OCTOBER 1937

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

VOL. 65 No. 6

BLUE BOOK

OF FICTION AND ADVENTURE

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OCTOBER

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"Freedom's Highwayman"
A complete novel by
EWING WALKER

A Red Wolf Story
by **WILLIAM MAKIN**

H. BEDFORD-JONES

L. B. WILLIAMS

KENNETH PERKINS

GREGORIO SOMERS

"Visitors from Venus"
by **ANTHONY RUD**

Fully Illustrated

Who's Who in Blue Book

EWING WALKER

THE author of "Freedom's Highwayman" (see page 98) was born in Boonville, Missouri, and has spent most of his life in the South, engaged in the lumber business. Yet he writes:

"My hero Tom Shandy, while a son of the South, despised slavery. I'm just as inconsistent, and I come by it naturally. My grandfather walked the floor, bowed with worry and muttering to himself over and over again: 'The Union must be saved!' Yet when the final showdown came, he had to resign from the Supreme bench because of his refusal to take the oath of allegiance. To me, the sublimest characters in American history are Lincoln and Lee. Nothing pleases me more than the steadily, even rapidly growing reverence for Lincoln in the deep South.

"If a man *honestly* writes his autobiography, as you request, he is as one who undresses in public. So, I reckon that brings on the matter of hobbies. First, with me, cock-fighting; second, football; third, hunting and fishing; fourth, horse-racing. And New Orleans! Yes, that's a hobby, too. The rarest spot in all this wide world!"

EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

TARZAN and his creator are too well known to require extended introduction. Mr. Burroughs was born and spent his boyhood in Chicago; and before the literary success which brought him fame, he was a cowboy, cavalry-soldier, miner and then business man. His novels have sold by the million, as you know, and have probably had more readers, both in English and in translation, than any other works of our time. Ever since 1916, these stories of Tarzan, and the other brilliantly imagined fantasies of Mr. Burroughs, have been a frequent feature in our pages. And we are glad indeed to announce that one of his best, "Tarzan and the Elephant Men," begins in our next issue.

CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS

THE co-author of the "Ships and Men" series went first to sea in the U. S. Navy, in 1909. Was ensign during the War, then first lieutenant, and still holds commission in the Naval Reserve. Battle Fleet and armed transport service during the war. After the war, second mate to master in the merchant marine. In the navy and merchant marine twenty years. During that time made eleven trips around the world. During periods ashore he has been a port captain, boss rigger at Shooter's Island shipyard and has done some deep-sea and shallow-water diving, with occasional ventures in commercial fishing, cattle-punching, dry gold-mining, and railroading. He is in the Los Angeles Fire Department as fireboat pilot now. "Married and must stay put!" he says.

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OCTOBER, 1937 MAGAZINE VOL. 65, NO. 6

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A Wanderer's Scrapbook

A writer who has lived in thirty countries tells of his youth.

By JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

IN my young days I canvassed Parramatta with a Medical Guide. I found an old man in a field, and I talked earnestly with him for about fifteen minutes. He didn't utter a word of protest when I told him that no home should be without the book, that it was the alpha and omega of all knowledge, and the greatest job he ever did in his life would be to sign on the dotted line. With that I handed him the order-book and a fountain pen.

He took them in silence, and I stood back, mopping my brow and feeling certain I had made a sale. After several minutes he handed me back the book, and I read what he had written. It ran: *"I'm deaf and dumb, but I guess you're a damned cackling book-agent. Clear to hell off my land."* . . .

Standing near the G.P.O. one day I saw the most romantic figure imaginable coming toward me. A man dressed in white silk, white shoes, a large felt hat, and a red silk sash tied around his waist. I was fifteen, and the sight of a man who looked like a pirate chief stirred me. He had large dark eyes, and his hair fell in black locks on his collar.

A little man cried out his name to the astonished pedestrians. I'll never forget those words. "He's up from Samoa!" shouted the little man. "Up from the Islands! He's Robert Louis Stevenson!" . . .

I had a brother who liked sea voyages. One evening as we were walking around the wharves in Sydney we noticed a steamer that was on the point of leaving for Brisbane and the Malay.

"I've always wanted to go to the Malay," said my brother quietly. "I like the look of that boat, and I think I'll take her."

"You have no money," I said.

"I have three shillings," he muttered.

The steamer gave a warning blast, and visitors started to scurry ashore. "Good-by," said my brother, "I'll drop you a line from Banjermassin or Batavia." And with no further comment he walked aboard.

I heard nothing of him for five weeks; then I met him making for the wharf where he had boarded the steamer.

"I'm waiting for that red-headed Scotch captain to come back," he said angrily.

"What happened?" I asked.

"We were off Newcastle when the purser asked for my ticket," he growled. "I told him to run away and play, and he rushed off and reported the matter to the ginger-headed Scotch skipper. Nothing happened, and I was puzzled.

"The next day we were plowing along the worst strip of coast I ever saw. I was looking at it, wondering if anyone lived there, when six sailors and the mate jumped on me. The captain stopped the old tub, and I was trussed up and lowered into a boat. They pulled for the shore and landed me on the beach, partly undoing the knots so that they could make a getaway before I got free.

"Do you know how far that beach was from a house? Thirty-three miles, and it was solid scrub that you had to push your way through. You'd hardly think a captain would do it. He looked a quiet little devil too."

That brother went to the Boer War and stayed away five years, not writing a line during the whole time.

He came back one moonlight night, stepping off the Melbourne train at our little village. We had a policeman in the place who was rather unfriendly.

"Hello, I see you're back," said the Law.

"Yes, and just as good a man as ever," said my brother.

"Is that so?" cried the cop. "If you wait till this train goes out, we'll have a few rounds behind the goods-shed."

In the battle the policeman had three ribs broken. My brother was arrested, but he escaped with a fine. The cop admitted that he had taken off his jacket for the fray, and that saved my brother from a jail sentence.

He loved fighting. He was with the Anzacs during four years, badly gassed near the end of the war, and was in bed for a couple of years before he passed on. He should have been born in Elizabethan days.

ONCE as a kid I was put off a train. I was carrying to Sydney a five-foot iguana in an out-size pasteboard umbrella-box.

It was in the rack of the compartment on the opposite side to where I was sitting. At a way station an old white-bearded gentleman climbed in and took a seat directly under the iguana. I saw the old chap glance upward now and then. Presently he addressed me. "Is there anything alive in that box, young man?" he demanded.

"Only an ol' goanna," I answered.

"Old iguana!" he screamed. "How dare you!" He pulled the alarm signal; the train came to a stop; the guard came, and the old chap told his story. I was told to put the iguana out; but as we were only three miles from my own home, I decided to get out with it, and the train went on without me. . . .

The town had a local paper with a circulation of four hundred. One day I called in to see the editor and found him crouched over a wooden case that served as a desk, his eyes alight with the fine glare of a man grinding out hot copy. *(Please turn to page 7)*

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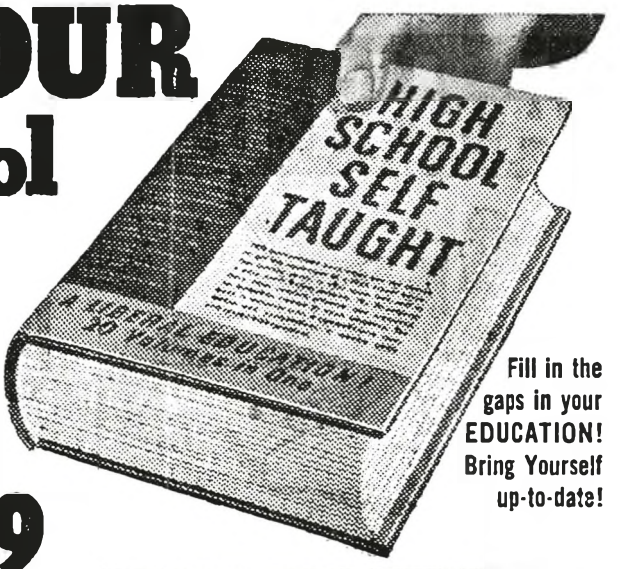

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The most celebrated adventurer in all fiction comes back to you next month in the best novel Mr. Burroughs has written in years.

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

A Wanderer's Scrapbook

(Continued from page 4)

"I'll see you in a minute," he growled, "I'm just giving Arthur Balfour ruddy hell!"

That paper had a column devoted to the movements of the tramps that passed through with their "blueys" on their backs. It was headed: *"Movements of the Daft World,"* and its items ran something like this: "Tambaroora Dan passed through this morning heading west. . . . Melbourne Jack with two sheep dogs stayed last night under the railway bridge. . . . Bendigo Billy with a mate who is nameless is heading for Mildura. Billy has been in Melbourne doing-in a cheque."

ONE day on the Great Southern Road running from Sydney to Melbourne I spoke to a shepherd. Most Australian shepherds are a little crazy, and this fellow was no exception. He was a fine story-teller, however.

Quite close to the road were two clumps of fallen gum-trees blown down by some great wind that had swept across the plains. I spoke of them, suggesting that it must have been a big storm that swept them flat.

The shepherd resented the storm solution. He said it was a mutiny of part of the trees against a monster gum-tree that governed them. He had heard the whisperings of treason for many days, and one night *they had fought.* He, so he asserted, had lain in a hollow and watched them go down one after the other, last to topple being the great eucalyptus that had ruled the group.

I moved on. If I had stayed long with that old man, I would have believed his story.

WORKING as a paragraphist for a Sydney paper I wrote a paragraph about a family that lived near my father's farm when I was a boy. There were four boys in this family, and the father was the meanest man in the district; he was so hard on them that they had to earn permission to walk in a funeral by previously collecting four bags of cow manure per boy.

To fill up my daily column I slipped in this story, and foolishly gave the name of the family. A few days later I was trying to think up some more paragraphs when a huge man, standing over six feet and built in proportion, stepped into the little caboose I occupied. "Are you the fellow that writes the Pen-Pricks?" he asked.

Fear spoke to me. "No," I said. "He's just stepped down the corridor. I'll call him."

"Do," said the visitor. "I'm going to lam him so that all the kids of the neighborhood will be willing to collect four bags of cow manure each to come and look at him!"

I did my paragraphs at home for awhile.

THEY tell Outback of an aboriginal who asked for a bottle of brandy and got refused. He went out on the street and flung his boomerang. The crooked stick entered the door of "The Lucky Digger," swept nine bottles off the shelves, knocked the head off a wooden cuckoo who had just climbed out of the inside of a clock to announce the hour, gave the publican a black eye, went through the small service window to the ladies' parlor, smashed a glass of gin in the fingers of a local temperance leader, then darted up the chimney and was never seen again. . . .

Near the place where this boomerang feat is supposed to have taken place there is a big sheep station, the owner of which was a ram fancier. To this place came an English aristocrat fresh from London and carrying a battery of sporting rifles.

On his first day at the homestead he took one of his weapons and went out to bag something. Inside an hour he was back with an extraordinary story. Going over the hill a mile from the house he was attacked by "a wild sheep." "A dreadful brute with large horns," he recounted breathlessly. "I stood my ground, drew a bead on him as he charged and gave him both barrels! What?"

The horrified squatter rushed to the spot and found that the Englishman had killed a thousand-guinea merino ram!

There is a sequel to this. Crossing the Sahara from Colomb Bechar to Timbuktu in 1935 I met at a spot called Bidon 5, in the very heart of the Sahara, a quartet of Englishmen who were driving up from Kenya. Yarning that evening, I told this story. When the laughs had died, one of the four said quietly: "That was on the Riverina in New South Wales. I am the man who shot the ram."

DURING that same trip across the Sahara I traveled in the company of a French officer. Near Tabankort on the road to Gao he got out and fired six shots at a gazelle who was standing motionless about three hundred yards from our automobile. Each time he fired, the gazelle flicked its little tuft of tail, but gave no other signs of alarm.

The officer was annoyed. He had previously informed us that he held the marksman's medal of his regiment, and after the sixth shot I said laughingly: *"Assez, monsieur! Frappez la bête avec le fusil."*

He was a little hornet. He there and then challenged me to fight him with swords, pistols, hunting-knives or even safety razors. I refused, and the silence of the Sahara was nothing to the silence within that vehicle for the rest of the journey. . . .

The French are a serious people. Once at Nice, on the Riviera I threatened to punch a fat man who pushed me off the sidewalk. He called an *agent* and I was given in charge for making *"le geste d'un boxeur Americain."* I was the most surprised Australian in France. I was arrested for making the gesture!

Additional episodes from our Wanderer's Scrapbook will appear in an early issue.

The Assassins of

FIVE minutes to five in the morning. The Taurus Express, simmering in steam, was alongside the platform at Aleppo. Despite the grand name of the train, the flickering lamps of the poorly lit station revealed the reality. It consisted of a kitchen and dining-car, a sleeping-car and two ordinary coaches.

Standing by the sleeping-car was a slim figure in a greatcoat. The sun had not yet risen, and Paul Rodgers felt the biting winds of the north sweeping down upon the station. He was bound north. His back was toward his refuge in the Arabian desert, whence a new adventure had lured him.

From his pocket he brought forth a cigarette-case. He opened it and selected an Egyptian. The other hand held a slip of paper which he twisted into a spill and casually inserted into one of the flickering lamps of the platform. It burned brightly; and as he applied the spill to his cigarette, the gray eyes and slightly ironic features were revealed.

That slip of paper was sending the famous Red Wolf of Arabia on this journey. The command was laconic:

From British Embassy, Angora, to British Agent, Bagdad. Urgent. Requested that Paul Rodgers report at once Embassy here.

Anstruther.

At that moment, above the hissing of the locomotive, came shouts and the scurry of feet. Rodgers turned. Through the barrier came three brawny porters, Syrians, bowed beneath heavy baskets strapped to their shoulders. Their faces perspired beneath their fezzes as they stumbled and staggered with their burdens toward the third-class coach. As they came alongside Rodgers, he observed that their baskets were piled with golden fruit: oranges—the giant oranges that came from the groves beyond Jaffa.

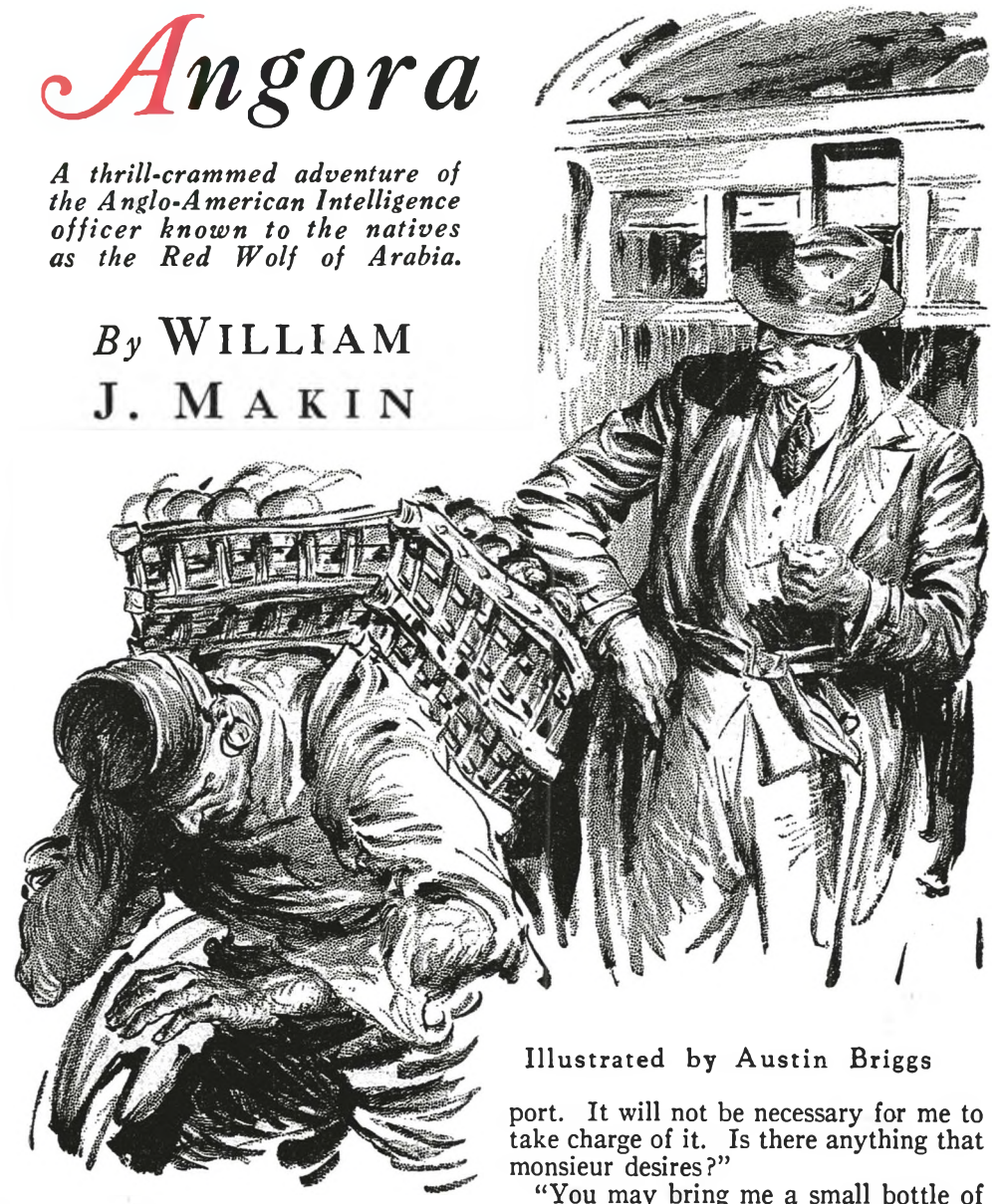
"En voiture, monsieur!"

The conductor of the *wagon-lit* was importuning. Rodgers saw the three porters with their heavy baskets of oranges scrambling to the wooden seats

Angora

A thrill-crammed adventure of the Anglo-American Intelligence officer known to the natives as the Red Wolf of Arabia.

By WILLIAM J. MAKIN



Illustrated by Austin Briggs

of their coach. Whistles were shrilling. There was an answering shriek from the locomotive. The Taurus Express began to move.

Lithely, the Intelligence officer swung himself aboard. He allowed the conductor to lead him to his compartment.

"Voilà, monsieur!"

"Thank you." Rodgers did not neglect the outstretched hand. "Are there many passengers aboard this coach?"

"Only one, monsieur," replied the conductor, pocketing the tip. "A lady from Damascus. Not many people travel at this time of the year. Ah! I see monsieur is traveling with a diplomatic passport. It will not be necessary for me to take charge of it. Is there anything that monsieur desires?"

"You may bring me a small bottle of Perrier," Rodgers requested.

"Very good."

As the conductor stepped back into the corridor and slid to the door, Rodgers again brought his hand out of his great-coat pocket. It held a huge Jaffa orange, to which he had helped himself from a passing basket. He grinned like a schoolboy, and slowly began to peel it.

When the conductor returned with the bottle of Perrier, it was to find a lithe, red-haired individual thoughtfully sucking an orange.

"Voilà, monsieur!"

Rodgers nodded, and with a queer expression in his gray eyes regarded the orange clutched in his hand.

An hour later, Paul Rodgers was bowing to the only other passenger, the lady from Damascus. He rose from his table in the restaurant-car, where he was taking a frugal breakfast, and indicated the seat facing him.

"Mademoiselle will surely do me the honor to breakfast at this table. It would be absurd for us, the only two passengers *de luxe,* to dine at either end of the coach."

He spoke in French, for he realized at once that the woman was a Levantine. Not a particularly engaging type, he also decided, but that fact had not caused him to hesitate over the "mademoiselle."

"Thank you. You are most amiable," she replied coldly, and took the seat indicated.

She adjusted the spectacles on her nose and gave him a swift, suspicious glance. Her black hair was drawn back tightly out of sight beneath an ill-fitting hat. Her features were regular enough, but set severely. The eyes were magnified out of proportion by the spectacles, and seemed glassily indifferent. And the forbidding exterior was emphasized by the formal white blouse, shining belt and black skirt reminiscent of the schoolroom.

"You come from Damascus, mademoiselle?" began Rodgers, sipping his coffee.

"I have been visiting my parents there," she replied. "Now I go back to my work. I am principal of the college for ladies at Angora."

"Then we are fellow-travelers to the end," smiled the Intelligence officer. "I too go to Angora."

"It is indeed a happy coincidence," she replied coldly. And to the waiter: "A boiled egg, please. Hard!"

HER voice was a dull monotone, lacking any inflection. A prosaic, passionless creature, decided Rodgers. But the next moment his eyes widened in surprise, for he had seen her hands. They had stretched out for a serviette, and revealed long, tapering fingers, beautiful in their slimness, the nails slightly tinted. The fingers of a genius. "Or a murderess," suddenly imagined Paul Rodgers.

"I beg of you to talk to me of Angora," he smiled at her.

"You have never been there?"

"This is my first visit, after many years."

"Then you will be surprised," she said.

"Already I am surprised," he said easily, "at finding this one-time Anatolian village now possesses a college for ladies —for Turkish ladies, I suppose?"

"Yes, and why not?"

"There was a time when the Turkish lady was never seen outside the harem," smiled Rodgers. "Her face was always hidden by the veil. And her ideas—"

"What of her ideas?" she challenged in that dull monotone.

RODGERS shrugged. "Those of the typical Moslem," he evaded.

"You will find that Kemal Ataturk has changed all that," she said, expertly slicing the top off the hard-boiled egg. "The women of Turkey are now free and equal with men; they have escaped the harem. No girl may marry under the age of seventeen. Polygamy is forbidden."

"A revolution indeed," smiled the Intelligence officer. "And are these modern women of Turkey happy?"

"Why shouldn't they be happy?"

"Why not, indeed! Kemal Ataturk has granted them complete freedom and equality and—"

"Kemal Ataturk *thinks* he has granted them complete freedom," said the cold voice quickly. For one brief moment those tapering fingers fascinated Rodgers. They seemed possessed of tremendous energy. "But why talk of the women of Turkey? As a tourist you would only be interested in the aspect of Angora itself."

"As a tourist, yes," said Rodgers guardedly.

The conversation became as prosaic as a guide-book read aloud. Rodgers was not permitted to delve further into the transformation of houris into feminists. Instead, he learned how in a few years the Dictator of Turkey had transformed a village into a metropolis, of roads built by German engineers, of buildings designed by German architects, of the modern luxury villa in which Kemal Ataturk himself lived with a little posse of guards to defend him.

"Most interesting," nodded the Intelligence officer. "A Westernized Turkey."

"Yes, a Westernized Turkey," said the woman from Damascus with a trace of bitterness in her voice.

Even as she spoke, the train stopped. A cold daylight had blanketed the stony landscape. The conductor entered the restaurant-car.

"The frontier, mesdames et messieurs. Passports will be presented."

"Yes, we are in Turkey," nodded the woman with the spectacles.

"In that case, I think I'll take my first walk on Turkish territory," said Rodgers, rising.

He bowed, passed along the restaurant car and descended to the platform. It seemed that a horde of beggars in rags had materialized from the low hills and swarmed toward the train. Threading and pushing their way through this mumbling mob were some khaki-clad figures of Turkish soldiers. Holding rifles with bayonets fixed, they clambered onto the train.

Rodgers ignored them as he strolled along the platform, gazing indolently into the coaches. He was seeking the three men of Aleppo with their heavy baskets of oranges. To his surprise, they were no longer there.

Or rather they were transformed. The three blood-red fezzes had disappeared. Three ordinary but battered bowler hats had taken their place. Three sullen faces stared out at him from above the baskets of oranges perched on their knees.

"I would like to buy an orange," said Rodgers.

"These oranges are not for sale."

"Oh, come now. Five piastres for an orange."

"No."

"Ten piastres."

The second of the porters pushed his face forward.

"The oranges are not for sale," he said, and spat on the floor.

"Forbidden fruit, indeed," Rodgers mused. He resumed his stroll.

On the train, the lady from Damascus was interrogating the conductor of the *wagon-lit*.

"Who is the gentleman who came aboard at Aleppo?"

"I think a person of importance," said the conductor. "He carries a diplomatic passport. His name is Paul Rodgers."

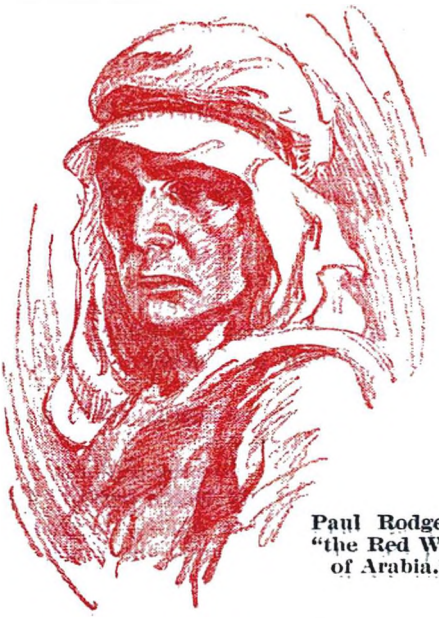
"Paul Rodgers!" The tapering fingers went to her mouth. "Thank you," she ended briefly.

Half an hour later, when the train had resumed its journey and was climbing the tortuous route to the Taurus Mountains, Rodgers was questioning the conductor.

"The lady from Damascus—I did not catch her name?"

"She is Mademoiselle Lilo Alaya. I understand that she is the principal of the modern college for Turkish women in Angora."

"Lilo Alaya," repeated Rodgers. "An attractive name."



Paul Rodgers, "the Red Wolf of Arabia."

"But not a particularly attractive woman," ventured the conductor.

"Nevertheless, interesting," mused Rodgers, and with a nod dismissing the conductor, turned his face toward the white rocks of the towering mountains.

Sir Herbert Anstruther, British Ambassador to the Turkish Republic, pushed a box of cigarettes across the table to Paul Rodgers. The two men were seated in the ornately furnished room of a villa in Angora, the temporary British Embassy.

"I need hardly tell you, Rodgers," said Sir Herbert, carefully lighting a cigarette himself, "that this conversation of ours is strictly unofficial. For the period of your stay in Angora, you are a private individual with no particular call upon our intervention."

"As the agent of an oil syndicate, seeking concessions in the Middle East, I shall have no cause to enlist the aid of the British Embassy," agreed Rodgers.

The Ambassador nodded approvingly.

"I see that you have already chosen your part," he murmured. "An excellent one, if I may say so. Your reputation, my dear Rodgers, stands high in the Intelligence service. It was only after careful consideration that you were chosen for this present task."

"And the task is an unpleasant one—obviously," smiled Rodgers.

"Did my tone imply it?" inquired Sir Herbert with a smile. "Well, I must admit it is an unpleasant one. Because of that you will realize that His Majesty's

Government can do nothing should you unfortunately find yourself in a dangerous situation."

"That is always understood, Sir Herbert," nodded Rodgers. "The task, if you please?"

Sir Herbert blew a cloud of smoke in the air and began:

"Angora, as you may have noticed, is at present full of diplomats. Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Russia have assembled diplomatic missions in this modern capital of Turkey. Including, of course—"

"Gentlemen of no status, such as myself," nodded Rodgers.

"Exactly. Actually, the diplomats are here to sign a treaty which permits Turkey to fortify, once again, the Dardanelles and the entrance to the Black Sea. This is a reversal of the treaty conditions imposed upon Turkey after the Great War. When, a few months ago, Turkey applied through the League of Nations for permission to erect forts and gun-emplacements upon the shores of the Bosporus, Britain showed herself sympathetic to the demand."

"And Russia?" inquired Rodgers.

"After a talk with British and French naval experts—also sympathetic," said Sir Herbert. "Briefly, the cause of Turkey, and in particular, that of Kemal Ataturk, has triumphed. The representatives of the various European nations are here to affix their signature to the treaty."

"When does the signing take place?"

"On Saturday evening, at the Villa Chevelik, the residence of Kemal Ataturk. A grand ball in celebration is to be held there by the Dictator. He rather likes these jazz nights."

"I shall be there," smiled Rodgers.

"You must obtain the invitation without my assistance," warned the Ambassador. "In fact, I was hoping that your task might have been accomplished before the ball takes place."

"And the task is?"

"A complete map of the newly planned fortifications of the Dardanelles," drawled Sir Herbert slowly. "While we are all willing to agree to these defences, each nation desires the knowledge of the position of forts and batteries."

"Is there already a plan in existence?"

"One. It is in the possession of Kemal Ataturk himself. To the best of my knowledge, it is in the Villa Chevelik. I need not point out to you with your knowledge of the Middle East and the

vital communications between Britain and the Empire, that some knowledge of those plans is essential for our future safety."

Rodgers dabbed the end of his cigarette in the ash-tray, a thoughtful expression in his gray eyes.

"An unpleasant and difficult task," he decided, "but I'll do it."

"Thank you, Rodgers," nodded the Ambassador. "I knew I could depend on you." He held out his hand. "And now, I do not think it is necessary for us to meet again until—"

"Until I hand you the map of the fortifications," smiled Paul Rodgers.

"By the way," added Sir Herbert as the Intelligence officer was leaving the room. "I had a man at the railway station to meet you. Evidently he missed you on the arrival of the Taurus Express."

Rodgers turned a bland face. "I was interested in three men carrying baskets of oranges," he said. "I followed them."

"Really! What an extraordinary idea! Where did they go?"

"To the Turkish women's college," said Rodgers quietly.

"It must be this modern passion for slimming," laughed the Ambassador.

"I wonder," said Rodgers.

FOR the next three days Rodgers idled. He sauntered the streets of the modern Turkish capital and found much to marvel at. He found Angora as drab as the khaki-colored plain of the Anatolian Desert in which it lay. But the wide boulevards with the modern concrete buildings, the German-designed shops, the two cinemas and the one cabaret, interested him indifferently. He was much more interested in finding the few survivals of the old market-town of Asia Minor.

He discovered one such relic in a ramshackle wooden structure nestling between the cement cliffs of two Government offices. It was little more than a kiosk, with a brave display of highly colored picture postcards and cheap literature of all nations.

It was a fat man bending over some pots of withered geraniums and whispering to them, that first attracted Rodgers.

"Good morning, my friend," said the Intelligence officer, in French.

The fat figure straightened itself. A cherubic face was wreathed in smiles.

"Good morning, monsieur. You wish to buy something?" he squeaked in a high-pitched voice.

"I would like to see what you have to sell," said Rodgers.

"Deign to enter my shop, monsieur."

Brushing past a little revolving tower of stern-gazing photographs of Kemal Ataturk, Rodgers idled into the dark interior. The fat man followed, taking his place behind a wooden counter.

"Monsieur would like to see some artistic pictures," he chuckled. "I have just received a unique selection from Paris. Permit me—"

But Rodgers shook his head. He realized that this man was as much a relic of old Turkey as was his ramshackle shop. One of the lost eunuchs. Since the decree abolishing the harem, a little army of eunuchs had spread themselves all over the Middle East. They betrayed themselves in their habits, the love of flashy clothes and worthless jewelry. Many of them, reduced to penury, could be found walking the streets, their fleshy necks dangling spurious amber and cheap gewgaws. Others prowled in public gardens, wandering the paths and stroking flowers. A queer, dying race of history.

"I am told that there are many beautiful women in Turkey," said Rodgers. "Maybe you have photographs to show me."

The fat man shook his head.

"The most beautiful women were those who reigned in the harem," he asserted. "Not these shameless ones of today who bare their faces to all. Look, I will show you pictures of some of those famous beauties."

From beneath the dark recesses he brought forth an album containing pictures of beauties who had delighted the heart of old Abdul Hamid before he was deposed. The fat, bejeweled fingers of the eunuch flicked the pages.

More and more pictures, modern ones, appeared in the album. One striking beauty attracted the Intelligence officer's attention. She was a blonde, and the pure features had not only an imperious gaze, but seemed vaguely familiar.

"Who is that?" he asked.

The eunuch put up his hands in a gesture of dismay.

"It should not have been shown you, monsieur," he said. His voice dropped to a whisper. "Her picture is forbidden by Kemal Ataturk."

"Why?"

"Because she was once his wife. She is Latifa Hanum. She was divorced by Kemal Ataturk because it was whispered that she interfered in affairs of state."

"Somehow, her face seems familiar," mused Rodgers. "Where did she come from?"

"Latifa Hanum was the daughter of a rich merchant in Smyrna. After the divorce the family disappeared. I have heard it said they went to Damascus."

"The family! Was there a sister?"

"An elder sister, yes. But no one speaks of them today."

"I'll buy that picture," Rodgers decided abruptly.

"I shall be glad to be rid of it," decided the eunuch.

A clink of coin, and with the picture of Latifa Hanum in his pocket, Rodgers sauntered forth again into the sunlight of Angora. He spent some time waiting the arrival of the Taurus Express at the station. Jostled by the swarming crowd, he watched eagerly each passenger come forth. He was not disappointed. The same three men with the battered bowler hats came out into the sunshine, bent beneath their heavy baskets of oranges.

"The messengers of the forbidden fruit," mused Rodgers.

ONCE again he trailed them. Again he saw them enter the wrought-iron gates of the Turkish women's college. He stood there irresolute for a moment. Then he tugged at the bell-handle let into the wall.

A moment's wait, and then an old woman muffled in so many garments that her face was almost hidden, peered at him from behind the gates.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

Rodgers bowed, politely.

"I would like to speak to the principal, Mademoiselle Lilo Alaya."

"Have you an appointment?"

"I regret—no. But if you will be good enough to present my card, mademoiselle may recall our pleasant companionship on the Taurus Express."

A grimy hand thrust forth and took the piece of pasteboard. The bundle of clothes turned its back upon him and shuffled into the cool and darkened corridors beyond. Rodgers waited five minutes—ten minutes. Then the old woman

reappeared. The piece of pasteboard was contemptuously thrust back at him.

"Mademoiselle regrets that she cannot receive you. She is very busy. The students are being prepared for the invitations to the great ball tomorrow evening at the Villa Chevelik. Therefore, mademoiselle asks to be excused."

"Mademoiselle is excused," said Rodgers. "Please convey my regrets to her."

He turned and walked slowly away from the gates. From an upper window in the college a woman with long, slim fingers drew aside a latticed blind and watched him covertly.

A pity that her gaze could not follow this slim, lounging figure into his room at the hotel. She would have witnessed a curious sight: Paul Rodgers, sitting at a table, was amusing himself with the photograph of Latifa Hanum which he had purchased. In prankish, schoolboy fashion he was drawing a pair of spectacles over those features with the imperious gaze. He was also sketching the hair into something drawn back tightly. When he had finished, he studied the picture.

"Interesting!" he murmured, and reached out for a cigarette.

SIR HERBERT ANSTRUTHER was worried. He had deliberately delayed his arrival at the Villa Chevelik, hoping to hear something from the elusive Paul Rodgers —that strange character known to the natives farther south, he recalled, as the Red Wolf of Arabia. But Rodgers had taken him at his word. The Ambassador had not set eyes upon him since that brief unofficial conversation at the temporary embassy.

Therefore, attended by two A.D.C.'s and hearing his name announced in the guttural voice of the major-domo, Sir Herbert was startled to observe an immaculately dressed, smiling Rodgers standing by the side of Kemal Ataturk.

"Our party is complete, Sir Herbert, with your presence." Kemal smiled.

Beneath the glittering chandeliers, Kemal Ataturk belied the hard-featured photographs of himself that stared warningly from every corner in modern Turkey. The fierce blue eyes were now twinkling with good humor. The hard line of the mouth beneath the mustache was broken with a smile.

"It is always a pleasure to attend your parties, Excellency," said Sir Herbert. "They are so—"

"'*Gay*' is the word, Sir Herbert," laughed Kemal. "I always believe in plenty of exciting food, gay music and pretty girls at my receptions. Otherwise, diplomacy would be very dull indeed."

"You appear to have gathered a fine bevy of beauty on this occasion, Excellency," approved Sir Herbert, glancing round the crowded ballroom with its brilliant frocked women and smartly uniformed men.

"The modern Turkish women," smiled Kemal. "No need to raid the harem. Many of these attractive creatures come from the local college."

And with a general wave of the hand which was the signal for a jazz orchestra to begin its syncopated clangor, Kemal Ataturk strode toward another room. And Rodgers accompanied him.

"He seems to get there," decided the Ambassador, watching the disappearing figure of the Intelligence officer. "But I wonder if he has that document in his pocket?"

He shrugged, smoothed the worry from his face with a smile, and turned toward the swirling gayety of the ball. He was introduced to a young lady around whose frock was a green sash.

"One of the students of the college, sir," explained the A.D.C.

During the course of the evening he danced with several green-sashed girls. They were all from the school. They were all equally charming and excellent dancers. He thoroughly enjoyed himself. But there were moments when he excused himself to go in search of the elusive Rodgers. And each time he found him sitting at the table in a smaller room, engrossed in a game of poker with Kemal and a few favored officers.

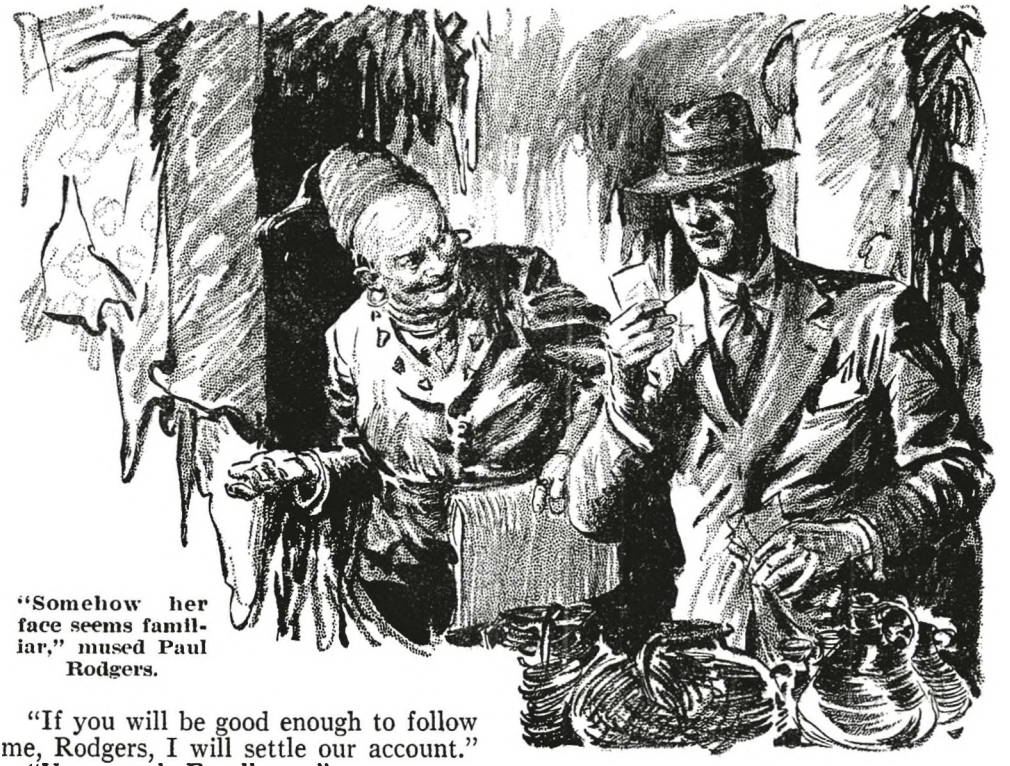
Poker, as the Ambassador knew, was one of the great passions of the Turkish dictator. Many a long night he had sat playing into the dawn, smoking cigarettes incessantly, and challenging those who had the courage to oppose him in a game of which he was an acknowledged master. This time, Kemal had apparently found an opponent worthy of his bluff. A pile of notes at Rodgers' elbow told of steady winnings.

THERE came a moment while Sir Herbert was watching, when Kemal flung down the cards with a harsh laugh.

"Once again, Rodgers, the luck is with you," said the Dictator. "Somehow the cards are against me this evening."

"It would seem so, Excellency," said Rodgers apologetically.

Kemal rose. The others followed suit.



"Somehow her face seems familiar," mused Paul Rodgers.

"If you will be good enough to follow me, Rodgers, I will settle our account."

"Very good, Excellency."

The Dictator strode away in the direction of his study, waving aside his guards. Obediently, Paul Rodgers followed. Sir Herbert watched the departure with some excitement. . . .

Kemal Ataturk led the way into his study—a small, comfortably furnished room with French windows opening on to a balcony. A map of modern Turkey stretched across one wall. Kemal took a seat at the imposing desk and indicated a chair opposite. Rodgers sat down.

"You are one of the cleverest poker-players it has been my good fortune to meet," said Kemal, taking up a check-book and writing vigorously.

"It has been a pleasure to play against you, Excellency."

Kemal flipped the check across the desk.

"And now, Rodgers, seeing that we've finished our game and my debt is paid, let us proceed to business. What is your real preoccupation here?"

"I came to discuss oil-concessions, Excellency."

"But oil is not your business," nodded Kemal. "I know something of your career in Arabia, my friend. We too have our Intelligence service, and the exploits of the Red Wolf of Arabia comprise a very interesting *dossier* in our collection. I think I can guess the reason for your presence here, this evening."

"I think Your Excellency can guess one reason, but not the real reason, for my request for fifteen minutes' private conversation."

"I have granted the request," snapped Kemal. "Well?"

"I wish to warn Your Excellency that there is danger of assassination," said Rodgers slowly.

The man before him was unperturbed.

"I am always in danger of assassination. Many men have plotted against me. All failed. All are dead. They have even tried to lead an army against me."

"That is why this plot is all the more dangerous, Excellency."

"Why?"

"Because it is an army of women, led by one woman."

"A woman, eh?" The blue eyes of the Dictator narrowed. "I agree, that is dangerous. When is the attempt to take place?"

"Within half an hour—here."

"Continue!" nodded the Dictator.

"Those charming young ladies now dancing so happily in the ballroom with your officers, it is they who will make certain that Moslem women will triumph in Turkey. Beneath their patriotic green sashes, each carries an automatic pistol, fully loaded."

"How do you know?"

"Because I chose to eat an orange in the Taurus Express, having helped myself from a basketload carried by porters. Here it is!"

On the desk before the surprised Dictator, Rodgers gravely placed a shriveled, half-eaten orange.

"I discovered two cartridges, unfired, carefully imbedded in this orange. Holes had been cut, the ammunition carefully inserted, and then the surface sealed again. There is no doubt that every orange in the baskets carried by the porters contained cartridges. And beneath the oranges, hidden in the bottom of the baskets were automatic pistols. They were all safely smuggled into Turkey."

"And the destination?"

"The Turkish women's college, of which Mademoiselle Lilo Alaya is the principal."

"Is she the leader of this conspiracy?"

"I have reason to think so, Excellency."

"Who is she?"

Rodgers shrugged.

"She is the sister of Latifa Hanum, your former wife, Excellency."

Kemal rose from his seat. He walked to the French windows, opened them and breathed deeply of the night air.

"Come here, Rodgers."

The Intelligence officer stood at his side. The Dictator indicated in the moonlit garden an ornamental pond, shimmering in the unearthly light.

"I loved Latifa Hanum," he said quietly. "I built that artificial lake as a memorial to our married life. Alas, politics, Turkey, came between us. We had to part."

"It has left bitterness in the heart of Lilo Alaya, who feels that the future of Turkey is with her womenfolk," said Rodgers.

The blue eyes of the Dictator had softened momentarily. Now they hardened again. He strode back to the desk and rang a bell. An officer appeared. Kemal snapped out instructions. Other officers appeared. More instructions were given.

FINISHING a dance and impatiently awaiting the reappearance of Paul Rodgers, Sir Herbert Anstruther was surprised to see the major-domo mount a pedestal near the band and hold up a hand for silence.

"An amusing dance, devised by His Excellency," declared the major-domo. "The ladies are requested to line up at one side of the ballroom; officers and gentlemen at the other."

Amidst laughing and chaffing, the orders were complied with.

"Officers will now advance and choose their partners," called out the major-domo. "Officers of the Turkish Army to have the first choice."

There were jovial shouts of dismay from the other nationals at this; but as the band began to play a Viennese waltz, the Turkish officers stepped forward obediently to the line of waiting ladies. Sir Herbert observed that each of them chose a green-sashed partner.

"They've seized all the best dancers," he growled to one of the A.D.C.'s.

Soon the floor was crowded with gay dancers again. But only for a few moments. The smartly uniformed Turkish officers were whisking their partners toward the corridors, urging them through doorways, paying no heed to laughing entreaties. Sir Herbert found himself dancing the waltz in old-fashioned style with a too-vigorous German matron.

Curiously enough, the green-sashed girls never appeared again that evening, although their debonair partners were to be seen later, searching for new conquests. Rumor had it that the girls had been packed into cars and rushed back to the college. The amusing waltz devised by the Dictator had been their Cinderella dance. . . .

Once again Paul Rodgers and Kemal were seated in that study.

"Yes, you were right," said the Dictator sadly. "The women had automatics. They were disarmed. Once

again a plot to kill me has failed. I have you to thank for it, Rodgers."

"I fulfilled my personal mission, Excellency," said the Intelligence officer.

Kemal shot a shrewd glance at the man before him.

"Then my suspicions were correct, Rodgers. You came here for another purpose."

Rodgers nodded.

"As a poker-player, I know when it is futile to bluff, Excellency."

"You came for the plans of the fortifications of the Dardanelles, eh?"

"Those were my orders, Excellency."

"And you are not afraid to tell me so?"

"No, Excellency. For I have succeeded."

The Dictator gave a swift glance over his shoulder at the safe in the corner of the room. He rose, towering over Rodgers. His eyes were as hard as steel.

"You have dared—" he began angrily.

He strode at once to the safe, maneuvered the dials, and swung open the heavy door. His hands dived in and brought forth a folded document. He glanced at it, and then turned a puzzled expression toward the Intelligence officer.

"You are a better bluffer than I thought, Rodgers," he said. "The plan of the fortifications, the only plan in existence, is still here."

"Exactly," smiled Rodgers. "It would be absurd of me to deprive you of that. But while you were arranging for the ladies in the ballroom to be transported back to their college, I'm afraid you left me to my own devices."

"Well?" A dangerous glint was in the eyes of the Dictator.

"I'm afraid I opened the safe,—yes, I'm considered good at that kind of work, —took out the plans, photographed them and handed a spool of film to a departing guest." Rodgers was regarding his slim hands with some pleasure. "I should say, Excellency, that the copy of the plan is now on the way to the archives of the British Intelligence."

THE face of the Dictator hardened. He hesitated a moment. He came to the desk, the plans in his hand, and seated himself.

"Rodgers, you have done me a service tonight. I have to admit that you have probably saved my life."

The Intelligence officer bowed.

"But that will not prevent my ringing this bell and calling my officers to take you away and have you shot for espionage," went on Kemal, sternly. "If you have anything to say, there are a few minutes at your disposal before I call my officers."

PAUL RODGERS' easy posture in the chair was not disturbed.

"May I smoke?" he asked, bringing forth a cigarette-case. At the same time he offered the case to the Dictator. Mechanically, Kemal took one and lit it.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Well," went on Rodgers easily, "I think Your Excellency will agree that if I had not achieved a copy of those plans, another would have done so. Furthermore, the knowledge of those fortifications will be safer in the files of the British Intelligence than in the files of any other nation."

The Dictator's hard lips relaxed.

"You make a better diplomat, Rodgers, than a spy. I am prepared to admit that Britain is friendly, most friendly toward Turkey. Without their agreement, the treaty that will be signed within an hour would have been impossible. The two nations respect each other. They have fought against each other, and that cements friendship."

"Your Excellency can be assured that Britain will never attempt the forcing of the Dardanelles again," said Rodgers. "They favor the fortifications as a defense of Turkey against more ambitious nations."

"No one but myself knows how near the British were to forcing the Dardanelles in the early days of the war," chuckled Kemal. "In fact, only by a miracle did I myself escape their soldiers."

"Well, then, Excellency?"

Kemal eyed the man before him. His hand still rested upon the precious plans. A suspicion of a smile crossed his face. He began opening the folded map, spreading it over the table. Then he looked up.

"Tell me, Rodgers, what did you think of it?"

Rodgers rose and sauntered to the desk. He stood behind the Dictator.

"In the little time that I had to photograph the plan," he said, "I was unable to study the fortifications closely. Permit me, Excellency."

He bent over the desk. His keen gray eyes took in the plans at length.

"A very elaborate system, Excellency."

"And very costly," agreed Kemal. "It was prepared by the best experts. I determined that if we had the right to

fortify the Dardanelles, the scheme would be of the best."

"It is *the* best—if you can afford it, Excellency," said Rodgers pointedly.

The Dictator grinned.

"If it has impressed you, it will impress your naval and military experts in Britain," he said. "So much the better. That is our plan, but only dictators realize how futile it is to make plans when the nation is still years behind the civilized progress."

"Then the plan?"

"Is still the plan," laughed the Dictator. "It may come into being. That is for the nation who attacks us to discover."

"I can see, Excellency, that you are still the best poker-player in Europe."

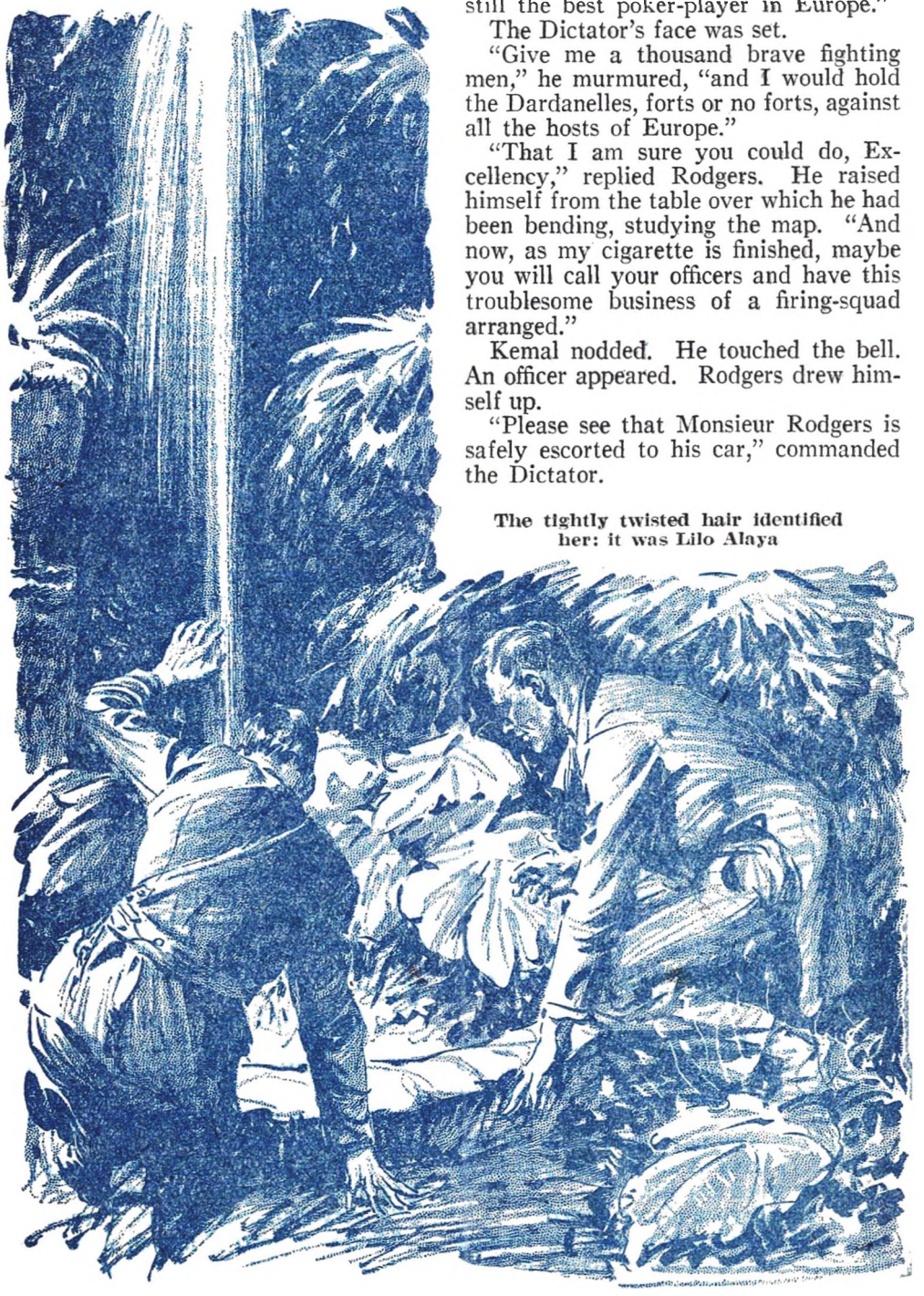
The Dictator's face was set.

"Give me a thousand brave fighting men," he murmured, "and I would hold the Dardanelles, forts or no forts, against all the hosts of Europe."

"That I am sure you could do, Excellency," replied Rodgers. He raised himself from the table over which he had been bending, studying the map. "And now, as my cigarette is finished, maybe you will call your officers and have this troublesome business of a firing-squad arranged."

Kemal nodded. He touched the bell. An officer appeared. Rodgers drew himself up.

"Please see that Monsieur Rodgers is safely escorted to his car," commanded the Dictator.



The tightly twisted hair identified her: it was Lilo Alaya

"Yes, Excellency."

"Good-by, Rodgers," Kemal smiled, holding out his hand. "As a poker-player I know when to cut my losses. What you have won, you are welcome to. And the world has too few good poker-players to deprive it of yourself."

Rodgers took the outstretched hand and grasped it warmly.

"May I say *au revoir*, Excellency? I would like some day to return and give you your revenge."

Kemal laughed.

"Let us both hope that I am in a pleasant mood. But if ever you should wish to serve another master, come again to Angora."

"You would, indeed, be worth serving, Excellency," bowed Rodgers.

He left the room with Kemal folding up the plan and pitching it back into the safe. . . .

Five minutes later he strolled across the grounds of the Villa Chevelik. Just as he neared the artificial lake, a shot rang out. He saw soldiers rush in that direction. He joined them. He arrived in time to see one of them flash an electric torch upon a woman who had shot herself at the edge of the pool, and fallen into the limpid water.

He saw the big spectacles on the pale, wounded face. The tightly twisted hair identified her. It was Lilo Alaya.

"If only she had received me yesterday!" sighed Rodgers to himself as he turned away.

AT two o'clock in the morning, a tired and yawning Sir Herbert Anstruther arrived back at the Embassy. The treaty had been signed; there had been mutual congratulations; the Dictator had shown himself in a pleasant mood.

It was the closing of another chapter in history, and like most ambassadors, Sir Herbert found the moment flavorless and without exultation. A manservant divested him of hat and coat.

"A gentleman has been waiting for you, Sir Herbert."

Entering the comfortable lounge of the villa, Sir Herbert found Paul Rodgers comfortably ensconced, and reading a copy of the Greek Anthology which he had found on the shelves.

"Well, Rodgers?"

"I congratulate you, Sir Herbert, on an excellent library. My one regret is that you don't possess a piano."

"There isn't room for a piano," said Sir Herbert, testily. "Any success to report?"

"Of course, the plan. Yes, I have it."

FROM his pocket he drew a shining piece of celluloid, almost the size of a postage stamp. The Ambassador seized it and gazed at it in astonishment.

"What is this?"

"The plan in detail," smiled Rodgers. "It is a photograph which only needs enlarging to reveal everything that you wished to know."

"Marvelous," replied the Ambassador, holding the precious little negative between his finger and thumb toward the light. "Everything in detail, eh? You've succeeded brilliantly, my dear fellow. How did you get it? By rifling his safe?"

Rodgers shook his head. "I found that too difficult. The combination baffled me."

"Well, then?"

"I told Kemal that I had photographed the plan in detail."

"My God, you've a nerve! What happened then?"

"He did exactly what I expected him to do—opened the safe to see if the plan was still there. He brought it out. Then, while he was debating whether to kill me or not, we studied the plan together. It was then I did photograph it in detail—as it lay on the table."

"How?"

Rodgers stretched forth his hand like a man offering his pulse to a doctor. He drew back his sleeve. Strapped to the flesh just above the wrist was a miniature camera.

"Useful little gadgets," remarked the Intelligence officer. "We've used them for some time in the service."

"I marvel that you came out of that villa alive."

"But I did, and promptly drew up the plan that you now hold in your hands. You see, Sir Herbert, I had been playing poker with the Dictator most of the evening."

"I noticed that."

"An excellent game for a diplomat. Gives one a keen insight into human nature. I knew exactly how to go to work after that game with Kemal."

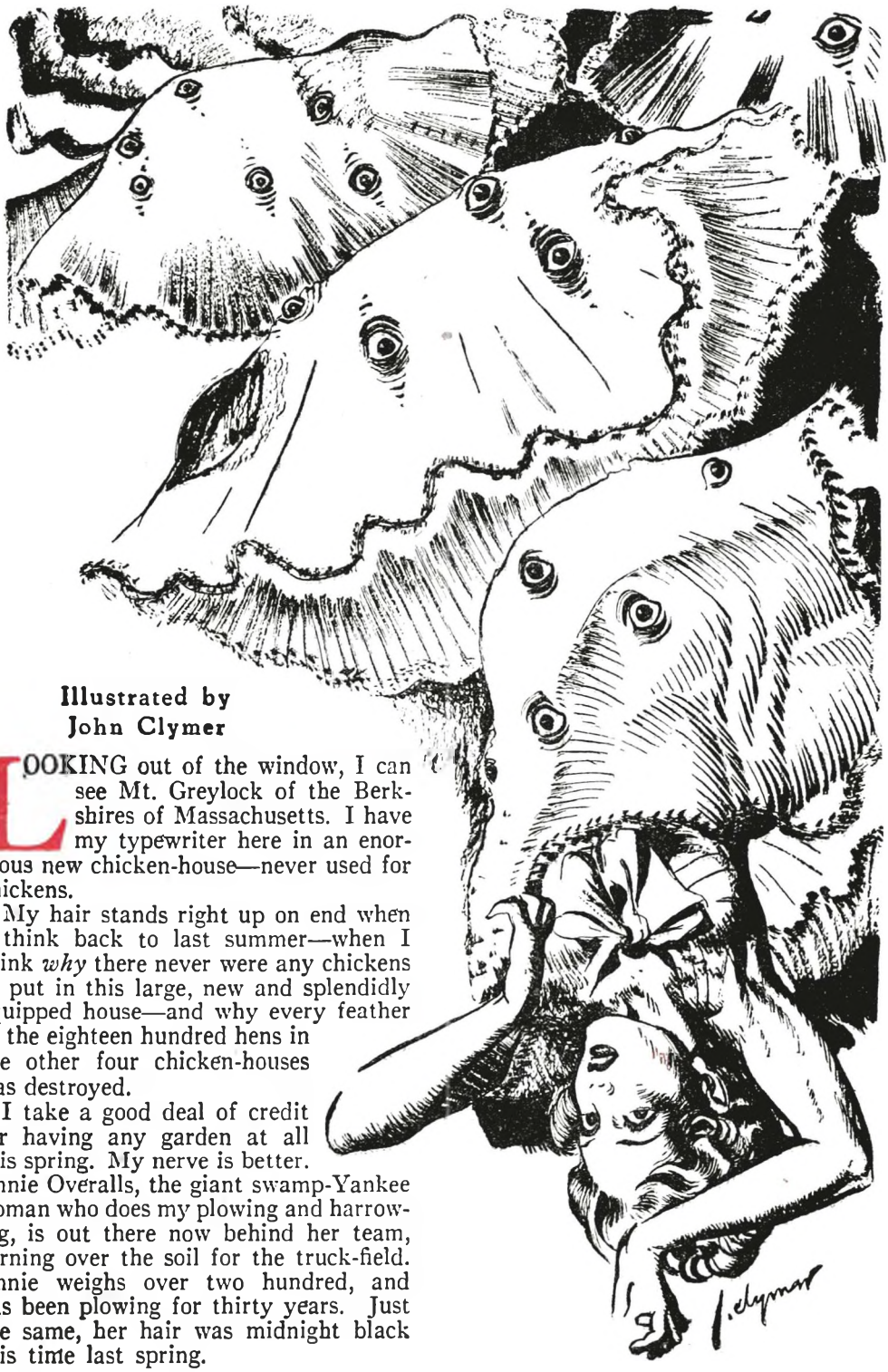
"And you won, handsomely, Rodgers."

"Not so handsomely. Good-by, Sir Herbert."

And before the Ambassador could lift his gaze from the precious map, Paul Rodgers had bowed and left the room.

Another Red Wolf story will appear in our next issue.

VISITORS from



Illustrated by John Clymer

LOOKING out of the window, I can see Mt. Greylock of the Berkshires of Massachusetts. I have my typewriter here in an enormous new chicken-house—never used for chickens.

My hair stands right up on end when I think back to last summer—when I think *why* there never were any chickens to put in this large, new and splendidly equipped house—and why every feather of the eighteen hundred hens in the other four chicken-houses was destroyed.

I take a good deal of credit for having any garden at all this spring. My nerve is better. Annie Overalls, the giant swamp-Yankee woman who does my plowing and harrowing, is out there now behind her team, turning over the soil for the truck-field. Annie weighs over two hundred, and has been plowing for thirty years. Just the same, her hair was midnight black this time last spring.

VENUS

By ANTHONY RUD

I lighted the match on Helen's heel and held the flickering flame to the folds of those horrible creatures.

The extraordinary story of the weird and malevolent beings from another planet who descended upon a New England farm.

Now it has a wide white streak, pure white. And there is a sullen, slightly distrustful look in Annie's black eyes, any time she runs the apex of the plow into a root or some other obstruction. This land is damned, she says.

Annie never knew Dr. Armstrong—Charles Llewellyn Armstrong, D. Sc., and all the rest of the alphabet. I did. He was why I came here last year. He tempted me with a mystery. It tempted him too, and that is why he died. I am alive—by but the margin of a frog-hair.

Chuck Armstrong taught astronomy at State when I was a freshman there. He was the youngest full professor of that science in the country then, I believe. He awed me. I did well enough during my four-year course, so for one year I was a fledgling instructor under him. But then I went to writing and editing. Doctor Armstrong's way led him further and further from the affairs of earth, and into attempts at short-wave communication with planets and even the nearer of the great stars. I have no doubt at all that by the standards of clerks and hinds, he became so obsessed with universal affairs, that in the eyes of the world he would have to be called crazy. Great astronomers cannot think in terms of glove-sizes and forty-quart milk-cans. They see a million miles, or a million million, and think in terms of light years. What price the short-ticking stop-watch of man's terrestrial existence?

TWENTY-TWO years passed. I was at Key West when Armstrong's telegram came. If I quoted the words, they would mean nothing. Suffice it to say that once long ago he had promised me a breath-taking thing. "I'll call you to help, Tom, when I get through indisputably to people of another planet, or get word here from them. Then you'll come, no matter what you're doing."

I remember how I chuckled to myself when I made that promise. Sure, I'd come—any time we had Mars on long distance.

"I—I'm afraid!" Helen whispered. "You — you are the only sane man around!"

That high noon, with the early spring sun pouring its rays like molten metal upon the sands of Florida's tip, I read the yellow sheets—three of them—of his night letter. My eyes widened.

Somehow I forgot to chuckle. I had learned a few things in the intervening years. I felt chills skitter across my shoulder-blades; but at the same time my stomach felt as though it were blanching like an almond. Either Armstrong had gone downright mad, or—or else here was something that would make Leif the Lucky, and Columbus, and Stanley and all the other explorer lads look a dime a dozen.

Here was a man who claimed to have received a shipment of goods from the planet Venus!

Of course his telegram was couched in words such as we had used in the observatory, and which meant little or nothing to the telegraph-operators. Doubtless they thought it code.

I WENT by air, changing once. I landed at Canaan, Connecticut, one afternoon, then took a livery car (as they call cabs here) a few miles across the Massachusetts line into the heart of the Berkshires. The snow had gone, but only recently. It was chilly, though the sun was warm. Some plowing had been started, though only foolhardy farmers would put in anything like a crop for at least another month. . . .

The Doctor had been near Flagstaff, Arizona, when it happened. I may as well say that the projectile from Venus missed the Southwest by a few thousand miles, and landed in New England. The Doctor knew all about it, though, and was on his way in a fast plane before the dazed natives of the Berkshires had got around to investigating. A little quick buying at a high price, no questions asked, and the Doctor owned one hundred and sixty acres, part of which had been used as a budding chicken-farm by an old fellow named Sassenach.

THE Doctor's second wife had died. Her mother, a worldly-wise frivolous creature—I had never liked her much—had spent a good many years moving from Monaco to Cannes to Paris to London as the seasons changed. She was about as much use on a farm as a spare tire is of use to a rooster.

Her granddaughter Helen—well, sometimes something good cometh out of Nazareth, and the most unlikely people are the ancestors of angels. That's how I felt at first sight of Helen, anyhow. I'd never particularly liked the name of Helen. Now I understood the Siege of Ilium, and all that. Helen was not very pretty; she was just a smooth and lovely blonde, built by a master sculptor with Eternity on his hands, and strangely enough endowed with sympathy and understanding. She could even understand her father and love him. Mighty few could have grasped his immensity, any more than they could have understood Copernicus in his early day. . . .

Just a few days before Armstrong brought his two womenfolk, buying the farm, and installing the half-witted hired hand to take care of the chickens till I arrived, something awesome and frightening had occurred in the still snow-capped Berkshires. A meteor had fallen.

Now, this was no ordinary shooting-star, to blaze a second or two in the night sky and then be consumed. It did not blaze at all. No one saw it—though they heard and felt it strike, that morning at two-forty-five.

It came at terrific speed, and in a slanting direction. Not straight down, as a baseball falls if you drop it from a third-story window, but at an angle of incidence probably no greater than twenty degrees. This slanting hit, of course, was due to the rotation of the earth.

As luck would have it, the projectile (I am admitting from the first that it was *sent* deliberately from Venus, though I did not believe that myself for a long time) struck rather lightly on the bare granite side of Ranger Mountain. It ricocheted like a flat stone shied across the surface of a pond. It narrowly missed Music Mountain, and then zipped a distance of some forty-odd miles before it lost elevation in its new trajectory and sought earth again.

Its final resting-place was this farm, of course; but before arriving to gouge that long furrow in the heart of the maple and pine woods beyond Dog River, it played a couple of strange pranks:

A brick silo on the Swanson farm lost the top twelve feet of its trim tower. And if Ole Swanson, who owns the most prosperous grazing farm and Holstein herd in Sheffield, was not known to be rich, his agonized Skandahoovian curses would have been pitiful. Doctor Armstrong sent him a fifty-dollar bill in a plain envelope, and worried no more about Ole. Probably he is still invoking Wodin, and Thor with his billyboats, and wondering just what happened.

Two miles farther along toward this place, having lost about ten feet of altitude, the speeding projectile neatly lifted one small new automobile (untenanted) from the top of one of these big trucks which deliver four new cars to dealers. I understand that the driver felt a jar, but thought nothing of it—until the driver tried to deliver four brand-new cars to a dealer at Egremont later that morning, and found only three cars left. Then there was hell to pay for the driver, and no mistake. . . . I don't recall what Armstrong did about that, though he probably got the man another job.

UNLIKE that first slanting hit on Ranger Mountain, when the meteor-projectile crashed into the maple and pine woods here at Dog River, it caused no great noise or earth tremor. The top-soil there is soft—ten eons of pine-needles lie rotting there, and the earth below that is sand, gravel and clay, the bedrock being nearly forty feet down. The meteor lost impetus and stopped, long before it got to bedrock, thanks to the ricochet, and fortunately for the Doctor and myself—or unfortunately, if you think human life precious above all else. I don't—though I value my own, and the lives of those dear to me. In the abstract, though, and to others on this earth, I and my sweetheart are worth mighty little. We are too much in love with each other. Yes, even if I am in crusty middle age, that seems to be true.

ARMSTRONG, discouraging Sassenach and other people who tried to be neighborly, had hired just the half-wit called Ranny, and told the womenfolk to use his car, get groceries, ice, meat and whatever, allow no deliveries (there were none anyway), and to keep house for a little while as best they could. I was coming and I would help. (It seems he forgot that I had turned writer, and described me as an instructor in astronomy who had been with him years ago. This explains Helen's eyes going wide, when I arrived in the most unsuitable attire imaginable. I had on a Palm Beach suit and Bangkok straw—and a cheap, heavy overcoat and gloves hurriedly purchased. The rest of my stuff was coming by express.)

"Why—Mr. Cattell!" she gasped, when I had mentioned my name and asked for the Doc. "I—I thought you—were *old!* You—oh, excuse me!" And she blushed, putting one hand on my arm and leading me in to the small living-room of the farmhouse where sat cross, tired, and frizzle-haired Grandma.

The old lady's name was Mrs. Kramer, if it matters. They called her Nana, which made her furious. She was going "to get right out of this horrible place" just as quickly as possible, and go back to her dear Monte Carlo.

Well, she got out fast enough when the time came. But her destination was not Monte Carlo—unless that rather run-down gambling resort has changed a lot since I last saw it, and has become a suburb of one of the after-worlds.

I could forgive Helen, all right, for considering me *not* old. Any man of forty, slowing down a little in his tennis-game, and going a trifle thin on top, could forgive a lovely girl for making that mistake. I may as well say right out, I fell in love the first minute I looked into Helen's blue eyes. I'd done it before, with all manner of eyes, of course; but somehow it never seemed to last. But there is a certain stanchness and sweetness about blue eyes. You— But I'll stop raving now and get to my meteors.

I had supper, listened to Mrs. Kramer complain, and then got out hastily. The Doctor had not appeared.

"He—*stays* out there!" whispered Helen, touching my arm as she came out into

Now there is a sullen, slightly distrustful look in Annie's black eyes.

the dusk with me. "There is a lantern here, Mr. Cattell—"

"The name is Tom, Helen," I dared. "D'you mind?"

"I'm glad, Tom," she said quietly. "I was scared. Tom, *what has he got, out there?* He won't tell us, except it's some kind of meteor. Is—is it very valuable, do you suppose? Made of radium, or something?"

"I don't know—but I'm going to find out right now," I told her. "Which way do I go?"

"I'll show you, but I'm not allowed to go out. When *you* go, whistle a tune. Do you remember 'Men of State'?"

Of course I remembered the old college song. And regretfully taking leave of the girl, who stayed there on the west bank of the small river, leaning against a stone fence, I distrustfully crossed the swinging footbridge, a suspension affair that swayed a full yard sidewise as I inched across.

Beyond lay the gloom of the woods. I lighted the lantern, started whistling, and then looked rather alarmedly at the straight bore through the wall of trees. Certainly some large meteorite had done this—and it was coming to earth when it did! Just thirty yards back in the close-thatched woods, where a man had to break branches from in front of his eyes continually, the first slanting gouge in the soft topsoil appeared.

Why, the blamed projectile, or whatever it was, must be as big around as a wine-tun, and smooth! The earth had fused until it was hard and almost like glass, there where the hot body from the stratosphere had struck!

Just as I reached a spot where the glazed furrow was five feet deep, I heard a short growl on the ground surface right beside my shoulder. A truculent white English bulldog stood there, evidently just about to take a jaw hold on my neck!

"Down, Lord Nelson!" came a brusque voice. "You, Tom—and thank the Lord you didn't waste time!"

Bearing another lantern, the short, rather paunchy figure of Dr. Armstrong—terribly ravaged by the years, from the man I had known—strode up, reached down a grimy hand, and clasped mine, shaking it and helping me climb up out of the bore, at the same time.

My old professor wore glasses now. He was hatless, and he wore old brogans and overalls, dirt-stained from digging. But his voice was just the same. Perhaps a little graver, but with a restrained triumph ringing through it every now and then.

Certainly he did not seem in the least mad, was my first reaction. And I was relieved. Then I began to get really excited. If he was not *mad,* then could this incredible tale have any vestige of truth? Had he really got something, even a meteor, from Venus?

A LOT of what followed, I must compress. The Doctor wasted no time in reminiscences. He took for granted that I was there to help him in every way, and simply commanded my services wherever he wished them. Largely because of the lovely girl I had left back there at the stone fence, I made less remonstrance at taking up chicken-farm duties, than you would have thought.

Sitting down at the side of the bore, with our two lanterns and two pipes burning, Dr. Armstrong told me hair-raising things. Most of them have been published in the scientific journals, and I can skip them—furnishing a bibliography to anyone who cares to read back through the months and years, of his scientific claims. Most of them were laughed at then, I must admit.

Now, no one laughs. Dr. Armstrong was not lying. He was not even exag-

gerating. A few of his inferences were faulty, but in the main the terrific and incredible tale he unfolded was nothing more nor less than the simple truth, as far as it went. But even the Doctor did not guess now the hellish trick that had been played upon him by the Venusians themselves!

"I have been in communication with Ooloo, the highest-powered of six message-sending stations on Venus, for thirteen years," he told me curtly. "This is the result—" And he waved a heavy hand toward the furrow. "Somehow, Tom, I am almost afraid to dig further. I'm going to dig, all right. But I have found out that the Venusians are scarcely people at all, as you and I understand the term. They are intelligences, all right. Far ahead of us. But I—well, I have not the faintest idea in God's world and universe, what a single Venusian *looks* like!"

"But—but isn't he a person? Isn't he a man?" I cried rather blankly. "What on—that is, what else *could* he be?"

"I don't know. A machine, perhaps. A sort of fish with a brain. A great pterodactyl, maybe. Anyhow, I pin my faith on the fact that he *does* have a brain.

"It is a highly developed intelligence, too. I think the Venusians live in caves, or have underground houses. Yet they knew about us, all right. I can't seem to get much out of them, though they accept and acknowledge all my messages, as if they understood perfectly.

"Lately, for over a year, they have sent me brief ether-waves which I have understood as meaning that they were building a great catapult or gun, and would send me on earth a shipment of goods of their own manufacture—or possibly, produce from their fields. I am not sure which. They have some way of shipping things in asbestos or some similar material, so it is not consumed by the heat of passing through another planet's atmosphere.

"In fact—well, down here a few more feet, is that shipment! Can you imagine, Tom Cattell, what we are going to find when it cools, and we can open it?"

NO use trying to tell anyone else the thrill those words gave me, as I stood and looked down in lantern light, in the midst of the dark woods, at the place where the furrow stopped, and the great projectile had burrowed on in an underground bore. But I could only stammer at the time. I was frightened, and at the same time so fascinated that I could not have left that thing, even had I been sure my own life was going to be forfeited to further curiosity.

I found out now, though, that I was to do no digging. The Doctor would call me fast enough when he really got to the projectile. But he estimated that there was more than a month of hard work here for himself—and meanwhile I would have to run the chicken-farm as a sort of blind, and see to it that the two women did not suffer. The Doctor had found a deserted cabin back here in the brush, and stocked it with bottled water, beer, tinned food of all sorts, and brought some bedding. He intended to stay till the job was done. I could come once a day, after nightfall—no other time unless he called me.

THINKING of Helen, I was torn two ways. But I agreed reluctantly, and wended my way back with the lantern. Certainly I had never thought that the young woman would still be waiting for me, after a good two hours, but there she was.

"Tom!" she cried chokingly; and she grasped my arms.

"Why, Helen!" I breathed, feeling that she was trembling from head to foot. "Why didn't you go back?"

"I—I'm afraid!" she whispered. "You—you are the only sane man around! I—" And then she hid her face in the lapel of my jacket.

Well, I'm human. I kissed her—idiotic though it may sound, after knowing the girl only about three hours. But I did, and she was modern enough not to mind. In fact, she seemed to take a certain comfort from it, though she speedily drew away a little, and did not allow any more of the familiarity. I know now that she liked me at first sight; but that womanlike, she needed a certain reassurance that normal, human things like love and sympathy and understanding, still could influence a man, no matter what queer visitors came from Venus or anywhere else in the heavens.

And I must say that I walked on air. I was really in love for—well, I almost said for the first time. For the *greatest* time, anyhow! If that be treason to science, make the most of it. I was only an ex-astronomer, anyhow.

Doctor Armstrong intended to keep his secret. He worked harder than might a section-hand on a railway, and the work changed him. He always had been clean-

shaven. Now he grew a white beard; it was stained yellow around his mouth from his incessant stogie-smoking. His paunch shrank. He hardened, of course, but somehow seemed to grow frailer instead of stronger. He was too old for the task he had set himself; but every time I offered to take his place, a certain fanatical zeal, and a light of what I came to know was genuine apprehension, blazed in his eyes.

"Never! This is my responsibility, Tom!" he would say firmly.

He ate supper late. I took to bringing him over hot meals from the house in a basket, then sitting down and listening—after telling him of Mrs. Kramer and Helen, and how I was getting along with the half-witted Ranny, and with the eighteen hundred hens. Those damned chickens really kept me busy. In the state of mind I was, loving a girl and waiting with trepidation for the wild cry from Doctor Armstrong, telling me that the meteorite was uncovered, I needed hours in which to accomplish an amount of work which normally I could finish in a half hour any time.

In order to make the place look like a real farm, I had engaged a giant swamp-Yankee woman, nicknamed Annie Overalls, to plow and harrow a truck patch. I would seed it, with Helen helping. It amused her, and provided something to busy her mind. She was glad, too, to have an excuse for getting away from Mrs. Kramer.

IT is the almost incredible truth that, lulled by the routine of the Doctor's steady digging, by the work of seeding a truck-patch in the company of a laughing blue-eyed miss who nevertheless could accomplish just as much as I at that sort of bending-down work, and by the responsibility of marketing eggs and broilers and caring for so many chickens, I really began to discount the matter of the Venusian projectile said to contain a shipment from that planet. Yet all this while of fool's paradise, more than two hundred thousand loathsome things were waiting down there—held by a high pressure of indrawn breath, in that queerly constructed cylinder below-ground!

Waiting to destroy me, the Doctor, Helen, Mrs. Kramer, Annie Overalls, the half-witted Ranny, and every other human being and living thing on the face of Mother Earth!

The Doctor had given me a hint. But he did not understand it himself, and of course I paid no particular attention—then. In the unsatisfactory, one-sided communications he had established with Venus—the Venusians would ask all manner of questions, but tell little or nothing about themselves—Dr. Armstrong had noted that their interest lay chiefly in the soil of the ground, and in descriptions of the living vegetation and animals upon the surface of the world.

"They don't seem to understand when I talk of cities, airplanes, skyscrapers, locomotives, and other things," he told me. "They seem to have an avid agrarian interest, however. I have sent messages of description as long as the ordinary juvenile encyclopaedia, and they never thank me. They always ask more questions. They never answer the things I ask—or only partly. I—well, to be frank, Tom, they have me worried. I fear they have no souls.

"Yes, I fear—worse than that! I have an idea that their intelligences are motivated by selfishness and a sort of hellish cruelty only! I do not think we would like the men and women of Venus, even if we ever managed to see one. And this shipment of goods on consignment, you might say, may turn out to be some devilish joke—a shipment of troubles worse than those which were held tightly in Pandora's box!"

"Anyway, we'll have a look," I chuckled—little dreaming how much more horrible than his wildest guess, the truth would prove to be!

I tried to let him rest while I dug a couple of evening hours—not that I care for digging and hauling up buckets of gravel—but he would not allow it.

"Something is going to happen, when I reach that cylinder," he told me solemnly. "I am not quite sure how soon I'll reach it. You see, the bore curves to the left? Well, I think the cylinder is about twelve feet more down; over there. But it may be closer. If—if something awful is there, Tom, I want it to act on *me*. You are young. You can see the women safely away. Uh, by the way, do you find my daughter at all—um, I mean—she is pretty, isn't she?"

THE old man actually had feelings! I colored, though in the lantern-light I don't believe it showed under my tan.

"Some day I'm going to marry Helen, if she'll have me," I said. "Too bad I didn't see her ten years ago."

"When she was twelve?" he asked. "Oh—I see what you mean. Nonsense,

Tom, you are young—young. Wish to God I were, now, though I never have regretted the years and what they have brought. This discovery, and possibly the contents of this projectile—"

He fell silent then; and I left him.

And the next day, early in the morning, the Doctor unexpectedly uncovered the end of the giant projectile!

HE did not let me know. I was busy. Helen had wrenched her back, and I was lame from hours of planting. So I had got Annie Overalls to finish up the truck-patch seeding. The first things I had planted, the lettuce and peas, were coming up beautifully. Annie shook her head and said they would get frosted. But I did not care much. After all, this farming and chicken-raising both were parts of an elaborate camouflage. The odd part was that I had found out I liked them. So did Helen. She never would make a farmhouse woman, a drudge, but for the playing at farming which most city people do, she was splendid, enjoying everything. I had begun to visualize life with her in a place a whole lot like this, with some one more capable than poor Ranny to take care of the chickens, while I went back to writing for five or six hours a day. . . .

That day, for the first time, through the coincidence of a message regarding a Venusian communication—a message for the doctor sent by his assistant left behind at the Ajo, Arizona, inter-planetary radio station—I hurried out at midday to the diggings in the pine wood.

I whistled. The dog came up, growling uneasily but wagging his stub of tail. Then I heard the gasping breaths of Armstrong. He was down at the foot of the ladder, shoveling away like mad to uncover more of the great cylinder.

Now I saw it, and gasped. The thing looked as though the outer shell was made of a soft sort of concrete. But it was covered with a bluish-green flame all over—something like phosphorus, perhaps, though it was perfectly plain in daylight. It was still hot. The Doctor heard me.

"It's here! See, Tom!" he croaked, in a voice gone fog-hoarse with emotion and triumph and apprehension all mingled.

"I see!" I cried. "Good Lord, what is it? Is it burning?"

"No. That is a cooling flame, I think. This—this is *made* by men of some kind, Tom! You see? Look at this great seam? I—I believe the thing is going to crack open when it cools some more! See that jagged line? It *is* a crack!"

Mrs. Kramer was "going to get right out of this horrible place!"

We were both wild with excitement now, the message from Arizona forgotten.

The cylinder, as we found out immediately, had been equipped with a disintegration mechanism, doubtless chemical, which began to act immediately the great shell struck Earth, much as a high-explosive shell of the kind used in war, works, only much slower. Hours were required for this, instead of from one to four seconds. Now the blue-green flame, which oddly seemed to cool and shrink the outer shell of the projectile, making it crack widely, was busily at work on every square inch of the cylinder exposed to air.

MY description must be sketchy, because of the fact of fast disintegration. If we only had been granted days instead of hours for examination! But there was a reason, known only to the cold-blooded Venusians themselves, why any inter-planetary shell of this kind, could not accomplish its hellish purpose, unless it cracked and crumbled like a big piece of sugar under a hot-water jet. And that is what this proceeded to do.

The Doctor had a sort of adz. He struck at the crack—and a whole chunk of the substance crumbled away!

"It's all going to pieces!" I cried. "The goods inside will all be spoiled before we can see what they are!"

"I don't think that, Tom," he replied, standing back in the bore and shaking his head so the white beard swayed. "Maybe that would be far better—or a few sticks of dynamite right now—"

"I think I got clear to the middle of it!" yelled Armstrong.

"Oh, for the love of Rameses!" I snapped impatiently. "Are you sunstruck? Here we have a chance to see just what this is, and you mumble a lot of nonsense!"

He was filled with forebodings, though, and for twenty minutes I argued, to dissuade him from doing anything rash. All this while the disintegration was going on apace, though we could not guess how thoroughly it was working. The outer shell remained about the same, except for widening cracks.

The cylinder—a few feet of which still remained covered by earth—was about twenty-eight feet long, and exactly seventy-eight inches high at the base as it lay on its side. I measured it. Roughly, the thing consisted of several layers of material, non-metallic by nature, which acted as a heat-resistant and insulation against cold for the inter-planetary flight.

Inside these several layers (and now I am giving pure inference, since I never saw with my own eyes what was there) was a relatively small cylinder, perhaps the size of a sixty-gallon hot-water tank of the old-fashioned sort you used to see in farm kitchens, hitched up to the stove by a coil of pipe.

This was of strong material, possibly metal. It was built to withstand a terrific pressure from within—but to let go when the cooling of the outside shell, and its disintegration, had proceeded to a certain degree. Maybe there were delicate cocks, and a release as sensitive as one of the thermostats we have on our oil-burners. I think that very likely.

"I think I will try to crack it open, then," said Armstrong at last. "I do not like how it is going, though as I have said, it might be far better for us—and the world—if it was destroyed right here and now. However, I have worked forty years for this, and at Ooloo on Venus—"

He raised his adz, hesitated, and then brought it down on that inner layer from which the crumbling flake had dropped away.

The adz went through just as though it had been cutting into husks! A huge piece fell away. Now a blue-colored layer appeared below. The blue-green cooling flame ran down in rivulets, attacking this hidden layer with a hissing and crackling avidity.

The Doctor sniffed. "No fumes that I can smell," he muttered, and raised his adz again. Down it came—and then the horrible end! The blade of the tool sank so deep that Armstrong's fingers almost followed the handle into the soft, oozy stuff that now bubbled and began to pop up spats of viscous bluish stuff like the mud-pots of Yellowstone.

zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz!

Up and out of the cylinder came a thin jet of vapor, almost colorless, though in the daylight there was a faint greenish tinge.

"I think I got clear to the middle of it!" yelled Armstrong, highly excited. He jumped back out of the way of that jet of vapor, which at first just played up about a yard, then wafted away in the slight breeze.

But then gasps came from us both. The hissing heightened to a whistling scream! Up came green vapor now like a geyser! It mounted eight feet, fifteen, thirty—and it was blowing green fumes that were half-liquid, up to the tops and through the nodding plumes of the pine trees! The screech drowned our voices. We scrambled out of the bore, to escape. This might be poisonous, we thought.

It was worse than poisonous! It contained something—two hundred thousand *things,* I should say!

The first intimation came when a popping sounded, then another; then

faster than a machine-gun chatters, the sounds came—and at each sound, something brown-rubbery, looking almost like a dead stingaree or a deflated football, was spouted and blown up into the air high above our heads!

"The cargo! What is it?" shrieked Armstrong, his mouth only a foot from my ear. I just shook my head dumbly, staring. I was truly frightened now.

BEFORE our horrified eyes, the great cylinder cracked and crumbled. The thin spout of geyser widened. Now the brown footballs were being vomited upward in a great cloud. I stared up at them above the trees. Then I shrieked, covered my eyes, and ran.

Those damned things were not falling to the ground! They were *hovering* there in a sort of immense swarm! And each of those near enough to me so I could see some details, appeared to be unfolding and shaking out creases, growing immensely larger, and lighter brown in color!

Panic had me. I brought up short when I ran squarely into a tree, and for half a minute or so I was stunned. Then I went back to the bore, but the Doctor was not there. He also had run, though not very far. He was out in a little glade in the woods, staring up at the floating amber-colored balloons—for that is what they seemed now. Second by second immense numbers of them were being vomited up to join their first comrades in the air; and the whole loathsome, shivery cloud seemed to float around an axis, or perhaps some kind of queen balloon, as bees surround a queen bee!

Probably the geyser of gas and cargo had been going full force about fifteen minutes, when I caught a lowering of the pitch of sound. Yes, the pressure was failing! The cloud of queer, light-brown things, floating now like gossamer scarfs, made practically a tent over this part of the wood, filtering down the sunlight in a tan haze. But the things were coming slower, the geyser rapidly falling. I did not guess the immediate danger, even when I saw a number of the loathsome things get only part way up to the main swarm. Some of them plastered themselves against branches as they failed to get high enough. And the last thirty or so were spewed up and out only a yard or so, and hung wavering and unfolding right there before my horrified eyes!

Oh, God, I was insane then for a time myself! *Those damned things were alive! They had big spots like bull's-eyes, that stared unwinkingly at me! Seven eyes apiece! I shrieked and tried to run.*

Let me forget that madness for a moment, just to tell you what they really were. Essentially they were slightly moist sheets of living fiber, when they came out of the gas-liquid in which they had traveled from Venus.

Yes, each one was a thin, translucent sheet, scalloped at the edges, oval in shape, and with seven eyes and a dark blotch near the edge at one place. As I know now, this dark blotch was a brain, an intelligence which activated the creature!

It was contained in a bag of this fiber, and was essentially a sticky, viscous mass no larger at first than a small grapefruit. (When the creatures were able to get water, or establish contact with earth or other food, this expanded quickly, as I shall show.)

These things, I believe, had been carefully dried out and packed in small compass, before being sent from Venus. If the soil and other food of Earth agreed with them, they would expand hugely, reproduce in swarms, and—well, you shall see!

A yell of terror and warning came then from Doctor Armstrong! He was out of my sight, behind some trees, but I heard the agony and fright. That same second a screeching *ki-yi-yi* came from Lord Nelson—one of the fearless breed of dogs, that nothing like an enemy on earth could cause to flinch.

With an answering cry, I started forward to help in God only knew what extremity. But I got only a few yards. Then I stopped, a screech of pure terror starting from my own lungs.

Something chill and damp had swathed itself, like the tendrils of a great goat's-beard jellyfish, about my left leg, side and arm!

FOR precious seconds, while my flesh crawled with loathing, I writhed and struggled against an impalpable but relentless foe. The thing knew its horrible business. It proceeded to swath my arms and legs, binding me stickily until I fell to the ground.

Then it threw a flap of prickly, stinging, malodorous fiber over my face and head! It was going to shut my nostrils and mouth, and suffocate me!

I could writhe, and move some. The fiber gave like live rubber. But I could

not get it off my skin! Choking, smothering as I tried to scream, I yanked forth my pocket-knife and slashed at the horror. It cut easily—but that made no difference. Even the strips and tiny pieces clung to me—and then joined up again with the main body of the creature! It was almost like a great amœba, offering small resistance seemingly, yet going right ahead to its horrible end, no matter what struggles its prey offered!

I could see those seven awesome eyes, hovering out there only a yard from my face. They burned with a queer green light. I felt my senses going. Damn them, they were gloating over me! *I was to be a first Earth meal for this abomination of the Universe!*

Pure luck, and the instinct which makes a man struggle—with his brain as well as his muscles—saved my life at the very last; perhaps saved all of Earth as well. I shiver when I think—

Anyhow, I was going. I could not breathe. I dropped the knife. One hand moved a little. It found my jacket pocket. It clutched something hard and heavy: My cigarette-lighter! I thought sickeningly but vengefully, "perhaps I can hurt this damned thing a little before I go!" . . . and I snicked on the lighter, forcing it outward toward those staring bull's-eyes of the Venusian creature. . . .

Crackle-crackle-sssssssss—*Whack!*

A frightful stench came to my nose—and my nose was free to breathe! The thing twitched, convulsed, almost breaking my ribs. Then it let go, and floated away—and it burned swiftly, fiercely, almost as though it were a celluloid envelope lighted at one corner. It writhed on itself, beating its folds of fiber vainly against the flame. Its great eyes, which had no lids, gradually slitted to black lines—and then the fire reached them.

Only a viscous, sticky something dropped with a plunk to the earth at my feet. But it also was burning briskly—and in sixty seconds more there was nothing but some oily-looking char upon the grass! I was free!

BUT what of Doctor Armstrong? Still clutching the lighter, I ran to help him, breathing great gasps of the blessed air, and scratching my itching skin where the creature had set up some kind of inflammation and irritation.

Another of the creatures swiped its folds at me as I ran. But I saw these and dodged them. They did not move very fast, thank God. I wanted first to succor the Doctor, and his dog—not having a real chance yet to think of the even greater emergency pressing upon the girl I loved, and the others at the field and house. . . .

Then a cry of anger and anguish burst from my lips. No less than three of the things had bound the Doctor. Another had the dog. Both were dead—though of course I was not sure until a moment later. In an instant, I had set fire to the folds of the things that had Dr. Armstrong. *Whish!* They burned fiercely, though they unfolded rapidly and freed him. He was scarcely scorched at all, as they floated away, squeezing their eyes to slits—I hope in plenty of pain!

But he and the dog both were stone dead, suffocated. They had been attacked before my particular foeman came after me; and the clinging folds had done their awful work.

I HATED to leave Armstrong there. But I saw something now. All the creatures remaining in the wood were wafting themselves slowly upward. They were joining the main swarm—a gigantic tent which now stretched like a manila envelope over several acres of the woods. I thought to myself, I would give ten thousand dollars for a skyrocket, right now, to shoot straight into that hell-born swarm of ghouls!

Then I noted something—and I think I leaped a yard from the ground and yelled insanely at the top of my lungs. The whole swarm was bound straight for the field, and the house where Helen and Mrs. Kramer were!

(I realize now that the things were aiming for the truck field. The plowed and harrowed raw earth attracted them particularly. But I thought only of the house and Helen. Wisely so, since there were far too many of the Venusian creatures to crowd down on the single acre of truck patch. They overflowed to the house-roof and porch, covered the chicken-houses—and a couple of thousand even oozed into the houses and fastened each upon one of my poor White Orpington hens! But I did not know that then.)

By sprinting, I managed to gain on the swarm. But I stumbled and went headlong, losing a few yards. And then when I came to Dog River, and the footbridge, the blamed contraption swayed so violently (it was made only for careful crossing) that I slipped and fell through the side. I splashed down into three feet of water, landing on my feet and

not falling. But with anguished curses I realized that the damned swarm would get to the house before I ever could reach it! Oh, God, that Helen might remain indoors and close all the windows!

While I was scrambling up the bank, forcing a way through thorn bushes, and getting under way again, terrible things were occurring. I know that now. Then, when I finally reached the path, and sprinted, I saw the giant figure of Annie Overalls running blindly in my direction —and getting tangled up in a barbed-wire fence as she came.

The swarm had hovered, then descended rather swiftly on the harrowed field where Annie was seeding corn in hills. She had been leaning on her rake, staring up at the phenomenon—and only taking fright when the things started down upon her.

Poor Ranny had come running out of one of the long chicken-houses, gaping and gabbling in his weak-brained way. Waving his hands, poor fellow, trying to shoo the yellow-brown creatures away from his precious chickens, he went down under a smother of half a dozen or more of the Venusians. He was not even noted. He died right there, and was partially consumed before he was discovered. But that is getting ahead of the rapid-fire happenings.

ONE of the things had seized Annie Overalls, and had blinded her so that she ran straight into the barbed wire. I grudged even a moment, but her loud yells of fright could not be ignored. I ran to her, just as the smothering started. She had managed to tear loose from the wire, but now the folds of the Venusian had her, and she fell, writhing. Even her great strength, equal to that of two men like myself, was powerless. The moist, clinging folds of fiber stuff would not be denied.

Croaking out sounds that had no meaning, I snicked the lighter with trembling hands, and thrust it against the brown folds. They caught swiftly with a crackle and blazing. And then Annie was free, her eyes staring, and stentorian bellows starting again as soon as a few good breaths took root in her lungs. Then she plunged past me, and made a straight line across fields and fences. She got home, to tell one of the wildest stories ever heard by countrymen. But at the moment I was not caring about her further fortunes. I saw that at the house two figures in women's dresses had come out to the front, and were coming down to investigate just what was occurring in their plowed field!

I screamed warning—too late! Helen stopped, startled. I heard her voice:

"Tom! Tom! Come here! What in heaven's name—"

THEN I give you my word, the most terrible thing of all happened. Those folded creatures had settled down, huddling in the soft field, swaying a little, jostling each other. The entire field, as I said, was covered, and there was part of a second layer of creatures on top of the first. These were Venusians denied access to the raw earth, from which they could draw quick nourishment—water and food. Almost as quickly as they could get it from the arteries, veins and flesh of a living creature like a cow, a chicken—or an unsuspecting girl come out to gaze upon the abnormal, unnatural wonder.

Helen and Mrs. K. had come down to within a couple of yards of the swaying, huddling mass. No doubt it looked innocent enough, if marvelous, to them. But the creatures saw two new victims—living victims from whom quick blood-and-flesh food could be taken.

A full dozen of the first comers to the field, now hauled up a multitude of white roots—water-seekers they had thrust down into the soft, sandy clay—and started to float toward the two women!

Of course I was running to help, sprinting around the acre field—it was impossible to cross, of course—but I knew I was too late, unless the women ran for their lives.

I screamed that command. They heard, and seemed to understand. They ran—but in opposite directions, and not very far. I had eyes only for Helen. I saw her stumble, cover her face with her hands, and fall. Then a cloud of those horrible creatures floated over and settled upon her quivering body!

There were about eight of them, I think. I got there, snicking my lighter —was it going to catch?

No! The thing took this terrible instant to refuse to light! I screamed, tore at the folds vainly, and then caught hold of reason. I searched my pockets fast. Ah, one match of the grocer's variety! Almost coolly, though my heart was dying inside me, I lighted it on Helen's heel—my own trousers were drenched, as were my shoes—and then held the flickering flame to those brown folds. . . .

Whish! Crackle! Snap! The blaze started. The things unfolded and floated away, flapping vainly and squinting their terrible eyes. I waited for no more. I grabbed Helen, finding that her heart still beat fast, though she was unconscious, and ran from there with her. I think I ran a half mile before I dared put her down. Then I remembered Mrs. Kramer.

I raced back, leaving Helen, praying for her safety. I needed matches or something with which to make a fire. I dashed to the house, slammed inside, grabbed the phone, called the police at State police headquarters, and told them to come and bring the town fire department. Then I ran out to the back, grabbed a hatchet and a box of matches, and ran to the driveway at the side where the Doctor's car was parked.

Jamming foot on the starter, I backed the car to the field. As I had known only too well, there was no sign of Mrs. Kramer. Over there at one side, in the grass some yards from the field, there was a detached huddle of swaying things —maybe forty or fifty of them. No doubt she was underneath. But since minutes had passed, I knew she was beyond all human help.

I DROVE the car right into the edge of the Venusians. Then I leaped out, hatchet in hand. One swipe spilled open the gas tank. A thrown match—and the great fire cleansing started. The whole field and the chicken-houses went, just as fire tears through celluloid!

I could not watch, for several of the things had fastened to me. I had to light a separate fire to free myself—and it was hard to get movement enough of one hand, so I could light that match! But I did, and I was free.

Then I dashed to that separate huddle, while the whole field seethed in flames behind me, and lighted that. Yes, there was poor old Mrs. Kramer, singed now by the fire, but looking calm enough in death.

And far over at the other side, now that curling, charring folds of brown-black were floating upward and leaving the ground bare, appeared the body of poor Ranny.

The chicken-houses caught fire. But the fire-department boys, with their booster pump, quickly extinguished the conflagration. Then I had to explain a whole lot—and I am not going to detail that anti-climax. Suffice it to say that in a neighboring field the police and firemen found three cows being consumed by the creatures from Venus. When I lighted matches and burned up the folded horrors, they were ready to believe anything I had to tell.

I went back up the road, and found Helen stumbling pale-faced toward the house. Without a word I took her into my arms, and let her weep relieving tears.

THERE is little more to tell. Just one thing, really, though that is important. I sent a version of the story by air-mail to Alonzo Jordan, who had been Dr. Armstrong's assistant at Ajo, Arizona, near Flagstaff. Unwittingly, I caused a further tragedy.

Young Jordan sent news of the destruction of the creatures on to Ooloo, before anyone could prevent him. And it seems that a spasm of anger and horror swept Venus—horror that we on Earth had not simply allowed ourselves to be consumed by that colony of dehydrated immigrants they had shipped to us, I suppose!

Anyway, Ooloo berated Earth bitterly. It seems that there were some intrepid pioneer Venusians in that shipment.

After cursing us up and down, in and out for our "heartless cruelty," the Venusians declared a ban and taboo on Earth forever! They would not come to visit, even if we begged them—and they would execute any of us who dared visit them! They asserted also, that hereafter Ooloo and the five other inter-planetary stations would be closed to messages from Earth. In short, in the future they would have nothing whatever to do with us. We might consider ourselves ostracized.

When Jordan learned this, he carefully jotted down the messages. Then he smashed the sending- and receiving-station beyond repair. Finally he sat down and wrote this:

My life-work was with Dr. Armstrong. It is ruined, and I do not care to live. Good-by.

Alonzo Jordan.

Poor, mistaken young fellow! He took that failure too seriously—since after all it was no failure at all, simply an experience. It showed us that one planet, at least, was peopled by creatures with whom Earthmen could not deal.

They found Alonzo Jordan with a bullet through his brain, and a pistol clasped in a lifeless hand.

Warriors In Exile

V—"Leather-Bellies in the Crimea" vividly presents a little-known but desperate adventure of the Foreign Legion.

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

CASEY, the red-headed soldier of fortune who had once been in the Foreign Legion, stared at me and Kramer with a ghastly fear in his eyes.

"It's awful! I can't stand to think of it," he blurted out.

He must have been on a spree for days, by his looks. Casey was not a wholly lovable or admirable person; but after all, he was an *ancien* of the Legion.

"What's happened?" Kramer demanded in some alarm.

"I just woke up to it; you know, how a fellow does." Casey swigged his drink, and looked at us again. The fear was in his gaze and no mistake. "It's seventeen years since I quit the Legion. Seventeen! That was back at the end of 1920. I was with the French mission attached to Denikin's army in South Russia—you know, the Bolshies blew us all to hell like a stack of dry leaves."

That campaign was, and still is, one of the nightmares of the French army.

"What about it, to make you get the wind up now?" I asked.

"That's the point." Casey nodded toward a corner table. "Come on over there and I'll tell you something—a ghost story, by heaven, that's true! Yeah—seventeen years; it just doesn't seem possible. Only, when I look at myself and see how this red thatch of mine is thinning out—"

I knew, or thought I knew, what the queer look in his eyes meant. Casey, the reckless devil who feared nothing, was afraid now: afraid of getting old. Some men are like that, when they stop to think of it.

Kramer and I got him seated at the corner table; he was pretty shaky, had reached the point where he wanted to talk his head off. We ordered drinks. Casey got out a coin and began to spin it—a big silver coin of Czarist Russia. He watched it spin, and it fell with the eagles up. He gave us a queer glance.

"Now I'll tell you something funny," he said, meaning it was not at all funny. "I had an uncle once."

"Back in Ireland?" I asked lightly.

Casey shook his head.

"Tails!" she said, turning away. "Tails! Tails!" With a

"Nope. We're Liverpool Irish. I never saw my Uncle Teague; he had skipped out and disappeared long before I was born. He was a tough one. He was the oldest, and my dad the youngest of a long string of kids. He went off to the Crimean War and never did come back. We used to have a picture of him in the parlor."

"The Crimean War," Kramer said skeptically, "was around 1856."

"Yeah," Casey scowled. "My dad was born in '50, and I was born in '90, when he was forty years old. I was thirty when I quit the Legion—hang it, stop reminding me how old I am, will you? I'm trying to tell about that picture of Uncle Teague."

"I thought it was a ghost story," was my comment.

"Well, it is; a hell of a story, too. Uncle Teague had a flat nose and a scar like a V right on the end of it. He was in a fight with a drunken sailor who bashed his nose and nicked it with a knife. That was one reason he took the Queen's shilling and skipped. He didn't like the army, and deserted about the time he got to the Crimea, and that was the last ever heard of him. But we had that picture in the parlor, and I used to look at his bashed nose and the scar when I was a kid. Got all that straight?"

"Fairly so," I said coolly. I didn't much care for Casey, or for anything about him.

"I don't know just how to tell you this. It looks screwy; maybe it's all screwy," he went on, spinning that silver coin again. Again it fell tails—eagles up. "A hypnotist, or some of these psychology sharks, might explain it. Anyhow, I'm going to tell you just what happened, and what I saw. I was bumming around

laugh. Casey nodded and pretended that he understood.

Illustrated by
Jeremy Cannon

with Captain de Silz, of the aviation, another volunteer; this was at Eupatoria, on the eve of the evacuation. Everything was in chaos. General Wrangel was somewhere at the front. The French fleet lay off the coast. White Russians, crowded into the Crimea, were slaughtered by tens of thousands; typhoid was everywhere. That night the chief of staff sent for me and Captain de Silz—I was a volunteer in the aviation unit too.

"He told us that one of us was to be sent in the morning to find Wrangel with dispatches; we both volunteered. He laughed and said to settle it between ourselves before morning. So we went off and had a drink, and I went to meet a girl I knew; and neither of us cared a damn whether we went or stayed.

"In the course of the evening I got knocked on the head, and woke up to find myself in one of the Cossack tents on the outskirts of town. I was tied up, too. That was an old trick—to murder one of the Allied Commission men for the sake of his money and boots. So I knew I was a goner."

Casey broke off to empty his glass and signal for another drink. He resumed:

"A huge jabbering was going on. By light of a lantern, I saw half a dozen Cossacks crowded into the place. Suddenly they all let out a wild yell and squatted down. One of them was old, white-haired, flat-nosed. He spun a big silver coin; they all let out another yell; then they trooped out. The old fellow came over and sat down by me, and chuckled. He said he had won me from the rest, and I realized that I was hearing broken French from his lips. And in the light of the lantern, as I stared up at him, I saw that he had a nick, a scar, in the end of his flat nose—a scar like a V. It

was just like the picture of my Uncle Teague."

Casey scowled at us; as though awaiting contradiction, but we remained silent.

"All right," he went on. "The old fellow said he had saved me because I was in the Legion uniform. He had been in the Legion once. And he said that when dawn came, I could go back safely to headquarters. Until then, I must wait here. And he settled down to talk, fingering that big silver coin. It fascinated me. Maybe I was hypnotized, maybe not; explain it as you like. I'm not trying to explain it. But I saw something as I lay there—I saw a whole story, like I was in on it. And either this old fellow was the ghost of my Uncle Teague, or maybe he was Teague himself; I dunno. Anyhow, this was what I saw."

And he told us.

A MAN was standing in a wet trench, with snow all around, and the chill of Russian winter on him. His blue tunic and baggy red pants were frayed and patched; he wore a blue-and-red képi; his mittened hands clung to his rifle as he stared out over the snow, and he was in big wooden *sabots—sabots,* not shoes! He was a strapping young fellow with a heavy beard and a big flat nose with a scar on the end of it. At his waist was a long flat pouch of leather—the famous cartridge-pouch of the Legion.

These were the trenches before Sebastopol.

Sad, glowering, cursing his luck, Private Casey of the Legion stamped his *sabots* and hugged the tattered greatcoat closer about him. He was the type of man who rebels at discipline; and he was in the most highly disciplined corps in the world, as he had found to his sorrow. Little they cared whether he were a British deserter or not—they needed every man they could get.

Here was Mullins approaching: Mullins, three years in the Legion, who had the adjoining beat—a big beefy Englishman who got on famously with everyone.

"Hello! Toes froze yet?" exclaimed Mullins genially. "Relief any minute now. Going to see them Russky friends of yours tonight? I'd like a look-in, s'elp me!"

"Aye, it's a bit o' Paradise after this hell," Casey said sulkily. "They'll be glad to have you, me lad, and if you've a bit o' clink, they'll turn out some grub to

warm your backbone. That slush they give us—ugh! Why in hell I ever jumped into this French outfit, I dunno."

Mullins grinned. "I do. Thought it'd be soft work, eh? But cheer up, Casey; you make a fine upstanding Legionnaire, and you've picked up French wonderful. I hear the British regiments are worse off than us; fair starving, they be, and half sick. We've men enough to lighten the job, but not them. Well, remember about tonight! It's ag'in' the rules, but I can fix the boys on sentry go. Anything to get warm, says I; and them Russkies keep warm. See you after retreat."

Casey nodded sourly, shouldered his musket, and growled curses afresh. True, it was flat against orders to sneak off to that Russian village back of the headquarters at Kamiesh; but little he cared for that. They were friendly folks, those Russkies. Most friendly of all, and free with his vodka, was the big Cossack peddler and his daughter with the eyes of fire; to Casey, that girl was as the magnet to iron, and all the more so because neither of them could understand a word the other spoke. Her father, the peddler, spoke a little French and even better English—a strange thing in a Cossack. But then, it was even stranger for a Cossack to be a peddler, had Private Casey known it. The other Russkies could only jabber and grin, but this one could talk, and his vodka was strong; and his daughter—well, her name was Irene, and when Private Casey pronounced it in the Russian way, a glow came into her face and a new light into her eyes.

Here was one person who saw no ugliness in a flat scarred nose. Cossacks did not bother about looks, anyhow.

THE relief came at last; and Casey slid and clumped through the snowy mud with a bitter eye cocked at the cold bleak sunset. There was good stuff in Casey, good fighting stuff, or he would never have made the fighting line with the 1st Régiment Étranger; there was some bad stuff in him too, maybe a bit more than is in most men.

It was the fourth of November; and Private Teague Casey cursed anew as he realized that the winter was not even well begun yet. He looked forward at the rest of it with a sort of terrified horror. The Irish have never liked winter; even in the ancient days they could never

comprehend the pangs of hell until it was pictured as all ice and snow—after which, they were quickly converted. And small blame to them!

As for slipping away that night, he was supremely unworried. The 19th and 39th of the Line had the adjoining posts; the English were beyond; and Casey's silver tongue could get himself out and in unless an officer happened to be around. He would chance that. A Legionnaire, as he had found, could get away with anything. Nor did he have any fear of being picked up by the English he had deserted. In this uniform, with this beard he was growing, he could evade recognition by his own mother.

Yes, it was safe enough. There was no danger; there had been no attacks along here; the big guns had done all the work thus far, after the autumn fighting was over. Men were always foraging for something to burn, too.

Casey cursed the camp as he trudged into it—he was cursing everything today. Here, he had some reason. The camp had been a quagmire, now happily frozen over; but there was no warmth in it at all. In those days soldiers, especially the two regiments of the Foreign Legion, were not pampered by Y.M.C.A. boys and nurses and aid societies and what-not. It was root, hog, or die.

Casey nodded to the other men. Most of the Legion went in for chin-tufts and long mustaches with waxed ends, like the Emperor Napoleon; others, like Casey, were contented with plain whiskers, as luxuriant as possible. Mullins and a few others shaved clean. But Casey looked more like a Russian than anything else—and knew it.

MULLINS showed up with a few twigs and sticks, found somewhere. The tent that they shared was ditched around the outside, banked around the bottom, and like most of the others, had a tiny fireplace made out of jam-tins. They built a small fire and tried to warm themselves.

"You said it," broke out Casey sullenly. "Them Russky boys—they're warm, anyhow; that's more'n we are. They got food; all we have is thin bean soup. For tuppence, I'd clear out of this army. I got into it to fight, and all we've done is starve and freeze and dig trenches."

"The Legion got its belly full at the Alma, in September."

"You mean, the élite companies did. I was digging trenches then."

"Lucky you got 'em dug before the ground froze, lad. Look here, forget such bally nonsense!" Mullins exclaimed earnestly. "You've nowhere to run, anyhow. This is Russia. You can jump into the sea or get a Cossack lance through your gizzard—no other choice."

"We'll warm up tonight, anyhow. Who's got the guard?"

"The 19th. I know all those lads; leave it to me."

FROSTY moon in a frosty sky, *sabots* clumping the snow, bitter wind blowing off the sea, they risked much that night for an hour or two of warmth; yet once away from the position of the Legion brigade, discipline was slack and many a forager was out.

They came into the little village. Casey knew the way; he was recognized, and presently the two shivering men were ensconced in the steaming warmth of a room occupied by no more than a dozen or so others. Peasants, all except the Cossack and his daughter Irene, huge bewhiskered amiable folk, who grabbed at the coins Mullins dug out, and then went into bursts of laughter, repeating one phrase over and over as they pointed at the huge leather cartridge-boxes attached to the belts of the two visitors—pouches whose very existence was traced back to the days when most of the Legion had died in Spain, twenty years before.

"What do they say?" Casey demanded of the Cossack Ivanov, who roared with laughter like the others. He winked.

"Leather-bellies—that's what we call the Legion."

"Yeah! I've heard that before now," growled Mullins. "*Ventres de cuir*—the Russkies have been calling us that ever since we landed. What about some grub?"

Still laughing and joking about the cartridge-pouches, the honest peasants produced and shared what food they had.

Casey had eyes only for Irene. As he held her hand and looked into her beaming face, those hard features of his took on a new and unwonted expression. He spoke to her, low-voiced, the while she listened uncomprehending, giggling. Her father, meantime, big Cossack square hat shoved back from his eagle-eyed bearded features, was talking with Mullins, offering him vodka, laughing and jesting jovially.

Then, to the astonishment of Casey, the girl put her fingers on his wrist and

leaned forward, and uttered one English word. It must have been the only one she knew.

"Tails!"

"Eh?" He stared at her. "Say it again—"

"Tails!" she said, turning away casually, as she made a gesture of caution. "Tails! Tails!"

Casey did not know what it was all about, but the gesture warned him, and with a puzzled frown, he determined to keep his mouth shut. Then she gestured again, made as though to spin a coin. "Tails!" With a laugh, Casey nodded and pretended that he understood. He was still puzzled.

Ivanov, the Cossack peddler, turned to him, and Casey accepted the vodka and tossed it off blithely. It was warm here, warm and steaming and expansive. Mullins, who had picked up a little Russian, was laughing and joking with the peasants.

"What about it?" said Ivanov in a low voice. His English was queerly clipped, quite impossible to reproduce, but it was good. "Have you thought it over?"

"I have that," murmured Casey. "How do I know it's not a knife in the back that I'll get?"

"Bah! Irene loves you; I've nothing else in life—except Holy Russia." And the big Cossack darted one glance at the girl which revealed all his heart. "If she wants you, she shall have you, my son. Besides, you're a man worth while. But mind you, it's marriage for a lifetime! I offer you a place, friendship, companions; not wealth, but honest work. Here I'm a peddler. Among the Don Cossacks, I'm something else."

"Done with you," said Casey. "How do you know I'll play you fair?"

Ivanov laughed in his beard. "I've seen you look at Irene—that's all I need to know. It's no easy life with us, if that's what you're after."

"No," said Casey. "I'm after a life where I give the orders."

IVANOV'S hand crashed on his back. "Good! That's Cossack life; that's what I saw in your face! It's agreed, then. A free man among free men—the brethren of the Don! You must have a horse, clothes, arms; you can't leave here a French soldier."

"I'm not leaving now," Casey said quickly. "Tomorrow night."

The other stared at him. "No, no!" he said urgently. "That may be too late."

"Not until then." And Casey gestured toward Mullins. "I must go back with him."

"Bah!" Ivanov passed a finger across his throat. Casey caught his arm and glared into his eyes.

"Careful! None of that. He's my comrade—until I go."

For a moment the Cossack stared at him. Then the bearded features relaxed in a wide grin.

"Ha! A gamble. You have money for horse and clothes?"

"You know well I haven't a sou."

"Right. Then listen! I'll spin a coin with you. If I win, you go here and now, and your comrade to the wolves. If you win, it's tomorrow night—and I'll provide the horse and clothes. Agreed? One spin of the coin?"

As he spoke, Ivanov drew out a big silver coin and flipped it in air.

Into Casey's brain flashed the memory of the girl's words. Somehow, she must have known her father meant to spin the coin—spin it, not toss it. Teague Casey was nobody's fool. He understood in a split second: a crooked coin, of course.

"Spin it!" he said. The Cossack stooped and spun the coin on the hard earthen floor. "Tails!" exclaimed Casey sharply. "Tails, I win!"

Ivanov leaped up, hand to dagger. Before Casey's grin, his face changed. The coin fell tails up.

THERE was an instant of silence. Ivanov glared at Casey, flashed one glance at Irene—then his white teeth showed through his beard in a laugh. He caught up the coin and pressed it into Casey's hand.

"I should have known that nobody can fight love," he said simply. "Keep it for luck, my son. Now, another drink! So those English lines above you are pretty thin, eh?"

The fiery vodka burned Casey's throat. The coin burned his pocket. The eyes of Irene, shining like stars, burned his very soul; and exultation surged in his veins.

"Thin as butter," said he. "They scarcely have enough men there to relieve the guards. Half their camp is down with disease."

Ivanov tapped him on the shoulder and spoke at his ear.

"Better go now, before one of your patrols comes around. Tomorrow night, here at this place, remember. All will be ready, my son. And if I were you,"—his eyes drew into glittering pin-points,

Looming bearded figures; a click, a stab—and on to the next. . . . . Into them

—"I'd be sick tomorrow morning—really sick! Good night."

The two Legionnaires went stumbling back toward camp. The high white frosty moon had thinned. Snow-mist was in the air, a high vapor.

"Bli' me!" said Mullins. "I have me doubts about yon peddler man of yours, comrade. He asked too many questions, he did. About the positions, the guns, all of it. A blinkin' spy, I say."

"Nonsense. He's coming to peddle his things in the lines, when he gets the permission," said Casey. "A spy isn't lugging his daughter along."

"Right you are, my lad, right you are. A fine lass, from what I could see of her. But what's to come of it, I ask you?"

"That's what I'd like to know," said Casey darkly, and hugged his secret to himself. One more day, and he was done with it all. Then off for the steppes, a wedding, a free man's life!

When he rolled up in the cold tent, he was happy for the first time in months. One more day of it! Then he wouldn't exchange places with General Canrobert himself, by heaven!

He completely forgot, until too late, what Ivanov had said about playing sick next morning. With no reason mentioned, it had made no impression upon him.

The day came up gray, with masses of fog sweeping in from the sea, filling the ravines and blanketing the heights. The meager breakfast was over, the business of the day was in hand, when a spattering of rifle-shots was heard from near and far, all along the line of outposts.

From the adjacent British positions, volley after volley began to crash out.

again—the wave was halted once more, not by men but by crazed fiends.

The French bugles blew frantically; the drums took up the alarm; to right and left the French 1853-model rifles, transformed carbines, began to ring out. Officers were desperately trying to get some men forward. Casey and Mullins fell in, and three companies of the 1st Regiment trotted off to the wide ravine that led toward the outposts.

"It's an attack under cover of the fog," panted Mullins. "Listen—hear them volleys? The British positions are catching of it hot and heavy, my lad!"

"And we haven't a brigade in shape to move up, from what I hear," Casey put in. "That means we've got to hold 'em. Holy mother o' God! Would you look at that!"

His gasp was reëchoed through the ranks. For a moment the fog thinned, lifted slightly. Coming for them in silence through the mist, filling the entire ravine, was an enormous gray mass, wave after wave of Russians. Then another swirl, and the fog was down again, cloaking everything.

An officer came dashing up. "The Legion must hold them until the brigades can be moved up!" he cried. "Fix bayonets!"

"Leather-bellies it is," said Mullins in French; and the words spread with a laugh through the ranks—then the ranks were charging into the fog and the tremendous gray sea of men there.

The first company was swallowed up in an instant. The second followed, and was engulfed. Casey went plunging in with the third and last company—and next moment that gray mass was halted and writhing.

Three companies against an army!

It was a mad pandemonium in which all order was lost. The Russians gave back; frantically the officers got what remained of the three companies formed up, and as the gray wave rolled on again, the Legion met them halfway. Flash, stab, jerk to clear the bayonet—to Casey, it was all a chaos of furious fighting such as he had dreamed long since but never met before.

Looming bearded figures; a rasp and a click, a stab—on to the next! Cold steel, and the leather-bellies sheer madmen in the midst. The wave rolled over them, writhed horribly, was halted again; fewer leather-bellies emerged now. Mullins had a blood-streaming face as he stabbed. Casey lost a *sabot*, cursed frantically, found it again, and went on.

Over them the wave rolled anew, and once more halted in agony as the cold steel of the leather-bellies pierced into its vitals. . . . Halted and rolled back, broken and in confusion. Another officer, his saber dripping blood, was yelling frantically.

"A demi-brigade of the Legion's coming up—hold them! Form up, form up—"

Casey looked around. Forty or fifty leather-bellies were rallying, waiting, panting and leaning on their weapons. Then it came as before, that huge gray mass rolling forward; and the order—and the charge.

Into them again; the wave broke, eddied around, was halted once more, not by men but by crazed fiends who fought like mad. A wild yell, and two companies of chasseurs were in on the flank. Then, on the other flank, a wilder yell—here was the demi-brigade of the Legion hurtling forward into the midst of everything, trampling corpses and wounded, plunging through the mist with the cold steel.

Casey tore into the thick of it. The Russian ranks had closed up, halted, were firing. The bayonets ripped them apart. A clicking rasp of steel, and the two lines wavered, surged back and forth. There was Viénot, colonel of the 1st, in the midst of it all with his saber flashing. Casey stabbed a passage to him; a little knot formed there, and the mêlée centered around it.

MEANWHILE, to right and left, along the French and English lines roared the volleys. The Russians, covered by fog from the dread artillery fire, were making a violent attempt to smash through the thinly guarded lines. Success meant an overwhelming victory, the allied positions crumpled and broken, the camps and headquarters taken—and only the leather-bellies, with the chasseurs aiding, held up that column of victory, preventing the allies from being driven into the sea.

Now came the remainder of the Brigade Étrangère; both regiments of the Legion, every man of them able to bear arms, striking into the Russian column with a ferocity, a brutality, that smashed those serried masses and rolled them back. Still the fight was stubborn, as fresh Russians poured up, but the Legion yielded no foot of ground.

And suddenly a terrific fusillade split the thinning mist, a hoarse yell went up—here was the Brigade of Lourmel, firing as it charged. The reserves were up at last; three French brigades were hurled at the Russians. The movement was flung back, the gray masses crumpled. The artillery began to crash as the fog lessened, and the sullen Russian column fell back whence it had come, defeated.

CASEY, unable to lift his wearied arms, stood panting in utter exhaustion. A voice among cries and groans of the shapes that littered the ground touched his ear. He stumbled toward it, and looked down at the beefy Mullins. A glance was quite enough.

"Hold it, me lad!" gasped the dying man. "You've done—good work. Leather-bellies, huh? They'll have something—to remember leather-bellies by—this day—"

So he died. Noon had come and gone, Casey found to his astonishment, and the battle of Inkermann had passed into history. . . .

The afternoon was a nightmare of labor with the dead and wounded. The Legion had suffered frightfully. The later hours came down with a bitter freeze, and Casey huddled for warmth. The hot blood had cooled in him now. Mullins had gone, and this obtuse but friendly tongue had been his one link with sanity. The eyes of Irene were beckoning to him, glinting at him out of the gray sunset.

Colonel Viénot passed by—he so soon to be cut down by Russian lead at the head of his men—and spoke briefly, curtly. When he had gone, Casey looked after him with a scowl, and spat, and rubbed the scarred end of his flat nose. Corporal? Corporal be damned. He was no bloody hero. That morning's fight had

brought on its reaction, and all heroism was sapped out of him in this terrific cold snap. Teague Casey wanted warmth above anything in the world—warm food, warm shelter, warm arms. And they were his for the having.

He took out that big silver coin, and twirled it between his fingers, and watched it spin, a grin on his lips.

"Tails it's go; heads it's stay and be made a corporal!" he muttered. The coin fell, and the eagles were up. "Tails it is!"—and Casey pocketed it.

That night Private Casey of the Legion, Corporal Casey to be, departed. That he had deserted, was unthinkable; he was set down as missing, and that was the end of it.

AS he told us this, and came toward the close of his own tale, red-headed Casey peered at us with weaving head, and his tongue was thickened. He emptied his glass again and resumed his story where he had left off.

"Now, was the old fellow talking to me the ghost of my uncle Teague, or was it himself in the flesh? I dunno," he said in maudlin accents. "And why did he take a shine to me, and throw vodka into me by the quart until I was pretty near drunk? It was him did all the talking. I had no chance at all.

"Along in the gray of dawn, he took me out and led me back into Eupatoria, and never quit me until we were close to our billets. Then he halted and shook hands with me, and shoved the big silver coin into my hand. And here it is in proof that I'm no liar when I tell it."

He spun the coin, and looked at it with morose and terrible eyes. Something in his look, in his face, startled me. Suddenly, without knowing why, I realized that I had been wrong in my first thought. It was not that Casey was afraid of old age. He was afraid of something else—some memory, some thought in his brain. And then, lifting his head with an effort, he told us what it was.

"I told you about Captain de Silz," he said. "It was him or me to go into that hell up-country, with those dispatches; and neither of us cared which got the job. I asked him which of us was to go, and he shrugged. So I took out this coin, and I spun it; and 'Heads!' says he, as you might expect. Then, while the coin still spun, he spoke again: 'Heads goes, tails stays here—' And as he spoke, the coin fell with heads down, as it always does. So Captain de Silz laughed, and shook hands with me, and went out; and that was the last ever heard of him, too."

Casey's head drooped. He could hardly keep his eyes open.

"There y'are," said he. "That's what I can't stand to think about. Seventeen years ago, and him off dead somewhere, and me worse'n dead with my red hair thinning out, and age coming on, and—and—"

He sighed, and with the deep breath lolled forward on the table, and his head sank down on his arm. His hand was covering the silver coin.

Kramer looked at him, then looked at me, and shrugged slightly.

"Poor devil!" he observed, but there was a thoughtful look in his eyes. "Or should I say 'Poor Legion!' that such a man should be known as one of its veterans? Well, remorse rides him hard, obviously; and tolerance is a great thing. And I suppose none of us is an angel."

"The whole thing was nonsense, something he made up," I said. "That yarn was no more than a drunken rigmarole, Kramer. It never happened at all."

KRAMER looked at me. "No, my friend: it did happen. It was real. I've no doubt that the old Cossack he saw was really his own uncle."

"What makes you so positive?" I questioned curiously.

"This fellow,"—Kramer gestured toward the sodden Casey—"doesn't know much about the Legion. He has a superficial knowledge, yes; he's not the sort to probe into its history and traditions, as you know. Yet his hypnotic vision, or whatever it was, contained a wealth of detail that was correct; and above all, one thing that can't be found in the records. One thing that happens to be true, and yet something that practically no one knows."

"You mean, that the Russians called the Legionnaires leather-bellies?"

Kramer laughed a little, and shook his head.

"No; that old army stuff is known to everyone. The more I think of it, the more I'm astonished by Casey voicing the one fact above all others. It's the very last detail that anyone would think of."

"And what the devil is it, then?" I asked.

"That the Legion wore wooden *sabots* in the trenches of the Crimea."

Another story in this colorful series will appear in our next issue.

The Right Kind

The story of a printer's devil and his wild brother, and of a man who would do to ride the river with.

JOHNNY McSORLEY fed the sheets into the press and looked up past Pyatt, the printer, to old Dorn. The old man sat there under the kerosene light up front, the *Argus* spread out before him, his face impassive, and with none of the excitement in it that Johnny felt should be there.

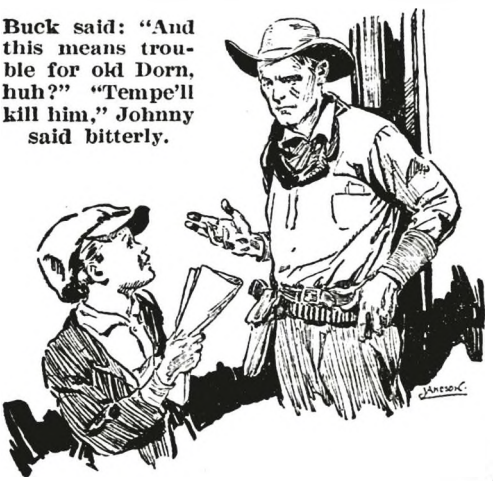
Johnny fumbled two sheets into the flat-bed press, and Pyatt said: "Quit it." He said it so mildly that Johnny paid closer attention to his work.

As the last sheet slid home, Pyatt reached in his pants pocket, brought out a couple of dollars and flipped them to Johnny, saying: "Beat it."

Johnny was gone. Out in the alley already darkening with the mountain dusk, Johnny ran, gathering his apron in his two hands, so that he would not trip.

Arriving at the back door of the Legal Tender, he stopped and peered in, wanting to enter. Instead he stood there waiting for Henry at the bar to look his way. The place was crowded at this time, and often Johnny had to wait almost ten minutes before some one recognized him and called to the bartender. Tonight, Johnny hoped desperately that some one would see him soon. None did.

He whistled shrilly, softly, watching the man facing him at the nearest poker-table. The man looked up and saw him, and Johnny made a sign toward the bar. The man only stared at him for several moments, then returned his attention to his cards. Johnny danced with impatience and anger. This was a grown man's way of announcing he couldn't be bothered with a kid. But Johnny watched the man, a puncher, with hope. Presently, with no warning at all, the puncher turned and bellowed: "Henry!"



Buck said: "And this means trouble for old Dorn, huh?" "Tempe'll kill him," Johnny said bitterly.

Henry saw him then. Johnny raised two fingers, and soon Henry walked back through the gaming-tables to Johnny. He gave the boy two bottles.

"Hello, kid."

"Is Buck in here?" Johnny asked.

"Buck who?"

"McSorley. Buck McSorley, my brother."

"Oh." Henry smiled down at the kid. "How you like findin' a brother all of a sudden, Johnny?"

"I like it all right. Is he in there, Henry?"

"I'll see."

Henry walked back to the bar, craning his head for a look around the room, and then he veered off to the right and stopped to talk to a man at a faro-table. Johnny felt proud as he saw this man leave the game and walk toward the rear door. He stopped to talk to a man watching a poker-game, and Johnny noticed that he dwarfed the other man. It wasn't only because Buck was tall and very straight, with a pair of shoulders almost too wide; it was his voice, drawling, and his quiet air of command, as if he did a man an honor when he spoke to him. In the week since Buck McSorley rode into Wagon Mound to look up his little brother, whom he had never before seen, Johnny had seen Buck almost twice daily. He saw him for a couple of hours every night when Buck came over to the Coopers', where Johnny lived. And in those seven nights Johnny had heard many a story of the Texas plains. He had heard a little of his father and mother, too, whom he could scarcely remember. But all that was not half as exciting as having the quiet assurance that this man was his brother. . . .

Buck left the man and strolled back toward Johnny. Rammed in the waist-

of Tough

By LUKE SHORT

Illustrated by Arthur Jameson

band of his black trousers, there was a Colt .44 which Johnny had already shot; and he wore a flat-crowned hat, different from the men here in Wagon Mound.

Beside Johnny, he towered, and his shadowed face held that slow smile that Johnny liked. "Hello, Bub."

"Hi, Buck." Johnny fumbled in his pocket and pulled out a folded sheet of paper.

"Read that, Buck," Johnny said.

Buck took it and looked at it, then handed it back.

"I cain't read, Johnny. What is it?"

Unfolding the paper, Johnny started to talk; and he talked rapidly, as if he had little time. "See,"—he pointed to the top center of the Wagon Mound *Argus*, where a story in big print was boxed in black, —"this here's the trouble. It—"

"What trouble?"

"Old man Dorn's trouble. My boss. You know him." He saw Buck's nod. "You want me to read it to you?"

"What's it say?"

"You know Ross Tempe, over at the assay office?"

"No."

"Well, it's about him. It says here that this rush over in Pajarito Cañon was started by Tempe. He's the assayer. It says Tempe give a wrong report on the ore over there and started the rush. I don't mean Tempe started it, but he hired men to start it. They started the rush, and all the others strung along and staked claims. Well, it turned out this land was private land of the Great Western Cattle Company. They was willing to sell a claim for a thousand dollars. And now Dorn, he found out that the Great Western Cattle Company is just Tempe, Ross Tempe."

BUCK chuckled softly, and Johnny watched his face, which was in shadow. "This Tempe must be sharp."

"He's crooked!" Johnny said passionately. Buck didn't say anything and Johnny pointed to the paper. "Mr. Dorn says he's crooked, Buck. And that he's a cheater."

"I reckon that's right," Buck drawled.

Johnny had lost the drive of his argument now. Whatever he said from now on, he sensed, would lack conviction. Buck saw it too, so he said: "And this means trouble for old Dorn, huh?"

"Tempe'll kill him," Johnny said bitterly.

Buck was silent a long moment, and Johnny maneuvered around so that he could see Buck's face. But still he couldn't read it, and despair settled down on him.

"You like old man Dorn, Johnny?"

"I—" he began, then stopped. "Sure," he said laconically.

"He aint a fighter, old man Dorn. Is that it?"

Johnny nodded, watching Buck narrowly.

"What about Tempe?"

"He killed a man last week. He makes mighty big tracks, Pyatt said."

Buck grinned at this, and lounged against the door-jamb. Johnny waited a long time for him to speak, but Buck looked out into the alley night. Finally he said: "Old man Dorn knows Tempe will look for him?"

"He knows," Johnny said swiftly. "It aint the first time, Buck."

Buck lounged erect and said quietly: "All right. When does this paper come out?"

"Now. Tonight. When it's out, old man Dorn will come up here for a drink."

"All right," Buck said.

"He can't fight, Buck. He's old."

"All right, Bub. I'll watch out for him," Buck said.

Johnny let out a whoop and dashed off down the alley. But he slowed down and entered the rear door of the Emporium. In a few minutes he ran out and down

the alley again. At the *Argus*, Pyatt was packing Johnny's papers in a sawed-off burlap sack for delivery. Johnny put one pint bottle on the job press, and went up front.

Old man Dorn was still reading the *Argus*. Johnny set the other bottle at old Dorn's elbow and waited. Dorn took one deep drink, then set the bottle down gently, and said to Johnny: "Let's see your spelling."

"Yes sir."

JOHNNY fumbled around in his pockets, brought out a soiled paper and placed it in Dorn's vein-ridged hand, which held the smears of a decade of printer's ink. Old Dorn was graying rapidly lately, and his shoulders were bowing a little. What had once been a fine and implacable face, bold of forehead and jaw, had settled into a tranquil nobility, leaving only his eyes their former keenness. With a kind of fumbling gentleness, Dorn unfolded the paper and ran his eyes over the list of words.

"You've been listening to the cow-men again," he observed.

"Yes sir."

"And the Mexicans."

"Yes sir."

"For instance, this town that you've spelled *C-o-m-a-l* is spelled *Q-u-e-m-a-d-a.*" He looked up at Johnny. "Because they're mealy-mouthed, don't you be."

"Yes sir."

Dorn leafed over to the inside page of the *Argus* and pointed to a column of personals. "Did you put this personal in? 'Buck McSorley, of Texas and the Plains Country, is in Wagon Mound visiting his brother, John McSorley, of the Wagon Mound *Argus'?*"

"Yes sir."

"It was in last week too."

Johnny flushed and said nothing.

Dorn smiled faintly and tapped Johnny on the chest. "Unless you can get a follow-up story on Mr. Buck McSorley, we won't run this item next week."

"Yes sir."

"That's all. Now get these papers out."

Johnny laid something on the desk and backed off. Dorn looked at it. It was a box of .44-caliber cartridges. He stared at them a long time and then looked over at Johnny, who was talking to Pyatt. He smiled again, very faintly, and put them in his pocket. . . .

Johnny's route was the business district, its stores and offices strung along a slanting rutted street, and the houses behind them or in their second story. Young Bugs Heffner, who must have called for his papers when Johnny was out for the whisky, had the rest of the town.

Tonight, Johnny raced through this delivery, starting at the feed-corral upstreet. At Tempe's assay office, he contrived to open the door, sail the paper the length of the long, littered room at a huge man bulked over a desk in the rear, and appear on the street again all in one fluid motion. He slowed down when he reached the middle of town. Dorn was still seated at his desk in the wide window of the *Argus*, but he had his coat on, the first move toward the Legal Tender. At Pearson's Emporium, Johnny saw Buck seated in a chair on the porch talking to a stranger. Johnny waved to him, and Buck raised a slow hand and kept on talking.

And now Johnny hurried—up and down the steps leading to the second-story rooms of *Argus* subscribers, until he was so out of breath he gagged, and each time he hit the board walk again, he looked up toward the Legal Tender. But he could see nothing. There wouldn't be anything to see, anyway.

WHEN he reached the U-eata Café at the south end of town, his work was suddenly intolerable. He had the feeling that the whole world was going to blow up on his left when his head was turned to the right. In the piled tumbleweeds beside the U-eata, he dumped his sack, still holding eleven papers, and streaked back up the alley behind the Legal Tender. Its door was almost closed, so that though he could hear what was going on inside, he could not see it.

The woodshed to the right of the door solved that. From its roof, he could look through the fly-specked transom into the room. The first thing he saw was old man Dorn bellied up to the bar. Lately, it seemed to Johnny, the old man had shrunk until his old black suit was too large for him; and now, as he gestured in his speech, he seemed to be making the gestures inside his suit. Or was he tired?

Johnny looked around for Buck, and for one panic-stricken moment he could not find him. Then there was a movement at the crowded bar, and Johnny caught sight of Buck. He was standing next to Dorn, on the side toward the rear of the saloon.

Tempe raised his gun. Dorn clawed wildly inside his vest. Then, from behind Dorn, Buck swung up his gun and fired.

Breathlessly, Johnny waited. Soon he saw a man enter the room and step away from the door. It was done quickly, as if some one were following him. Then the bat-wing doors parted, and Ross Tempe stepped in. His dark suit made him look smaller than Johnny thought him. In his hand was a gun. He stopped just inside the door, and the men in front of Dorn all stepped aside.

There were no words spoken. Tempe raised his gun. Dorn clawed wildly inside his coat. And then, from behind Dorn, Buck swung up his gun and fired, and Tempe wrapped both arms around his chest as if he were hugging himself, and sat down on the floor, then lay down. There was silence in the room.

Buck drawled with a note of curiosity in his voice: "Is there any reason why that man would want to gun for me?"

After a silence, some one said: "It wasn't you. It was Dorn."

"Dorn who?"

Then Dorn turned around, and Buck looked at him. "Oh," Buck said. He still held his gun. "Now don't that beat hell?" he asked mildly of the room. "Why didn't he say so?"

Nothing more happened. Two men picked Tempe up and carried him out, while Buck was talking patiently and mildly to some men around him.

Johnny shinned down, his heart beating with a wild exultation, and ran back to the office. It was lighted, empty. He went over to the job press. It was set up to turn out a handbill for a sheriff's sale next week. On the apron was a stack of finished bills. Beside it was a stack of plain paper, eloquent testimony to the fact that Pyatt had deserted his post.

Johnny went to work. Pyatt came in in another minute, walked straight to the locker, took out the bottle and drank what remained, hauled a gun from his apron and put it in the locker, then came over to the press.

"Hurry it up," he said huskily, and cleared his throat, looking at Johnny.

THEY were working patiently when they heard the door open and saw old man Dorn come in. He went to his desk and stood there looking down at the paper, musing. Still wearing his hat and coat, he came back to them at the press.

"Close shop, boys," he said. But he was looking at Johnny. When Johnny turned to his locker, Dorn said: "So this Buck McSorley is your brother."

"Yes sir."

"Well, he—" Dorn paused, scowling. Johnny waited. "I'm a lucky man," Dorn said, looking keenly at Johnny. The boy's innocent blue eyes were untroubled. "A very lucky man," Dorn said slowly. He sighed and went out.

Johnny got out before Pyatt, and ran down to deliver the papers he had forgotten. On his way back for supper, he saw Buck riding down the street with three other men. Buck pulled up when he saw Johnny, and they faced each other, silent.

"He's tough, kid. Dorn is—the right kind of tough."

"All right, kid?" Buck asked.

Johnny's throat was pretty well tied up. He was fumbling with Buck's stirrup when he heard Buck's warm chuckle. "I thought it was pretty good, myself."

"Sure," Johnny said, letting go the stirrup so Buck could ride on.

JOHNNY never got around to thanking Buck properly, for Buck didn't come over to the Coopers' much after that, and then only at noon. He wouldn't get off his horse. He'd ask Johnny if he needed any money, and when Johnny said no, Buck would sometimes look at him and laugh and say: "Then you're the only human I know that don't."

But Johnny didn't mind Buck's absence. Bugs Heffner hung around the shop quite a bit that week, and he would bring other kids with him. Pyatt kicked them out daily. They all wanted to hear more about Buck McSorley, but Johnny was too proud to talk. And scared. He kept his mouth shut.

During that week, Sheriff Adams rode over from Tent Rock. He called on old Dorn, and they talked most of the afternoon up in front. Johnny asked Pyatt what was up, but Pyatt only grunted and wouldn't say. It seemed to Johnny that he was more lonely than he had ever been. Old Dorn forgot his spelling-lesson two days in succession, and Pyatt had ceased to cuff him around as usual. And Buck didn't show up. On Wednesday, Sheriff Adams was in the office again.

But on Thursday, press day, Johnny was so busy that he couldn't be lonesome. The peak of the work was always in the afternoon, and it mounted to a fine frenzy toward evening. The *Argus* was supposed to be out by four in the afternoon. Never, since Johnny could remember, had it been out before seven, and the hours from three till seven were bedlam.

Therefore it was surprising when, around six, when it was just dark, Dorn came back to the press. He had an envelope in his pocket, and he pulled it out and said to Johnny: "You take that up to Mrs. Dorn, Johnny."

Johnny stared at him. "But I got—"

"I know. I'll take your place. I haven't forgotten how to run a press yet."

Obediently, Johnny took off his apron. He looked sharply at old Dorn, who seemed to be avoiding his eye. Pyatt wouldn't look at him, either.

He went out the front door, turned up the street, and then his pace slowed. They wanted to get rid of him back there, but for a reason he couldn't understand. Immediately he determined to. He crossed the street, cut for the alley behind the stores, then, when he was abreast of the *Argus*, he knifed in between two buildings and worked his way toward the walk. From here, he could see Pyatt and Dorn at work across the street. As he watched, his suspicion dying, he saw Pyatt look up, then walk to the back door. In a moment he returned. Then something very queer happened.

Dorn leafed down through the stacked sheets of the *Argus* to the bottom one. While Pyatt held them up, Dorn withdrew the first sheet, and as he walked toward the door, folded it.

Recklessly, Johnny ran out, crossed the street, and slid in the cluttered narrow passageway that separated the *Argus* building from its neighbor. When he was almost in the alley, he stopped. He heard a horse moving, heard the bridle-chains jingle. Then Buck's voice drawled:

"I cain't read, Dorn."

"Ah," Dorn said. "Apparently, then, this was wasted."

Buck said nothing. Dorn used the same words Johnny had used on a similar occasion:

"Do you want me to read it?"

But Buck's answer was not the same. "I reckon not. I reckon I know. This is a warnin', kind of."

"Or a threat."

"I see," Buck drawled. "All right. I'll go, if that's what you're tryin' to tell me."

"I think you'd better," Dorn said mildly.

THERE was a long silence; and then Buck said earnestly: "It wouldn't do no good to tell you how plumb

ashamed I am, would it? No. You see, I figgered after what I did for you, you just wouldn't say nothing about it. I needed money bad."

"You were wrong, then. But I would have loaned you the money if you'd asked."

"Sure," Buck said. He stirred faintly in the saddle. "You would have. Only maybe it wouldn't have taught me what I know now."

Dorn said nothing.

"I'm goin' back to the XIT. I reckon I'm a cowhand. That suits me—now."

"Yes."

"You tell Adams it's that little feeder cañon above the Salt Lick over them adobe hills north. He'll know."

"I think he does now."

"Sure." Another pause. "Does Johnny know?"

"Not yet."

"You reckon I could see him?"

"He'll be back in a few minutes."

"Well, good-by, Mr. Dorn—and much obliged."

"Good-by."

Johnny backed out. Out on the walk, he paused, trying to make his face smooth enough to cover the panic he felt. Then he walked inside. Dorn and Pyatt were running the press. At Johnny's entrance, Dorn looked up. "Your brother's out back, Johnny. He wants to see you."

WHEN Johnny went out, Buck was sitting his horse there in the dark. He said: "I'm ridin' out, kid."

"Where?"

"Back to Texas. To my old outfit."

Johnny didn't say anything, and Buck pulled his horse up closer.

"You stick with Dorn, Johnny. You aim to?"

"I—I guess."

"He's an honest man. Lord knows, that's scarce enough. He's got sand, too. You reckon you could learn both from him?"

"I don't know."

"You stick till you do," Buck said. He added more gently: "If any man can teach you to say out what's right, no matter if it costs you your neck, then he'll do to ride the river with. He's tough, kid, Dorn is. And wearin' a gun don't make him so. He's the right kind of tough. More'n I am. You hear?"

Johnny heard. He didn't understand right then, but he was willing to take Buck's word for it.

Buck leaned out and rumpled Johnny's hair. "So long, kid. You'll hear from me. You write too. I'll see you again."

And he rode off. Johnny watched him go, misery in his heart, and no understanding to leaven it. In a few moments he went inside. Things were going as always, with Dorn up front. Johnny and Pyatt finished the run, and Johnny went out to deliver his papers. He was back by eight o'clock. Dorn had gone, and Pyatt was cleaning up. Johnny got his broom and started to sweep out, but he kept an eye on the litter of the floor. Pyatt left then, after saying good night.

Johnny went up to Dorn's desk and got a fresh copy of this week's *Argus*. Nothing he could find on the front page had any mention of Buck. Inside, he ran across this personal:

> Buck McSorley, a visitor from Texas and the Plains Country, left this afternoon for his old outfit. He carries the well wishes of Wagon Mound with him, and of this office in particular.

Johnny pondered this. But this wasn't what he was after. He went back to the press. Around it was the usual litter of crumpled papers. Carefully, Johnny assembled them, and kneeling on the floor, examined each. Most of them were trial-sheets, run off to test the inking and the set of the type. The first dozen or so were identical to the one he had seen on Dorn's desk. But he collected them all and spread them out in a circle around him. Column by column, he compared them all. And on the last, the dirtiest, the faintest, he found what he was looking for. There had been a tiny box on the front page of the other papers, announcing that the ladies of the Baptist Church had changed the date of their bazaar from the twelfth to the sixteenth, the reason being that the freighters had been badly delayed by the spring rains.

But on the dirty one, in faint type inside the box, Johnny read this:

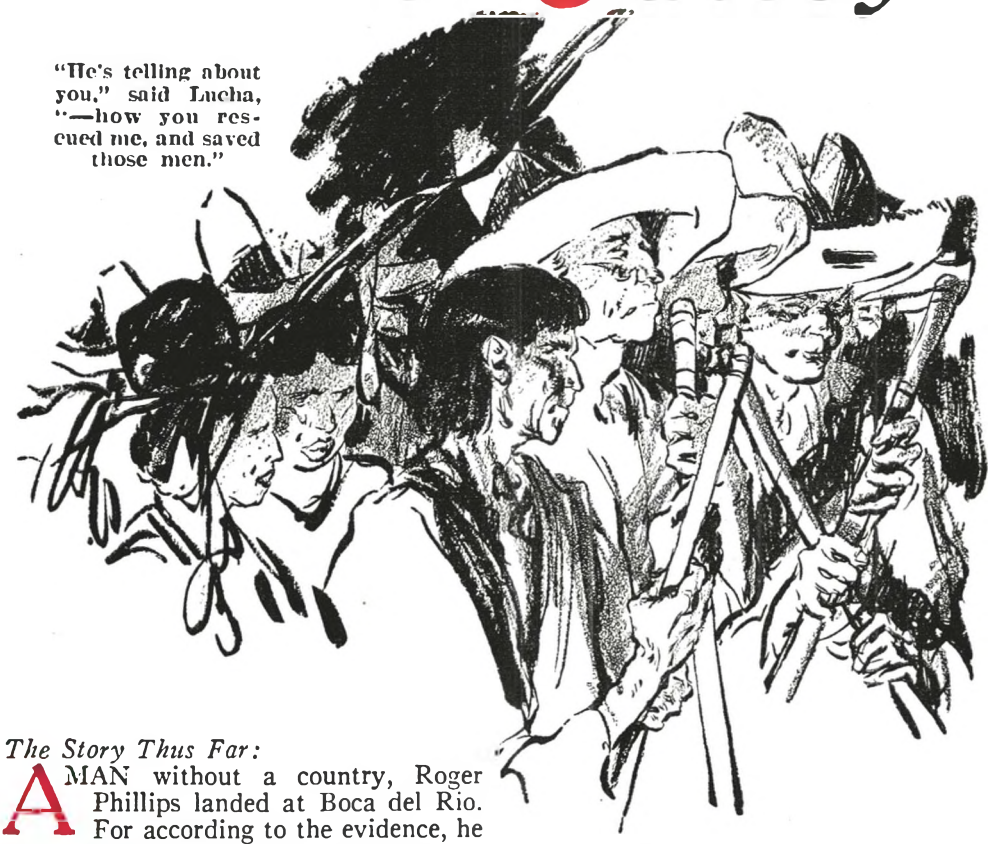
> This office has information from an outlying ranch that a herd of stolen cattle is being held on land near it. We know the thief. These cattle may be yours. Tonight the Sheriff is being notified of this. Cattle-thieves are not wanted here.

Johnny remembered Buck's words: "He's tough, kid, Dorn is—he's the right kind of tough. More'n I am. You hear?"

Again Johnny heard. And this time he thought he understood.

Another vivid story by Luke Short will appear in an early issue.

The Valley



"He's telling about you," said Lucha, "—how you rescued me, and saved those men."

The Story Thus Far:

A MAN without a country, Roger Phillips landed at Boca del Rio. For according to the evidence, he had committed a dreadful crime, and in desperation had fled to this remote place whence extradition could be avoided.

With him landed a girl; when her own people failed to meet her at the dock, she turned to him in her distress—which presently became her danger. For she was the daughter of the Torreons, just returned from completing her education in the United States. And the Torreons were the old Spanish family who held an interior mountain valley as feudal lords and defied the corrupting inroads of so-called civilization.

The local commandant tried to take Lucha under his protection—really to hold her as hostage to force her family to terms. Roger fled with her and held the enemy at bay until a party of the Torreons' Indians, headed by Carlos and Rodrigo Torreon, arrived; later with a captured machine-gun he fought a rear-guard action to enable the rescue-party to escape to the valley. Here they met Ignacio to whom Lucha was engaged. *(The story continues in detail:)*

THEY rode on together toward the great stone house. All five were silent, a blanket of suspicious reserve descending about their shoulders. Finally Lucha could stand it no longer.

"Roger," she said, "I'm going ahead with Ignacio. I want to tell my father all about you."

She spurred her horse and rode ahead, Ignacio following. Don Rodrigo turned to Roger with a slightly apologetic smile.

"Ignacio came back only two months ago. He doesn't know our ways. Don Hernando will greet you properly."

"Is that Lucha's father?"

"Yes. His name is Don Hernando Torreon. He is the lord of this valley, and we think he is the finest gentleman in all the world. When you meet him, you will think so too."

"Is Lucha's mother living?"

"No. She was our sister. She died when Lucha was born—and Don Hernando has worn black clothes ever since."

Riding on, Roger forgot the shock of learning about Lucha's engagement; for-

Stronghold

By GREGORIO SOMERS

(Jack Leonard)

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

got the unpleasant meeting with Ignacio Lopez. The beauty of the valley crept back into his heart, pushing out all disagreeable thoughts. The fields were so perfectly cultivated, so green, so rich. On both sides of the trail ran low wattle fences covered with masses of brilliant blue morning-glories. They passed a small village of neat adobe huts with thatched roofs. Smiling Indian women stood in the dooryards, bowing politely. They waved and called to the other Indians on the trail.

"They are happy," said Don Rodrigo, "because all their men have come back safe from Boca del Rio."

They were only a few hundred yards from the big house now. It looked like a fortress, standing alone surrounded by royal palms. The outside wall was built of immense rectangular blocks of gray stone. There were no windows—only narrow slits fifteen feet above the ground. Other small buildings were scattered about at a distance, but the big stone house stood aloof, disdainful, conscious of its strength, like the lord's castle on the edge of a medieval village.

The trail led up to a wide arched door. There was no one in sight but a single Indian guarding an iron gate, one side of which was open. Roger was breathing hard with excitement as he approached the blank, frowning wall of the house. He felt as if he'd stepped back a thousand years, to become a knight of the Middle Ages, clanking up to his lady's house in plumes and armor.

Don Rodrigo bowed with a smile.

"This is not my own house," he said, "but I welcome you here with all my heart. Be good enough to enter, my friend."

With a thrill of anticipation Roger passed through the gate. First came a short dark passageway, then a big patio open to the sky, paved with stone slabs and full of palms and flowering plants in terra-cotta tubs. A scarlet macaw swung on a high perch. A fountain splashed in

the distance. Roger heard voices—then a gay laugh, and Lucha ran forward to meet him.

"Welcome, Roger," she cried in Spanish. "This is my home. And here is my father."

AS Roger looked past the girl, he did a rather strange thing. Unconsciously, without effort, he put his heels together and bowed low. He had never bowed that way before, but it seemed the most natural thing in the world to do. A few paces behind Lucha stood Don Hernando Torreon. He was an elderly man with a thin, handsome face, white hair and mustache, and he was dressed in black clothes of old-fashioned cut. He was very grave, but there seemed to be a reservoir of twinkling good-humor behind his clear black eyes. He answered Roger's bow, striding quickly forward to take his hand.

"My house is yours, my friend," he said in a deep, resonant voice, "and everything else I possess. My daughter is worth more to me than life itself. You have saved her from my bitterest enemy. I shall try to prove that I am grateful."

"You honor me," said Roger. "I did what any gentleman would do."

"Perhaps," said Don Hernando; "but there are very few such gentlemen today. Do you plan to stay in our valley? You will find life rather dull here. We have no modern amusements. I have never seen a motion-picture, and I have never heard a radio."

"I've seen and heard a lot too many of those things."

"Good," said Don Hernando. His gravity disappeared, and he broke into a gay smile. "I'm glad to hear an American say that. My son Ignacio is not an American, but he feels differently. Already he says he misses the pleasures of American life."

"I shall not miss them," said Roger; "but I want to make one request: Will you let me join the work of your valley? I am a graduate of an engineering college—I think I can make myself useful."

"I sent my son to California to gain such knowledge. It is what we need most. We'll be grateful for anything you do."

Don Hernando Torreon was so impressive a personality that while he was speaking, it was impossible to pay attention to anything else. But now came a pause in the conversation, and Roger looked about him. There were many other people in the patio. Lucha stood a few feet away, observing with pleasure the favorable impression he'd made upon her father. Ignacio Lopez sat on a stone bench. Carlos and Rodrigo stood in the background with two pleasant-faced middle-aged women and a group of young children. Behind them, peering from the shadows, were a number of Indian servants.

All were smiling and expectant. One by one Don Hernando motioned them forward to present them to Roger. First came the wives of the uncles; then the children, the eldest first; then the Indians in a group. The latter were rather timid, smiling quickly, bowing, and fleeing back to the shadows. Roger tried to catch all the names, but didn't succeed.

"Now you know the entire household," said Don Hernando. "You must be tired. I shall have you shown to your room, and I shall let you know when dinner is served."

Roger was glad to withdraw. He was tired all over, his legs stiff and aching from the long ride, his brain reeling from the impact of new and strange impressions. He bowed to Don Hernando and his family, smiled at Lucha. Then he followed a servant up a broad stone stairway to the second floor and along a balcony to a room with two unglazed windows which opened on the patio. It was very large and rather bare. A heavy wardrobe, two straight-backed chairs, a small table and an enormous canopied bed were the only furnishings.

In a sort of alcove to one side was a great stone tub and a stone washstand. There were no faucets, but a fountain of clear, cold water sprang out of the wall, followed a short, open channel, and disappeared with a rushing sound down a hole in the floor. Roger experimented with a system of wooden stoppers and finally managed to wash his hands and face, using a block of brown soap and a soft cotton towel. Then he lay down on the bed. There was no sound but the whispering of the water. He fell asleep in an instant.

WHEN he awoke, the room was dark. An Indian servant stood near the bed with a single candle in a pottery candle-stick.

"It is time for dinner," he said softly. "The master sends you a message. He says he knows you lost your baggage, so he does not expect you to appear in fresh clothes."

Roger smiled gratefully. Such thoughtfulness was quite in keeping with the opinion he'd formed of Don Hernando. When he'd made himself as neat as he could, he followed the servant downstairs. The patio was dark, but a glow of soft yellow light came from a door by the staircase. He crossed the threshold and entered a great paneled dining-room. In the center, around a long candle-lit table, sat the Torreons. The men wore formal evening clothes of rather old-fashioned cut. The women were dressed in black silk dresses with high necks. Lucha wore her brown linen suit. She had lost her baggage too. Rising from the head of the table, Don Hernando motioned Roger to a chair by his side.

IT was a very patriarchal, formal scene, but the atmosphere was easy, friendly. Roger sat down beside Don Hernando, who ordered a servant to fill his plate with yellow rice, unfamiliar vegetables, and roast turkey. Everything had an odd though pleasant taste, as if prepared with many strange herbs. There was fresh butter, almost white, and the bread was light brown, crisp and delicious. Roger was ravenously hungry. He hadn't eaten since the early morning. Don Hernando watched with smiling amusement, saying almost nothing until the first course was finished. Then, while the servants were changing the plates, he leaned back in his chair. A sudden silence fell.

"My friend," said Don Hernando, "I owe you an explanation for many things. We live an odd life here in our valley, and it is our custom never to talk about our affairs to strangers. You are no longer a stranger. You are one of us, and we are greatly indebted to you. So now I shall tell you the history of the valley, to explain why we act as we do."

"You honor me," said Roger.

"But first you must swear upon your word as a gentleman that you will never talk about what you see or hear. So far, we have managed to protect our people from the greed of the outside world, but if this valley should become well-known in America or Europe, we could not continue to do so."

Roger rose to his feet, looking down the table at Lucha. She was very serious. So were Don Rodrigo, Don Carlos and their wives. Ignacio Lopez was serious too, but he seemed rather bored. The silence was complete. The servants stood stock-still, watching Roger like the rest.

"I swear upon my word as a gentleman," said Roger slowly, "I shall never speak of what I have seen or heard here." He looked steadily into the eyes of Don Hernando. "I am in debt to you also. I hope your daughter has told you why I came to Boca del Rio."

Don Hernando nodded gravely.

"She has told me," he said. "But I shall never ask more about it."

Some subtle instinct made Roger glance suddenly at Ignacio Lopez across the table. He was sitting in the same attitude as before, but his eyes were no longer bored. He was looking up with new interest. It was quite apparent that he did not know about Roger's past.

"Sit down, my friend," said Don Hernando, "I want to tell you the history of the valley."

Roger resumed his seat. Don Hernando was sitting bolt upright in his straight carved chair. His eyes were glowing with an intense light—the expression seen in ancient pictures of saints or martyrs.

"My first ancestor came to this valley four hundred years ago," he began in his deep, vibrant voice, "—four hundred years ago and a little more. Charles the Fifth was king of Spain. Henry the Eighth was king of England. Cortes had conquered Mexico; Pizarro was conquering Peru. It was a time of greed, of slaughter, of cruelty. Every criminal, every ruffian in Spain took ship for the New World. The King and the Church made laws to protect the Indians, but they were not obeyed. From Florida to Chile the slaughter went on. The Indians were helpless, for they had no fire-arms, no steel, no armor, no horses. They could not resist; they could only die. But to one single spot no Spanish conqueror ever came. That spot was this valley. My ancestor was a Spaniard, but not a conqueror."

DON HERNANDO'S handsome face was pale, his hair and mustache glowing brilliant white in the candle-light. He looked at Roger intently for a moment. Then he continued in the same low voice.

"In 1527 a Spanish ship landed at Boca del Rio. The Indians there were gentle naked people, who offered no resistance. The Spaniards built a fort and began exploring the mountains behind the town. They heard rumors of a valley full of gold and silver. Half of them remained in the fort, while the rest went up a trail to the mountains. Not a single one came back.

"No news came back, either; but later another kind of Indian appeared in Boca del Rio. They were civilized after their fashion, dressed in cotton clothes and wadded cotton armor. They had obsidian swords and spears. They seemed friendly; and they wanted to know all about the Spaniards. They would sit for hours watching the soldiers and studying their ways.

"Early one morning, before sunrise, the attack came. A thousand Indians surrounded the fort. They swam out to the ship with torches, and burned it to the water's edge. They burned the fort to the ground, swarming over the walls with ladders. They were not afraid of guns or cannon, although many were killed. They slaughtered every Spaniard —except one. That man was my ancestor, Rodolfo Torreon. They took him captive and carried him into the mountains, into this valley.

"It is hard to believe, my friend, but it is true. My ancestor expected to be killed, but the Indians treated him with kindness. Every day the leaders taught him their language. When he could talk with them easily, they held a council and

"I see that your suspicions have been aroused," said Ignacio calmly. "Pablo acted quickly!"

asked him to rule over the valley. Their chief had been killed in the fight with the first party of Spaniards. They had heard about the conquest of Mexico and Peru, and they knew they'd be conquered themselves if they didn't learn how to fight as the white men did. So they sent spies to Boca del Rio to study the Spaniards there and select the man best fitted to be their ruler.

"It was a good choice. My ancestor was a man of honor. He had been horrified by the slaughter of the Indians in Mexico, and he was planning to return to Spain to make a report to his king. He did better. He stayed in the valley, collecting gold ornaments and trading them

for Spanish weapons. Finally he returned to Spain to get a special charter from the king which gave him perpetual control of the valley. He also brought back a wife. Their descendants have ruled over the valley ever since. I am the last of the male line. My daughter Lucha will inherit my duty."

THERE was an impressive silence around the table. Don Hernando's final word had been "duty"; it seemed to echo back and forth across the great room. Roger felt an intense emotion growing within his breast. There was something grand about the Torreons, something magnificent which made him want to swear eternal devotion, use words and phrases which had never occurred to him before. He pictured their first ancestor, the armored Spaniard who came to the valley four hundred years ago, bringing a young wife and a high ideal. He pictured the Indians—wise, brave little brown men who had chosen so well.

"You mentioned duty, Don Hernando," he said slowly. "I have never had a duty which was worth devotion; but I have just come to realize that duty is the most important thing in the world."

Don Hernando smiled, an appreciative, affectionate smile. He reached over and patted Roger lightly on the shoulder.

"You have seen our hearts, Don Roger," he said. "I do not need to explain. There are five thousand Indians in this valley. They are brave and loyal, industrious and intelligent. They made a bargain with my family four centuries ago, which both sides have kept without a single violation. They give us wealth and power in return for protection and guidance. We have shielded them from exploitation. This valley has always been a little patch of still water in the middle of a stormy sea. We are surrounded by greedy enemies, but none have ever passed our gates."

Roger stood up suddenly. His heart was beating loudly, and he felt a wave of high exaltation. He glanced at Lucha, and saw she shared his feeling. So did Rodrigo and Carlos. They were all very still, but their eyes were gleaming brightly in the candle-light. He put out his hand to Don Hernando, who took it and pressed it tightly.

"You have taken me into your life," he cried excitedly. "I had no home, no friends, no duty, nothing to live for. You have given me all those things. I hope I shall prove myself worthy."

"You have already done a great deal, my friend," said Don Hernando, "and we know that you are a man of honor. That is enough." He rose to his feet and pushed back his chair. "Now there is one thing more to do tonight: I have asked the Indians to come together. I must present you to them, for their wishes are quite as important as ours. That is part of the bargain."

Everyone rose except Ignacio Lopez, who remained in his chair, looking down at his plate.

"Are you not coming?" asked Don Hernando.

"I'd rather finish my dinner." The young man looked up carelessly. "I've been working with the coffee since morning. I've seen enough of the Indians for one day."

"Stand up!" cried Don Hernando.

Ignacio rose, a disagreeable scowl on his face.

"You refused to go to Boca del Rio last night to meet my daughter," the old man continued. "You said you were tired. Now you refuse to come to the meeting. Perhaps it was a mistake to send you to California."

Ignacio shrugged.

"You are coming with us," said Don Hernando.

He turned away without waiting for any reply, took Roger by the elbow and led him out of the dining-room. The patio was no longer dark. A dull, flickering orange glow was streaming through the great arch, and a low murmuring sound could be heard faintly like the whisper of a light breeze. When Roger followed the old man out through the arch, a strange sight confronted him.

ON either side of the door huge fires burned, tossing sparks high in the air and lighting up the grove of palms around the house. In a semicircle twenty yards from the door stood a throng of Indians, like a solid white wall, their cotton clothes gleaming bright in the firelight. They were chattering among themselves; but when Don Hernando appeared, a quick silence fell, broken only by the crackle and roar of the flames. The old man walked forward, motioning Roger to follow. Behind them came the rest of the Torreons. Lucha walked close to Roger.

"This is very important," she said in a low voice. "The Indians like you; but if they didn't, you'd have to leave the valley. My father consults them about

everything important. And the coming of a new white man is very important."

Roger watched with growing excitement. As Don Hernando approached the crowd, seven elderly Indians walked forward to meet him. They were dressed like the rest, but each carried a wooden staff with a silver band.

"Those are the chiefs," said Lucha. "There is one in each village. It was just such men as these that brought my first ancestor into the valley."

The seven chiefs arranged themselves in a line. Don Hernando bowed to them and to the crowd. Then he began talking in a clear, loud voice, using the Indian language. Though Roger couldn't understand a word, he listened with pleasure to the strange flowing, liquid sounds. The Indians made no comment; their faces did not change.

"What's he saying?" whispered Roger.

"He's telling about you," said Lucha, "—how you rescued me from General Marso, and how you saved those eleven men. They hate General Marso. They know he wants to invade the valley."

DON HERNANDO talked for several minutes. Then he stopped and motioned to Roger to come forward. The seven chiefs examined him closely, though not impolitely, and the crowd did too.

Finally one of the chiefs spoke quietly in Spanish.

"You are welcome here," he said. "My people are grateful. They love you like one of their own."

Roger shook hands with the old chief. His face was very wrinkled, but his eyes were clear, grave, and extremely intelligent. The other six chiefs gathered close. Roger shook hands with each in turn. That was all. The Indians walked back and merged into the crowd.

"They have taken you into their hearts," said Don Hernando, smiling, "as we ourselves have done. Now we'll find you a guide and counselor."

Turning to the crowd, he spoke again in the Indian language. After a moment a young man stepped forward. Don Hernando seemed surprised.

"You, Pablo?" he demanded. "Didn't you ask to guide my son Ignacio when he came back from the United States?"

The young Indian said nothing. He didn't look up. Don Hernando turned to Ignacio Lopez, whose handsome face was suddenly distorted with anger.

"What's this?" he demanded sternly. "What have you done to the boy?"

"I've done nothing," cried Ignacio. "I've treated him well, and now he wants to leave me for this gringo."

He glared at Roger with hatred in his eyes. Roger thought he saw another emotion there also. It was fear. He wondered what Ignacio was afraid of.

Don Hernando went forward and spoke to the young Indian in a voice too low for Roger to hear. Presently he came back, shrugging.

"He gives no reason," he said. "But you will have to find another guide, my son."

Don Hernando seemed worried. He looked at Ignacio perplexedly and shook his head. Then he turned toward the Indians and made a slight gesture with his right hand, evidently a sign that the meeting was over. Without sound or confusion the crowd dispersed, and soon the grove of palms was empty—only Pablo remaining with the Torreons in the circle of firelight.

"Now you've been properly introduced," said Don Hernando. "You'll like the Indians."

"I began to like them this morning in Boca del Rio. If it hadn't been for them, I'd be dead by now."

"Yes. They are brave and loyal. But you must be tired, my friend."

"I don't want to go to bed just yet," said Roger. "I couldn't sleep. I'd like to go for a walk."

"Why not? Take Pablo with you. He'll see you don't get lost."

ROGER said good night to the Torreons. Lucha smiled warmly. So did Carlos, Rodrigo and their wives; but Ignacio seemed sullen, resentful. Turning on his heel without saying a word to Roger, he walked ahead of the rest toward the door of the stone house.

Roger looked at his guide, the Indian Pablo, a slender, wiry young man with the large eyes and round face of his people. He seemed shy at first, but soon his eyes began to twinkle, and he broke into a merry smile. Roger put out his hand.

"We're going to like each other, Pablo," he said. "Come on, let's take a walk. I want to see the stars and smell the night air."

"The night is very beautiful here, Don Roger," said Pablo, "and the stars are very near."

They walked together out of the circle of light from the dying fires. There was no moon. The sky was clear, and the stars were flashing like jewels set in a

dome of polished jet. A light breeze rattled the stiff fronds of the palms. The air smelled of grass and fresh earth. Night-birds fluttered softly overhead, making curious twanging cries. A dog was barking far away. From the nearest village came a thin trickle of plaintive music, like a flute in a minor key.

"IT is very quiet here," said Roger to Pablo. "In my home, New York, the night is full of loud noises; but all the noises here are pleasant and far away."

"Yes, Don Roger," said Pablo with a laugh, "the loudest noise we have is the song of the burro; and all the burros are asleep."

They walked on toward a grove of trees which stood in the open fields a quarter of a mile from the house. Roger was happy. He'd never felt so happy before. Like a dim black wall below the stars he could see the ring of mountains surrounding the valley, cutting it off from the struggle and greed and worry of the outside world. He felt protected from all evil. The valley was a small earthly heaven, governed by a friendly living deity with a white mustache and a twinkle in his black eyes.

They were nearing the grove of trees. Suddenly Pablo stood still.

"Listen, Don Roger," he said. "There is some one coming."

Roger heard it now—the running steps of several men.

"Quick!" whispered Pablo.

Grabbing Roger by the elbow, he dragged him in among the trees. They squatted down in the underbrush.

"They want to kill us," said Pablo. "We must run for the house."

"All right. Come on."

They dashed out of the trees and ran toward the house. Roger felt the presence of several men behind him. Something whizzed past his head as he ran, and fell with a loud metallic clang on the beaten ground.

But they reached the house in safety. Roger stopped before the gate. No one was following.

"Who were they?" he demanded.

Pablo didn't answer at once, standing silent, looking down at the ground. Then he spoke—very slowly, as if the words were hard to speak.

"There are bad men among us, Don Roger," he said reluctantly. "They are traitors. It is not my place to tell you who they are; but—tomorrow I'll show you something."

Roger tried to question him further—without success. But he was getting used to the atmosphere of mystery which hung over the Valley of the Torreons.

"All right," he said. "Good night, Pablo. I'll see you in the morning."

"No, Don Roger," said Pablo firmly. "I am going to sleep inside your door tonight. It is better."

They went into the house and felt their way upstairs. Roger was a long time getting to sleep. The soft whisper of the fountain in the corner sounded sometimes like the beat of horses' hoofs, sometimes like human voices, sometimes like the rushing of the wind. Pablo went to sleep at once like a healthy animal, curled up in a blanket just inside the door. His revolver lay beside him on the stone floor.

CHAPTER III

WHEN Roger awoke next morning, the room was full of gray light, and Pablo was standing quietly beside the head of his bed.

"Your breakfast is ready," said the Indian. "And our horses are saddled."

Roger rubbed his eyes. He stretched, yawned, and protested sleepily. Then all at once he remembered where he was. He stared around the great bare room with its stone floor, its stone walls, and heavy timbered ceiling. In a rush, the events of the day before came back to his memory. He leaped out of bed and began putting on his clothes.

"Where are we going, Pablo?" he asked.

"To the other end of the valley."

"Why?"

Pablo didn't answer for a moment. Then he looked up shyly.

"You will meet Don Hernando at breakfast," he said. "Tell him you'd like to see the whole valley."

"You mean you don't want him to know where we're going?"

"That's right, Don Roger."

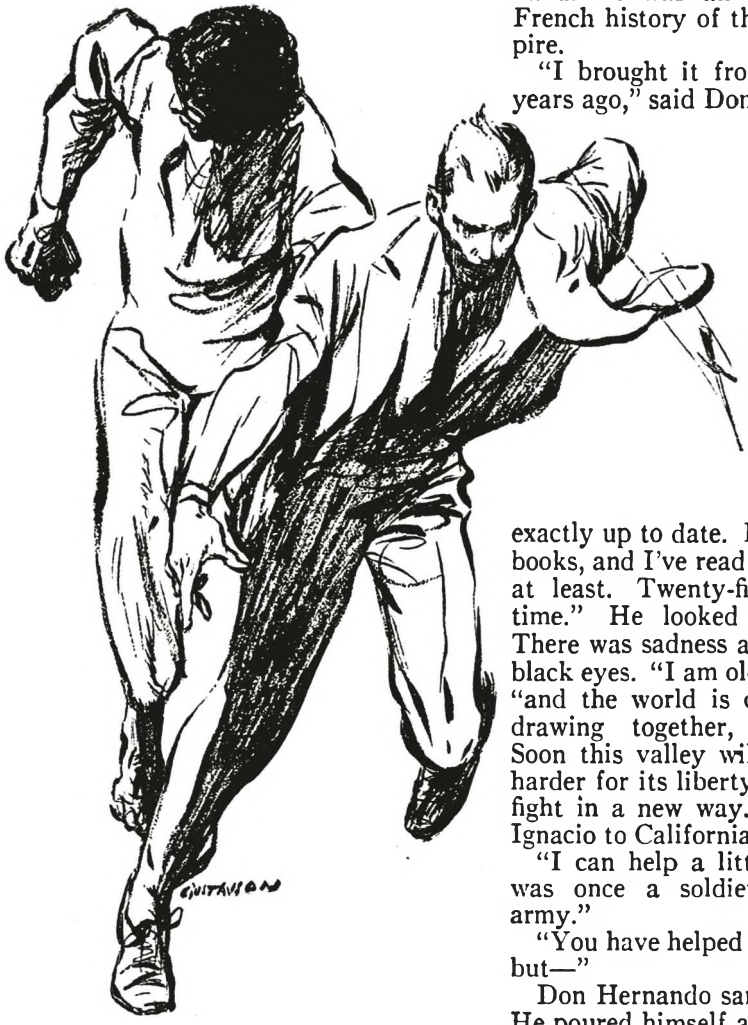
"Why should we deceive him?"

"Sometimes," said Pablo, "the honest man is not the most honorable one."

"And I suppose you want me to keep quiet about those fellows that tried to knife us last night?"

"Yes, Don Roger. This is not the time to speak."

Roger was dressed by this time. He went down to the stately paneled dining-room, where he found Don Hernando sit-



"They want to kill us," said Pablo. "We must run for the house." They dashed out of the trees. Something whizzed past Roger's head as he ran.

ting at the table before a large copper pot of black coffee. He was dressed in a loose silk smoking-jacket and was reading a leather-bound volume. He smiled and stood up when Roger entered the room.

"Did you sleep well?" he asked.

"Very well."

"It's the mountain air," said Don Hernando with a touch of pride. He called loudly, and an Indian woman appeared with a piping hot omelet, crisp rolls, fresh butter, comb honey and a tall glass of creamy milk.

"I ordered your breakfast," said Don Hernando. "Pablo says you are going for a ride to see the valley."

"Yes," said Roger guiltily.

"Pablo is a fine boy," said Don Hernando. "You can trust him in every way. I wish, though, that he'd tell me why he doesn't like Ignacio."

Roger thought it best to say nothing. He glanced at the book in the old man's hand. It was an Eighteenth Century French history of the Holy Roman Empire.

"I brought it from Spain twenty-five years ago," said Don Hernando. "It isn't exactly up to date. I brought a thousand books, and I've read them all three times at least. Twenty-five years is a long time." He looked at Roger intently. There was sadness and worry behind his black eyes. "I am old," he said musingly, "and the world is changing fast. It is drawing together, becoming smaller. Soon this valley will have to fight still harder for its liberty, and it will have to fight in a new way. That's why I sent Ignacio to California."

"I can help a little," said Roger. "I was once a soldier in the American army."

"You have helped a great deal already, but—"

Don Hernando sank back into silence. He poured himself another cup of coffee, sipping it slowly. Roger finished his breakfast. He longed to tell the old man all he knew, all he suspected, but he decided not to do it.

"When I come back, I'll tell him the whole story," he promised himself. "I'm too dumb to be anything but honest."

Finally he rose from the table. Don Hernando looked up suddenly.

"Lucha hasn't come down to breakfast," he said. "She'll want to see you when you get back."

The old man's eyes were watchful, keenly observant. Roger knew his reaction was being weighed with microscopic accuracy.

"And I'll want to see *her*," he said in confusion.

Don Hernando smiled politely and returned to his book and his coffee. Roger strode hastily out of the dining-room. It had all been very subtle, very delicate, very brief—but wholly sufficient.

"What of it, after all?" said Roger to himself. "What if he does know I love his daughter? Of course I do. Anybody would."

He found Pablo waiting with two horses outside the arched gate.

"Let's go," he said. They mounted and started off.

THE valley was incredibly beautiful in the morning light. Patches of mist lay in the meadows, like lakes of shallow water. The mountains were bathed in a yellow glow, but much of the valley itself was still in shadow. The air was fresh and cool. Cocks were crowing. Large black birds with yellow tails were screaming in the palms. From far away came the bray of a burro—a clumsy, ungainly sound, but somehow quite in keeping with the spirit of the morning.

Pablo and Roger rode side by side along a dirt road. They crossed a high-backed stone bridge across the river, and turned right at a fork. Four miles away stood an almost vertical cliff of black rock with a short steep slope of stony débris at the foot. The wall was seldom less than five hundred feet high, and it swept around the entire valley with hardly a break. Evidently a lake had once occupied the basin, depositing silt to form the rich soil of the level floor.

"Tell me about your people," said Roger to the Indian after they had ridden half a mile.

"We are only a little people," said Pablo shyly.

Roger made no comment. They rode on in silence for a time. Then the Indian began to speak in a soft, serious voice:

"We have lived in this valley for a long time," he said. "Since the beginning of the world."

Pablo fell silent again. Roger waited. He was getting used to the Indian method of conversation.

"We are only a little people," said Pablo again, "but we have fought a great deal for our valley. A long time ago we fought the men of the north. They wore coats of feathers, and they cooked the hearts of their enemies, and ate them. We built a wall across the road by the river. We drove them back. Then we fought the men of the south. They shaved their heads and used little arrows tipped with poison. We made coats of wadded cotton against the arrows, and we drove them back."

"Then later," said Roger, "the Spaniards came."

"Yes, Don Roger. We knew we couldn't fight the Spaniards very long. They were too strong. So we captured one of their leaders and made him our chief."

"Don Hernando told me that."

"We chose his ancestor, Rodolfo Torreon. He taught us how to fight with guns and horses. We lived in freedom while the Spaniards conquered all the world outside our valley."

"And you've never forgotten how to fight."

"No, Don Roger. We've fought the President across the mountains. We've fought General Marso and many others like him. No enemy has ever entered the valley."

"You were lucky," said Roger, "to find a family like the Torreons."

"Yes. They have always been brave and just."

Pablo hesitated a moment.

"Go on," said Roger quietly. "There's something you want to tell me."

"Yes," said the Indian. "We think there are other enemies coming, and we are afraid."

Pablo rode on in silence for several minutes. Then he pointed up at the deep blue dome of the sky.

"A year ago, Don Roger," he said, "a thing like a great bird came flying over the mountains. It flew without moving its wings, and it made a roaring sound. It carried men. We could see them looking down."

"That was an airplane," said Roger with a laugh. "You've seen automobiles in Boca del Rio. An airplane is just an automobile that can fly."

The young Indian stopped his horse and faced Roger. His eyes were burning and serious.

"Don Roger," he cried suddenly, "tell me about these things. We go to Boca del Rio to sell our coffee. We talk with the people there. We are afraid. The soldiers of General Marso tell us that soon they'll be flying through the air above our valley. They'll shoot us down from above. Then they'll take our land and make us slaves. Is it true, Don Roger?" His voice rose to a desperate pitch. "Tell me, Don Roger, for the love of God."

ROGER hesitated. He knew it was the accurate truth. There was no use denying it. No use to deceive this Indian, so earnest, so concerned for the fate of his people. Not much longer

could the valley hold itself aloof from the outside world. New enemies were coming, with new weapons which would carry everything before them.

"Yes, Pablo," he said quietly. "It is true. Very true."

"What shall we do?" cried Pablo.

"You'll have to learn the ways of the outside world. When the Spaniards came, you learned their ways. You'll have to do it again."

"How can we do it?"

"Have you spoken with Don Hernando? He knows the danger; he told me so."

Pablo's brown face was a curious study. He averted his eyes, looked down at his saddle-horn. Finally he looked up.

"Don Hernando is old," he said very slowly. "Don Rodrigo and Don Carlos are brave men, but they do not know the world beyond the sea. And the Señorita Lucha is a woman."

"How about Ignacio Lopez? He's been away. He's young, and he knows a great deal."

Roger watched the Indian closely. A hostile glitter appeared in his dark eyes.

"Let us ride on, Don Roger," he said. "I want to show you something."

The sun was higher now, and the whole valley was full of yellow light. Roger and Pablo had covered three-quarters of the distance to the mountain wall. They had passed through two small villages. Ahead lay nothing but open fields, mostly pastures full of sheep. The road was but a narrow track in the close-cropped grass.

They drew near the mountain wall. A few small trees and bushes clung to the face of the rock, and a stream of water leaped from a cranny and dissolved in a rain of silvery mist before it hit the ground. At last they reached the slope below the wall. The fertile soil of the valley disappeared abruptly beneath a layer of jagged stones covered with cactus and thorny undergrowth. Pablo dismounted to tether his horse.

"WE must walk from here, Don Roger," he said.

Leaving his horse, Roger followed the Indian along a faint path which led up the slope toward the cliff. A few goats bounded away and turned to watch from a safe distance; but no other living thing was in sight. Finally the path itself disappeared. They climbed on, struggling among thorns, clambering over stones.

"We are almost there," called Pablo encouragingly. "It is only a little way."

At the top of the slope he waited for Roger to catch up. The mountain wall stood directly overhead, vertical and sheer. It was made of dark gray stone shot through with little curving veins of softer red material like streaks of dried blood. One of the veins was much wider than the others, slanting downward to disappear beneath the stony slope.

"Over here," said the Indian.

Roger followed him around a boulder. On the other side was a pile of fresh-dug earth and broken stone. A low tunnel slanted toward the face of the cliff. Pablo got on his hands and knees, and crawled into the hole. In a minute or so he reappeared. In one hand was a chunk of dark gray, glittering mineral.

"A very pretty stone," said Pablo simply. "Perhaps it is valuable."

ROGER examined the fragment. It was very heavy, with a bright crystalline structure.

"What is it?" asked the Indian.

"I don't know," said Roger. "I am not a miner. Have you asked Don Ignacio? He ought to know all about it."

The Indian's face set hard in a stubborn mask.

"He knows, Don Roger," he said. "I followed him here and found this place. I came upon him suddenly and asked him what he was doing. He told me to speak about it to no one. He says the stone is silver."

"Silver!"

Roger looked at the sparkling rock with new interest. *Silver!*

"Pablo," he said slowly, "do you remember what I said a little while ago? You need new weapons to fight against the world. Well, silver is a weapon. With silver you can buy everything."

The Indian shrugged.

"You are right, Don Roger," he said. "Ignacio told me that. He says the silver will make us rich and strong. We'll have automobiles and fine clothes and good things to eat."

Roger looked at the Indian sharply. He sat down on a rock and tossed the chunk of silver ore from hand to hand.

"Pablo," he said, "you haven't told me what's the matter. You seem to want my advice, but before you get it, you must answer my questions. Are you willing?"

"Yes, Don Roger. I'll tell you everything."

"All right. Who was it tried to knife us last night?"

"Ignacio."

"What!"

"That's the truth, Don Roger. He didn't want me to show you his mine."

"God Almighty!" cried Roger. "He's got a swell chance to kill us right now."

PABLO smiled and pointed out over the valley. A quarter-mile away was a group of mounted men, sitting their horses beside a small brook.

"They are watching, Don Roger. I asked them to come."

Roger laughed. "You win," he said. "Now tell me something else. Why don't you get along with Ignacio?"

The Indian was slow to answer. He seemed choosing his words carefully.

"We don't trust him," he said. "He is not a real Torreon, and we think he is planning to take the valley away from Don Hernando. He wants all the silver for himself. He won't divide it with my people."

"How do you know?"

"We have watched him, Don Roger. Ever since he came back to the valley, he has been sending letters to General Marso and receiving letters in reply."

"So that's it!"

"And we think he told General Marso when the Señorita Lucha was coming home, so he could capture her."

"Why did he want to do that?"

"Then he could force Don Hernando to let the General come into the valley. They could take all the silver away from us and the Torreons."

"What a mess," Roger thought.

But in spite of himself he felt a certain satisfaction. Lucha's engagement to Ignacio was as good as broken already!

"Why didn't you tell Don Hernando?" he asked Pablo. "And why did you tell me? I'm practically a stranger here."

The Indian smiled shyly.

"Last night," he said, "while you were having supper, all the head-men of the villages met together. They decided what to do. Don Hernando loves Ignacio. He would not believe the truth about him until it was too late. But we know you will do right, Don Roger, because you love the Señorita Lucha."

"How do you know I love her?"

"Everybody knows it," said Pablo with a shrug.

"Well, I'll be damned!" cried Roger. "No wonder you Indians have kept your freedom. What do you want me to do?"

"Tell the Señorita about Ignacio. She will tell her father, and he will believe her. He loves her most of all."

"Why don't you tell her yourself?"

Pablo seemed surprised at the question.

"She is a young girl and a Torreon. We cannot talk with her alone."

"Nonsense. You'd think up some way. What's the real reason?"

"She is engaged to Ignacio," said Pablo with a faint smile. "Perhaps she wouldn't like to hear evil about him from us. But we think she loves you more than she loves him. She will listen to you without offense."

"You've certainly figured everything out. I hope you're right about Lucha."

"We're very much afraid," said Pablo simply; "and fear makes the head work well."

"All right. I'll tell her about it. Let's get back to the house. They'll be wondering where we've gone."

He put the chunk of silver ore in his pocket, and followed Pablo down the slope to the place the horses were tethered. As soon as the distant horsemen saw them coming, they started off ahead, keeping their distance like a band of skirmishers. When they were half a mile from the house, Pablo touched Roger on the shoulder.

"Don Roger," he said, "I want to tell you something else."

Roger reined his horse to a stop. He had a feeling that something important was coming.

"What is it, Pablo?"

"The Spaniards tried to make us slaves," he said softly. "They were bad men, but one of them was good. We want you to marry the Señorita Lucha and stay with us, for we know you're a man of honor, like Rodolfo Torreon."

Roger touched his horse with the spurs and rode on in silence. He didn't dare to show he understood, for he knew he'd been offered a kingdom. His heart was beating very hard, and his pulse was throbbing like a little, busy machine. He'd been offered a kingdom like a knight in a fairy-tale. . . . A kingdom and a princess.

THERE was no one in sight near the big house or in the cool patio. Leaving his horse with Pablo, Roger ran upstairs to his room to wash his hands and face before he went to look for Lucha. He was glad to be alone. He wanted to think; but try as he would, he didn't make much progress. The situation was too fantastic; wherever he turned, a single unavoidable fact stared him straight

in the face, like a movable barricade closing all the exits.

"Oh, my God!" he thought desperately. "Why on earth did I do it? If I'd only come down here with a clear conscience, everything would be all right. These people don't know what I really am. I hate to tell them."

He finished at the washbowl and sat down by a little table, resting his head on his hands. "I can't marry Lucha," he told himself, "even if she'll have me. I'm a murderer, and I mustn't forget it. I can't help Don Hernando with the silver mine. We'll need outside help, and I'll be pinched the minute I show my face in civilization. What a mess!"

WHILE he sat there, he heard a knock on the door. He rose, opened it cautiously, not knowing what to expect. There across the threshold, a bland smile on his hawklike face, stood Ignacio Lopez. Roger sprang back. Automatically his hand dropped to his pocket.

"I see that your suspicions have been aroused," said Ignacio calmly. "Pablo acted quickly, as I thought he would. Let me come in. I want to have a little talk with you. You won't need that gun. I haven't got any."

"Come in if you want to," said Roger, still keeping the gun in his hand.

Ignacio walked into the room and sat down in one of the chairs by the table. He seemed very much at ease, smiling up at Roger with careless amusement.

"Well, Mr. Phillips," he said, "what do you think of my silver mine? Do you like it as much as you like my fiancée?"

"I like it fine," snapped Roger. "Why didn't you bump me off this morning if you knew I was going there?"

"In daylight?" said Ignacio with a laugh. "Ridiculous! The valley is full of eyes. And I've just learned that the head-men told Pablo to spy on me. I don't think he was taking any chances."

"You were right."

"And anyway," continued Ignacio easily, "I've decided I don't want to get rid of you. I'm going to make you a proposition."

"The hell you are!"

Ignacio leaned back in his chair. He took out a gold case and offered a cigarette to Roger, who refused. He took one himself, lit it, and smoked for a moment in silence. Then he looked at Roger sharply.

"I don't think you appreciate my mine," he said. "I'm a trained geologist, and I know what it's worth. At least ten million dollars, believe it or not. You only saw one of the veins. I've found others. The ore is silver sulphide, easy to mine and easy to smelt. There's a little gold in it too; and besides the silver and gold, there are good deposits of lead and copper. This valley is a treasure-house. It will rank with Pachuca and Potosí."

"You talk as if you owned it," said Roger shortly. "But you don't. You're just engaged to the daughter of the man who holds it in trust for the Indians. It all belongs to them by rights."

"Another idealist!" said Ignacio with a light laugh. "This place is full of them. The Indians! Hell! Who owned Pachuca? The Aztecs. And where are the Aztecs now? Don't kid me, Phillips. You're no fool, and neither am I. We're not Torreons. We're not enchanted by a fairy-tale four hundred years old. Indians are fine miners. We'll make them work for a dime a day. If they won't work, we'll throw them out of the valley and import Chinese."

Roger's muscles twitched. He wanted to grab Ignacio by the throat and choke the life out of him, but he managed to restrain his impulse.

"Come on, Phillips," urged Ignacio. "You'd better play along with me. I'll give you a good cut; and you can have Lucha too, if you want her."

"What?"

"Sure. That's what I said. She's too high-minded for my taste. I like my women faster and hotter."

ROGER glared at the smiling, cynical face across the table. His rage was mounting.

"You give her away as a bribe? That's all she's good for?"

"That's all."

"Say! Why are you telling me this? You know damn' well I won't do it."

Ignacio waved his hand in a careless gesture.

"I'm telling you, Phillips," he said, "because I've got you where I want you."

"The hell you have! I'll kill you first."

Roger jabbed his gun toward the other's heart, but Ignacio continued to smile.

"You don't dare kill me," he said calmly. "My dear adopted father would have you shot like a dog. He's a simple soul, and I'm all the son he's got."

Roger didn't know what to say. He watched Ignacio nervously, wondering what was coming next.

"As a matter of fact," said the other, "Don Hernando would throw you out at once if he knew what I know about you."

"What!" cried Roger.

"Don Hernando is very chivalrous. Oh, yes. He's got very high ideals about women. He thinks a man ought to behave the way his ancestors pretended they behaved, but didn't."

A dozen men, apparently overwhelmed by the news which the paper conveyed.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Plenty." Ignacio blew a smoke-ring toward the ceiling. "Listen. I'll tell you a little story. When I was a boy, a distant cousin of mine lived here. He fell in love with an Indian girl. Then he got jealous. Thought she was cheating. So he went to her house and beat her half to death with a whip. Don Hernando had him hanged to a tree the next morning."

Roger felt a cold chill of terror rising up his spine. Perhaps Ignacio *knew;* but how? "Very interesting," he commented. "What of it?"

"Plenty," continued Ignacio. "If he does decide to throw you out, it won't make a bit of difference what you tell him about me. He'll do it just the same. That's the way he is. So you better be good. General Marso might catch you outside. He doesn't like you a bit. He might stake you down on an ant-hill, or feed you to the crocodiles."

Roger fingered his gun helplessly. His hands were trembling.

"There's another road out of the valley," continued Ignacio. "It's difficult, but you might dodge the General. It wouldn't do you any good, though. The President would catch you."

"Well—"

"You'd be extradited quick."

Roger's shoulders drooped; he couldn't help it. Ignacio settled comfortably back in his chair.

"It's lucky for me, Phillips," he said with a smile, "that you haven't got a bottle in your hand."

Roger sprang forward.

"Who told you?" he cried angrily.

"Oh, I keep in touch with the great world. Take a look at this."

Ignacio drew from his pocket a folded tabloid newspaper three weeks old. On the front page was a photograph of Roger. He wore a small mustache, but the identity was clear. *"World Search For Bottle Slayer"* read the caption below the picture.

"A very unpleasant crime, Mr. Phillips," continued Ignacio smoothly. "If you'd killed a man, it would have been quite all right with Don Hernando. He's killed several men himself. But a woman! That's different. He'll be shocked to death."

Roger glared across the table through half-closed eyes. He felt an almost uncontrollable desire to resort to simple violence, if only as a relief for his feelings.

"I mustn't do it," he told himself desperately. "I mustn't. That's how I get in trouble. I've got to think."

"So I'll give you three choices, Mr. Phillips," said Ignacio with a graceful wave of the hand. "You can kill me right here with your gun. In that case Don Hernando will have you shot at once. Or you can refuse to join me, and tell Don Hernando all about my plans. That will cause me a certain amount of trouble, but it won't do you any good at all. Before you get a chance to talk, I'll inform my adopted father that you are the murderer of a beautiful and helpless girl. His absurd ideals will force him to throw you out of the valley. If General Marso doesn't catch you on the way out, the American police will do the job."

"And the third choice?"

"Use your head. Join up with me. We'll develop the mine. You'll be rich, and you can have Lucha. You see, Phillips, I've got you exactly where I want you."

Roger's head was clearing. Deliberately he waited while the red mist of rage cleared away from before his eyes.

"Not quite good enough, Lopez," he said calmly. "You're not cut out to be a really successful crook."

He looked across the table with a faint, amused smile. Ignacio seemed slightly taken aback. He frowned doubtfully. With great deliberation, great assurance, Roger raised his gun, moved it forward, and poked the muzzle gently against the other's heart.

"Keep quiet, Lopez," he ordered, *"and put up your hands."*

Sudden panic flashed across Ignacio's face. He hesitated, trembled. Then slowly he raised his hands above his head.

"That's right," said Roger. "You're not quite good enough. You've neglected one very important possibility."

WITH slow, cautious motions, still keeping the gun against Ignacio's heart, Roger reached across the table and took a handkerchief out of the other man's pocket. He shook it out, rolled it into a ball.

"Don't make a motion," he whispered. "Don't make a sound."

IGNACIO'S air of easy self-confidence had wholly disappeared. He seemed weak, terrified, watching with frightened eyes. Roger walked around the end of the table and put the muzzle of the gun against Ignacio's temple. Then with a quick motion he clapped the crumpled handkerchief across Ignacio's lips.

"Open!" he ordered.

Roger stuffed the handkerchief into his mouth, then took him by the collar, lifted him out of his chair, and threw him face down on the bed.

"Lie still, rat," he growled. "I've got you covered and gagged. Now I'm going to tie you up."

Swiftly Roger bound Ignacio's wrists with his own belt. He tied his ankles together with a strip of cloth torn from a sheet. He knotted another strip across his mouth to hold the gag. Then he stood Ignacio up at the foot of the bed and bound him firmly to the heavy post which supported the canopy. This took several minutes. Ignacio didn't resist in any way. He seemed wholly unnerved.

Finally Roger completed his work.

"You tried to bluff me, Lopez," he said. "But I bluffed *you*. Why did you put up your hands? You didn't have to. You told me why I wouldn't dare shoot you. And you were right. I guess you're just a coward. I couldn't do this to the Torreons. They're men. They'd see me in hell first."

Ignacio's eyes flashed angrily above the gag. He struggled, twisted. The bonds held fast.

"Thanks," said Roger. "Now I know you can't get loose."

He picked up the newspaper with his picture on the front page.

"I'll take this along," he said. "You had me worried for a while, Lopez. Don Hernando would have thrown me out of the valley, just as you said, and I'd respect him for it. But he won't do it now. I've got the only proof, and I'll have the first say. When I get through with your reputation, my lad, he won't be in any mood to let you talk. So long."

He folded the newspaper and put it in his pocket. Then, waving good-by with ironic cordiality, he went out the door, closing it behind him.

All was quiet in the patio. An Indian servant was filling a pottery jar at the

fountain, but no one else was in sight. Roger stood irresolute. His victory over Ignacio had given him a momentary thrill of confidence. Now he felt his confidence ebbing away. Doubts began to assail him. He wished he'd asked Pablo a few more questions. Where did Ignacio get that newspaper, he wondered. How many of the local Indians were on his side? What was General Marso doing?

"Well, anyway," he decided, "I'm going to talk to Lucha. That's the only thing to do. She's the person that matters most. I'm sick of lying. I'm going to tell her the whole story."

He squared his shoulders, somehow strengthened by the resolution. Lucha might never speak to him again. She might hate him, as he often hated himself. But perhaps not. You never can tell about women.

The first person he met on the ground floor was Carlos, who shook hands cordially and asked him how he enjoyed his morning ride.

"Where's Lucha?" asked Roger.

"She's in the garden behind the house. I think she wants to see you."

Roger went out and found his way through an arch in a stone wall to a formal garden. Lucha was sitting on a bench beneath a flaming bougainvillea. She was wearing a light cotton print dress with short sleeves and a full skirt—very ingenuous, a little old-fashioned, and utterly charming. She had done her hair in a different, fluffy way to go with the dress.

When she saw Roger, she sprang to her feet, she smiled gayly, stood on her tiptoes and spread out the skirt to its full width.

"Look," she cried. "How do you like it? This was my favorite dress before I went away. I haven't worn it for five years. Isn't it pretty?"

Roger smiled in spite of the weight of worry on his mind.

"Very pretty. You look like a little girl—a nice little girl."

"I'm so happy," cried Lucha. "I'm home again. It's lovely here, and so peaceful. I feel as if nothing could ever go wrong." She looked at Roger with an affectionate smile and very large little-girl eyes. "I *know* it, Roger," she repeated in a soft whisper. "Nothing can ever go wrong."

ROGER sat down on the bench beside her.

"I wish I were sure of that," he said reluctantly. "I've got a lot to tell you. It isn't as peaceful round here as you think it is."

"What's the matter? Has my father been talking to you? Did he say I'd got to marry Ignacio right off?"

"No. It isn't that. It's worse than that. Listen, Lucha. Last night, when I went to walk with Pablo, somebody tried to knife us."

"Roger!"

Calmly and with considerable detail he told about the attack in the darkness.

"Pablo wouldn't tell me who did it," he concluded, "but he slept just inside my door all night."

Lucha's eyes had lost their gay sparkle. In spite of her fluffy hair and her little-girl dress, she looked very serious and competent.

"Go on, Roger," she said. "You've got more to tell."

"Yes, I have. A lot more."

HE talked at length, telling about the ride to the other end of the valley, Pablo's revelations, and Ignacio's mine. Finally he took the lump of silver ore out of his pocket and showed it to her.

"Did you ever hear about this?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "My father told me about it before I went away. He said I ought to know, but he made me promise to keep it secret. That mine was discovered a long time ago by my great-grandfather. He didn't tell anybody outside the family. Neither did my grandfather or my father. They were all afraid of it. They knew what would happen to the valley if the outside world ever learned we had silver here."

"Did he tell Ignacio?"

"I don't know. Probably. He sent him away to study mining. I think he decided we ought to develop the mine."

"Your father doesn't know Ignacio's been digging there. Pablo's sure of that. And Lucha—Pablo told me something worse: Ignacio is plotting with General Marso. That's why the General tried to kidnap you."

"What for?"

"So Ignacio could force your father to let him develop the mine in his own way—for his own benefit."

"Roger! That's terrible. Is it true?"

"It's entirely true. I talked to Ignacio. He admitted trying to kill me last night so I wouldn't hear about his plans from Pablo. Then he offered to take me into partnership. He wants to develop the mine, using the Indians as labor for a few

Many things began to happen quickly. The two uncles staggered out, burdened with rifles. Only a few minutes passed before the grove was swarming with armed men.

cents a day. He says the silver's worth at least ten million dollars."

"You refused, of course," said Lucha with perfect confidence.

"Of course—but it wasn't easy."

Roger was silent for a full minute. He stared down at the ground, where a column of large black ants was streaming by, carrying bits of green leaf over their shoulders. He looked at his own hands, listened to the beating of his heart. Lucha didn't say a word. Finally Roger gathered courage to speak.

"Lucha, dear," he said in a low, almost inaudible voice, "it wasn't easy, because Ignacio knows all about me. I'm going to tell you too."

He hesitated again. The words were hard to speak. Lucha reached out and patted the back of his hand.

"Tell me if you think you ought to. And, Roger,"—she whispered very softly,—"I love you. Does that make it easier to tell?"

"No. It makes it harder." He hid his face in his hands. He was almost sobbing. "I love you too, Lucha. You know that. But I've done something I can't forget or excuse."

"Perhaps I can excuse it, Roger."

He felt her soft little hand steal into his, giving him courage and strength. He straightened up, but he didn't dare look at Lucha as he told his sordid story.

"My mother died while I was in college," he began in a flat mechanical voice, "and my father died a year later, leaving me a little money. I was sort of wild. I couldn't stand the idea of settling down to a dull job for the rest of my life, so I joined the army and went to the Philippines. That didn't reform me any.

"Then I came back to New York, still looking for excitement. I began running around with a bunch of men that were nothing but high-class crooks—gamblers, smugglers. And some were gun-runners. That's how I heard about General Marso.

"And I met a girl named Clara Jordan. She'd had a try at the movies, but her voice wasn't right, so she quit and took up with a blackmailing gang. I loved her, or I thought I did. I just wanted her because she was pretty, and because a lot of other men were trying to get her too.

"She got most of my money. She wanted the rest, and when I said I wouldn't give her any more, she began to threaten me—said she'd frame me and send me up the river. She could have done it, too. I got hold of some machine-guns and sold them to General Marso's agent. It was legal, but it would only take a little perjury to make me look like a crook.

"One night she came up to my apartment with a couple of men—Joe Petrucci and Abe Fishel. I guess she'd got the goods on them too, because they told me just how they were going to help her frame me if I didn't give her all the money I had.

"Well, I wanted time to think, so I ordered dinner sent up from the restaurant downstairs. We sat around the table, the four of us. I drank a lot. It was just the wrong thing to do, but I wasn't thinking very straight. I was getting mad. How I hated that girl! She was jeering at me and asking me how I'd like to spend five or ten years in Sing Sing.

"After a while the two men left. As soon as they shut the door, everything went red. 'Now's my chance, I thought.' And the next thing I knew I woke up a couple of hours later. I had a broken champagne bottle in my hand. The girl was lying dead across the table, and somebody was knocking on the door. I beat it down the fire-escape."

ROGER put his head in his hands and stared at the stream of ants on the ground. Lucha didn't speak. Finally Roger looked up again.

"You know the rest," he said. "I paid five thousand dollars to General Marso's agent. I shaved off my mustache and got a forged passport. Then I caught the first boat and came down here. It was the only place I could go. I was lucky to get away. When you're a crook, it pays to know a lot of other crooks."

"You're not a crook," said Lucha.

HE looked at the girl with amazement. There were tears in her eyes, but she was smiling happily.

"Oh, Roger!" she cried. "Now my father won't make me marry Ignacio."

Roger couldn't believe his ears.

"Have you been listening?" he demanded, almost annoyed.

"Of course I have," said Lucha, "but I've been listening to my own heart too. I don't care what you did in the United States. Only wicked men commit crimes. If you were wicked, Roger, you wouldn't have fought for me in Boca del Rio. You wouldn't have refused to join Ignacio. And you wouldn't have told me all this."

"But I killed a *girl*, Lucha. She couldn't defend herself. I'm a murderer."

"I don't believe a word of it, Roger." She put her hands on his shoulders, smiling into his eyes. "I've got faith in you. You don't remember striking the blow. Maybe you were very drunk or drugged, and somebody else did it. You're not the kind of man that murders a girl."

She took her hands from his shoulders.

"Go on, Roger. Tell me more about Ignacio and the mine. Don't talk about yourself. We've got more important things to think about. We've got to save five thousand people from the worst sort of slavery. We've got to think fast and act fast. Tell me the rest, and no foolishness."

"Lucha, do you mean it?"

"Of course I mean it. I was going to marry Ignacio because my father wanted us to carry on the family tradition together. Now I won't have to, and I'm delighted."

"What will your father do when he hears about Clara Jordan?"

"He won't hear for a while. By that time he won't believe anything Ignacio says. There isn't any written proof, is there?"

"I've got all there is."

Roger produced the tabloid newspaper and spread it out on the bench.

"*Bottle Slayer!*" read Lucha. "Ridiculous! Let's see what it says."

She turned to an inside page to look for the written account. Roger happened to glance at the inside cover.

"Say, wait a minute!" he said. "I know that face."

He pointed to a picture of a rather reptilian man with smooth dark hair. "*Freed in Bottle Murder,*" read the caption.

"That's Joe Petrucci," cried Roger. "He's one of the men that came to my apartment with Clara Jordan."

"AND look!" cried Lucha. "There's something written here."

She turned the paper sideways. On the margin were a few words in pencil. "*Hello, Iggie,*" they read. "*This is my calling card. See you soon.*"

"*Iggie!*" said Roger, trying to think fast. "That's Ignacio. He must know Joe Petrucci."

"Roger, where did you get this paper?"

"I took it away from Ignacio. Listen! I've got it! Joe Petrucci was the man who sold the guns to General Marso's agent. He must have got in some jam and beat it down here. Just like me! Most natural thing in the world. I heard about him in Boca del Rio. And Ignacio must have hooked up with General Marso before he went to the United States. That's how he got to know Joe Petrucci. It all fits together."

"Roger," demanded Lucha, "how did you get this paper away from Ignacio?"

"I tied him up."

"You tied him up! Where is he now?"

"I tied him to the bed in my room with a gag in his mouth. He's all right."

"Oh, Roger!" Lucha almost screamed. "I know he isn't there. If he's got Indian friends, they'll watch out for him every minute. He's gone. I know it."

Roger sprang to his feet.

"Come on!" he cried. "We'll see about that."

"There's a back door. It's quicker."

They ran out of the garden and into the kitchen. Half a dozen servants were working by the charcoal fires, but they only stared open-mouthed while Roger and Lucha dashed into the patio, up the stairs, and along the balcony. The bedroom door was open. The strips of sheeting lay in a tangle on the floor. Ignacio was gone.

"What'll we do?" cried Roger. "Where is he? What's he doing?"

He stood helpless. Lucha came inside the door. Her face was slightly flushed, but she seemed very calm and collected.

"Let's think, Roger," she said quietly. "It always pays to think. What would you do if you were Ignacio? What would you do first?"

Roger tried to think, to put himself in Ignacio's place.

"He'll want to get out of the valley before we tell your father. He's probably gone to Boca del Rio."

"He can't. No one can pass the gates in the cañon without my father's seal on a written order."

"Then he'll try to hold out somewhere and send for help from General Marso. And say, Lucha! I know what I'd do first if I were Ignacio. I'd get hold of that machine-gun. He probably knows how to use it."

"I think you're right," agreed Lucha. "Where's the gun?"

"Your father's got it."

"We'd better go and see if he's got it still."

They hurried down the stairs. Roger was nervous, his head full of plans and perils and dangers, but Lucha walked calmly as if nothing very unusual were going on. The patio was empty and silent. So were the dining-room, the library, and the huge formal parlor. At last they found an Indian maid.

"Where's my father?" Lucha asked.

The maid was one of the servants who'd seen them running through the kitchen. She seemed excited.

"He is there, señorita," she cried, pointing to the arch. "Outside, and many others with him. They are talking."

Lucha looked serious.

"Something's happened," she said. "We'd better find out."

They passed through the arch into the grove of palms. Gathered in a close group were a dozen men—Don Hernando, Don Rodrigo, Don Carlos and various Indians. They were looking at a large sheet of paper pinned to a tree with a slender dagger. All were silent and serious, apparently overwhelmed by the news which the paper conveyed.

ROGER and Lucha walked up to the men, who parted in silence and stood away from the tree. Lucha gave a little faint cry. Roger looked at the paper with horror. It was another tabloid newspaper, not exactly like the first, but carrying on the front page the same picture of himself, with a similar caption.

"Two of the damned things!" growled Roger. "Joe Petrucci must think he's famous."

Don Hernando was staring at him sternly, his thin, sensitive face distorted with anger. Roger drew a deep breath and waited. The old man opened his lips

to speak, but Lucha ran forward, thrusting herself between him and Roger.

"It's a lie," she cried. "Oh, my father, it's a lie. He didn't do it. I know all about it. I *know*. It isn't true."

Don Hernando didn't believe her. He tried to push her aside.

"I can read English, my daughter," he said coldly. "A man who murders women cannot remain in this valley. He must leave at once."

"Ignacio put it there," cried Lucha desperately. "Ignacio is a traitor. Listen, Father. He's found the mine. He wants to make slaves of all the Indians. He's a friend of General Marso. That's where he got the paper. They sent him another, too, with a message on it."

DON HERNANDO seemed somewhat taken aback. He hesitated, but not for long.

"That has nothing to do with it," he said. "I will attend to Ignacio, if what you say is true. But this American murderer of women cannot stay here. He cannot continue to know a daughter of the Torreons."

Lucha became very calm.

"Father," she said in an even, quiet voice, *"where is that machine-gun?"*

"The machine-gun? Why, Ignacio borrowed it half an hour ago. He wanted to practice with it."

Even while he was speaking, a change came over the old man's face.

"That's all he needs!" cried Lucha.

"Rodrigo," demanded Don Hernando, "is this true about Ignacio?"

Rodrigo didn't answer directly, but he motioned two Indians to step forward. Roger recognized them at once as village chiefs. They began talking excitedly in their own language. Don Hernando listened carefully, his face growing white.

"They're telling him all you told me," explained Lucha. "They say Ignacio gathered his partisans together this morning. They are waiting for him somewhere across the valley. The chiefs heard about it an hour ago. They came here to give the warning."

"How many are there?" asked Roger quickly.

"I don't know. Wait a minute."

As soon as the chiefs finished their tale, Lucha touched her father's elbow.

"Father," she said, "Don Roger gave me this same warning half an hour ago. Ignacio offered him a share in the silver mine. He refused. He is loyal to you and to me."

Don Hernando looked at Roger doubtfully, his eyes not quite so cold.

"Believe me, Father," pleaded Lucha. "I *know* he didn't do that thing. I'm absolutely sure of it."

"Señor Phillips," said the old man slowly, "I shall want to talk with you later. Just now I have other things to do."

Roger was about to speak, but Lucha touched his arm.

"Don't," she said.

Together they watched Don Hernando. He was no longer a mild, cultivated elderly gentleman, but a commander in the midst of a battle. In a loud voice he shouted orders to the Indians in their own language. They scattered in various directions, running like cats. Rodrigo and Carlos dashed into the house.

One Indian went to the two great bells outside the arch, snatched up a hammer and began striking the green metal with all his might. The bells rang a loud, rapid rhythmical tune like a bugle-call.

"That's the call to arms," said Lucha in Roger's ear above the clang of the bells. "I've heard it twice before."

THINGS began to happen—many things, and quickly. Indians in the fields dropped their tools, left their plows in the furrows, ran toward the great house. The two uncles staggered out through the archway, burdened with rifles and cartridge-belts. They dumped them down on the ground and returned for more. Little clouds of dust were moving along the distant roads. Shouts echoed from the nearest village, women's screams, the beat of horses' hoofs.

Roger watched with amazement. He'd never seen anything like this. Only a few minutes passed before the whole grove was swarming with armed men, some on horses, more afoot. Little children were dashing about, screaming with excitement. Rifles were tossed from hand to hand. Men were shouting, horses rearing. The bells were still ringing their wild tune. The valley had sprung to arms.

"Lucha," cried Roger suddenly, "I've got to get into this scrap."

He broke away and went over to Don Hernando. The old man looked around.

"I can fight," shouted Roger above the uproar. "I *want* to fight. Later we can talk together."

Don Hernando hesitated; then he held out his hand.

"You are a brave man, Don Roger, and I need you now. I believe what my

daughter says about you. I've been a fool. I've suspected Ignacio ever since he returned from the United States. The Indians have warned me in their own way, but I was blind. I have no son of my own. I loved him, so I did nothing. Yes, you may fight, Don Roger. There'll be plenty of fighting to do."

"My orders?" cried Roger eagerly.

"Report to Rodrigo."

Roger felt a touch on his elbow. Pablo was standing beside him.

"We are grateful, Don Roger," said the young Indian.

"Well, I tried to do what you asked me, Pablo, but it wasn't as simple as we thought. I told Lucha about Ignacio. She told her father. You know the rest."

"I want you to speak to *my* father," said Pablo.

He led the way to a group of Indians near the wall of the house. In their midst was the old chief who'd welcomed Roger to the valley at the meeting the night before. He carried his silver-headed cane.

"This is my father," said Pablo.

Roger took the Indian's hand. Neither spoke, but they looked into each other's eyes with perfect understanding. Just then the bells stopped ringing, and the sudden silence gave a curious solemn emphasis to the old man's speech.

"Four hundred years ago," he said slowly, "we brought a young Spaniard into this valley. He was our prisoner, but we watched him and talked with him. We saw he was a man of honor, so we give him our liberty to guard. You are also a man of honor," continued the old man. "You will guard our liberty too."

Roger lowered his eyes. He was thinking of the tabloid newspaper, still posted on the palm-trunk only a few yards away. The old Indian raised his staff and pointed to the paper.

"They have told me what that paper says. You have had trouble in your own country. But"—he waved his hand in an eloquent gesture—"that is nothing, the chattering of monkeys far away. We know what you are, Don Roger. The rest is nothing."

ROGER'S eyes were grateful. He was about to speak, but he heard Rodrigo calling his name.

"Go with God," said Pablo's father. "It was God who sent you here."

Roger turned away abruptly so his feelings wouldn't show.

"These people trust me too much," he thought bitterly. "Pretty soon I'll be kidding myself I never did that thing at all. I wish my memory weren't so good."

Rodrigo was sitting his horse with a rifle in his hand and two glittering cartridge-belts across his broad chest.

"Ignacio has gone to the old fort across the valley," he announced. "He has thirty men with him, and he has the machine-gun. We must take the fort at all costs. We cannot defend the valley with a well-armed enemy in our rear."

"Who's going to attack the valley?"

"General Marso."

"How do you know?"

"We captured one of Ignacio's men and questioned him. The General will attack as soon as he gets a message from here."

"Who are the men with Ignacio?"

"Indians—traitors to their own people and to us. I heard rumors of this, Don Roger, but I was a fool, and blind. Yesterday we could have crushed the whole conspiracy with a word. Only a few of the Indians are traitors. But now it is too late. We've got to fight our own people as well as General Marso."

"Let's get going," cried Roger eagerly.

Rodrigo dismounted and led his horse to the great arch where Don Hernando stood, with Lucha and her two aunts. Roger followed. Carlos appeared, and joined them. Don Hernando shook hands with his two brothers-in-law.

"Guard the pass well," he said to Carlos. "We'll reinforce you as soon as possible." He turned to Rodrigo. "Take the fort, my brother."

THEN the old man looked at Roger. "Señor Phillips," he said slowly. "I want to thank you in advance for your loyalty in this crisis. I cannot say anything more now."

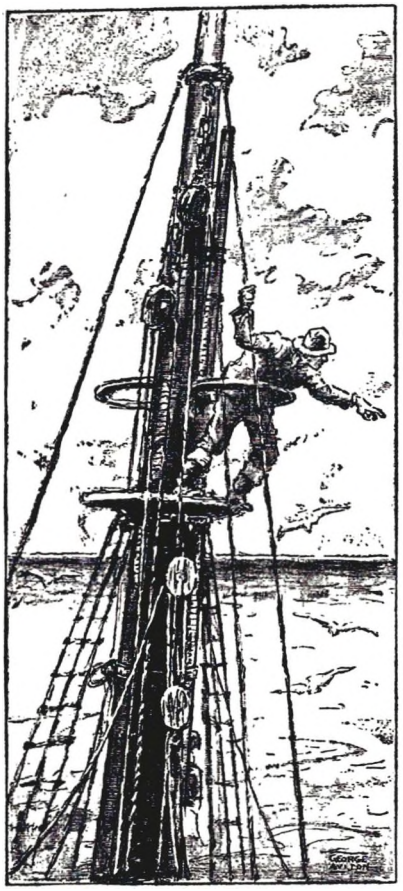
"But I can say more," cried Lucha suddenly. She ran forward, threw her arms around Roger's neck and kissed him on the lips. "Roger dear," she sobbed, "you're fighting for me. Do be careful. Don't get hurt."

Roger put his arm around her and held her tightly. Rodrigo and Carlos looked on, smiling at the scene, apparently well pleased, but Don Hernando's face was wholly without expression. He didn't seem angry, but he didn't show in any way that he approved.

"There's no time to waste," he said quietly.

The dramatic conclusion of this fine novel will appear in our forthcoming November issue.

From Hangtown to the Sea



Illustrated by George Avison

The author of "Piping the Devil" offers a grimly dramatic tale of the days of the Forty-niners.

By KENNETH PERKINS

A BONE-CHILLING wind from the Cordillera kept the crew below at cards or at sleep, or at carving whalebone trinkets for their womenfolk in Salem. There was only one, besides the helmsman and look-out, who preferred the deck.

This was a tall girl in a bonnet of shirred satin with a panache of ostrich-tips that flayed madly in the icy wind. Her dress was an astounding creation of bustled and basqued alpaca flounces whipped out of its arbitrary lines into the diviner form of a woman's figure.

As she stood there with great masses of light reflected from the billowing sails, a lank dark man prowled up from the main companionway and slipped silently into the shadow of the caboose immediately aft. At the same instant, without being seen, the woman pressed her slim body against the mainmast between the two pumps, crouching, holding her skirts to still their rustle. In that attitude she was like a fallen bird dropped from the drift of sea gulls overhead.

She watched tensely as the man passed her and went aft in an accurate line that kept the capstan, the skylight and the mizzenmast between him and the helmsman. The skylight made a triangle of glowing yellow out of the mizzen staysail, against which his lean form was silhouetted, although he kept carefully in the shadow.

For a dreadful moment she could see him as he reached in his coat pocket for a gun, fingering it, peering aft.

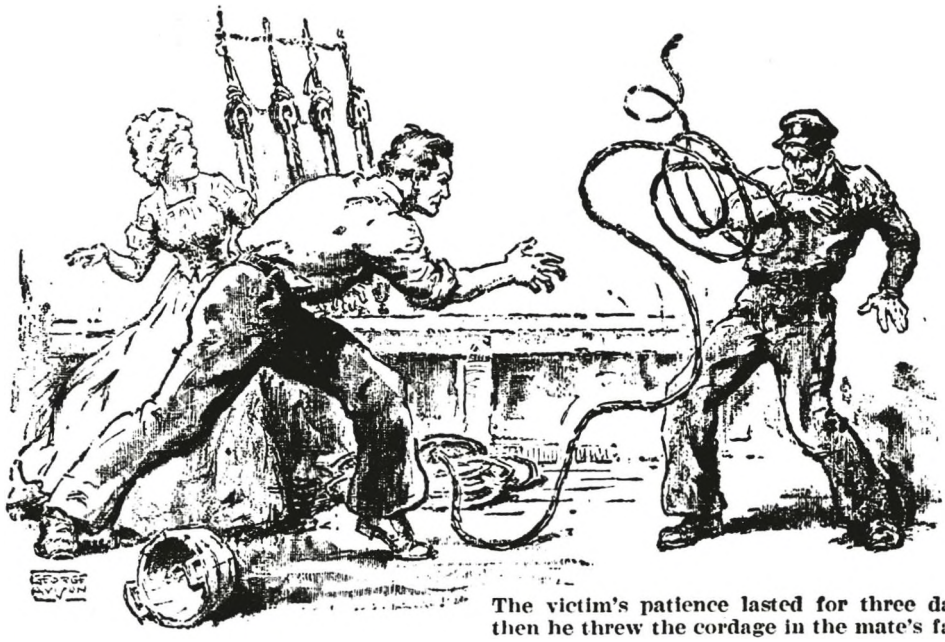
The helmsman was there, his young face lifted and radiant with moonlight as he watched anxiously for the slightest flutter of the edge of the filled sails. As the gun was lifted to shoot him, the girl dashed out with a swish of skirts into the open space of deck between the mizzen and mainmast, and as suddenly lapsed to a strutting walk. Again she might be likened to a bird frightened from its covert and then stopping with a whim to spread its gorgeous feathers.

The lean man jerked his gun behind his back and relaxed unnaturally.

"Can it be possible, Miss Wynthrop, that you're on deck in this blow?"

"I'm watching the horizon, hoping to catch another sight of that spout the look-out reported."

"We're holding over more for the coast," the man said casually. "The skipper thinks there's more chance of finding it, or others, in shoal water. He forgets that it's not a gray we're hunting. It's the gray that likes shoal water."



The victim's patience lasted for three days; then he threw the cordage in the mate's face!

"What type of whale are you hunting, Mr. Leroyd?" she asked in her gentle voice.

"From what the look-out said, the spout didn't slant like a sperm. Nor would a sperm be in this cold water. It might be a southern right—which would be a blessing, its oil being the best, and its bone the finest and longest."

"Are you sure that's what you're hunting?"

"Well, now! The spout shot straight. I can make no guess except by the spout, and the particular locality of these hunting-grounds."

"Then I am very curious to find the answer. I shall stay up on deck with the hope of seeing the spout again."

"You mean—all night?" Mr. Leroyd gasped.

"At least until the sailor's rattle sounds for the new relief."

By this time he had smuggled his gun into a back pocket. He lit a pipe in the lee of the mast, the girl staring aghast at the sudden illumination of his face—hard, bony, marble-eyed, yet complacent. The wind sliced the smoke away from his eyes, and she saw them for a quick moment staring into hers; then he bowed, and with an easy shrug turned into the galley.

She went aft and sat on the gear-casing almost at the helmsman's side. She waited there a long time before speaking, anxiously watching the door through which the man with the gun had disappeared. Nor did she speak before carefully weighing her words. Here was a problem of intrigue and death which demanded a special technique, a special conscience. . . .

This girl had the necessary equipment. She inherited it from her father, whom she had just left in California. Intrigue was his forte. He was not exactly what the good people of Salem would call a godly man. Most of his business consisted in cheating the Mexican agent, the historic Benito Diaz, out of the outrageous imposts on Yankee goods. He helped our Yankee skippers land their cargoes of velveteen and fustian, false pearls and bishop's lace and Boston hardware without duty. He was a smuggler, to be frank—and also a hero. He was loved by New England merchants. Ungodly though he was, he made them rich.

When his daughter was eighteen, her home village of Yerba Buena became almost overnight the meeting-place of all the adventurers of the world, and was named San Francisco. Neaf Wynthrop worried about the motherless girl. She had an exciting type of beauty bequeathed by a Spanish mother. On her brown arms, her lovely chest, her neck, her ears, she wore heathenish ornaments given to her by her father's cronies, skippers in the China trade. She wore silks, vivid shawls, jeweled combs. And here were bearded miners from the goldfields looking at her, not to mention the gamblers who had San Francisco under their thumbs. She must be whisked out of the devil's reach before it was too late.

Accordingly Neaf Wynthrop deputized one of his friends, the master of a whaler who was returning from the off-shore hunting at Kamchatka, to take the girl back to Salem and her Yankee grandparents.

ON board the *Joseph Newton,* Carmelita found she had been transported out of the soft foggy world of San Francisco and its *caballeros,* its songs and dances and fiestas, into the rock-bound desolation of New England, where every man was ruled by his conscience and the fear of the Almighty God.

Of all this crew that worshiped her mutely from the respectful distance of the forecastle, there was one who never looked at her. He was a slim, rugged youth with deep-set gray eyes, a proud sad mouth and old hands—hands that were scarred and calloused by swinging a pickax in the gold placers. He was not dressed as a seaman. He had no pea-jacket, but a rawhide coat and tight black trousers over his well-worn boots. At San Francisco, when all who had no share in the oil deserted the ship for the diggings, the skipper had taken on any hands he could find on the waterfront.

She was intrigued with him the first day when, as they stood out through the Golden Gate, the first mate laughed at him for making a granny knot. The girl saw the flash of murderous light in the youth's eyes at the taunt. He doubled his bony fists, then opened them as if to rend the mate's throat. But noticing the girl at the rail, he contained himself.

The mate was astonished at this stark signal of insubordination. He immediately piped up the carpenter and ordered him to break the points of the knives of all the waterfront rats who had shipped at San Francisco. The girl had heard at her father's house that this was merely the observance of the law, and she noticed that all the new hands submitted to the ritual without a murmur. But the eyes of the young gold-miner flashed again with fury and frustration. The mate dismissed the other hands, then went up to the youth and faced him.

"Where are you from?"

"Slumgullion and Poker Flat, if it is any of your affair."

"Where are you going after this voyage? That may be more of my affair." He laughed harshly, glancing at the girl, and then said for her benefit: "You are going to be a farmer, no doubt, judging from your manner of handling a rope."

"You happen to be right. I intend purchasing a farm in Maryland and raising horses."

"A *gentleman* farmer! But why, then, did you ship before the mast?"

"I need all the dust I've panned to purchase horses."

"We have a saying in Salem that it is better to steal a horse and go to jail than go whaling."

"Not in California. They hang a man there for that offense. And for asking too many questions, they shoot him."

The girl gasped. Mr. Leroyd only smiled hideously. "You are a man of some spirit. But six months' journey around the Horn may be sufficient to break it. We do not use men with too much spirit to man the braces. Your duties for the present will be those of ship's house-maid."

Carmelita said nothing to the youth when the mate left, although she yearned to. He seemed to be in need of guidance and mothering. There was a desperate sort of pride about him which awoke her sympathy and fear—and likewise her admiration. It was the type of recklessness which had made her father famous.

For a while, she noticed, he accepted his menial duties. The mate had him working for hours at brightening gilt with flowers of sulphur and boiled garlic, fighting the rats with powdered corn and glass, soaking mildewed sails in salt, and lamp-wicks in vinegar. She began to fear that he would stand this degradation for but a limited time. Repeatedly she saw that look of hate in his eyes when the mate spoke to him, or even when he passed by. She feared the youth would strike him. She thought of confiding in her father's crony, old Captain Samuel Cotton, but knew that this would be meddling in the ship's routine. Wisely, and luckily, she never mentioned the matter to the skipper. Instead, she mentioned it to the mate himself.

The skipper had retired, heavy with rum. He took it for granted that Carmelita, for whom he was acting as chaperon, would not sit up drinking manzanilla with the mate. But he was mistaken. Carmelita was not like the women of Salem. She had been brought up in the Spanish art of coquetry, climaxed with the roaring life of the Forty-niners.

THE mate was beside himself with astonishment and joy. This girl wanted life! She even asked that they have some music. She had heard one of the

sailors playing an accordion in the forecastle. The sailor was piped up—a leathery-faced frightened little man—and ordered to play "Oh, Susanna," Spanish *tristes*, and songs of the mining-camps. The mate and the girl sat together on the opposite side of the table, with the fan of the hanging lamp shading them, the sad pull and wheeze of the music mingling with the creak of the ship's timber and the wash of the sea.

He reached for her hand, but she drew it away, flicking her fan open casually. She knew she must speak before he tried again.

"That landsman who incurred your displeasure on the first day does not seem to like the duties you've assigned him."

"Which is my reason for assigning them."

"You railed at him within my hearing. Naturally a youth of his mettle could not accept it. It should be forgotten."

"It's the young hellion who won't forget. I've seen him prowling around on deck at night. I'm blowed if he's not waiting for a chance to jump me like a thug. He's what those Californians call a desperado. I knew it when I first saw his eyes."

"I suppose you will kill him."

"I shall if he attacks me. Naturally."

"Yes. Naturally."

Her voice was so queer that his eyes snapped up to hers.

"My father told me," she said, "that the mate of this ship had killed a man on the voyage around the Horn."

"I was acquitted at the District Court at San Francisco before which seamen are tried. Captain Cotton said I was morally in the right. The man struck me, and—" He checked himself, flushing. "Is it for the purpose of reviewing my past that you suggested this pleasant little party?"

"I merely wanted to ask a favor: that this landsman Buck Purdee be given the work of a mariner and a man."

"He is a landlubber and not suited to the handling of ropes. But," he said smoothly, "my earnest desire, and the desire of Captain Cotton, is that every wish you make known to us be granted."

THE next morning, when they sat at breakfast with the mates and boatsteerers and skipper, Mr. Leroyd said to the latter:

"That landsman from the California diggings seems to have got his sea-legs by now. I believe I could make a good seaman out of him if you turned him over to me for instruction."

The skipper grunted.

"We're short-handed, and the boy is a landlubber who can't lay a hand on a rope without making a cat's-cradle."

"That's just my point. Since we bespoke that ship from the Tumbez and Paita bases, and learned that whales have been sighted off the coast of Chile, we shall need every hand well trained for the work when the time comes. We have only three men who know the duties of a tub oarsman."

Captain Cotton admitted that there was much to be said for the suggestion. He would consent, provided that every moment of the sailor's time be put in sedulous application, so he would be able to make all the principal knots without thought and with immediacy of action.

WHEN the mate summoned his victim aft and ordered him to sit on the deck at his feet with a bit of cordage, he illustrated how to make not many knots, but only one. They were on the poop, the girl near by. She quickly noticed that the mate's method of teaching was peculiar. He showed that this one knot—a clove hitch on a bight—resembled several others; and whenever the student was on the point of mastering the puzzle, the mate pointed out its similarity to a magnus hitch, a halyard bend or a round turn and half hitch. Quite a trick!

It confused the novice, then frustrated him, then maddened him. He must have seen after many an attempt, sweating, gulping, puzzling, that a clove hitch on a bight could not be regarded as a knot at all. It was elusive. It was nothing. One wrong twist, and it dissolved into a straight rope. The right twist, and it caught—but could not be described. It was a figment, a worry, a phantasmagoric thing of geometry, a snare.

Mr. Leroyd obviously had picked out his victim's weakest point. And he must have known that if a man has no adaptability for cordage, the interlacements and tangles have a very direct effect on his nerves. The victim's patience lasted for only three days. Then he threw the cordage smack in the mate's face!

Mr. Leroyd turned splotchy white; but conscious that the girl had given a breathless cry, he avoided a scene.

"I shall report to the skipper," he said, smiling, "that you not only refuse to learn, but that you have shown a definite

attitude of insubordination as thanks for my pains."

He went aft, swaggering, for he had won his first advantage.

Carmelita hurried to the sailor when the mate was gone, and said gently:

"Don't think so hard. The sense must be in your fingers, not your head. See how I sew the picot on this lace without thought." Then she added, lowering her voice: "He is attempting to worry you into striking him. That is how he killed a sailor on the voyage here—and with impunity. He beat him to death with a belaying-pin."

Buck Purdee nodded slowly. "They have told of that in the forecastle, and I believe it. It's no galley yarn. The man was frail. They put him in irons, for the skipper thought him insensible with drink—and he died. . . . The mate shall not provoke me to strike him, I promise you."

Her warning came just in time; for at the next session, Carmelita noticed that the mate had a gun. He had it in his hip pocket, but the bulge was unmistakable. From that day on, Purdee was subservient. He fumbled, swallowing hard, his forehead wet, his eyes glaring with worry. The mate continued his distracting trick of showing how a mere twist would turn a clove hitch into a halyard bend. He was patient, insidious. He wove knots about his victim's brains like a spider.

BUT Buck Purdee saw the girl's slim brown fingers plying at that lace; and in watching, his own fingers became cannier. The knot worked all of a sudden, like a miracle. He got it, and clung to it. For ten times, as the mate tried to baffle him with further instructions, he made a clove hitch on a bight.

Then Mr. Leroyd changed his tactics. He taught him no other knots. Instead, he made him do that same one over and over again for hours. It was a new and cumulative torture. How Purdee must have hated that combination of twists! How he must have dreamed of it at night! Every repetition had chafed at his nerves, as stays chafe at certain points when a ship at anchor rolls steadily, forever, with the run of the groundswell. The next day Carmelita hoped that, with this knot mastered, the mate would teach another. It would be a relief. But the pupil was taught no other knot that day, or any day thereafter. He was kept at twisting a clove hitch on a bight, hour after hour and day after day.

The mate, pleasantly and congenially, without letting the crew know of his purpose or enmity, would set a forecastle hand to watch the tortured man. "When he can make it thirty times in a minute, I will consider he has learned the lesson."

For long periods of time the mate himself would keep an eye on his victim. He watched, even while he sat in the quarter boat taking bearings. For days, as the whaler piled up the south latitudes, Buck Purdee made a clove hitch on a bight. He could make it now with miraculous speed, for the pattern was a deep grove in his brain, burned there.

Carmelita saw him sitting like a crazy man making movements with his hands, unthinking. He began to mumble to himself crazily, and the girl passing by heard him. "If the mate comes here again, I will tie this thing about his neck. I will strike him. He'll be beaten to a ham hanging up to dry before he can draw his gun!"

IT was the unsubstantiated word of the look-out that a spout had been sighted far away to windward which changed the course not only of the whaling-ship but of Buck Purdee's destiny. That night, although the spout and the whale were lost in darkness, Captain Samuel Cotton opened a bottle of Spanish sherry with his mate and Carmelita.

"Since we may redden our harpoons before another day is ended," he announced, "it occurred to me to examine this landlubber you have been instructing, lest we have to use him for a tub oarsman. I find, Mr. Leroyd, that your patient instruction has accomplished little. I examined him carefully. I asked him to make a heaving-line bend, then a sheepshank, a stunner hitch, a half crown and a wall knot double. He made a knot each time with such lightning rapidity as to astonish me. Never have I seen any knot spring into being with such sleight of hand. The only objection I had was the fact that to every knot I asked for, he responded with a clove hitch on a bight!"

The mate lit his pipe, grinning. "The young sea-cook is incapable of learning," he said. "His mind seems to be forever on some affair. When an order is given, he looks blank, as if startled out of a dream."

"I've noticed that," Captain Cotton admitted. "He seems half mad."

"More than half," Mr. Leroyd agreed.

In that flash of action a man went overboard like a

"The matter worries me," the white-haired old sea-captain said ingenuously. "With the daughter of a dear friend on board"—he nodded anxiously to Carmelita, who was listening like a cat—"I feel that I should not have taken any water-front scum I could find at San Francisco. This landsman from the gold-fields gives me the impression that he might run amuck at any moment. I wish you would inquire into his past. He might be a fugitive, a Sydney duck, a desperado. Find out from those other fo'castle rats who shipped at San Francisco if they know aught of him."

Mr. Leroyd would attend to it.

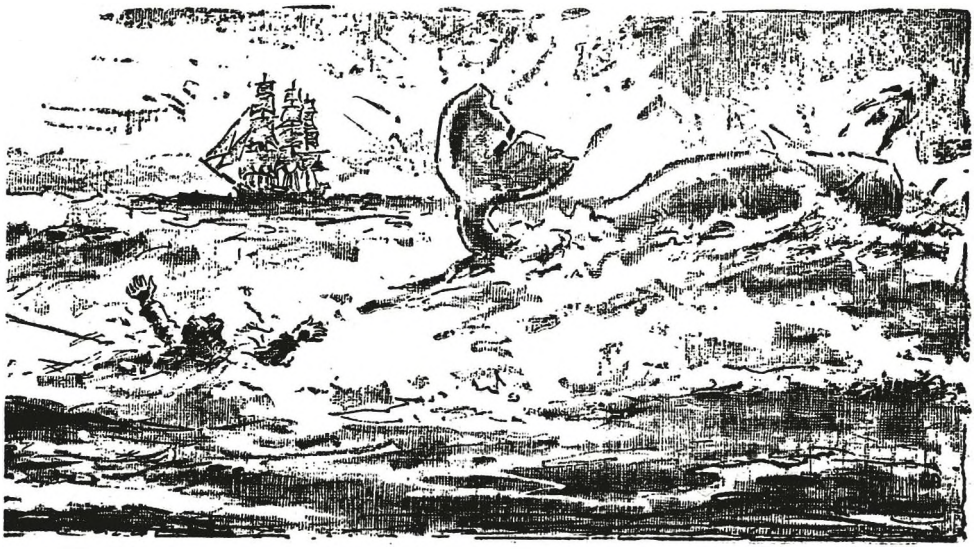
THE watch was changed. Buck Purdee was at the wheel; the skipper, washing down his sherry with grog, reeled off heavily to his bunk. Carmelita stayed up once more with the mate, this time because she had heard him send to the forecastle for the delegation of ragged men who had been picked up on the muddy streets and from the *baile*-houses of the gold-rush town. She was more anxious than the kindly old Captain to find out just who this Buck Purdee was.

One of the forecastle rats, the accordionist, said that he had played in the *cantinas* of Slumgullion and Poker Flat, the mining-camps from which Buck Purdee pretended to have hailed, but had never heard of him. Another, who was returning broken in health and penniless to his farm in Vermont, said that he had seen Buck Purdee in Sacramento, and in one of the camps which might have been Deadman's Bar or Hangtown—he could not remember which. The others had never seen him except on the muddy waterfront of San Francisco the last day, when they were all trying to get passage by shipping on any homeward-bound vessel before the mast.

The mate was not listening to these others. He was saying to himself, but aloud: "Hangtown—Hangtown."

Carmelita read the word on his lips and saw his scowl. Suddenly he dismissed the men and stepped into the cabin immediately aft. He seemed to be very much perturbed, for he left the door in the intervening bulkhead open, and it swung with the roll of the ship, so that Carmelita could see him poring over the log-book. As if sensing the burn of the girl's eyes on his back, he closed the log-book quickly and hurried to his cabin. He avoided her gaze, like one caught in a covert act.

When he was gone, Carmelita slipped into the cabin aft. She wanted to know what connection that log-book had with the famous California mining-camp called Hangtown. She opened it, and turned over pages that were filled with Captain Cotton's fine Spencerian script. It would take all night to read the log of that two years' journey from Salem to the Western Islands, the Brazil Banks, the Horn, the cruise around Masefuera and Juan Fernandez, and then the successful hunt for gray whales in the North Pacific. It was only because Mr. Leroyd in his excitement had puffed his pipe into sparks and dropped some burning bits of tobacco on one of the pages, that she guessed at the spot he had been reading.



jumping-jack on a string, as the whale-line whizzed.

It was that part of the log which concerned the wages due to a seaman dying during the voyage, and the itemized list of his effects. The dead seaman was Seth Haven; and in the list Captain Cotton had written with meticulous care:

1 pack playing cards. 1 Bible. 1 horse carved in whalebone. 17 $ in silver. 3 letters from one signed "Paul" (no surname) dated at Hangtown, California.

Carmelita rushed up on deck by the after companionway at about the same moment that the mate, who had stopped in his cabin further forward for a gun, came up the main companionway amidships. She intercepted the mate, held him with small talk, and announced finally that she would stay on deck "to watch for that spout." When the mate, defeated temporarily in his murderous purpose, went below, she sat for a long time on the gear-casing close to the helmsman. At last she said calmly:

"You knew Seth Haven."

The helmsman stiffened. Slowly he turned to her, his hand still gripping the spokes.

"Does the mate know?"

"Yes."

"Who else?"

"No one." She waited for him to speak, but he turned his face to the sails again, his jaw clamped.

"I shall tell the skipper that he must protect you," she said like a mother.

"No! By God! The skipper would know why I came aboard!"

"But how can you defend yourself?"

"By killing him before he kills me."

She wrung her hands. "God in heaven! You can not do that! You must not! It will be murder!"

"There are many in San Francisco—godly men—who have taken the law into their own hands. I have appointed myself a Vigilante to avenge my brother's death."

"He was your brother!" the girl gasped. She thought a long time before she said: "If you kill this man, what will you gain? Doubtless you have loved ones at home. If you are hanged for this, they will suffer the rest of their lives."

"My brother and I were orphans. I have no loved ones left."

"There may be some one who loves you," Carmelita said.

His face was still lifted to the vast light of the sails. She could see that he had no thought for what she had just said. There was but the one dominant yearning. His brother's brutal death must be avenged.

FOR another hour she sat there, but neither spoke. What was there to be said? She loved him. But he must kill Leroyd. She sat there, not to put this stark truth in repetitious words, but to guard him; she even followed at his heels after he had sounded the sailor's rattle for the new relief. He went to the forecastle by way of the decks, and she even went below with him to the forecastle door itself. It was here that she reached for his hand.

"I beg you," she said, her young face shining because of her tears, "do it so that it will seem like an act of God!"

In the icy sunrise a call from the lookout awoke the whaler and her crew.

"Blows! Blows! There blows!"

The ship's carpenter was first on deck, shouting:

"Blows! She blows! There again!"

"Val! Val!" shouted the Swedish cooper.

"She blows and breeches!" other voices joined as every hand stampeded up on deck. "Haul back the yard, hoist and swing!" Captain Cotton said, wiping his chin, for he had spat to windward—his only mark of excitement. The ship, being hove to, answered with a bang of canvas, a lurch, a shudder as if standing aback with surprise. In the slob ice of the horizon, the whale's spout looked precisely like one of Carmelita's ostrich feathers puffed up by a rhythmic wind.

CARMELITA dressed and ran above, searching frantically for the one loved face. The mates were manning the larboard, waist and bow boats—all on the port side, choosing their men in turn like boys for a baseball game.

Carmelita found him aft at the larboard boat, which, as of ancient custom, was the first mate's. Her heart jerked, blanching her face, when she discovered Leroyd had chosen him—the greenest man on board—for his own boat. She drew him aside before they lowered, her eyes burning, her lips gray.

"Don't turn and look at the whale when you're rowing," she whispered. "The mate will crack you on the head and be thanked for it! Keep your eye aft on him—he'll be steering. And don't get your feet snagged in the whale-line. I've heard skippers tell my father what happens: it might happen to you—"

"Lower away and lay me on that hump!" Captain Cotton ordered softly.

Carmelita hung eagerly over the rail.

Her lover was gone from her grip, out of her reach, seated amidships of the double-ended craft. The harpooner and bow oarsman sat at his back toward the prow. At his feet was the tub oarsman, then a Kanaka, being the lightest man, at the stroke oar. In the stern sheets was Mr. Leroyd. That was the way she saw them stand off.

She prayed fervently. She prayed to the Mother of God whom she had worshiped in the Mission of San Francisco. She prayed to the patron saint of sailors, San Pedro Tomás. Her petition was that her lover had seen the murderous hint in her gorgeous eyes. She had told him how he must save himself in that whale-boat from what might happen; and in telling him she had planted a seed. She was not a girl of Salem. She was her father's daughter. She would condone. She would still love.

The cooper was at the wheel, the cook and the Captain at the rail. No one else was on board—except the one passenger. She stood with the Captain, the latter focusing his glass on the jet of vapory spray and the four boats standing down toward it under sail. Carmelita's hair was blown out wild by the wind, her hands clutching her heart. The boats had lowered their sails now, and their muffled oars loomed in the dim light. With blood pounding in her ears, she thought she could hear the *"choo-choo, choo-oo"*—of the spouting, the gurgle of water piling up in a mountain of white in front of the beast's head. She had a vision of the small unblinking eyes boring into the backs of the oarsmen with monstrous contempt; for the whale had seen them and turned on them.

THE men were small shadows in the icy air, but Carmelita knew that the splotch of brown amidships was Buck Purdee, the rest being blue-black. She sensed that now was the hideous moment when Leroyd had her lover at his mercy.

The whale half breeched. "A forty-barrel bull!" said Captain Samuel Cotton. It was a more important observation than his cursing at what happened next. It happened in an instant of mad confusion. The larboard boat was the first to get close enough for the harpooner. He struck the iron up to the hitches, and the coils of tarred hemp in the tub twisted open like a broken spring. With the end of the harping staff deep in its lungs, the whale lobtailed, breached, beat its sides with its fins. The spout turned red, raining clots of blood on boat and men. It banged its tail on the sea with cannon-burst that clapped across the distance between and seemed to crash against the girl's skull. Then she saw it bolt for the nearest ice.

Somewhere in that flash of lurid action a man went overboard. He went as the whale-line whizzed, and as the tub oarsman drenched it with water to stop its burning on the bollard. Carmelita did not know which man was lost. She knew that the moment the harpooner let fly, he had dropped back, and the mate had gone forward with a lance to take his place and finish the kill. This she knew

not entirely by her eyes, but by her knowledge of the ritual.

Whoever it was, he went over like a jumping-jack on a string—arms and legs in four directions. The whale sounded, making eight knots speed, so that the harpooner, lest the boat be dragged under ice, hacked the rope free.

"One lubbery cockroach less," the skipper growled; and he spat and swore. "And good riddance to him!"

The girl was panting. Her eyes did not tell her whether it was a tiny splotch of brown that was missing, or one of the others. She was only sure by intuition. She stopped panting; she got her breath; she clutched her hands tightly together over her bodice to stop the mad slugging of her heart.

The skipper was not thinking of the lost man, but of the forty barrels of oil that would increase the wealth of all on board—that is to say, all who were on lays. He screwed his eye on the sea, and the four boats making bolder with the drift ice and brash. The wind had compressed the ice into a sludge fathoms deep; and under this roof which was neither water nor land nor iceberg, the whale might have stayed for an hour, except that it was mortally wounded. It floated from under the pan four miles off, rolled fins out, mawed and lay still.

IT was several hours before the boats, under sail, tallied on and towed the dead whale alongside.

Captain Cotton had by this time almost forgotten the incident of the lost man. The flensing and boiling were all that concerned him now. His mind was full of ambergris and oil, of blubber and blanket strips and "Bible leaves."

It was Carmelita who saw him first—the slim landlubber reclining lazily on his elbow on the midship thwart. And she saw that the man with the steering-oar was not the mate.

Mr. Leroyd, the mate, was gone. . . .

With a very slight shudder of her smooth shoulders, she imagined Leroyd floating in black water, staring with his marble eyes underneath that purgatory of slob ice.

When Buck Purdee came aboard with the rest, she said nothing to him. She merely caught his eyes, clung to them with hers. She heard the harpooner explaining to the skipper and the rest that the mate's leg was snagged in the whale-line. It was due doubtless to the fact that they had so many green hands on board—that Kanaka at the stroke oar whose business it was to coil the line, and the tub oarsman who had never done the work before. Even the bow oarsman, an old salt, was excited because the whale turned on them. He performed his duties—taking the rings out of the beckets and the sheaths off the lance-heads—with the awkward frenzy of a landsman. And of course there was the greenest man of the crew at the midship oar; although the skipper agreed he could not be blamed, for he had no duties with the rope. In fact, no one could be blamed.

"This was an act of the Almighty," the skipper said; "and I shall so write it in my report. It's happened before, and will happen again when there are landlubbers in a boat who make cat's-cradles of everything they touch. Mr. Leroyd was a good mariner, and his loss means much to me. We shall lay aft for a memorial service for his soul—after the boiling."

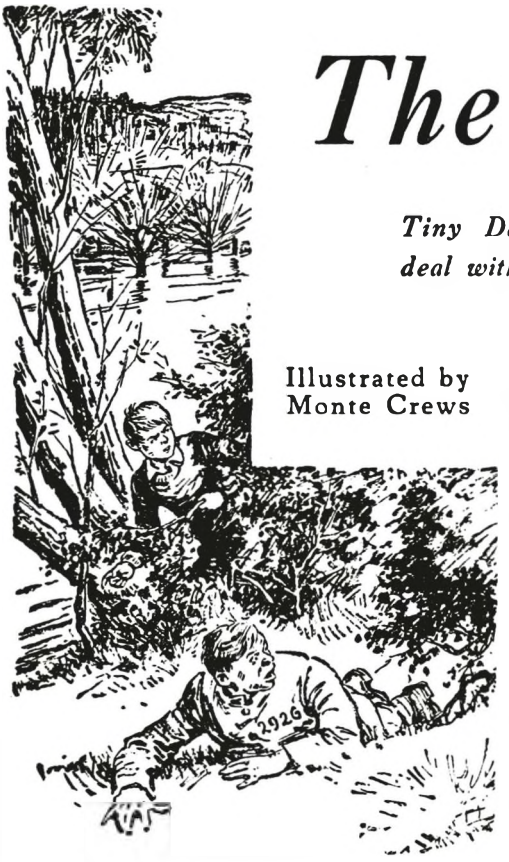
The ship turned into a hilarious sort of inferno. A roar and stench went up when the whale's belly was cut. Fires flamed; men stripped to the waist; decks heaved under the strain of the great tackles, and ran with water and oil. Black fetid smoke enveloped the pursed sails, the shrouds, the decks, the smoky hell between-decks. It smudged the half-naked choppers black. It oozed into the satin and alpaca basqued flounces of Carmelita, although she still remained the one figure of light, a will-o'-the wisp in the jet fog.

She searched out Buck Purdee, her slippers squashing with oil. She had dipped some hardtack in the boiling oil, making a doughnut, and this she took to one of the men. At least that would seem to be her motive for going near the try-works.

SHE drifted close to him, and for a moment they were in their own sky, buoyed up, enveloped and hidden from all others by black clouds. She saw his eyes behind the mask of smudge, and found them for the first time without pain or distraction or fury. For the first time those eyes were free to look at this girl and see her.

"When he was flipped out of the whale-boat to his doom," she whispered, "what sort of knot did the Almighty contrive to snag his leg?"

"A clove hitch on a bight," said Seth Haven's brother.



The Case of

Tiny David and the State Police deal with three dangerous problems.

Illustrated by Monte Crews

"THE pneumonia special," declared Lieutenant James Crosby, as he indicated an open touring-car, "is yours." He peeled off his gloves, and chose the most comfortable chair on the porch of the general store. "The good deed, if any, also is yours. All yours. Mrs. Crosby's boy wants no part of it."

Lieutenant Edward David, the oversized man known to the Black Horse Troop, New York State Police, as Tiny, grinned sheepishly as he slouched behind the wheel of the troop-car.

"Just the social-service worker in you, I suppose," continued Mr. Crosby, warming to his subject. Then, mixing his metaphors a trifle: "You are big enough, and ugly enough to be a St. Bernard. All you need is a keg tied around your neck."

Mr. David calmly lighted a cigarette, and remained silent.

"Here." Mr. Crosby fumbled in his pocket, produced a roll of bills, selected one and tossed it to his companion. "Put that in the keg. A fool and his money—"

Whereupon Mr. David drove away, for the ritual that invariably accompanied the start of this particular mission had been observed. He chuckled to himself as he piloted the car from the main road to a dirt lane that led through the woods. That was one of the nice things about Jim Crosby: you always could depend on him to react to any situation in the typical Crosby manner. Part of that reaction, and not the least part, was the fact that he would maintain complete silence regarding this transaction, as far as outsiders were concerned.

Not that there was anything to be ashamed about. This just was one of those things that crop up in the life of a cop. No use to let the world know about them. People are funny. They might not understand.

Tiny David had been the moving spirit at a certain going-away party tendered one George Genhart, whose specialty had been burglary, and whose present address was Linton Prison. That caused Mr. David no regrets; for to use his own words, Mr. Genhart was a leading member of the better-dead club.

The law makes exact provision for the George Genharts, but it is less definite regarding the persons unfortunate enough to lead lives that are bound with theirs by ties of blood. In this case it was an aged mother, and a youthful brother, about eleven years old.

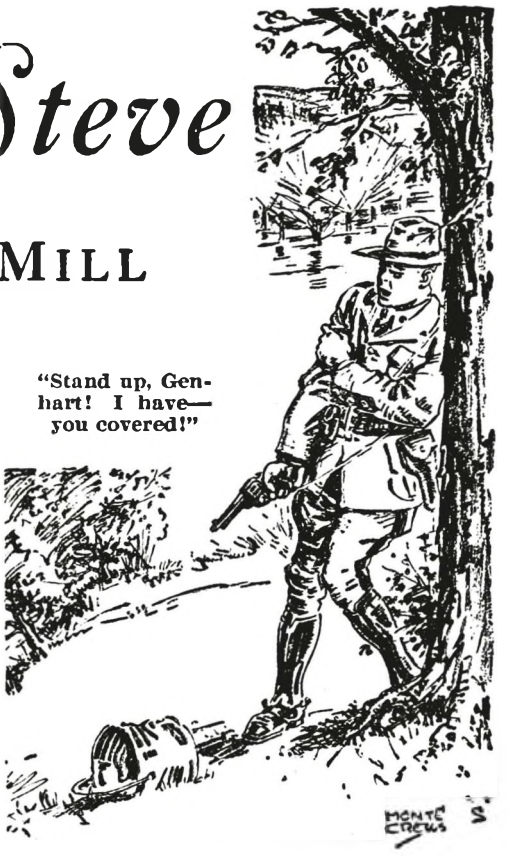
Mrs. Genhart had found a place in Tiny David's heart, even while he was engaged in sending her son away. She was an honest, hard-working, motherly old soul. The trooper had admired her clumsy efforts to shield George, attempts in which her inherent sense of right clashed with her entirely natural inclinations. He had made the mental observation that she acted just as he would have liked his mother to act, assuming she was alive, and assuming he was a no-good so-and-so like George.

Tiny David also liked Steve, the youthful brother, but that was strictly a one-way attachment. George was Steve's god. This man in gray had triumphed over his idol, but Steve was loyal. He wanted none of the trooper.

The road wound along the bank of a roaring mountain stream, and Tiny Da-

Young Steve

By ROBERT R. MILL



"Stand up, Genhart! I have—you covered!"

vid wished that he had thought to bring his fishing tackle. Plenty of trout near those rapids. Perhaps he could borrow some kit from the youngster. Their mutual love of the sport might break down the barrier.

There was more than his natural desire to have all youngsters like him, in his desire to win the friendship of the boy. There was good stuff in Steve—far more than his older brother ever had, or ever would have. He was a bright kid; witness, his standing at school. And now, and in the next few years to come, he was at the turning-point.

"Jail-fodder or regular people," was the way Tiny David summed it up.

He halted the car before a cabin perched beside the stream. A woman appeared at the door, wiping her hands on her apron. Her face lighted with pleased recognition when she saw the trooper.

"Hello, Mrs. Genhart. Been sort of neglecting you. Had a lot of chasing around to do. How did you make out during the hunting season?"

The woman sighed.

"Not so good. Had two sports from the city the first five days. They roomed together, and beat me down on the price until I just about broke even. The leaves were too thick for hunting, and when they saw they weren't going to have any luck, they pulled out. Didn't have another boarder during the whole season."

Tiny David smiled.

"Cheer up. What you lose on the peanuts, you make up on the bananas. Little early in the season yet, but in about two weeks or so the trout fishermen will be storming your place so that we will have to give you a man to direct traffic."

A worried look appeared on Mrs. Genhart's face.

"Then they will have to get here before next Monday."

"How come?" asked Tiny David, climbing out of the car, and seating himself on the doorstep.

"The power company is putting in a dam about a mile above us. Going to cut off the flow Monday. They will leave us a thin trickle, but our days of trout fishing will be over. Seems to me the Conservation Department ought to do something about it."

Tiny David shook his head slowly.

"No hope there. Heard Captain Field talking about it the other day. The river isn't in the Adirondack Park, and the company has old franchises and water-rights that allow them to do about what they please with the stream."

HE got to his feet, and entered the cabin, the woman following him. In the living-room was a rough table covered with a white cloth. Tiny David produced two folded bills, and tucked them under the cloth.

The woman's face flushed.

"I don't want you to do that."

"Do what?" Tiny David demanded. "You take boarders, don't you? And don't I hang around here enough to rate being one of the steadies? Anyway, only half of it is mine. The rest has Jim Crosby's name on it."

He sought to change the conversation.

"Heard from George?"

"You aren't going to make it any harder on your mother, are you, Steve?"

"Yes." Mrs. Genhart fumbled in the drawer of the table and produced a letter upon which was stamped, *"Censored by the Warden."* She handed it to the trooper.

Tiny David read it through. Beyond the trite salutation, there was no term of endearment. It contained no word of sympathy for the woman and child forced to struggle along without his support. Half the page was devoted to what the convict wanted his mother to bring him at the time of her next visit. The balance of the letter concerned a coming meeting of the Parole Board, at which time the man hoped his case would be considered.

"Does it sound good?" asked the woman, only partially masking the eagerness in her voice.

Tiny David pretended to give the letter a second reading. In the first place, George was not eligible for parole. The fact that he had received a minimum sentence made his chances less, even when a parole was possible. And in the offices of the District Attorney were two indictments upon which he had not been tried.

"I wouldn't count too much on it," said Tiny David. He glanced about. "Where's Steve?"

The woman looked at an alarm-clock.

"He should be along from school any minute now."

"Good enough," said Tiny David. He walked outside, seated himself comfortably, and lighted a cigarette. "Don't treat me as company. Go right ahead with your work."

It was pleasant there beside the stream, which flowed along with a roar that at times was muffled to the sound of a lullaby. Tiny David stretched lazily. Then he sat up as a boy approached the cabin.

He was a manly chap, with tousled hair and freckles. His clothes were worn, but clean. He was whistling, but the tune ceased abruptly when he spied the trooper.

"Hello, Steve."

The boy faced him defiantly.

"Hello."

Tiny David stood up.

"Swell day to take a smack at those trout. Got an extra rod you can lend me?" He made the suggestion casual. "You might care to come along."

The boy hesitated. He was not skilled in masking his emotions, and he probably didn't even try. He started to say he had no rod, then decided against the falsehood.

"There's a rod inside you can have." There was nothing gracious about the offer.

Tiny David ignored the tone. "How about coming along?"

The boy hesitated. "No," he snapped.

Tiny David shrugged. "Fair enough. We'll skip it. Not much fun fishing alone. I'll be moving along." He paused beside the car. "You don't like me, do you, Steve?"

The boy flushed. "No," he said defiantly.

Tiny David nodded. "I understand. George is your brother, and you think he is a swell guy. That's only natural. I'd be the last one to tell you not to like your brother. But George made a mistake, and it was my job to go after him. You aren't going to make mistakes like that, are you, Steve?"

"You don't have to jaw me," retorted the boy.

"I am not jawing you," Tiny David answered. "You are a smart lad. You know I am telling you the truth when I say that people who make mistakes like that aren't smart." He entered the car. "Think that over, Steve. Forget about me, forget about George, and forget about yourself. Look at it cold. Then think it over. See you later, Steve."

He drove away. . . .

Mr. Crosby, who came down from the porch of the store as the car approached, shook his head sadly.

"Your face lacks the righteous glow that is the property of every successful reformer. What's wrong, Tiny? Doesn't the kid react?"

Tiny David grinned.

"Not exactly. And I made the mistake of reading him a lecture. About the best way in the world to sour a kid on you." His face was serious, and his voice was gruff. "It's like a game, Jim. It's worth winning, and you have a chance to win, but all the odds are against you.." The grin reappeared. "That's what makes it interesting."

Mr. Crosby nodded as he entered the car.

"Just the reformer in you," was his verdict. . . .

They were greeted at the barracks by Captain Charles Field, the commanding officer, who apparently had decided ideas regarding lieutenants riding about the country together.

"Why don't you stop at a gas station, and get some road maps of New England?" he demanded. "You've seen most of the country around here, and there's no reason why you shouldn't do your touring where you will find new things to interest you."

"Yes sir," said Tiny David.

Mr. Crosby was silent. This, his manner indicated, was not his party.

THREE rather uneventful weeks went by when, early one morning, the drowsy night sergeant was called to action by the ringing of the bell on the teletype machine. He leaped to his feet, and bent over the machine as the keys clicked out the message:

"Escaped from Linton Prison: George Genhart, 34. Employed as trusty at prison farm outside the walls. Killed a guard, and fled to the woods. Home in Hillview. Genhart is armed. Use extreme—"

Technical descriptions followed, and before they were ended Tiny David stood over the machine. There was a worried frown on his face. He nodded absently as Max Payton, the top sergeant, showed him the orders to the various patrols.

"Might be a good idea to have somebody check his home," Payton suggested.

"Right," said Tiny David. "I'll do it. Take Linton with me. Tell the Skipper, will you, Max?"

Sergeant Henry Linton welcomed the ride. "You sent this baby away, didn't you, Tiny?" he asked.

"Yep."

"Always a bad actor, wasn't he?"

"Yep."

"Has some folks, doesn't he?"

"Yep."

Mr. Linton stared at his companion fixedly.

"Pardon me. I didn't know this was Save-a-Word Week. I'll ask the questions and also supply the 'yep's.' Be just as easy. And just as sociable."

Mr. Linton, retreating to the far end of the seat, lapsed into injured silence.

AT a school about two miles from the Genhart home, Tiny David halted the car, and stepped out.

"Be back in a minute," he said.

"Yes sir," Mr. Linton responded, his official tone expressing his displeasure, and his manner indicating that Mr. David's actions were a matter of small concern.

A young and rather attractive teacher met him at the door.

"Good morning. I would like to talk with Steve Genhart—outside. Sorry to take him out of class, and it won't be for long, but it is rather important."

"Surely," said the teacher.

Soon the boy appeared. He stiffened when he saw the trooper.

"Hello, Steve. Let's take a little walk."

"What for?" the boy demanded.

Tiny David was kind but firm.

"Because I say that is what we are going to do."

He led the way to one side of the building, and paused beside a fallen tree.

"Sit down," he ordered.

The boy obeyed. "What d'you want?"

Tiny David's tone was matter-of-fact: "George escaped this morning."

"Gosh!"

He watched excitement grip the boy; saw pride in the accomplishment of his idol blend with that excitement.

"Yes," Tiny David repeated. "He escaped. He killed a guard, who had been good to him, and who trusted him. The guard never did anything to George, and he was only doing his duty; but George killed him."

The boy's eyes widened. Tiny David fought back his sympathy in a desire to make the lesson effective.

"When you kill somebody—if they catch you—then they put—"

"Yes," said Tiny David. "They do."

The boy's fists clenched. Loyalty triumphed over all other emotions.

"You'll never catch him!"

"I think we will," Tiny David said. "We caught him before. He will have less chance now. Everybody will be against him. There is only one place he can go—home."

Steve's excitement increased.

"Home?" he repeated. Then its full significance struck him. "Why do you tell me this? Do you think I'll squeal?"

Tiny David shook his head.

"No, you won't squeal. That doesn't enter into this deal. And I think you have nerve enough not to be afraid, even when you know that you can go to jail for helping George. You probably think that would be a noble thing to do. Not so sure I wouldn't have had the same idea when I was your age. But that isn't what we are going to talk about."

He took his time about lighting a cigarette.

"We are going to talk about your mother. She has had plenty of grief with George. You know how many nights she has cried herself to sleep over him. This is going to be hard on her—harder than it will be for George, no matter what happens. You aren't going to make it any harder, are you?"

There was no answer from Steve.

"We could put a man at your house," continued the trooper. "I don't want to do that. It would worry your mother. So I am going to take a chance. After I have had a talk with your mother, I am not afraid about what will happen, even if George does show up there."

His big hand went forward and came to rest on the boy's knee.

"I am not going to ask you to make any promises. George may get in touch with you away from the house. He may ask you to do things for him, and to get him things. Before you do that, I want you to think of your mother. Ask yourself whether you want to do anything to make it harder for her."

He stood up.

"That's all, Steve. Go back to school."

BACK at the car, he found Mr. Linton engaged in putting up the top.

"Going to rain. Felt a few drops a minute ago. It's rained every day for two weeks, and if it's all the same to you, Lieutenant, I'd like to skip my daily wetting."

Tiny David nodded, and helped with the task.

Then they drove on up the climbing road toward the Genhart home. The river, flowing beside the road, was a raging torrent. They encountered spots where the water had flowed over the banks, and formed pools in the dirt road. Mr. Linton ducked as the water flew away from the front wheels of the car.

"Had my bath this morning," he explained. "I thought they put a dam in this river."

"They did," Tiny David said. "Guess we've had enough rain to fill the storage space and send this over the dam. Heard the Skipper say something about it the other day, but I didn't pay attention."

WHEN they reached the cabin, Linton remained in the car, while Tiny David entered. His face was grim when he emerged and as they drove away.

"Ever have to tell a woman her son was a murderer?" he asked.

"No," said Linton.

"My first stab at it, too," declared Tiny David. "Can't say I liked it."

They drove back to the general store, and there they encountered a patrol headed by Mr. Crosby, who drew Tiny David to one side.

"How did she take it?" Crosby asked.

"Hard at first," Tiny David said. "Then she bucked up. Poor old girl, I think she had been half expecting something like that for months."

Crosby nodded. "Keep a watch on the house?" he asked.

Tiny David hesitated.

"It's a gamble," he decided. "He may regard the house as his best bet, or he may be smart enough to know we will watch for him there. But even if he tries to make it, I doubt if he can get through the patrols. And son or no son, something tells me he won't find any 'welcome' signs there. Let's just skip it, Jim."

"Good enough," said Mr. Crosby. "By the way, the Old Man told me to tell you that when you have finished your Ward and Watch Society work, he would like to look at you in the barracks. Said he wanted to see if you have grown any uglier."

Tiny David found Captain Field waiting for him when he returned to the barracks.

"How's the river?" demanded the commanding officer.

"High, sir. I thought that power outfit was going to put in a dam."

"How high?"

"Over the banks, and into the road at spots. What about the dam?"

Captain Field snorted.

"They have had the dam in place for two weeks."

"Then why is all that water coming over it?"

Captain Field's snort was fiercer.

"Because it's a damned fool outfit. Damned fools at the head of it. Damned fool engineers working for it."

He led the way into his office, and produced a rough drawing.

"Take a look at that. I went over there the other day." A pencil outlined his words. "They built a dam long enough to back up enough water to generate power for New York City. Ordinarily, they wouldn't get enough flow of water to fill it. Then we have this continued heavy rainfall, which fills the basin, and now a flood is coming over the dam."

Captain Field put the drawing aside.

"I am no engineer, but I didn't like the looks of that dam. It is a cheap outfit, and I am betting they did cheap work. Wrote to Albany for instructions —don't know whether we can do anything about it; but I am betting the dam goes before we hear. And when it does go, with all that lake backed up behind it, there is going to be hell to pay."

He glanced out the window. "And this rain isn't going to help things a bit."

Tiny David spoke slowly:

"I could take a run over there, look the dam over, and if I think it is dangerous, order them to open the floodgates and ease the pressure."

Captain Field's first reply was an oath. Then he demanded:

"What floodgates? Didn't I tell you this is a damned fool outfit? They have one-way minds. All they know is take, and they don't give anything away, even water. The only thing that looks like a floodgate in that dam is where the water goes over to create power. And that is so high up it keeps plenty of dynamite back in the basin."

"What are we going to do about it, sir?" asked Tiny David.

"We aren't going to do anything yet," declared Captain Field. "But if anything happens, I am going out and grab myself a couple of utility magnates. Hold 'em for disorderly conduct, if I can't make anything else stick. Ruined the best trout stream in this section!"

He stood up. "Any trace of Genhart?"

"No sir."

"The kid did a cleaning and bandaging job like nobody's business."

And there was no trace throughout the day. Evening found the patrols of the Black Horse Troop settling down for a long chase. Some of the men were relieved. Others, stationed far from the barracks, were ordered to carry on.

THEY were at the evening meal in the barracks when Captain Field was summoned to the telephone. He emerged from the almost deserted office spouting a stream of profanity, which abruptly merged into terse, purposeful orders.

"That dam's going out within an hour! All the office force, get on the phones. Tell the operators what you want, and call every family in the section that has a telephone. Order them out at once!"

He turned to Max Payton:

"Order all available patrols in there to evacuate the section. Take people, but no belongings. And make 'em leave!"

He spied Lieutenant Charles McMann.

"You go to Krebs' store, and take charge. The patrols will report to you there. I'll keep in touch with you by phone, and tell you when to pull out—that is, if we have a chance to pull out. But keep working as long as you can."

Payton looked up from the teletype.

"How about Genhart, sir?"

"To hell with Genhart!" snapped Captain Field. "Use all we've got."

He turned to the barracks force grouped about him.

"All cars out, including trucks. But one man only to a car. We need the room for residents. David and Crosby in charge of the cars. And scatter them through the section, so there is no duplication."

He called the names of ten men.

"You stay here on reserve. The others go with the cars as far as Krebs' store. Drop off there. Lieutenant McMann will put you to work. Snap into it, Black Horse!"

They were shouting instructions as they raced toward the garage, where already motors were turning over. Cars darted out into the night. The noise of engines changed from a steady roar to the whine of an infuriated wasp as they were pushed to full capacity.

THE cars driven by Tiny David and Crosby were close together when they reached the store. They exchanged shouted directions with Lieutenant McMann. Men were tumbling from cars, which, freed from their surplus burdens, again darted off into the night.

"I'll get the Genhart house!" shouted Tiny David.

"Take somebody with you!" yelled Crosby.

David shook his head.

"I'll take the other houses near it. Need the room. Keep the other cars out of there. Too close to that dam."

The river was higher, angrier; and the road was in worse condition. He drove with his foot pushed to the floor, but as the car plowed through some of the deepest pools he slackened speed, fearing that water would be thrown into vital parts of his motor. There was a steady and steep grade as the road wound up toward the highlands where the dam was located.

Tiny David recognized the school as it flashed by. There were no houses here. Then one house appeared. Tiny David decided to stop on his way back. The Genhart home was nearest the dam. The short gain these people would make by walking would be more than offset on his return with the car.

The temperature of the water in the radiator of the over-pressed car mounted, and soon the indicator on his instrument board pushed into the red. Tiny David checked an exclamation of impatience as a cloud of steam poured from the radiator. He pulled the car to a halt.

He was not so far from the Genhart cabin. A grove of pine trees screened the river-bank here. He jumped out, found a collapsible canvas bucket in the rear of the car and ran toward the river.

Just as he entered the grove he saw a shadowy form slip behind a tree. A smaller form tried to flatten itself against the branches.

"Who is there?" Tiny David called.

The answer was a flash of light and a roar, which came so close together it was impossible to separate them. A terrific weight struck Tiny David in the right shoulder, and sent him reeling. He regained his balance with an effort, and his hand dropped on the butt of his revolver.

The larger of the shadowy forms darted toward the river. Tiny David tried to raise the revolver. It seemed heavy, terribly heavy.

A root exposed above the ground caught the foot of the shadowy form, and sent the man crashing to the ground. Tiny David, who had moved forward mechanically, stood over him. The trooper fought back the growing nausea.

"All—all right, Genhart! I have—have you covered. Take your hand away from that gun."

There was a tree just a foot to the right, and Tiny David backed against its trunk, grateful for its support.

"Stand up, Genhart!"

The convict obeyed him.

"Steve!" Tiny David called.

There was no answer, but a branch cracked near by.

"Come out, Steve!" Tiny David ordered.

The boy came slinking into view. He stood near the two men uncertainly. Tiny David ignored him, and turned to the convict:

"You got me in the shoulder, Genhart, but I can still use a gun." He fought back the mounting dizziness. "I was on my way in to get your mother and Steve. The dam is going out any minute. Everybody here will be drowned."

A cry that was almost a whimper came from the convict.

"Shut up!" Tiny David barked. "I can't drive. You can." The throbbing in his chest was gaining in intensity. "Pick up that bucket. Fill it with water, and come along. You too, Steve."

GENHART came toward him, talking rapidly. Tiny David tried to bring the revolver up. The words the convict spoke seemed blurred and indistinct. Then, as his clouded senses realized their meaning, Tiny David realized he had nothing to fear from Genhart.

He was whipped, this man who on this same day had killed one man, and who a few minutes ago had tried to kill another. His words were a craven plea to rush to the car and fly for safety.

"We'll never make it if we go back there!" Tiny David turned the sentence over in his clouded mind. "Take time to get the old woman—" The full meaning struck Tiny David, came to him even before the cry from the lips of the boy:

"George!" All the bitter disillusionment of youth was in that single word. "We can't leave Mother!"

A warm glow crept over Tiny David. He steadied himself against the tree.

"That's—that's right, Steve. Can't leave Mother." A dark cloud came toward him, but he fought it back. "Got to hurry. Fill that bucket with water. Put it in the radiator." The waver left his voice, and it became firm. "And this rat is going to drive!"

IT was Mr. Crosby, who, some hours later, sat across a desk from Captain Field and painted a fairly satisfactory word-picture of events from that time on.

"Quite a party, sir; and for catch-as-catch-can work of this sort, I must say that the old outfit came through in rather good style. We used the store as a loading-station; we had everything into there, and were beginning to load them out again on their way to high ground when we remembered that Tiny hadn't showed up with the Genharts and the others from the part nearest the dam."

Mr. Crosby lighted a cigarette.

"No time to do anything, sir." Mr. Crosby made a gesture of apology. "One life looks just like another, and we needed every car. So we kept on working, but our heart wasn't in the job.

"We were down to the last load, which Mac and I were going to escort in person, when we see a troop car pulling up from the right direction. We throw a flashlight on it. The guy driving is in civies. The guy beside him is slumped over so far we can't get a good look at him, but we see the uniform. Then, while we keep the light on, the guy in uniform slides right off the seat to the floor."

Mr. Crosby made use of the ash-tray.

"We charge down on the car, and pull George Genhart out from behind the wheel. Then we got to Tiny. He was out cold, white as a sheet, blood all over his shirt—the perfect picture of a corpse.

"We worked fast. There were five in the back seat, including Genhart's mother. I started to load them in with Mac. Then two more cars came back, and we put them in one of those. Linny had the other car, and we gave him Genhart. Not too gently either, sir, if you get what I mean.

"We put Tiny on the back seat of his car, and I slipped in behind the wheel for a quick trip out. Mac had given you the 'all clear,' and we were all set to go. Then there is an interruption.

"Genhart's kid brother jumps out of the car he is in, and hops on my running-board.

"'I am going with you!' he yells.

"'What's the big idea?' I ask him.

"'I am a Boy Scout. I can be doing things for him until you get to a doctor.'

"'Jump in!' I told him.

"He went right to work, Skipper. Cut away the shirt as gently as a woman could have done. I tossed him back the first-aid box, and he did a cleaning and bandaging job like nobody's business.

"'Why didn't you get that idea sooner?' I asked him.

"'Because—because it wasn't safe to get between him and George.'

"I played dumb and said:

"'George wouldn't hurt you.'

"He bit his lip, but he blurted it out:

"'No, but he would have hurt Tiny, and then beat it.'

"Maybe it was brutal, but I wanted to see if he would go the whole way.

"'Didn't you want to see your brother get away?'

"He took some time on that one, Skipper, but then he let me have it right between the eyes:

"'No. He's my brother, but he's just a rat.'"

MR. CROSBY extinguished his cigarette in the Captain's ash-tray.

"That's about all, sir. We got out of the valley with about five minutes to spare. Doc Hayden said Tiny has a nasty flesh wound, and had lost a lot of blood but nothing else. Seemed right glad to see him at the hospital. Said he used to be a steady customer, but that he had fallen off lately."

Crosby chuckled.

"Has a special nurse. When I left there, as per request from an interne who thinks he is God's gift to all the nurses, young Steve Genhart was sitting right beside the bed."

Mr. Crosby stood up and stretched, preparatory to retiring for the night.

"Something tells me we never will have any more trouble from any of the Genhart family. 'Night, sir."

The Battle Fleet at Actium—from an etching by Yngve E. Soderberg

By H. BEDFORD-JONES
and CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS

SHIPS and MEN

X—Cleopatra's Beads

ON a bypath of the Nevada desert reaching up to Utah, with naked sun-scalded rock on every hand and the only water in sight rank poison, was a car and trailer. I approached it painfully. My own car had boiled about dry and I needed water badly.

It was a Saturday morning.

Halting, I left the car and approached the battered trailer, with a hail. I was aware of music, but paid little heed, being absorbed in my own plight. To the door of the trailer came a massive hairy man, naked to the waist, tattooed blue and red all over his torso and arms.

"Can't talk now," he said jerkily, with a gesture of invitation. "Come in and set. Flagstad is singing *Isolde*."

He disappeared.

I stooped and entered the trailer. A radio was going, and my host motioned in silence to a stool. I took it and sat staring around. Shelves, pictures, polished stones—and the deathless surging music of "Tristan," coming from the Metropolitan thousands of miles away!

Signs on the wall proclaimed that I was in the abode of Mogollon Pete, the rockologist. At the moment, Pete was wholly and utterly absorbed in the magic of the "Liebestod." He sat silent, entranced, a flush in his hairy cheeks, staring at the radio until the music died and there followed the thunderous applause that was shaking an opera-house half across the world.

With an oath of irritation, he shut off the thing.

"Why the hell people got to clap when they hear music, I dunno," he growled. "Say, wasn't that swell? Waves, that's what it was—made you feel waves, made you see 'em curling and smashing under the bows of a boat, going back and coming on again like to tear your heart out. Huh? Sounds foolish, I guess."

"Wise," said I. "The most wonderful love-waves ever imagined."

"Love-waves?" Pete frowned. "I mean sea-waves. Me, I used to be a sailor; but I wanted to learn about rocks, so here I am in the desert. I dunno what them folks were singing about, but the music was sure great. Made me think of Cleopatra."

For the next hour or so I learned a lot about rocks—all kinds of rocks. Pete knew them right down to the ground, loved them, lived for them. He made a living by selling rocks he collected and polished.

Presently he took from a drawer a glorious queer-shaped opal.

"Found that just the other day and polished her, without cutting," said he. "Finest Nevada opal I ever did see—green on one side, red on the other. Cleopatra herself never did have a piece of gem-stone like that one—for all her pearls."

This was the second time that he had mentioned Cleopatra.

"How d'you know she hadn't?" I queried idly.

Mogollon Pete looked startled.

"Huh? I'd ought to know," he stated. "I was sailing-master for her and Mark, that time over on the Greek coast. You know, off Actium."

I LOOKED up at him sharply. He was quite serious. Of course, I knew well that all desert rats were said to be cracked on some subject; but Mogollon Pete looked pretty well balanced.

"Just which Cleopatra do you mean?" I asked. "There were seven queens of that name, you know."

"More'n that," he calmly returned. "This was the seventh. I was back there about six years ago—just before I quit the sea. Looking over the ground, so to speak. Funny thing, too, how one little notion changed the whole history of the world."

"Little notion?" I echoed blankly.

"Yeah. Me saying to that there double-crossing Crispus what I'd do if I was Octavian. It was a durned good thing for me that I happened to do it, of course, but just the same it went kind of hard. I thought a lot of Mark, even if he had got to liquoring up pretty heavy. I'm bound to admit that when it came to taking a tip, Octavian was right on the

spot. Yes sir, it was me that founded the Roman navy, just like that! They'd never had one before my time, you know; they just got a bunch of ships ready for a job, and then disbanded 'em. But Octavian started a regular navy."

IT was not hard to see that I had run into a character. Whether Mogollon Pete took himself to be a sort of Wandering Jew or Flying Dutchman, I was not sure, but he was interesting. And mind you, he was dead serious about it.

"That particular sea-fight," I said slowly, "happens to be a specialty of mine. That is, the circumstances surrounding it. I've read up on it a lot. It certainly did change naval history! Up until then, fighting-ships were immense affairs, the bigger the better; Actium altered all that. And the course of history with it. But nobody knows exactly what happened, to make Mark Antony skip out as he did."

"Well, I know," said Mogollon Pete.

He opened up book-shelves hidden in the trailer walls. As you may guess, I was studying this brawny tattooed man rather closely. When I saw the sort of books he kept on hand, I had the key to his mental quirk—rather, the ostensible key. For these books dealt with all sorts of queer religions touching on the occult, the transmigration of souls and so forth. Obviously my host was some sort of crank who believed that he had lived before now.

But he was something more. When he started in to recount his story, he not only made it live, but he had his data correct. He knew his subject, when it came to this battle for the world.

"This Crispus was my chief signal officer," said Pete, sadly shaking his head. "A smart seaman, too; but the night before we sailed, he got cleaned out in a crap game. It was a big game, for the fleet was lousy with money. We had the loot of the whole Eastern world aboard—Mark had looted the temples, the treasuries, everything in sight, and all of us got ours. But Crispus got taken for his wad, and he skipped out and told Octavian how to lick us. Told him what I had said about it, the dirty so-and-so! But let me show you how we were fixed. Boy, we had things by the tail!"

Now you must take the story in his own words. . . .

Here on this rocky coast of Greece were gathered all the forces of the known world, with empire staked on one turn of a card. Octavian, crafty and cold-blooded, the heir of Julius Cæsar, led the armies and fleet of Rome. Not much of a fleet, either. Chiefly Liburnian galleys with two banks of oars—biremes, we called 'em. A couple of hundred, all told.

We had Roman legions too, the legions that had followed Mark Antony for years and worshiped him. That army could have whipped Octavian without half trying, but the fleet was even better, and Mark had more confidence in the fleet. Cleopatra was on hand with sixty Egyptian galleys; the bulk of the ships, however, consisted of about a hundred of the most tremendous vessels that had ever walked the water.

They were regular floating cities, if you ask me. Why, some had up to forty banks of oars, and bathrooms, and a theater stage, and God knows what all. Engines of all kinds, too, for hurling stones and huge arrows and weights. Given a five-knot breeze, any one of those ships could smash through a whole fleet of biremes and never turn a hair. I was quartered aboard the *Thunderer*, Mark's flagship.

Mark was out to lick Rome, and Cleopatra was helping him. Between them, they had plundered everything in sight. Why, I've gone down below with Mark and seen the ballast brought up to pay the legions ashore—ballast of gold coin and silver bars! And when it came to girl slaves, and wine and rations, that fleet was living high. Mark was no miser. If we won, we had the plunder of Rome ahead; and if we lost, we'd not need what we had, so the sky was the limit those days.

I fouled hawsers with Crispus, this signal officer of mine, over a girl in the camp. Her father was Flavius, a centurion in one of the legions, and she was rightly named Flavia, but answered to Dimples. Her old man was a hard egg who had been in Gaul with Cæsar.

"PETE, Flavius says we're going to get licked," Crispus told me one day. "He says the talk in the ranks is that Mark has lost his grip. And there's a lot of Roman money around. Some of the brass hats have sneaked out and joined Octavian."

"Good riddance!" said I. "A lot of bums sitting around drinking all day and spouting about their family connections! We're better off without 'em. Anyhow, the fleet's going to win this war, not the army."

"That's what Flavius thinks," says Crispus, giving me one of his impudent grins. "He figures that Dimples will be safer aboard the *Thunderer* than ashore —especially if she and I get spliced."

"Says which? Listen, that girl is going to marry me!"

"Not if I know it, Pete. You've been seen too often hanging around those Egyptian ships; your rep's ruined. So lay off Dimples."

Right then, we tangled. He pulled a knife on me, but I finally got him down, got my own knife out, and was just about to finish him when the door slams open, and in walks Mark himself. If he hadn't interfered then, he'd have been emperor of Rome.

"What the devil's this, Pete!" he exclaimed. "Two of my best officers fighting? What about?"

Drawings by Frederick Anderson

Boy, when that dame turned her lamps on you, something happened inside!

"Dimples, sir," I says, and he broke into a roar of laughter. So did all the officers with him. When he had heard what it was all about, he turned to Crispus.

"Cap'n Peter is your superior officer, young man," said he. "If he wants that girl, or a dozen like her, I'll see that he gets her. You run over to the slave-market and get a couple to your taste, and charge 'em to me."

Crispus went white. "Flavia loves me, sir! And I love her."

"Don't answer me back, or I'll have you crucified," says Mark. He had quite a hangover that morning, and was in an ugly mood. Then he swung around to me. "Pete, is there any chance of Octavian's fleet licking us?"

"Not with him in command, sir," I says. "If I had his fleet, I might do it, but—"

"Eh? You might? How so?"

"Well sir, these light, fast galleys of his are good. If I had 'em, I'd try and catch your fleet in a calm, when the big ships were about helpless. I'd break off the oars, ram in and out, use fire, and bust things up generally. It could be done. But only in a calm, mind you. With steerage-way on 'em, ten of our ships could whip the tar out of his whole fleet."

And Crispus heard me say it.

"Then we'll see to it there's no calm." And Mark laughed. "Besides, Octavian hasn't your head, Pete. I want you to go aboard the Queen's ship at six tonight with me. There's to be a council of war, and I may need you to answer questions."

I saluted, and he went out.

CRISPUS went ashore, and so did I. Going up to camp, I found Dimples and sat down to have a talk. Pretty soon she lit out on me for fair, when I mentioned her marrying me.

"Marry you?" she said. "I'd sooner drown."

"You'll get over that," I told her, "once we're settled down together, and you get used to me. Besides which, you've got nothing to say about it, Dimples. If you've got any fool notions about that fellow Crispus, forget 'em."

"He's a better man than you," she flashed out. I grinned at her. Give me a girl who has a temper, every time.

"But he'll come to a worse end, and pretty near did this morning. Where's your dad?"

"Over at the quartermaster's store."

I hunted up Captain Flavius. I stood pretty well with the centurion, and the two of us went over to the canteen and washed out our throats. . . .

Mark Antony, drunk or sober, never forgot the men around him. He had already sent Flavius an order that Dimples was to marry me, and Flavius was willing enough.

"But don't expect miracles, Peter," he said. "That girl's got a will of her own; and let me tell you, she can raise hell. It's a caution what the young folks are coming to, these days. Why, back in my time—"

"Let things ride," I said. "Anyhow, right now it's against regulations to have women aboard ship. See what breaks. If Mark trusts to the fleet alone, your camp here will be the safest place for Dimples. Meantime, kick Crispus out if he comes around."

"You bet I will," the centurion replied. "It's bad enough to have a sailor for a son-in-law, let alone a wild young devil like him."

"What d'ye mean, sailor?" I says. "I'm flag-captain and sailing-master of the fleet, and that's a damned sight more than you, with a measly company of flat-feet under you! What we need is another drink."

"Two," says he, and we ordered them.

DURING the rest of the day, I was the busiest man in those parts. I had to check on the condition of every ship in the fleet and have everything at my tongue's end by night. There was a lot of sickness ashore, some of the legions being only at half strength, and I had a hunch that Mark would stick to the fleet for the fighting job.

Cleopatra's flagship was lying alongside the *Thunderer*. Promptly at four bells I went down the ladder to the galley with Mark and his chief officers. Being the end of August, the weather was hot as blazes.

The after deck of the galley had been cleared of everyone except Cleopatra, who received us there. She was all for business, and so was Mark; and we lost no time getting down to cases. There would be a feast later, and you could smell the roasts that were cooking, but first we had to settle things.

Naturally, I knew the queen pretty well, as any man in my position would. She was not so much for looks, being in her late thirties; but at that, she was

mighty easy on the eyes, and she sure had everything there was to have on the ball. Neither I nor anyone else who knew her, could blame Mark a particle for preferring her to all of Rome. Boy, when that dame turned her lamps on you, something happened inside!

"What's your weather-report, Cap'n Peter?" says Mark to me.

"Blow coming up, sir," I replied. "Looks like a gale, tomorrow or next day."

"And that's what we need," he says. "In a blow, these ships of ours are steady as rocks. Give me a stiff breeze, and we'll win the world."

"Not me," said Cleopatra with a grimace. "I get seasick."

"Then you stay out of it. Peter! Condition of the fleet?"

"First class, sir. Can't answer for the Egyptian galleys. The other ships are every one of 'em in shape for battle at an hour's notice."

"Good." Mark turned to the queen. "Now, Cleo, here's the lay of it," he says. "Two spies came in from Octavian's camp today. He's getting cold feet and wants to skip out. I know many of my officers have gone over to him, but that makes it all the worse. He's fully aware that we can whip him. Agrippa and some of his captains are trying to force him into battle; he doesn't like it."

"I had the same report from an Egyptian who was in his camp," said Cleopatra.

"Then, I say quit the army, take to the fleet, and move on him!" exclaimed Mark Antony quickly. "His fleet won't dare attack us. Day after tomorrow, at dawn, we embark, weigh anchor, and go after him. Do you agree?"

There was a flame in that man, when he was sober, that would carry any woman off her feet, or any man either. It was so agreed; and the council was ended then and there. Cleopatra called me over and gave me a string of beads off her own neck, Mark shoved a wine-cup at me; and inside of another fifteen minutes the dancing girls came along and things got hot. It was pretty near daylight when I clambered back aboard and somebody tucked me into my bunk.

AT noon I was up and going ashore, having summoned a council of all the fleet captains. We had no admirals in those days; I was the nearest thing to it. Nearly three hundred of us met in the camp theater.

"All shore-leave canceled at midnight tonight, and be ready to sail at dawn," I told them. Somebody objected that weather was coming on. "Exactly what we want. When it comes to fighting, I'll lead with the heavy ships, the rest of you follow and mop up. You all have your signal books. Crispus! Where's that damned signal officer?"

He was not in sight. Philocrates, who commanded the Egyptian galleys, took me to one side after the meeting. He seemed worried.

"Peter, the Queen insists that she goes with Mark Antony and the fleet. Now, if we have a blow, Lord knows what may happen! That woman can't stand the sea. She gets sick and loses her color, turns sea-green, and becomes wild. I tell you, it's cursed dangerous. Don't place dependence on our sixty galleys."

"All right, you follow us and play safe," I said, and that was that.

HALF a dozen of us located Flavius and some more officers, and a big crap-game got under way. Crispus showed up, went into the game, and got cleaned out in no time at all.

"Luck at love, no luck at dice," says he, and walked off.

Along in the shank of the evening I went home with Flavius, meaning to have a talk with Dimples and settle things. She was gone. One of the slaves told us she had skipped out with Crispus about dusk. When we investigated further, we found they had left camp entirely. Crispus had deserted to the enemy.

"So help me, I'll have him crucified when we've licked Octavian!" Flavius threatened.

"You're not the only one," I said grimly. "Still, he's a smart lad. Let's find another drink or so."

When I went aboard at midnight, shore parties were coming out fast. Mark Antony was on the Queen's galley alongside, and I went down to report the desertion of Crispus and the obvious betrayal of our signal-books to the enemy. Mark roared with laughter when I told them about it.

"Signals be hanged, Cap'n Peter!" said he. "We'll whip Octavian by fighting, not by signals. Here, have some of this Falernian."

Cleopatra gave me a smile. "Where are those beads I gave you last night?"

"Right here." And I showed them, around my neck. . . . I still have 'em, to this day.

"They'll bring you luck," she says. "They came from the tomb of an ancient Pharaoh. Maybe I shouldn't have given them to you."

She refused to take them back, however. Mark said that when we took over Rome, I could take my pick of the senators' daughters for a wife, and that cheered me up a lot.

PROMPTLY at dawn the fleet pulled out, with a stiff breeze freshening out of the north. Barely were we clear of the land, however, than it switched around, and by noon was blowing great guns out of the south, which was dead against us.

There was nothing we could do except wait for the wind to switch again, so we anchored in the lee of the Actium promontory. I laid our big ships well up inside the gulf, leaving the lighter vessels and the Egyptian contingent strung out toward the promontory. We had small, fast dispatch-boats at work among the fleet, and also spying on Octavian's fleet across the gulf.

And there we lay, pitching and tossing, four blessed days. It was the end of August, and this was the first of the equinoctial gales. Along on the third day, Mark and I got into one of the dispatch-boats and we went aboard Cleopatra's flagship. Mark went below to see her, and I stood in the lee of the deckhouse with Philocrates, her flag-captain.

"Is she laid out?" I asked. Philocrates wagged his head.

"Matey, she's pretty near dead, and no mistake. Aint seen anyone so seasick since I can remember; and she's been keeping us on the jump with her notions. She says the minute we can put to sea, we put, war or no war, and get her back to Alexandria and solid ground. And boy, she means it!"

"Don't be foolish," I said. "She'll get over the notion when the sea goes down."

"When that woman takes a notion, it takes for keeps," said Philocrates. "You know that priest of Isis we had aboard—that old duck with the cast in his eye? Well, he undertook to cure her seasickness, and didn't do it. He went over the side this morning with a knife in his gizzard. I bet you a cookie that Mark Antony comes on deck faster than he went below."

Sure enough, Mark came up looking flustered and angry, and we started back for the *Thunderer*.

"You're damn' lucky you lost your girl, Pete," he says to me. "Take a tip and leave the women ashore."

"This will be all blown out by tomorrow night, sir," I said; and he brightened up a bit.

Sure enough, by next night the wind was falling, but the sea was pretty high. The stars came out clear and fine, and I turned in.

It was getting along to four bells in the morning watch, when somebody yanked me out of my bunk, and I jumped for the deck. A dispatch-boat had just come alongside in the dawn—one of those watching the enemy fleet. It seemed that they were out and coming. Mark came on deck, heard the news, and rubbed his hands together delightedly.

"Fine!" says he. "Fine!"

"How-come?" I said, pointing to the water. "Nothing fine about that."

Sure enough, a flat dead calm had fallen. There was not so much as a cat's-paw on the surface.

"What of it?" said Mark. "We have oars, haven't we? Out with 'em, Peter!"

Our trumpeter gave the signal, and it was repeated from ship to ship. Anchors were weighed, and the whole fleet slowly got under way. Before we were well started, another dispatch-boat came in with word that Octavian's whole fleet was not five miles off, and coming down fast with all oars double-banked.

And there we were, in a flat calm.

However, there was something about that fleet drawing out to sea in the sunrise that gripped you, made you forget everything else. The lighter ships and the Egyptian galleys kept the wings, and the solid ranks of our heavy ships moved out slowly and majestically, oars aflash,

drums beating time for the rowers, cymbals clashing. Even her forty oar-banks could scarcely move the *Thunderer;* she towered above the sea like a castle. I kept the two dispatch-boats at hand, for messenger use.

With close to three hundred ships on the move, you can imagine the sight we presented. We were just off the cape, when the morning mists lifted a bit, and there was Octavian's fleet, within a mile and bearing down on us fast. Nearly all his ships were Liburnian biremes—long, fast ships, but so low in the water alongside our great hulks that the idea of their attacking us was rather ludicrous.

One of our biggest, the *Ajax,* was well in the van of the rest. The biremes came down for her; we could see her engines working, and she sent a huge stone aboard one Roman that smashed him like an eggshell. She went slap into another, rammed him, rode over him—and then something happened.

A bireme came in on each side of her, and drew in oars. They struck her massed oar-banks, smashed them, splintered them, and sheered off. Two more biremes dashed in beneath her sides; and when I saw black smoke drifting up in masses, I turned to Mark with a groan.

"Somebody's too blamed smart, sir," I said. "See that? We've got to stop it. Shall I signal the lighter ships to engage?"

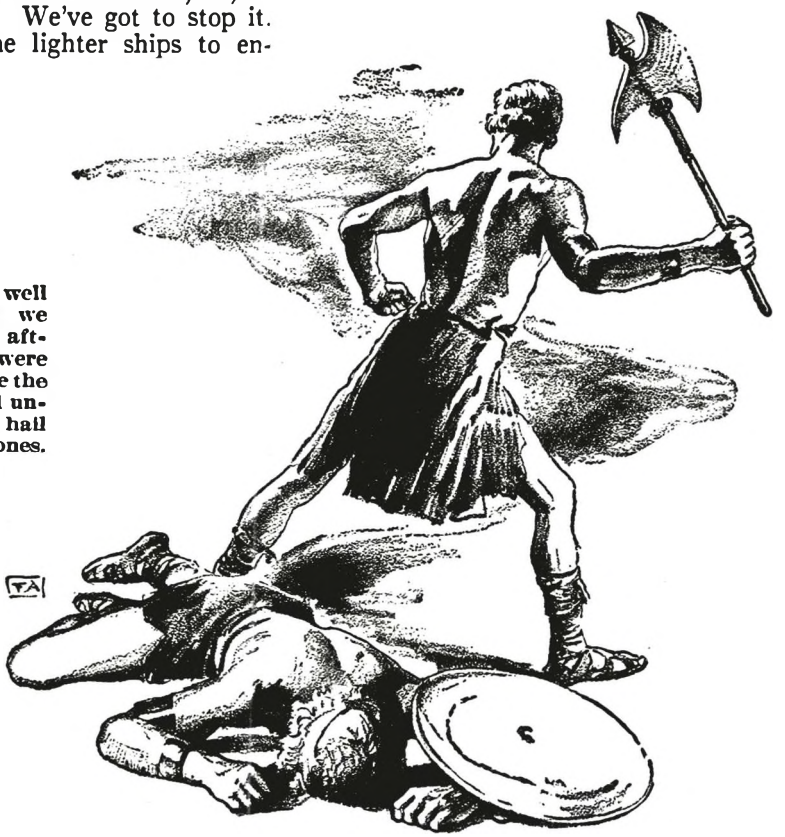
"Do it," said he, and the signals went out.

Our wings circled around; the Egyptian galleys did their share; and the two fleets were engaged, ship to ship. Meantime the *Ajax* was afire and crippled, and some of the biremes were heading down for us.

Our engines went to work. We smashed two of the biremes. A third swept in and caught our whole port side as the oars flashed. Screams went up from below-decks; the oars splintered or dragged, but the starboard oars swung us around, and inside of a minute that bireme was drifting away with most of her crew dead or dying, under the hail of arrows and spears that we poured into her.

Rowers were shifted, new oars put out, and I signaled the battleships to form behind us, with the *Thunderer* for the apex of the triangle. This, for the moment, held off the enemy's attack.

THIS is all soon told, but took hours in the doing. Most of the morning was gone. Our lighter galleys were all engaged, but another of our big ships had followed the *Ajax* and was in flames. We were well outside the cape now, and



We made out well enough at first: we fought them hour after hour; our sides were never scaled. None the less, our men died under an unceasing hail of arrows and stones.

there was a heavy, rolling swell. Suddenly Mark caught my arm.

"Look there! What's happening?"

I squinted seaward. Wind! No doubt of it. A breeze was coming up from the west; the water was darkening; and that sea, full of iron and clanging fury, was beginning to kick up again. Then a scarlet red sail was loosened, bellied out, and I knew it for the royal galley of the Queen. It was drawing out of the fight.

Mark Antony let out an oath. "What's she doing, Peter?"

"Running," I said. "Philocrates was afraid of it. There go some more!"

Drawing out, indeed—ship after ship of the Egyptians pulled out of the tumult, as their canvas took the wind. They headed straight out and away to the south. With a curse of fury and dismay, Mark flung his cloak around him.

"Call in that dispatch-boat, Peter!" he yelped at me. "I'm going to bring her back. . . . Stow your jaw, blast you! Carry on here until I reach her."

The dispatch-boat ran in under our counter, Mark clambered down a ladder all by himself, and hardly a soul knew he was gone. I was simply too dumfounded to stop him. Bring her back? Not a chance of it. Why, the whole Egyptian contingent was on the run after her by this time, and the biremes were tearing in for us big fellows, and now there was merry hell to pay.

And all because that dame had got seasick with the swell.

IT was about noon when this happened. The breeze was freshening out to seaward, but it died before reaching us, and there was not a thing we could do. Ship after ship came darting in to smash our oar-banks, and to save our men below and avert the chance of fire, I ordered the oars in and the lower ports closed.

Thus, we could give our entire attention to fighting, and we did it. I signaled the other captains to repeat what I had done, but few caught the signals. The whole Roman fleet was in around us by this time; it was every man for himself; and to their sorrow few of the others heeded my signals.

We made out well enough, at first. There was no way for firepots to be slung into us, with all ports closed; and from the advantage of our towering height, we sent Roman after Roman drifting away. Those who tried to board us, never got a man over the bulwarks. The biremes were too light to damage us much by ramming, and our engines kept up a storm of arrows and stones that did heavy damage.

Given mere steerage-way, we could have run through the whole Roman fleet. But we were helpless to move. And those Romans were putting into play the very tactics I had thought up. No doubt whatever—that rascal Crispus had lost the day for us!

ONE by one our huge ships were crippled, as the oars were rammed and splintered. True, the Romans lost heavily; but one by one our immense craft were set afire. None were captured, I will say for them. They fought to the finish and went down in flames.

The Egyptian galleys were clear over the horizon, and Mark Antony with them, by this time.

Our lighter ships were cleared or captured, or ran for it. Those of us who remained in the battleships, knew the day was lost, but no quarter had been proclaimed; and none of us was anxious to decorate a cross to celebrate Octavian's victory.

Besides, there was still a chance. The breeze reached us at last, we shook out the canvas, and some of us got under way. Ship after ship was afire, however. That trick of using firepots was really what settled the use of big navy ships for good and all.

The Romans had engines, too. We had our sprit-mast shot away; and a half-ton chunk of rock came aboard and splintered our mainmast, and that finished the *Thunderer*, so far as motion was concerned.

It was a regular bit of tactics, as I soon saw. The biremes circled off any of our ships that had canvas up, and played their engines until the masts carried away, then closed in. Once those high oar-banks had been rammed and splintered, the ports were smashed open and the whole below-decks were in ruin, so it was no trick to hurl in firepots.

As the afternoon drew on, ship after ship smoked to heaven and then went hissing down. The whole sea was covered with smoke and wreckage and bodies of men by the thousand. Around the *Thunderer* were grouped a ring of biremes. We fought them hour after hour: our engines played; our bowmen and spearmen hailed death into them; our high sides were never scaled.

None the less, our men died under an unceasing hail of arrows and stones. I

got a shaft in the ribs; and a stone smashed my helmet and laid me out for a while; but I was back in the fight presently. Meantime a bireme laid in under our stern, and her crew literally chopped a way into us, and set us afire.

Even so, we were the last to go down. The wind came up, toward sunset, and lifted the smoke to disclose blazing hulks everywhere. We were ablaze too, and could do nothing about it. We had not a score of men left on their feet when at last the Romans did lay us aboard, and came pouring up over the side, with the whole after end of the ship roaring up in flame.

Some of us were killed; some were taken with nets, like fish. I was netted and tied up, and taken aboard a bireme, so exhausted I fell asleep in my bonds.

And the *Thunderer* went down like all the rest—hulks ballasted with gold, crammed with all the treasure of the Eastern world! Lying there to this day, off Actium. . . .

I woke up again to daylight. Morning had come, and soldiers were bustling me around; we were ashore. They were taking me before Octavian, they said, but little I cared what might happen. Somebody had looted my armor, and I had nothing left except that string of beads around my neck, which Cleopatra had said would bring me luck. Luck! A lot of luck it had brought me. For now Octavian would crucify me.

THEY hauled me to his tent and set me before him. A pale, crafty-eyed fellow he was.

"So you are Captain Peter, sailing-master of the rebel fleet!" said he. "Well, I owe you something."

"Then make it short," I said sourly. "And remember I'm a Roman citizen, so no flogging."

He smiled a little at this. Somebody moved behind him, and I looked up to see Crispus there. Crispus himself! And he was grinning at me. I straightened up and let him have it straight.

"You blasted this-and-that!" I said. "If it hadn't been for your double-crossing us, things would be different!"

"They might," said Octavian. "But things are as they are, my man. Aye, Crispus gave us an idea of what tactics to use, thanks to you. And that idea has saved your life, Captain Peter. It may do more for you. I'm going to build a standing navy for Rome, all biremes; no more big ships. I'm putting Crispus in command. He's spoken for you as his chief of staff, so to speak. Yes or no? Allegiance to me or not?"

I gulped hard. Then I met the grin of Crispus, and saw him nod to me; not a bad sort, he wasn't.

"Yes," I said. And that's all the story.

ALL the story? Well, that was all Mogollon Pete told me, as we sat there in the Nevada desert and watched the sunset light touch the rocks to fire. With a deep breath, I came back to realities again, and lit a cigarette.

"And," I said slowly, "you believe all this actually happened—to you?"

"It did," said Mogollon Pete earnestly. "And I've got the proof right here to show you."

He went to one of his drawers and took out a string of beads, and handed them to me. They were of glazed beads and glass. They were certainly Egyptian; I had some of the same kind that I got from the museum people in Cairo.

"That's the identical necklace Cleopatra gave me for luck," said he. "Glass was something wonderful back in those days, you know. Yes sir, she gave away her luck and no mistake! And yet, for all her wealth and glory and empire, she didn't have a jewel in the whole lot that could touch this here Nevada opal. Take a look at it."

That opal was a glorious thing. Hard to realize that it was nothing but a mass of silica and water that had once been like jelly! Opals are nothing else, if you stop to think of them that way.

In the sunset light, one side of it had a glowing greenish opalescence, the other side was all red fire.

"Think what a ring that would make!" said Mogollon Pete. "Of course, opals are mighty soft and shouldn't be used in rings; but they are, just the same. Or you could give it to your best girl."

By George! That reminded me that my wife was waiting for me to come, up in the camp. I got up, and asked a question.

"Only fifty dollars," said Mogollon Pete. "And dirt cheap at the price."

I thought so myself—the story included. But the queer part of it was that his story was correct in every detail. And if you can figure that out, you are good.

"The Silence of the Sea," the next story in this fine series, will appear in the forthcoming November issue.

Freedom's

Illustrated by Oscar Howard

OUR house, of brick covered with plaster, stood a good fifty yards back from Mulberry Street. Pleasantly shading the yard were great low-limbed water-oaks, and fragrantly brightening it were cape jessamine and japonica, azalea and spirea and hibiscus. Surrounding the whole was a white picket fence half-hid by honeysuckle.

In the late afternoons, I would see my father coming along the street, his tall figure erect, his stride leisurely. As he drew nearer, I could see the black stock about his throat, and finally, the cameo in that stock. Behind him, affecting the dignity of his master, came black Guinea Sam. (He claimed, perhaps truthfully, he had been a king in Guinea.)

I was sixteen when, one day in October, I was seated on the steps of our "gallery" or veranda. Suddenly I was aware of a man hurrying along the street. To my wonderment, he turned into our gateway and all but trotted up the grass-tufted brick walk. It was our old friend Dr. Scofield.

"Where's your mother?" he inquired, breathing rapidly.

"In the house," said I.

With no more to-do, he crossed the gallery and flung open the door. I followed at his heels.

Whether my mother had seen or heard him, I cannot say; but there she stood before us at the base of the stair.

Dr. Scofield went up to her, tossing his hat to one side. "Mary," said he, "I've always thought you a brave woman."

She waited for him to go on.

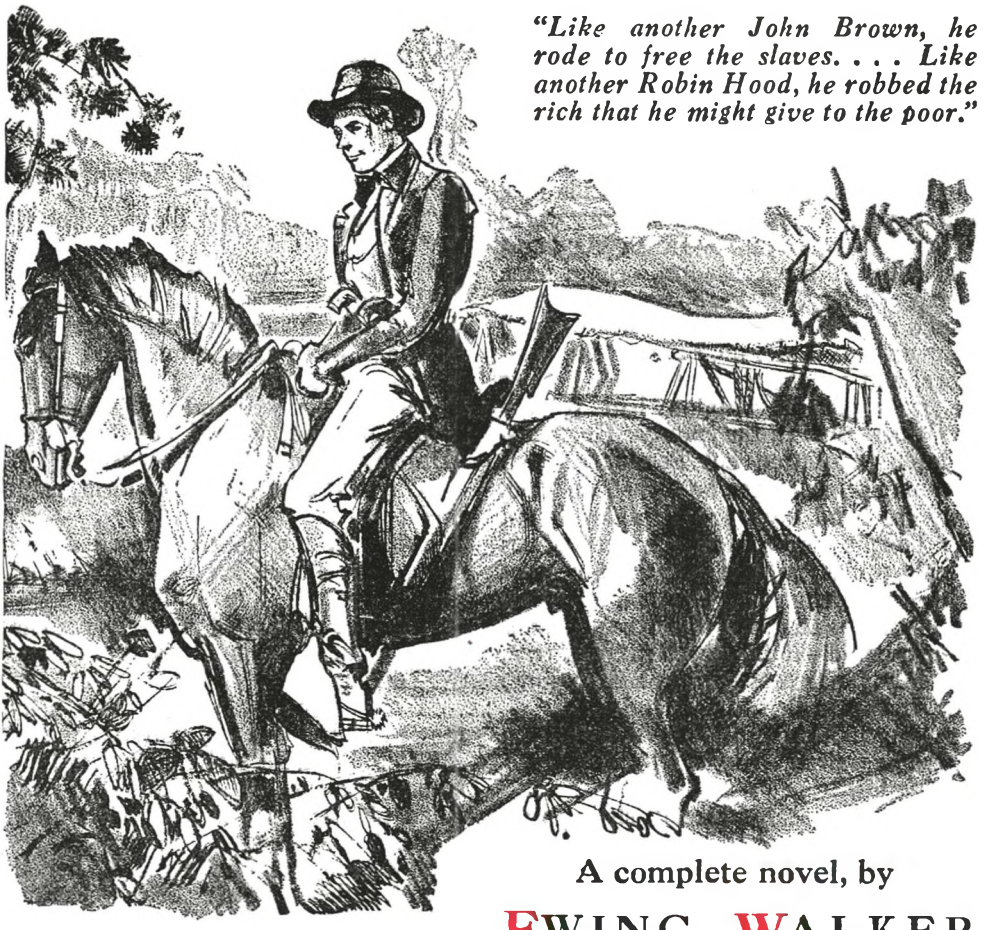
"I've bad news for you—grave news," said he.

Her cheeks paled, but her hands and eyes were steady. "It is—the Judge?"

He nodded. "He's an ill man—a very ill man, I fear. They are fetching him home." He wheeled to me. "Have the servants heat some water. Hurry, Tom."

When I was back, Dr. Scofield and my mother were waiting on the veranda. Soon a carriage slowly came along the street, and halted before our gateway. Four men lifted my father from the ve-

Highwayman



"Like another John Brown, he rode to free the slaves. . . . Like another Robin Hood, he robbed the rich that he might give to the poor."

A complete novel, by

EWING WALKER

hicle, and walking gingerly, started along the walk toward the house. Our servants peered, with startled, bewildered eyes, from windows and around corners.

Slowly the men mounted the broad stairway. I remember the first pang of poignant fright came to me when my father's head fell back and I saw his eyes were closed and his face strangely white and his expression shockingly fixed.

Soon they had placed him upon his great tester bed, whereupon Dr. Scofield and my mother bent over him. The men who had brought him tiptoed from the room. I, wondering, bewildered, crouched in a corner of the room.

That night my father died. . . . There is no need of dwelling upon the next few days—of the friends and relatives who came to us from near and far; of the pall of silence over the house; and of the funeral. . . .

It was Friday. My father had been buried two days before. The servants moved about in unwonted silence. Only my mother seemed little changed. It is true a pallor had stolen into her cheeks; and occasionally I saw her biting her lip to hold back her grief; but she went about her duties as ever she had done.

IT was shortly after two in the afternoon when Lindy, a housemaid, came to my mother.

"Ge'man to see you, ma'am," said she.

"Who is it?"

"Hit's Mr. Brinkley. He's a-settin' in de parlor."

"Tell him I will be down immediately."

A moment she paused before a mirror; then she turned to me. "Come with me, son. You will soon be a man and will handle our business matters. The sooner you begin, the better." And she led the way from the room and down the stair.

IT is well to tell you what manner of man this Thaddeus Brinkley was. He had come to Gordon some eighteen or twenty years before. At the time, he had little more than a frayed carpet-bag in his hand and a servile smile on his lips. For a year or so, he peddled his wares about the countryside—garish ginghams and calicoes, laces, needles, ornate fans, cheap jewelry, strange nostrums that held a peculiar appeal to the negroes and poor-whites. Later on, he opened a small store, and by the time of which I write he was, general opinion had it, the wealthiest man in the county. He owned a large plantation out Seminary way; how many mortgages he owned on land, only the good Lord and Brinkley knew. He bought negroes as the rest of us bought mules; and he sold those negroes with less compunction than we felt when selling mules unsuited to our needs. Thus he prospered—if that be what you term it. Many names were applied to him; few, if any, called him friend.

As my mother and I entered the room where he waited, little Mr. Brinkley rose, bowing low.

My mother seated herself, sitting stiffly erect. "You wished to see me?"

"I came, madam," said he, "to pay my respects and to offer you my—my profoundest condolences."

"Thank you," said my mother.

"Your husband was a fine man, madam—a great man."

"Thank you." A certain crispness had stolen into her tone. An awkward pause followed. "That is all?" she asked.

He was taken aback. Finally: "Well, you see—now that you mention it, madam, there is one other matter that—well, another little matter we should discuss."

"What matter is that, Mr. Brinkley?"

He touched his moist forehead with his handkerchief—not, however, wiping off his oily smile. "I assure you, madam, I would not think of bringing the matter to your attention now were it not absolutely necessary. You see, business conditions are so deplorable—"

"What is this matter, Mr. Brinkley?" demanded my mother.

"It concerns a little note, madam."

"A note?" said she, surprise in her tone.

"Yes. A note for— Here—" he broke off, reaching into a pocket. "I happen to have it with me," said he, and passed a paper to her.

She read it, and bewildered, faced him. "Why, this is a note for eight thousand dollars!"

"Yes," said he, his round head bobbing, "eight thousand—and interest."

"This is signed by my husband, Judge Shandy."

"Yes, madam. You did not know of it?"

"I did not. What is it for?"

"It seems, madam, your husband wished to make an investment, and being a little short of cash, came to me for the money. Of course, I was delighted to be of service to my friend Judge Shandy."

Still my mother did not understand. "Did my husband give you security?"

"Oh, yes; as a matter of form, as you might say."

Evidently my mother sensed a something that eluded me. "What security did he give you, Mr. Brinkley?"

"Some of his landed property, madam."

"You mean—this house?"

"Yes."

"I see." She mulled over that a long moment. "And was there other security?"

"Well," said he, striving to throttle his embarrassment, "there was the River Road plantation. He suggested including that."

Slowly my mother nodded, her lips close together. Then: "I see. Our home here—and the River Road plantation. And the little farm out near Shiloh Church?"

"Oh, no! That was not included."

My mother smiled a little wryly. "No, that would not have been included. It is a well-nigh worthless place, I believe."

It seemed to me Mr. Brinkley winced.

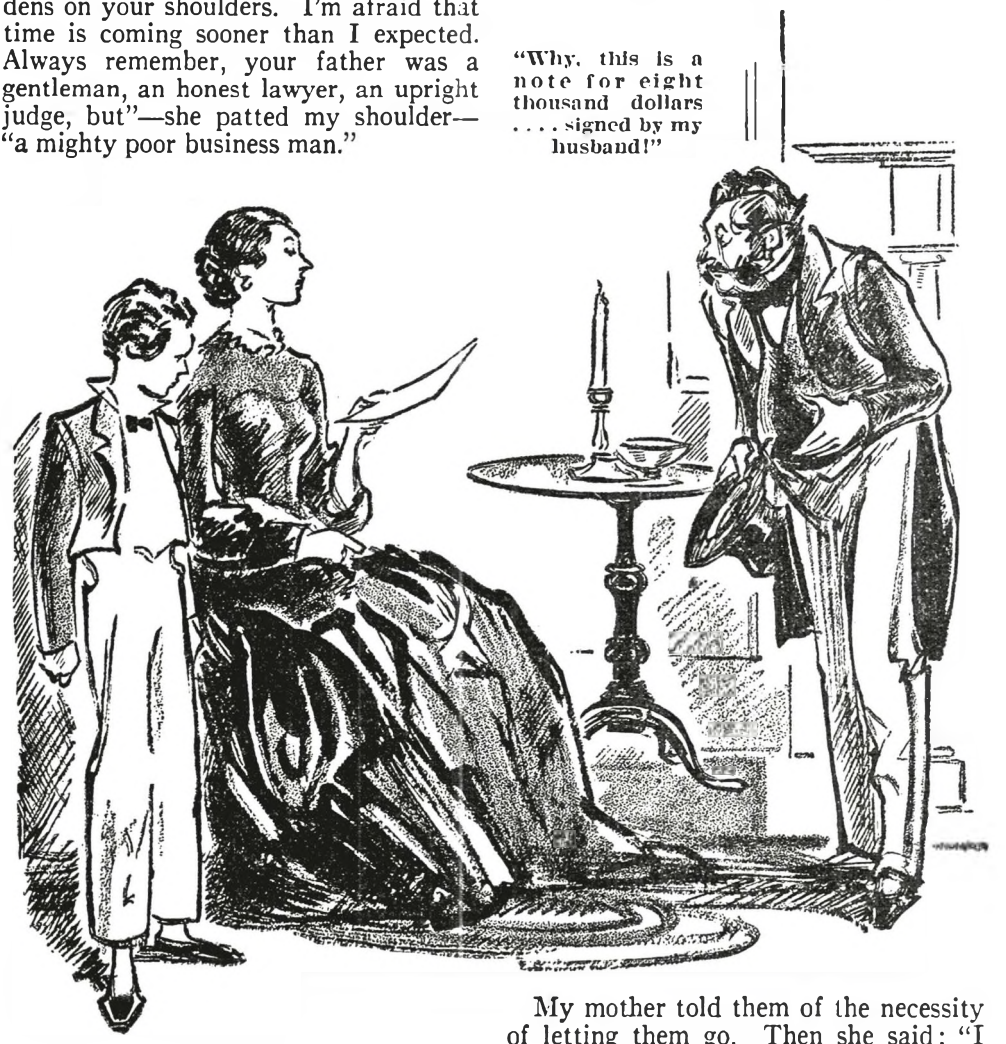
"As I understand it," pursued my mother, "if I am unable to pay you immediately, this house and the plantation are yours. Is that correct?"

He nodded, moistening his lips.

MY mother rose, dismissal in her expression and posture. "I will communicate with you very soon," said she.

He took up his hat, and with his oily little protestations, departed. Through a window, I watched his short plump legs bear him quickly away. I think there was more than a hint of satisfaction in his bearing.

When I turned, my mother was facing me. She came to me and placed a hand upon either shoulder. A long moment she looked into my eyes. "Tom Shandy," said she, "I told you a little while ago you would some day have a man's burdens on your shoulders. I'm afraid that time is coming sooner than I expected. Always remember, your father was a gentleman, an honest lawyer, an upright judge, but"—she patted my shoulder—"a mighty poor business man."



"Why, this is a note for eight thousand dollars . . . . signed by my husband!"

There was nothing for it but to turn our home and the River Road plantation over to Brinkley. There were, we found, other debts which we were honor-bound to discharge quickly as might be. The total of them left us no alternative.

Our chief problem was the servants. My mother would not, of course, sell them to any who would buy. Some were old and infirm; others were mere infants. Truly, it was a problem. At last we had them assembled in the yard back of our house—those from the plantation, those kept for service at the house in Mulberry Street. I still can see them clearly as if I had looked upon them but yesterday, standing stiffly, their eyes wide, wonderment writ upon their countenances—and fear. None knew what the future held: Where they were to go, with whom they were to live, how they would fare, whether they would ever again see children or wife or husband or parents.

My mother told them of the necessity of letting them go. Then she said: "I am not merely selling you here and there. Judge Shandy would not have done so; I will not do so; my son would not do so." She paused, as a great shout went up. Countenances a moment before fixed as graven images broke into broad grins; some threw their arms about others, dancing madly. "Hallelujahs!" and "God bless you, ol' Missus!" rent the air. "We gwine stay wid you," many of them shouted. "We'll work our fingers to de bone an' pay off dat po'-white trash," called one, not to be repressed.

"First of all," resumed my mother, "no family is to be broken up."

"Bless Jesus!" shouted a young wife and mother.

The old darky at her heels, she strode away with never a glance at any of us.

"You know our relatives, our kinfolk," my mother went on. "I have seen or written all of them. Each will take one or more of you. And I want to tell you this: Each of you is to receive half of what you are sold for. I wish I could give it all to you, but"—she paused—"I cannot. I want you to save that money, and perhaps one of these days you can purchase your freedom." (I should set down here that a number of them did ultimately buy their freedom, while others of course—true to their happy-go-lucky ways—spent their share as fast as ever they could get rid of it.)

My mother drew a paper from the bosom of her dress. "First, there is my sister Mrs. Bedwell. All of you know her. She can take a family of four or five. Which of you would like to go to her?"

And so it went. Each was consulted, and each was sent to the one he had chosen for master or mistress. Even old blind Timothy had his wish. He was to go to my Uncle Fred, upon whose plantation he might sit before his cabin and nod, between whiles keeping in order the plantation harness and cotton baskets.

When the future of the last one had been decided, they crowded about my mother, a mad, seething, shouting, singing little throng. Suddenly, the hubbub ceased; the group, as by an unworded command, parted, forming a narrow lane. Coming slowly toward my mother was old blind Timothy. "Where is you, ol' Missus?" he asked, his voice vibrant.

"Right here, Uncle Timothy," said my mother, and she touched his arm.

Standing before her, he straightened yet more. "Ol' Missus," said he, and his voice rang, "dey been sayin' fo' de longes' dat I sees a heap o' visions. Maybe I has; maybe not." He threw back his head, and his eyes closed; he flung away his cane and raised trembling arms toward the sky. "All o' you folks listen to me. Listen close! I's facin' my Lawd, an' I's facin' my Jesus. I sees a vision now. I sees you, ol' Missus, when yo' time comes, wid a golden harp in yo' han' an' a great shinin' light above yo' haid; an' I sees my Lawd an' I sees my Jesus holdin' welcomin' hands out to you; an' I sees 'em set you down wid de odder saints an' de odder angels." Suddenly he stared at those about him with unseeing eyes. "On yo' knees!" he shouted, his voice tremulous. "On yo' knees, I says! An' de las' one o' you bless de Lawd an' bless Jesus an' bless ol' Missus!"

I am afraid I was weeping openly; but even through my tears, I saw, for the second time since my father's death, tears in my mother's eyes; and I felt her hand gripping my shoulder.

CHAPTER II

MOVING into our new house—the little farm not mortgaged to Brinkley—was to me somewhat of an adventure. I was buoyed up by the thought that a grave responsibility rested upon me. I surveyed the broom-sedge field back of the house, and envisioned myself cultivating that field. Staring toward the mist-shrouded horizon, my boyish fancy had full sway. I saw myself the head of the family; I pictured myself amassing wealth from cotton and stock, and in the end buying back our old home in Mulberry Street and evicting Brinkley and leading my mother there.

The woods surrounded us, and I knew that game was plentiful; a few hundred

yards to the rear of the house flowed Shell River, abundant with fish. The house was an old log affair of four rooms, two upon either side of a wide hallway that was open at both ends. The "chinks" or cracks between the logs were closed with a mixture of clay and pine straw; the roof was of rough hand-split shingles. Actually, we had moved but a matter of six miles; in a sense, we had passed into another world.

Perhaps you have wondered why we moved from Mulberry Street; why, having well-to-do kinfolk, we did not borrow from them a sum sufficient to pay off little Brinkley. Certainly enough of them made the offer, but my mother would have none of it.

"Tom Shandy," said she, "it is a wonderful thing to have loyal friends; but it is a cheapening thing to make too great a use of their friendship. You're just starting out in life, and I'll not have you owing any man for money or favors."

Of the four of us,—my mother, Guinea Sam, his wife Mammy Claire and myself,—Guinea Sam alone was irreconcilable. His head bent, his gnarled hands gripping the plow-handles, he muttered to himself down one row and up another: "'Taint no sense to it, givin' all dat money to dem niggahs. No sense. Livin' out heah in de piney woods, wid sca'cely a roof ovah our haids, when we might as well be livin' on Mulberry Street same as evah!"

IT was, I remember, a Saturday. We had been in our new house a matter of three weeks. The air was crisp and the sky all but cloudless. I took up my gun, and leaving the sandy road, slowly made my way through the woods. Soon I saw a squirrel bounding along the ground, and finally darting up an oak tree. Creeping along, I seated myself near by, silently waiting for the squirrel to show himself.

Suddenly I heard horses approaching from the south, and soon afterward the voices of men. I waited, supposing they would pass on. Instead they halted a scant twenty paces from me, and I realized I was nearer the road than I had supposed. A slight knoll hid them from view, though now and then I saw a horse's head as he flung it up to dislodge an annoying fly.

"How about right here?" a voice inquired.

There followed a brief pause. "Looks all right," said another. "You know for sure he's comin' along?"

"Hell, no!" retorted the first voice. "Who ever knows for sure what that fellow's gonna do?"

Another pause. Then: "Which way'll he be comin' from—if he comes?"

"From the north, I figure."

"All right, Sheriff. What's next?"

"Here's the plan," said he who had been addressed as Sheriff. "First off, we'll lead the horses back in the woods a piece—far enough so they won't nicker when another horse comes along. Then we'll slip back up here an' hide out along the road—two just about here an' the other two up the road a spell—fifty yards, say. Now, boys, understand: First of all, lie low. Then, when he comes along, make sure—dead sure, mind!—that it's him. An' then start shootin'. Wait for nothin'; just go to burnin' powder. An' let me tell you this: you sure better shoot straight, 'cause he don't miss."

WITH my heart pounding, I heard them lead the horses away. I crawled to the top of the knoll. There were four of them, one of whom I recognized as Sheriff Pratt. The others, I later learned, were deputies.

They were waiting to kill a man! Four of them—four to one—waiting, hiding to shoot a man without warning. The thought all but sickened me.

They had said he would probably come from the north. Forgetting my gun, I bent low and ran from the knoll. I came to a small stream and floundered through it. Perhaps he would come before I could warn him! The thought lent wings to my feet. At last I felt I was well beyond sight of the Sheriff and his men. I turned toward the road, and gasping for breath, reached it none too soon. A horseman was approaching, his body swaying slightly in rhythm with the gait of his horse, his hands folded over his saddle-horn.

I waved to him frantically. "Stop! Stop!" I called.

He was a man, I should say, about five feet ten in height and neither thin nor heavy with flesh; his face was of a roundish turn and clean-shaven; what little hair I could see beneath his broad hat was of a reddish or sandy tinge; his eyes were blue as ever I saw in the head of man. His feet were in boots with stitched uppers that reached well toward his knees, and upon either hip he carried a silver-mounted pistol. His saddle was a joy to behold, and under a

saddle-flap was a long gun the like of which I had not before seen.

He halted before me, his hands still placidly folded over his saddle-horn. "What's wrong?" he asked in a voice holding an odd accent.

I was still panting. "They're waiting —to kill you," said I.

"Oh, ho!" His lips puckered and his brows arched. "Waiting to kill me, eh? And just who might 'they' be, lad?"

"The Sheriff—and three other men!"

"Well, now, that *is* a pretty howdy-do. Come along. Let's step off a bit and hear the tale. Hold onto the stirrup-leather."

We passed through the woods a hundred yards or such a matter, and finally rounding a sandy hill, halted at the base of it. He dismounted and seated himself upon the ground, placing his hat at his side. Seemingly he had not a worry in the world.

"Now," said he, "let's have the tale." And he smiled, a warming sort of smile.

I launched into the story, telling him all I had heard and all I had seen. Abruptly, I halted, staring at him. "I forgot my gun," said I.

"That's easily mended," said he. "So, they were waiting, eh, to shoot me down like a dog?" A moment the smile fled, but it was quickly back again. "Well, well! With all their careful planning, it seems a shame to disappoint them." He cocked his head to one side. "And just how did ye know *I* was the man they were after?"

THE question confused me. Perhaps I flushed. "I didn't know," said I. "I just—I just thought it pretty low-down, not fighting in the open."

He pursed his lips thoughtfully. "'Fighting in the open! Fighting in the open!' I'll not say to ye I always did just that thing, but I will say this: If ye always do *your* fighting in the open, the finer man ye'll be." He turned away, pondering. Then: "So they led their horses away, eh? Do ye think ye could pretty well tell where those horses are?"

That was quickly done.

"Fine!" said he. From a pocket—and chuckling the while—he drew a piece of paper; from another pocket he brought out the stub of a pencil. "Ye'll excuse me a minute, sir, whilst I write a bit of a letter—a love-letter, as ye might say?"

Rising, he placed the paper on the seat of his saddle and wrote. Now and again he paused to touch the tip of the pencil to his lips, thoughtfully glancing away. Finally, he was done. "Now!" And he smiled down upon me broadly. "All ready!" His manner was jaunty. "Now sir," said he, "if ye'll but excuse me a little while, I'll go post my love-letter. Sure, it would be a shame to keep the dears waiting." His face sobered. "Ye'll wait here for me? I'd take it kindly if ye would, for I'd like to talk with ye a bit."

I nodded, and he hurried through the woods noiselessly as could an Indian.

Who was the man? I asked myself. Why did the Sheriff wish to kill him?

IN less than a half-hour he was back and seated before me. He looked at me a long moment. "So ye ran—to warn me!" said he. "And just what might your name be, if I might make so bold as to ask?"

"Tom Shandy," said I.

"Shandy? Now, ye wouldn't happen to be the late Judge Shandy's boy?"

"Yes sir," said I.

"Well, well! That explains it. No wonder ye like the idea of fighting in the open. So ye hurried to warn me!" He glanced away, thoughtfully; then his blue eyes were upon me again, and a smile touched his lips. "Do ye, by chance, happen to know just who I am?"

I shook my head.

"Maybe did ye know, ye wouldn't be to so much trouble to save me. I wonder did ye ever chance to hear the name Jim Hope?"

I stared at him. "*You* are—"

He bowed. "The same. Robber, outlaw. . . . No doubt ye've heard harsh names given me," said he, eying me quizzically.

I saw he expected an answer. I lacked the heart to say it was common talk he had been guilty of all manner of deviltry. "I've heard," I began stumbling, "you've smuggled—"

"Negroes across the Ohio?" he broke in. He nodded. "I plead guilty to the charge. I've been told they say I've smuggled a hundred across. The number's not quite so large," he protested modestly, "though I'm not saying it don't crowd it. Ye know,"—eyes half-closed, and head to one side, he glanced away,— "ye know, Tom Shandy, mayhap I don't see things as some people do. No doubt 'tis my ignorance that comes of little schooling.

"Yes, lad, I've smuggled the negroes across the Ohio; and confidentially, I

wouldn't be a whit surprised did I smuggle a few more over. It's a funny thing, Tom: their skin is black, but I 'spect if you prick that skin they bleed just about the same as you and me; and when food's short or their shirts are ragged, it's likely they get just as hungry as we do, and just as cold. It's even possible," he added drolly, "the thought of freedom occurs to them now and then.

"Yes, lad, I'll smuggle them over—over to a land that most ways seems about like any other land, with its pretty spots and its ugly ones and its good-weather days and its stormy ones. It seems that way to you and me; but to these black people, it's the Land of Freedom; it's sort of a heaven to them, where at last they can fling back their heads and shout till their throats ache with the sweetest pain in all the world, 'I'm black, and I'm poor, and I'm ignorant; but I'm free! Oh, great God, I'm *free!*'"

Abruptly he got to his feet and strode back and forth before me. "I made a vow, Tom Shandy. I swore that, so long as I lived, I'd lead as many as I could away to their freedom." He shrugged. "It's the only way I have, the only way I know. I'm unscholared, Tom; I can't fight this thing as others do, with grand speeches and such like.

"And I'll tell ye something else, Tom: oh, I've little enough to be proud of, what with a bit of deviltry here and there, and a sort of a—well, a sort of a what-does-it-matter-about-tomorrow? way of living; but I know how a medicine-doctor feels when he's done his work well. He closes his eyes and maybe smiles a little bit; and then he says to himself, he says: 'I've saved a man's life!' Yes, I know how he feels. I lie down at night, and though I've an ear cocked for the officers who are after me for my rascality, I close my eyes and I see nigh upon a hundred faces turned toward me—some old, some young, some fat, some lean, but all of them black, and at last, all of them smiling. Smiling, I tell ye, Tom! And somehow I sort of like to whisper to myself: 'Ye're not much good, Jim Hope, but—ye saved them their manhood!'"

HE bent over me, his hands upon his knees. "How can I *keep* from smuggling them over to their freedom, Tom Shandy? Why, man, *I* can hardly stay in a house; it seems there's something pressing in on me. Think, Tom! Think of never being able to go skylarkin' when the far places call! Think of having to stay in one place, on and on and on, till the green sod's above ye! Maybe I'm wrong to hustle them away, Tom Shandy, but it seems I just can't help it."

FLINGING off the mood, he reseated himself. "An' maybe ye've been wondering," he resumed with a droll smile, "just what I wrote on that bit of paper. Well, 'twas sort of a love-letter to the Sheriff, telling him how desp'rate sorry I was to have to disappoint him, but that business called me elsewhere. Sure, it'll be a bothersome sort of walk for him and his good men back to town."

"Walk? Why—"

"Oh, no, they haven't horses." And he shook his head in mock-sobriety. "No sir, not a horse to their names—at least, not right handy, as ye might say. Ye see, I tied my bit of a note to the horn of the Sheriff's saddle; then I just led their horses off a way and took off their bridles and spanked them on their flanks and headed them toward town." He threw back his head and laughed heartily. "Can't ye just see those people in Gordon when they see the horses trotting down the street in a cloud of dust? The Sheriff and his men, they know, went out to get Jim Hope dead or alive—but prefer'bly dead; and here comes the horses with four empty saddles! Why—why, the villain has up and killed the Sheriff and three other God-fearin' men! Raise a mob! Get some rope!" He wiped his eyes. "Ye live in Gordon. What might ye be doing out here today?"

"I don't live in Gordon now," said I.

"No?" His brows lifted. "The last time I was through the town, it seems to me your house was still standing there on Mulberry Street."

"The house is still there," said I, "but we don't own it any more. It belongs to Mr. Brinkley." I told him the whole of the tale.

He mulled over that a long while. Then: "Mr. Banker Brinkley, eh? Ye know," said he, leaning toward me and a quizzical smile again coming to his lips, "I wouldn't be surprised did Mr. Banker Brinkley learn a lesson one of these days. Just how much did ye owe the little varmint?"

Certainly I had heard the figure often enough. "Eight thousand, four hundred and sixty-two dollars," said I.

Abruptly he rose. "Tom Shandy, I'll not insult ye by offering to pay ye for

what ye've done for me. Ye saved my life, lad. I'd like ye to have something to remember me by; for some day, soon or late, the time will come when there won't be a lad like ye to run and warn me. Let's see, now!" He felt in his pockets. "Here! Mayhap that wouldn't exactly displease ye." He handed me the strangest knife that ever I had seen. The handle was of ivory, with a bit of silver here and there. I saw at a glance it was of foreign make. "'Tis little enough," said he, "but my heart goes with it, Tom."

He took up his bridle-reins. "Well, I better be on my way, lest the Sheriff come back for a postscript to my letter." Once more his air was jaunty. He tossed the reins over his horse's head and leaped into the saddle. "Good luck to ye, Tom Shandy!" And away he rode toward the east.

He halted his horse fifty yards or so away and held up a hand. "Thank ye again, Tom Shandy!" he called. . . .

Once back at our little farm, I told my mother of my adventure.

"I wonder what he was doing around here," said she.

"Oh, he covers a large part of the South," said I knowingly.

She rose. "Well, let's hope he doesn't 'cover' this part very often," said she, leaving the room.

That night I was a long while falling asleep. Jim Hope! I had seen Jim Hope! Seen him? Why, I had *talked* with him; he had treated me as a friend. Jim Hope, known throughout the South—he and his men! And he had given me a knife, the like of which any boy would cherish. What would the boys of Gordon think could they but know of my adventure? That was the only bitter part of it. I could not tell them.

CHAPTER III

A HALF-MILE to the north of our home was the schoolhouse of the neighborhood, a one-room affair built of logs. There I went the Monday following my meeting with Jim Hope.

A little while before the professor rang his bell, I saw a strange couple approaching. In the lead was a young girl, of perhaps my own age, and instantly I knew she was not native to our section. Well-nigh as tall as I, she wore a dress of silk that even I, to this day ignorant of such matters, could see was a garment of rare material. Her face I thought was the loveliest that ever I had seen. It was neither brown nor black. Were there shades of black, I would say it was *light-black*. Her eyes, that looked neither to right nor left, were dark blue. Her lips were pressed close, and her head was high—high as ever my mother held hers—and her shoulders were back. On she came toward us, granting none so much as a glance. Behind her came as queer an old negro as ever eye rested upon. His body was bent and twisted; a frightful scar empurpled one entire side of his face, showing he had suffered a terrible burn—as do so many of the children of the poor in the country where open fireplaces abound; one leg was gone just below the knee, and in its place was a home-made wooden peg. His eyes to the ground, he followed his young mistress to the schoolhouse door, handed her a book, turned on his good leg, and bent half-double, hobbled away.

"WHO are they?" I asked.

"Jean Ferguson," said a boy, "an' her old nigger Shadrach."

"Do they live around here?"

"*You* ought to know. They live less'n a half-mile from you, back on the river. Folks says they's rich."

"Rich?"

"Well," said he, "you can figure it out yourself. Her an' her aunt, old Margot Ferguson, an' their two free niggers—*free*, mind you!—old Shadrach an' his wife is all they is of 'em, an' *they* sure can't do much work or make much cotton; but they sure live good. Pap says they paid cash-money for their place. But they's sumpin' curisome about 'em."

I waited, wondering.

"They's furriners," the boy kept on, "an' don't 'sociate with *no*-body. Don't even go to church. They sure act high an' mighty."

I accomplished little in school that day. I would bend over my book conscientiously enough, but soon found myself glancing toward Jean Ferguson—at her hair, at the mold of her cheek and chin, at her straight lithe figure. When school was done with and we were dismissed, there was old peg-leg Shadrach waiting for her. She strode away with never a glance toward any of us, the bent old darky at her heels. . . .

That night—it was close upon three o'clock in the morning, it developed later—I felt a hand shaking me, and sitting up, saw my mother bending over me, a

"If you don't tell me where it is, I'll cut your throat!"

candle in her hand. "Get up, Tom. Some one knocked at the door, but they don't answer when I call."

Instantly I was wide-awake. My mother and I went to the door. "Who is it?" she called, and again, louder: "Who is it?"

But none answered.

"What's that?" I asked, pointing.

At her feet lay a small bundle, tied with a leather thong. I took it up, glanced at my mother and at the bundle again.

"Let's see what it is," said I.

As we closed the door, a shout came to us from the woods near by. "Thank ye again, Tom Shandy!"

"Jim—Hope!" I whispered.

We seated ourselves on the edge of my bed and tore open the package. Again we found ourselves staring at each other with wide eyes. Before us lay a mass of money—such a mass as I, certainly, had never before seen.

"What does this mean?" demanded my mother.

A startling thought came to me, and I started counting the money. When I had done, I looked up at her. "I believe I know," said I. "There's exactly eight thousand, four hundred and sixty-two dollars here. When I was with him the other day, Jim Hope asked me how much we had owed Mr. Brinkley, and I told

him. And I *know* that was Jim Hope who just called."

"But"—my mother's hands spread out—"we can't keep this! Why it's—it's preposterous!"

There was no more sleep for us that night. Carefully we wrapped the money again just as it had been wrapped, even to the tying of the thong.

What did it mean? We soon were to learn. In the morning, as I was ready for school, my mother and I stood before our door. A farmer of the neighborhood came by in his wagon, his children, school-bound, with him. "Mornin', ma'am," he called. "Heared the news?"

We told him we had heard no news.

He paused to bend over and laugh. "When I heared it, it like to been the death o' me. It 'pears that long 'bout midnight last night this rapscallion Jim Hope eases hisse'f into ol' Banker Brinkley's house, an' the first thing ol' Brinkley knows, they's a big pistol p'intin' slap at his head. 'Don't make a peep,' says Jim, 'an' hustle into your clothes.' Right soon, Jim Hope an' him was out of the house an' down the street an' in ol' Brinkley's office. 'What does this mean?' says ol' Brinkley. 'It just means," says Jim, 'you're gonna hand me right quick eight thousand, four hundred an' sixty-two dollars.' 'Aint got it,' whimpers ol' slick-head. 'Then,' says Jim, 'I'll just take your head instead, though the Lord knows it aint nothin' pretty to have about.' An' with that, he whips out a knife.

"Well sir, ol' Brinkley aint long diggin' up the money; an' then Jim says to him, he says: 'If you'd like a receipt, I'll be glad to give you one. I'll carve it in your hide,' he says. Well, ol' Brinkley aint honin' for *that*, so Jim up an' leaves."

When his wagon had jolted away, my mother turned to me.

"No school for you today, Tom. We're going to Gordon."

A CHANGED Brinkley greeted us. His unctuousness was gone, and in its place a frank irritability.

"I've something for you," said my mother, handing him the package.

"What's this?" he demanded, none too civilly.

"It is eight thousand, four hundred and sixty-two dollars," said she.

"Oh-ho!" said he. "*You* bring back the money that—that scoundrel robbed me of. I must say, madam, that is strange. Are you and Jim Hope—"

He got no more words out. I found myself shaking a fist dangerously close to his nose. "Another word out of you, and I'll—Give my mother a receipt for that money."

With no more to-do, but scowling the while, he wrote out the receipt, and we left him with his choler.

On our way home my mother was strangely silent; but as we came within sight of the farm, she turned to me. "I'm afraid your impetuous friend may prove a little embarrassing, Tom. But he's not all bad. No, he's not all bad. There's something good in him—as in everyone."

"Even in old Brinkley?" said I.

She smiled. "Sometimes the good in us *is* rather deeply hidden."

CHAPTER IV

JIM HOPE was accused of much of which he knew naught. Even if a horse or mule disappeared, the name Jim Hope leaped to every tongue. I took all these tales with a grain of salt. In the first place, I instinctively knew there was nothing petty about the man. Then, when I recalled his jaunty air and merry eyes, I felt no one truly worthy would actually suffer at his hands. With the coming of mature years, I saw he was one in whom a deal of the boy would linger to the end; that in a sense he *was* a boy blithely discharging a sober vow—to gain freedom for slaves.

Meanwhile I was at my wits' end to make friends with Jean Ferguson. Each day she came to and returned from school with old Shadrach limping at her heels. Not only would she not unbend before my awkward advances, but had nothing to say to the girls. At last I hit upon the idea of loitering near her home. Drawing close to it one afternoon, I halted at the edge of the surrounding woods. From this vantage-point I could survey the place deep in shade. I saw old Shadrach hoeing in the garden, and I saw his wife Dicey step to the well, draw a bucket of water and enter the house again.

Suddenly, off to the left, I heard some one singing—singing softly as one so often does when alone; and soon I saw Jean Ferguson, unaware of my presence, approaching. A few paces away, she saw me and halted; her head came a trifle higher; her eyes rested unwaveringly upon mine. Perhaps the whole of a minute passed, I in the grip of a mastering embarrassment.

At last I managed to get upon my feet. "Hello," said I lamely.

She did not answer; there was no change in her expression.

"I—I was just passing by—"

Still she studied me challengingly.

Somehow I grew a little more at ease. "We're neighbors," said I. "Can't we—be friends?"

Still she was silent.

"That was a pretty song you were singing," said I.

With that, and looking straight before her, she started toward her home. Not once did she look back; not a word had she spoken. . . .

There came a day when the professor of our school announced there would be an entertainment Christmas Eve night. There would be a Christmas tree and—Peering at us over his spectacles, he "gave out" the parts.

"Harriet Jenkins, please stand." She stood. "You will sing a solo. . . . Henry Smithers, please stand." Henry, face crimsoning, stood. "You will play a piece on your French harp. . . . Tom Shandy, please stand." My legs felt weak. "You will speak a piece from the Bible."

And so it went. Finally: "Jean Ferguson, please stand." Every eye in the room was upon her. She stood, head back, shoulders squared. Perhaps a hint of paleness had stolen into her cheeks. "You will speak a piece," said the professor.

"I would rather not," said Jean evenly.

THE little room seemed electrified. Leaning forward, the astounded professor removed his steel-rimmed spectacles. "You—you 'would rather *not?*'" he repeated incredulously.

"Yes, I would rather not," said she.

"Why,"—the professor glanced about as though seeking for something he had lost,—"why, I never heard of such a thing! Well, let me tell you this, young lady: You will have to! Every student in this school will have to perform that night."

Then we did experience a shock. "And what if I refuse?" she demanded, her eyes never leaving his face.

The professor studied her a long moment, his usually pasty cheeks redder than ever I had seen them. He removed his spectacles, swiftly batted his eyes, and with trembling hand, adjusted his spectacles on his nose again. "What if you refuse? If you expect to remain in this school, just don't you refuse."

Jean, to all outward appearances at least, was the calmest one in the room. "You mean I will have to quit school if I refuse to speak a piece?"

"I mean exactly that."

"Then I will speak it," said she calmly. Somehow there seemed no defeat in her surrender.

IT was two days later, just before dark, that I went to a pine stump for lightwood splinters.

"Tom Shandy!" called a voice softly.

I wheeled. Grinning at me from behind a tree was Jim Hope. "Jim!"

"None other," said he. "I thought I'd drop by to pass the time o' day with ye. Have ye time to talk a spell?"

"Certainly," said I, and we seated ourselves at the base of a tree.

Abruptly he sobered. "What I really came to ask ye was this: did ye happen to bring a reading-book or two with ye from Mulberry Street?"

I nodded. "Hundreds of them."

"*Hundreds* of books?"—incredulously.

"Yes."

"Well, well! Hundreds! That would be a sight worth seeing. I'm wondering would ye do me a bit of a favor."

"Of course."

"Ye see, it's this way: A man sort of bounding about, as ye might say—here today and there tomorrow—gets little enough chance for book-reading. Here of late, for some reason, I've been fair thirsting for a bit."

He leaned toward me. "Do ye, by chance, have any with poetry in them?"

"Oh, yes; a number of them," said I.

"Ye don't say! But of course ye wouldn't happen to have one of Robert Burns'."

"Yes, we have," said I; "a book with all his poems."

"Well, well! Now that's luck for certain. Would it be asking too much to ask ye to lend it to me a little while?"

"We'd be glad to," said I.

He leaned back, studying me. "Confidentially, Tom, I lack the heart to face your mother. Of course she thinks me a black-hearted scoundrel—nor do I blame her a whit for that. So I wonder would ye—say around nine o'clock tonight—put the book on your doorstep? I'll come and take it along with me."

I agreed; and soon, with a, "Good luck to ye, Tom—and thank ye," he strode away.

A short way off, he halted. "Oh, Tom! If it's no bother, would ye mind wrapping

a bit o' paper around it? I'd hate to soil a book—'specially a Robert Burns book."

"Of course he shall have the book," said my mother when I told her of Jim's request; and close upon nine o'clock she rose and passed into the kitchen. Soon she returned with something in her hand covered with a napkin, and, I thought, a hint of embarrassment upon her face. "It's just a pie," said she. "Poor man, living as he does, he may enjoy it."

Together we placed pie and book upon the doorstep and hurriedly closed the door.

It was not long before I heard a light step without. After a while, I opened the door. Book and pie were gone.

AT last, Christmas Eve came; a little after dark the small schoolhouse was crowded with nervous pupils and stiff and proud parents. In the extreme rear of the room I saw Jean Ferguson, rigidly erect and staring before her. Had she been the only one in the room, she could not have been more alone.

The professor at last tapped his desk, and the "exercises" began. Each of us went through his assigned task, some forgetting, all of us painfully self-conscious. Finally, the professor glanced at the paper in his hand. "Jean Ferguson will now recite."

All eyes turned toward her. If Jean felt embarrassment, she hid it well. Calmly enough she walked to the front of the room, her head high as ever. Her near-black hair was combed severely; her throat was bare; her dress I thought prettier even than the one she had worn the first day of school. I thought her strangely lovely.

Reaching the professor's desk, she turned, and for a moment surveyed the still room. Then, "I am reciting," she began slowly, "'Man Was Made to Mourn,' by Robert Burns."

Her voice was low, though each word reached me. At the moment, her selection of that doleful poem struck me as in no-wise odd; but as the years passed, understanding came to me. Once I glanced toward my mother. Her face was sober and her eyes bright. She was seeing, sensing far more than did I. . . .

When Jean Ferguson was done, instead of returning to her seat, she strode to that corner of the room where hats and wraps were hung. She had been told to recite a "piece;" she had not been told to remain for the rest of the program and the Christmas tree. She would go.

Seeing her intention, my mother hurried to her and took her hands in her own. "You did splendidly, my dear!"

A moment Jean studied her soberly, questioningly; then, a hint of a smile touched her lips. "Thank you."

"Come sit by me," invited my mother.

"I must go."

"But the Christmas tree!"

"I must go," repeated Jean; and turning, she walked from the room and into the night.

It was a bitter blow to me. I had, with the scant money at my command, bought her a simple little ring as a present. I had hung it upon the tree, her name plainly printed on the wrapper. I would not be thwarted so easily. Unmindful for once of the eyes of others, I strode to the tree, removed my gift and hurried from the schoolhouse. In the faint light I could see Jean, followed by old Shadrach, starting along the road.

I caught up with them. "Here," said I, "is a Christmas present for you. Merry Christmas!" I ended in confusion, and hurried back toward the school.

"She's a lovely girl," said my mother when we reached home; "but you know, Tom,"—thoughtfully she glanced away, —"there's something almost tragic about her. I wonder what it is. I wonder!"

THE days and the weeks passed, but I made no progress toward tearing down the barrier Jean Ferguson had raised between herself and the rest of us; not once did she wear to school the little ring I had given her.

One night, when supper was done with, my mother rose abruptly. "Tom, I'm going to see Jean Ferguson."

I was taken aback. "You mean—you mean you're going to their *house?*"

"Of course. Why not? Get your hat."

It was a dark night, so we needs must walk slowly. At last a light was distinguishable through the woods, and at sight of it my heart beat faster. I was calling upon Jean!

As we drew near, a dog barked furiously. Toward the rear of the house, a testy voice called: "Dandy! Hesh! Hesh, sir! You heah me? Come 'ere, sir!" I took it to be old Shadrach.

Crossing the yard and mounting the steps to the porch, my mother knocked. Silence. Once more she knocked.

"Who is it?" asked a voice that I recognized as Jean's.

"Mrs. Shandy, my dear. Tom and I have come to visit you."

A pause, as though a brief consultation were going on within; then the door opened. Jean Ferguson stood before us, eyes wide, lips pressed close.

My mother smiled. "I've been wanting to come for a long time."

Jean curtsied, a gesture I'd seen none of our girls employ. "Come in," said she.

A woman in her late fifties, I judged, sat before an open fire, a shawl about her shoulders.

"This is my Aunt Margot," said Jean, patently wondering.

The older woman smiled. "Ye're Mistress Shandy?"

"Yes."

"And Master Tom?"

I nodded, ill at ease, you may be sure.

"I'm right pleased to meet ye both," said old Margot. "Ye'll excuse me for not rising to greet ye? My rheumatism has been overly bad this week gone."

Of a sudden a rare happiness swept over me, for I saw upon Jean's finger the ring I had given her. So she *did* wear my ring, when others might not see!

Though the evening started stiffly enough, it was not long before that stiffness fled before my mother's tact. Even Jean unbent a little. Once she smiled at some remark of my mother's, and as for old Margot—well, already she seemed a different woman from the one who first greeted us. Time after time she chuckled delightedly.

Abruptly old Margot halted in the middle of a sentence and turned her head as though listening. I saw Jean start. Somewhere along the lane leading to the house I heard a horse galloping.

Old Margot forced a smile. "Jean, lass, will ye turn the light down a bit?"

Quickly Jean crossed the room and turned the lamp low.

"That's overly low," said old Margot. "A bit higher, my dear."

Up went the flame.

"Let me do it, Jean." With surprising agility, and with the aid of her stick, Margot crossed to the lamp. Down went the wick. She turned to smile at my mother. "I'm getting old and shaky. It seems"—she turned the lamp higher—"I can't quite get it." Again the flame was turned lower. "Just right. There! That's better." Back to her chair she hobbled, and seating herself, smoothed out her skirt. She smiled at my mother. "I was afraid the light was too strong for your eyes," she explained. "It's all right now?"

"Much better," said my mother.

There, watching calmly, was Red McNair.

Why such a to-do about the lamp? Their turning it down and then up and down again seemed a signal of some sort. But why a signal?

Whether my mother had her suspicions, I knew not; but in any event in a few minutes she rose to take her leave. At the door she turned to Jean; and when she spoke, her tone was sober. "My dear, I am your neighbor. From now on, I would like for you to know I am your friend," she said gently.

We said little on the way home. I was visualizing a lovely hand and a simple little ring upon a finger of that hand.

CHAPTER V

GUINEA SAM'S one passion was 'coon and 'possum hunting—a passion which I shared. As a consequence, many a crisp night we took my dog and gun, an ax, a sack and a torch of lightwood splinters, and roamed the woods and creek-banks. On the night of which I write, we had hunted for an hour or such a matter with no success. "Let's

head toward the river," said I, and soon we found ourselves in the narrow lane leading toward the Ferguson place. A hundred yards from the dwelling we turned into a path which would take us to the river. We had gone but a short way, when of a sudden we heard a scream in the direction of the Ferguson house.

I clutched old Guinea Sam's arm. "What was that?"

Again it came, shrill, piercing, terror-laden.

"Come on," said I, breaking into a run.

"Us bettah git home," called Guinea Sam. "I aint gwine. You—"

I paid no attention to his warning, but tore through the woods, clutching my gun. Suddenly I realized my dog had stayed with Guinea Sam. I hurried on. No scream, no shout, no further sound came to me from the direction of the Ferguson place. I came into the open and faintly saw before me the trees that surrounded the house. No light shone from the windows. I came to the yard and sped through the narrow gate and on to the house. I peered through a window, the while wondering at the fact their dog was silent.

FOR an instant, I believe, my heart stopped at the sight that greeted me. The lamp lay upon the floor, shattered. The room was dimly lighted by the glow of the open fire; and at what I saw, a fury of which I had not known myself capable took hold of me. In her chair sat old Margot, head flung back, eyes staring. At the moment, I thought her dead. Before her, bending over and with hands upon his knees, stood a man, a mask upon his face. Across the room was another, likewise masked. One hand gripped Jean's shoulder, and he shook her violently. His other hand clasped a knife. He cursed hideously. "I'll ask you just one more time, and if you don't tell me where it is, I'll cut your throat, so help me God! Where is it?"

I waited to see no more and to hear no more. The window was shoulder-high to me, but by standing on tiptoe, I managed it. I leveled my gun and let fly at the legs of the man holding Jean. I feared to aim higher, lest I wound her. With the sound of the gun, I sped toward the front door. Ere I reached it, it was flung open and two men raced across the yard. Aiming as best I could in the dim light, I fired the other barrel of my gun at them. On they raced.

I ran up the steps and across the porch and into the house. In one corner of the room cowered Jean, the fingers of one hand pressing her lips and her dear blue eyes staring wildly. A moment she stood there; then, running to me, flung her arms about me and sobbed piteously.

Before ever I knew what I was about, my lips touched her hair and her cheek and her throbbing temple. "Please, Jean!" I murmured again and again. "Please! Everything's all right now."

Abruptly her sobs ceased; she hurried to old Margot, who still sat stiffly.

"Aunt Margot! Speak to me, Aunt Margot!" She looked up at me, appeal in her eyes. "There's a bottle of wine in the kitchen. Please get it."

We forced a few drops between old Margot's lips. Her lids fluttered; her stiffened fingers twitched, and a long sigh escaped her. Then she saw us. She tried to sit up, but Jean forced her back.

At last: "Ye're all right, Jean?"

"Yes."

Then she saw me, and managed a faint smile. "And why is young Master Tom here?" she asked.

"He drove them away," Jean explained, glancing toward me gratefully.

I'll not pretend I felt no pride in the rôle she had given me. To appear well in Jean's eyes!

Old Margot glanced about. "Shadrach—and Dicey?"

In our excitement Jean and I had forgotten them. I ran toward their cabin in the rear. As I hurried across the yard, I stumbled over an object that was soft and yielding. It was the Ferguson's dog, which the would-be robbers had killed.

Old Shadrach and Dicey were seated upon the floor of their cabin and trussed up like fowls for baking. Soon I had them free, and but for their terror, neither was the worse for the experience.

QUICKLY I rejoined old Margot and Jean, and we prepared to await the coming of day.

Suddenly the three of us fell silent. Faintly there had come to us the sound of a running horse. Jean started toward the lamp, and it flashed upon me it was her intention to lower it and turn it up and lower it again.

"Leave it be," said old Margot evenly. "The lad has rendered us a great service, and I'd have—him—know of it."

The horse drew nearer and then fell into a walk just beyond the yard, and

then made its way around the house to the rear. A door opened and closed; footsteps sounded in the hallway. In a moment Jim Hope stood framed in the doorway.

"Well," said he blithely, "we seem to have a visitor."

Old Margot looked from me to Jim. "Ye know the lad, Jim?"

"We're old friends," said he, dropping a hand upon my shoulder.

"Sit here, Jim," said old Margot. "I've untasty news for ye."

NEVER have I seen a man undergo such a change in so brief a while—as Margot, with an interjection by Jean now and then, told the tale. His lips were drawn in till they seemed two thin straight lines; a look such as I cannot describe had leaped into his blue eyes.

He waited till the whole of it was told; then he turned to Jean. "Do ye know either of them?" he asked evenly.

"No."

He turned to me. "And you?"

I shook my head.

He peered into the fire, thinking. Again he turned to me. "Do ye think ye hit either of them when ye fired?"

"I'm sure I hit the one I shot at in the room—hit him in the legs," said I.

"And then they ran across the yard?"

"Yes."

"And then rode off, I suppose."

"No. They had no horses," said I.

"Oh, ho! No horses, eh? That means they came afoot; coming afoot means they live near by." He strode from the room and out into the yard. He whistled shrilly three times, waited a moment, and whistled a third time. Meanwhile I had joined him.

Soon we heard horses running toward us. As we waited, he turned to me. "Tom Shandy," said he, "this makes twice—three times—ye've done me a great favor. If ever the time comes when ye need me, lad, I'll not fail ye."

On the horses came, finally halting before the gate.

"In here," ordered Jim; and the men, dismounting, tossed their reins over the pickets of the fence. There were five of them.

Quickly Jim told of what had happened. He turned to a tall, broad fellow whose coat seemed too small for him and whose trousers too tight. "McNair, ye know the country around here as well as I do. Ye'll take three of the boys and make the rounds. Go to every house, if need be, within a mile of where we stand. Go straight in and seek out a man with a fresh-wounded leg. If ye find the fine fellow, make him tell you who was with him. Fetch the two of them to the sycamore tree on the river-bank. I'll be waiting for ye there." He turned to another. "Ye'll wait here, Harry, to guard the house."

McNair and the three others mounted their horses, and with never a word, rode away; the one he called Harry leaned upon the picket fence. Jim hurried back into the house, I at his heels.

He bent over Margot, patting her wrinkled hand. "I'll have to leave ye a bit; but don't ye worry. A man's outside on guard." He turned to Jean and touched her cheek with his lips. "I'll be back before day," said he.

"I'm going along with you," said I.

"As ye will," said he, with a shrug of his shoulders.

He led the way through the woods. We came upon a path that ran along the edge of a small stream, and this we followed in silence. At last I saw before me the river and I heard its waters pleasantly lapping the bank. We halted beneath a great sycamore and seated ourselves. Neither of us spoke. Now and again Jim rose, slowly walked back and forth, and pausing, tossed bits of earth into the flowing stream.

AT last we heard the sound of horses approaching, and in a little while they halted before us. I caught my breath as Jim's men, none too gently, thrust two others before us, for I recognized Lem Worley and his son Henry.

A long moment Jim studied them. "So ye fetched them both," said he, not taking his eyes from the culprits.

"Both chicks from the same nest," said McNair. There was no hint of excitement or elation in his tone. It all seemed matter-of-fact to him.

"Bind their arms and legs," said Jim, and the order was quickly executed.

Once they were tied, McNair lifted young Worley and laid him flat upon the ground; he straddled his torso. "So," said he, calmly as you please, "you like the taste of money, eh?" He felt in his pockets. "Well, I'm going to give you your fill." With thumb and forefinger of his powerful and hairy left hand, he forced open the man's jaws; his right, with studied deliberation, thrust coin after coin, into the fellow's mouth. "So—you like—the taste—of money," he

muttered as he dropped coin after coin into the wretch's mouth. "That's—just —fine. Now here's—a nice—big juicy— one."

Young Worley strained at his bonds; his face grew purple. I heard his father mumbling unintelligibly through his gag.

"That'll do, Red," said Jim Hope. "Leave him be for the present."

McNair removed his hand, and the fellow spewed coins as a Chinese sprays water upon his wash before the ironing.

"On your feet!" ordered Jim. The two miscreants were stood side by side. "Ye're a cowardly pair. So ye thought those good people had money, eh, and ye'd murder them or scare them nigh to death for that money? Well, ye were mistaken; they have no money to speak of." He stepped nearer them. "If you or anyone else around here ever bothers them again—oh, God have pity upon ye!" He turned to Red McNair. "I'm taking a bit of a walk for the air. These two have made it foul around here. You and the boys entertain them while I'm gone. It may teach them the folly of frightening two helpless women." He led McNair a few paces to one side. "Careful, Red. Stop in time, mind. I want them to live, so's they can spread the fear about the neighborhood. Ye understand?"

"Right," said McNair.

Jim turned to me. "Maybe 'twould be best did ye come with me, Tom. Ye may have a weakish sort of stomach."

Together we walked away and on toward the Ferguson place.

Well-nigh there, Jim halted, facing me. "Tom, I don't seem to know just how to say it. If any harm had come to them tonight— Ye'll never know my debt to ye, Tom Shandy! If ever the time comes when I—oh, ye understand, don't ye, lad? To tell ye the truth, I'm fair chokin' right now."

A moment he gripped my arm; then we went on toward the house.

YOU can realize what a bombshell all these happenings proved in our usually peaceful community. By noon the following day the streets of Gordon were crowded; and on the second day a man in a buggy halted before our gate. It was Sheriff Pratt.

Once within-doors: "I'm downright sorry, ma'am, but I'll have to take Tom back to town with me. The Squire wants to ask him some questions about the affair at the Fergusons'."

"Very well," said my mother. "I'll go along with him."

The court-room was crowded when we got there; even the windows and doors were filled with the curious. Little time was lost in starting proceedings.

Squire Munson motioned me to a chair, and I was administered the oath. The questioning began. I related the story from beginning to end.

"Did you recognize the two men in the room?" asked the squire.

"No sir. They had masks on."

I told of a man coming to the house, and upon learning what had happened, of calling five men to him; I told how four of these five had gone in search of the culprits, finally returning with them. At this juncture I halted. My eyes had strayed to one of the windows, and I believe my heart for an instant paused, for there, watching the proceedings as calmly as you please, was Red McNair, Jim Hope's lieutenant.

"PROCEED with your story," Squire Munson prompted.

I told of the rest of it, even to the thrusting of the money into young Worley's mouth.

The old squire leaned toward me. "Did you know this leader, Tom?"

"Yes sir," said I, suddenly in a panic.

"Who was he?"

I moistened my lips. Every eye, of course, was upon me, and every ear strained to get my answer. At last, said I: "I—I'd rather not tell you, sir."

The squire's surprise was apparent enough. "I'm afraid you'll have to, Master Shandy. Remember you're under oath."

"I'm sorry, sir, but I can't tell you."

Squire Munson seemed unable to believe his ears. "And just why can't you tell the court, sir?" he demanded, a new harshness in his tone.

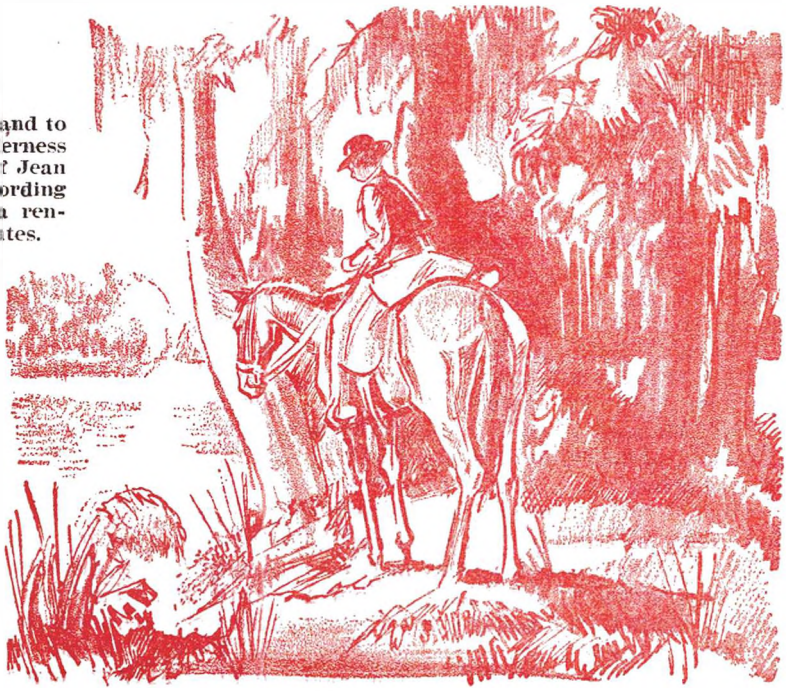
Somehow a greater confidence came to me. "Because I just the same as gave my word I would not."

"Oh, ho! You gave your word you would not! You seem to forget, Master Shandy, that you have just sworn to tell the truth and the *whole* truth. And what have you to say to that, sir?"

For the moment I was stumped; I could only reply again: "I'm sorry, sir, but I can't tell you."

McNair, from his perch in the window, nodded his head by way of approval.

The old squire removed his spectacles and testily tapped the arm of his chair.



I knew Honey Island to be a swampy wilderness that in the day of Jean La Fitte had, according to rumor, been a rendezvous of pirates.

"Thomas Shandy," said he, "I demand that you answer my question: what is the name of the leader?"

"I can't tell you, sir," said I, stubbornly.

He straightened, pointing a shaking finger toward me; his face had become crimson. "Then, sir, you leave me no alternative. If you persist in your refusal, I must declare you guilty of contempt of court. Do you wish to change your answer before I sentence you?"

At that most of my already flagging courage fled; but somehow, I managed it. "I can't change my answer, sir," said I.

"You will stand," the squire all but shouted.

I stood.

"Thomas Shandy, it is my painful duty to sentence you to ten days in the county jail. Sheriff Pratt will take charge of the prisoner."

I feared to glance toward my mother, but when at last I did look toward her, she smiled at me encouragingly.

"Let's go, Tom," said Sheriff Pratt—reluctantly, I thought; and we started from the court-room.

My mother joined us. "I will go with you," said she.

If embarrassment gripped her, none of it showed in her bearing. Her head was high as ever; graciously she nodded to old friends and acquaintances. At last we came to the small jail, a squat brick structure of four rooms or cells. At the moment it was empty—as indeed it usually was.

Calmly my mother peered into each of the cells, and at last turned to the Sheriff. "Tom will occupy this one. I think it will be cooler in the afternoon." To all appearances, she might have been selecting a room at an inn.

Soon enough, I was in my cell, the door was locked and the Sheriff, rather sheepishly, left us.

My mother seated herself before my door. "Tom Shandy," said she, "it would be an unnatural mother who did not dislike seeing her own son in jail—from any cause; but—I am glad you did not break your word."

When it was well-nigh dark, she left me, wishing me pleasant dreams and saying she knew I would be brave. I had my doubts about that. I was the only prisoner, and I dreaded the hours before me. Finally I fell into a troubled sleep.

How long I slept, I do not know; but suddenly I found myself sitting upright. There was a scratching and a grating and a prying at the door of my cell. "Who's there?" I demanded, my heart racing.

"Sh-h-h! Not so loud."

"Who is it?" I whispered.

"McNair," said a voice in the darkness, the while the prying and grating continued. "You didn't expect your friends to desert you, did you, after the way you behaved today? Now—"

I heard the door swing open. The next moment McNair was seated beside me on my narrow bed. "Contempt of court, is it? Ten days, eh? Well, we'll see about that. Have you anything to bring along with you?" he broke off.

"'Bring along?'" I repeated.

"Of course. What else? A certain party—no need of naming names—is waiting a short way off with horses. A little ride, and you can thumb your nose at old High-and-Mighty."

"I can't," I whispered to McNair.

He was silent a moment. "You can't *go?*" he demanded incredulously.

"No, McNair, I can't. I *was* guilty of contempt of court, and I'll stay and take my medicine."

"Well," said he resignedly, "I've run into queer folk in my day, but none the likes of you. Preferring to stay in jail—"

"I'm grateful to you," said I, "but I can't. Hadn't you better go? If they find you here—"

"Well," said he, rising, "that's one good idea you have." And he left me.

After all, McNair's effort toward a jail-delivery of a prisoner who wouldn't be delivered had its good effect. Scores came to scrutinize the broken door, among them Squire Munson.

He eyed me and then the door, and then me again. "Well, Tom Shandy, I take it you wouldn't care to say who did this."

"No sir," said I.

He chuckled. "Well, you're not under oath, so I'll not try to force you." Turning on his heel, he left me.

The door of my cell remained open, for no move had been made to repair it, and the Sheriff said nothing about moving me. Throughout the day my mother sat with me, reading aloud or knitting as we talked. Each day several of our friends "called" to sit with us. It made an odd picture.

I had been sentenced to serve ten days, but I was destined to serve but five of them. When a prisoner voluntarily remains within an unlocked cell, the reason for incarceration somehow loses its force. At the end of the fifth day Squire Munson released me.

CHAPTER VI

ONCE back at our little farm, old Guinea Sam eyed me dourly, the while carrying on a crotchety monologue. "Humph! Quality folks locked up in de jail-house! Jes' what dey kin expec', 'sociatin' wid white trash. Thank de Lawd, Jedge Shandy warn't heah to see his onliest boy in dat fix! Jail! Humph!"

Quickly we were back in our usual routine. A matter of three weeks passed, and a certain Sunday night came.

MY mother and I, supper over, were sitting in the small front room of our home. It was close upon nine o'clock when suddenly we looked up, listening. From beyond the door voices reached us vaguely—voices that even at that distance bespoke excitement. The voices drew nearer, and at last we heard our front gate open and close again.

Some one said: "Hello!"

Opening the door, I peered out into the night. Dimly I saw a man and two ladies and a black servant striding toward me. The four of them mounted the steps to our narrow porch.

"We've had an—accident," said the man. "May we come in?"

"Certainly," said I, standing aside.

The man, I saw, was of middle-age and elegantly dressed. He bowed before my mother. "Madam, I trust you will excuse this intrusion; but we have just had a most unpleasant encounter. I am John Fenwick, of New Orleans. This is Mrs. Fenwick; and this is my daughter Elizabeth."

After these little formalities I fetched chairs; and as the gentleman told of their experience, I saw a hint of wonderment upon his countenance as he glanced about the walls of our small room—at the books, the several oil portraits, the mahogany and rosewood furniture, the silver candlesticks and vases on the crude pine mantel.

"We were driving to Jackson," said Mr. Fenwick, "when, about a mile down the road, a group of men rode out of the woods. One of them called 'Halt!' Another grasped the bridles of our horses. The fellow who seemed to be the leader dismounted and came to my side of the carriage. 'I'm sorry to detain you,' he said, 'but I must.'"

"He first took off his hat and bowed very politely," interjected Mrs. Fenwick.

Her husband went on with the tale. He told of the highwaymen asking if they had any arms—which they had not. "That's right. No need of bothering with firearms on a peaceful road like this," the leader had said.

"'Peaceful?' Who are you?" Mr. Fenwick had demanded.

"Who am I? Well now, I'll just up and answer with an old saw: while there's life, there's hope," the bandit had replied.

"I don't know what you mean," our guest had rejoined.

"Well, well," the other had gone on, "I see ye're a man for details. My name might be—only *might* be!—Jim Hope."

"I suppose you want our money," Mr. Fenwick had said.

"Confidentially, I *did* have such a thought in mind."

I listened to the whole of it with wide eyes and racing heart—of the highwayman taking a ring of Mrs. Fenwick's while, at her earnest request, leaving another which she had explained had belonged to her mother; of calling attention to and being handed a brooch of diamonds and pearls worn by Elizabeth Fenwick; of the bandit saying to Mr. Fenwick, "Could ye by chance tell me the time o' night?" and when his victim had removed his watch from his pocket, of taking it into his own hand, saying, "Allow me. My sight's rare good." And then: "I'm thinking maybe I'd better just keep this. It'll save me the necessity of stopping good folk and asking the time o' day—or night."

At the end, it seems, he had driven away in the Fenwick carriage, calling back: "Good-night to all of ye, and thank ye kindly."

With the ending of the tale, Mr. Fenwick's face was grim. "I'll have this Hope hanged for tonight's doings!"

THROUGHOUT the whole of this, my eyes, of course, had studied our visitors; but they lingered most of the while upon Elizabeth Fenwick, comparing her with Jean Ferguson. Jean was lissom, but Elizabeth was dainty; while Jean's eyes were blue, Elizabeth Fenwick's were brown—a deep brown, rich and soft as age-touched mahogany, yet with an unmistakable merriment and coquetry lurking within them.

"You will pardon me, madam," Mr. Fenwick was saying, "but you have not told us who you are."

"I am Mrs. Shandy," said my mother, "and this is my son Tom. We formerly lived in Gordon."

At that he straightened a little. "Not the widow of Judge Shandy?"

She nodded.

"He was my friend," said he. "I had known him many years. A rare man." He turned to me. "I suppose you plan being a lawyer, Tom?"

"I haven't quite decided," said I.

"Well,"—he handed me a card,—"if ever you come to New Orleans, let me know." He rose. "We must intrude no longer. How far is Gordon?"

"About six miles," said I.

"Have you a horse on which I may send my boy for a conveyance?"

My mother spoke before I could answer him. "I shall be glad to send you in my carriage," said she. "My servant will drive you."

"Let me drive them in," I proposed.

"As you please."

CHAPTER VII

SIX weeks or thereabout had passed since the Fenwicks had their brush with Jim Hope and his men. My mother and I were in church—our little country church with a partition down its center, to the left of which sat the women and girls and to the right of which the men and boys.

Of a sudden a boy of the neighborhood whispered in my ear: "The Fergusons' old servant wants to see you outside."

I tiptoed from the church. Old Shadrach, waiting at the gate, motioned with a gnarled finger. "We got trouble at de house," said he.

"Trouble? What sort of trouble?"

"Miss Margot been took bad. Miss Jean say she sorry to bother, but kin you come?"

"Of course. I'll hurry along," said I, and trotted on ahead.

At the Ferguson place, old Margot lay upon her bed, her wrinkled cheeks white.

Jean came to me. "She is very ill," she whispered. "She—is dying." Tears stole into her eyes. She raised her hand to brush them away, and I saw my ring upon her finger. "I must get word to Jim."

"I'll go to him," said I. "Do you know where he is?"

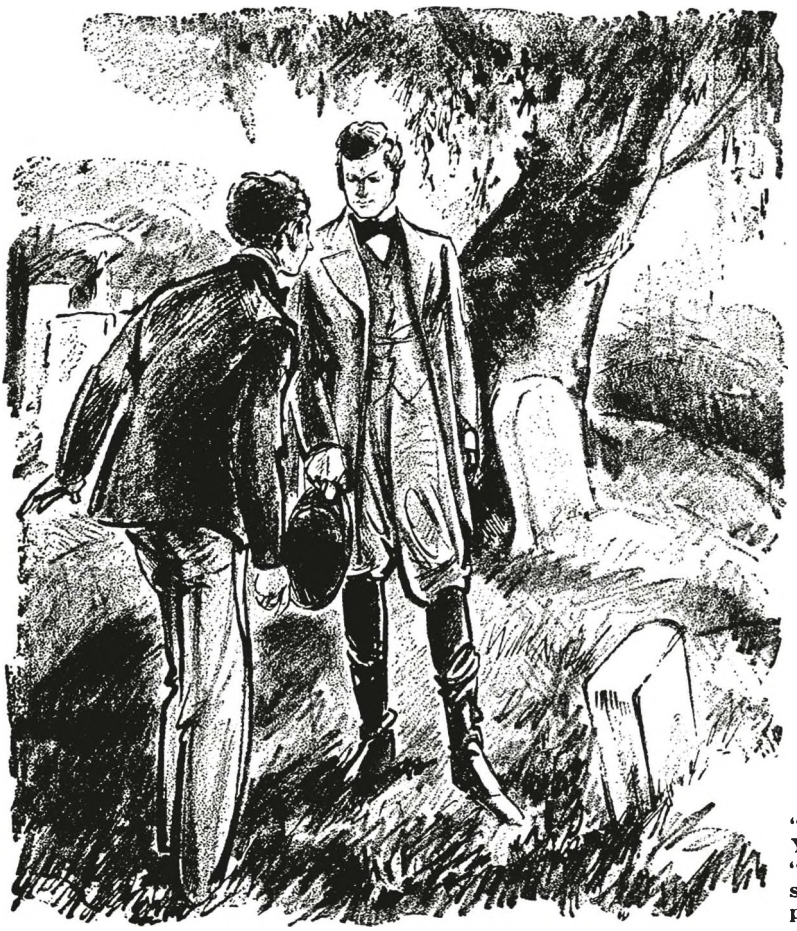
A brief moment her hand rested upon my arm.

"Probably on Honey Island."

"I'll go at once," said I. "My mother will come to you."

Once at my own home, I got down a pair of saddle-bags, packed a few clothes and a little food and took a few dollars from our scanty hoard. Going to the small barn, I saddled Button, the younger of our two horses.

Bidding good-by to Guinea Sam and Mammy Claire, who stared at me wonderingly, I started toward the church;



"Listen to me, Jim! You must run!" "Thank ye, lad," he said; "but it happens to be too late."

but I had ridden but a little way when I saw my mother approaching. I drew her aside and told her of the situation.

"It's a long journey," said she soberly, when I had done. "There may be some danger."

"I hardly think so," said I, with secret misgivings enough.

"Of course you must go." She stepped closer. "Good-by, Tom."

Bending down, I kissed her, clucked to Button, and with as confident an air as I could muster, galloped down the sandy road—toward I knew not what. . . .

I was much as a man riding through the dark: I knew little enough of Honey Island. I knew it lay somewhat over a hundred miles in a southwesterly direction; I knew it to be a dense, swampy wilderness that in the day of Jean La-Fitte had, according to rumor, been a rendezvous of pirates.

Soon I found myself in the pine forest that extended almost uninhabited to the south. For hours I rode through the rolling hills, seldom passing another traveler. Twilight came, and still the woods, well-nigh free of undergrowth as a park, surrounded me. It was close upon dark when rounding a bend in the dim road, I saw before me a small log house, and near by, a man chopping wood. There I spent the night.

The second night I spent in the woods. I slept but little, what with keeping my fire alive and the occasional hooting of an owl and the almost constant calling of whippoorwills.

By riding hard the third day, I reached Davis Corners, a small village near the coast. There I found food and shelter at a small ramshackle inn. I had covered close upon a hundred miles.

When I asked my host how far away lay Honey Island, he eyed me wonderingly. "Right at twenty miles," said he, "and the longest twenty ever you rode."

"Why the longest?" I asked.

"Why? Huh! Wait'll you ford those streams and flounder through the swamps." He paused, pursing his lips. Then: "'Course, it's none o' my business, but what might be takin' you to such a place as Honey Island? I see it

aint huntin'." He had noticed I carried no gun.

"I'm looking for a man," said I.

"Huntin' a man, eh? Well, son, I'm thinkin' you're apt to meet up with *some* men you'd be better off not findin'."

I WAS astride my horse with the breaking of dawn and riding into the west. My course lay for the greater part through a wilderness, for there was no hint of a road.

Several times I forded streams; across two I had to swim my horse. It was a process new to me, and one I heartily disrelished. I found myself making my way under the low-spreading limbs of live-oaks and magnolias, while all about, clean-trunked cypress and gum trees towered high. Happily there were narrow, winding cattle trails, and these I followed through the boggy region, though even upon them my horse often sank to its knees in the muck. I could but keep on, uncertainly enough, ever toward the west.

At last, about three o'clock in the afternoon, I came into a small clearing dotted with stumps. Then I knew I was near the river, for the clearing meant logs had there been removed for floating down the stream. Crossing this open space, I came upon a twisting, rutted road, and of a sudden saw the river gleaming before me. Upon its bank stood a small hut built of logs.

A man sat before the place, leisurely chewing tobacco and eying me with neither interest nor displeasure.

"Good afternoon," said I, drawing up before him.

He waited a long moment. Then, gruffly: "Howdy?"

I got off my horse. "I've a message for a man named Jim Hope. Do you know him?"

"Me?" He grunted. "I don't know nobody." He glanced about; then his heavy eyes rested upon me again. "'Pears like you're all by yo'self."

"I am."

He rose, ambled into his shack and presently returned with a gun in one hand and a horn, such as we use in fox-hunting, in the other. Throwing back his head, he blew two long blasts upon the horn, paused a moment and then blew a third time. Once more he seated himself on the bench before the hut, the gun across his knees.

Suddenly I heard voices off to the right, and wheeling, saw three men emerge from the surrounding swamp.

"He's by hisself," commented my host, still placidly chewing his tobacco.

A long stoop-shouldered fellow with two fingers of his right hand gone, stepped before me.

"What's your name?" he demanded.

"Tom Shandy," said I uneasily.

"Where you from?"

"Gordon."

"Gordon, eh? Sort o' strayed off your range, aint you?"

"I'm looking for a man named Jim Hope."

"Jim Hope? Who's he?"

"He's a friend of mine," said I.

"Well, now, aint that nice?" Then, to his fellows: "Tie him up."

A rope was soon fetched from the shack, and two of them grasped my arms. "Wait a minute," I protested. "I don't know who you are, but I've told you the truth. I *must* find Jim Hope quickly."

"Don't know nothin' about him," said my interrogator. "Go ahead and tie him up."

"Wait!" I pleaded. I thrust my hand into my pocket. "Here. I think you're Jim Hope's men. If you are, maybe you'll know this." I held out the ivory-handled knife Jim Hope had given me.

Slowly the one who had ordered me bound took it from my hand, closely examined it and then thrust it into a pocket of his coat. "If you're lyin' to me—" He turned to the others. "Hold him till I get back."

He strode away in the direction from which he and his companions had come.

PERHAPS ten minutes passed; then from the woods I saw Jim Hope hurrying toward me. He gripped my shoulders, holding me from him. "Ye're a sight for sore eyes, Tom Shandy," said he. Abruptly he sobered. "What brings ye, lad? Something happened—to Jean?"

I shook my head. "She's all right; but Miss Margot—"

He gripped my shoulders harder. "Out with it, lad."

"She's dying, Jim."

A long moment he stared into my eyes. Then: "Come along."

Wheeling, he led the way into the swamp. For a quarter of a mile or such a matter, we followed a narrow path, all but hidden by the dense growth about; then of a sudden we came into a clearing of two acres or more. The ground was packed hard; along one side ran a long corral in which twenty or more horses stood; along another side was a

long low building of logs that served as sleeping-quarters, and to the left of it a storehouse and a small blacksmith shop. Here and there negroes—ten or a dozen of them—pottered about. Later I learned they were runaway slaves. Six or eight white men, lounging about, eyed us interestedly.

Jim called one of the negroes. "Saddle Pilot for me." He turned to me. "When did you leave home?"

I told him.

He called another black boy. "Saddle McNair's bay. —Your horse must be fair spent," he explained to me. "We'll fetch him home later on. It's time that counts now."

Soon we were off. We made the trip home in a deal less time than I had taken in getting to Honey Island, for not only were we better mounted, but Jim, of course, knew the shortest way as a crow knows the course to its roosting-place.

Both nights we slept in the woods; and though we lacked the comfort of bed and roof, I found those nights far less lonely than many I have spent within-doors. We would tether our horses near by, and rolled in our blankets, peer up at the star-jeweled sky, awaiting sleep.

"YE'VE been my good friend, Tom Shandy," said Jim, as we lay upon our beds of pine needles.

I made no answer. He fell to humming softly. Then, abruptly breaking off: "Ye'll be a big man some day, lad; and ye'll have money too." He paused, peering up toward the sky. "Did ye ever fancy the idea of traveling some—traveling to far places?"

What boy has not?

"Indeed I have," said I.

"Then I'll give ye a bit of advice, Tom: Some day, when ye've the time and the money,—and mayhap a fine young wife on your arm,—make a trip to Scotland. Oh, but it's a grand place! A grand place, Tom Shandy!"

"Why did you leave it, Jim?" I asked.

He sat bolt upright, his blanket falling to his lap. "Why did I leave it? *Why?* I wonder, lad! I wonder; for no sooner was I gone, than I was fair yearning to be back. Oh, I don't know, Tom. I just don't know. It always seems there's a something, away off yonder, calling and beckoning; and—well, I just seem to want to go to see what's there."

A long while I lay awake, speculating upon the strange man an arm's-length from me—one moment sober, cautious, matter-of-fact; the next, blithe, sentimental, and reckless. Like another John Brown, he rode to free the slaves. . . . Like another Robin Hood, he robbed the rich that he might give to the poor.

CHAPTER VIII

IT was well past noon next day when we came within sight of my home and in a little while, to the crest of a high bare hill. I reined in my horse. "Wait!"

Jim's eyes followed mine. Far to the right of us lay a valley; toward the farther edge of it was our church, and beside it the graveyard. I sucked in my breath, as I saw a group of people standing there. Faintly there reached us the strains of a hymn.

"Too late," muttered Jim Hope; and to me: "Please go on—down there." He motioned toward the churchyard. "If ye've a chance, tell Jean I've come."

Without speaking, I rode down the hill and into the valley and on to the church. Hitching my horse, I made my way to the side of a new-made grave. My mother was beside Jean. I stood behind them.

The services had but started. Another hymn was sung; then the minister read a brief service. The casket was lowered into its resting-place, and we waited, as was the custom of our region, while the grave was filled.

Suddenly, from around a corner of the church, a man strode toward us. I stared in amazement; it was Jim Hope.

Looking neither to right nor left, he came to the head of the grave, and removing his hat, got upon his knees. For a moment his eyes closed. "I'm sorry, Margot, for all the worry I've caused ye. God be good to ye, dear!" Another brief moment he stood there; then he got to his feet, and strode through the crowd and disappeared behind the church.

A murmur went up, and quickly a man was elbowing his way through the gathering. It was Sheriff Pratt. "Why, that—that was Jim Hope!" said he, hurrying toward the road where his horse was tied. But, on glancing toward the west, I saw a great sorrel horse, a rider erect upon its back, galloping away. Soon horse and rider disappeared over the crest of a hill. . . .

No sooner were my mother, Jean and I back at the Ferguson place, than Jean came to me, her cheeks pale, but her blue

eyes wide and her lips firm. "Thank you for what you've done for me, Tom."

I turned to my mother. "Will you excuse Jean and me for a little while?" And I led her from the room. Not that I had aught to conceal from my mother. I simply felt it best that the less she knew of Jim Hope's doings, the better.

I led Jean into the room that had been old Margot's, and I took her hands in my own. "I'm afraid the Sheriff and his men are lurking about the place in the hope of catching Jim."

She nodded.

"I believe I know where he will be. I'll take you to him after dark."

Of a sudden I was leaning toward her. "I love you, Jean."

There came into her eyes a look that was a piteous plea; and momentarily her hands gripped mine; then she turned away, and we joined my mother.

AT last twilight came, and finally a moonless starlit night.

I bent over Jean. "We can go now," I whispered.

Again we passed into the room that had been old Margot's. Cautiously I crawled through a window and dropped to the ground. I held up my arms for Jean, and in a moment, she stood beside me. We tiptoed our way across the narrow side yard and through a gateway opening into a garden spot. Soon we were in the surrounding woods, and ere long, under the great smooth-barked sycamore at the river's edge.

Jim Hope was there. He took Jean in his arms and touched his lips to her cheek. "Little Jean!" he murmured. "Little sister!" After a while he turned to me. "It's a shameful thing when a man can't enter his own house—even when it's a house of death. A shameful thing! Don't think me uncivil, lad, but Jean and I've a deal to talk over. Would ye mind did we leave ye a little while?"

"Of course not," said I; "but you stay here. I'll walk down by the river." And I hurried away, well out of earshot.

Close upon an hour had passed, when I heard my name softly called. I climbed back up the bank to the sycamore tree.

Both of Jim's hands fell upon my shoulders. "I'm saying good-by to ye, Tom Shandy," said he.

"'Good-by?'"

"Yes, lad. It's likely I'll never see ye again."

A gripping sadness swept over me. "I'll—I'll miss you, Jim."

"Bless ye for the words! And good luck to ye always," said he, his voice none too steady.

"And good luck to you, Jim—always. My mother and I will look after Jean."

He waited so long I wondered at his silence. Then, so low I could scarce hear his words: "Jean'll be going too, Tom."

"Jean going? Where to?" I demanded.

His hands fell from my shoulders. "It's best—that ye not know, lad."

I clutched his arm. "Jim, I must tell you: I love Jean." I heard her catch her breath. "I told her so tonight. . . . I've known it a long while."

"It's sorry I am to hear ye say that, Tom Shandy. But ye're only a lad and will soon forget it."

"I'll never forget it." I wheeled toward Jean. "Do you wear the ring I gave you?"

"Yes," said she, in little more than a whisper.

I took her hands in mine. "Do you love me, Jean?"

She waited a long moment before answering me. "Yes, I love you, Tom; but—"

I turned to Jim Hope. "You mustn't take her where I'll not find her. We love each other."

"Listen, Tom Shandy," said he. "Mayhap ye love Jean; and mayhap she loves you. Ye're the rarest lad that ever I met up with, and I'd trust my little sister to ye and your mother as long as the sun shines and the night comes; but it can't be. I'm thinking of ye, Tom."

"Of me? I don't understand."

ONCE more he paused, as if feeling about in his mind for just the right words. "Tom Shandy, there's a place in the world for ye—a big place, I'm thinking. Some day, soon or late, ye'll marry a girl of your own kind." Suddenly, his fingers were pressing into my shoulders. "It tears the heart out of me to say it—it fair shames me to say it; but we can't forget that Jean Ferguson is Jim Hope's sister. It wouldn't be fair to ye, lad. If Jean loves ye, she'll give ye up, Tom, for your own good. . . . Ye'll see Jean back to the house, lad?"

"Yes," I managed.

He gripped my hand. "Don't blame me for what I'm doing. Some day ye'll understand. God be good to ye, Tom Shandy!" Turning, he disappeared into the woods.

I led Jean back to the house, neither of us speaking along the way. . . .

The second day following the events I have just recorded, Guinea Sam and I were getting in wood. "Dem folks done moved," he muttered casually.

"What folks?" I demanded.

"Dat Ferguson gal an' dat peg-leg niggah Shadrach an' his ol' ooman."

I dropped my ax and all but ran to the house that had been old Margot's and Jean Ferguson's home. Finding the door unlocked, I entered. I passed from room to room, and as I made my way, the greater my bewilderment grew. Each room was, seemingly, as I had last seen it. Nothing had been disturbed, nothing removed. Even in the kitchen old Dicey's cooking utensils seemed ready for the preparation of another meal. I opened the drawers of cabinets and the doors of the two great armoires, and I found there the clothes of Jean and of old Margot.

An oppressive loneliness settled upon me. I came upon a small lace-bordered handkerchief that I had seen Jean carry, and taking it up, I pressed it to my lips. Apparently she had left all of her old life behind her—all, including myself.

It was twilight when I got to my home. My mother sat before a lamp, knitting. I knew she knew where I had been, and I knew she knew of the pain in my heart.

"Tomorrow is Sunday," said she. "We'll drive into Gordon to church."

And then she spoke of other things, little every-day things; and she so fashioned her words that never a word of my own did I need speak. Was there ever another quite like her? I doubt it.

CHAPTER IX

CLOSE upon a year passed. No word had come of Jean Ferguson or Jim Hope. The poorer neighbors began to make free with the old Ferguson place and all within it—so free that ere long it was stripped bare.

One sultry August night my mother and I sat on the front porch of our small home. She turned to me. "You're nineteen, Tom."

"Going on twenty," said I. "Maybe Mr. Porter would let me read in his office. He has the largest law library in Gordon."

"I'm sure he would," said my mother, "but I think we can do better. You must go to college."

At that I sat up. "College? How can I go to college? It costs money."

"We can arrange it, if we're both very careful," she stated calmly.

"But how?" I demanded.

"We can borrow enough on the farm," said she.

I rose and stood before her. "I'll never do that. Leave you here to worry and—"

"When you've thought it over, I think you will. You'll only be away a year.* If you stay here on this little place, it will mean hardship and worry for both of us as long as we live."

"Where would I go?" I asked, weakening.

"I had thought of the University of Louisiana in New Orleans."**

"It must be terribly expensive."

"Just as expensive as you make it," said she. "I've made inquiries."

SO it came about that upon a bright morning in the fall, old Guinea Sam drove me into Gordon, and soon I was aboard the coach for Natchez, whence I would go by steamboat to New Orleans.

As the stage jounced and jostled along, I made brave vows, and in fancy fashioned a roseate future for my mother.

The trip down the river from Natchez to New Orleans was, to untraveled me, strange and fascinating—the bell ringing in the pilot-house; the shouts of the deck-hands; the boat nosing into the shore, and the mad churning of the paddle-wheel; all manner of things floating along the ponderous stream; a rowboat frantically scurrying out of the way; men and women and children standing upon the banks waving to us as we passed; negroes picking cotton in a hillside field, the vague melody of their song reaching us; the passing of an upstream steamboat, whistles sounding a salute.

I was bewildered by New Orleans. I stepped ashore bravely enough, but soon was agape at the numbers of drays and wagons and carriages, and at the people upon every hand. Walking aimlessly, I came at long last to Royal Street, and there, from a little old lady, whose hair was half-hid by a lace cap, I engaged a room overlooking Royal Street.

Having paid a month's rent in advance, I sauntered out to see the city. I strolled into a large hotel, which was quite the grandest thing ever I had seen, with its marble floors and great mirrors. And in the lobby a hearty voice greeted me: "Well, if it's not my friend Mr. Shandy!"

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*Law was a one-year course at the time

**Now Tulane University of Louisiana

I wheeled. Holding out his hand was a young man named Everly whom I had met on the boat-ride from Natchez to New Orleans. Though but in his early twenties, he had been one of those who played poker on the boat most assiduously—and most successfully.

"Let's have a drink," said he.

"No, thanks. I don't believe—"

"Come on, come on! It'll do you good—make your blood flow."

I gave in, and strolled into the bar with him. Presently a strange bravado stole over me.

"Come along," said Everly after several drinks; "I'll show you the town."

We left the hotel arm in arm. Once or twice we stepped into a tavern for another drink. Suddenly he halted, gripped my arm and glanced about. "How'd you like to make some money—a great deal of money?"

Nothing could have appealed to me more.

Turning a corner, we mounted a narrow stairway and entered a smoke-filled room. At a long table men were rolling dice; others played what I later learned was roulette; black boys scurried about, fetching drinks and bearing away empty glasses.

"Dice is the quickest way," whispered Everly. "Bet as I do."

As we played, the black boys brought us drinks—how many I know not.

BLINKING my eyes and gazing about, I saw I was in the room I had rented, though I had no recollection of getting there. I was fully dressed, save for hat and coat and shoes. My head ached unconscionably.

Suddenly, I remembered. I searched my pockets. *I found exactly three dollars there!* A great fear and a greater shame swept over me. In a few brief hours I had squandered the money my mother had raised for my schooling. Three dollars left to show for all she had done! I buried my face in my hands.

I straightened. A driving anger stole over me. I knew I had been rooked.

Three dollars left out of four hundred! I fled from my room, as though to leave my shame behind me. I hurried along the street, bound I knew not whither. I came to the broad river. Boats of variant types and sizes glided by before me; black laborers wheeled freight about the loaded wharf. . . . Three dollars! What could I write my mother? Where to turn? Surely I was life's most pitiable

"Come along," said Everly, after several drinks; "I'll show you the town."

sight—one who had fancied himself a man, only to awaken and find himself a wounded, disillusioned boy.

Suddenly, I saw approaching a powerful man with crimson-red hair, and a coat that seemed too small and trousers too tight. My heart raced, for I had recognized him instantly.

When he was abreast of me, I called, "McNair!" for it was Jim Hope's lieutenant.

He halted, studied me a moment and then drew nearer. "So, it's young Master Shandy," said he. "And just what might you be doing in New Orleans?"

Before I scarce realized what I was about, I had told him all.

At the end his face sobered and his great hairy hands clenched and opened and clenched again. "The dirty thievin' hounds! Show me the place, and I'll get your money back or my name aint Red McNair."

"That wouldn't do," said I. "It would mean serious trouble for you."

He eyed me wonderingly. "You're a strange lad. You're put in jail and won't leave when I swing open the door; you're robbed and won't let me get your money back. Well,"—he shrugged,—"they say it takes all kinds to make a world. Where do you live?"

I told him.

"And just what might your plans be?"

"I'll have to find work. I can't go back home—like this."

"Well," said he indifferently, "I guess better men have worked before. Good luck." And he left me.

Work: I started in quest of it.

It was night when I returned to my room. How many business establishments I had visited I do not know. All, it seemed, could continue their businesses without the services of Tom Shandy.

I flung myself across my bed. I had a little over two dollars left. What to do next?

There came a knock at my door. "Come in," said I wearily.

The negro maid of the house entered and handed me a small parcel. "A ge'man lef' it fo' you."

"What sort of a gentleman?"

"A biggish sort o' ge'man wid red hair."

Red McNair! "Thank you," said I.

When the maid had gone, I tore open the package. Money spilled about my feet. A sheet of paper caught my eye, and, my hands none too steady, I read:

To my frend Tom Shandy—

As it is hily probabal I shall some day need the survices of a lawyer unless I mend my ways—and to my shame I admit that seams unlikly—I urge you to attend the collidge as you had planned.

Heer is the bit of monie you will need. You can just call it a fee in advanse or a lone if you prefur.

Your frend,

Jim Hope

As I finished reading, somehow I had to blink and gulp to hold back the tears.

CHAPTER X

WHEN I had entered college, I called upon Mr. Fenwick at his offices. He remembered me well and invited me to supper that night—an invitation I eagerly accepted. It proved a pleasant evening—so pleasant, in fact, that for the moment, I forgot my recent follies.

Mrs. Fenwick graciously expressed the hope they would see much of me. Elizabeth played and sang for us. I thought her quite the daintiest being that ever I had seen—and certainly the most bewitching, with her bantering air and her merry brown eyes.

We talked of the misadventure that had led to our acquaintanceship. Mr. Fenwick lighted a cigar. "Do you remember my saying, Tom, that I'd have that Jim Hope hanged if it was the last act of my life?"

"Yes sir," I managed, a disturbing fear taking hold of me.

"Well, we're making headway—*real* headway, I hope."

When at last I bade them good-night and made my way back toward my room in Royal Street, I was happy one moment and depressed the next: Elizabeth Fenwick had promised to teach me dancing; her father had reported "headway" in his determination to see Jim Hope hanged.

I HAD heard a deal of Lake Pontchartrain, so one Sunday, when thoughts of my mother and old Guinea Sam and Mammy Claire left me lonely, I rented a saddle-horse from a public stable and soon was riding along the shell road bordering Bayou St. John. It was a pleasant ride, what with all manner of small boats making their slow way along the bayou—their crews frequently singing in a patois I did not understand—and the gulls dipping and soaring overhead. At last I saw a great expanse of shimmering water before me, and soon I stood on the shore of Lake Pontchartrain. I secured my horse to the wreck of a small boat and started along the beach.

Of a sudden my eye was attracted by a distant figure walking toward me. It was a negro man; his body was bent; one leg was gone, and in its place a peg-leg which sank discouragingly into the soft sand. There was something strangely familiar about him, even to his halting gait. I studied him till he disappeared behind a small dwelling near by.

I hurried on, halting before the yard he had entered; and standing there, I found my heart racing and my eyes blinking at the sight that greeted me. There was a Cherokee rose growing on a crude trellis; near by was a row of crimson roses. A young woman, bending over, was gathering some of the half-opened buds.

I called softly: "Jean!"

A long moment she did not look up; I saw her fingers slowly open, and the roses fall to the ground. Then she turned. I leaped over the low fence.

"How did you know I was here?" she asked.

"I didn't," said I; and I told her of my ride along the bayou and of seeing old Shadrach. "I've many things to tell you," I ended.

We made our way to the small porch of her dwelling and seated ourselves on a cane-bottom bench. I told her of my studying law, and of chancing upon Red McNair; and I told her of Mr. Fenwick and of his vow to capture Jim.

"Why did he get this place for you?" I asked.

"Because he can come by boat to see me with less risk than going into New Orleans." She turned away. "I'm afraid for him, Tom. This *can't* go on! Some day they are sure—"

"He must not come any more," I warned. "Even your neighbors, these fishermen, may be spies. The next time he comes, you'll tell him what I've said?"

"Yes; but it will do no good." She looked into my eyes, and I saw her lips were trembling. A moment her hand rested upon mine; quickly she drew it away. "I think you should go now; and you must never—come again."

I leaned so close to her I felt her breath upon my lips; I forced a smile; I took both her hands in mine and I touched my lips to the palms of those dear hands. "I'll come back, Jean Ferguson," said I, measuredly, "every—single—chance—I get!"

ON Sundays, when the weather was favorable, carriages rolled along the Bayou St. John road; frequently parties drove out to the lake shore to bathe or on picnics.

There came a Sunday in mid-December when the skies were clear and the weather warm. Again I rented a horse, and again I rode along Bayou St. John, despite Jean Ferguson's orders. Reaching her house, I knocked softly. Soon the door opened and Jean confronted me. Her near-black hair was drawn severely back from her forehead; she wore a dress dark as her hair, and like her hair, having tracings of gold. It was a garment that revealed the soft firmness of her throat and her rounded arms and her strong slender figure. At her breast was a brooch of pearls and diamonds.

"Ah, but you're lovely, Jean!" said I.

"You shouldn't have come," said she.

I leaned toward her, smiling. "You hoped I *would* come. That's why you dressed this way. Isn't that so?"

She colored. "You shouldn't have come," she repeated.

I took her hands. "Never mind all that! We'll forget all unpleasant things today. We'll walk along the lake shore and pretend we're on a South Sea isle and no one there but you and I."

Leaving the house, we started along the beach; we came to an overturned pirogue and seated ourselves. We had been there for perhaps a half-hour when we heard voices behind us. Turning, we saw approaching two gentlemen and two ladies, and behind them, a black boy carrying baskets—evidently a party on a picnic.

The voices drew nearer and more distinct. There was something familiar. . . . Turning again, I recognized Mr. and Mrs. Fenwick and Elizabeth, and a young man of about my age, one Parker, whom I had met at the Fenwick house.

They halted before us. "Well, Tom Shandy!" said Mr. Fenwick. "This *is* a pleasant surprise."

Jean and I had risen. Elizabeth was eying the two of us with a wondering expression, and I fear my cheeks grew red as my hair.

Awkwardly enough, I introduced Jean to each of them.

Quickly, Elizabeth was her merry self again. She chatted lightly with Jean, who replied only when a direct question was addressed her. Of a sudden I saw Elizabeth's lips part and her eyes widen in surprise. "Father! Look! How re*mark*-able! Miss Ferguson's brooch is exactly like the one I lost—to that terrible robber." She was pointing to the brooch at Jean's breast.

The others drew nearer. "Isn't it strange?" Elizabeth pursued. "It's *exactly* like the one Father had made for me."

Mrs. Fenwick touched the jewel. "It's lovely, my dear." And then, smiling up at Jean: "It *is* strange. My husband had one just like it made in New York. May I ask where you got yours?"

NEVER before or since have I felt so infinitely sorry for another as I felt for Jean Ferguson that moment. As ever, her head was high and her blue eyes unafraid; but in her expression there lurked unutterable misery, despair. And no word crossed her lips.

I could not continue silent as they unwittingly tortured her. "I gave Miss Ferguson the brooch," said I.

Elizabeth looked up at Jean, smiling. "May I examine it, Miss Ferguson?"

Still not speaking, Jean unfastened the brooch; her hands dropped to her sides.

Again Elizabeth faced her father, her eyes wide in amazement. "Father! Look! Why—why, this *is* my brooch! Here are my initials—*E. F.*"

"I can't understand it," said Mr. Fenwick. He turned to me. "Where did you get it, Tom?"

I groped for words. "From—from a money-lender in New Orleans."

"You, of course, could find the fellow again?"

"I suppose so."

"I see. I wonder if you'd mind coming to my office tomorrow?"

I nodded.

"Good." He turned to his daughter. "Give the young lady her brooch, Elizabeth."

Slowly, Jean shook her head. "No. You must keep it." She turned, and young body erect, started along the shore toward her cottage.

Elizabeth faced me, an odd expression in her eyes. "Will you join us in our picnic, Tom?"

My eyes were following a figure hurrying along the beach—a figure that, despite its erectness, seemed piteously lonely. "Thank you, but I can't," said I, and ran after Jean.

Quickly I overtook her. Side by side we walked in silence. We passed through the gateway of her yard and into the house.

The next moment her face was buried in her hands, as she silently sobbed.

"Please, Jean!" I murmured, my arm about her shoulders. "Please!"

She looked up at me, her eyes moist. "Please go, Tom."

A mist before my own eyes, I ran from the cottage, mounted my horse and hurried along Bayou St. John back to town.

CHAPTER XI

I HAD lied to Mr. Fenwick in the hope of sparing Jean, and perhaps of saving Jim Hope—and it was clear enough Mr. Fenwick knew I lied. Still, I knew I had to brazen it out; so, after my last class in school next day I made my way, with trepidation enough, to his offices.

Greetings over with, he smiled. "Being a gentleman, Tom, you lie miserably." He patted my knee. "I respect you for the yarn, and I hope I would have done the same thing under the circumstances; but—you didn't give Miss Ferguson the brooch, did you, Tom?"

I colored. "I can't answer you, sir."

"Look at it this way: A rascal named Jim Hope robbed us of a brooch; we find you with a young lady wearing that brooch. What is the connection between this young lady and the man I intend to see hanged? Tell me, son: how did she come into possession of it?"

"I can't tell you any more than I have, sir," said I.

"I see. Where does the young lady live?"

"I can't tell you that, sir."

"Your father was a fine man, Tom."

I nodded.

"I wonder how he would feel, seeing his son doing all he can to circumvent the law. You'll answer my questions, Tom?"

"I simply can't, Mr. Fenwick."

He rose. His expression had become stern. "I must wish you good day, sir. I must add that Mrs. Fenwick and Elizabeth and I will not be at home should you call."

Swallowing my pride, I left him.

WHILE I regretted nothing I had done, I sorely missed my hours in the Fenwick home. The third night following my break with Mr. Fenwick, a knock sounded upon my door, and I called: "Come in."

With the opening of the door, I leaped to my feet. Jim Hope stood before me.

"Jim!"

He seated himself, thrust out his legs and dropped his hat to the floor. He wore the air of a man with never a care in the world.

"You shouldn't have come here," I protested.

He pursed his lips in mock-surprise. "Well, now, do ye hear the lad? I thought I'd always find a welcome from Tom Shandy."

"You know what I mean, Jim. Coming here—why, it's suicide."

"Ye—don't—say!"

"I'm serious, Jim. They suspect me of being your friend and may trail you here."

"Trailing a fox is one thing, lad, but getting your hands on him is another."

I turned from him in exasperation. "But if they *do* get their hands on you—what of Jean?"

He sobered. "I know, Tom. Forget all that foolery I've been speaking. I *had* to come. It's about Jean."

"Jean?" I repeated, fearing what might come next.

"With all my big talk, they'll get me sooner or later, Tom Shandy. And then, as ye say, what of Jean, now that Margot is gone? . . . Would ye do a bit of a favor for Jean, lad?"

"Anything in the world," said I. "I love Jean."

"No, Tom, ye only think ye do. Ye're young; ye'll change. Your road and Jean Ferguson's road are not the same."

"We'll see as to that," said I.

He avoided my glance, and took a folded sheet of paper from a pocket of his coat. "But when I'm—gone, Tom Shandy, Jean will be alone, desp'rate alone. I've put away some money for her. This paper shows where it's hid. When the time comes, I'd take it kindly if ye'd get that money and turn it over to her. And when ye do that, Tom Shandy, I want ye to tell her every dollar of it was honestly come by. While being—well, certain other things, I've been a trapper too; and every dollar I ever made from it I've put aside for Jean. That's the truth, Tom Shandy—ye'll make that clear to Jean, Tom?"

"I will," I promised.

"I knew ye would," said he. Instantly there came over him one of the changes I had come to know so well. He placed his broad hat jauntily upon his head; he smiled. "With your kind permission, I'll be upon my way." In a moment he was running lightly down the stairs.

The following day's *Picayune* carried an article that left the city agog: Nine slaves, men and women, had been held for an auction. During the preceding night, their guard was overpowered, gagged and tied. The negroes were gone.

There was no hint as to the perpetrators; but I fancied I knew whose handiwork it was. I pictured those negroes hiding for a while in the fastnesses of Honey Island, then making their devious way to the Ohio River—and freedom.

BELOW my window in Royal Street, the world paraded by—beggars, carefree youths of the city out skylarking, sober business men hurrying homeward, laborers plodding along after the day's toil, sailors arm in arm, weaving from one tavern to another; black servants, baskets on their arms, passing from the French market to the homes of their masters.

December came, and at long last, I left to spend the Christmas holidays at home. My journey to Gordon was uneventful. But it was good to be back.

On the second day I roamed the woods I knew so well; I lingered on the crest of the hill from where Jim Hope and I had looked down upon the burial of old Margot; I sat at the base of the towering sycamore where Jim and his men had met. It all seemed long, long ago.

I went to the house where Jean Ferguson and old Margot had lived, and I found it unutterably dreary and lonely and desolate. I went to the church near

Elizabeth Fenwick

our home and to the graveyard at its side; and I found Margot's grave still but red clay. The next day Guinea Sam and I covered it with carpet-grass sod.

I had been at home not over a week when I decided to take the bar examination. Today a lad must spend his four to six years at law-school. In my day, we spent one. As a matter of fact, few attorneys had attended law school. Instead they "read law" in some lawyer's office, later taking the examination before a judge.

I fear my own examination was a rather perfunctory procedure. Old Judge Shackelford had been my father's lifelong friend, and he had known me from infancy. Crisply he asked me his questions; as calmly as might be I answered him. Now and again, with a great wrinkling of his forehead and a pursing of his lips, he made notes upon a sheet of paper.

At the end he solemnly discoursed upon the sacredness of the law; now and then he sandwiched in Latin phrases which none of his hearers—and I suspect not even he—understood. Finally he spoke of my heritage, and then commended me. I know within reason that some of my answers had been dubious enough; but judging by his encomiums, it appeared I was a legal prodigy with a future of brilliance awaiting me.

I left the court-room a lawyer. The whole of it had taken little more than an hour. Tom Shandy, Attorney-at-Law! I had come to man's estate! Though I realized how cursory had been my examination, I fear I was inordinately proud.

Following my successful examination, I spent much of my time at the courthouse, listening to cases being tried, or going through old records. A new sheriff, Manuel Taliaferro, had been elected, and we quickly came to be friends.

Thus it happened I was sitting in the Sheriff's office one day when four strangers entered. Evidently they mistook me for one of the Sheriff's staff, for they ignored me.

"Sheriff, my name is Brownlee," said he who seemed the leader of the group. "We're officers from New Orleans. I've some serious business to talk over with you. You know Jim Hope, I reckon."

"I know plenty about him."

I was tense.

"We've been trailing him for a long while," continued Brownlee; "and now we're gonna get him."

"That's easier said than done," countered Taliaferro.

"Wait'll I tell you: in a few hours, he'll be within six miles of this spot."

Taliaferro was impressed. "How do you happen to know this, Mr. Brownlee?"

"One of my men joined up with him."

"You mean—"

"Yep, just that. One of my men made out he was a trapper. Took him close onto six months to work it, but he finally did. For the past two months he's been a member of Jim Hope's band. But the point is this: can you round up about ten men you know you can trust—and who can shoot straight?"

Taliaferro nodded.

"Good. Then have 'em here around four o'clock. We'll hole-up at the inn until then."

As soon as Brownlee had left, I rose. "Well," said I, "I'd better get on home."

I all but ran along the street, mounted my horse and hurried out the sandy road toward home. Jim Hope trapped! The mantle of the law, of which I had been so proud, fell from my shoulders. I thought only of my friend.

AT our place, I tossed my horse's reins to Guinea Sam and hurried away. Having no watch, I glanced toward the sun. It was well after three o'clock. I must find Jim Hope. But where? I hurried to the abandoned, desolate house that had been the home of Jean and old Margot; I searched the rooms and the outbuildings, without result.

I remembered the sycamore tree on the bank of Shell River near by, and I hurried through the woods to it. At my approach a squirrel scurried away. It was the only sign of life.

The sun was low in the west. Desperation gripped me. I ran to the roadside and stood there, waiting, hoping. Suddenly I realized he would avoid the highroad, so a second time I hurried to the deserted house. I seated myself on the rotting steps, praying he would come. The sun fell below the horizon. Slowly the moon rose above the pine trees.

OF a sudden I was on my feet and speeding down the road. Margot's grave! At last, gasping for breath, I came to the church standing bare and bleak in the moonlight; I sped across the grassless yard and through the narrow gateway leading into the graveyard. Dimly I saw old Margot's grave. I ran to a figure standing above it.

"Jim!"

He turned with no more surprise than as if he had left me but a half-hour agone. "Well, now, if it isn't my friend Tom Shandy! And how's the law?"

I clutched his arm. "You must run for it. They'll be here any moment."

For aught that he showed, he had not heard a word I spoke. He peered down at the grave before him. "I take it kindly of ye, Tom Shandy, to have sodded Margot's grave."

"Listen to me, Jim! You must run. I *know*. I heard them make their plans."

"Thank ye, lad," said he evenly, "but it happens to be too late. They're here already."

"Here now?" I demanded, astounded.

He nodded, calmly as you please. "I'm downright surprised ye didn't stumble over one of them as ye ran to me."

I peered about, but could see no one. "Try for it, Jim," I pleaded.

"No use," said he.

"Surely you're not going to stand here and let them take you."

"I'm thinking I'll have to, lad. Ye see, I'd not have a hair o' that red head of yours harmed. Did I run for it, there'd be shooting, and ye'd stop your share o' the lead."

At his words a bitter-cruel chill swept over me. "So, if I hadn't come, you could have got away." Surely the pain of the thought showed in my voice. "Oh, I didn't know, Jim! I only hoped to help."

Consolingly, his arm came about my shoulders. "Of course ye did, Tom Shandy, and I love ye for it. Besides, what difference does it make? Tonight,

tomorrow, next week, next year—soon or late, they're bound to get me."

If I had not come! "Jim!" I whispered. "Maybe there's a way after all. I'll lie here by the grave. It'll protect me while you make a dash for it."

"Oh, no, lad. From one side, maybe; but what of the bullets that'll be coming from all other sides? No, there'll be none o' that." He chuckled, but it was a mirthless effort. "What matters it? Bullet or rope. Never having tried either, I can't rightly say which is the best route to take, but better men than me have gone each way."

He clapped a hand to my shoulder. "Whatever happens, Tom Shandy, there's one thing I'd like ye to know: never in my life have I spilled the blood of a man. Oh, I admit I've stirred up the dust at their feet and played a bit of a tune about their ears—just to keep them respectful, as ye might say; but never more than that." He placed his silver-mounted pistols upon the ground and gripped my hand. "Luck to ye, Tom Shandy—as long as ever ye live!"

He stepped away from me, head flung back; he halted at a spot brightly flooded by moonlight; he raised one hand high above his head. "Hello, out there!" His voice was gay. "I'm waiting for ye; and when ye come, be sure ye do no shooting. I'm not armed."

At that, a voice called: "Do you surrender, Hope?"

"That's what I've been trying to tell ye," answered Jim. "I'll either come to ye, or ye can come to me. Which do ye choose? I'm an accommodating man."

"Stand where you are," the other called. "If you make a move, we'll drop you in your tracks."

"I'm peaceful as a lamb," said Jim.

SLOWLY, warily, a dozen or more men came toward him. Once they were near enough to see his hands in the air, they made a rush, and quickly he was in handcuffs.

One of them caught sight of me. "Who's that?"

I stepped toward them. "Most of you know me. My name's Tom Shandy."

The leader, Brownlee, approached. "And who might you be?"

"He's a young lawyer," interposed Sheriff Taliaferro.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Brownlee.

"What's he doing here?" challenged Jim Hope. "Hasn't a man the right to consult his lawyer? What if I told ye it was him persuaded me to surrender?"

They led him away, as I watched.

I took up Jim Hope's pistols and carried them home. They hang above my mantel as I write, their silver tarnished, their ivory mellowed by age.

CHAPTER XII

WITH the news of Jim Hope's capture, the streets of Gordon were quickly crowded. I made my way through the throngs and on to his cell, where I found him eating his breakfast—cheerful as ever I had seen him.

"And why the long face, lad? Smile, man, smile! Don't ye know it's a red-letter day for ye, now that ye have your first client?"

Surely my mouth fell open and my eyes widened. "You mean—"

"Of course! Jim Hope must have a lawyer, so he employs a bril-liant young attorney named Thomas Shandy to defend him. That is," he added whimsically, "unless his fee be too desp'rate high."

"You want *me* to defend you?"

"Of course," said he. "Who else?"

"But I can't, Jim," I protested. "I've had no experience."

"I hate to see ye start out with a case ye're bound to lose, but I'd take it kindly of ye, Tom, if ye would act as my lawyer. Maybe, lad, the dose would be a bit less bitter did I see ye out there fighting for me. Ye'll do it, lad?"

Defeated, and unable to control my voice, I turned away.

"Wait!" he called. He motioned me close to the bars of his cell and whispered into my ear. "Ye'll do me a bit of a favor—today?"

I nodded.

"Please go to the sycamore tree. Red McNair will be there with some of the men. Ye'll give them this message: They're to make no try at rescuing me. I forbid it. I'll have no bloodshed. I think ye'd best hurry," he ended.

I left the jail, and mounting my horse, was soon galloping out of Gordon. At last I came to the sycamore tree. There, glum, silent, sat Red McNair and six of his fellows. I gave him Jim's message.

Slowly McNair rose; he gripped my shoulders till I winced with pain. Then, with never a word, he mounted his horse, and followed by the others, rode off. . . .

In a manner of speaking, Jim Hope was convicted before ever a jury was

empaneled. His name had been on the tongues of the countryside for years. They blamed him for all he had done, and for a deal besides. In their eyes he was the most despicable of beings: an abolitionist.

Quickly the grand jury indicted him for the robbery of the Fenwicks, conviction for which offense carried, at the time, the death-penalty. Time and time again, I pleaded with him to permit me to employ an older lawyer. He would have none of it. Either I would be his lawyer, he insisted doggedly, or no lawyer at all would he have.

FINALLY the day came. I stared unseeingly toward the judge's bench. A murmuring aroused me. I turned in my chair. Coming down the aisle, with an officer on either side, was Jim Hope. His head was high; the hint of a smile lurked upon his lips; his step was all but jaunty. Following close behind him was Jean Ferguson, her slender body erect, her lips close, her blue eyes looking straight before her. Jim sat down, Jean at his right, I at his left.

He leaned nearer. "Cheer up, lad! Don't look so solemn-colic! Don't ye realize it's your first case? Ye must make a good impression."

The bailiff made his usual singsong pronouncement. Court was in session. Jim Hope was ordered to stand. Did the prisoner at the bar plead guilty or not guilty?

"Not guilty, Your Honor," said he, no hint of a tremor in his voice.

The jury was quickly chosen. Though I knew they had already made up their minds, I challenged but few of them. I knew well enough that if I challenged Jones, Smith would be just as bad—and Brown perhaps worse.

The prosecuting attorney rose, and in pompous fashion began: "Your Honor, and gentlemen of the jury, we propose to show—" He proposed to show the defendant was a heartless villain, a "nigger-stealer," a vile abolitionist; that at such and such an hour of such and such a day of such and such a month, he did, with the use of firearms, stop and rob upon the highroad Mr. John Fenwick of New Orleans and the charming wife and lovely daughter of the said Mr. John Fenwick; that the security of society, the purity of the very air they breathed, cried out for the permanent removal of the unspeakable wretch who had spent years preying upon a peaceful, God-fearing citizenry from the green banks of the Ohio River to the smiling wind-swept marshes of Pontchartrain—and so on, *ad infinitum*.

At last the first witness, Mr. Fenwick, was called to the stand.

Did he recognize the prisoner at the bar? He did. When had he last seen him? He named the night of the robbery. Would the witness kindly relate just what occurred that night? Mr. Fenwick calmly, evenly told the whole of it, even to the subsequent recovery of his daughter's brooch.

The prosecutor bowed to me, patronizingly. "Your witness," said he.

I rose. He was the first witness that ever I had examined. "Easy, lad!" whispered Jim Hope, smiling. "He's only one man."

"You say, Mr. Fenwick," I began, "that you recognize the defendant as the man who robbed you?"

"I do," said he, smiling amusedly.

At that smile I bridled. I was woefully conscious of my youth and inexperience. The thought came to me that I might use the witness' manner to the advantage of my client.

I leaned nearer the witness. "I see, Mr. Fenwick, you are smiling. May I remind you a man's life is at stake, and that you are the principal witness against that man? May I ask you, sir, if you hold the life of a fellow-man so cheaply that you *smile* when you place it in jeopardy?"

He flushed.

"Now, we will proceed with the question: you say you recognize the defendant as the man who robbed you. At what time of night were you robbed?"

He stated the hour.

"Was there a moon that night?"

"I cannot say."

THIS time, I smiled. I held up an almanac of the time. "On the night in question, the moon did not rise until about three hours after the time of your robbery."

"Good work, lad!" whispered Jim Hope. "Ye're doing grand!"

"Is it possible, Mr. Fenwick," I kept on, "that you have the faculty of seeing in the dark?"

"No, but I hear well in the dark."

"'Hear?'"

"Yes. He *told* me he was Jim Hope." At that, the crowd murmured.

"That is all, Your Honor," said I, to the surprise of all.

"Father! Look! How re-*mark*-able! Miss Ferguson's brooch is exactly like the one I lost to that terrible robber."

Mrs. Fenwick next took the stand. She was followed by Elizabeth. Neither did I cross-question. It would have been futile.

There arrived the time for summing up. In the main, Prosecutor Reid's remarks were a repetition of his first address to the jury. He was violently gesticular; one moment he roared; the next he hissed in the best adderlike fashion: "Robber, bandit, thief, nigger-stealer, preyer upon frail womanhood, murderer—" Generously he sprinkled the words over his speech.

My turn came. "Your Honor—gentlemen of the jury: You are about to make the gravest decision of your lives: You must say whether a man is to continue the life God gave him, or is to die at your hands." I referred to the testimony of the three witnesses. "All of them testified the robber *said* he was Jim Hope. Is that proof, gentlemen? Is that evidence that justifies the taking of a human life? Could not you or I, on a dark night, say *we* were Jim Hope, or Bill Brown, or Theodoric Whiffletree?"

I dwelt upon Mr. Fenwick's assertion that he recognized Jim's voice as being that of the man who robbed him. "I have just done a little reckoning," said I, "and I find my client has spoken just four words—*four*, mind you!—since being in this courtroom. He said, 'Not guilty, Your Honor.' Four short words! Six short syllables! Yet the gentleman from New Orleans recognized the voice, though he was robbed months ago, at a time, I've no doubt, when the wind was blowing and his horses snorting and stamping and the frogs incessantly croaking. Our senses function inaccurately when we are excited."

And so on, and on. I took my flings and digs at the prosecuting attorney. "I know my client well," said I. "I know him to have a heart of gold. Yet the attorney for the State has pictured him as a vile thing to be thrust from the world of living men. With a great shaking of his fists he called him 'Murderer!'" A ripple of laughter ran over the courtroom. "That statement, gentlemen," I continued, "I know to be

false. I happen to know he has never spilled any man's blood.

"The prosecuting attorney has pictured my client as a heartless fiend. I ask you, gentlemen: Where was he when the officers arrested him? He was standing with bowed head above the grave of a loved one. Was that the act of a heartless fiend?"

Once more I briefly reviewed the evidence; then I ended. When I had done, a ripple of applause went over the room. The judge's gavel fell peremptorily. I seated myself at Jim Hope's side.

UNDER the table, his hand gripped my knee. "Man, man!" he whispered. "Sure, it's almost worth being hanged to hear ye, Tom Shandy! Oh, ye were grand, lad! Grand! I'm proud of ye."

Jean Ferguson's eyes were bright as she granted me a faint smile of gratitude. Across the courtroom Elizabeth Fenwick nodded approvingly.

The judge instructed the jury; the twelve men filed from the room.

In less than an hour they were back. A pall of silence settled upon the room.

"Guilty as charged!"

I leaned toward Jean Ferguson. Her cheeks were pale as death, though her head was high and her eyes wide. My hand closed over hers. "Don't worry, Jean," I begged. "The fight has only begun. We'll beat them yet."

Even as I spoke, I knew it was an empty boast.

I followed Jim to his cell, and when the officers had locked the door and left, I seated myself before him. I was utterly fagged.

He reached through the bars and clapped me upon both shoulders. "Perk up, Tom Shandy! Why, lad, ye should be proud as a peacock! Ye didn't have a chance, and yet ye put up a fight they'll talk of for years to come."

"We're not beaten yet," said I. "First of all, we'll appeal."

He shook his head. "No, lad, there'll be no appeal."

I stared at him. "Do you know what you are saying?"

He smiled a little wistfully. "Do I know? Aye, Tom Shandy, I know bitter well; but there'll be no appeal. The high court'll confirm the decision, as ye well know; and think what those months of worry and waiting would mean to Jean."

Again Jim Hope was led into the courtroom; and once more he stood before old Judge Shackelford. For all the emotion he showed, the grim words might have been a benediction:

"Hanged by the neck until dead; and may God have mercy—"

The words pursued me, during the days that followed, wherever I went, whatever I did. A horse trotted by, and I heard them in unison to the sound of its pounding hoofs; they lingered before me as I fell asleep; they flashed before me in bold relief when I awoke.

The fifth day after Jim was sentenced, I was sitting with him when the Sheriff came with a minister.

"Would you like for me to pray for you?" asked the preacher lugubriously.

"Of course—and thank ye kindly," said Jim; "but before ye start, I'd like to ask ye a question: how much leeway do ye suppose the good Lord gives us?"

"'Leeway?'" repeated the perplexed man.

"Well, ye see it's this way," Jim explained. "I can't rightly say I know a deal of the Bible, but I reckon the Ten Commandments are sort of the foundation of it all. Ye see, sir, there've been times when I was a wee bit careless with one or two of them. But about the leeway: Maybe it's sort of like a lad in school, about to take his examination—the teacher doesn't demand that he was *always* perfect in *everything*. I'm wondering if it might be that way with the Lord; that—well, that He gives us a little leeway, as ye might say."

"The Lord forgives all sinners who truly repent," the preacher assured him.

"Well," said Jim, "I reckon that's just another way of putting what I said."

The minister prayed. When he was done, he turned to leave.

"Just a minute, sir," said Jim. He threw back his head, and his eyes closed. "Lord, when I was a lad, they accused me of misleading Mollie Anderson. I did no such thing. It was—well, I'm naming no names, but he lived over Bannock way. And three years ago come June, they said I killed Bill Crowley. I never so much as pointed a gun at him. If he'd listened to me, he'd be living yet. Thank ye, Lord. Amen!" His eyes opened, and he turned to the preacher. "Ye see, sir," said he apologetically, "I thought it just as well to remind Him."

DAY and night, one bitter thought would not down: If *I* had not gone to Jim Hope there in the graveyard, he

might have escaped. To shield blundering me, he had let them take him without a struggle. The thought came to me when I awoke in the morning; it clung in my mind throughout the day; it tormented me when I sought sleep at night. All the while, day by day, Jim's time was growing shorter.

At last there came a night when I could bear it no longer. I rose from my bed, dressed hurriedly and stole from our house to the great sycamore tree.

I peered about. "McNair!" I called softly—and again, louder, "McNair!" Only a whippoorwill answered me. I remembered Jim's method of summoning his men, and I whistled as he had done, and waited. I heard only the faint baying of a hound far to the north. A maddening desperation took hold of me. "McNair!" I shouted loudly.

OFF to the right a twig snapped; I heard the rustling of leaves on the ground; and then a gruff voice demanded: "Do you think I'm deaf, that you have to make as much fuss as a steamboat heading round the bend?"

I forced into my voice a calmness I in no-wise felt. "McNair, Jim has eleven days left."

He waited.

"There are three guards at the jail. If anyone tried to storm the place, no telling how many would be killed."

He made no answer.

"Jim has been a perfect prisoner. The guards like him. They don't seem to watch him quite as closely as they did.

"Two blocks from the jail there's a small plot of pine timber—an acre or so. There's a heavy covering of pine straw on the ground."

McNair had leisurely filled his pipe. "Match?"

I handed him one. "If that pine straw happened to catch fire some night,—well, say around twelve o'clock,—there wouldn't be many people up and about, and the few who were would be pretty apt to hurry down there and help put the fire out. I wouldn't be surprised if a guard or two from the jail should go."

Still McNair had not spoken. I rose and managed a yawn. "Well," said I, "I'd better be getting along home. Good night."

"Good night," said McNair, indifferently.

Defend my behavior? I make no pretense of doing so. I merely say—I was powerless to do otherwise.

There is no need of a detailed recounting of what followed my talk with Red McNair. On the second day following, and appearing as innocent as ever I could, I rode into Gordon. Men, talking earnestly, stood about in groups; business was virtually suspended. It appeared that the night before, the pine straw under the young timber down the street had caught fire. The flames leaped high under the fanning of a brisk breeze, and that end of town was quickly enveloped in smoke. The few who were still on the streets hurried along to fight the fire. Others, living near by, dressed hurriedly and joined them. One of the three guards at the jail thought he had better lend a hand, lest the fire spread to the dry grass in yards near by. After a while—the flames were still mounting high—another of the three guards remembered Jim Hope hadn't caused them a minute's trouble; so, with a word to his companion, he hurried down the street.

The fire was extinguished; the citizens retired to their homes; the two guards, grimy and sweating, returned to their posts at the jail. Their duties were even lighter, once they got there; for the third guard was lying upon the cool floor, bound and gagged; Jim Hope's cell door swung wide; Jim Hope was gone.

CHAPTER XIII

FREQUENTLY, during the days that followed Jim Hope's disappearance, I detected my mother eying me speculatively; but if she suspected aught of the part I had played, she put none of that suspicion into words.

And it was an older and a sobered Tom Shandy who soon found himself once more on the coach rolling toward Natchez, and again on the steamboat bound down the Mississippi for New Orleans. Somehow, this time, the singing deckhands, the country folk waving from the banks of the stream, the passing boats and the water lapping against our hull, had lost their former fascination.

Jim Hope had gone. Where? Jean Ferguson had gone. Where?

I rode along Bayou St. John to the cluster of little dwellings on Lake Pontchartrain. A family of Cajuns were living in the cottage where Jean had lived. None knew whither she had gone.

I haunted the streets of New Orleans, hoping, praying; I sat on the wharves till

night or bad weather drove me within-doors. There came a day when, my legs dangling over the wharf's edge, I studied the lines and gear of a great vessel tied up near by. From the activity aboard her, I knew she would soon weigh anchor. "Where is she bound?" I asked another loiterer.

"New York and Boston," said he.

I strolled along the wharf and, idly curious, boarded her. Seamen scurried about; negroes struggled aboard with cargo, and empty-handed, trotted off again.

I made my way to the stern of the ship, examining every part of her, for it was a new experience. Of a sudden my eye was attracted by a figure in seaman's garb squatting before a small door and vigorously polishing the brass knob and lower hinge.

The seaman's hand paused in its polishing; slowly he turned his head, peering at me from under his arm. His hair was black, but there was no changing the blue of those eyes.

My heart racing, I started toward him when something in his expression stayed me. Slowly he turned back to his work and launched into a rhymeless, near-tuneless song, the while his hand moved over the brass knob in unison to the air:

There was a man who said, said he,
"I think it best I sail away."
Hi dee diddle dee doe!

He paused, removed his hand from the knob, and cocking his head, examined the result of his labors.

"I think," said he, "'twill safer be,
The quicker and further away I go."
Hi dee diddle dee doe!

The third mate strode up. "You there, Ryan! Make sure you leave no trash on the floor when you're done."

"Aye-aye, sir," said the deck-hand.

The mate passed on; again the other took up his work—and his song:

I'm going far, oh, far away;
I'll never come back again.
Hi dee diddle dee doe!
I tell ye true I'll miss ye sore.
I wish ye luck—the rarest luck.
Hi dee diddle dee doe!

He rose, stretched and shook himself to get the cramp out of his muscles and started to work on the upper brass hinge.

If ever they should catch me now,
'Twould be the end of me.
Hi dee diddle dee doe!
Ye'd best move on away from me,
For less the risk I run would be.
Hi dee diddle dee doe!

I stepped close to him, but to arouse the suspicions of none who might be looking my way, I threw back my head and pretended to examine a pennant flying at a mast's head. "I'll go when you tell me where Jean is," I muttered out of the corner of my mouth.

Quickly he took up his song again.

Oh, there was a lass, a bonnie lass,
Who said to herself, said she—
Hi dee diddle dee doe!
"I'm sailing far, oh, far away,
With a brother of mine," said she.
Hi dee diddle dee doe!

I turned ostensibly to peer toward a small boat making its way up the river. Again I spoke, moving my lips as little as might be: "Where is she now?"

There's many a cabin aboard the ship,
But there's one marked twenty-three.
Hi dee diddle dee doe!
I'm thinking if ye would seek it out,
A maiden fair ye'd see.
Hi dee diddle dee doe!

"Whee!" The sailorman straightened, scrutinized his work and took up his polishing-rags. "Shining like the sun," said he, striding away with never a glance toward me.

I groped my way about, being unfamiliar with ships and their ways; but at last I came to a narrow passageway, with a row of cabins upon either side. I halted before a door bearing the number *23*.

I glanced about, struggling the while to quiet the mad pounding of my heart. Then I knocked, softly.

Some one stirred within; a bolt was drawn back; the door opened.

I could manage no word; I could but look at her standing there before me, her dear hand trembling as its fingers pressed her lips, as her blue eyes gazed into mine. Still not speaking, I stepped within her cabin, closed the door and bolted it. Even then but a single word came to me—"Jean!" And before ever I knew what was happening, my arms were about her and I was pressing my lips to her hair.

I felt her hands gripping my arms, as she murmured over and over again: "You *did* come, Tom! Oh, you did, you did!"

When the both of us were, as you might say, ourselves again, I glanced about the cabin. "You must hide me for a little

while," said I. "And once in a while you must go on deck. When we are twenty or more miles downstream—"

Three times she left me to learn of our whereabouts. And then: "The mate says we are twenty-odd miles below New Orleans."

"Come along," said I, taking her hand.

Soon we were standing in the doorway of the captain's cabin. "This young lady is a passenger," said I.

His eyes, looking out from a cheerful weather-tanned face, observed me calmly, "I'm aware of that fact, sir."

"But I'm a stowaway."

"You're a—*what?*"

"A stowaway, sir," said I.

He leaned back in his chair. "I've had a good many stowaways in my time, but you're the strangest of the lot. You're the first that ever voluntarily came to me and said he was a stowaway."

I smiled. "I've a pretty good reason for doing it," said I.

"You have, eh? And just what might that reason be?"

"You're the captain of the ship."

"So they tell me," said he.

"As captain, you—you have the right to marry people."

"Oh, ho!" Slowly his head rose and fell. "So *that's* the way the wind blows! But I'm thinking you're overlooking something."

"What's that, sir?"

"I have the right to marry people *at sea!*"

At his words, a great fear took hold of me. "But sir," I protested, "you're just the *same* as at sea! You've cleared your papers; you've—you've *left!*"

Lips pursed, he mulled over that. Now that I look back upon it, I believe he was but having his little joke. At the end he rose. "You seem a determined sort of stowaway! It's a bit irregular, but—" He shrugged and then turned to Jean, his eyes twinkling. "If I do it, does the sea-parson kiss the bride?"

Blushing, she nodded.

"There's one other thing, Captain," said I.

He looked at me questioningly. "Out with it!"

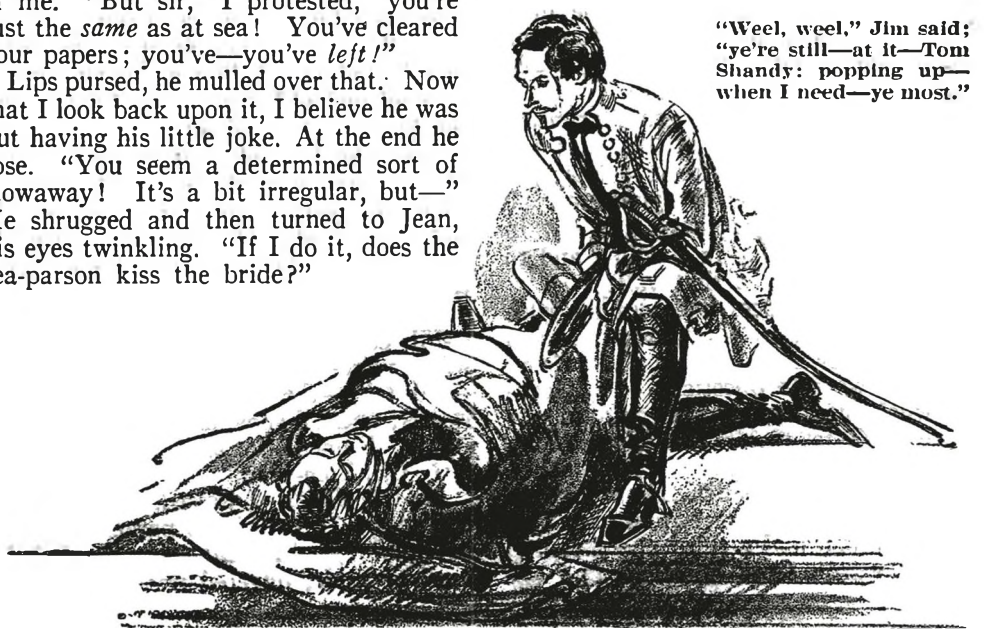
"When you discover a stowaway, don't you—well, don't you put him ashore if you're still near land?"

"Umph! Yes, I guess we'll manage *that,* too. The two of you can get a boat back to New Orleans from Pilot Town. Now"—and he made a mock-obeisance before me—"if there's anything else you'd like, such as my captain's certificate or some other little thing, don't be backward about mentioning it."

"That's all, sir—and thank you kindly," said I.

He took Jean's hands in his own and smiled down at her. Then he turned to me again. "If *I'm* any judge, you already have more than any mere man is entitled to."

THERE is little enough to be told of the next three years. There was a bit of a house, furnished simply enough; and within that house lived a young couple who hopefully and happily looked toward the years to come—and who now and again, wistfully and wonderingly, looked back upon the years that had gone. Tom Shandy had cut no great swath in his chosen profession, the law; but he did manage to fetch home dollars enough to keep the pot boiling and the modest rent paid—by the practice of unflagging frugality, be it said.



"Weel, weel," Jim said; "ye're still—at it—Tom Shandy: popping up—when I need—ye most."

The clouds had long been gathering; and then the storm broke. Now that I look back upon those grim days, I scarce can place the ends of the fast-moving events together; it all seems, in retrospection, confusion, chaos, madness—a bewildering tangle of names: Lincoln, Davis, Sumter, Lee, McClellan, Beauregard.

Men gripped hands and slapped each other upon the back, their eyes bright the while; hurriedly assembled bands discordantly played; torch-lit parades kept up their din by night; women's fingers fashioned and stitched uniforms; drums and bugles drove rationality from men's minds.

Companies were gayly formed, and soon, bravely departed. Now and again I detected acquaintances looking at me askance. I had determined not to go to war; I did not believe in the institution of slavery—had never believed in it since that day, following my father's death, when our own slaves were assembled in our back yard; and I was determined not to shed blood or have mine shed in preserving it; I had scarce heard of the man Lincoln—whom I, like my brothers of the South, later came to reverence; I did not wish to see the Union torn asunder, cleaved through its very heart. No, I would not go to war.

Still, my acquaintances looked at me askance; still that madness, that intoxication was in the air about me. Thus it came about that, while I can scarce tell the why of it now, on a crisp October morning Tom Shandy, in a gray uniform, was riding northward toward the hills, singing lustily as his fellows before and behind him, shouting loudly as any other.

THOSE months—the grim, crimson-tinged, soul-trying months that followed, I pass over with a grimace, a shudder; and averting my glance as you might say, I lead you back to a day in 1864 and to a valley in Virginia and to a shattered house in that valley.

My superior officer had sent me with another captain to that house wherein lay a score or more of wounded prisoners. We were to question them, gleaning what information we could of the enemy. My fellow-officer took one room, while I entered another. I approached a straw pallet on which lay a man in blue. I addressed him a question.

To a second and a third and a fourth I went, wording my questions and endeavoring to retain the meager information given me. My heart was not in the work. And then I came to the fifth man, and had just bent over him when, at my back, a feeble voice said: "Will ye—just—look! Sure, and I've gone—a-dreaming—again. I thought—'twas Tom Shandy."

I WHEELED. Before me, on a bed of matted straw and covered with an old great-coat, lay Jim Hope. As I fell to my knees beside him, I saw a great stained bandage about him, and that his right arm was in splints; and even as I started to take his left hand in both my own, I saw the death-like pallor of his face.

A faint smile came to his thin lips, and the blue eyes I knew so well. "Weel, weel," said he, lapsing into the accent of his native Scotland, "ye're still—at it—Tom Shandy: popping up—when I need—ye most."

With an effort I smiled back at him, but somehow I could manage no words.

"And I'm—still at it—too," he said; "still trying—to get—a bit o' freedom—for the black folk." And then, turning his head a little: "Jean?"

"She's fine, Jim, fine." I leaned nearer him, and releasing his hand, I let one of my own rest on his shoulder. "I've great news for you: there are three of us now."

His eyes brightened. "Ye—mean—"

I nodded. "A boy."

"Weel, weel!" Wearily then his eyes closed, but the smile still lingered on his bloodless lips. "It seems—but yesterday—ye were but—a lad—yourself."

"Look, Jim." He opened his eyes, and I held before him a daguerreotype of Jean and our boy. "We named him for you—James Shandy."

"For—*me?* Just—to think! For me!" Weakly he groped for my hand. "I'm desp'rate proud—Tom Shandy." Again he closed his eyes; and, when at last he again spoke, I could scarce hear the words. "When all—this fighting's—over—when the black—folk are—free,—I'll come back—Tom Shandy; and while ye're—grubbing wi' your—books,—I'll take—the wee bairn—into the—woods; and I'll show him—how. . . . For—me! Named—for *me!* James—Shandy! Oh, Tom—lad."

He fell silent. I waited. Still he did not speak. I called his name. He did not answer; but a smile—a smile of gladness, of pride, lingered upon his lips.

THE END

REAL EXPERIENCES

What was the most extraordinary event in your life? In this department a group of your fellow-readers each tells of his most unusual adventure. (For details of our Real Experience contest, see page 3.) First comes the story of the man who led an expedition to remote Komodo Island to bring back the little known giant lizard—as told to Burt M. McConnell—

By W. DOUGLAS BURDEN

Dragon of Komodo

THE dragon figures in the mythology of almost every country in the world. The Imperial Chinese flag used the dragon as a symbol of national strength. This mythical saurian is mentioned in folklore everywhere. From time immemorial the dragon was always pictured with a long, forked tongue, powerful jaws, and gigantic claws with which he could rend his victims. The various descriptions of the dragon throughout the world have such a striking resemblance to each other that it doesn't seem possible they could have been concocted.

Imagine, then, how eagerly my wife and I set out to find, on a little island halfway around the world, the dragon lizard, the *Varanus Komodoensis*, which may well have given rise to all dragon mythology. We found him to be the largest member of the lizard family in the world; also the oldest, dating as a genus back to the beginning of the age of mammals, and almost exactly the same as the lizard which crawled over the face of the earth some sixty million years ago.

Armed with the proper credentials, and letters of introduction from the State Department, we arrived at Batavia. After making arrangements for an interview, my wife and I motored to the Governor General's temporary residence at Tjipanas. He was most cordial, and other government officials helped the expedition in many ways. There was no regular steamer to Komodo; in fact, the island had been made into a preserve; but the Governor General gave us permission to capture or kill for scientific purposes fifteen dragon lizards. Moreover, he furnished us with a government vessel for a period of two months.

A few days later we went aboard, and were soon steering down the coast of Java through a choppy sea. Dr. E. R. Dunn was our herpetologist, and Lee Fai our motion-picture operator. And we had Defosse, a professional hunter who had spent his life in the jungles of Indo-China. We had every confidence in his ability to capture a lizard alive.

It was seven hundred miles from Batavia to Komodo. On the morning of the second day out we anchored off the quaint village of Sapi, and took aboard sixteen native bush-men furnished by the Rajah. They came out in a fleet of dug-outs, and a wild and picturesque crew they made as they clambered aboard.

We found Komodo to be a small island, about twenty-two miles long by twelve in width. Scientists from Java had obtained

a few specimens of the giant lizard before the World War began, but by the time we arrived, the existence of the beasts virtually had been forgotten. With the exception of a few pearl-fishermen and a traveler who spent the night there, no white man had landed on the island in recent times, so far as we could learn.

With its sharp serrated skyline, its gnarled mountains, its sun-washed valleys and its giant pinnacles, Komodo looked more fantastic than the mountains of the moon—a suitable haunt for the predatory dragon lizards we had come fifteen thousand miles to seek.

We coasted into the quiet waters and dropped anchor in the lee of a miniature island. Then we went ashore. Judging from the signs, game was abundant; deer and wild boar were numerous.

Early next morning we set out in different directions to explore Komodo. It was an arid island, and the first necessity was water. The sun blazed down on the barren hillsides; it was like walking in a furnace. Loose, porous boulders rolled underfoot. Saw-grass cut our hands; the soles of our boots were torn to pieces, and came off at the toes, so that it was necessary to lash them on with rope and rawhide. After a rest in the shade of some bamboo, we came to a pool on the lava rock. Here was the ideal place to camp —good water and a delightful breeze.

This enchanting spot lay at the head of Python Bay, and the next day we established our camp there. The whole of our little hut was open to the sea breeze. The roof of woven palm leaves whispered in the wind—and concealed an amazing assortment of spiders, scorpions, centipedes and snakes; the first morning we found a green pit-viper in the roof. The next morning I was awakened by a great commotion outside the hut, where our Chinese boy was pursuing a pink-and-black centipede. I left camp early, and shot a deer to provide meat for the bushmen. Later, at the foot of a group of pinnacles, I saw my first dragon lizard in the open! A monster!

He seemed to me to be twenty feet long—although he probably was nine or ten feet long, actually. Against a background of sun-scorched grass, he looked quite black with age, and I felt sure that he bore the battle scars of many a fierce encounter. Once he stopped, with his nose buried deep in the grass, as if scenting out some small shrew or rat. Three wild pigs dashed away, as if to give this great reptile the wide berth he deserved.

The lizard worked his way slowly down from the mountain crags, obviously hunting for something in the short grass, his yellow tongue working incessantly, his magnificent head swinging ponderously this way and that—a marvelous sight: a primeval monster in a primeval setting. Had he stood upon his hind legs (as a Komodo lizard can) the dinosaurian picture would have been complete. But suddenly, in some strange fashion, he vanished as completely as if the very earth had swallowed him. Shortly after this episode, in the same ravine, I came upon a large cave beneath a tangle of overhanging roots. This was the abode of the great lizard.

Under the direction of Defosse, the natives built leafy screens or "bomas" near the base camp, from which we could keep the lizards under observation without being seen, and shoot such specimens as appeared to be desirable for a museum group. Since these animals appeared to be quite deaf, we did not need to take precautions about noise.

IT was not safe to relax our vigilance for an instant while on the island, for, unlike any part of the world except India, Komodo is cursed with all four classes of poisonous snakes; we found cobras, pit-vipers, true vipers, and back-fanged snakes plentiful. The centipedes and scorpions on Komodo are among the largest in the world.

Defosse superintended the building of the traps. These were made by bending a sturdy tree until its top touched the ground, and fastening it down by a notched stick so contrived that when the lizard put his head through a noose fastened to the bent tree, in order to reach the bait inside the enclosure, the trap would be sprung and he would be yanked into the air.

The native bushmen had seen a particularly big and vicious-looking dragon lizard at the edge of the jungle. He was quite wary, and we wanted to take him alive, so Defosse killed an old boar for bait, and the coolies set to work on the trap. They drove stakes deep, encircling the bait except for an opening for the lizard to enter. The stakes were lashed together with rattan, and the whole contraption was carefully camouflaged with branches and leaves. A live tree was selected as the twitch-up. The branches were lopped off, and the rope tied to the top. The fifteen bushmen hauled on the rope until the tip of the tree was bent

over the opening of the trap, and fastened. The rope was arranged so that our quarry could not reach the bait without sticking his head into the noose.

We did not wish to have the trap sprung by a small animal, so we arranged to spring it by pulling a string, well covered with leaves, that ran from the trap to our boma.

Next morning we were on the job early, for the bait had already begun to smell. For a long time we waited in the leafy shelter, quiet and watchful. Then a big red centipede crawled into our hiding-place. For a moment the excitement within the four walls of that gloomy lookout was intense—until a Malay succeeded in cutting the beast in two with his machete. After that, however, we did not feel like stretching out and making ourselves comfortable. And it was well that we did not relax, for two scorpions soon appeared. These were dealt with after the Malay fashion.

We were beginning to feel rather uncomfortable in our congested quarters, when a small dragon lizard appeared and circled the trap several times. He was soon followed by a much larger beast. This one swaggered right up to the trap and tried to drag the whole boar carcass through the opening. We had, however, lashed the bait in place.

The smaller lizard had been frightened away by the appearance of the larger one, and now we saw *him* look up, and after a single glance off into the jungle, scuttle out of sight. This was an indication that the big one was coming. I peered through the back of the boma.

Here in truth was a dragon—a living remnant of the monster lizard of the Pleistocene! I could see a big black head, with two dark beady eyes sunk grimly beneath their projecting supra-orbital bones, surveying every inch of the scene, ready to detect the slightest move. I could see the ugly brute clearly. He looked as black as ink. His bony armor was scarred and blistered. Apparently assuring himself that all was well, the old warrior lowered his head, flashed a long yellow bifurcated tongue into the air, and moved rapidly toward the bait. Soon his footsteps were plainly audible. We could not see him as he neared the boma, but he passed so close that I could have reached out and touched him with my hand.

The impression this giant lizard gave as he came ponderously forward was one of great weight and strength. Compared with the slim and agile younger lizards, he was thick-set and muscular, with a very heavy body. He seemed to be all of twelve feet in length. His long sharp claws gripped the earth as he walked. I pictured him using them to scrape and tear at the bait; and employing his thin recurved teeth, with their serrated edges, to rip off great chunks of the meat. I could imagine him, as I had seen other lizards, seesawing back and forth on braced legs, giving a wrench at the bait with every backward move. Sometimes, in this position, with jaws buried deep in the meat, and the neck curved forward and down, a Komodo lizard resembles nothing as much as paintings of the Tyrannosaurus restored. When they have detached a piece of flesh, they lift their head and gulp down the whole slab, regardless of size. As the food goes down, the skin at the back of the neck becomes distended in the most astonishing fashion. Then the lizard licks his chops, rubs both sides of his face on the ground, as if to clean it, and lifts his head, the better to observe the landscape. He may even sit on his haunches, with forefeet dangling like those of a kangaroo. If he is surprised while feeding, the results are apt to be disastrous, for this beast is easily excited, and immediately disgorges himself.

This particular lizard was in a very suspicious frame of mind. He walked up to the opening, and almost put his head into the noose, then backed away. Then he inspected everything very closely, his snaky tongue in constant motion. Again he approached the trap, and just as my fingers tightened on the string, he turned abruptly, walked off, and sat motionless. For at least five minutes he sat there, looking into the surrounding jungle. This happened again and again; at the end of half an hour the suspense was almost unbearable. Then, unexpectedly, he walked over to the opening of the trap, stepped quickly through the noose, and seized the bait. I jerked the release, and the noose tightened.

HIS weight, however, proved to be too great a strain on the tree, and it broke; while the rope remained tight, he lay on the ground, instead of being suspended in the air. The Malays gave him a wide berth, but faithful old Defosse brought out his lariat, and stepped close to our prey. A strange pair they made—the grim hunter and his writhing antagonist! The lizard was working him-

self into a magnificent fury; foam literally dripped from his jaws. Defosse took no unnecessary chances. His first throw missed, and he coiled his rope again as methodically as if he were practicing on a tent peg. Meanwhile the lizard was clawing at the noose, in an attempt to escape. While he was thus engaged, Defosse stepped up behind him, quite close, and roped him about the neck. The end of the rope was made fast to a tree, and a third rope placed about the lizard's tail, to prevent him from doing damage to the bushmen. The Malays then stepped forward, hog-tied the lizard, lashed him to a pole, and carried him to camp in triumph, thrust him into a cage, and loosened the rope.

That night the camp slept peacefully under the jungle moon; it had been a strenuous day for us all. In the morning we found, much to our dismay, that our prize catch had broken through the heaviest wire we had been able to obtain in Batavia, and escaped through the air-hole at the top of the cage. Here was evidence of a degree of strength that we had never suspected—strength, perhaps, that has enabled the dragon lizard to survive through the ages. . . .

During our stay, we captured two other live lizards, and eventually brought them back to the Bronx Zoo, in New York City. They lived only a short time, however. Also, twelve specimens were brought to the American Museum of Natural History for an exhibit. The largest of these was a little more than nine feet long. So our expedition was a success, although we still have much to learn about the dragon lizard. We do not know, for example, what age they attain. Whether the two monsters that reached the Zoo were ten years old or a hundred, we haven't the remotest idea.

There is also the fact that Komodo is geologically recent. Thus we have a very ancient animal living on an island that has risen from the sea in recent times, geologically speaking. How did the dragon lizard get there? We know that he can swim, for we turned five of them loose on the beach one day, and two of them immediately took to the water. But if they swam to the island, whence did they come? Why is the dragon lizard of Komodo restricted to a few islands in that vicinity?

These questions remain unanswered. But we are sure of one thing: This probable source of dragon mythology is a game fighter, a worthy antagonist.

War

AFTER the tragic ending of the Peace Conference at the council tent, and the murder of General Canby, it was decided to make a united attack upon the Indian stronghold, and capture or annihilate the savages.

Our camp, at the base of the bluff, on the west side, and Colonel Mason's on the east, were about seven miles apart; and between lay the indescribable lava beds. The signal corps was kept busy sending and receiving messages between the camps, arranging plans for the concerted attack. Three days after the massacre, everything was in readiness for starting the punitive expedition.

About an hour or so after midnight the troops of our camp moved silently out under the command of Colonel John Green, a very efficient officer. We had somewhat over three hundred men, two-thirds cavalry, but unmounted on this occasion, for the nature of the ground would not admit of movement on horseback. Colonel Mason, with a like number, moved from his camp about the same time in order to coöperate with us.

It was a beautiful balmy night; there was no moonlight, but a star-bespangled sky afforded enough light to enable us to pick our way, single file, over the jagged rocks without stumbling. We were cautioned not to make the slightest noise.

Our progress was unavoidably slow, but everything went well until just after we had passed the southwest point of a triangular-shaped lava projection that jutted for more than a mile into Tule Lake. Upon that rugged projection, near its apex, the "stronghold" was situated.

It was intended that the two forces should approach from opposite directions and form a junction somewhere near the center of the base of the triangle, and then close in on the stronghold, compelling the Modocs to surrender or be driven into the lake. The infantry contingent of

in the Lava Beds

A participant in the attack on the Modoc stronghold which followed the murder of General Canby, tells his dramatic story.

By MAURICE FITZGERALD

our force was in the lead, groping its way over heaps of broken rock and around cavernous pits that impeded its progress, when one of the men stumbled, accidentally discharging his rifle.

The sudden report of the gun caused every man to halt in his tracks and hold his breath; but before the sound died away, another more ominous, and seemingly not a hundred yards away, broke upon our ears. It was the warning cry of an Indian picket—"*Wow-ow-ow*"—made by rapidly tapping the half-opened mouth with the palm of the hand and emitting a yell at the same time.

We were in the midst of a vast stretch of lava-beds extending for miles on every side but one, and on that the waters of the lake; in the darkness of the night, without accurate knowledge of our location, and in close proximity to our lurking foe, who was familiar with every boulder and crevice. Is it any wonder that when we heard that weird and awesome signal, for the moment our hats seemed lifted by some unusual agency?

MUCH quicker than I can tell it, there burst forth from every crag and cavern that same bloodcurdling war signal, as if the place were alive with ten thousand redskins ready to annihilate us. Every gloomy recess and cavern took up that terrifying cry and from the bosom of the placid lake the echo reverberated.

As the darkness vanished and objects became visible, firing began on our front. The Indians seemed to have divined our intention of uniting our forces against them, and set out forcefully to prevent it.

I belonged to a detachment of cavalry that halted on a rocky eminence from which we could observe what was doing on our right and front. The infantry, instead of pressing forward to form a junction with Colonel Mason's command, were compelled to turn and face the Indians, who were annoying them by persistent sniping on their flank. Judging from the rattle of firearms in the distance, Mason was already engaged.

The soldiers, about five paces apart, were deployed as skirmishers, and after advancing at a run, where the ground would admit, for a short distance, would then fall flat behind some protecting rock, observe the spot where the smoke of the enemy's gun came from, fire at that spot, then jump up and advance again. We would frequently catch a glimpse of a Modoc dodging quickly behind the jutting rocks. When they caught sight of a blue-coat, we would see the puff of smoke and hear the soft *ping* of the Henry rifle in contrast to the sharp bang of the soldier's gun. The Indians wasted no ammunition, for they knew the difficulty of replenishing their stock.

A great part of the day was spent in this kind of desultory fighting, the Modocs gradually retiring toward their stronghold. Finally we received orders to move up toward the stronghold.

During the day a pack-mule with a small "Cohorn" mortar on its back arrived at our command from headquarters. It was led along a kind of trail by the margin of the lake where the action of the water had made the surface of the lava rocks reasonably smooth. This baby mortar, not more than thirty inches long, was intended to throw shells into the stronghold, preceding an assault.

Having been onlookers so far during the day, our contingent was now ordered to advance and take position on the west side of the stronghold a short distance from the lake. Here we were deployed as skirmishers, facing the outer works of the Modoc citadel.

Where the natural formation did not meet all the requirements of their fortification, the Indians had constructed artificial barriers of stone about four feet in height as breastworks, with loopholes to shoot through. We were now facing several of these defences. The Indians took an occasional shot at us, but the

distance was a trifle too great for their rifles. To make our attack more certain of success, the little mortar was now brought up and placed in position for shelling the breastworks.

Its position happened to be taken about thirty feet behind Troop K. During this proceeding all the men on the line were lying on the ground, as a protection from the enemy's bullets. The mortar was quickly loaded, sighted and touched off; but through some oversight or defect in the shell—I never knew what—instead of being hurled behind the breastworks, it fell some ten or fifteen feet in front of our line and spun around this way and that, hissing and sputtering.

An officer who took in the situation and the imminent danger to which the men were exposed, shouted: "Everyone lie close to the ground." He was instantly obeyed. Then the thing exploded, scattering fragments through the air in every direction. No one was hit; but all got the scare of their lives. For several seconds the pieces of the shell could be heard falling on the rocks in every direction. The next shot was more successful; it landed behind the breastworks, and was followed by two or three others equally well directed.

The shells from a mortar can be followed by the eye in their trajectory, especially in the dusk of evening. This caused the hostiles to waste some good ammunition firing at the fiery projectile descending in their proximity.

We were now ordered to charge at double time, which we did with a will—firing, running, stumbling and clambering over rocks, the Indians pegging away at us till we reached the breastworks. Most of these we found abandoned.

In this charge several were killed and wounded; I never learned the exact number. As it was now getting dusk, we were ordered to bivouac on the line taken, and we sat, lay or crouched uncomfortably amongst the lava rocks for the night.

IN the morning another attempt was made to make contact with Colonel Mason's command by a single flank skirmish line movement to the right. In its execution we had to keep up a continuous exchange of shots with the Indians hovering on our flank, seemingly determined to checkmate our purpose. The increasing roughness of the broken lava likewise reduced our progress to a snail's-pace. Judging from the distant report of firearms toward the east, the other command was not having any better success in reaching us.

It was, therefore, decided that we retrace our steps, take a position as close as possible to the stronghold and attempt to storm it next morning. In conformity with this change of plan we straggled back, tired and hungry, through the rocks, harassed all the time by a galling fire, to very near the place we had occupied the night before.

NOW it was the evening of the second day, and our haversacks and stomachs were empty. Under such conditions, though the prospect of another sleepless night among the rocks was not a pleasant outlook, still not a murmur was heard; everyone felt that the Modoc fortress must be taken at any cost, and the murder of General Canby avenged.

As the evening advanced the Indians became much more active than on the previous night. They moved out from the stronghold, and in the darkness approached very near to our line, moving along from one place to another, and shouting frequent volleys of profanity at the soldiers, keeping a screen of rock between themselves and danger. We afterward learned this shouting—and listening for replies—was their way of finding a weak place to pass through our line.

When it was good daylight, the command to advance on the stronghold was given. And as we raised from our recumbent positions, we became aware that there were hostiles behind us, for bullets began whizzing from that direction as well as from the front. Then it began to dawn upon us that the Indians had played us a foxy trick.

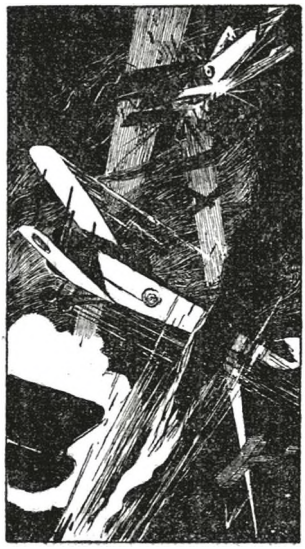
We pressed forward, however, heedless of what might be behind, fully determined to enter the stronghold or perish in the attempt. The task was much easier than we had anticipated, for we found only a few crippled and wounded Modocs holding the place; the others had decamped during the night, and were now somewhere in our rear. These few wounded, left as a sort of decoy, kept fighting to the last.

By unceasing and relentless efforts the Indians were soon forced to leave the lava beds and betake themselves to the open country. By scattering in small groups, they sought to avoid capture; but in a few weeks all had been compelled to surrender. Thus ended one of the most tragic campaigns in the annals of Indian warfare in the United States.

The Flying Headsman

A strange episode of the Great War, in the air.

By ROLAND D. DOANE



IN 1918, Willie McGregor was sixteen years old, and weighed ninety pounds in his complete flying-clothes. He of course laid claim to being older, but there wasn't a man in the squadron, from Major Thomas O'Brien Hubbard down to the lowliest Ack Emma-3rd Class who believed him. How he ever got into the Royal Flying Corps will always remain one of the unsolved mysteries of the Great War. But he did get in, and for several glorious months he flew like a fool up and down the Western Front, dealing out a brand of trouble for the enemy that compared favorably with the record of the best in the service. As far as I know, he is living today, with three bullets which he picked up in his last fight still embedded somewhere in his small frame. . . .

Everything had been quiet along the Front for a couple of weeks, too quiet for comfort. A routine patrol in squadron formation every other morning, and an occasional afternoon show made up our entire contribution. It was a rare event when an enemy was spotted, and seldom could we get within range of his aircraft. We had gone for nine days without losing a pilot, and everyone was developing a splendid case of the jitters. The only casualty had been the equipment officer, who mistook the motor of a passing truck for that of a Gotha night bomber, and broke his leg diving into the nearest dugout.

It sounds queer for a gang of pilots to get nervous because no one had been killed for quite a stretch, but nevertheless understandable. The usual average for a British scout squadron—particularly for one flying those cantankerous, tricky, ground-looping, spinning Sopwith Camels was close to two a day when things were going as usual; and the mess at night seemed strange to all of us with the same faces still around. We had become so accustomed to the replacement pilots coming up each day or so from the Pilot's Pool, so full of vim and vigor and a firm conviction that they could settle this minor matter of aërial supremacy in no time, that we felt lost when the need for them suddenly ceased.

Such a state of affairs could not go on indefinitely, and we were all aware of it. The main question in every one's mind was just when would the trouble start again, and who would be the next to come diving from the heavens with a trail of flame and smoke lighting the way for his one-way trip to another world.

It was only a day or two later that the peace and quiet was shattered with a vengeance. We blamed the Australians for being the cause of it all. They had a squadron on the next field, which handled the daylight patrol on alternate mornings. What they did the rest of the time we never knew, for fraternizing was not encouraged. This particular morning, as they were taking off, some crazy Digger conceived the bright idea of warming up his Vickers guns as he passed over our tents. Presumably he just wanted to be sure we were awake, which was all in fun; but some of the other Aussie pilots decided to go him one better, and they did their warming up while in a dive.

In less than a minute our tents were riddled. Fortunately none of our crowd was hit, but it didn't do our already weakened nervous systems any good at all. An hour later Dick Mortimer and Pat Hayes went up to test their motors, and they came together at three thousand feet for no reason that anyone could ever determine. We buried Dick

the next day. Pat got down somehow with no prop and one strut missing.

In the afternoon Bert Douglas went off toward the Front to see what was going on, and never returned; and before darkness had set in, a visiting bomber went into the trees on the take-off, and his two sixty-pounders let go. And later that night the Major dolefully dropped into the mess with the message that a push was to start at daylight, and we were to start trench-strafing as the Tommies went over the top.

For some unknown reason, I looked at the Wee McGregor while the C. O. was speaking. The kid had had his share of trench-strafing, and he knew full well what it meant. But he never batted an eye. In fact, I would have sworn that he liked the prospect. Maybe the idea of diving down on trenches, troops and transports at 120 miles an hour with both Vickers guns spouting bullets at the rate of 450 shots a minute did appeal to some people, but I wondered if Willie looked ahead a bit to the many times he would have to climb back for altitude while dodging rifle-fire, machine-guns, one-pounders, flaming onions and every other kind of ordnance that the enemy could muster. That was when they got you; and nine times out of ten they got you good. And maybe he had not also thought that he would not be alone in the sky. Instead it was a safe bet that once the push started, the E. A. would be ready and willing to play leap-frog with you. But the more I watched the kid, the more I would have sworn that he had the whole picture in his mind's eye and was reveling in the prospect.

AS luck would have it, I was the first out; to make matters worse, my companion was a youngster from South Africa who had had less than three weeks at the Front—and no trench-strafing. He didn't last long. We crossed the lines at one thousand feet and spotting a staff car, chased it for four or five miles until it overturned in a ditch and burst into flames.

So engrossed were we in the chase that we failed to watch out for enemy aircraft. Suddenly a couple of holes appeared in my celluloid windshield, and then the instrument-board went to pieces in a burst that no doubt had been intended for the back of my head. Looking around, I saw the South African going down in a cloud of smoke, and five or six Fokkers doing a little stunting in celebration. Then they started after me, but an escorting flight of S. E. 5's popped out through the mist and took over the chore, so that the trench-strafing could go on without further interruption.

How many trips I made that day, I don't know. We lost so many pilots that the mess that night looked like the home of a hermit. But the Wee McGregor was there, and apparently quite unperturbed with the day's activities.

"How did you come out, Willie?" I asked.

"Pretty good," said the Wee McGregor. "I crashed awhile ago. Lost my undercarriage out at the Front and had to slide in on my belly."

"How did that happen?" I inquired casually. "Archie?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," said Willie. "So forget it."

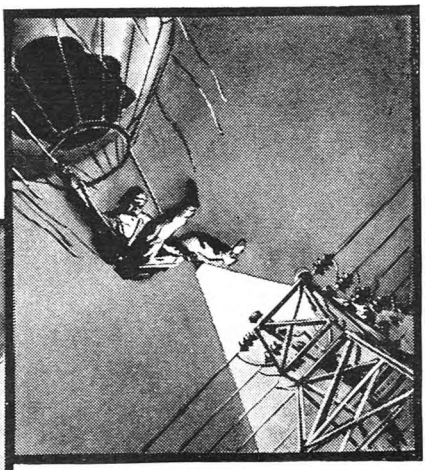
IT wasn't until a week later that we heard what had happened; then the story came from an artillery officer who had been in an observation-post in front of his own lines on the day of the push. Passing by our field, he noticed the squadron-markings on the planes and came in to inquire who was the pilot of the ship carrying the personal letter *"F"* on the fuselage. We pointed out to him the Wee McGregor.

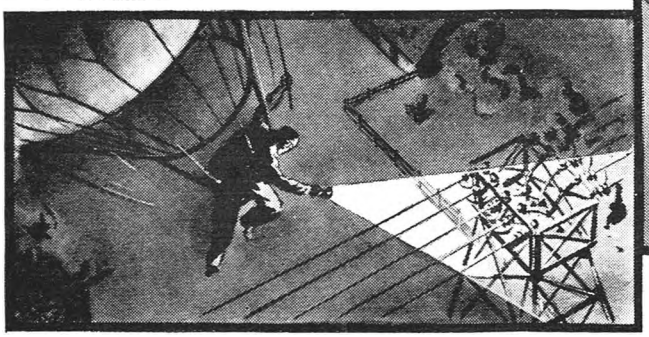
"That beggar is crazy," the artilleryman said. "Completely crazy! Blime," he went on, "I was laying out there in my blooming O. P. when along comes this ruddy little Camel. He was shooting hell out of the trenches and apparently having the time of his life. Up ahead, a big German trooper climbs up above the parapet to get a good shot with his rifle as the plane went by; and do you know what that crazy fool pilot of yours did? Why he drops his bus down so that it damn' near touches the ground, and before the German could jump, the axle of the undercarriage caught him right on the Adam's apple and took his head off clean as a whistle. Was that Heinie surprised! Then the plane hit the top of the trench, smashed both wheels flat, but was going so fast that it bounced clear. 'Struth, I hope I never see anything like that again."

The artilleryman's story was later confirmed in an official communiqué, and Wee Willie McGregor became known as the Flying Headsman. . . . Whether he dropped his plane purposely or whether it was just one of those freaks, we will never know; for Willie wouldn't talk.

Death Waited While He Hovered in the Sky!

Crowd Waits Electrocution As Failing Balloon Wafts toward Wires





"I never did like jumping from balloons," writes G. W. de Grange, professional daredevil of Martinsburg, West Virginia, "and this time there was a mean wind to make matters worse.

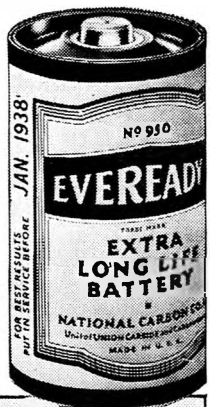
"We finally got the hot air bag filled, and I took off in the dark from the fair grounds at Emmitsburg, Md., intending to make a parachute jump into the town square.

"But the balloon was soggy. She wouldn't give me altitude. I passed about 300 feet over the treetops of the town square, and didn't dare to jump... and then the big bag began to slowly settle.

"I ripped my 'Eveready' flashlight from its straps on my 'chute harness and snapped it on to see what was below me. To my horror, the balloon was going to set me none too gently down in a nest of hot, high-tension wires!

"I've sideslipped by these death-dealing wires with a 'chute many a time... but just imagine steering a lollopy big dying balloon by pulling on the shrouds. But I pulled with everything I had while the crowd waited for an aerial execution... and because those faithful, fresh DATED 'Eveready' batteries were on the job, and showed me the wires in time, I slid by certain death by *inches!* Without light *the instant I needed it*, that crowd would have got more than its money's worth. *(Signed)*

George W. de Grange"



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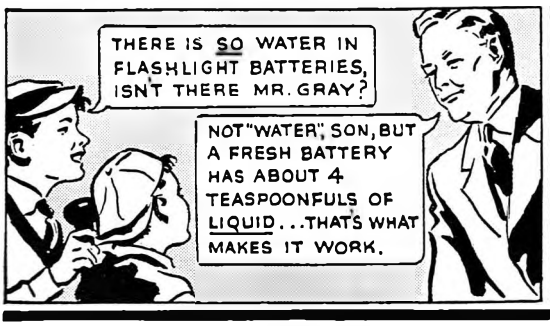
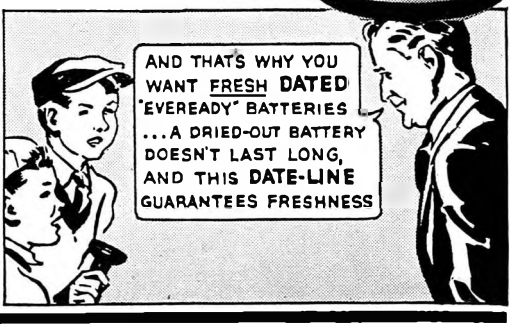
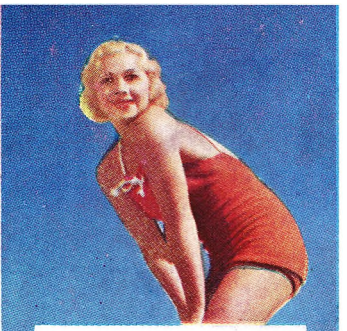




SPRINGBOARD ACE. Jane Fauntz Manske says: "When I smoke Camels at mealtimes and after, I find that my digestion runs more smoothly." The best meal digests easier when you smoke Camels.



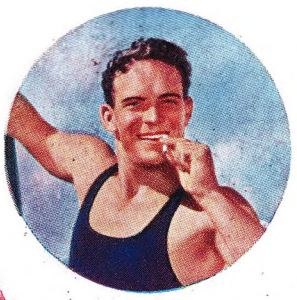
THREE-TIME OLYMPIC WINNER in the high dive. Dorothy Poynton Hill says: "I prefer Camels because they don't get on my nerves. And, like so many other women, I like Camel's flavor."

WHAT SOME OF AMERICA'S AQUATIC STARS SAY ABOUT SMOKING...

(*Left*) **LENORE KIGHT WINGARD.** She has broken 7 World's Records—16 Nat'l Records—in speed swimming. Lenoré comments on smoking: "Camels are certainly mild. They never jangle my nerves."

MISS GLORIA WHEEDEN says: "I always think of smoking Camels and eating as going together."

(*Right*) **HAROLD "DUTCH" SMITH,** who holds Olympic diving championships, says: "I've found great pleasure in Camels. I long ago found Camels restore my energy after a strenuous meet."



(*Left*) **PETE DESJARDINS** — internationally famous diver—speaking: "Divers like a *mild* cigarette that doesn't upset nerves. That's why I prefer Camels."

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