowd closed in even more thickly; the pressure of thousands. By dint of height and brute strength alone, Mike fought his way forward, finding himself at last within six or seven yards of the barriers.

But of Jane and her charges there was no sign whatever. The avid multitude had gulped them up, and it certainly wasn't disgorging yet awhile.

And then came more bayonets, forcing a pathway to the barrier—the pathway down which arriving Dictator Franz Heilbrun would pass to his waiting war. And Mike, trying to return to his vantage-point, found himself on the wrong side of the pathway!

He tried to fight his way across. He was unceremoniously thrown back. He appealed to the officers, the soldiers. He shouted. He cajoled. He wheedled. The faces of the men were impassive. Their bayonets shone like burnished silver.

And a mighty roar from a hundred thousand throats was striking the arched roof of the St. Theresa terminus. Herr Heilbrun's train had been sighted, rounding the curve on the river bridge.

Mike gave up the unequal fight. Here he was, marooned beside the ticket barrier, and here by all appearances he would have to stay. He consoled himself with the knowledge that Danny had a camera and was more than capable of handling the actual arrival-shot. And anyway, thanks to Mike's own position near the barriers, Cosmographic would at least get an angle which no other newsreel service could secure—an angle which might be useful after all.

Useful!

The train was running down the platform. The locomotive slowed powerfully to a standstill. The strains of the Heilbrun Party National Anthem hit the arched roof. Herr Heilbrun himself was descending from his coach.

Wild cheering. From his point of disadvantage Mike could see nothing of the arrival at all. But he could see Danny, away up on the rostrum, doing his job with clockwork precision.

And then the newly-arrived Dictator was advancing down the platform toward the barrier. Danny's camera was panning with him. In a matter of mo-

ments the official party would be out of Danny's range—and into Mike's.

Mike could see Heilbrun now. A kindly-looking man, somehow very different from the grim pictures with which every Renzburg street corner had been bedecked for the last two weeks. Around him were his staff, gray-faced militarists. In this moment Mike had the swift conviction that blood and iron was really no part of Herr Heilbrun's make-up at all. It was his advisers who had nominated him "The Scourge of Slavonia."

Danny Boyd, away beyond, had left the rostrum and was evidently trying to force his way through the cheering crowds in the hope of getting another shot of the Dictator as he passed toward his car.

HEILBRUN was nearing the barrier now. The crowds around Mike were in ecstasies of patriotic fervor. A man immediately at Mike's elbow was yelling with a noise queerly akin to the bray of a laughing jackass.

The entourage stopped beside the barrier gate. Bayonets had swung to the salute. Mike, with his camera raised, was thanking the lucky fate that had brought him into this admirable position. Heilbrun was smiling as a blushing seven-year-old child advanced diffidently, carrying a bunch of pink rosebuds.

She dropped a little curtsy, extending the bouquet. Heilbrun leaned forward to receive it. . . . And in this moment the bomb was thrown!

It came swiftly, apparently from nowhere. . . . For what seemed an eternity but which must have been really barely a fraction of a second, the bomb was rolling, like a child's ball at the Dictator's feet. Not a soul seemed to be stirring. Each staff officer, Heilbrun himself, the child with the pink rosebuds, held their positions rigidly, as if momentarily turned to stone.

And then with a sickening roar the bomb had burst. Heilbrun was standing stock still, the smile even yet on his lips. But his side was billowing blood. As Danny Boyd expressed it afterward, the rosebuds seemed to change color instantly, the pink obscured by the swiftly spreading burst of dark crimson.

And then the wreck that had been Heilbrun had fallen, across the body of the child. Screaming onlookers, victims of flying shrapnel, had fallen too. The whole world seemed to be wheeling over.

But Mike, acting utterly instinctively, had got the shot! Though in this moment he wasn't even aware of the fact.

With men and women tumbling fantastically around him, his thought, curiously it seemed to him even at this moment, was of Jane. Was she all right? Was she near enough to have been hurt? He was swiftly scanning the terrified crowd while the uproar intensified a hundredfold.

And then, somehow—neither Mike nor Danny ever knew how—Danny Boyd was at his elbow. He was shaking Mike, yelling: "Are you all right? Wake up, man!" Then with sudden amazed realization: "By God, *you must have got that shot!*"

"What shot?" gasped the bewildered Mike. "Jane? Did you see Jane?"

Danny snatched the camera, thrusting his own into Mike's hands. He was shouting: "The police'll want this shot! Look! That guy over there is on to you already. Bolt for the Kirchplatz. Draw them off. I'll double back along the Rumpelstrasse."

Danny had gone.

Mike was conscious that three policemen were leaping toward him, stumbling over the fallen twisting bodies, shouting. And he took to his heels, writhing through the surging, screaming crowd, heading for the Renzstrasse.

DANNY BOYD, with Mike's camera tucked beneath his arm, was racing for the Rumpelstrasse. He was conscious that a man was running at his elbow. Sharply gasped, barely articulate questions:

"*Mein Herr,* but what happened? Was it shooting I heard? Or an explosion? But, *mein Herr,* it sounded like an explosion."

Danny shot a glance at the man's face. Furtive eager eyes. A wiry, apologetic beard curling ridiculously toward the left ear. Danny lengthened his stride, twisting down an alleyway, knowing he could reach the Tona-Film Laboratories by heading across the Josephweg and doubling back toward the Lindenstrasse.

A massive truck-driver loomed before him.

"You came from the Bahnhof Platz? That crash? What happened?"

Danny sped on, his arm still clutched tightly around the camera. For an instinct which no argument could have overcome was telling him that this thing

he was carrying—Mike Lester's "one shot in a million"—would answer the truck-driver's question only too clearly.

CHAPTER III

SIX men were waiting in the cellar of the Tona-Film (Austro-Serbania) Ltd., Laboratories. The gathering consisted of Dave Lubbock, the manager; Harry Nestor, his second; Jake Symon, in charge of Near East distribution for Tona-Film (Paris) products; Bob Scolt, Renzburg representative of the London Daily *Sun;* Mike Lester and Danny Boyd.

Housed in a medieval building of almost fabulous antiquity, this Balkan offshoot of the New-York-financed Aona-Film (Paris) Ltd., had more the air of a friendly drinking-club than of a film laboratory and distribution center. Any and all passers-by were welcome. An itinerant news-reel photographer could drop in on Dave Lubbock, either to discuss the developing of his negatives or to play an amiable game of ping-pong; either eventually being of equal interest to Dave.

But today the Tona-Film office had received a distinct jolt.

Early in the afternoon that excellent fellow and quite useful ping-pong player, Danny Boyd, had arrived hot and breathless with a length of film negative which really promised to mean something. Mike Lester, who had seemingly obtained the shot, followed a few minutes later, saying he had shaken off a police pursuit in the Renzstrasse. Urgent negative development with one "running" copy had been put under way at once. Soon now the copy would be ready for showing.

Hence the gathering in the cellar,

They had gone below-ground because under the circumstances it seemed the safest place. A makeshift screen had been erected at one end of the room. A spare projector had been hoisted down the steps. Outwardly the offices of Tona-Film (Austro-Serbania) Ltd., were in absolute darkness, closed for the night.

For neither Mike nor Danny were kidding themselves that this reel was going to be overlooked. A dozen witnesses at least must have seen that poised camera—and remembering the camera's notorious faculty for picking up matters which have eluded the human eye, an attempt at confiscation was assuredly inevitable.

And this matter *had* eluded the eye. London newspaperman Bob Scolt was the authority for that. Bob had come here straight from the Press Club. He was speaking for the best-informed circles in Renzburg when he stated that there was not one person in the city, save maybe the assassin himself, who could say just what had happened during that wild minute at the Bahnhof St. Theresa.

"Things moved so quickly," Bob related. "No one saw the bomb thrown. A dozen men and women died in front of fifty thousand eyes, but not a solitary soul seems to have spotted the killer."

"But the camera may have spotted him," reiterated Dave Lubbock for the fifteenth time.

Jake Symon peeped furtively into the street.

"No sign of any police yet," he said.

Mike nodded. "I gave them the slip close to the Monograph offices. Ten to one they'll think I was one of the Monograph men. They'll be sticking around there, waiting for every inch of negative to be developed."

"But they'll be here sooner or later," said Bob Scolt with discomforting conviction.

Upstairs, Joe, the projectionist, and Max, his assistant, raced ahead with the developing and printing, while the other six waited, suspensefully conscious that this lull was merely the calm before the storm.

Not that the city of Renzburg was calm by any manner of means; far from it. The Government-controlled radio station, having cut off dead in its running commentary on Herr Heilbrun's triumphal arrival, had come to life again two hours later, curtly informing the waiting world of the assassination, but stating that all was quiet in the city.

NEEDLESS to say, the announcer had been lying. In point of fact the only quiet thing about Renzburg on this warm summer's afternoon had been the Government radio station itself. The city had gone completely mad. Martial law had already been proclaimed, but no troops on earth could hope to arrest the frenzied orgy of looting which had raged throughout Renzburg within the hour. It was said that over twenty people had died on Heilbrunner bayonets in an attempt to storm the Slavonian Consulate. The roar of the angry mob penetrated even to the depths of the Tona-Film cellar.

Late in the day the telephone system had thrown a skeleton service into commission. Without quite knowing why he was bothering, Mike had telephoned to Jane, who had seemingly managed to get her charges back to the hotel under military escort. Her voice had been calm. She was leaving Renzburg tonight, she had told Mike, the authorities allowing a refugee train to proceed. Vaguely, and again to himself inexplicably, Mike was hoping to see Jane before she left. But as the men waited for the developed reel to come through, the chances of seeing Jane seemed to be fading. Her train was due to leave at eight-thirty. It was almost seven now.

BOB SCOLT was back, his feet on a packing-case.

"If this reel shows anything worth while, I suppose you two'll be trying to get it out of town and to the States?"

Mike grunted an affirmative. Neither he nor Danny were feeling any particular affection for Bob Scolt. Newspaper men, English, American or Javanese, are proverbially dangerous. In the face of a scoop they are apt to say too much, or if under oath, too little. Bob was under oath tonight. He had sworn by all his gods, most of whom probably resided in Fleet Street saloon bars, that this day he would be the soul of discretion. Dave Lubbock had backed him up.

"Bob's one of the boys," Dave had said. "Bob wouldn't print a word you didn't want him to print, would you, Bob?"

"Not a word," Bob had echoed innocently.

"That's right," nodded trusting Dave. And to Mike and Danny: "Now don't you lads worry your heads. Just you forget he's a newspaper man. Think of him as a good fellow. A darned good ping-pong player. One of ourselves." And as he spoke, he brought out a couple of bottles of whisky.

Mike and Danny each took a drink but they still found it hard to think of Scolt as anything but a newspaperman.

The clock, up above in the shadowy offices, chimed a quarter past seven.

And at this moment Joe, the projectionist, reëntered with the copy.

"Looks pretty good to me," said Joe. "You can see old Heilbrun blow up, clear as daylight. I'm not sure you can see who did it, though. Course, *I* only saw it on the movieola. It'll be bigger on the screen."

Danny drained his glass. As Joe put the reel on the projector, the group sank restlessly into chairs. This might show nothing. Joe's words were not encouraging. But the screen might reveal something Joe had missed. Mike tried to demonstrate his nonchalance by lighting a pipe—a gesture which convinced no one at all.

And then the projector was running. Danny's long shots flickered across the screen. A good workman, Danny. Practically a sequence. First a wide panning shot over the heads of the vast crowd, swinging and focusing on the train running down the platform, slowing. And then the reception committee going forward. Herr Heilbrun, smiling as he left his coach, the "Vulture" flag of the Heilbrun Party carried at his elbow. Military saluting. An escort with shining bayonets goose-stepping into the shot. "Just like so many kids' soldiers," mused Mike.

The shot was panning again, down the platform. Herr Heilbrun's back was to the camera now. Beyond, rose a fence of bayonets. They swung to the salute, half obliterating the sea of faces.

Then suddenly the long shot had gone. Mike's own camera had picked up the sequence. Silhouetted bayonets cut the immediate foreground. The arriving Dictator, smiling still, was approaching the barrier.

Herr Heilbrun paused. He stooped to receive the flowers. And—

"Look!" gasped Danny.

A swift movement had come in the crowd beyond. A man's face, seen like a flash. A black object hurtling. . . . The face had gone. A lull. And then the explosion. Heilbrun falling, the child beneath him. The crowd twisting back like a kicked football. Soldiers reeling. Figures running. A face which passed in swift close shot. Utter chaos.

The projector stopped running with a loose clicking. The group of men sat in awed silence.

Then— "God Almighty!" whispered Dave Lubbock.

Mike Lester spoke quietly. "Rewind, Joe. Let's take a look at that assassin—in slow motion."

Joe rewound the reel. Dave Lubbock spoke unsteadily.

"Anyone else like a drink?"

No one bothered to answer. Dave took his straight, then sank back into his chair as Joe spoke from beyond.

"Okay, Mr. Lubbock."

The lights clicked out. Almost as one, the men leaned forward. The reel flickered across the screen again, but this time in slow motion.

The reception seemed interminable. Mike heard Danny mutter through his teeth: "Did I take as much as all that?" The goose-stepping soldiers looked completely comic. The boy, Max, beside the projector, uttered a semi-hysterical little laugh, that was quickly silenced by Joe.

The location changed. At long last Mike's camera had taken over again. Walking like a clockwork toy running down, the child approached the Dictator. The shot swung once more to include the sea of faces beside the barrier.

And then, suddenly, Mike was gasping:

"Do you see who it is, Danny?"

Danny had half risen. The movement in the crowd, dead slow now, had come again. For a long moment the man's face hung poised.

It was deathly pale. A thin-lipped mouth. A scar livid across the forehead —and a cheek which seemed bruised, as if from a powerful blow.

THEN the bomb was soaring like a baseball pitched in a dead slow curve, toward the Dictator.

"It was that Slavonian!" half whispered Danny.

A long, eternally long wait. No one moved. The bomb was exploding, amazingly slowly. Heilbrun seemed to leap at the impact—but the slow, graceful leap of a ballet-dancer. Then his side seemed to be visibly disintegrating.

He fell, elegantly, across the dead child. Bayonets were swinging slowly, forming fantastic arcs. Other figures softly cushioned themselves on the stone pavement. One woman, incongruously, seemed to be without her nose.

And then once more the dead pale face was seen, in seemingly never-ending close shot. Completely recognizable in every feature—the eyes gleaming with triumph.

Slow, indeterminate, protracted chaos. The projector clicked loosely into silence again.

Once more a long pause. Once more Dave Lubbock was the first to speak.

"You're certain you knew that man, Mike?"

"We met him last night. He was being beaten up by some young Heilbrunnites. A Slavonian."

Another long pause.

At last, "Then this means war," murmured Dave, and Mike realized he had never before heard Dave's voice so grave.

DAVE LUBBOCK rose and took another straight whisky. Joe flicked on the lights. All the assembled faces looked unusually pale. Dave was speaking again.

"I've been here ten years, and I know how they feel. The hate—fostered even in the schools." He shook his head. "This is the excuse Austro-Serbania's been waiting for. This shot will mean the invasion of the Slavonian frontier, and God knows where that'll lead."

He looked at Mike squarely. "D'you know what I think?" he asked. "I think this shot should be destroyed."

Suddenly Mike was smiling, but his smile was twisted, like the smile of a dead man.

"This reel is going to New York," he said. "It's going to the people who paid me to get it, and it's going to be the biggest thing that ever hit the newsreel game."

"Take a drink," muttered Dave.

And at that moment, sharply, the telephone bell began ringing in the empty offices above. Eight pairs of eyes jerked instinctively ceilingward. Max, the assistant, darted toward the door.

"Don't answer it!" rasped Danny, sharply metallic.

Max stopped in his stride. "They're trying to find out if anyone's in the building," said Nestor.

"The police?"

Dave Lubbock opened the door. The telephone continued to ring, challengingly, echoingly, in the dark offices above. After a long while it stopped. The building seemed unnaturally silent.

"What are you going to do?" Dave asked Mike.

Mike helped himself to another drink, sitting, thinking it out. Presently he said:

"Do you think the Consulate would take charge of this reel? Get it back to New York in the diplomatic bag or whatever it is?"

"I think you'd better lay off believing in fairy-stories," replied Dave. "Why

should the consular authorities get themselves involved in a diplomatic mess for the sake of a private news-reel concern?"

"Hm!" Mike nodded. He glanced up the stairs. His clear blue eyes had taken on a steely quality. "Any way out of this dump, besides through the front door?"

"There's a back entrance into the alley. But if they're watching at all, they'll be on both sides."

"What about the roof?"

Dave reflected. "That might work, too," he murmured. "Across the housetops to the café fire-escape. That is, if they're not on the roof as well."

Mike looked at Danny's deeply furrowed face. "Mind traveling without your toothbrush?" he asked. "There's a train out of Renzburg at eight-thirty. We're going on it."

"Or are we?" asked Danny sharply.

A loud hammering had come on the front door above. It resounded through the still offices like thunder. Then the hammering ceased, and a voice could be heard, speaking in English:

"We know you are in there. Will you kindly open up, please?" Even at this moment there was a certain grace, in the phrasing of the request.

Mike took the can containing the reel of negative, quickly wrapping an old sheet of brown paper around it. He nodded toward the copy. "Burn that! he said. "Joe, will you see to it?"

The hammering above had resumed.

NOISELESSLY, Dave led the way up the stairs—four flights to the trapdoor beneath the sloping roof. He whispered:

"There may be men here. I'll try to distract their attention by opening up down below. It might work." He glanced at his watch. "Give it two minutes, and when you hear me, go like steam. I'll hold matters up as long as it's possible."

He descended the stairs again. Mike glanced at his wrist-watch, then silently eased back the trapdoor bolts. Danny was carrying the negative now. Both men stooped to remove their shoes, and in stooping became conscious of Bob Scolt's presence in the dimness just below them. Bob answered Mike's swiftly questioning glance.

"*I* don't want to spend the night in a Renzburg jail," he whispered.

The acrid smell of burning film was ascending from the cellar. With a smothered sigh Mike looked at his watch again. The second-hand was creeping on. Mike thought swiftly that going over the top in the war must have been much like this.

The hammering was continuing, men shouting; and then the downstairs lights were on. The sound of thrown-back bolts. The turning of the key. Dave Lubbock's voice, loudly protesting:

"All right. All right. What is this? A house on fire? Why, Herr Inspector, what's wrong?"

The Inspector was answering—but another voice had broken in, modulated, cultured.

"I am Baron Hans Richter of the Police Intelligence Department. May I ask why you did not answer the telephone when we called you?"

SWIFTLY Mike slid back the trapdoor. Luck was with them. It moved silently, recently oiled. His eyes rapidly scanned the flat roof, only to realize that Dave's prognostications had been correct. There were men there, two of them. But even as Mike saw them, the men were slipping over a buttress to a roof level below, obviously trying to see what was taking place at the front door.

Mike climbed, moving like a ghost, Danny and Bob Scolt at his heels. They reached the shelter of a medieval chimney stack. Still Dave's voice could be heard speaking below. "No telephone rang here. Maybe the line's out of order."

A voice spoke gruffly in German: "The telephone did ring. I heard it from the street."

The cultured voice: "Perhaps you would be so kind as to let us come in. I conclude you are Mr. Lubbock, the manager?"

The three on the roof were waiting to hear no more. Still silently, Mike led the way, climbing swiftly to a higher level roof beyond. Bob Scolt dropped his shoe. It clattered away down over the sloping tiles. But the great bell of St. Theresa was booming out across the city. Eight o'clock.

"Get that shoe tomorrow!" hissed Danny.

On across the roof of the adjoining bank. A drop and they were above the café. Away in the eastern suburbs a crimson glare painted the sky. The rioters were not stopping at loot. With the glare reflecting faint red on his face, Mike located the fire-escape ladder.

Downstairs in "the front office," Baron Hans Richter glanced at the five faces, then at the Inspector.

"It is certain no one of these men got away?"

"Quite impossible. Even the roof is guarded."

Baron Richter nodded with satisfaction. Then he became conscious of the smell of the burned film.

"You have been playing with firecrackers. Or burning a length of film. Was that it?" he asked smilingly.

DANNY BOYD, Mike Lester, and Bob Scolt reached the foot of the fire-escape ladder. The street was dark. Rioters had smashed the lamps. From the direction of the Renzstrasse came the roar of the crowd, the staccato bark of intermittent firing. But this street was utterly quiet.

With Bob Scolt hopping on one foot, the three turned down an alleyway toward the Rumpelstrasse. Mike half stumbled. An inert form lay on the flagged pavement.

"Dead?" asked Danny.

"Or dead drunk," replied Mike, and hurried on.

But over against the church steps of St. Genevieve, Danny glanced sharply over his shoulder.

"That darned Britisher has given us the slip," he said . . . .

An alert police lieutenant had returned from the cellar. He was speaking levelly, in German.

"They had converted the cellar into a temporary projection theater—evidently running the film. To run it they would need a copy." He held up a short, scorched length of stock. "I think it was the copy they burned."

Baron Richter looked squarely at Dave. His charming smile, famous in diplomatic circles as the most untrustworthy smile in the state, played wistfully around his lips.

"You will understand our eagerness. This length of film—the existence of which I feel sure you will not bother to deny—may explain one or two matters of urgent, I may almost say *quite* urgent consequence. It is possible your film even reveals the identity of the assassin. You will realize that it is important for the state to ascertain whether this assassin was a countryman of Austro-Serbania or not."

"Supposing the answer is *not?*" asked Dave.

Baron Richter leaped at the words. "He was a foreigner then?"

Dave shrugged. "I didn't make a statement. I just asked, supposing he's not an Austro-Serbanian?"

The Baron stiffened visibly. His smile had gone. "If this murderous attack was a deliberate act of mischief on the part of, shall we say, Slavonia?—I have no doubt my country will take necessary steps."

"Invasion," said Dave bluntly.

Baron Richter smiled again. "Mr. Lubbock, we haven't come here to discuss problematic questions of diplomacy. As I stated, there is a certain urgency. Will you please relinquish this negative?"

"What negative?" asked Dave.

A suspicion of anger crossed the Baron's face. Swiftly he changed his tactics.

"Your attempt at evasion convinces me that you are fully conversant with my meaning. You will please give us this length of film photographed by your cameraman at the Bahnhof St. Theresa this morning."

"I don't employ a cameraman, and beyond ten reels of Ufa's 'Patrioten,' which by all means look at if you want to, I haven't a foot of film in the building," Dave asserted.

Baron Richter's eyes narrowed. This deliberate lying was going a little far—even for an American citizen. He issued sharp orders. "Examine the laboratories. Overlook nothing." He pointed at the steel safe, built into the wall. "Open that safe."

But Dave Lubbock shook his head. "I've lost the key. It's really a great inconvenience."

AT this, Baron Richter smiled again, satisfied at last that he had come to the end of his search.

"You will be inconvenienced but a short time longer, Mr. Lubbock," he said. He turned to the Inspector. "Send for a blow-torch."

Dave's voice was coldly incisive. "My company will hold your government responsible for any willful damage done to these premises or furnishings."

The Baron's smile was angelic. "It is possible my government may be holding your company responsible for a great deal more than that," he said.

Dave shrugged. He glanced at the clock. The hands stood at twenty minutes past eight o'clock.

CHAPTER IV

MIKE LESTER and Danny Boyd had reached the Bahnhof St. Theresa only by circumnavigating a battle royal in the Lindenstrasse. An anti-Heilbrunner section, emboldened to new and desperate hope by the unexpected death of the Leader, had clashed violently with a New Youth Battalion. A viciously spitting machine-gun was rendering the Seidlitzer Platz a graveyard. The two newsreel men had been forced to make a half-mile detour via the St. Eulalia Island.

They reached the station at last. The crush was almost as great as that earlier in the day—marooned provincials and suburbanites fighting to enter the ticket salon, desperately hoping to put half a dozen leagues at least between this reasonless inferno and themselves. Bayonets—dozens of them—holding back the crowds. The inevitable steel-helmeted guards, inquiring into anybody and everybody's business.

Thanks to their American passports the two gained a footing in the salon. They, at least, were not complaining of the crush. Back at the Tona-Film Ltd. offices anything might have happened by this time, but in this fighting mob there was less chance of being recognized.

It was twelve minutes past eight. The train, eight-thirty out of Renzburg and connecting with the Orient at Belgrade fifteen hours later, was waiting at Platform Ten.

Over against the spot where Heilbrun had died a fence had been erected. More bayonets. Gray-faced men closely guarding the scene of the crime, almost as though the Renzburg authorities were expecting a momentary recurrence of it.

The main difficulty threatened to be the securing of tickets. A queue a hundred yards long wound around the salon from the two ticket-office windows. It moved interminably slowly. And the clock hands had stolen to twenty past.

"We'll be here this time next week," murmured Mike.

And then, unexpectedly, away across the hall a third ticket-office window had clattered open. The rear section of the queue broke like a wave on the seashore, men and women running, fighting to reach the heaven-sent square of light.

But Mike's youth and height stood him in good stead. He secured the tickets, two to Belgrade. The clock hands moved to eight-twenty-three as he and Danny fought their way toward the barrier. Haggard faces were around them, of high-cheeked Slavonians—men and women who knew only too well that shrift would be short in Renzburg should it be proved that the hand who threw that bomb had been a Slavonian one.

But police were lining the barrier, keen eyes scrutinizing every face. Mike and Danny hesitated. Had they escaped arrest at the Tona-Film offices only to be apprehended here?

"We'll have to take a chance on it. We've got to get on that train," muttered Mike grimly.

Danny spoke sharply.

"Look!"

Mike looked. A group of tourists, English and American, were approaching the barrier, a path being cleared before them by three hefty constables. While walking at their head, for all the world like a school-marm in the park, came Jane.

Mike acted promptly.

"Stick by me," he said, and with a sharp sidewise movement he had fallen in beside the primly shepherding Jane, immediately plunging into loud, effusive English. "My dear Miss Lovat, we were so afraid we'd miss you. You wouldn't believe how lost us Americans abroad can feel without our guide. Sort of a matter of habit, I guess."

STARTLED out of her primness, Jane's eyes had come to Mike's face. Mike had slipped his arm nonchalantly into hers—and at this moment they were passing through the barriers.

An official spoke gruffly in German. "The tourist-agency group. Seventeen tickets—" He and a barrier attendant were counting the two-by-two crocodile as it passed.

And Jane had recovered.

"You've nothing to do with me," she gasped. "You know very well you've not."

Mike was smiling broadly. "You mean you won't let us join your Sunday School treat?"

Jane's temper was rising.

"You know perfectly well I've only got reservations for my own party and—and what *is* all this, anyway?"

"Nothing to worry about," grinned Mike, glancing back at the police around the barrier. "Just a friendly little chat, *en passant,* as it were."

He raised his hat, then turned sharply toward the near-by coach. Jane was conscious of his triumphantly mocking smile. Out of the corner of her eye she could see Danny also, somewhat sheepishly lumbering after his companion. A *wagons-lits* attendant was approaching.

"The Travel and Express party, is it not?" he asked. "I have kept your coach locked till your arrival. The train is already over-full—"

A wail rose from back at the barrier.

"Miss Lovat! *Miss Lovat!* They won't let us by!"

JANE turned sharply. On the wrong side of the barrier was Mr. Grosset of Arkansas, while a portly English matron fumed beside him. The barrier attendant was explaining:

"There are seventeen tickets. If this *Herr* and *Fräulein* are of the travel group also, then it would seem that the party is nineteen—"

Jane groaned. "You counted wrong. Two of those people had nothing to do with me—"

The *wagons-lits* attendant had said the train was over-full. His remark had been a monument of understatement. As Jane talked to Mr. Grosset and the matron through the barrier, Mike and Danny, with first-class tickets in their pockets, were struggling to secure restricted standing-room in a third-class corridor.

Twenty-seven minutes past eight.

"This journey's going to be comfortable," muttered Danny, and took stock of their surroundings.

The corridor was as choked as the compartments. . . . A crazily incongruous collection of passengers. Nearby a dignified Belgrade lawyer was compressed sardine-wise against the ample bosom of a Slavonian peasant woman. A baby howled vociferously at Danny's ear. Jews, drovers, soldiers, laborers. A cadaverous dark-eyed student. The smell was nauseating.

Meanwhile on the platform the stream of would-be passengers flowed incessantly by. Almost half-past eight.

Mike was straining toward the door, his eyes following the tourist group.

"They're getting into a *wagon-lit*—the second along. A guy is unlocking it for them."

"Reserved," enviously muttered Danny.

"Jane's in the second sleeping-compartment," announced Mike, straining still.

But bayonets were passing. Danny snatched Mike roughly back. "Keep in, you fool! D'you want to attract attention?"

"At-ten-ti-on!" barked a voice at Danny's elbow.

The two men turned sharply. An aged peasant, thin as a lath and waggling a moth-eaten Uncle Sam beard, was standing erectly, his fingers at his forehead in an attitude of salute. He grinned delightedly, toothlessly.

"At-ten-ti-on!" he again reiterated. "Engleesh! Engleesh *soldat!* At-ten-ti-on!"

"Certifiable!" muttered Mike — but Danny was looking at the idiotically beaming face in definite alarm.

"You're right. At-ten-ti-on—as they say in the army," he agreed.

"At-ten-ti-on!" burbled the peasant ecstatically.

"How much *more* English do you know?" asked Danny, keenly.

"At-ten-ti-on!" grinned the peasant.

Danny smiled sweetly, friendily. "I think perhaps I shall murder you before we cross the frontier. *Comprenez vous?* Kill? Keel!"

"At-ten-ti-on!" grinned the peasant, completely reassured, the fingers snapping back waveringly to the forehead.

"Okay," said Danny, satisfied. "'At-tention' is the only word he knows!"

"Okay, Shief!" rapturously gurgled the peasant.

STRAININGLY, creakily, the train was pulling away from the platform, past what seemed a forest of bayonets. Through a criss-crossed pattern of shining steel gazed hundreds of bewilderedly disappointed eyes, desperate eyes—eyes full of the fear of death.

Bumping over the points, slowly gathering speed, the train slid toward the suburbs. Beyond the river bridge it plunged through a pall of smoke, crimson-tinged at the one side. Fitfully, as though through breaks in a cloud, low buildings, burning fiercely, could be seen. Figures ran and danced, lending the scene an air of orgy. A peasant spoke dully.

"The Slavonian Market—"

The train swept clear of the smoke. It was on the second bridge now, the big bend to the residential suburb of Feldbach. Things seemed quieter here. Danny touched Mike's elbow, pointing back toward the city. The cathedral towers stood out staggeringly immense against a great dancing glare which lit the southern sky. Mike nodded and his elbow tightened over the paper-wrapped parcel beneath his arm. He glanced toward the connecting link to the *wagon-lit* coaches beyond.

"I'm going to get matters straight with the girl friend," he said, and rose from his crouched posture as if to clamber across the wall of intervening humanity.

But Danny's fingers closed on his arm.

"You're going to stick around here till we're across that frontier," he said.

Mike glanced at the rugged face. "How long's that?"

"Something over three hours."

MIKE hesitated, then sank into a semi-sitting position again, his toes and knees against one side of the corridor his back against the other. Maybe Danny was right, after all. It might be just as well to lie low until safely out of Austro-Serbania. . . .

The engine, which looked just about ten times as powerful as it really was, snorted protestingly. Really this mountain country was a bit too much for an elderly gentleman who should have been put peacefully out to scrap years since. The Austro-Serbanian mountains toward the border certainly were on the tough side. Spurs of the massive Black Tarquins, with passes of over six thousand feet, made the track seem in places more suitable for a mule than for a self-respecting and elderly locomotive.

But the eight-thirty out of Renzburg toiled on, climbing slowly, painfully, shudderingly, but climbing.

It was well after midnight. The train as a whole was sleeping. In the corridors passengers lay sprawled across each other like so many casually tossed sacks. Rumbling snores hung lingeringly on the thrice-breathed air. And the atmosphere was increasingly fetid.

It was a warm night, even up here in the hills—but this fact seemed to have been completely overlooked by the train officials. The steam heat was full on, the heat further generated by some hundreds of sweating bodies, sending the temperature rocketing.

Once Danny, unable to bear it any longer, had managed to open one of the windows. The elderly peasant with the Uncle Sam beard was directly in the path of the heartening blast. Soot-specks from the overworked engine fell like intermittent rain, Danny finding himself watching with academical interest as the beard, starting as a shabby gray, slowly took on a hue of richest ebony.

But fresh air was a commodity in little demand in Austro-Serbanian third-class circles. A blue-chinned gentleman awoke, protesting noisily. Others woke too, force of public opinion compelling the re-closing of the window. Danny suffered in silence, reflecting that the Black Hole of Calcutta must have been a sun-deck compared to this. . . .

The train was late in reaching the frontier. Sleep had eluded Danny. For upward of four hours his mind had been vaguely wandering—back into the past—halfway across the world to Hollywood. Those old days behind the camera in the studio off Santa Monica Boulevard. That red-letter morning when he had been informed that as he was a first-class cameraman, the corporation's Master Mind had decided to switch him into film direction.

Danny smiled wryly, reflecting. That morning had been the beginning of the end. "Sabertooth of the South" had been the first assignment—an epic of a magnificent jungle gentleman, carelessly mislaid in early childhood during a hunting trip in the Malayan forests and subsequently reared by kindly tigers.

Danny had dashed his own chances. First, by insisting that the adoption of the baby by kindly tigers seemed somehow against the law of nature. Second, by refusing to direct Googie Manners in the part of Pamela St. George—and that at a time when the glamorous Googie was meaning much in what passed for the Master Mind's mind.

DANNY nodded in time to the beat of the train-wheels. The Master Mind had been right to push him out on his ear. After all, tact is only another word for civilization.

He was conscious that thoughts of Jane kept recurring. Undoubtedly Jane had something. A sort of frankness, directness. He found himself comparing her with Googie Manners and wondering how it was that an uneducated, vulgar, brainless little blight like Googie could be the darling of a million fans,

while an honest-to-God creature like Jane, with a figure such as normal men dream of, should be just a fifty-dollar-a-week tourist's guide.

Presently even Danny found himself nodding off. He jerked himself into wakefulness again, looking sharply at the brown paper-covered news-reel can still tucked beneath the sleeping Mike's arm. All things considered, it was as well that one of them should remain awake.

The aged engine emitted a heart-searching wail—the wail of one who is condemned forever to climb a mountain which has no peak. The wheels leaped clatteringly. Mike awoke, aware of his parched throat. He glanced questioningly at Danny.

"How long to the frontier now?"

Danny inspected his watch. "We ought to have been there an hour ago."

And even as he spoke, a shudder ran through the coaches. Brakes had been applied. The train was stopping. Desultory lights were sliding past the windows. An overshadowing silhouette of mountain seemed to be slowing, wheeling as the engine puffed laboriously round a curve toward the frontier station.

"Guess we're stopping to show passports," yawned Mike.

But Danny was looking through the window, and his voice was sharply apprehensive.

"I'd like to be sure it was only *that*," he said.

Mike swung his long frame to Danny's side. Low huts were beside the track. Strong lights emphasized their crudity. The train was wavering unevenly to a stop.

And then Mike had seen the reason for Danny's disquietude. Bayonets again. Some two dozen of them, lining the side of the track. Somehow the coldly set faces seemed to suggest one word only —and that word was: *Search!*

DANNY and Mike glanced at each other. For the moment no words were spoken. Then Mike turned away toward the next coach.

"Where are you going?" asked Danny, sharply.

Mike looked back. His blue eyes were cold steel again. But even in this moment he was noticing speculatively that Danny's deeply furrowed cheeks were more than usually drawn. "I'm not sure yet," he said. And then: "Yes, I am. I'm going to Jane's compartment. If you're questioned, you've never even heard of me."

"Okay!" suddenly ejaculated a voice at Danny's elbow.

The two turned swiftly. The soot-dyed Uncle Sam beard was waggling idiotically beneath the toothless grin.

Mike's elbow closed tightly around the brown paper-covered news-reel can. He clambered away over the bosom and belongings of a portly peasant woman, leaving Danny eying that Uncle Sam beard doubtfully.

"Are you quite *sure* you can't speak English?" he asked uneasily.

"Okay!" croaked the peasant triumphantly.

Danny gave it up, turning away. He ran his hand through his shock of tousled hair. He glanced after Mike, suddenly conscious of a definite pang. In a few moments now Mike would be talking to Jane!

MIKE reached the *wagon-lit* corridor. The struggle to get this far had been a stern one. A battle fought and won against fearful odds. But reaching journey's end was like coming into haven. The sleeping-car was utterly quiet.

Mike glanced through the window. A captain of guard was leading a squad of men toward the coach. Mike slid to Jane's compartment, rapping smartly on the door.

And it was Jane's sleepily inquiring voice which replied, "Who is it?"

Rattling bayonets. The thud of a rifle-butt on the coach steps. Mike turned the door handle, slipping inside.

"Very careless, leaving your door unbolted," he said. "Anyone might come barging in."

A gasp of bewildered surprise in the darkness. Then the bed light flashed on, and Jane's sleep-drenched eyes were blinking bewilderedly through unruly curls which threatened to obscure her vision.

But even at this moment, with the heavy tread of men in the corridor, Mike was telling himself how lovely she looked. Cheeks puckered from the pillow. Embroidered pink rosebuds at the neck of her nightie. Her age might be round about twelve.

Mike's quick eyes had taken in the compartment. A bed wide enough for two. A large pigskin suitcase on the floor below the window. A smaller

brown leather one on the rack. A dressing-case of elegant blue leather open on the chair with delicate vestures, tossed lightly aside by the disrobing girl, hanging from it in alluring abandon.

But Jane's eyes were focusing. She had seen Mike swiftly shoot the door bolt. Then she sat bolt upright in bed, her voice frigid.

"I conclude this is your idea of humor?"

"Not a bit of it," grinned Mike. "In fact, it's going to be a pretty grim tragedy for me if you won't let me stay here half an hour or so."

Jane got hold of herself.

"Listen, Mike, I'm not going to be angry. After all, we're both fairly sophisticated people—and I suppose a girl knocking around Europe on her own is to be considered pretty fair game whichever way you look at it. You see, in some ways we're rather alike, you and I. We bum around the world, finding our adventures where we can. Like a couple of tramps. Or sailors, with a night in every port." She shook her head, somewhat pleased with her own phraseology. "But as it works out, Mike—you don't happen to be my kind of adventure. Not this way, I mean. Do I have to make myself any clearer than that?"

But Mike didn't go. Instead he moved sharply, sitting on the bed, a queer note of urgency in his words.

"No, I'm not going to say good-by. Not yet, and not like this. There's a lot I want to talk about—a lot to get settled. Jane, you've got to believe me."

It came like a blow to the chin—Jane's sudden realization that this man was not meaning a word he said. He was talking—words—words. His attention was—where?

And at that moment came the sharp rapping on the door. An imperative voice beyond. "Open this door, please!"

Mike had risen. Bewilderedly Jane was aware that he was throwing off his jacket, his tie, kicking off his shoes.

She gasped. "What in the world are you doing?"

And Mike was smiling, his very white teeth gleaming. "I'm afraid we'll have to let them in. I think it's the military."

It was.

Jane darted swiftly from her bed, sliding back the door bolt as the voice came again.

"Open, please. In the name of the Government!"

But Mike had moved even more swiftly. Jane turned as the door swung open. But she hadn't seen the young man slip the paper-covered news-reel can beneath the undies in her blue dressing-case.

The Captain of Guard stood in the doorway, a police inspector beside him. The Inspector was speaking.

"Your pardon, *Fräulein*—er—*meine Frau.*" He had seen Mike. He bowed in his direction. *"Mein Herr—"*

The two men entered. Bayonets lined the corridor beyond. The Captain's eyes gave Jane's nightie-attired figure an appreciative once-over. The Inspector was speaking again. Even in her state of semi-bewilderment, Jane yet found herself once again admiring the graceful charm of these people.

"We cannot state too emphatically our regret for this intrusion." The man addressed Mike. "It is our duty to check on every passenger through this train. May we ask pleass—who are you? And who is this lady?"

Mike glanced sharply at Jane. Her alabaster face was impassive. He knew he was taking a chance. "I am an American. This lady is my wife."

A sharp, almost imperceptible intake of breath from Jane. Mike looked at her again. Her narrowing eyes came to the Inspector's face. Her lips moved to speak, and in that moment she was conscious that Mike's foot was pressing gently on her bare toes. The Captain was stepping forward, very businesslike.

"Thank you, *mein Herr.* May we then see your passports, pleass?"

Of course it was inevitable. Mike had known that all along. The frontier guard had obviously stopped this train in order to arrest two Americans, men who would be identified by the names on their passports. Oh, well, what the hell? Mike had shot his bolt. He might as well submit gracefully.

With a grin he produced his passport. Once more he glanced at Jane. She was smiling, rather mockingly, he thought. The gleam of a bayonet in the corridor caught his eye. He told himself that it could only be a matter of moments now before the squad would have fallen in around him. He was feeling much like

one who kneels at the guillotine block, waiting for the knife to fall.

But the knife didn't fall. Nothing happened. The Captain of Guard was eying the passport vaguely. He handed it to the Inspector, who viewed it professionally but without any noticeable reaction.

And suddenly the realization had flashed stunningly across Mike's mind. *These men had no idea of the name of the people they were seeking!*

But why didn't they know the name? Mike's mind was racing. Dave Lubbock! Could that be it? Could Dave have somehow fooled the police? Held the names back? Mike was blessing Dave and his kin unto the third and fourth generation.

The Captain was handing back the passport. "United States citizen," he said, then turned to Jane. "And the passport of your wife also?"

MIKE was conscious of a sinking feeling in his stomach. He wasn't out of the wood even yet. Again Jane's eyes were mocking. They seemed to be saying: "You asked for it; now you're going to get it." She handed her own passport to the police inspector.

A lull—like the lull that follows a flash of lightning before the thunder breaks. Life seemed to hang suspended. Then suddenly the Inspector emitted a sharp snort. His accusing eyes had switched to Mike's face.

"You said this lady was your wife!"

Mike lied lamely. "We were married three weeks ago in Athens."

"Then this passport should have been altered. I fear you will have to be detained."

Jane's eyes were saying: "Talk yourself out of that one if you can!"

And Mike addressed Jane. "You don't speak Slavonian, do you?" he asked casually.

"Why?"

Mike grinned. His hand closed on the Inspector's elbow, drawing the man aside. He spoke low in Slavonian. "I thought the Austro-Serbanians were men of the world. Have you never said a lady was your wife when she was just—your friend?"

The Inspector's eyes flashed to Mike's face.

It has been said the Austro-Serbanians share one characteristic with the French—that characteristic being a wholesome respect for the other fellow's sweetheart. Mike's move had been brilliantly tactical. Both the Inspector and the Captain were smiling understandingly. The Inspector's reply, in diplomatic Slavonian, was rich with envy.

"And very charming too, my very good sir." He turned to Jane. "I understand entirely, *Fräulein*. We Austro-Serbanians are not quite utterly uncivilized."

"WHAT did you say to him?" gasped Jane.

But the Inspector had skated smoothly over this delicately thin ice. He was changing the subject easily, graciously.

"There is just one other little matter. We will have to examine the luggage of you both."

Mike started sharply. "Why?"

The Inspector explained apologetically. "Some little thing has been taken out of Renzburg, against the desire of the Government. Oh, but I need not bother you with tiresome details."

He approached Jane's open dressing-case. "You have no objection, *Fräulein?*"

Jane shook her head. "None at all. *I'm* not escaping with 'the papers.'"

"I had no suspicion that you were, *Fräulein.*"

The Inspector's hands were idly turning over the flimsy bits of apparel. One slipped to the floor. The man retrieved it, swiftly apologetic.

But Mike's eyes were fixed on his straying fingers. At this actual moment those fingers were right over the news-reel can, with only a piece of delicate silk separating them therefrom. The game was assuredly up.

But it wasn't. The Inspector was speaking over his shoulder to the Captain. "Will you look at the *Fräulein's* second bag, my friend?"

Jane reached for the bag, helpfully opening it. The Inspector's hands were still poised above the news-reel can, but his gaze was on the second case.

And Mike was thinking quickly. At the best his turn was coming. He glanced down at the large pigskin case at his feet, and suddenly his heart leaped.

For the name written on the slip-in card of the leather tie-on label was *"Marcus J. Grosset, Little Rock, Arkansas."*

The Captain, with his hands elbow-deep among stockings and traveling frocks, was saying: "Will you please have your case ready also, *mein Herr?*"

Mike stooped, jerking at the leather label. Heaven be praised, the string snapped easily. He pocketed the label as he nodded at the pigskin case.

"This is it."

"Unlock it, pleass."

Mike plunged his hands deeply into his trouser pockets. A well-simulated look of bewilderment stole into his eyes.

"Where's that key? Don't say I've lost that key!"

The Inspector, in the act of resuming his exploration of Jane's dressing-case, jerked around sharply. The Captain jerked from the suitcase. Their eyes were alight with swift suspicion.

"Better not to say you have lost it, *mein Herr,*" remarked the Inspector.

Mike was desperately searching through his entire suit now. Jane's eyes were puzzled. What was this young man up to? At last Mike was shaking his head.

"It's gone."

The Inspector's face was like granite. "In that case we must open the bag without the key."

He turned to a soldier in the corridor. "Your knife."

"You can't do that!" desperately interjected Jane, her mind on Mr. Grosset of Little Rock, Arkansas.

"Don't interfere, dear," said Mike gently. "They'll have to pay for any damage."

"But what about Mr.—"

Jane was going to say "Mr. Grosset," but Mike broke in quickly. "We'll get it repaired in Belgrade. That is, if there's anything left to repair."

Anything left to repair! The knife, sharp as a razor, was slicing into Mr. Grosset's case with a gayly rapturous abandon and a complete disregard for the future. Slices of pigskin bedecked the floor. A lock fell loosely, rattling under the wash-bowl.

And Mike, unobtrusively, closed the elegant blue dressing-case. He heard the lock snap sharply.

Mr. Grosset's wrecked case opened.

THE INSPECTOR grunted, plunging his hands deeply within, casting Mr. Grosset's shirts, ties, socks, to the four winds.

But he didn't find what he sought.

He paused. He plunged his hands in again. The deliberately lost key! The missing can of news-reel must be here!

But it wasn't!

At last the man stood up. His face was suffused with shame. "How can I possibly express my regrets?" he said. "It was in the course of duty. I will put in my report. I trust the authorities will grant you the recompense you deserve."

"Nicely put," said Mike. "I'm sure I trust the same." He airily included the girl. "And I'm sure my lady friend trusts the same too."

"I'm sure I do," fervently agreed Jane, her mind on Mr. Grosset.

Inspector and Captain were withdrawing. "Our regrets. Our sincere regrets, *Fräulein . . . mein Herr. . .*"

"Don't mention it," said Mike. "Good-by. Good-by."

He had closed the door.

JANE sat heavily on the bed. She glanced down at the débris, the sliced pigskin, the unattached lock. She observed, not unreasonably:

"Perhaps you will explain what in blazes this is all about?"

Mike started, almost as if puzzled. He half stuttered.

"Me? *Me* explain? Perhaps you'll be honest enough to say just what Mr. Grosset's bag is doing here in your compartment?"

"Easy," said Jane, removing a blonde curl from her left eye. "Overflow. He travels so heavy he's no room for all his stuff in his place." Suddenly she had remembered. "But what's that to do with this, anyway? Will you tell me why you put on that act? If I hadn't been under an obligation to you,—for saving me from that mob at Renzburg,—I'd have let you get what was coming to you."

The bewilderment, though, was still in Mike's eyes.

"But why? I was saving you again!"

"You were what?"

"I was saving your reputation. Why, darn it, I couldn't let them think you the sort of girl who let strange men travel in your compartment. I had to let 'em think I'd a right to be here."

Jane's face was grim.

"I see." She rose. "Well, Mr. Lester, I don't care a ten-cent hoot what anyone thinks of me. But you've been up to something. What is it?"

"I'll tell you some day."

"Tell me now."

Mike nodded. "Why not? You may as well know it now as later. I'm a crook. In the excitement of the assassination, I lost my head and robbed the bank of Renzburg. I've got eight mil-

lion Austro-Serbanian schillings concealed about my person. That's what those fellows were looking for."

And Jane too suddenly smiled radiantly.

"We can have a grand time on eight million schillings in Belgrade," she said.

DANNY BOYD had survived the search with much less trouble than had Mike. Many passengers on this train—particularly in the third-class coaches—were traveling light. Danny's lack of luggage had occasioned no comment; indeed the palpable fact that he had nowhere in which to hide a newspaper, let alone a news-reel, had acquitted him of even passing suspicion. The Belgrade lawyer had had a much tougher time. A German ten-millimetre movie camera had been found in his kit. The lawyer had argued. Home movies were his hobby. Did he look like a professional camera-man? Forty favorite feet of Renzburg cathedral had been ruined before the police decided that he didn't.

Meanwhile Danny had gone wandering. Eager to know what had happened to Mike, he had fought his way through the intervening coach into the sleeper.

The searchers had already dealt with this section of the train. Danny hesitated before the second compartment.

And then he was aware that the soldiers were withdrawing. A captain of guard was hurrying down the track, issuing sharp orders. Rifle-butts rattled. A whistle sounded shrilly, away forward toward the engine.

A girl's laugh rippled behind him. Danny turned sharply. The laugh had come from within the compartment. Mike's deeper laugh followed. Danny knew that his heart had missed a beat.

The whistle again. A moaning wail from the engine, echoing, then dying flatly against the mountainside. A creaking, a straining. The train was moving once more, very slowly, past the huts, past silent soldiers, past a towering tangle of barbed wire.

Danny emitted a sigh of relief. They were across the frontier. They were safe.

And then the train was stopping again—a lurching, a rattling of couplings. Danny started. More bayonets sliding slowly by as the coaches groaned to a standstill. More faces hanging in the reflected light—high-cheeked, Slavonic faces. Sharp guttural orders in a tongue Danny knew to be Slavonian.

He turned and rapped on the door. Mike's voice replied easily, "What's wrong?"

Danny spoke low. "I think our friends the Slavonians are going to take a look around too."

CHAPTER V

YES, the Slavonians *were*. And they were a useful jump ahead of the Austro-Serbanians too. Bob Scolt was to blame for that.

Bob had passed out of Mike and Danny's lives in the alleyway adjoining the Rumpelstrasse. Certainly he had promised not to make use of what he had seen—but darn it, no one in their right senses could expect a journalist to keep a story like this under his hat. Bob had made for the Hotel Adler. He had written his story, then converted it into code. Half an hour later that story was humming over the wires to London, and Bob Scolt was sitting in the hotel lounge, knocking back a Pilsener and congratulating himself on a really first-class evening's work. For this was definitely going to make 'em sit up a bit in Fleet Street. A news-reel of the actual assassination! A news-reel too which revealed the identity of the assassin! Big stuff. And only the Daily *Sun* would have it!

Bob salved his conscience by telling himself that passing this story on couldn't hurt those news-reel boys, anyway. Admittedly Bob had spilled the whole beans. He had described the shot. He had told of how the two news-reel men had cleared Renzburg on the eight-thirty train, heading through Slavonia for Belgrade. But none of this would be in print till tomorrow. The world wouldn't know a darned thing until it read the flaming Daily *Sun* headlines in the morning! "News-reel Camera Records Heilbrun Killing!" "Sensational Shot Reveals Slavonian Assassin!" "American News-reel Photographers Bolt For Home!" And by that time, Bob Scolt assured himself, Mike Lester and Danny Boyd would be nearing Belgrade itself, some hundred miles over the neutral Yugo-Slavian border.

. . . But he had reckoned without Slavonian Secret Agent X6214.

Bob Scolt's code cable to the *Sun* had been explicit enough. The news-reel shot of the century—now on its way to America. The shot which when seen would undoubtedly compel military action on the part of Austro-Serbania against Slavonia.

With the code deciphered, the cable was only too clear to the gathering of grave-faced men sitting around a table in the Foreign Office at the Slavonian capital city of Ebsjerg. X6214 had already related his part in the drama. Working in his position as telegraphist at the Ebsjerg postal department headquarters, he had intercepted the message as it came through, copied it, then passed it forward to Belgrade for London. He had not stopped the cable, as to have done so would have been merely to warn others that the Slavonian Secret Service was on the alert.

The Slavonian Foreign Minister had frowned at the deciphered cable. So the assassination had been the work of a Slavonian! The Minister had feared as much, practically known it. Some crazy loon with a petty grievance, probably.

But Austro-Serbania wouldn't think of it that way! For years she had been longing for an excuse to pour her troops into the Black Tarquins—that heavily timbered range of mountains which had been wrenched from her under the Treaty of Trianon and presented to the hated Slavonians. For nigh on a generation now, every ambitious militarist in Renzburg had turned a coldly contemplative eye toward those selfsame mountains. Elections had been fought with the prospective demand for the return of the Tarquins as the main plank and issue. It was over the Black Tarquins that Heilbrun had rattled his saber to such sweeping effect.

The Foreign Minister sighed. Damn these German minorities, incongruously inhabiting obscure corners of Slav Europe! Damn the Treaty of Trianon! Above all, damn this wretched news-reel camera-man whose zeal seemed to have resulted in the photographing of an incident which would have been infinitely better left unrecorded!

THE Chief of the Secret Police spoke slowly. "If it comes to the worst, we still have our allies—"

"It mustn't come to the worst," said the Minister. "Remember how Belgium was overrun before England or France could even mobilize. A general European war would be serious enough without our being its principal victim."

But X6214 leaned forward.

"Gentlemen, the reel, then, is on its way to the frontier—our frontier—on the eight-thirty train out of Renzburg. The Austro-Serbanians of course will try to stop it. But if this cable is correct, they are moving quite in the dark. They may not even know the names of the men they have got to catch, which puts them, I think, in the position of a man who is trying to stop a needle from working its way out of the proverbial haystack. Thus this small can of news-reel may slip across the frontier. In fact, for roughly five hours, from soon after midnight onwards, it may be actually crossing Slavonian territory."

The Foreign Minister nodded. He addressed the Chief of the Secret Police.

"Have the train stopped just this side of the border. The camera-men are the American subjects, Michael Lester and Dan Boyd. They can be allowed to proceed with apologies—*after* we have confiscated the news-reel!"

SO it was that Lieutenant Janos Hatvany of the 4th Battalion, Slavonian Alpine Corps, found himself round about midnight waiting with a platoon of men at the Slavonian frontier post of Csabas, two thousand meters up on the slopes of the Black Tarquins. Janos was young and supposedly intelligent. He loved a girl named Tania, back at Ebsjerg. In fact, when Janos had finished with his term of mountain duty, it was his intention to return to the big city and get married. Even at this time Tania was already considering furnishings for the apartment they hoped to rent overlooking the Sekely Gardens. In her last letter she had written of a settee she had seen. She was hoping to secure it at a fairly reasonable price.

Janos stood with his sergeant, looking down the cleft-like valley which ran beneath the immensity of the towering Szepeshegy into Austro-Serbania. Far below, a twisting snake of light was crawling higher and ever higher—the eight-thirty train out of Renzburg.

"She will be here in thirty minutes if those square-heads do not halt her at the border," murmured Janos.

But the square-heads did halt her. The snake of light wriggled to a standstill, remaining stationary for nearly an

hour some half-mile down the track. Janos and his men waited chafingly.

"It looks as if the square-heads are searching before us," remarked the sergeant stolidly.

But at last the train was moving again, hesitantly, reluctantly. The engine, just getting under way, snorted indignantly at the sight of the Slavonian frontier-post lights, gleaming red in the dark night. The train slowed again, creaking to a stop in the gloomy shadow of a pine forest. Lieutenant Janos Hatvany advanced, the bayonets of his men shining in the light from the coaches.

"Do you think those square-heads will have got what we are seeking?" asked Janos of his sergeant.

"I think not," replied the sergeant contemptuously. "There is no Austro-Serbanian who can see an inch beyond his beer."

The two men climbed aboard the end coach, into an inferno of heat and closely packed humanity.

"Those Austro-Serbanians are no respecters of a man's comfort," observed the sergeant. "It is almost incredible —to let a train run as overcrowded as this one!"

JANOS nodded his agreement. The search commenced. Both officer and sergeant felt that it should not be a hard one. It was these two Americans who had to be located. It was surely only a matter of examining passports.

The two, with an accompanying squad of men, came through the third-class carriages with hardly a glance at their occupants. Janos, though, was conscious of the pale haggard faces. Slavonians mostly. His sympathies were very much present, though his expression registered nothing. To have abandoned everything so swiftly—cattle, grazing lands, life-savings. . . . Well, if this reel could be found, then war would no doubt be averted, and these poor folk could go back to their homes. That is, if they wished to go back. To Janos' mind, he would rather spend an eternity in the sickliest of the Central American swamps than even one week in the most beautiful corner of Austro-Serbania.

But the tastes of others was hardly the concern of Janos at this moment. Janos' job was to find these two men—and the can of news-reel if they were still carrying it.

Officer and escort reached the sleeper. The train guard was quite helpful. But yes, this section of the train was positively infested with Americans.

Janos knocked at the first door, entering. And he came face to face with Mr. Grosset of Little Rock, Arkansas.

Mr. Grosset had just sunk back once more into the arms of Morpheus. He was dreaming of an oil-well.

Janos Hatvany's hand gently shook his shoulder.

"Please, it is our desire to know all about you, sir."

Mr. Grosset awoke. Mr. Grosset viewed his disturber. Mr. Grosset was suddenly very angry.

But this was really an outrage! Was no one allowed to sleep in this quite hideous journey? Was it the wish of the Austro-Serbanians to keep self-respecting tourists away from their filthy country for good?

"You are now in Slavonia," coldly pointed out Janos.

"Slavonia or the Slough of Despond, *I* don't care!" fumed Mr. Grosset. "If you want to know about me, go to that young person whose job it is to give me a light-hearted, trouble-free holiday. Next door! Oh, dang it, I'll take you there myself. I'll tell her what I think of the treatment one gets on these gosh-darned, disgracefully conducted expeditions into purgatory!"

Mr. Grosset was out of bed now, leading the way to the next compartment. He threw open the door. He started to speak—then his voice choked bewilderedly in his throat.

For sitting on the bed of Miss Lovat, the guide, were two men, a young and an older.

A sharply eager exclamation from Janos. He was pushing forward. Already he was asking: "You two gentlemen, what are your names, please?"

But at this moment Mr. Grosset saw his suitcase. A wreck of sliced pigskin —lockless, slashed!

He let out a yell. He hit the ceiling. This was the end. After all the indignities, the discomforts to which he had been subjected! This! *This!* His best suitcase. Irreplaceable and—

A scream! Mr. Grosset had bitten his tongue!

AND in that moment things suddenly happened. Looking back on it afterward, Lieutenant Janos Hatvany knew that everything had gone just a bit too fast for him. But how was one to know that Americans could be so violent?

It was the young man who had struck first, straight between the eyes. Janos found himself staggering back into the corridor. He had seen his sergeant fall, with Mr. Grosset tumbling on top of him. Like a flash he had seen the two men pass, the elder throwing aside a Slavonian guard who darted to intercept him. They had reached the coach door, leaping wildly for the darkness of the pine woods. But even as they went, the reeling Janos had been aware that the younger man was carrying a woman's dressing-case of elegant blue leather.

Janos had shouted, he hardly knew what. Rifles were spitting after two dark forms, swiftly swallowed up by the forest. Shouts. Dismayed screams. And then a machine-gun stuttering—sweeping the cavernous depths of the trees.

Swaying uncertainly, Janos reached the coach door. Mr. Grosset's well nigh apoplectic voice was shouting behind him. Never again! Never again would he set foot on this unholy continent!

A burst of firing now, right along the train, the roar of the traversing machine-gun echoing back from the trees like a giant's laughter.

And Janos suddenly knew that the young American girl was at his elbow. Her silk nightdress, with pink rosebuds embroidered at the neck, was clinging to her lithe young figure. Her eyes were alight with deadly fear for the escaping men.

But Janos had forgotten Mike and Danny and the news-reel and the danger of war. In this moment he was thinking of Tania back at Ebsjerg, and of what deadly fear there would be in her eyes if it were he who was running in a dark mountain forest with a hundred bullets spitting at his heels.

CHAPTER VI

MIKE and Danny had been walking all day through a green forest which seemed to climb forever toward a break in the mountain wall. They walked silently, the carpet of pine needles deadening the sound of their footsteps. High above, the pines themselves formed a dome, richly green. High above, too, a breeze was stirring, fresh from the mountain-tops, but down here everything was still—cool, shadowy. Occasionally, as the mountain-side dropped steeply, the head of the pass would stand out clear across the tree-tops. Always high above, never any nearer. An enchanted way, climbing eternally through the sweet scent of pine.

In point of fact, the two could hardly have chosen a spot more suited to the first chapter of a break for freedom. No chance of recognition here. These forests were loneliness itself, utter, complete. Only once in the half-dozen hours after dawn was the silence broken. Very far away, the sound of a rotting pine falling, crashing dully. The two stood rooted, listening. The crash echoed, re-echoed, died. Silence descended on the forest again like an enveloping mantle.

ESCAPE from the guards had been simple if lucky. A chance bullet, stabbing the shadows, might have put an end to the adventure in the first fifteen seconds. But after those seconds the odds were with the escapers. Mike had led the way up a sharply ascending gully. A friendly moss-enshrined rock afforded immediate shelter. For a few moments machine-gun bullets were ricocheting whiningly above them—then the machine-gunner had altered his view; the gun was traversing the shadowy line of forest. Only odd rifle-bullets scarred the sheltering rock.

The two had stayed here for nearly five minutes. Guards were spreading out, combing the woods above the railroad track. Mike and Danny moved like shadows, down the gully again, through a minor forest of giant fern a hundred yards down the track. Then they had slipped across the track itself, past the rear of the train, away behind the frontier huts—into the dark woods beyond, while the guards were still searching for them in exactly the opposite direction!

They started off rapidly. Presently they had struck a descending path. For the next two miles they were running. Then they slowed. The path, like that machine-gunner, was changing its views. It started to rise steeply. Mike and Danny pushed on.

"They'll be getting down to some serious searching at daybreak," Danny had remarked. Then, queerly, after a moment's pause: "By the way, how do you imagine the Slavonians found out about this news-reel?"

Mike pondered. After a while:

"Bob Scolt," he said.

Danny nodded. "A trustworthy fellow, Bob," he observed.

A palely waning moon was rising, gleaming intermittently through the pine tops. Desultory rifle-fire still echoed from the woods beyond the track, far below them now. Presently they were on an open ridge of mountains.

They paused, looking back and down. Very far away they could see the train, the thin snake of light. It was moving again now—very slowly—climbing toward a high pass.

"I wonder if Mr. Grosset has got to sleep again," murmured Danny.

But both he and Mike were thinking of Jane.

"I never knew a girl's dressing-case could be so heavy," said Mike.

Danny took the case for a while. The wail of the aged engine came very faintly on the night air. The two pressed deeper into the forest.

IT was when their path was crossed by a swift-running mountain stream that Danny remembered the closing chase sequence of a film he had once worked on called "Midnight in Manhattan." The hero, escaping from the gangsters' headquarters at the far end of Long Island, had thrown his pursuers' bloodhounds off the scent by wading some quarter-mile along the edge of the sea.

Carrying their shoes and socks they took to the stream, working down through a series of eddies and minor waterfalls. The moonlight, stronger now, flashed back from the gurgling water.

They came to a gully. The brook, with a triumphant leap, did a swift about-face, then hurried on down the mountain-side. Danny led the way, turning left, climbing from the gully into the shadow of the trees, striking toward what he judged to be the north. Presently they were on another path, a woodsman's cart-track winding up through the pine woods. The two hurried on in silence. . . .

It was three o'clock when Mike suggested an hour or two's sleep. No point in wearing themselves out. They were at least eight miles ahead of their pursuers, even if those pursuers should guess which direction they had taken.

They threw themselves down on the soft carpet of pine needles. The night was warm, very still.

Mike spoke once before he slept.

"They all seem pretty keen on stopping this darned thing. I reckon we're going to be tops in news-reel circles if we succeed in getting it through."

Danny replied lazily: "*You'll* be tops. Well, it's your show."

Mike was silent for a while, then:

"D'you really think this thing'll make any difference? Politically, I mean?"

"I haven't thought about it yet. I haven't had time."

"It'll give 'em something to talk about at home," observed Mike drowsily.

Two or three minutes later his even breathing told that he was sleeping.

But Danny lay on his back, looking straight up. A star winked through a break in the tall pines. He was thinking now. What would, what could be the result of this shot? Would any sane nation really disrupt its own peace for the sake of a few flickering feet of film? He turned his head. Jane's dressing-case, with the can of news-reel locked within it, lay at the foot of a tree where Mike had haphazardly tossed it. Danny reflected. It looked of so little consequence, so utterly unimportant.

Perhaps it was. A crazy Slavonian killing an arriving dictator. Could the world go up in smoke on an issue such as that? Danny glanced up at the star again. It blinked. His mind drifted. . . . Sarajevo. That had been an assassination too. Some fanatical student. They put up a statue to him afterward. A statue commemorating his action—and his death. But not the death of seven million others. Danny shook his head at the blinking star. It couldn't happen again. The world was too wise now. It could never happen again.

Unaccountably, Jane's face was hanging above him, smiling down. The star was visible through it. Danny's mind continued to drift. A fanatical student. Seven millions. A few feet of news-reel. Heilbrun. News-reel. Jane. News-reel. Sarajevo. . . .

DANNY awoke feeling a bony hand clutching at his shoulder, the hollow eyes of death staring into his own. The vision faded swiftly, leaving Danny conscious of his own chattering teeth in a vaguely indefinite world. He peered swiftly through the trees. A gray dawn sat chill on the mountain-tops. He glanced at the dressing-case. It still lay where it had been tossed beneath the tree overnight. Danny got to his feet—and Mike opened his eyes.

For a moment the younger man was smiling.

"Do you mind if I say you look like hell? Or perhaps you always look like that at this hour of the morning."

Danny passed his hand before his eyes, sinking to his knees.

"I've been dreaming. At least, I think I've been dreaming."

He looked toward the mountains and his eyes were full of bewilderment.

"That's queer. In the dream it was those mountains. That one with the white scar—and those others. But we couldn't see them last night."

"My mother's aunt had second sight," said Mike. "She died of alcoholic poisoning."

Danny's puzzled eyes were still on the mountain-tops.

"They were on fire—the whole ridge of them. People, peasants they must have been, were pouring over that pass. But it wasn't a forest fire."

"I've guessed it first time. It was war," grinned Mike.

"There were blind men—and lame men—and men who were coughing up their hearts. And women with dead children at their breasts." There was a shudder in Danny's voice. "And behind it all I could hear the guns—"

"Glad I don't suffer from nightmares," nonchalantly murmured Mike.

The two got to their feet. A mountain stream provided ice-cold water. Danny took Jane's dressing-case. They walked for some way in silence.

But presently Danny spoke again. "I've a feeling Dave Lubbock was right. This reel ought to be destroyed."

Mike's clear eyes came sharply to Danny's face—then his laugh echoed into the tree-tops. "After the trouble we've been through to get it so far!"

Danny didn't reply at once. His gaze was averted, fixed on the path as they walked. His homely features were wearing the same drawn expression that Mike had noticed on the train overnight. Presently:

"I'm dead serious, Mike," he said. "If it's true this thing means war—"

Again Mike's echoing laugh broke in on his words: "War! I don't believe a word of it!"

Danny shot a sidelong glance at his companion. "Then why did they try to get it away from us at the frontier? Two countries trying to get it—"

Mike shook his head. "What's that to us? Ah, Danny, forget it!"

"I'd like to—for good," murmured Danny. "In fact, I'd like to put a match

to this reel right now and then toss the can into that ravine."

"Jittery?" asked Mike. "Afraid of what's coming to you if we get caught?"

Danny glanced at his partner swiftly again. Mike was smiling—the same maddeningly supercilious smile that had irritated Jane back in Renzburg.

"I'm not afraid," grunted Danny, "but somehow I'm not so keen that people should die through any action of mine."

"It was *I* who got the shot," said Mike shortly. And then: "I reckon you'd better get hold of yourself, Danny-boy. I'll be thinking you're getting soft."

Danny shook his head. "You were a kid in the last war. I lived through it."

"Senility's no excuse for lack of guts!"

"Lack of guts!" Danny had stopped dead, his fists clenched, his eyes blazing.

But he didn't strike. After a long pause he spoke again quietly.

"One of these days you'll be sorry you said that."

Mike's voice was as steady as his steel blue eyes.

"I'll take a chance on that."

A pause. A twig cracked like seeming thunder in the stillness. Danny spoke slowly, bitterly:

"You like yourself one hell of a lot, don't you, Mike? You're not only God's gift to women, but you're ambitious to be papa's little hero too."

"Yeah?"

For a long moment the two men were facing each other—then suddenly Mike's expression changed completely. The superciliousness had gone. He was smiling sunnily.

"What are we quarreling about, Danny?" he asked.

Danny turned along the path once more, Mike falling in beside him. Presently the younger man spoke again, very sincerely.

"I'm sorry, Danny."

A streak of pure gold had suddenly stabbed the gray on a mountain top to the northeast.

Mike spoke once more.

"I reckon it's our job to get this thing back to the States," he observed soberly.

The two trudged on through a world of green and gathering gold.

Once toward noon, very far away, they thought they heard the baying of hounds. Sound will travel vast distances in a mountain forest. The two looked at each other swiftly. But the baying didn't come again.

The track was rising, always rising, hopefully toward the break in the mountains. Evidently some sort of pass must exist there. These forests were certainly deserted. Time told them they had been walking for upward of twenty miles, but never a sign of life had been seen, never a path that suggested recent use. Never the distant echo of a woodsman's ax. A cathedral tranquillity. A hushed peace.

DANNY seemed to have forgotten his qualms. They discussed their plans as they trudged on, talking low. The main point now was to reach Ebsjerg, with its trunk railroads and riverboat services to Belgrade. But the immediate problem was one of food.

"With the right kind of upbringing, I suppose we'd be able to live off the land," said Danny.

"Stewed pine-cones!" suggested Mike.

By four o'clock the trees were thinning, the pass seemed close above them. They quickened their step. A new world lay beyond the mountain crest. The plains, perhaps—provincial towns.

By five o'clock they were clear of the pines. Half an hour later they had reached the crest itself, and stood there, looking toward the northwest.

Forests. The sun dipping over the deep never-ending green. A heat haze wreathing the distant peaks.

Mike spoke ruefully. "I expect one gets used to it after about the fourth week."

They trudged on again. The northern slope of the pass was much as the southern. Presently they were down among the pine trees. The scent hit their nostrils like sweet wine.

Danny started to sing. Quietly at first, but with gathering strength. Probably for the first time in their ageless history, the ravines of Black Tarquin echoed to the songs of the American Civil War—"Marching Through Georgia," "John Brown's Body." Others. Presently Danny changed his language and sang in Italian—"Questa o Quella" from Verdi's "Rigoletto."

"Queer," reflected Mike, "that a voice so lovely should come from a face so completely plain."

Later they were walking in silence again. They approached a bend in the trail.

And suddenly Mike had stopped dead, his hand sharply touching Danny's elbow. The two stood there looking forward. . . .

But Danny had seen it too: A form which moved lithely over against the shadow of a bush, then remained utterly still.

Mike took a step forward. No movement. He stepped again. Then suddenly the lithe form had gone, swiftly, like an arrow down the path.

A girl!

Danny leaped aside to a moss-covered rock, and Mike joined him. They could see the girl running below, heading across open grass to where a group of men were standing beside some caravans.

The girl reached the men, then turned, looking back. Danny had dropped behind the rock, peering forward.

"Gypsies," he whispered beneath his breath.

CHAPTER VII

FOR weeks after the shattering events already related, English sportsmen were recalling the fact that the Heilbrun assassination had coincided with Gold Cup Day at Ascot. In point of fact, in the late-edition newspapers of that auspicious evening it was hard to say which item of news had commanded the greater amount of space—the sensational murder of the Austro-Serbanian dictator, or the equally sensational last moment spurt by means of which Lord Worthington's "Lisping Annie" had romped home to a more than popular win. The British Prime Minister, urgently called from the Royal Enclosure as a hundred thousand voices boomed "They're off!" had remarked with a certain rueful wit: "If this is the New Armageddon, at least we're away to a flying start."

For what with the tangle of alliances, pacts and military understandings enmeshing Near Eastern Europe, Armageddon it might be. Every sane statesman knew that. By midday on June the seventeenth Lisping Annie's triumph had been forgotten, and a shuddering world, already up to its neck in some half-dozen European crises, was awakening to the realization that this particular

crisis looked like the genuine article at last.

A news-reel photographer had been on the spot in Renzburg. According to the Daily *Sun,* his camera had photographed the actual killing, his reel of film proving, or so stated the *Sun's* correspondent, that the assassination had been the work of a Slavonian!

Reflected the Prime Minister, driving from Downing Street to the House, Houdini himself would have found it hard to wriggle out of this tangle.

Shouting newsboys with flaring news placards were running through Parliament Square. The Prime Minister adjusted his spectacles. "Austro-Serbanians Mobilize." "Russian Troop Movements Reported." "U. S. President Urges Europe to Keep Its Head." "Austro-Serbania Waiting."

Waiting for what? The Prime Minister sat back. Waiting for a wretched piece of news-reel to be shown. To be shown where? In the Austro-Serbanian Ministerium? At the Parliament beside the Danube in Slavonian Ebsjerg? In Paris? Or Washington?

It all depended on the luck and tenacity of these infernal news-reel men—on their ability at avoiding arrest. The Prime Minister sighed. . . . The car turned into Parliament Yard. The Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs was waiting in the Prime Minister's retiring room, a bunch of telegrams in his hand.

"Well, what's the latest?" asked the harassed Prime Minister. "Is that news-reel in Austro-Serbanian or Slavonian hands?"

"In neither," replied the Under Secretary grimly. "A tricky couple of customers, these two fellows. It seems they slipped through a Slavonian patrol on the frontier early this morning. That reel is now doing a personally conducted tour of the Black Tarquins."

SALKA, the raven-eyed daughter of old Anatol, was gazing with rather bewildered eyes at the elegant blue leather dressing-case, tucked protectively beneath the amazing young man's left elbow. Salka was thinking the case very beautiful. It looked like blue crocodile skin, but Salka had never heard of a blue crocodile, so of course it couldn't be that.

The gypsy girl sat on the caravan steps with the two men perched on the tailboard just above her. The caravan was jolting over the grassy track, the three pairs of legs swinging in unison. Salka had laughed when she first noticed this fact, and the men had laughed easily with her.

This summer had been a lucky one for the tribe of Anatol, and old Anatol himself was a great believer in luck. On the day prior to leaving the eastern province of Prokovjik, he had found a section of silver fern with an undoubted crucifix strongly patterned thereon. The fern now hung in the King's caravan, but the crucifix had almost dried away.

Luck and prosperity though had attended the journey. And now, to crown it all, beneath the shadow of Hatarhegy, silver had literally dropped from the skies. Two men, a young one and an older, had come down over the northern ridge. They had approached the caravans, the younger speaking with an accent most laughable, yet possessing a certain authority.

"We are citizens of the United States of America. We would like to ask, do you travel north, south, east or west?"

ANATOL had weighed his answer carefully. The question seemed to hold promise of a bargain to be made, and when a bargain is in the air it is well not to appear too eager.

"We go whichever way good fortune will direct us," he had answered. "Maybe we go north."

The younger man seemed well pleased.

"And will you be visiting great cities and large villages on your way?"

Again Anatol had weighed his answer. These men had come down out of the loneliness of Black Tarquins; and men, foreigners saying they are Americans, do not come down out of the loneliness of Black Tarquins if they are traveling honestly. Tact governed Anatol's reply.

"We do not visit great cities or villages."

And the younger man had seemed even better pleased.

"In that case we will offer you fifty Slavonian florins for transportation to the great river," he said. "If when there you can secure for us river passage across to Yugo-Slavia, we will pay you fifty florins more."

Anatol withdrew awhile, discussing this matter with seven of his eight sons, Stefan, Roszi, Simony, Bela, Gabor, Laijos and Bepi, who played the fiddle very beautifully. He would have liked to discuss it with Mirko, his eighth son

—but Mirko had left with his cousin, Janku, nine days earlier, to cross the frontier by means of the Kovacshegy Pass, in order to take view of a gypsy girl, one Terez, whom it was felt might prove a useful and desirable match.

The eldest son, Stefan, had voiced his opinion first.

"Fifty florins is good money. I think we should take these men."

Roszi had spoken next.

"Let us ask them to pay us ten florins more."

Simony, Bela, Gabor and Laijos had signified their agreement to this last suggestion. Only Bepi had said no word at all, continuing merely to play his fiddle. But Bepi was always a youth of few words, and his mind was so often on his music.

Anatol had returned to the two Americans.

"My sons are of a mind," he said. "We will take you to the river for sixty florins."

The younger man nodded. "It is good," he agreed; and presently the gypsies had moved on, with the two men sitting on the leading caravan's tail-board and with Salka just below them. Anatol had noted Salka's swiftly eager interest. He suspected that the blue dressing-case was attracting her quick eye. For Salka loved pretty things. Also she was a very excellent thief—had been from earliest childhood.

Which suspicion showed how little Anatol knew of the workings of his daughter's mind. For Salka was not thinking of the case. Not any more. She was thinking only of the man who carried it.

SALKA knew she loved him. But in any event that was right and proper. After all, she had known he was coming. A tall dark stranger out of the south. She had read it all in her own palm.

She examined his face. It was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. More beautiful than that blue case. His dark eyes were liquid like a woman's. His hair curled like the hair of that zimbal player at Leysac. She had loved that zimbal player, but he hadn't noticed her, and so she had stolen his watch. That was three years ago, when she was fifteen.

But this one would notice her. The palm had been clear about that. They would be married with much rejoicing; and then he would take her away to his own people. She had read it all in her own palm.

Once the man had looked at her. She had felt her heart leap. She had wanted to say then: "We are going to love." But she knew he must speak first.

Her eyes came again to the case. When they were married, she would ask him why he carried such a case, and if there were indeed blue crocodiles. She slipped her fingers gently toward his hand.

MIKE, indeed had looked at the girl more than once, but on seeing the effect of his first glance, he had done it covertly. She had flushed, then gone pale. Mike had put it down to shyness.

And presently the caravans were creaking down a steep track, Anatol's sons, cousins and dependents clinging to the wheels with much shouting and jocular comment. The sun set. A long dusk faded regretfully. Mike mused. This curious feeling of arrested animation, of being suspended as it were between yesterday and tomorrow, couldn't go on forever. In less than a week they would be making their final break across the river frontier, and then hotfoot for New York.

But before that there would be five days at least of this jog-jog-jogging along narrow, ageless ways. Not the most comfortable form of travel perhaps, but peculiarly restful.

Quite suddenly Mike was conscious that a small warm hand had slipped quietly into his own. For a moment his mind was swimming bewilderedly, jerked too violently into the immediate present. Then he looked at Salka.

Her face was indistinct in the dusk, but he could see that her lips were parted in a shy smile. Her dark eyes were shining. Mike didn't remove his hand. He smiled back. No word was spoken.

With old Anatol directing, the caravans had swung off the track into a pine-carpeted glade. Fires quickly burned; and food was being prepared. Mike, watching from where he lay beneath a tree, had a queer feeling of unreality: The caravans around the pool of firelight. The trees shooting up into an interminable nothingness. It was all much too like a film set, with carefully selected bit players and extras. Only Bepi seemed to do no work. He just sat on the steps of a caravan, forever playing that old fiddle. . . .

Supper was served, rough but palatable. Salka seemed to have disappeared.

But she put in an appearance later. She came from her father's caravan, and Mike saw that she had changed her frock. This new one was fresh and clean. The flounced skirt, interwoven with bright colors, only seemed to emphasize more strongly the panther litheness of her young figure.

Presently she came to Mike and Danny, dropping on the soft bed of pine needles.

"Is it that you would wish me to read your fortune?" she asked.

Mike felt in his pocket. "Do I cross your palm with silver?" he asked.

But Salka shook her head.

"I do not wish silver," she said, and took his hand, holding it open so that the firelight reflected on the lines. Bepi's fiddle sobbed feelingly.

And Salka was smiling.

"A girl. It is not long since you have met her. She means much in your life. She will mean very much more."

"Is that all you can tell me?" asked Mike.

"A journey on twisting water. The girl goes with you, a long way from this place. You will live until you are very old. You will be happy. You will be the father of three children, and the grandfather of many more. You will grieve when you die, for you will have loved your life very greatly."

"Sounds good to me," grinned Mike. "See if you can say as much for the boy friend."

Salka smiled, taking Danny's hand. Danny was conscious of an almost unbreathed sigh; then the girl was very still.

"Can't you see anything?" grinned Danny.

Salka's dark eyes peered into his face.

"You are very kind," she said. "Much kinder than people would believe. You have had good times, hard times. You are in love too."

"You never said *I* was in love," sharply interjected Mike.

"But what about my future?" asked Danny. "Do I have children too?"

"You will have four children," replied Salka. "You too will be very happy, and very rich. You will ride in a swift motorcar. But first—I see you lying with blood on your chest."

But she knew she was lying. She was making it all up. For of this man's future she knew she had nothing to tell—save that one terrible thing. She looked at his face again. It was deeply rutted, and rather plain. Well, maybe to a man who was not handsome, the dreadful wound she saw would not matter so much.

She returned to Mike: The right hand. The left hand is the fortune with which one is born, the right the fortune which a man will build for himself. The proof would lie in the right hand.

And Salka's raven eyes were shining.

"You will be married within one year," she laughed gayly. "We have that little in common. It is in my hand that *I* will be married within the year too."

"We ought to make it a double wedding," smiled Mike.

Salka nodded, though his real meaning had passed over her head. To Salka, double meant two, and it was two people always who married each other. . . .

Presently she had gone.

Danny lay back on the grass. "That child's crazy about you," he murmured. "I suppose she meant herself, when she talked of a girl."

"I don't know who else she could have meant," replied Mike.

But once again the two were thinking of Jane.

CHAPTER VIII

THE three days that followed were uneventful. The caravans jogged on, dropping down from the mountain forests into rolling foothills where little winds rippled patterns in the standing corn. On the third day the foothills were behind, too, and a great empty plain stretched ahead. Mike had once seen the Hungarian Pustka. This was like it. Utterly flat, with distance meaning nothing. Only an occasional line of poplar trees broke the level. As the sun rose, high mirages hung across the horizon—the soft still waters of a lake. The cupola of a church.

A very different country this to Austro-Serbania. The Teuton neatness had gone. The narrow roads were of dust, heavily pockmarked. A queer melancholy hung over the plains, like the

attractive and utterly unforgettable melancholy of Picardy in northern France.

Old Anatol walked beside Mike and Danny. He pointed out the first mirage.

"The 'Fata Morgana.' That lake does not exist there at all, though undoubtedly it is somewhere. A reflection—of the Keltese perhaps, a hundred miles behind us in Austro-Serbania. Or it may even be reflecting Lake Balaton in southern Hungary."

Presently Anatol talked of news he had heard as they came through the hamlet of Cynzka. Heilbrun, the Austro-Serbanian strong man, had been murdered—some four days since, now. Feeling was running high along the frontier.

"My son, Mirko, will bring us details," Anatol said. "Tonight he will rejoin us, back from across the border. He would go. Even *I* could not restrain him." But there was a world of pride in the old man's voice.

He looked up at an eagle, winging low above them.

And presently the sun was dipping toward that quivering horizon. The quiet day drew to a close.

AT dusk the caravans pulled into a small wood beside the road. This was obviously a recognized gypsy encampment, the earth charred from past fires. Mike and Danny went to the wood's edge, looking back the way they had come. The Black Tarquins lay like sprawled giants across the southwestern horizon, in hard silhouette against the sunset's afterglow. The acridly sweet scent of the gypsy fires drifted through the trees. The night was very still.

Suddenly the two men were conscious that Bepi, the fiddler, was beside them. He was pointing toward the north, where a faint glow seemed to reflect back from the gathering night cloud.

"Ebsjerg," he said. "Thirty miles away. My father will pass to the east of it. Tomorrow night you will see the Danube."

It was the first time Bepi had spoken to either of them.

The evening was a repetition of previous ones—uneventful, peaceful. Salka seemed to be occupied with her own thoughts, but it was obvious they were happy ones. A village lay some two or three miles along the road. A cracked bell could be heard chiming each hour. By ten the encampment was sleeping.

And the village church bell had just tinkled midnight when Mirko was led in by his cousin Janku. The sound of the footsteps awakened the lightly sleeping Anatol. The old man's shout awakened the rest of the tribe.

JANKU stood in the firelight with the giant Mirko utterly motionless beside him. Janku spoke dispassionately.

"We were caught by a farmer and his men on the Austro-Serbanian slopes of Joszefhegy. They had been drinking, and were nervous, afraid of war, else their attitude could not have been so harsh. They said we were Slavonians. I replied we were gypsies. But Mirko, bravely foolish as ever, proudly said that we were gypsies *and* Slavonians. He said we would live to see Austro-Serbania included among our provinces. The men laughed, and replied that he might live till such a time, but assuredly he would never see it. They put out Mirko's eyes—twelve of them holding him while they scorched with a red-hot fire-iron. My eyes they spared because I held my tongue."

Old Anatol had listened in silence. Now he turned to face his giant son. His whip was in his hand. Suddenly he let out a great cry, striking Mirko stingingly across the bandage-covered eyes. His voice was livid with anger.

"You fool! You were always a proud, headstrong fool! What are you without your eyes?"

The giant hadn't even winced at the blow. Anatol's voice broke.

"You are nothing any more—but my son—only my son—"

He was crying like a child. Mike turned away.

But Danny stood with his gaze fixed on the bandage covering the sightless eyes. His face was ashen.

Janku was speaking again.

"We reached the encampment of Sandor, and there the women tended Mirko's eyes. He never saw the girl Terez, which was as well, for she is very plain."

Bepi's fiddle was playing quietly. He had shown no interest in the scene whatsoever.

IT was just after four o'clock, when the encampment was sleeping again, that Bepi crawled to the side of his giant young brother, touching him on the sleeve, waking him. Bepi had been wanting to ask a question. Mirko, no longer knowing the difference between

dark and light, would be able to sleep in the daytime now. There seemed no reason why the question shouldn't be answered tonight.

Mirko had come out of Austro-Serbania. It was the death of Heilbrun that had led to the burning of his eyes. Mirko must have heard many people talking. Did any of them talk of two men—foreigners—who had escaped into the depths of Black Tarquins?

Mirko spoke slowly.

"Do you refer to the two Americans for whom the Austro-Serbanian Government has offered a reward of ten thousand schillings?"

Bepi started. "Why did they offer such a reward, my brother?"

But Mirko only shrugged. "They were wanted."

Bepi leaned nearer.

"Can you tell any reason why these men should also fear to be seen in Slavonia?"

Mirko replied with incontrovertible logic.

"Maybe they are wanted in Slavonia too."

Bepi leaped swiftly to his feet.

"You are wise, my brother," he said. "Give me your hand. You must tell this to our father."

So it came about that as the night clouds gave way to the first gray of dawn, Stefan, Anatol's eldest son and the tribal heir, stole away from the little wood, mounting a pony and cantering into the north. The conference in Anatol's caravan had been quiet but direct. All eight sons had been present. Bepi had said: "If Austro-Serbania is willing to pay a reward for these men's betrayal, then possibly Slavonia will pay a like reward also. In any case there is no harm in investigation."

"I will meet you all at the southern gate to Kestathely," Stefan had said. And directly to his father: "Do not have these men near you at that time, for if I bring the police, it is possible they will take fright and escape before we can give them up."

Anatol nodded his agreement, and Stefan slipped away to a field where the pony stood with its knees deep in dew. By the time the sun climbed over the horizon, pony and man were eight miles on their way. . . .

The gypsy cortège took the dusty road past the village, then swung east, avoiding the road to Ebsjerg. The cracked bell chimed six as the caravans creaked past. But for the bell this might have been a village of the dead.

Mike and Danny walked side by side, but Danny was curiously silent, his face pale. Mike wondered if he were feeling ill.

There seemed a change in the gypsies today. They were disinclined to talk. Mike put it down to the shock of overnight. Only the dark-eyed Salka was the same. Mike had wondered at her lack of despondency, mentally deciding that she was either very simple or very heartless.

He wasn't to know the girl's reasoning.

For Salka had certainly tried to be despondent. For many hours in the night she had thought of Mirko's eyes, and the thought had made her sad. Then the sun had got up and the birds had started to sing and she found she couldn't be sad any longer. She had talked with Mirko, and he hadn't been sad either. In fact he hadn't even mentioned his misfortune. Instead he had talked of Salka's own future, with the air of one who knows more than he will disclose. He had said: "You are going to be very happy. Soon, I think, you will wed." Salka told herself that the blind know much that is hidden from those who can see.

And with this realization, thoughts of the rosy future that was opening out for her came surging back. Last night she had consulted her hand again. She had crossed her palm with a very sacred charm that had been given her by a shy young priest at Algrad. She had read that things would come to a head tonight. The man would speak, request her hand in marriage. Soon he would take her away to his own people.

LATE in the afternoon a slight rise broke the level of the plain. The sun glinted on wide, winding water. It was the first time Danny had spoken for hours.

"The Danube," he said.

Mike nodded. Danny glanced at him.

"You haven't changed your mind about that news-reel? About destroying it, I mean?"

Mike groaned. "Do we have to go into this again, Danny?"

Danny shook his head. "I just thought you might have," he murmured.

The sun set. The dusk gave way to darkness. Mike looked with interest at the great crimson glare of Ebsjerg, hang-

ing close now across the western sky. Presently the caravans stopped unexpectedly. A flight of geese rose clamorously protesting, heading for some low woods, necks astrain.

And Roszi, Anatol's second son, came to Mike and Danny, speaking urbanely, saying that his father had a matter of importance to discuss. Roszi led the way to where the old gypsy sat waiting at the roadside. Anatol waved his hand toward the uncertain lights of a small town ahead, speaking gravely:

"We are half a mile short of the southern gate of Kestathely—the barrier where travelers pay toll for the right to pass through the town, a money exaction much regretted by those who have to pay, but nevertheless traditional. This is the dangerous section of this journey, for if any people are searching for you, then undoubtedly they will be searching here."

"What makes you think people might be searching for us?" asked Mike.

Anatol smiled. "I think nothing; but if you are sure they are not, then I am surely wasting my breath."

"Go on," said Mike quietly.

ANATOL continued: "I take my caravans directly through the town. It is my suggestion that you shall not be with us as we pass through."

"How?"

Anatol indicated a footpath, threading the gloom to the right of the road.

"That path passes beside those poplar trees—you can just see them—skirts a wood, then comes out on a very poor road, deep with cart-ruts and sometimes impassable, two miles east of Kestathely. There is a hamlet, Laiszon by name, and a café. The café proprietor is an excellent friend of mine. You will meet no one there who could be of any account. There I would like you to wait until I send for you—perhaps at eleven o'clock. By that time I shall be through the town, and tomorrow we will reach the river."

Mike looked doubtfully toward the line of poplars.

"Are you sure we will find this place?"

"You will find it under Salka's guidance," replied Anatol.

Mike had forgotten Salka. He turned to find her waiting eagerly.

"I will guide you," she said.

Anatol broke in once more.

"The toll we pay is not ruinous, but even so it has to be paid. Perhaps you would give me some part of the fifty florins which will be due to us tomorrow?"

"I gave you sixty florins four days ago," said Mike. "You'll get the rest when you've found us a barge at the Danube."

"I was afraid that would be your reply," said Anatol a little regretfully.

THE gypsy girl led the way, hurrying lithely. At first the path ran parallel to the road, back, away from Kestathely. A horseman was passing on the road, going toward the caravans and the town. The three remained very still beside a bush. For a moment the horseman's face was seen in dark silhouette. Salka's keen eyes were puzzled. The man looked like a gypsy.

He had gone. Salka proceeded. The path turned away from the road. The poplars loomed above. Salka noticed that Mike was carrying the blue case, and wondered why. It could have been left on the caravan, seeing that they were returning before midnight.

She glanced sidelong at his face. He smiled at her, she thought perhaps gratefully. Perhaps his love would spring from gratitude.

The three skirted the wood. There was a touch of damp in the air. The path nearly died in standing fern, then grew again, widening. A flying beetle struck Danny's forehead. Suddenly low whitewashed cottages seemed to leap out of the shadow.

"Laiszon," said Salka. "The café is beyond."

They came into the village. A miniature if greedy forest of fir trees seemed to close right in, making it hard to tell where the forest ended and the village began. Laiszon looked like the loneliest place on earth.

They came to the café—"The Broken Ploughshare." A candle flickered uncertainly within, the only sign of life in all Laiszon. Salka entered the parlor, while the two waited in the gloom of the wall.

But Mike was thinking back.

"Why did that old rascal ask us for money?" he murmured reflectively. "Do you think he's up to something?"

"We can trust the girl—anyway, where your interests are concerned," said Danny.

Presently Salka returned. "It is all right," she said, and led the way into the parlor.

The room had a look of squalor which even its whitewashed walls couldn't dispel. Its furnishings were bare. A trestle table and some half-dozen benches, one broken. A heap of old bottles against a wall. An aged mechanical piano. A few fly-blown wall cards advertising obscure Slavonian beers. A cracked mirror. A disused bed in one corner.

Two peasant laborers, the only customers present tonight, were leaving as Salka led the way in. They glanced without interest at the two Americans.

But there was interest in their eyes as they saw Mike place the dressing-case on the table. One touched the other's arm, speaking low, then laughed coarsely as the door slammed after them. Salka had caught the man's words.

"He said these foreigners are like women in the pretty things they carry," related Salka without emphasis.

Mike grunted. Mine host appeared, a swarthy Slavonian with an undoubted gypsy strain. He muttered a greeting, placing two mugs of beer on the table. He glanced curiously at the case, then withdrew.

Salka was speaking regretfully.

"I have to return to the caravans. You will wait here." She glanced at the mechanical piano. "You can play the instrument; no one will hear or care. I will come back to fetch you when my father bids it."

"Make it soon," said Mike, viewing the room distastefully. And Salka left, walking on air, the word echoing in her mind. Soon. *Soon.* This man wished her to return to him soon!

MIKE was looking dubiously at the dressing-case.

"The reel itself wouldn't be so noticeable as this darned thing," he said. He inspected the locks. "Pass me that fire-iron. Let's see if we can force it open."

Without comment Danny passed a bent piece of rusty iron. For a second time in a week a fine example of the leather craftsman's art was giving up the ghost before its appointed day.

Danny shook his head ruefully. "That dressing-case probably cost Jane a week's salary."

"I'll buy her another," grinned Mike.

But there was no answering smile on Danny's lips. Mike tried to rally him.

"Pretty glum, aren't you? Cheer up. Have another beer. Put on that infernal music-box. Or sing! It'll cover up the noise I'm making."

SALKA returned to the caravans. She found them standing one behind the other at the southern barrier to Kestathely. Gypsies were lounging around, and she was conscious of a queer feeling of expectation. In the light of the barrier lamp stood a powerful automobile.

And also in the light of the lamp, tethered to the steps of the king's caravan, stood a fine young mare.

Salka was puzzled. She hurried up the steps—and stopped dead on the threshold. The room seemed full of people: Anatol, her brothers, others. She noticed that Stefan was here. A man's voice was speaking, the words cutting across the girl's senses like a whiplash.

"As a soldier, I can't express myself too clearly. If you know where these two men are hiding, then it's your duty to tell us now!"

Salka's eyes had flashed to the speaker's face. The type was easy enough to place—coldly military, a captain of the Slavonian Guard. And the man beside him was easy to place too, the neat clipped mustache of a high ranking Ebsjerg police official. But the man beyond—

Salka's keen eyes had come to the face of a third stranger—a dark-eyed young man with black matted hair, and features keenly chiseled. A gypsy, but not of the tribe of Anatol. Unaccountably uneasy, Salka was aware that the young man was staring at her. In fact, his eyes never left her face. Blind Mirko sat by, his expression registering exactly nothing.

Anatol was replying to the captain of guard.

"I have not said I knew where these men were hiding."

"You've implied it," countered the captain hotly. "How else would you know we were wanting that blue dressing-case? In your own interests I'd better warn you—"

The police official broke in. He was a more intelligent man than was this domineering soldier.

"I don't think we'll get anywhere this way, Debro," he said, and faced the old gypsy, speaking gently. "Anatol, this is a very grave matter. It may even be a matter of war."

Anatol shrugged. "Such things are beyond my comprehension."

"The thousands of crosses in Galicia aren't beyond your comprehension," replied the official. "Have you ever seen

them, Anatol? They lie there—well-nigh half a million of them. Little stone crosses, side by side, with an inverted sword hanging above them." He looked at Stefan and Roszi and Simony. "These men were too young for the last war. They will not be too young for the next."

ANATOL spoke without emotion. "It is you who threaten now."

But the official shook his head. "I don't threaten, Anatol; but you've got to realize. Your sons won't be spared any more than mine will be—or his will be." He indicated the captain.

And in doing so, he had seen the silent Mirko. His voice dropped low:

"Or any more than that lad was spared when he went up across the Black Tarquins!"

Anatol knocked the ash from his pipe.

"What will you pay?" he asked.

The captain broke in violently: "So! Then you do know where they are!"

"What will you pay?"

Salka had leaned for support against the door. The whole caravan seemed to be swaying, swinging sickeningly. As in a dream she could hear the voices talking, striking the bargain.

"The Government will pay two hundred florins."

"Two hundred florins could hardly jog my memory."

"Three hundred."

"My sons will tell you how forgetful I have grown."

The captain growled:

"Damn the man, it's blackmail, but—five hundred!"

"Your sons will die too," said the official.

And Salka believed her heart had stopped beating. It seemed numbed, heavy like a lead weight. Abstractedly she could see her father nodding his agreement to the price. She could hear him speaking.

"They are at Laiszon. Stefan will go with you. The road is bad, but if you drive slowly—"

The captain was already hurrying to the car, the police official following. Anatol, his eyes gleaming avariciously, went to pass his daughter in the doorway. Her voice came as if from very far away.

"You are selling these men?"

Old Anatol was chuckling. "The good luck of the tribe runs still. Five hundred florins—"

"But for what?"

Anatol was suddenly aware of the terror in the girl's eyes. She was frightened. Foolish girl, but why? He spoke reassuringly.

"There, there, little bird. It is nothing to concern your pretty head." He turned. "But here is your concern: Aranka, who has ridden from the hills where five days since I talked of a certain matter with Lazar, his father. There, Salka, the tribe of Lazar is rich. Aranka will make you a fine husband."

Salka's face was paler than death.

So she had been right—and wrong. He had come, the tall dark stranger who would take her hand in marriage! He had come—and Salka knew that the numbness in her heart had gone, and in its place was a cold aching.

The young gypsy was smiling, proud of his good looks. His teeth shone in the lamplight.

And Salka turned and ran. Half blind with tears, she was yet aware of the car with its engine throbbing. Two soldiers, with revolvers at their hips, were clambering in. Stefan was taking his place beside the military chauffeur. But Anatol was saying to Aranka: "She is young, and shy. But she will love you."

SALKA was running, back down the road and up the footpath. The poplars loomed above her. Running like the wind, she skirted the wood. She clutched at her heart. She felt it would never be warm again. She would never laugh again. Never dream sweet, unbelievably sweet dreams.

Running. That road was so bad. She could reach the Broken Ploughshare before the car.

But ah, the aching in her heart. . . .

The village was ahead. The man she loved was there, and the soldiers were coming to take him. Panting, she told herself that she would save him. To know that he was free, might ease a little this aching in her heart. And the soldiers could take the other—that plain one. For in any case, what use would escape be to him, in view of what she had read in his palm?

Salka had got it all planned. She would say she brought word from her father. She would tell that homely one to stay in the parlor, while she drew the other out to the road. There was a field path that ran into the forest. The police would not know where to pursue. Or perhaps the arrest of that homely one would suffice.

She reached the pitted village street. No sign of the car yet. She thought it must be at least half a mile away still. She ran toward the Broken Ploughshare.

And suddenly she stopped dead.

A voice, very lovely, was singing. Salka stood entranced, telling herself that she had not known till now that Mike could sing. And his voice was so beautiful, too. Almost as beautiful as his face. The words meant nothing to her, of course, but the girl was certain they were full of an exquisite sadness; a sadness, perhaps, that could find an answer in her own aching heart. . . .

Salka remembered the soldiers and the police official and the car. She threw open the door. The voice was singing still. She stopped dead, staring.

FOR it was the plain one, Danny, who was singing, while the other sat at the table, the blue dressing-case just beside him. And somehow, in this moment, Salka knew that she could not let the soldiers take Danny either. A voice as beautiful as that, boxed in a prison—like a beautiful singing bird stifled in a cage.

She choked back something that seemed to be closing her throat. She spoke quickly, addressing Mike instinctively:

"You must get away from this place quickly. And him—the one who sings. They are going to take you both." She was pointing at the dressing-case. "I think it is that they are after."

Mike rose sharply.

"They can have it!" he said, utterly matter-of-fact, and turned to the door. But even as he turned, Salka was conscious that he had snatched a small brown paper-covered parcel from the table.

Salka gave swift directions. The field path led into the forest. At the parting of two ways, they would turn left, over a small hill. From there they could reach the river. They could find a boat, perhaps, some way of crossing into Yugoslavia.

Mike was muttering grateful thanks. He tried to thrust a note into Salka's hand.

"For your father."

But Salka replied: "My father has had all the money he will deserve."

The two men hurried away into the gloom.

And the headlights of the approaching car were bumping up the village track.

Salka turned back into the room. She saw the blue dressing-case. His case! She caught it by the handle. It sprang open. A woman's clothes—stockings, delicate underwear, a flower-embroidered brassière, were strewn across the table. Salka was staring, utterly bewildered.

And the soldiers were entering the room. The Captain darted for the case. He cursed aloud.

"It's gone! Where are those men?"

The police official was facing Salka, speaking with a voice as thin and swift as a winging arrow.

"Have they gone? Were they here?"

Salka lied weakly.

"I—don't—know."

And then she saw Stefan, large and menacing, beside the door. His eyes were accusing.

She ran from the room. As she went, her foot kicked a silver-backed hairbrush. It sped across the rough floor. She snatched it up, the instinctive thief.

MANY hours later Salka returned to the caravans, where they stood in a glade beside a small stream, a mile or so north of Kestathely. The sobbing of Bepi's fiddle rose and fell.

She paused on the path, looking toward the mountains, cut by the dying moon. She looked toward the glare of Ebsjerg. A distant rumble of thunder broke on the still summer air. It sounded like the reverberation of big guns. And suddenly Salka knew what she had done. She remembered the words of that police official. "Half a million crosses. Little stone crosses, lying side by side. Your own sons will not be spared."

She shuddered. Stefan's face was before her, very still—but strong even in death.

Bepi's fiddle ceased. The silence was broken only by the monotonous rippling of the stream.

Salka turned toward her father's caravan. But she stopped dead again. It

must have been an effect of light—perhaps summer lightning reflecting on cloud.

For a moment it seemed that a sword was hanging above the encampment. An inverted sword—like a cross.

The cross faded. But in that moment Salka knew she loved her brothers, and she feared for them. Walking like one in a trance, she entered the caravan. And then she saw: Anatol standing within, the seven brothers around him. They stood as a group, waiting, menacing.

Blind Mirko sat, his face registering nothing.

Stefan's hand went aloft, with the fist clenched, enormous. . . . Salka's scream rang wildly through the night. . . .

And Mike and Danny were on the rise of a hill, looking back toward Kestathely. Mike was pointing. It was as though they could see the blue smoke of gypsy fires rising thinly above the dark trees.

CHAPTER IX

IT was to the inevitable Hotel Bristol on the shining Duna Utza, the famous Danubian waterfront at Ebsjerg, that Jane was eventually brought on the early morning of June the seventeenth; the morning following Mike's and Danny's flight from the train in the forests of Black Tarquin.

Jane's adventures on the way had been varied. The few minutes immediately following the news-reel men's flight had been hectic. With Mr. Grosset moaning over his riddled suitcase on the one side, and with Lieutenant Janos Hatvany firing questions at her on the other, she had found her mind reeling utterly.

For one wild moment she had actually tried to follow Mike and Danny, impelled by the thought that one of them might be wounded, needing her help. But Janos had snatched at her wrist, pulling her back, shouting: "No, you shall not escape too!"

Jane had groaned. "I'm not trying to escape—what have I to escape from? But those men may be hurt."

Janos had thrust her back into the sleeping-compartment. His questions came swiftly.

"Who, exactly, *are* you?" he demanded. "Why did you let those men take your dressing-case? Is the length of news-reel within it? But of course you will admit to being an accomplice?"

Jane had covered her ears, more to shut out the rattle of the machine-guns than in an effort to evade providing answers. But Janos had obviously jumped to his own conclusions. So this woman was disinclined to talk? Very well, then, there were those who would assuredly know how to make her!

The train moved on, with Jane locked in her compartment, the most bewildered young woman in Near Eastern Europe.

She lay on her bed beside a six-inch slit of open window, watching the dark forests slip by, trying to disentangle things in her own mind. What had happened? What had these men done? Neither of them looked like a crook—or a spy. Then why should a miniature army turn out to arrest them? She passed her hand before her eyes, and found herself wondering if Mike was dead—or nice homely Danny. She shuddered, trying to put the thought out of her mind.

In the small hours of the morning the train was running into the suburbs of Ebsjerg. Through the open slit of window Jane could see moonlight gleaming on a broad stretch of the Danube. She could see the twin city of Zunt, climbing unevenly over her hills, immediately across the river in Yugoslavia.

Thoughts of Mike and Danny were recurring again. If, as seemed possible, they were trying to pull off some unaccountable get-away into Yugoslavia, then it must have been for these twin cities of Ebsjerg and Zunt that they were aiming. The Danube, she knew, formed the frontier between the two countries. From the window she could see the red lights of the two frontier posts, gleaming midway across the river bridge.

She started to dress, trying to view life practically. Mike had probably lost her her job, in any case. She certainly hadn't heard the last of that sliced pigskin case. There'd be more trouble ahead with Mr. Grosset.

THERE was more trouble—but not with Mr. Grosset.

Three taciturn police officials were waiting on the station platform at Ebsjerg. Jane found herself hustled off the train. Indeed, she never saw Mr. Grosset or any one of her charges again, but the thought of their faces when they found at Belgrade that their escorted

tour was escorted no longer made her laugh spontaneously.

Jane was taken through the silent, freshly washed streets to police headquarters and placed in a stuffy waiting-room. Passing police looked at her with mingled interest and suspicion. She began to feel like Olga Pullofsky, the Beautiful Spy, except that she wasn't so sure about the beautiful end of it.

Presently a plain-clothes police inspector arrived, accompanied by a muscular-looking woman with a face like a bulldog. Jane was thrust into a taxi and taken to the Hotel Bristol—a quite comfortable apartment with a fine view of the rambling streets of Zunt across the river. The inspector departed, but the lady with the bulldog features remained, grimly making up a bed for herself on the sitting-room couch. Jane mentally nicknamed her "Cerbera, the Guardian of the Gates," and endeavored to institute a little desultory conversation in German. But the woman replied distantly in Slavonian, so Jane gave it up. Why worry, anyway? The worst these people could do would be to put her in front of a firing squad. She went to bed as dawn stole palely over a wide bend of the Danube. She slept, and dreamed of handsome Mike and homely Danny, and of a ferocious she-bear who spoke only Slavonian.

JANE awoke to find Cerbera bending over her with a cup of tea and a morning's copy of the Ebsjerg *Telegram*. The tea was weak but welcome. The newspaper wasn't so welcome, on account of the fact that Jane could neither speak nor read one word of Slavonian. She eyed the semi-Greek characters with a certain dispassionate interest. She judged by the size of the headlines that the Heilbrun assassination had caused more than a passing stir in Slavonian editorial circles. But beyond that, she gleaned nothing.

She rose and bathed and felt better for it. But as she dressed, she began to be conscious of a new feeling which she realized had not been present overnight. At first the feeling was indefinite, just a vague and unaccountable irritation; but gradually it took shape, crystallizing into a growing sense of resentment which seemed to center around one name only—Mike! It was Mike who was to blame for all this.

She came on a tourist map in the bureau and automatically found herself studying Mike's and Danny's possible means of escape. The Danubian frontier? The open stretches of river would be hard to cross without help. Ebsjerg itself, the frontier bridges between the twin cities? Not easy, but easier perhaps than elsewhere. The traffic- and foot-bridge to Zunt would obviously be too closely guarded. But there were trains crossing the great steel railway bridge. It might be possible to stow away on one of them. Then there were passenger steamers too, plying upstream, twelve hours or so to Belgrade, with a further few hours on to Budapest and Vienna. From her window Jane could see them—large paddle steamers with cabins and brightly painted decks. She saw the morning boat leave, churning away from the quay just in front of the Carlton and the Dunapolita-Ritz hotels. The boat backed downstream, then swept round under the traffic-bridge, crossing the river and picking up further passengers directly opposite. Very pretty it looked in the sunlight. Jane decided that when she was old, and had at last been released from the Ebsjerg Bastille, or whatever the local jail was called, she would start her journey home that way.

Presently she thought of telephoning the American consul. There was no difficulty. Seemingly she was not being telephonically restricted. The consul was awkward and non-committal. He said he would call on her later in the day, and didn't seem at all pleased at this prospect of becoming involved in a matter which might have a political significance. Jane gave it up again, deciding there was nothing to do but wait. She sat and conjectured on her plight while Cerbera knitted by the window. The lady with the bulldog features seemed to have thoughts of her own.

AT two o'clock, just at the close of a rather desultory lunch, life took another jerk forward. Cerbera had just offered Jane a second cup of coffee, emitting a word which sounded midway between a spit and a hiccough, when the police inspector returned.

Cerbera rose respectfully, her teeth grinding in a sort of nervous ecstasy. The inspector looked at Jane's frank eyes, at her neat figure. There was an ill-concealed note of admiration in his voice.

"You have to accompany me to the office of the Commissioner of Police."

Again a taxi. Jane was struck by the gayety of the streets. The terraced sidewalk cafés with their gypsy orchestras, the bustle of the business area. She noticed, too, the number of soldiers in service uniform.

THREE men rose as Jane entered the Commissioner's office. The Commissioner himself, a well-fed-looking individual, presented the other two—a tall young man in the early thirties, bearing a remarkable resemblance to England's Anthony Eden, and a much older man, obviously a soldier. Both bowed as the Commissioner spoke.

"Count Paul Csiky, of the Foreign Office. General Erzhegyi—"

Jane nodded, and sat down in a chair politely proffered by Count Csiky. The Commissioner's opening gambit told Jane a thing she had been only too anxious to know.

"Miss Lovat, you may as well be told at once: The two men who escaped from your compartment last night are still at large."

Count Csiky was watching Jane keenly. He was certain he saw her give a start of relief. But she only replied: "I see."

Count Csiky spoke. His voice was velvety, queerly effeminate.

"Miss Lovat, I need hardly stress the awkwardness of your position. The men have escaped for the moment, but you at least can be held as an accomplice."

Jane started involuntarily. "An accomplice?"

Her eyes switched to the Commissioner's face, but the man's voice was as stern as his expression. He nodded grimly. "Count Csiky is right. Miss Lovat, you will be doing yourself the best possible service by being entirely honest with us. Now—first—tell us all you know about these two men."

There was an expectant pause. Then Jane replied quietly.

"I know nothing about them."

Count Csiky broke in sharply.

"Lying will help no one, Miss Lovat—least of all yourself!"

Lying! Jane's resentment against Mike suddenly seethed almost to boiling-point. So she was being held as an accomplice, was she? An accomplice in what? A piece of international jewel-thievery, perhaps. She spoke angrily:

"I'm not lying. I don't lie. I know nothing about them at all."

Csiky showed his very white teeth.

"Come, Miss Lovat. They were in your sleeping-compartment—"

"Even then I know nothing about them. Oh, I spent an evening with the two of them, the night before Herr Heilbrun arrived in Renzburg. But that was the first time we'd met."

"Then what about this news-reel?" suddenly challenged General Erzhegyi.

News-reel! That lieutenant on the train had mentioned a news-reel. Jane shook her head.

"I don't know anything about any news-reel," she said.

The three men exchanged glances. Count Csiky gave a queer little sigh, then leaned forward, speaking very seriously.

"Miss Lovat, supposing I were to tell you that the action of these two men may bring about a new European war?"

Jane started violently. This was new ground.

"By escaping from your soldiers?" she asked.

"By escaping with a length of news-reel—we presume in that dressing-case they snatched."

Jane was becoming increasingly puzzled.

"They didn't put any news-reel in my dressing-case. That is, as far as I know."

General Erzhegyi broke in acidly:

"May I say you are not improving your chances, young woman?"

Jane turned on him. "I don't know what you mean."

"If you wish to help your own position—"

Jane ran her fingers bewilderedly through her blonde curls. "My position! How can I help my position? I don't even know what it is."

The Commissioner nodded. "Hm!" He glanced at Count Csiky once more. Csiky smiled, extending his cigarette-case to Jane.

"A cigarette?"

Jane took one. She spoke somewhat dazedly.

"Will you tell me—how could a length of news-reel bring about a war?"

IT was General Erzhegyi who answered, crisply. Count Csiky was providing a light.

"They got a shot of the assassination of Heilbrun. According to an English journalist's report, that shot reveals that the assassin was a Slavonian. If once that news-reel shot is shown, proving this

journalist's statement, then Austro-Serbania will declare war on Slavonia—"

"And Russia will declare war on Austro-Serbania," murmured Csiky, the words purring around his lips. "Germany will declare war on Russia. France will declare war on Germany. Italy will declare war on France. England will declare war on Italy. Japan will declare war on England. America will—" He shrugged, smiling. "Who knows what America will do—but undoubtedly she will have to foot the bill eventually, and I don't suppose she really wants that."

Jane was staring disbelievingly. "And all because two men have escaped with a news-reel?"

Csiky shrugged again. "I may be exaggerating, but I don't think I am. Anyway, we aren't eager to take any chances. We want to stop that news-reel—quietly—before it can do any definite harm."

The Commissioner leaned across his desk.

"So will you help us now?" he asked.

But Jane only shook her head. "I can't. I would, but I can't. I've told you the truth."

"You are in sympathy with world war?" accusingly rapped out the General.

"Oh, no."

Count Csiky spoke quietly. "I believe you're sincere in that," he said. . . .

And later, when Jane had gone:

"I believe she's speaking the truth," said Csiky, "but we'll keep her by us for a few days. She may be useful even yet."

JANE was taken back to the hotel, her mind in a whirl. But she was desperately eager now to find out more. War! World war! It sounded too utterly fantastic.

Mr. Lewton, the American consul, was waiting in the lounge. He was surprised when he saw Jane. He too had been thinking along the lines of Olga the Spy.

Up in the suite, with Cerbera knitting silently at the window, Jane told her position and just how she had got into it. She held back nothing.

Mr. Lewton listened attentively. Presently he was prowling up and down the room.

"War!" he said. "I'd like to think your Foreign Office friend was overstating the case, but I don't think he was. If these men get out of Slavonia with that wretched news-reel intact—that is, if it shows what it's said to show—then there's no doubt Slavonia will be overrun in a matter of days. Austro-Serbania has been wanting war for years. The other countries of Europe—well, who's to say? But Germany's certainly talking of mobilization. So is Russia. It's just this sort of crazy incident that could set off the spark."

Jane spoke quietly. "And if the news-reel never got through, the whole thing might die down again?"

"It *would* die down again," said Lewton with conviction. "No country is ready for war yet, except perhaps Austro-Serbania. And if she lost her excuse for it—"

He took his hat.

"I'll see the Police Commissioner this afternoon—although, quite frankly, I don't think they'll let you leave this country until these two men have either been caught or accounted for."

"Accounted for!"

The Consul glanced at Jane sharply, catching the alarm in her eyes. He spoke apologetically.

"Sorry I said that. But these Slavonians are pretty desperate, I fear. Let's hope these fellows just get caught. Nothing much can happen to them once this length of reel has passed out of their hands."

He spoke again from the door.

"Anything else I can do for you? Anything I can get?"

Jane nodded. "I'd like a radio. One that will pull in Paris and other stations."

"I'll have one sent up. They can be hired for so many *fillérs* a day."

He left. Jane sat looking across the river at Zunt. But she was thinking of a length of news-reel in a blue dressing-case, carried by a tall young man who hadn't hesitated to get her into just about the worst jam she had ever known.

Later in the day the radio arrived. Jane spent the six or seven hours up till midnight roving through the European ether. But she wasn't very lucky. She caught the name Heilbrun more than once, but the stations always seemed to be tuning off this subject as Jane tuned in. She heard one statesman's speech from Paris—a solemn voice talking of the "unparalleled gravity of the situation." She caught a fiery speech from Stuttgart

—wild cheering, the blare of military bands. But she got nothing definite. She went to bed at twelve and lay for an hour thinking black and resentful thoughts of Mike. Cerbera had been snoring like a grampus since before eleven.

A LULL set in. Jane began to think she had been forgotten. It was on the second day she noticed the microphone neatly concealed in the shade of the standard lamp. She smiled. So they had been listening to everything she said! Well, it didn't matter. She had spoken the truth in the Commissioner's office. She had still spoken the truth to the Consul, with the added admittal of a certain friendship with the villainous Mike. She left the microphone alone and spent the next three days tuning the radio.

She was getting the knack of it now, learning when to expect the news bulletins. England she noticed, had very little to say, the British Broadcasting Corporation being most well bred and reserved. Paris was saying a lot, and Italy even more. Austro-Serbania was rattling the saber in terrifying manner. Wild threats and the broadcast clank of marching feet. Moscow seemed to be pretty noisy too.

But no news came of Mike or Danny.

It was not until the morning of the sixth day that Jane Lovat was sent for to police headquarters again. She found the same group assembled; the Commissioner, the keenly intelligent Count Csiky, the hard-bitten General Erzhegyi. But a fourth person was present, a young man whose face seemed familiar. It took her some seconds to place him as Lieutenant Janos Hatvany, the young officer of the train.

Count Csiky came directly to the point:

"Miss Lovat, last night at a small market town called Kestathely, some ten miles east of here, we came within an inch of capturing your friends."

Jane started. Csiky's white teeth shone swiftly.

"You have no objection to my calling them your friends? Unfortunately, they slipped through our fingers, and we now feel they may be heading for Ebsjerg. That is why we have sent for you."

Jane was definitely puzzled.

"I don't understand," she said. "Are you thinking that one of these men may have telephoned me?"

"I'm thinking that one of them may telephone you during the course of the next few hours."

Jane's opinion of Slavonian Foreign Office officials dropped with a thud.

"Why, they don't even know I'm here."

"Perhaps they *will*," smiled Count Csiky; and suddenly he was speaking eagerly: "Miss Lovat, it is one chance in ten, but we can't leave any stone unturned. Always provided you agree, we are going to have you photographed, with a collection of what you Americans might refer to as film extras posing as tourists under your charge. This photograph, of you as a free agent carrying on with your job in Ebsjerg, will appear in all the evening papers—just as an interesting picture. It is a longer chance that they will telephone you, perhaps in a desperate attempt to enlist your help in their escape. If they do telephone, we want you to arrange to meet them both—at a café we will name."

Jane was staring.

"But I can't do that! You can't expect it! I—why, *I'm* American too."

Count Csiky sighed and glanced half-humorously at his companions. Then he spoke again, biting on the words.

"Miss Lovat, it is this very national feeling that is plunging the world into war. But perhaps I haven't made myself clear: No harm can come to these men—provided we can take them quietly, and relieve them of this offensive length of news-reel. Please be assured, we want to save lives, not take them." Suddenly his manner changed, insinuatingly. "But if they are not taken in Slavonia, then of course anything may happen."

JANE could hear her own voice speaking, though she had a curious feeling of being an onlooker.

"What do you mean by, 'anything may happen'?"

Count Csiky replied directly:

"Dear young lady, it should be obvious to anyone that while these men are still in possession of that news-reel, they are safer on Slavonian soil than on any other. Tonight they may try to break across the frontier, either by train or by boat. I have a feeling that your regard for one of these two is a little greater than you cared to admit at our last meeting."

Jane spoke involuntarily.

"Have you had a lot of fun with that microphone?"

Csiky smiled. "You found it? But that is splendid! Now the cards are really on the table." His eyes suddenly hardened. "As I said, if they manage to cross the border, anything may happen —and *one thing assuredly will!*"

"What?"

The voice was grave. "They will not get through to Belgrade alive."

"But—how?"

"Miss Lovat, do believe we have our agents on every train, on every boat leaving Ebsjerg. Let these men get through our police cordon here, they still have to run the gantlet of our agents. And whereas on our own soil we can arrest them, outside Slavonia we can't, and there will be only one alternative left to our men."

"You mean—" Jane's question died on her lips.

THE COUNT nodded. "If allowed to slip through our hands, this thing is going to spell chaos. Seven million men were killed in the Great War. What are two lives against a recurrence of that?"

Jane spoke very quietly: "They will die—"

"They will never be heard of again." Csiky's voice was purring. "They will disappear—just as others have disappeared when the fate of a nation has been at stake. But there will be no war."

Jane was conscious that she could no longer feel the beat of her heart. A few minutes since, it had been beating very fast—but now it seemed to have stopped, almost as if numbed. Once she had been full of resentment against Mike. Now that resentment had passed, leaving an accountable feeling of desolation.

"They will never be heard of again."

Out of the corner of her eye, Jane could see a sparrow on the window ledge. And she was remembering something she had once been told about the Western Front:

There had been no silence, ever in the world, quite like that silence when the guns were not speaking. The only live things left were those pitiful men, hidden away in holes in the earth, watching for each other through rusting barbed wire. Everything else was either dead or had gone. Even the sparrows had gone.

Csiky's voice cut through her thoughts.

"In war it is the masses who suffer most. This length of news-reel *is* war—in embryo. And one of those men has it in his pocket. There isn't a soul in Slavonia—or in Europe for that matter —who would help those men one half-inch on their way. Don't tell us you would be the exception?"

For a while Jane didn't reply. Her face was pale ivory. Her eyebrows were puckered. Again she was thinking—of hundreds of women and children, scorched and mangled by falling fire from the sky. She was thinking of those sparrows flying away to where it was quiet, and safe. And then she was thinking of two young Americans—and of secret agents with murder in their eyes waiting around the shadow of a door.

And she knew that whatever he had done to her, she had a very warm feeling for Mike as well as for Danny; somehow she had to save him—not only from death, but from himself: from the horror of this thing that he was bringing on the earth—this thing, the memory of which would haunt him until his dying day.

She gave an involuntary little sigh. Six pairs of eyes were watching her keenly. She nodded.

"If you will promise no harm can come to them following the arrest—"

"They will be allowed to go on to Belgrade, just as soon as this news-reel is in our hands."

"I'll help," said Jane.

SHE had gone. Count Csiky was speaking gravely.

"What I said, I meant. If these men slip past our police cordon, they must still be stopped before they reach Belgrade." He looked at a chart on the desk. "The evening train north is well covered. Prokov will be on the Orient connection with his best men. But I still think the river is the most likely means of escape." He turned to Lieutenant Janos Hatvany. "Would you know these men if you saw them again?"

"I'd know the younger one in a million," said Janos—and a face that had stood out hard against a swiftly looming fist was dancing before his eyes. Csiky was nodding.

"I thought as much. Then I'll want you to be on the Belgrade boat. It goes out at ten-twenty tonight. Don't go aboard in Ebsjerg. These men might recognize *you,* and give us the slip before you can pass the warning. Cross the river into Yugoslavia and wait for the boat at Zunt. She picks up passengers there immediately after leaving the Ebs-

jerg quay. But go aboard quietly. Miklos and his assistant will be with you. I'll want that boat searched from stem to stern. Miklos will know how to deal with that. If the men are aboard—well, Miklos will know how to deal with that too."

ON the café terrace of the Bristol the photograph was taken. An incongruous collection of "tourists" had been provided. But they looked genuine enough. Jane stood in the center, smilingly pointing at the river. Later that day the picture graced the second page of the Ebsjerg evening paper. The front page would have been too obvious. The quarry might have scented a trap.

Then began the wait in Jane's suite at the Bristol. Count Csiky was present, the Commissioner, two inspectors, General Erzhegyi. Other police were waiting in an adjoining room.

The group sat around in armchairs. Special listening extensions had been run from the telephone exchange.

But nothing happened. The hands of the clock slid forward. Seven—seven-thirty. Eight—eight-thirty. The General remarked that the evening train for the north would have just left. Nine—nine-thirty. Ten—the Commissioner observed that the Belgrade night boat would be leaving in twenty minutes. Csiky glanced from the window. The boat itself, shining with lights, was waiting at the quay facing the Dunapolita-Ritz Hotel. General Erzhegyi followed the Count's eyes. He asked: "That young lieutenant goes aboard at Zunt?"

Csiky nodded. "He'll know these men if they're there. Miklos is on the boat already."

The General sat back, gratified. Csiky helped himself to a cognac, and in doing so noticed Jane. She was looking through the window at the waiting boat. Her eyes were frightened.

But suddenly the telephone bell rang. A call for Miss Lovat. Jane took the receiver. The others had taken the extensions, listening intently. The clerk at the *caisse* below effected the connection. Count Csiky moved quickly to her side.

And Jane's heart leaped. It was Mike's voice.

"Jane? Swell! Ah, my angel, I've been worrying myself ill about you—about what might have happened after we ran out on you. I saw your picture in the paper. Didn't know you were still around. We've been some time getting here—taking a look at Slavonia on the way. See here, I wanted to apologize for borrowing your case—"

Jane tried to find words. Her mouth was dry.

"My case? Oh, please don't worry about that."

Mike again: "Your middle name's *sportsman*. Jane, you and I have got to get together more than a lot. We're going to look pretty hitting the high-spots."

Count Csiky touched Jane's wrist. "Ask where they are," he whispered.

Jane nodded. Mike's voice was burbling on:

"I've been thinking about you a lot, Janie-Pie. I'll be in Paris by Tuesday night. There's a little café up on the Butte—'The Cadets of Gascony,' facing the Place du Tertres, with Paris at your feet—maybe you know it? If only you could be there! Somehow I feel it's our setting—"

Jane spoke thinly: "Where are you now, Mike?"

"Oh, knocking around," came the answer. "We only hit town an hour or so back. We're pushing off on the Orient Express connection tonight. Ebsjerg seems a cheery spot."

"The Orient connection goes at four A.M.," whispered the Commissioner.

"Ask them to meet you at the Jozsef Café," said Count Csiky.

Jane nodded. Again she had a suspicion that her heart had stopped beating. She was feeling rather sick. But she knew this thing had to be. She spoke with a forced attempt at cheerfulness:

"I'd like to see you. Can't we meet?"

There seemed a moment's hesitation from the other end. Then Mike's voice came back:

"Would it be safe?"

Jane nodded again. "The streets are crowded. No one will notice you. What about ten-thirty, at the Jozsef Café?"

Once more the momentary hesitation. Then—

"It's a date. The Jozsef Café. I saw it just now. It's the big one on the Nagymezo Ring. Okay. I'll be there."

Jane went to hang up, but Mike's swiftly eager voice came through again:

"Oh, and Jane—till we meet again—don't forget to remember I adore you."

"We'll be meeting in twenty minutes," said Jane.

"It's too long," replied Mike. "Twenty minutes. I'll be waiting."

Jane heard the click of Mike's receiver. She hung up. An inspector had already hurried from the room. Jane noticed that her fingers were shaking.

Count Csiky came to her, his eyes gleaming.

"You handled it magnificently."

Jane said quietly: "You've promised."

"I've promised," solemnly nodded Count Csiky, and took another cognac.

THE ancient clock above the Palace of Justice had chimed a quarter past ten. The Count's big car whisked Jane, the Commissioner, General Erzhegyi and himself through the busy streets. Plain-clothes police followed. Promenading Ebsjergites withdrew discreetly to the sidewalks as the high-pitched alarum bell trilled, denoting the passage of a member of the diplomatic corps.

The car deposited its passengers around the corner from the Jozsef Café. Jane went on alone, conscious that the police were surrounding the building, and that the occupants of the car were waiting near the door.

Neither Mike nor Danny was at any of the tables on the sidewalk terrace. Jane entered the café itself. It was comfortably full. She glanced once over her shoulder. Count Csiky was in the doorway now, watching eagerly. She went on, toward the tables around the gypsy orchestra at the rear.

She was saying to herself: "I'm going to betray Mike—but I'm doing it to save him."

But suddenly she had stopped dead. She had seen a man, sitting alone. But that man wasn't Mike. It was Danny.

CHAPTER X

AFTER the precipitate flight from the hamlet of Laiszon, Mike and Danny had put one mile only between themselves and their probable pursuers. The woodland path twisted inconsequently, presently coming out on a rise beyond Kestathely, the wide Danube shimmering to the north.

The two had spent the rest of the night in the edge of the wood, believing that to attempt to reach the road might be to walk blindly into a trap. Also, Mike reasoned that the police would hardly expect them to "stick around," as it were, and the pursuit would go quickly farther afield—a line of reasoning which was entirely correct.

Early next morning, under cover of the dawn mist, they pushed on across dew-drenched fields toward the river. Danny was very silent, his strongly rutted face a study in thoughtfulness. Mike asked if anything was wrong, but Danny merely shook his head.

"I'm not sure," he said. "I'm trying to work it out."

Mike let it go at that. They reached a sharply rising field and lay among the fern, looking out across the Danube at the low Yugoslavian coast. The clearing mist still hung on the face of the water.

Mike turned his keen blue eyes on Danny: "You're a pretty strong swimmer, aren't you?"

"The water would ruin the negative," replied Danny laconically.

A string of river barges drifted slowly downstream.

"Do you think we could attract their attention?" asked Mike.

"More likely to attract the attention of the frontier guards," observed Danny, and pointed to where the early sun flashed on the steel helmets of a squad obviously searching the riverbank.

Mike nodded. "We'll have more chance in Ebsjerg," he said. "Better keep under cover as much as possible."

They moved on warily, taking advantage of every available cover—fields of standing corn, the reeds of a stream. Toward midday the spires of Ebsjerg Cathedral cut the sky to the west. The city's suburbs could be seen.

Soldiers were moving on the road—big guns going south. They made a detour through a wood, very nearly running head-on into the arms of a search party which was systematically beating the undergrowth.

The sun set. The two worked their way across a hill, keeping just below the crest. Lights were twinkling. On one side a ribbon arm of suburb stretched along the paved highway. Darkness fell, the glare of the business area hanging across the sky some three or four miles ahead. They knew they must be past the searchers now, past any guards on the roads approaching the city. They struck left, leaving the fields and entering badly lit suburban streets of small houses, quaint but poverty-stricken. As they reached the highway, a street-car clanged cityward.

Mike said, "We'll take a chance on it," and held up his hand for the driver to stop.

The car reeked of stale tobacco-smoke. The two or three passengers didn't even look up. Mike took tickets to the Nagymezo Korut. Presently the car was clanging its way through streets of lighted shops.

And then a policeman came aboard. Mike's foot pressed sharply against Danny's. But Danny seemed to have lost all interest in his surroundings.

The policeman seemed in much the same mood.

The car was running along a fine boulevard now, the sweep of the Danube to the right. A sharp clanging turn into the Vaci Utza with its bright lights and promenading crowds. Past the Palace of St. Maria and the old Guild Hall —and then the terraced cafés and general cheerfulness of the Nagymezo Korut. As the two left the car, the policeman withdrew his feet to let them pass. But he didn't raise his eyes. He was a very tired policeman.

Like its northeasterly neighbor Bucharest, Ebsjerg has been called the Little Paris of the Near East. The city's gayety is undoubted. The cafés haven't a thing to learn from Montmartre, and the Nagymezo Korut is as brightly lit as the Boulevard des Italiens itself. And the women are notoriously beautiful.

Mike paused, surveying the crowds—always stimulating. Ebsjerg tonight seemed to have acquired something of the abandon of Paris on the fourteenth of July, but with a certain grimness behind the mirth. War was obviously in the air. Soldiers were everywhere; officers in uniform, drinking and laughing at the café tables. And police—hundreds of police mingling with the throng. Anti-Austro-Serbanian riots could only precipitate trouble.

MIKE knew his Ebsjerg. He and Danny snatched a meal at a restaurant against the Theatre St. Stephen. Then Mike led the way off the Nagymezo Korut, past the sidewalk tables of the Café Paris Sports de la Paix, into the older section of the town, striking through to the railroad station.

The two men mingled with the crowd around the train-indicator. A slow train would leave for Belgrade at eight-thirty. The Orient connection wouldn't go out till four A.M. But the barriers were infested with police—police questioning, inspecting passports, searching luggage.

"Looking for us," remarked Mike dryly. Danny didn't reply.

Mike led the way again through another cross-section of the old town. They came out on the Duna Utza, the Danubian waterfront, just below the Carlton Hotel. The Belgrade-Budapest passenger-boat stood waiting at the quay, the ticket-office time-table announcing that she would go out at ten-twenty, calling at Zunt across the river, and leaving there again fifteen minutes later. She would be in Belgrade at nine in the morning.

Mike took a passing glance at the frontier post on the new bridge. Even at a hundred yards, it was possible to see that everyone crossing was being stopped, questioned, made to show his passport or *carte d'identité*.

"No chance of skipping across to Zunt," mused Mike, then looked back longingly at the boat. "I can't help feeling that's the solution. Overnight to Belgrade. If only we could get through that passport barrier—"

Still Danny didn't reply.

THEY took to the narrow streets around the ancient city. Presently they sat outside a café on the comparatively quiet Szepes Ut. Mike ordered beer. Danny asked for a brandy. Mike glanced at him curiously.

"Better not get high," he observed warningly. "It's going to be tough enough slipping out of this city sober."

Danny spoke quietly. "I'm not slipping out of this city," he said.

Mike nearly spilled his beer. "What's that?"

"I've worked it all out, Mike. I'm not going on."

Mike was goggling. "Have you lost your senses, or something?"

But Danny was shaking his head.

"I think I've come to them. No, it's no good, Mike. If you go on, you're going on alone."

For two days now, Danny had had a hunch that he was going to die. He had had it first, of course, when Salka told their fortunes; and again when he had seen that blinded gypsy lad led into the camp by Janku. He had felt it again when he was singing in the Broken Ploughshare at Laiszon.

The knowledge hadn't worried him. It was just one of those things—it had to be accepted. Other matters had worried him more: Mirko's hideous fate, for example, even though he knew the blinding of the gypsy lad to be just one of the least of the million horrors this

new war would produce. Again it seemed the crazy old world was reeling. Kipling's lines had been beating on his mind: *"Once more the dreadful word that sickened earth of old: No law except the sword, unsheathed and uncontrolled."*

But what had worried Danny most was the fact that he himself was playing a part in these mad events. This war would flame, and it would flame perhaps because he and Mike were doing the job they were paid to do. As a man going to the scaffold mentally readjusts his outlook, so Danny had readjusted his angle of the immediate future. He had come to a decision—a dying man can make decisions. He would subscribe to this stark insanity no longer. If, as he felt, he was going to meet his Maker, at least he would meet Him without this hideous thing on his conscience.

Mike had the appearance of a man who had been knocked sidewise. He was stuttering.

"But we're practically out of the woods. We've only got to get aboard that boat—somehow. We're going to be tops, with the news-reel ball at our feet."

"We're going to smell to high heaven," said Danny quietly. "If not to our employers, at least to ourselves."

"You'd better lay off drink," barked Mike.

"Another brandy," said Danny to the passing waiter.

A pause. Presently Mike rose.

"I'm going to have a shave," he said. "You could do with one too."

He crossed the narrow street to a small barber-shop.

And Danny sat alone. The brandy arrived. He downed it. He rose, followed Mike. It would be pleasant to have a shave, after a week without one.

HE entered the barber-shop. The barber was applying a hot towel to Mike's six-day beard. Danny returned the man's cheerful nod and took a seat on the bench.

The barber was a talkative soul.

Well, well, and the gentleman was certainly *needing* a shave. Quite right not to trust to these provincial barbers. Cut your head off soon as look at you—with their razors only fit for cutting cornstalks!

And so the gentleman had just come in from the country, was that it? A pity. In that case he will have missed the football match between the Ebsjerg

Panthers and the Harlequins. Such a good match, too. The Harlequins won by two goals. But no doubt the gentleman would have heard.

He brought Danny into the conversation.

"And this gentleman who also needs a shave? You two are friends, am I right?"

Mike nodded doubtfully. The barber glanced furtively over his shoulder. With the exception of Mike, Danny and the barber himself, the shop was indubitably empty. But the barber had matters of political import to discuss, and he wasn't one to take any chances.

"You two came from Csetnek, or Kestathely perhaps? Were they talking much of these two Americans—wanted by the police—*you* know?"

Mike caught Danny's eye in the glass behind the basins. He bubbled through the lather around his lips.

"The Americans? Oh, yes, the two from Austro-Serbania, with this famous bit of news-reel."

The barber nodded sagely. He knew a thing or two, that barber. In fact, as he was presently relating, he knew things not known to the ordinary man in the street.

"You will understand, what I say to you here is in the greatest confidence. If you or your friend should repeat this confidence—well, of course, anything might happen. But those men—ah, I know. I have my sources of information." He leaned forward. "These men—they actually *employed* the assassin who killed Heilbrun!"

Mike looked up sharply. Danny's glance had jerked to the barber's face. The little man's eyes were beady with pleasure.

"But oh, yes. It is almost general knowledge in Government circles. They employed the assassin, in order to get this remarkable shot and so plunge the world into war. They of course were employed by a group of financiers with world munition interests. But indeed, it is surely the truth, though neither of you must relate it to a soul."

"I'll promise you that," muttered Mike.

The barber was shaking his head.

"Dear me, but it is wicked the way these things are done. Though, take it from me, these men are in for a difficult time of it. They have done a thing, very much as the English would say, 'outside the pale.' They are two against a nation; and speaking for myself, I wouldn't raise a finger to help them, not if I saw them being torn to pieces by the mob. I mean, when you recall what we went through in the last war—"

He was silent for a while, applying the razor. Danny was watching Mike in the mirror. The younger man seemed to be deliberately avoiding his gaze. But the next remark nearly resulted in Mike losing his nose! "I pray to God they are dead. . . . Oh, but sir, did I hurt you?"

"All right. Something bit my neck."

"A gnat. These summer nights are full of them." The barber's little eyes were gleaming again. "But I was saying, it will be hard for these two men to survive. I was told by a friend of mine, one who fills a most important capacity at the Foreign Office. 'Our secret agents are as efficient as any in Europe,' he told me. 'And it will be hard,' he said, 'very hard, for these men to leave Slavonia alive.'"

DANNY took Mike's place in the chair. The barber hardly seemed to notice the change. He was obviously on one of his favorite topics—the vital necessity for a powerful secret service.

"And when one thinks of the freedom a foreigner is allowed in this city! English and American tourists, in and out of Ebsjerg, looking around the Cathedral and the Zoo, and the Castle Museum with all the freedom of a Slavonian national. And who is to know if they are tourists at all? Who is to know what they are? When one thinks of these two alleged news-reel men, hiring assassins and doing heaven knows what mischief else! If I had my way with Americans—"

But he stopped dead. A look of horror had suddenly come into his eyes. Mike's gaze jerked to the man's hand. The razor was poised, directly above Danny's jugular vein. The barber's voice was shaking.

"You two are not Americans?"

"No, Swedish," swiftly countered Mike from his seat beyond.

The barber heaved a fervent sigh of relief. The razor slid on toward less vulnerable portions of Danny's physiognomy.

"But that is different. Swedes are good men." The barber was lathering Danny's cheeks again now. "I would never put any bar up against the Swedes. I have a Swedish sister-in-law, the wife to my brother, Erno Kovacs. She comes from—oh, but of course you would know the place. They make matches there, twenty miles out of Stockholm?"

The situation looked awkward. The barber was waiting expectantly, his eyes on Mike, the razor poised again. Danny smiled ironically through the lather. Mike made a wild dive in the dark.

"Helsinglub!" he said.

The barber looked vague. "It might be that—"

"It is that," stated Mike, and wondered if such a city existed.

A LARGE blond man carrying a bulging Gladstone bag was entering the shop. Helsinglub and its problematical matches was forgotten.

"My good friend, Hans Vogel. But this is a great pleasure. I had not expected you back so soon." The barber delightedly addressed Mike and Danny. "But Mr. Vogel is a foreigner too. A Swiss. Of course the Swiss are good men also. I would not bar the Swiss. My Hans, these two gentlemen are strangers—Swedish—from the same city as my sister-in-law Greta. Helsin—er—"

"Glub!" concluded Mike.

"Helsinglub, of course. Greta has talked of it many times. But you three gentlemen should be very good friends. Foreigners, you know, in a strange land—"

Mr. Vogel was shaking Mike's hand warmly. He shook Danny's too.

"A pleasure. A great pleasure."

He hung up his jacket beside Danny's. He planted himself firmly in the second barber's chair. He removed his stiff collar from his sweating neck. He was announcing determinedly:

"I have just arrived in from Belgrade. I thought I would have a shave before returning home to surprise my wife."

"Do not surprise her too undiplomatically," warned the barber. "Knock loudly on the front door, and do not look to see who runs out at the back."

Both barber and Vogel laughed uproariously. This was a good joke indeed. Danny had risen and was stroking his smooth chin.

It is said that the little god of luck is always waiting around the corner. Mike had risen too. Mention of Belgrade had reminded him of his main problem. As the laughter boomed, he was wondering: "How in hell am I going to get across that frontier?"

Suddenly he caught sight of Mr. Vogel's jacket. It was swinging slowly on its hook. The inside pocket was visible—and sticking from the pocket was a passport!

Mike couldn't believe his own eyes. Things like this just didn't happen.

But they did.

A hot towel was being placed around Mr. Vogel's chin. Mr. Vogel's piggy little eyes were viewing the ceiling good-humoredly. Mike took Danny's jacket from the wall—and in taking it, he also took the passport.

Mike passed Danny his jacket, Danny slipping into it, puzzled by this unexpected show of politeness. But he murmured his thanks.

Affectionate farewells. Assurances that both would return again. The barber was wishful that the two should meet his sister-in-law, Greta. Mike and Danny said that this was one of the wishes nearest to their hearts. They went out to the street.

But the barber was shouting, hurrying after them. Mike turned, surprised.

"You are forgetting your parcel," said the barber, and passed the brown paper-covered can of news-reel.

"Thanks a lot," said Mike.

"Ah, you Swedes!" gurgled the barber.

THE two hurried away along the street. Mike mopped his brow.

"Nearly lost it that time," he said.

"It's probably a pity you didn't," murmured Danny, then asked: "What's your next move?"

Mike glanced at him. "You still intend to stay put in Ebsjerg?"

"Yes."

Mike turned toward the lighted streets beyond. "Then I've got to shop. A respectable voyager on river boats doesn't travel without baggage."

"River boats?"

Mike nodded. "I'm on the ten-twenty boat for Belgrade."

"Good talk! And will you tell me how you're going to get aboard?"

The younger man was smiling sunnily. "My name is Hans Vogel. My nationality is Swiss. And if you don't believe me, take a look at my passport."

IT was Saturday evening. The narrow brightly lit shopping streets were thronged. Neither Mike nor Danny attracted any attention. Mike bought a second-hand suitcase, two new shirts and some new underwear. He bought a hairbrush, a toothbrush and some shaving materials. Also he bought an old pair of flannel trousers, an old jacket, a wide canvas belt and a raincoat.

Mike led the way again, through narrow ways which opened out suddenly on the vividly lighted Duna Utza waterfront. For a minute or so he disappeared into a men's lavatory below ground, then rejoined Danny beside the river parapet. The news-reel can was in his hand, the brown paper no longer around it. Quietly, unobtrusively, he let the can slip from his hand, the dark waters below swallowing it.

Danny started violently, staring. Then he saw the recently purchased wide canvas belt around Mike's middle and he nodded understandingly. A length of news-reel wound around a man's waist is as useful a form of smuggling as any other.

It was a quarter to ten. They stopped at a café for a last drink. Mike was conscious of a feeling of awkwardness. He bought an evening paper.

The front page was full of war news—the speeches of diplomats, new threats. England had ordered the *Hood* and the *Repulse* to Gibraltar. But there seemed a note of optimism, even then. The two missing men, the paper said, had not been found. And this was the sixth day.

Mike turned over a page and started. A picture—a group of tourists on a hotel terrace. The caption below read: *"Foreign Tourists in Ebsjerg. Enthusiastic Visitors at the Hotel Bristol."* And the guide in the center was Jane.

For a few moments Mike stared at the picture; then he grinned and passed it to Danny. His eyes were full of devilment.

"I'm going to phone her," he said.

"And get caught?"

The strangely flat note in Danny's voice made Mike glance at him sharply. It struck him in this moment that he had never seen a queerer look behind the man's eyes. Danny was shaking his head.

"Of course, it doesn't concern me any more. But this may be some sort of trick."

"Two can play tricks," said Mike.

"Stick around." And he went to the telephone booth at the rear of the café.

In a matter of moments he was through to the Bristol. Moments more, and he was aware of an unaccountable quickening of his pulse. Jane's voice was coming through.

"Mike! My case? Oh, please don't worry about that. . . . Where are you now, Mike?"

Mike sensed Danny at his elbow. He turned his head, meeting the other man's gaze. A trap? Others listening perhaps?

He replied: "Oh, knocking around. We only hit town an hour or so back. We're pushing off on the Orient Express connection tonight. Ebsjerg seems a cheery spot."

There was a momentary pause from the other end. Then Jane was saying: "I'd like to see you. Can't we meet? . . . . The streets are crowded. What about ten-thirty, at the Joszef Café?"

Mike's dancing eyes were fixed on Danny's face. More than ever it sounded like a trap. Somehow Jane had been "got at!" He replied blithely:

"It's a date. The Joszef Café. I saw it just now. It's the big one on the Nagymezo Ring. Okay. I'll be there."

A word or two more, and he hung up, grinning.

"And if any people were listening in, this'll teach 'em a lesson."

He hurried Danny out to the street. They fell into a passing taxi, heading toward the river boat quay.

They didn't see the police cars disgorging plain-clothes police at the café three minutes later; the inspector cursing as he found his birds had flown. . . .

The taxi reached the quay. Mike paid it off just short of the Dunapolita-Ritz Hotel. Keeping away from the bright terrace lights, the two crossed to the ticket office. Passengers were going aboard, predominantly young couples making the week-end trip to Belgrade. The boat was comparatively full. Police and soldiers were at the barrier.

Mike took Danny's hand.

"So long, Danny. Maybe I know how you feel. See you at home sometime."

He turned to go, then spoke over his shoulder.

"I hate to break a date," he said. "Take a chance on it and meet Jane yourself if you like. Ten-thirty at the Joszef Café." He glanced across the river to Zunt. "I'll be in Yugoslavia by that time, but you'd better keep quiet about my whereabouts if anyone's in earshot. I'd like a quiet night; and as you said, that meeting may be a trick."

He had gone. Danny stood looking after him.

Mike purchased his ticket. He came to the barrier, a policeman stopping him. He showed the passport, apologizing gutturally for his lack of Slavonian.

An official ran his hands through the contents of the suitcase. For a moment a soldier's eyes rested meditatively on the wide canvas belt. But the inspector in charge nodded for Mike to proceed. The police, it seems, were interested in *two* men, one of whom would be carrying a parcel shaped like a can of film negative.

CHAPTER XI

DANNY stood watching the boat go out, paddles swirling as she backed down toward the bridge before swinging across the river to pick up further voyagers at Yugoslavian Zunt. He was conscious of a queer elation. This thing was no longer his business, nothing to do with him any more. He was free. And he was going to see Jane. He had pictured her face so often during those nights across Slavonia.

He turned away. The boat's whistle tooted shrilly, but Danny had lost interest in the boat. He was walking on air. Everything was different. New! Perhaps his presentiment of death even had been just a form of morbid reaction.

He passed through the crowds on the Nagymezo Korut. He came to the Joszef Café, brightly lit, comfortably full. He went toward the gypsy orchestra in the rear, finding a vacant table. He was very happy. Jane would be coming here. What if it was a trap? At least he would be seeing her face.

He glanced unsteadily at the clock. The hands crawled to the half-hour. Mike would be out of Slavonia by this time. The boat would be coming to Zunt. Danny drained his glass. To hell with the boat! To hell with the newsreel. He was here to meet Jane.

And then he saw her coming, threading her way through the tables, walking lightly, neat and real. He thrilled at the sight of her. Ah, but she was fine.

And she was alone, too. Then this wasn't a trap.

Jane had seen him. Danny rose. He was smiling, starting to speak.

And then he was suddenly conscious of the bewilderment in her childlike eyes. Her voice, full of what seemed like unreasoned terror, came sharply through the rosy haze:

"For God's sake, where's Mike?"

FOR a moment Danny stared uncertainly. Jane had slipped into a chair. Danny half staggered, sitting too. Jane spoke sharply below the rising and falling of the Tsigane fiddles

"Answer—oh, quick—where is he?"

"He's gone," said Danny.

"Gone where?"

"Mustn't say—people about."

"Danny, this is desperate. No one can hear you but me. You must tell me where he's gone."

Danny hesitated. This wasn't the sort of reunion he had visualized. He glanced peeringly around. Certainly no one was within earshot, not with the gypsy orchestra kicking up such a shindy.

"He's gone on the boat."

"The boat!" Jane's reiteration was more a gasp than anything else.

"The boat to Belgrade," explained Danny. "By this time, he'll be safely out of trouble."

Jane's eyes were full of terror. "Safe! He's never been in greater danger before."

"What's that?"

She was glancing sharply at the clock. "Ten-thirty. The boat's at Zunt." She half rose.

Danny spoke bewilderedly.

"Is anything wrong?"

Jane's eyes were fixed on the man's face.

"He's going to be killed, Danny," she said quietly.

"That can't be. He's out of Slavonia now."

"That's *why* he'll be killed," said Jane.

Suddenly she shuddered violently. She leaned forward, shaking Danny's arm.

"Danny, you've got to do something!"

"I'm through."

Jane's voice softened. "You're right. Oh, you're right, of course. This thing should never have gone so far. But—" She shook her head. "I can't—I can't let this happen."

For a moment she was standing quite still. Then suddenly she had gone, running toward the street. Danny sat looking after her.

JANE was facing Count Csiky on the sidewalk. And the Count was thinking: "This young woman has just sustained a shock."

Jane was saying: "He's not here. Mike Lester, I mean. He's gone."

"Where?"

"I don't know." Her eyes were desperate. "Oh, let me go. I can't help you any more."

The Count nodded. "I don't think you can—willingly." He smiled kindly. "All right, go to your hotel. —Get a taxi for this lady, Szabo. No, let her go alone. I'll see you tomorrow, Miss Lovat."

The taxi moved off.

"Do we follow?" asked a police inspector.

Csiky nodded. "That girl's desperate. If the man's across the frontier, she may try to get after him. Don't blunder in, if it's a job our agents can handle."

The inspector and two of his men left, trailing Jane's taxi. The Commissioner nodded toward the café interior.

"Shall we take him along to headquarters?"

But Count Csiky shook his head. "No. He also may be more useful free. We'll wait—just a little while."

Jane was being clever with her taxi. First she had told the driver to go to the Bristol. Two blocks away, she had given fresh directions. The man was to drive along the Duna Utza, double back swiftly on his own tracks, then cross the river bridge to the steamboat pier at Zunt.

The driver was content. The whole thing sounded crazy, but foreigners were like that, anyway. This young woman was a good fare, and he always liked taking passengers into Zunt. There was a Yugoslavian girl at the Café Margit. She had hips like a young gazelle.

The taxi doubled back. It swung across the river bridge after a pause for passport-inspection at the midstream frontier posts. It came alongside the Zunt steamboat quay with five minutes to spare. Jane bought a ticket for Belgrade. A small cabin was available on B deck, somewhere uncomfortably near the starboard paddle. A steward tried to conceal his surprise on learning that this passenger had no baggage. Jane followed the man below.

BUT she had not seen the Slavonian police car purr silkily to a standstill opposite the quay. She had not seen

the plain-clothes police-inspector hurry to a young man who was passing unobtrusively up the gangplank.

A whistle was blowing. The *Queen of Hungary,* pride of the Duna Steam Navigation Company, was preparing to cast off.

This was the week-enders' boat, the retreat of lovers and would-be lovers, up the river to Belgrade and back. A dance band played into the wicked small hours on the upper deck. A gypsy orchestra fiddled away in the restaurant-bar.

The steward brought Jane to her cabin. The paddles were starting to rotate, the walls creaking shudderingly in sympathy. The steward departed.

And Jane hesitated. How to find Mike? He might be next door—or at the other end of the boat.

She came into the narrow passage running the length of the starboard cabins. The passage smelled strongly of new paint. A steward passed, leading a couple of passengers to their cabin.

Jane ascended the steps to the promenade-deck. The strains of dance band and gypsy orchestra were mingling incongruously. The *Queen of Hungary* was backing away from the quay toward the arches of the bridge. The paddles slipped with a noise like swishing thunder.

Jane went uncertainly toward the stern.

And suddenly she saw Lieutenant Janos Hatvany. His back only, but she knew she wasn't mistaken. Even as she stood watching, the young man turned, his profile clear-cut against the lights of Zunt. He was standing outside a deck-cabin door, two men with him, one of them speaking eagerly.

JANE hugged the wall. Janos' eyes were fixed on the cabin door. He made as if to open it, but the fingers of the speaking companion deterred him sharply. It was as if the man was saying: "Not yet. Wait until we are in mid-stream." Janos drew back. The three men turned from the cabin door, crossing the deck to the rail, glancing at the receding quay.

Jane took her chance. Useless to wait until it was too late. She hurried forward. With grim amusement she saw the men step swiftly into the shadows at her approach. She reached the door, rapping urgently, at the same time turning the handle. The door opened. The girl slipped in, throwing it closed behind her.

"Lock that door," she said sharply.

Mike was staring, bewildered.

"I've tried," he said. "It won't lock. It's been fixed."

Jane could hear rapid footsteps outside; the men would be within earshot. She held up her hand in desperate warning, her words bewildering Mike even further.

"I couldn't let you go without seeing you. It's just one of those things. I can't help myself."

"What is this?"

But Jane's eyes were full of meaning. "Aren't I making myself clear? Is what I'm saying so horrible?"

She was writing swiftly on a slip of paper, her eyes signaling Mike to read as she spoke. He read the words as they came from the pencil:

"They're going to kill you.
Men outside this door now.
You can save yourself by
giving up the news-reel—"

Mike smiled, his white teeth gleaming. He moved to the door, slipping the back of a chair beneath the door handle. He raised his voice as he replied.

"I was hoping you'd come here. I knew all along I couldn't give you up. I never have been good at—giving things up."

IT was some ten minutes after Jane had left him that Danny became aware of the full extent of his own insanity.

He had ordered a brandy. He had brooded on the strange ways of womankind. He glanced indefinitely at the clock—twenty minutes to eleven. Vaguely he remembered the boat. Mike—on the boat. Jane had seemed alarmed about that. Mike was a handsome devil—probably Jane had really fallen for him.

The boat. Gypsy fiddles. . . . Mike. . . . . Jane.

Suddenly Danny was sitting bolt upright. *Jane!* Her alarm! Why had she been alarmed? The answer swept through Danny's consciousness like a streak of flashing light. She knew something. This meeting. It *had* been a trap—to take Mike. And Jane knew the alternative. "He's going to be killed," she had said. Killed! By agents on the boat, of course!

Danny rose. He stumbled toward the street. Jane—Mike—the boat. He must reach the boat. Somehow.

COUNT CSIKY saw Danny pass, scrambling into a taxi. A waiter came running in pursuit, angrily brandishing the bill. Csiky nodded to an inspector to pay it. He and the Commissioner entered the waiting car.

The Count's car paused on the bridge, twenty yards short of the red lights of the frontier post. Danny's taxi had stopped ahead. A frontier guard was asking for his passport.

Count Csiky smiled dryly.

"And that's just as far as he gets," he murmured.

But even as he spoke, the Commissioner had gasped. A shot spat, ricocheting whiningly against the parapet. But Danny had gone, leaping for the darkly swirling waters fifty feet below.

He hit the water. Both Commissioner and Count were staring down. No sign of the man. The swift current had swept him into the gloom of the central arch.

And backing in midstream, her paddles churning, was the *Queen of Hungary.*

Count Csiky came to the frontier post, pale with excitement. Startled foot-passengers were gazing about them bewilderedly. The captain of guard was apologizing.

"Your Excellency, he jumped before our men had time to realize. Unless he swims strongly, he will drown in that current."

Csiky nodded, addressing the Commissioner.

"That means the man Lester is on the boat."

"Do you think our agents will find him?" asked the Commissioner.

Csiky's eyes were grave. "I pray to heaven they do."

A Slavonian police car, coming from Zunt, purred up. The inspector approached.

"The girl went on the *Queen of Hungary,* Excellency. We managed to warn Janos Hatvany, and through him Miklos. They will know this means the man is already aboard."

Count Csiky's eyes were on the boat's twinkling lights. He murmured almost silently:

"For the sake of my country—for the sake of humanity itself—please, Good my God, let not our men fail this night."

The *Queen of Hungary* was turning in midstream. The paddles churned. Slowly the boat started to move—westward—upstream. . . .

FERENZ MIKLOS, a traveling salesman by ostensible trade. Secret Agent X629 by official designation, had his own method. When faced with a problem, Miklos would first put himself in the other fellow's shoes, decide what course of action the other fellow would take, then act to counter any such action. Miklos' method had worked effectively tonight. Putting himself in the place of either Mike or Danny or both, he had decided that they would get aboard, if they got aboard at all, at the last moment. They would go directly below. They would stay below, with the cabin door locked, until the boat came alongside at Belgrade.

Miklos had countered this probable action by having the locks of all unbooked cabins put out of commission some two hours before the Ebsjerg departure hour. This damaging of the locks had been done unofficially. Miklos had his own channels. The boat's captain had been greatly puzzled when faced with a series of complaints from irate voyagers.

Miklos himself, with his assistant Anday, had gone aboard the *Queen of Hungary* some fifteen minutes before her departure from Ebsjerg, being joined by Lieutenant Janos Hatvany half an hour later at Zunt. By that time Miklos, acting on description, had formed a fair suspicion that the tall young man with the old suitcase and the new raincoat might easily be one of the wanted Americans. He had ascertained that this young man was traveling in one of the deck cabins. Also, with quite brilliant perspicacity, Miklos had rightly decided that the second American was definitely not on the boat.

Miklos had welcomed the presence of Janos Hatvany. The young officer seemed smart and intelligent. Besides, if there was any killing to be done, Miklos would much rather it was done by some one else. For Miklos had a rooted objection to killing. In his ten years of government service, he had only killed eight people in cold blood. He hadn't enjoyed the experience once.

Also, of course, Janos knew these Americans by sight. There would be no

danger of the wrong man being picked off. Twice Miklos had killed the wrong man, and he hadn't found that very pleasant either.

Janos had brought almost definite news that the younger American was aboard. Police at the Zunt pier had told him that the young woman had joined the boat, a circumstance which spoke for itself. As soon as the boat cleared the quays of Zunt, Miklos, with Anday in tow, took Janos to the deck cabin in which he believed the American to be traveling. Janos had wanted to enter at once, but Miklos had restrained him. Quite right, of course, to get the job finished as soon as possible, while the boat was noisy with dance bands and gypsy orchestras. But this was just a little too soon. Wait at least until the *Queen of Hungary* should be in midstream, away from the strong lights of the cities.

But even as Miklos whisperingly discussed this tactical question, a footstep had approached. The three men had drawn into the shadows. A girl—*the* girl, it appeared to Janos—had entered the cabin.

THE three came swiftly to the door. This thing was developing. For a girl to go to a man's cabin or vice-versa was scarcely unusual on the Belgrade week-end boat, but this nocturnal meeting could hardly be deduced as a romantic one.

The three men listened.

But the words were romantic. A love scene. Two adoring hearts who could not bring themselves to face a parting. Miklos looked at Janos, definitely puzzled.

Janos took out a revolver. Miklos shook his head, promptly providing his own gun in its place. For his own gun boasted a silencer.

This section of deck was shadowy, deserted, though riotous music from above told that the week-end gayety was off to a flying start. The *Queen of Hungary* was swinging about near the arches of the bridge. Then her paddles began churning. She moved slowly forward into midstream.

Janos' hand closed on the door-handle. Somehow the door had been fastened. He nodded to Anday. The two applied their weight. A cracking, like the snapping of the back of a chair. The door swung open. Janos entered, facing Mike.

"I want that news-reel," he said, the silenced revolver leveled. "I don't want to kill you, but I am ordered to do so unless you give it up."

Jane's gaze, fascinated, had come to Mike's face. Once more his eyes were cold steel, but not a muscle had moved. In this moment Jane knew that this man had real courage.

Mike was replying in German.

"There is some mistake. I know nothing of a news-reel. I am Hans Vogel—Swiss citizen of Basle."

Janos was smiling, but his face was deathly pale. "I shall count ten," he said.

And it was at that moment that Mike heard Danny's voice—singing—clearly, resonantly, above the beat of the dance band. Once more the song was "Questa o Quella," from Verdi's "Rigoletto."

Mike started. Jane had heard the voice too. For a flash their eyes met, full of question. Danny, here on the boat! Singing! Obviously searching for them, and singing because he knew his voice would be heard and recognized.

Janos Hatvany was speaking mechanically.

". . . . four . . . . five . . . . six . . . ."

"One moment!" suddenly shouted Mike—and more loudly still: "We're here, Danny!"

Janos had been taken off his guard. For a split second he wavered. Miklos turned sharply. A man was leaping out of the shadows, striking hard. Janos swung his gun on the new assailant, and he shot to kill.

DANNY had swum through the swirl of the current. He had kicked his shoes off, somehow managing to get a foot-hold on the semi-circular paddle-box. He had reached the deck.

How to find Mike? Even now it might be too late; and protracted search was impossible. Suddenly, almost instinctively, he began to sing. Singing, he hurried across the promenade deck.

And then Mike's shout, close at hand:

"We're here, Danny!"

We? Jane too, then.

Danny twisted toward the voice. He saw three men framed in a deck cabin doorway; one held a revolver. He saw Jane's terrified face beyond. The dance band was playing "My Heart Belongs to Daddy."

Danny leaped forward like a madman. A death-knell, thought Danny, and struck Ferenz Miklos between the eyes.

Janos Hatvany shot Danny in the body. But a revolver bullet cannot always stop a man who is willing to die. Danny lurched on. Janos shot again, and in that moment Danny's hands closed on the revolver. Janos was sure the man was finished. This effort was superhuman, unreal. . . .

Everything was unreal. Janos Hatvany knew that as a bullet seared through his own side. He clinched with the madman, striving to wrest back the revolver. They were against the rail—then they were falling together toward the dark waters.

Miklos' assistant, Anday, believing discretion the better part of valor, had already taken to his heels.

And Miklos himself, leaping for his life from a revolver in the hands of the other man,—who had torn it from the struggling hands of Danny and Janos,—hit the water too. He struck out for the shore. This was his third close escape in three months. At least he was safe now until the next cycle of three came along.

And as the waters of the Danube closed over Janos Hatvany, he was thinking of Tania and that apartment overlooking the Sekely Gardens. He was wondering if Tania had secured that settee at a fairly reasonable price.

THROUGH the night the *Queen of Hungary* slipped upstream, past low shadowy banks, veiled with reed. There was no moon now, but poplars stood out like thin ghosts in the starlight.

Mike and Jane sat in the cabin. Incongruously, neither mentioned Danny at all.

Jane said: "I wanted to get you caught. I was afraid for you—if you crossed the frontier, I mean."

"Why were you afraid?" asked Mike, eagerly.

Jane shook her head.

"It's a pity you are taking that newsreel home. We could have been very happy."

"We won't be?"

Jane shook her head again.

"In two or three days' time the world will blow its head off. And, you see, it's you who'll be to blame. I couldn't care for a man who could do that."

Mike nodded. He knew that what she was saying was true. He would be to blame. For the first time he didn't want to go on.

It was a long time before he spoke.

"I love you," he said. "But I've a job to do. A man's job *must* come first."

Jane lowered her eyes.

"I knew you'd say that." She spoke through a sigh. "Yes, you're the gallant fellow, all right. Mister Hero, who couldn't be stopped—not even by the Last Trumpet." Her voice trailed off into a queer little shiver. Mike slipped to her side.

"Jane!"

SHE turned her averted cheek, and Mike was conscious of shock as he read the deep bitterness in her eyes. His voice shook involuntarily.

"My God, Jane, you look as though you'd seen the end of the world."

Jane's fingers were drumming on the chair in time to the almost imperceptible *swish-swish* of the boat's paddles.

"I *have* seen the end of the world—of *my* world, anyway." She turned away. Then suddenly she swung back, her eyes alight, her voice full. "Oh, Mike—Mike—why do you have to do it? What are you gaining? A pat on the back from some cheap little dope in New York!" She shook her head, shuddering queerly again. "And what's that going to be worth—when there's nothing left for any of us—any more?"

"You're exaggerating."

"Am I?" Her voice was as cold as death itself.

"One man is dead, Mike—that poor young lieutenant. But that's only the beginning."

Mike spoke desperately.

"Jane, won't you understand—I'm only doing the job I'm paid to do."

"I know." She nodded again. "That's quite right, Mike. Oh, you'll go down to history sure enough. This reel will be shown in New York. It's going to be the signal, Mike."

"The signal?"

"Or call it the deadline." Her voice broke sharply. "I'm sorry; that wasn't intended as a pun. But when the world as we know it is gone up in smoke, Mike—time will be dating from the showing of that reel."

"Now you're going melodramatic on me."

"Does it sound like that?" Jane forced a wistfully bitter smile. "Of course, I should have remembered. Mister Hero will surely be there himself—leading the first attack—joining in the war which he started all on his own. You'll probably come out of it as a general, at

least." The grotesque smile was still on her lips. "Do you mind if all that breaks my heart too?"

She was crying now, half-choked sobs smothered against his coat; then after a while against his face. To Mike she seemed a very little thing, and he wasn't dead sure whether he, old hard-boiled Mike, wasn't crying himself—because, all of a sudden, the objects about him seemed to be moving, whirling. The lights were blurring, starting to run.

And Mike knew that Jane was right. This *was* the end of the world. . . .

The *Queen of Hungary* paddled into Belgrade in the morning. Mike walked off with the week-end lovers. He said good-by to Jane beside his taxi, a formal handshake. Neither looked back at the other as the taxi sped from the quay.

There had been no inquiry—for the revolver had been silenced; and the ship's captain thought he knew when to mind his own business about a smashed railing and a bloodstain or two.

CHAPTER XII

MIKE went straight to the Belgrade offices of Tona-Film (Paris) Ltd. He slipped in by the back entrance. Jim Templeton, the manager, was passing to the cellar-like film storeroom. He stopped dead in his tracks as Mike turned the passage corner.

"By all that's holy—Mike!"

A man who walked with Templeton had stopped too. He was staring, his face blanched; the look of one who sees a ghost. His high cheekbones bespoke him a Slavonian.

But Mike was speaking sharply to Templeton.

"Don't tell a soul I'm here, Jim. I've got to call New York straight away."

Templeton was goggling. "Have you still got this shot, Mike?"

A footstep was approaching down the passage. Mike sidestepped sharply into the shadowy twelve-foot-square storeroom. Film cans lined the shelves. At sight of them Mike's hand went instinctively to the canvas belt about his middle. He could feel the length of news-reel around his waist. A telephone was on the storeroom table.

"Can I use this phone?" asked Mike. "And will you let me speak to New York alone, please?"

Something behind Mike's eyes stilled further questions on Templeton's lips.

"Gosh, you look ill," he murmured.

Mike's voice shook slightly.

"Please—I can't talk just now, and I don't want to be seen around the office. Do you mind if I use this phone?"

TEMPLETON withdrew. As the Door closed, Mike could see the face of the Slavonian beyond him. The man was staring fixedly at Mike; and Mike knew that he had never seen real hate in anyone's eyes before.

Mike took up the telephone receiver, asking to be connected with the Cosmographic News-reel offices in New York—then he remembered it was after midnight, Eastern Standard Time, and he altered the call to Plaza 6-2567, the apartment of Bredon, the Cosmographic manager at the Essex House.

The call took fifteen minutes to get through. Mike sat alone, trying to keep his mind off the night's events by scanning the pages of a morning newspaper which had been left on the store-room table. The paper announced a generally easier feeling throughout Europe. The Paris Bourse had shown a strengthening for the first time since the assassination. No news had come of the missing news-reel men. This newspaper expressed the conviction that they would never be seen again.

Mike smiled grimly. The telephone bell tinkled.

Jim Templeton was speaking.

"New York's coming through. Okay, Mike, talk freely—no one'll be listening at this end."

Mike heard the click of Templeton's replaced receiver. The wires were humming. Suddenly he could hear the voice of Bredon's manservant.

"This is Mr. Bredon's residence! Mr. *Lester!*"

An explosive gasp from somewhere beyond the telephone. Mike could positively hear the receiver being snatched from the manservant's hand. Bredon's startled, bewildered voice was speaking.

"Mike! Good Lord, we'd given you up for dead. In the name of all that's holy, where are you?"

Mike replied without warmth:

"Belgrade. Got in this morning on the river boat from Ebsjerg. I've got this thing with me."

"The news-reel? You've got it!"

"Am I to bring it straight on? I can't guarantee they won't try to stop me on the way."

It sounded as if Bredon were dancing.

"Gosh, this is the biggest thing! But it's out of our hands now, Mike. We were told days ago—if the reel got through at all, it's to be seen by the head guys in Paris. You've got to take it to the consul."

"The consul?"

"The American consul at Belgrade. He'll see to its being sent on to our Paris embassy."

Mike was nodding. A showing in Paris. Before an audience of world-politicians, most likely. Well, that was to be expected.

He asked: "And what about me?"

"Oh, you'll have to stick around Paris too—they'll be wanting your report." The voice was full of elated excitement. "But Mike, between ourselves, does it show as much as that English journalist said?"

"I don't know how much he said," replied Mike soberly.

"Well, you know what I'm getting at. How bad is it? Just what does it mean?"

And suddenly Mike's voice was full of bitterness. A face was before him—the face of a wounded man plunging to death into swift dark waters.

"It means war," he replied. "It means millions of men, maimed and blinded and—"

Bredon's laugh broke in deprecatingly.

"Oh, come, come! You're exaggerating. You've had a tough trip, maybe. But you'll be okay after a night or two of shut-eye. By the way, how's Danny?"

"Danny's dead," said Mike flatly, and hung up the receiver.

HE stood motionless. His hand went to the canvas belt again. Well, he'd brought the reel through, hadn't he? Sure he had. But somehow at this moment it didn't seem to matter so much, because he could still hear Jane's words, cold with bitterness, above the *swish-swish* of those paddles. "It will be your fault. Mister Hero, who couldn't be stopped—not even by the Last Trumpet." He mopped his brow. A smell of death and decay seemed in the air.

And suddenly Mike was seeing things clearly. He knew the meaning of the hate in that Slavonian's eyes. Behind that look had been love of home, of a wife, of children. Of sweet-scented pine forests. Of gypsy music and laughter. Laughter, which would pass like a wind in the night—and all because a length of news-reel had reached Paris from midway across Europe.

He shook his head slowly, his lips forming the words: "I guess Danny was the lucky one," he whispered. . . .

Half an hour later he arrived at the American consulate. For some blocks he had believed that a closed car was following his taxi. But the car went straight on as Mike entered the consulate, asking to see the consul, "on a matter of some importance."

AND so it was that at round about eleven o'clock, Belgrade time, this bright June morning, the world suddenly awoke to the fact that the supposedly diminishing crisis of the last week had not diminished at all but was still hideously present. For days the chancelleries of Europe had been lulling themselves into an ever-increasing sense of security. They had been hoping—and latterly believing—that an efficient Slavonian secret service had unobtrusively done its job, quietly removing these two sources of irritation and equally quietly confiscating the news-reel. But now they were faced with the realization that this admirable solution to a bad diplomatic headache had awkwardly slipped up some place. One of the men was dead. The bombshell bulletin from Belgrade revealed that. But the actual photographer himself was very much alive, and the length of news-reel was still intact.

The world caught at its breath.

And then it was known that the reel had been passed to the American consular authorities at Belgrade. The news-reel photographer had put his own seal on the can. This can, it was officially reported, would only be opened under close surveillance at Paris. A copy would be made. The film would be viewed first by an official audience at the American Embassy.

A second bulletin from Belgrade. Photographer and reel, under military guard, had left Yugoslavia. The strip of film would be seen in Paris in two days' time.

And it was to a Paris in the grip of war fever that Mike came, dropping out of the skies onto Le Bourget late on the following afternoon. Cheering crowds filled the streets; the singing of the "Marseillaise" occasioned wild displays of patriotic fervor at every sidewalk café. War seemed the one topic of conversation—war and a tumbling stock-market.

Mike bought a Paris edition of the Chicago *Tribune;* two columns had been

devoted to American press opinion. Half the newspapers, it seemed, were shouting, "Keep out!" while the other half cried: "Collective action!" The headlines screamed Europe's danger. "AUSTRO-SERBANIA LINES THE FRONTIER." "GERMAN BATTLE FLEET SAILS UNDER SEALED ORDERS." "FRANCE MANS THE MAGINOT LINE." "'GRAVEST DAY,' SAYS BRITISH PREMIER."

Jane had said: "In two or three days' time, the world will blow its head off." To the world it certainly looked as though the explosion was only too imminent.

THE reel was to be run off in a library room in the eastern wing of the embassy. The gathering was a highly impressive one: Winthrop Stern, the United States Ambassador to France; Ewart Gross, his chief attaché; the British, German, Italian and French foreign ministers. Sundry others. A gray-faced individual, nervously picking at his finger nails, was the Slavonian chargé d'affaires. The Austro-Serbanian chargé sat on the opposite side of the room, and seemingly neither had noticed the other's existence. But the Slavonian chargé noticed Mike when he was brought into the room by Ewart Gross, the attaché. Mike saw the man's face, and once more he was conscious of hate in another man's eyes.

The room was heavy with tension. Men's voices were low. One or two tried to speak normally, casually, but the attempt seemed a hollow pretense.

Mike was presented to Ambassador Winthrop Stern. Stern's face was grave, his cleanly chiseled features unusually ashen. His smile was ironical.

"I suppose I should congratulate you on your smartness, Mr. Lester. But do you mind if I say that I wish you'd been a little less smart?"

Stern went to his chair. Mike found himself standing alone. The lights went out. He felt his way to a seat. A hand recoiled sharply. Two eyes were close to his face, just visible in the velvet darkness. They were the eyes of the Slavonian chargé d'affaires.

MIKE turned away with a muttered apology. He slid into a seat. The darkness was full of rustling. A long sigh came from somewhere at the back of the room. A theater audience might have snickered—but no laughter came here.

The rustling died. A silence followed, heavy with expectation—and heavy with something more as well. An intangible sense of danger beyond description.

The sigh again. A voice whispered nervously: "What are we waiting for?"

Now the projector was running. A faint whirring—a great square of white light blazed on the screen. A sudden crackle of sound.

Sound? Winthrop Stern started. He leaned toward Ewart Gross. "I understood this film was silent—"

But his words were drowned, annihilated. A loud, an ear-splitting loud *"Quack!"* had erupted from the concealed loud-speaker. Flickering movement—and suddenly the all-too-familiar features of *Donald Duck* were ferociously filling the screen. *Donald Duck*—very angry—quacking, complaining, inarticulate in his rage.

The startled audience sat up. Mike was on his feet. *Donald Duck,* well nigh apoplectic, seemed to be about to burst a blood-vessel.

And the audience was starting to laugh. The laughter came, emerging out of bewildered silence, growing, growing. . . .

Winthrop Stern turned on Mike, speaking dazedly.

"Does your reel follow this or—what *is* this, man?"

But Mike's gaze was fixed on the screen; and suddenly Stern was conscious of the strange look of ecstasy burning behind the young man's eyes.

For Mike knew now that he had done the right thing. During those few minutes alone in that film storeroom at Belgrade his decision had been the only possible one. There are occasions when a man's job *mustn't* come first!

Laughter was sweeping to the uproarious—laughter to which intense relief was subscribing a hysterical note. Winthrop Stern's voice was shaking.

"Is *this* what all the excitement's been about?"

But Mike's voice came thinly, queerly exalted:

"Some one must have changed the reel at Belgrade."

"Changed it? Destroyed your stuff and substituted this nonsense, you mean?"

Donald Duck nailed his beak to a door. The audience rocked. *Donald* cursed inarticulately through his nailed-up beak. The laughter was sweeping in great gusts.

Mike's eyes left the screen. Feeling queerly faint, he half staggered, clutching at a chair for support. For forty-eight hours, he had known this was coming, but now it was here, it seemed almost too great to bear.

For the war danger was over, no doubt of that. These men were laughing. The world would laugh. The war threat would wither and die in a welter of uncontrollable laughter—and all because one young news-reel photographer had made the most important decision of his life.

Mike turned. In the semi-darkness he could see the Slavonian chargé d'affaires. The man was doubled up, almost helpless. Tears of mirth—and of something much deeper than mirth—were streaming down his cheeks.

Walking unsteadily, Mike came out into the sunshine. The news was ahead of him, traveling with the swiftness of wind. Rich laughter was shaking the Champs Elysées, spreading along the cafés of the Grand Boulevards. A young reporter seized Mike's shoulder.

"Come on, pal, give us the low-down. Was it *Donald Duck* who threw that bomb?"

But the exalted look had passed from Mike's eyes. He was laughing himself now, although he couldn't have told just when it began. The laughter welled up in him—and with it came elation.

SO it was over. The whole crazy adventure was over. Or was it?

For a transatlantic phone-call from Cosmographic in New York gave him a lot of difficult and expensive explaining to do. And at the end of it he was ordered to the Danzig area, with instructions somehow to get by the official restrictions and get pictures that really told the story. . . . Well, that was all right. An assignment like that was plenty interesting. Only—

And then the world changed. At his hotel he found a telegram forwarded from the American Embassy from Jane in Ebsjerg:

DANNY FOUND ALIVE DESPERATE CONDITION BROUGHT HOSPITAL HERE BY AUTHORITIES.

Another wire came next morning:

CONGRATULATIONS. DANNY STILL UNCONSCIOUS. LETTER FOLLOWS.

AND on the second day the letter (which may or may not have been censored) arrived.

"Dear Mike:

"Danny recovered consciousness last night, and the doctors now say he has an even chance. He was found on the riverbank by some fishermen, who called the authorities. While their first motive may have been an anxiety to get him well enough to talk, they at once got the best specialists and a whole corps of nurses to look after him.

"It was fine of you, Mike, to do what you did about the film—whatever it was. I sha'n't try to guess just what happened—or what imp of the perverse made you finally stage a farce to end the tragedy.

"Since the good news from Paris has been added to the assurance that Danny was carrying nothing dangerous, Count Csiky and the others have been most kind and considerate. I shall stay here with Danny until he is able to travel, and then will go home to America with him. He's really a grand person, Mike.

"No, I'm not thinking of marrying anybody just now—not at least till I get away from Europe and its appalling inheritance of hate and fear and suspicion. Maybe back home I can get a better perspective on things and people.

"Congratulations again, Mike. All in all, maybe you're a pretty grand person too.

Yours,
Jane Lovat"

Wonderful news! War was coming, probably. But at least it was no fault of his.

THE END

REAL EXPERIENCES

For details of our prize offer for these true stories of adventure, *see page 3.*

(Continued from page 4)

By PETER

IT was in Natal, not far from the Zulu border that my father finally bought his farm. I loved the place on sight. It seemed to me to have been specially made for a small boy's playground. It was a region of wooded *kloofs* which sloped gently down to the Tugela river. Beyond the river the rounded hills of Zululand held up for view the circles of beehive huts, brown nipples on the great earth mother's green breasts, the Zulu kraals. In the kloofs, dainty bushbuck slipped silently through the shoulder-high growth of staghorn moss to drink, or barked defiance to some rival ram. Ghostlike rhebok grazed on the high ridges and floated to invisibility at my approach as they halted in their effortless flight before the first patch of protective coloring. . . .

My mother took my education in hand. But wherever I was, about the house at my lessons, or hunting with throwing sticks, accompanied by little Zulu playmates, it was Zululand which drew my thoughts, as a magnet draws steel. My skin would creep with excitement as I pictured the Zulu *impis* fording the Tugela, as they had by the ford above my swimming-hole in days gone by, ox-hide shields aloft, crane feathers nodding as they flung their heads backward in the war chant, "If we go forward we die, if we go backward we die," before they fell on the Weenen settlers and slaughtered them where they fought behind the wagon circle of the *laager*.

Zululand was nominally subdued, but still under the rule of Dinizulu, last of her race of kings which Chaka had founded. Old Chief Umfogozana was still a power in the land. A great stately savage he was. Shiny black head-ring, skin loin-flap and a bone snuff spoon thrust through the perforated lobe of one ear were all his wardrobe. He became my first boyhood hero. I would steal away from home, cross the river at the ford and take the trail which wound between hills to his kraal. He flattered me by treating me as a grown-up, and allowing me to sit in the ceremonial circle when the beer was passed, a distinction granted only to adults by Zulu custom.

I thrilled at Umfogozana's tales of war, told as he squatted in the shade of the reed stockade, taking snuff daintily with his little bone spoon from the round calabash snuff box he carried somewhere in the mystery of his loin-flap. I absorbed the Zulu folklore till I became Zulu in thought, and their complicated but melodious language came more readily to my lips than my own.

It was not until I was nine years old that I went to Weston College, in the midlands of Natal. At first the discipline of the school irked me after the freedom of the life I had enjoyed at home. It was a rough school and its code was the Spartan Zulu code. But it was a good school, even though its class-rooms were constructed of corrugated iron and looked more like barns than seats of learning.

SOON after my arrival the Boer War broke out. Thousands of Boer burghers swarmed over the Transvaal border, drove the British forces southward into Ladysmith and besieged them there, while fast-riding *commandoes* pushed on to meet the British reinforcements, which were being landed in Durban and rushed up-country to raise the siege.

It was a warm, sunny day. The odor of the wattle bloom floated in at the class-room windows with a sticky sweetness which combined with the conjugation of a Latin verb to make the class drowsy. My gaze wandered to the window. Ladysmith lay out that way, fifty miles or so. When the wind blew from it, we could hear the booming of the Boer Long Toms as they battered at the town from Umbulwana hill. Some one had said that the Boers were riding southward, headed our way.

Pioneer of Africa

RAINIER

Suddenly I stiffened. There were soldiers outside. They were dismounting from their horses behind the wall which surrounded the school grounds, tethering them under the wattle trees. I weighed my chances of escape from my seat beside the door, and slipped out unnoticed.

"Seen any Boers about here, youngster?" asked the lieutenant in charge of the patrol.

"No sir." I wished I were an officer to wear fine top boots and spurs, with a pistol hanging from my belt.

"Will ye look at this, sorr," cried an Irish trooper who had been posted as lookout behind the wall.

"Just look at the funny old jossers riding this way. Reg'lar toffs, by crikey," exclaimed a Cockney who had joined the Irishman.

"Top hats and long coats, begorra. It's going to church they must be. But why would they be after taking their rifles to the priest?"

"Who are they, boy?" asked the officer.

I ran to the wall.

"They're Boers, sir. They'll be out of sight in a moment. They're riding for the gully just ahead of them. Can't see it from here. Better shoot quick."

"Great God, boy, they're civilians! No uniforms. Can't shoot civilians."

"The Boers haven't any uniforms, sir. They put on their best clothes to fight, same as they go to church in. They say they may meet God on the battlefield, same as in church."

I was dancing with excitement, tinged with fear. The Boers were only about two hundred yards away, and might see us any moment. I had a healthy respect for their marksmanship, a respect that a young "Johnny-from-home" officer could not be expected to share.

To my relief, some one took the initiative out of the officer's hands. A rifle cracked beside me, and the leading Boer horse began to buck as though the bullet had burned its belly. For a second or two we were treated to as fine an exhibition of horsemanship as a circus could have provided. The elderly gentleman kept his saddle without any apparent effort, while his beard and coat-tail floated up and down with the motion of his horse. Somehow the slung rifle translated itself from his back to his hands, apparently of its own volition. As his horse settled down to a mad gallop for the gully after its fellows, he loosed a bullet toward us, which whispered over our heads and whanged through the corrugated iron walls of the class-room which I had just left. The drone of *"amo, amas"* stopped suddenly, and there was a noise of benches being overturned.

THE Boers were out of sight now, all but a row of high-crowned hats on the edge of the gully, from which bullets came sighing toward us, whanging through the class-room behind, *sputting* against the wall in front or ricocheting from the top of the stonework with a menacing but minor shriek.

I wanted to run. I wanted to hide. Wanted to stay and see the fun. I compromised by crawling along the base of the wall until I found a crack through which I could see.

My attention was divided between the crack in the wall and the young officer. The hand which lifted a cigarette to his girlish lips hardly trembled at all, although he kept walking up and down behind the row of firing troopers, scorning cover, except what he got from the waist-high wall.

A trooper's hat sailed from his head, the brim on one side shot away. But the Boers were off now. They came out of the gully at a gallop, bent low over their horses' necks. The troopers mounted in pursuit.

Our class-room was in a turmoil. Everyone had been told to lie down after the first bullet cracked through the walls.

Now we lined up before the housekeeper's room to receive such of our clothes as we could conveniently carry, and were told to make our way home as best we could from Mooi River station, ten miles away.

Some of us lived up the line; our homes were already in Boer hands. We were allotted to more fortunate fellows, to be kept till school reopened or our parents might otherwise arrange.

"THE White Queen is d-e-a-d!" A long-drawn-out cry in liquid Zulu came winging across two hundred yards of troubled water as I stood on the Zululand bank of the lower Tugela River, hundreds of miles below the home which the Boers were even now occupying on that same river. Victoria had gone. It struck me with a sense of disaster, as though something immortal had passed.

I had been lucky in the shuffle at school, when the temporarily homeless had been allotted to the more fortunate.

Jimmy Middleton had picked me out.

"Come home with me, Peter. My father's surveying for a railway in Zululand. He promised me a wagon-trip with him next hols. Maybe we can get it now," he had said.

"What's that they're shouting?" came Jimmy's voice behind me now as I stood listening.

"The Queen's dead. My father once said that when she died, the Zulus might give trouble."

"Pooh! My father's not afraid of Zulus. When he was surveying in Canada he lived among the Indians. He's going into Zululand tomorrow to see Dinizulu about his right of way for the railway. He says we can go with him because you can speak Zulu. He's afraid native interpreters might cheat him."

There was plenty of game about as we trekked through Zululand. Haartebeste and zebra mostly. After Etshowe settlement was passed we moved into a Zululand as unspoiled as it had been when Cetywayo had been king—before the Zulu armies had broken a British square at Isandhlwana and massacred a whole brigade, themselves in turn to be smashed at Ulundi a few months later.

Dinizulu, son of Cetywayo, of the house of Chaka, sat on a stool in the dim vastness of the royal hut. Fat bulged from his white-man's frock coat where the collar cut the neck.

Tears came to my eyes in my disillusionment. Chaka the Great, the empire-builder; Dingana the treacherous, the anniversary of whose defeat at the battle of Blood River was our South African national holiday; Panda the Good, friend of white men; Cetywayo the Brave, whose armies had fought the British to a standstill for so long—these Zulu kings had been my boyhood heroes. They had meant to me what Nelson, Washington or Henry Morgan mean to the civilized boy. And *this,* Dinizulu, was their descendant—the last of their house!

Dinizulu laughed at me and called me "little woman." I hated him.

Some of my boyhood dream picture was restored at the war dance he gave in our honor. Thousands of warriors rushed across the plain in mock battle, head plumes nodding as they sped. Thousands of spear-hafts made rolling thunder against the three-ply bull's hide of their oval shields. They loomed, great fantastic shapes, as they raced past us through the dust fog of their own raising. The smell of their sweat was acrid in our nostrils. The rattling of the charms they wore around their calves made a menacing undertone to the thunder of the shields. *Bayete!* The royal salute came suddenly like the bark of human hounds, amplified a thousandfold. Then the killing cry *Cobalio Je-e-e-e!* Well had their enemies known that cry in the days when Chaka's *impis* pushed northward to the Limpopo, southward to the Orange, carving a million square miles of empire, which only the superior arms of the white man was to challenge. Even the white man had learned to fear it. From this very mound on which we stood by Dinizulu the great plumed figure of Cetywayo had watched his army crumple, raced downward to lead the last desperate charge, whose few survivors had at last got to grips with the enemy behind the rolling smoke-clouds and shown that, weapon for weapon, man for man, an Englishman with the bayonet was no match for a Zulu wielding his *umkonto* from behind a five-foot shield.

Mr. Middleton, Jimmy and I walked back to our wagon that night in silence. On us was a sense of awe; we had seen power incarnate—if it had a leader other than Dinizulu the degenerate.

IN an exasperated mood I rode the trail to Umfogozana's kraal some six years later. School was due to reopen after the summer holidays in a week or two, for one thing. For another I had been staying at the Miller farm near Estcourt and had had a quarrel with Winnie Miller,

their pretty flaxen-haired sixteen-year-old daughter. Sixteen myself, I had decided to live a man's life. I was off women for good.

Old Umfogozana was also pessimistic. There was something on his mind.

"What ails you, Man of Cetywayo?" I rallied him as we sat discussing a small pot of beer in the cool shade of the hut. "Is the new wife barren? Are the cattle sick?"

"None of these things, son of my friend. There is evil talk astir in Zululand. Bombata, chief of the Nkandhla clan, has been summoned to Dinizulu. There is rumor of war."

The stilted Zulu phrases sounded like the Song of Solomon.

"ALWAYS there is rumor of war," I laughed. There had been talk of unrest in Zululand ever since Queen Victoria had died. No one paid much attention to it any longer. Natal colony had grown immeasurably in strength since the last Zulu war. We had grown to despise the Zulu power, and yet—those *impis* of Dinizulu's would create havoc along the border if ever they were unleashed.

"Youth ever laughs at wisdom," reproved Umfogozana with dignity. "The hyena laughed at the lion and was forever condemned to eat his leavings."

"I laughed not at you, Umfogozana, who is the friend of my father and like a father to me. But the young men among you have always talked war. I have heard the talk since I was no higher than a calf and fought your sons in the cattle kraal with sticks, learning to be warriors. Tell me what you know."

"A man knows the past, but the future is hidden from all but the *isanusi*, whom the white men have forbidden to practice their arts. . . . But I tell you that your father should take the offer which he has recently received for his farm and live no more on the border country for a while."

He rose majestically, took snuff again, and disappeared through the low doorway of the hut without another word.

I did not pass the message on, for fear of ridicule. It did not matter really, because I knew that my father had already sold, and that another month would see the family domiciled in Pietermaritzburg, "A school for the girls," of whom there were now four, had been the reason for the move this time.

But Umfogozana had been right. A few months later Bombata was in revolt. Dinizulu made no move as yet, but a word from him would set the Zulu *impis* rushing across the Tugela as in days gone by.

The rebellion itself was a dismal business. My part in it was that of a trooper of Natal Carbineers under the command of Duncan Mackenzie, my father's old friend, a colonel now. It rained incessantly. Bombata kept dodging us over half of Zululand, refusing action while he waited for Dinizulu to give the word which would transform the rebellion of a minor chief into another Zulu war. That old hedger Dinizulu waited for Bombata to win some initial success before he declared himself, although Dinizulu had instigated the whole affair.

Finally Bombata was cornered and smashed. The troops were disbanded and Natal colony settled down to its everyday affairs, not without a sigh of relief.

But the taste of active service had spoiled me for school. On my return home I declared against returning. I encountered a stiffer resistance than Bombata had given us. My father had set his heart on the church as my profession, my mother on the law. Either profession entailed years of further schooling. The fact that either was unsuited to my character and absolutely distasteful to me did not seem to weigh with my parents.

The decision was suddenly taken out of their hands. I received an order for immediate mobilization. It was a welcome communication, although I had no more idea than anyone else what we were mobilizing for. Zululand was apparently quiet, now that Bombata had been slain and his forces scattered.

ONE week later the Natal Carbineers detrained at Ulundi railway station, from the closed box-cars in which we had been locked for the forty-eight-hour journey, to prevent news of troop movements from spreading.

Straws and stable refuse were stuck to our uniforms. Horses are uneasy bedfellows on a moving train.

We had guessed our destination by that time. Dinizulu's kraal was only thirty miles from Ulundi station. No other could be our quarry. He had called me little woman when I had met him before. I wondered what would be the circumstances of our meeting this time.

Further experiences by Mr. Rainier dealing with his life in Africa will appear in an early issue.

The Stunt That

As told to Tracy Richardson

By COLONEL WILLIAM C. BROOKS

MILLIONS of Americans got their first sight of an airplane when our aërial circus came to town. Any news about aviation was big news, and the papers played it up. Also it was partly due to the evil mind of the publicity man, who drank black coffee by the gallon so as to stay awake and think up more crazy stunts for us flyers to do, something more for him to ballyhoo.

In 1924 our aërial circus was flying from Audubon Park in New Orleans. I was in Dutch after being arrested in a low-flying publicity stunt over Canal Street, and was taking it kind of easy. It was then the fertile brain of the publicity man concocted the brilliant stunt that almost caused me to give up flying as a profession.

"Bill," said the boss one bright summer morning, "Doc's figured out a good publicity stunt for you to pull. Won't many people see it, but it'll make the front page all right, and will sure draw the crowds. He'll give you all the dope."

"Yeah," said Doc, the publicity man, "it's a cinch, a beaut, a natural for this country. Now, here's the dope: You fly out to a spot where the Harvey canal goes into the bayou, and then you fake a forced landing. I've been out there, and there's a nice field to land in. The story's that while you're repairing your plane, somehow or other an alligator climbs into the rear cockpit. When you take off again, he attacks you, and you have a battle in midair, subdue the animal, tie its mouth shut and fly your prize back here to the field."

"I've got a better idea," I broke in on Doc. "You go along as a passenger, and you do the fighting with the croc. I'm not having any."

"Oh, everything's all fixed," they hastened to assure me. "The alligator is already captured. It will be helpless, tied down so it can't wiggle; and besides, it will be on its back, and an alligator is harmless when it's on its back. It is only a little 'gator, anyway."

Finally, against my better judgment, I let them talk me into the crazy stunt; and after getting the location of the field and full directions, I took off.

I spotted the field and landed. A tall lanky Cajun ambled out to the plane. He didn't speak more than a dozen words of English, and my French was zero, so we talked mostly by sign language. I followed him to a small cotton shed at the edge of the field; and there, tied up as they had described, was the 'gator; but it looked like a monster to me—six feet long and at least a foot wide and thick, with teeth that could punch holes through a two-by-four scantling. The brute weighed at least two hundred pounds, and I doubted very much if anyone who knew much about alligators would believe I had ever let go the airplane controls and wrestled such an animal to submission, even if they figured out how it could crawl into the plane. Well, we were slaves to publicity, so I took the Casey.

The 'gator was lying on its back, and I saw the Cajun tickle its belly. It certainly did seem to be a peaceful animal, all right. For the job we had taken out the back seat, and the Cajun and I carried Mister Alligator out, and without much trouble placed it in the rear cockpit, its head just back of my seat and its tail down in the fuselage, where it was held reasonably secure by the internal bracing wires that kept the fuselage lined up and the ship in flying condition.

The Cajun crossed himself and waved me good-by. I hoped it would bring me good luck, for I felt I needed it. I knew I was on a jinx job. I'm not superstitious about most things, but if there's one thing that brings me bad luck, it's a cross-eyed man, and that Cajun's eyes were so crossed he'd have to stand sidewise to see in front of himself.

I got off the field without trouble and climbed for altitude. There wasn't a safe landing-place between there and New Orleans; and to come down in one of those cypress swamps meant a lost ship

Backfired

As a publicity stunt a circus flyer was to stage a sky battle with an alligator as passenger! But the 'gator didn't stay put.

and being eaten alive by mosquitoes if I had the luck to survive. . . . I'd got up about a thousand feet when I felt a jolt as though the ship had hit something. For a minute I couldn't figure it out. Then I thought of my captive alligator.

Hastily I leveled off and stretched up until I could look back over my shoulder into the rear cockpit—and I discovered that while I had held the ship in the stiff climb, the alligator had slid back farther into the tail. That also accounted for the fact the ship was flying tail-heavy.

I felt a sort of sinking down where my stomach was. The jinx was working. The 'gator could do a lot of damage back there if he went on a rampage. There was only one way to get it forward again. I pushed forward on the stick. For a minute I didn't think I was going to make it; then the tail came up, and I went into a steep dive.

I couldn't hear a thing above the roar of the motor, but suddenly I felt a heavy jolt against the back of my seat, and the pressure on the stick was gone, so I knew the animal was back in place again. I stretched for another look, and there it lay, tight against my seat, its white belly uppermost.

I started to climb again, but this time made it as gentle a climb as possible. Down below me I could see the cypress swamps. In the distance through the haze I could see the tower of the Hibernia Building in New Orleans. I didn't have much farther to go, and I swore that after this I'd have enough nerve to say no, publicity or no publicity.

I was revving along smooth when I passed over the edge of the swamp and struck an ascending air-current, and without warning I got one of those terrific bumps that seemed to toss me around like a feather. The ship fell off on one wing, and I ruddered hard into it to keep from spinning. I caught it, and a minute later was again on an even keel.

I felt another jolt, that I now knew was caused by my passenger. I looked over my shoulder, and this time I saw the alligator's back instead of its belly. They had told me that as long as it was on its back it was harmless; but they had not told me what to expect when it was on all four feet and stretching up as though trying to reach me. I thanked goodness its mouth was tied shut, so it couldn't do any damage.

At least, that's what I thought. Presently I realized the plane was flying right wing heavy, and I had to exert a stiff pressure to keep level. I looked over the wing; everything seemed O.K. Then I looked back at the tail unit; and there, sticking out through the side of the fuselage, was a black scaly object about four feet long, the alligator's tail! Somehow it had crashed through the linen covering. "When the wind gets in that hole," I thought, "it will strip every bit of fabric." I began to think that Bill Brooks was going to need a lot of luck.

From then on, there was just one jolt after another as the 'gator threshed around, snapping wires and tearing the fabric. Sometimes the controls would jam for a minute, and I was worried. A long streamer of fabric was whipping around the tail unit, and all I needed to complete the picture was for that to jam something, and then I would be done. I did not carry a parachute.

IT was miles yet to New Orleans and the landing-field. I knew the ship could not stand much more punishment, but for once I was stumped. There was no precedent. As far as I knew, no one before had ever been fool enough to take a live alligator up in a plane. My control-stick was acting as if it was crazy. One minute I couldn't move it; then it would come free, and I'd over-control. I could almost feel my hair turning white. I knew that if I didn't do something quick, that alligator would be the death of me.

I had got to two thousand feet altitude. I wished I had some one there to help me. I had to guess mostly as to what was

going on back of me, but I could see enough to know it was not my imagination. I could sure use a good pal—Gates, Diavola, Pang—that was it! Like a flash, I got my answer. Pang was famous for his ability to fly a plane upside down. I'd never tried it except for a few seconds, but I knew I could do it.

I dived the ship to be sure the 'gator was well forward, and then I leveled off, crossed the controls and rolled the ship over on its back, straightened out and held it there, hanging by my safety belt. Nothing happened; the alligator was still with me. I began to rock the ship. I rolled and bumped it around as much as I could, and still stay on my back. I found time to be proud of myself for the swell job of upside-down flying I was doing, and figured that if I ever got out of this scrape alive, I'd add it to my list of stunts.

Then the ship gave a jump, and I knew it had been relieved of a couple of hundred pounds' weight. Deftly I rolled the ship over, right side up, and looked over the side. Down below me was a black speck hurtling earthward. For a minute I lost track of it, and then I saw a tremendous splash in the bayou, and so knew my late passenger had got back into its native element again.

Half an hour later I jockeyed the ship down onto the field at Audubon Park. I cut the ignition and sat there almost too fagged to move. The boss and the publicity man raced toward me, and Doc had a camera in his hand ready to take pictures of my captive.

The boss got one look at the ship, stopped and started to cuss. I climbed out and started toward them, running. I don't think the boss even saw me, but Doc did, and he took to his heels and ran. He was lighter on his feet than I, and got away, and I didn't see him again for ten days, until we had moved to Morgan City. By that time I could see the humor of the whole thing, so while I did not forgive him, I did him no violence. I'd had the life almost scared out of me; it cost the boss a hundred dollars to repair the ship; and for a long time the publicity man ate crow—that is, a long time for a publicity man.

Naturally the story never got into print, for all the proof we had was a smelly plane and a lot of torn fabric and busted wires. Everyone thought stunt flyers were crazy, but we didn't want them to know we were that far gone. Pang and I are the only ones of that crew left alive; so now it can be told.

The Sad

A jungle episode described by a noted naturalist.

COLLECTING animals can be a most disheartening business. You set out with an array of bottles, tubes, guns, and nets, search literally high and low over a wide area and return home empty-handed, only to find that the cook has captured a rare snake in the firewood. And I could count on my fingers the number of times that I have had occasion to make use of a rifle when I happened to be carrying one; whereas the number of times that I have sat with my shotgun across my knees and watched larger animals, that could only be decently shot with a rifle, meandering about and posing in natural picture frames, are so numerous that I can hardly bear to mention the matter. . . .

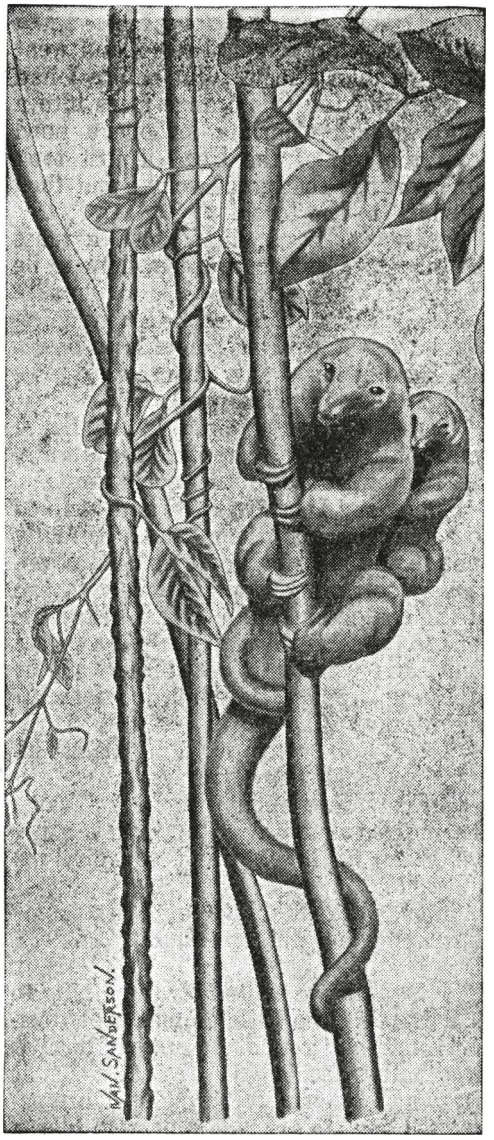
We had finished dinner. An outsized moon was sailing through the alabaster surf that surged across the deep blue sky. The forest was illuminated from directly overhead by its aluminum sheen, and in this it rested silently and still, so that the great rosettes of leaves of the parasitic plants seemed to be a thousand inert lips parted to catch its rays. There were sounds enough, but only those tireless sounds of activity that arise from the industrial activity of the insect world—a world that remained in the lacquered blackness of the shadows. The whole amphitheater of the jungle around us was etched; there was a universal blackness upon which the moon's rays engraved a giant filigree of apparently luminous highlights.

We wandered along the little path toward the ravine arm in arm, and as silently as possible, for it seemed a sacrilege to disturb this natural loveliness.

It was a long thin creeper swaying in the moonlight that interrupted our harmless wanderings. I do not know whether it is a primitive instinct or a trait of civilization that makes one distinguish a swaying creeper from a group of still ones; in a silent motionless jungle night it is, nevertheless, a signal. We came to an abrupt halt and peered upward, for the creeper was absolutely straight, and

Anteater

By IVAN SANDERSON



in company with a dozen others, hung from the top of a high tree directly down into the ravine.

The creeper continued to sway gently back and forth like a great seaweed stem in a gentle current. Every now and then it gave an extra little wiggle. There was no doubt that something was either ascending or descending it; so leaving Alma to watch, I scooted back to camp, hastily took the gun out of its case and grabbed up the torch. Capriata was optimistically chewing a pemmican dinner. This he abandoned at once when he saw me taking the gun.

WHEN we rejoined Alma, the creeper was still swaying gently. Capriata flashed the torch upward, but a mass of bromeliads obscured the top of the creeper and hid whatever might be disturbing it. We tried from all angles, but could not get a view and still the movements went on. Eventually Capriata dropped down into the ravine and took hold of the bottom end of the creeper. This he pulled taut so that it was unable to sway, held it thus for a minute or so and then let go again. At once the movements began again. Next time he gave it a little tug, and at once a long, thin, high-pitched and altogether pathetic whistle issued from the foliage above.

"Listen, listen!" whispered Capriata from below. "It is a Poor-me-one."

"What's that?" we asked in chorus.

"A very sad little beast, sir. He always bury his face in his hands."

"How do we catch it?" I asked.

"I think I can climb fast," came the reply; and without further ado, he swung out over the ravine on the end of two other near-by creepers. Capriata was one of the finest bushmen I have ever met and about the only genuine natural hunter that we have come across in all our wanderings in the Western hemisphere. In his knowledge and love of bushcraft generally and his lightning decisions he might have been an African. His particular interest in zoölogy was amazing and genuine, his keenness perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that now, after more than a year of parting, he still sends me hundreds of specimens carefully preserved, labeled *and* catalogued.

We stood on the brink of the ravine holding the torch while he drew level with us and finally passed us going on upward. At first the moon illuminated him; then the inky shadows under the great branches above swallowed him up, and we waited for a long time in silence. All the creepers were swaying violently now, and I had been instructed not to flash the light upward until it was called for, so I began aimlessly looking around below.

Immediately I spotted something shiny and bright orange in color growing on

the gnarled base of a tree near by. I had not seen such a fungus before, and went closer to take a look. But before I had finished picking this orange mass into a handkerchief, Capriata let out a howl from the top of the tree. I just took time to knot the handkerchief and then attended to the torch.

The white beam illuminated a mass of foliage. Capriata was nowhere to be seen, nor was anything else, as far as I could discern; but Alma began jumping up and down, making comic-strip noises and waving her hands about.

"What is it?" I snapped.

"I don't know, I don't know, but I want it!" came the reply. I naturally peered upward with renewed interest.

I must say I was relieved and inclined to agree with her when I did eventually spot something small and round and obviously soft clinging precariously to one of the creepers about two feet below the foliage. It seemed to be helpless in the light, and we could just discern a pair of the unhappiest eyes imaginable peering down at us.

"Here, here, come down on the creepers," we bawled at Capriata.

"Yes, I know about those two," came the muffled answer. "But there's a big one going up here. Can't you give me a light?"

"No! For the love of Mike come down and get this one first."

AND while we waited for something to happen, the little animal kept turning round and round the creeper until it eventually decided to retreat. As it neared the cover of the mass of bromeliads, Capriata's head appeared like a great gnome immediately above it, a hand reached down, and the animal was whisked off the liana and disappeared upward. After a long time it appeared again, tied in a red handkerchief dangling at the end of a long thin creeper, which slowly descended to ground.

Naturally enough, we took the handkerchief as soon as it was within reach and extricated the animal from this colorful wrapping. What appeared brought forth a sort of high-pitched baby-noise from Alma suitable for instant rebuke, had it not been for the perfectly adorable countenance that we beheld. The little creature *(Cyclopes didactylus)* had a face unlike any well-known animal that can be called to mind, the whole thing being tapered into a kind of beak covered with fur. It possessed, however, two small black eyes that could be and were incessantly squeezed shut, but appeared to have no proper eyelids. These eyes were filled with tears.

In my hands this sad little beast uttered another plaintive whistle and then curled itself up into a tight ball, its strange face between its front paws and its long tail coiled over its neck; the naked pad at the end of the tail—pale pink and creased, exactly like the underside of one of your fingers—clasped a bunch of the fur of its rump. It was covered in thick, short, woolly yet silky brown fur, and seemed so abjectly miserable and helpless that I passed it over to Alma, who eagerly cupped her hands to receive it.

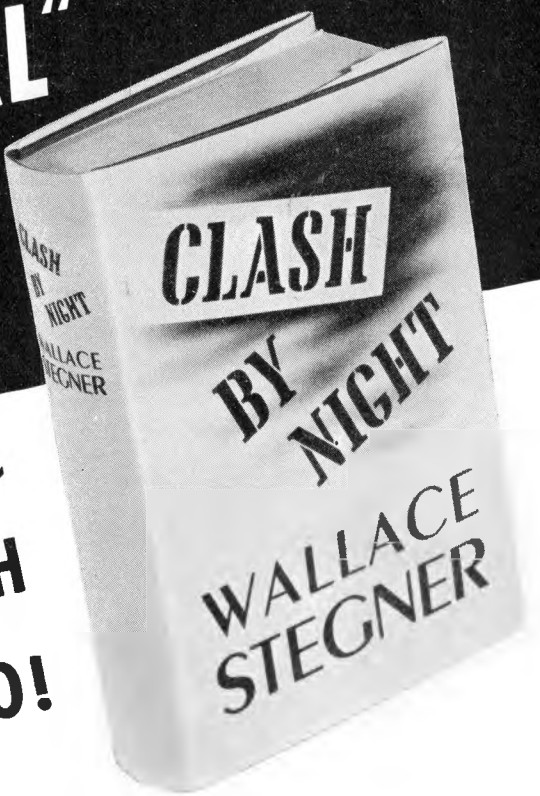
THAT, however, was the signal for it to uncoil with astonishing suddenness and become remarkably self-sufficient. This animal was armed with powerful recurved claws, those on the hands being as dense, tough and sharp as a gaff. The little anteater now endeavored so to close its extremities, but gathered up four pieces of skin from Alma's arm in the process. The animal is small but remarkably powerful for its size, and its grip was exceedingly painful, for the longest of the two claws on both front feet dug deeply into the flesh.

When Capriata got down to us again, the active little creature was still giving trouble, though Alma was freed. When I handed it over, Capriata gave me in exchange an exact replica, though about one-eighth the size. At first I could not believe my eyes and it flashed through my mind that Capriata might be playing some kind of conjuring trick on us. It turned out that this baby had been clinging to its mother's back when he had taken her off the creeper. We now reunited them, but the mother paid no attention to her offspring, and it scrambled back most unceremoniously though efficiently to its safe seat, and there clung on with all its little recurved claws deeply imbedded in the mother's thick woolly fur.

This animal is a member of one of the three kinds of true anteaters which are all inhabitants of the tropical parts of the Americas. The *Cyclopes* are the smallest type, and are not bigger than a squirrel. Their mouths are tubular and quite toothless, and provided with an immensely long thin tongue. This is obviously to facilitate the collection of ants, which are their staple food.

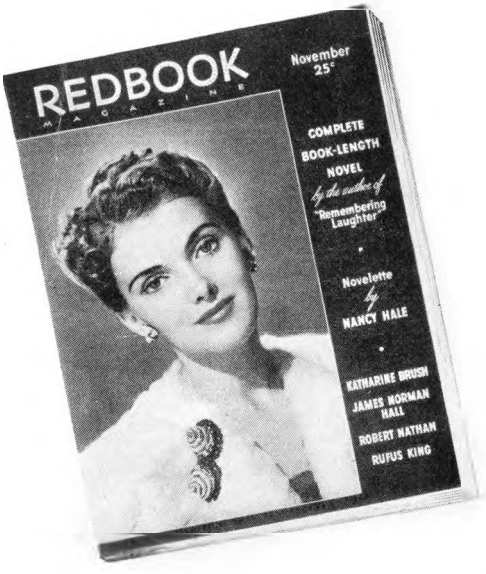
"UNUSUAL" is the word for Redbook

...and for its BOOK-LENGTH NOVELS, TOO!



"Always something unusual". . . the phrase belongs to one of Redbook's readers who says that he likes Redbook because "it always contains something unusual."

"Unusual" is the dream of every editor.



And the editors of Redbook are no exception. They spend a good part of their time in search of the unusual. And for the November issue they have found:

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A book-length novel of 50,000 words by Wallace Stegner. The dramatic story of a disillusioned man's eager search for something he never had—youth and love. Complete in this issue.

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