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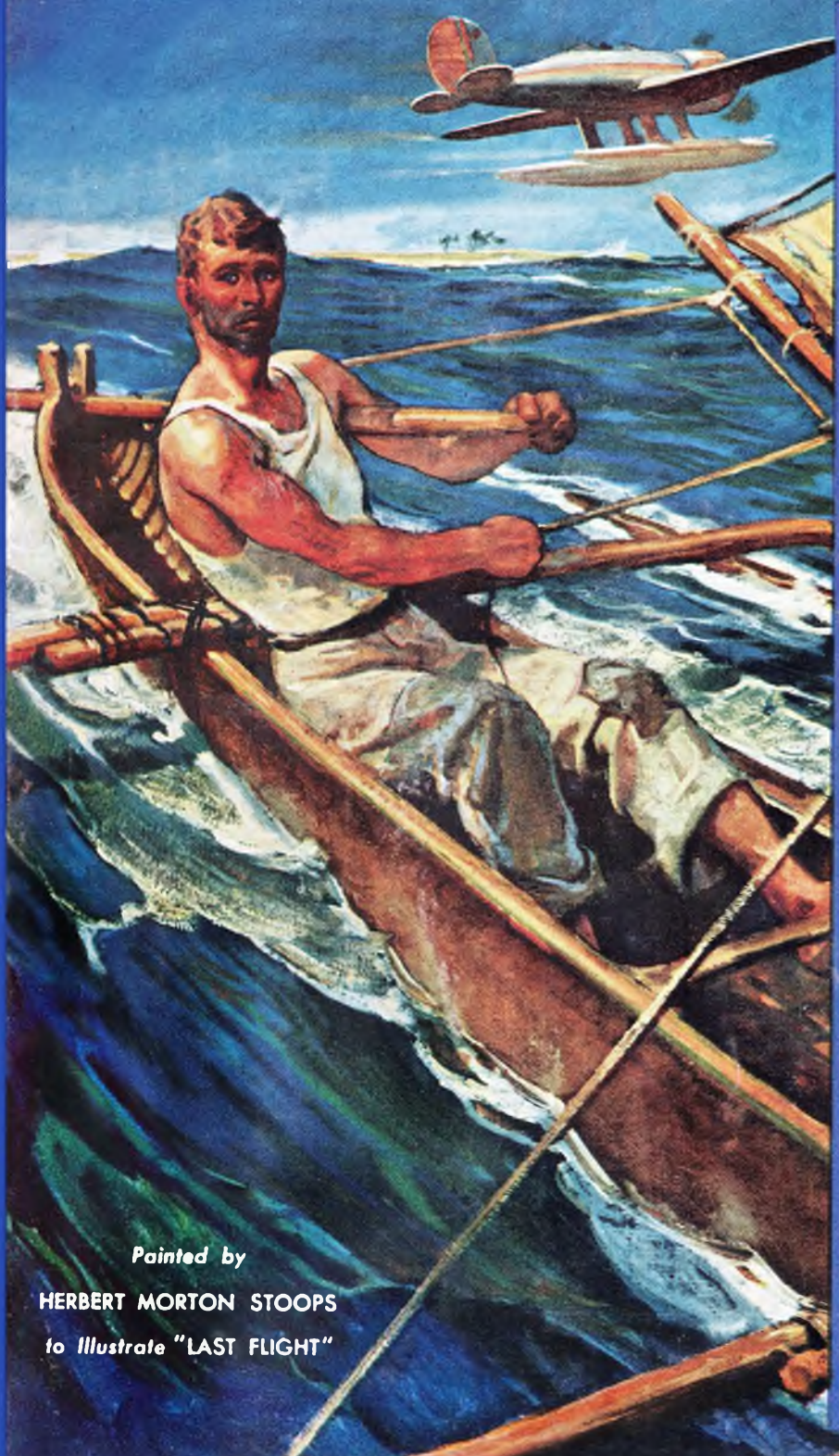

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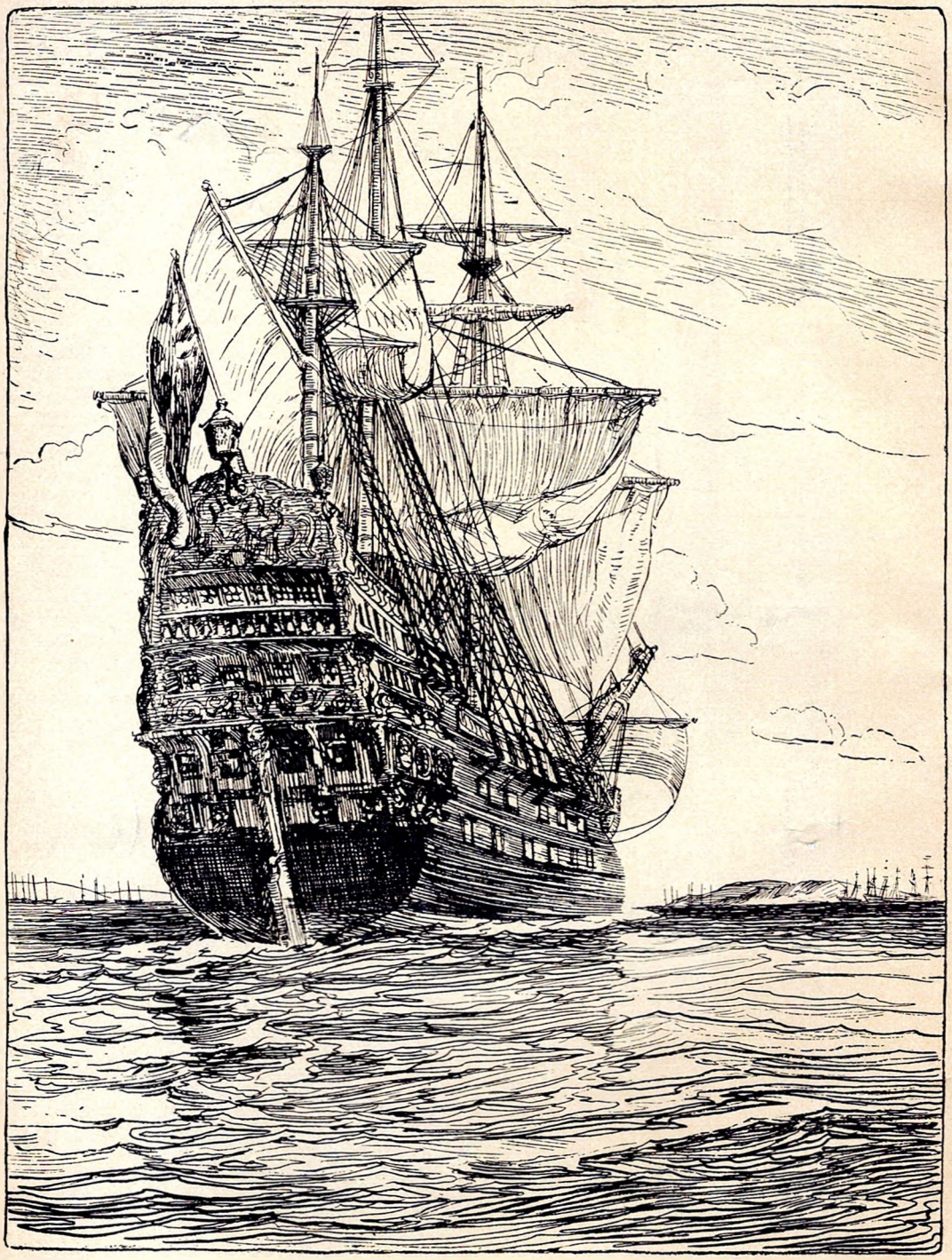

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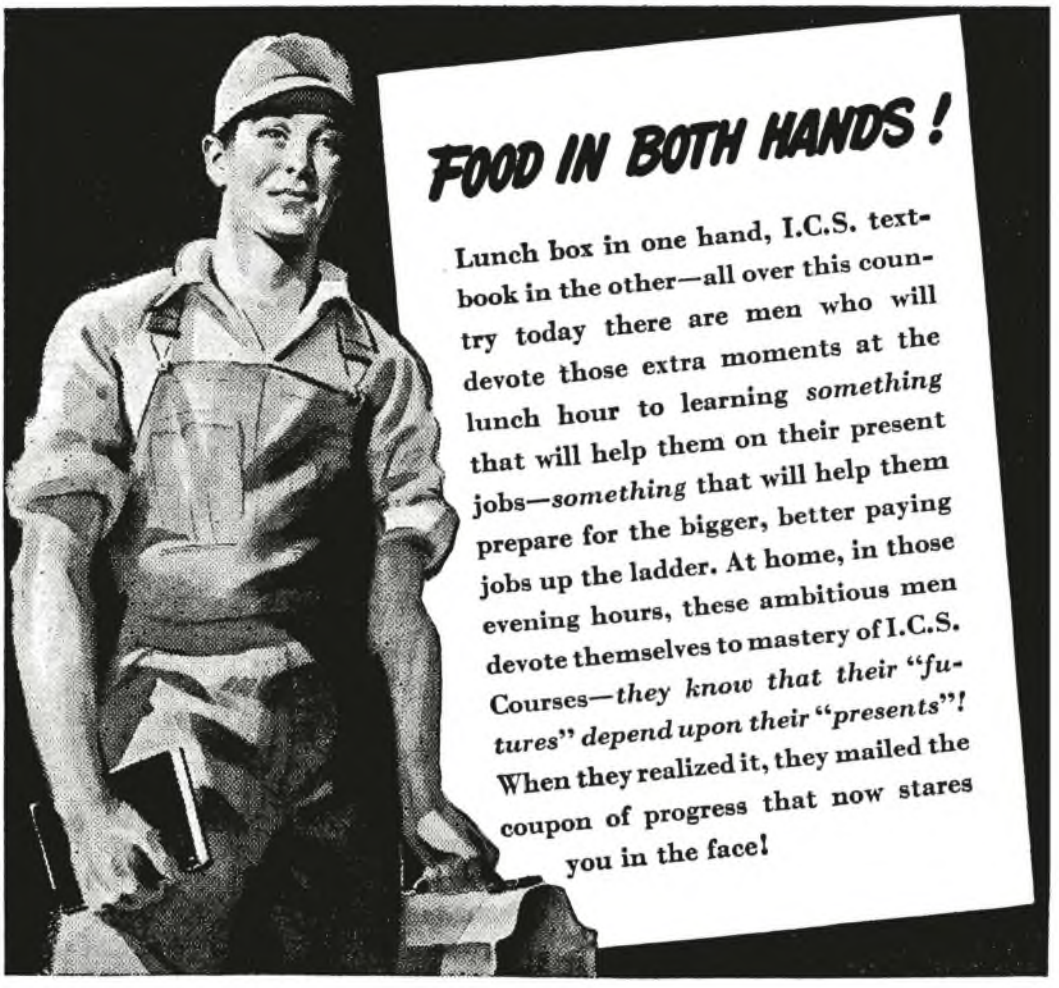

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BLUE BOOK

SEPTEMBER, 1938 MAGAZINE VOL. 67, NO. 5

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Published monthly, at McCall St., Dayton, Ohio. Subscription Offices—Dayton, Ohio. Editorial and Executive Offices—230 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE—September, 1938. Vol. LXVII, No. 5. Entered as second-class matter, November 12, 1930, at the Post Office at Dayton, Ohio, under the Act of March 3, 1897. Subscription Prices, one year $1.50, two years $2.00 in U. S. and Canada; foreign postage $1.00 per year. For change of address, give us four weeks' notice and send old address as well as new. Printed in U.S.A.

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Next Month!

"Poppy Island"

The fascinating story of an American boy brought up as a Chinese in old San Francisco.

By WILLIAM McKEEVER

A Ranger's

Drafted as sheriff, a Ranger deals with cattle-thieves.

IN the spring of 1893 the sheriff of Castro County resigned, and the people demanded that I take the job.

I realized I had been appointed sheriff for the special duty of cleaning up the county of horse- and cattle-thieves, so I started in. I began to arrest the ringleaders on any charge. The juries would not convict, so I determined to break the gangs up through lawyer fees.

The main operators soon got tired of paying out this money and began to round up their off-color cattle, and quietly slipped them out of the county. Their sympathizers did all they could to mislead me, but I took two good men and followed the trail. They turned the cattle loose on the Washita River in the Indian Territory, loose-herding them, as we cowboys termed it. We slipped up on three of the rustlers, who readily surrendered. Two of them agreed to come back to Texas without extradition papers, but the third refused.

I sent the two men who had come with me back to round up the cattle while I took the third man to Guthrie, capital of the Indian Territory, for safekeeping. Here I saw the Governor, and asked him for thirty days' time to go back to Texas and get extradition papers for this man. He gladly consented.

I then hurried back to the boys on the Washita River. They had all the cattle gathered—over three hundred head. I started them back toward home with the cattle, while I went to Cheyenne to get the two prisoners. I joined the men with the cattle the following day. I did not fear these two prisoners very much. I would handcuff them together at night, but we three had to stand all the guard around the cattle at night, which made us a long guard. We always rode the best horses, so if the prisoners undertook to get away, we could overtake them without shooting them.

My great problem was to get the man I had in jail at Guthrie indicted, as the governor of Texas would not issue extradition papers on another State only following an indictment. In Donley County, I was told the court was in session there, so at Clarendon I told the district attorney my story. He asked me to tell the grand jury the circumstances connected with the stealing of the cattle and my trailing them through Donley County when they were taken to the Indian Territory. This I did and I told him to let me know the result of the action of the grand jury, and to send a copy of the indictment to Governor Hogg, asking

Scrapbook

By IRA ATEN

him to send the extradition papers to the Governor of the Indian Territory at Guthrie.

This done, I mounted my horse and overtook the boys with the cattle that night. The word had gone ahead of us that we were returning with the stolen cattle, and hundreds of men lined up along the route waiting for us. We would let these ranchers look through the herd to see if we had any of their cattle. Some were found to have been stolen from every county the cattle had passed through.

When I got back home at Dimmit, the county seat of Castro County, a letter was there from the district attorney at Clarendon saying the grand jury had brought an indictment against my man in jail at Guthrie, and that a copy of the indictment had been sent to Governor Hogg at Austin, as I requested. As soon as I could arrange my affairs, I returned to Guthrie, arriving there just the day before the thirty-day time allowed by the governor was up. The Governor had honored the extradition papers from the Governor of Texas.

This man was a dangerous criminal, having several other charges against him. I took no chances with him. I had brought along handcuffs and leg-irons, which I used on him during the return trip. In the daytime I would leave one side of the leg-irons on one leg, draw the other up under his pants by a light chain about twelve feet long, and let the prisoner carry the chain in his hand, or put it up his sleeve, so that no one would know he was a prisoner.

I always had a horror of shooting a prisoner for running away from me. I came back by Vernon on the train getting there at eight o'clock at night. As the Amarillo train would leave at five o'clock the next morning, I decided to go to a hotel instead of the jail, as I was afraid I would not get my man out of the jail in time to catch the train.

I asked the proprietor of the hotel to give me a room next to his own. I handcuffed my left hand to the prisoner's right. Then I asked the proprietor to shackle us together with the leg irons and take the keys and my pistol, until morning.

When I arrived at Amarillo, I still had fifty miles to go with the prisoner, southward to Dimmit. We made the drive with a team and buggy next day. . . . At the trial of the prisoners, they were convicted, and that broke up one of the worst gangs of cattle thieves which had ever operated in the Panhandle.

The Treasure

Two Americans wrecked on a strange primitive island off the French coast find gold—and disaster. An exceptional story by the able author of "The Devil Came to Our Valley."

CONTRARY to general belief, the life of a correspondent working on an American news-agency in Paris can be pretty dull at times. It was that day, I remember. Nothing was happening—not even a war in the Balkans. Assassinations were out of fashion, and it was too hot and muggy for strikes, street-mobs and the usual run of news that keeps the Inter-Press office active. I was just about to sneak out and grab a beer, when I heard the Chief's booming voice yelling:

"Nielen!"

I went inside. He had a couple of clip-sheets from the Navas News Bureau, and waved them at me.

"You're catching a train to Brest," he said, "—in just half an hour. You'll take a boat early in the morning and get out to that island and run down this story. Get going. Cashier will give you an advance on expenses."

I grabbed the clips, ran a quick eye over them and wondered if the Chief had been touched by the heat. Sending a man off on a jaunt like that generally means a hot story; but this—or these—looked like the fillers on the back page of a Sunday feature-section. The Navas agency, a local French outfit, had got a queer rumor about some old fisherman living on an island out in the foggy waters between France and the English Channel, finding a gold nugget. All right if it happened to be an American, but it wasn't. I couldn't see any "news angle" for the hundred and twenty American dailies we served with foreign stuff. The other clip was even less, to my mind: A couple of American boys—taking a cruise between college terms—had got themselves wrecked in their little thirty-five-foot ketch, on the same island. Interesting, and all that. Worth a blurb of a few lines in the week-end cable, but I couldn't see why the Chief wanted to spend the money sending a man down there. And I said so, too.

He growled at me:

"Nobody cares what you think," he said. "I'm still handing out assignments on this desk, until further notice. But if you must know, Nielen, there is just a chance of that gold-story being important. America has just gone off the gold standard, which puts France in a delicate position, with a lot of gold in the Banque de France, but no gold resources at all. If somebody should discover workable gold-fields on French

of Ys

By FULTON GRANT

Illustrated by
Austin Briggs

They who would have burned human flesh to propitiate a werewolf god, flung their souls into chanting—

soil,—if they *should*, I say,—its effect on international currency would be overbalancing. Now I happen to know that those Breton islands contain a lot of quartz and similar geological formations which sometimes accompany gold deposits. Probably there isn't anything in this report; but if there is, I want Inter-Press to get there first with the story. Off you go."

"What about those American kids and their ship?"

"That's nothing much," he admitted. "Since you're going there, get the dope on them. They're the Brownford kids." (For reasons, I'm not using their real names in this record.) "Old Samuel J. Brownford's boys—you know, the meat-packer," the Chief went on. "It's a society story, really. Not important, but you can kill two birds with one stone. Now shut up and get started."

So I caught a train out of the Gare St. Lazare, spent the night in a Brest hotel, caught a small bathtub of a launch that sails weekly with mail and provisions for that whole archipelago of outlying islands—and sailed right into the Fourth Dimension.

In the first place, nobody ever heard of that island. It is called Bihanoc'h, which means, in the Breton language, "the littlest one," and it's not a bad name. You sail through the awful Fromvœur, which the fishermen call the "Passage of Great Terror," and that's an understatement. Your boat is tossed, whirled, hurled and spun through a boil-

ing caldron of water churned to milk. The mist is pale black. Scimitars of eerie light from the Craec'h lighthouse on Ushant Island, in the distance, slash through like knives, whittling your spirit down to green-pea size. Overhead the gulls are screaming like damned souls. Invisible monsters and ancient demons roar and howl in the wind. You graze sudden death on port and starboard as your skipper steers, somehow, through jagged rocks where Scylla calls, "Yoo-hoo!" to Charybdis, and doom is crackling all around you like fireworks.

And then you are flung into a cleft of rock which is the gate to a little harbor on the huge rock called Bihanoc'h. The fiends are still screaming outside, and there is a slumbering giant snoring thunderously somewhere on the island. If it weren't for the cold, it could be a man's idea of hell.

But you arrive, miraculously, all in one piece. Sailors dangle you on a rope-ladder and shove you into a rowboat, but you don't even care by then. You are sick. Your face is green, and so is your very soul. You are trembling all over and wishing you are dead. You just let them push you around. And the next thing you know, they leave you high, if not quite dry, on a smelly, fishy wooden wharf where groups of grim-looking old men in flat hats and hose-like pants stand staring at you as if you dropped from the moon.

I LOCATED the Brownford boys with some difficulty. The trouble was language. They don't speak much French on the islands, and no English at all. They gargle, gasp, spit and cough a kind of Celtic speech called Breton, of which I didn't have any. But by dint of sign-language and the international language of setting up a few drinks at a local *buvette* (bar, to you), I managed to get a line on the shipwrecked play-boys. They were alive, all right. But they were—or was I wrong?—not exactly in good standing among the islanders. I couldn't make out just what it was, but there was a shade, a *feeling* about the way the men spoke of them, that suggested—well, something.

I found them boarding for the time in the only decent house on the island. It belonged to an old Frenchman, a sort of hermit, who had gone out there to philosophize, think and commune with nature. His name was Pierre d'Aulie, and he had been a professor in a Paris university until he wrote some document that put him in wrong with the Academy of Historians. Anyhow, he had taken the boys in after their wreck, and was housing them until they could get a boat back to civilization.

A queer little *hombre*, this Professor. He looked like a fat stuffed hedgehog, and he bristled like one; but he was courteous enough to me.

"*Entrez, entrez, donc, monsieur,*" he greeted me when I jerked a rope that clattered a bell inside his place, and he came to the door. "Ah, the press. I do not like the press, but come in. You wish to see the *jeunes Américains? Eh bien—*"

So I met the boys.

SAMMY JR. was a nice lad; his brother Jud wasn't. That's short, neat and blunt. Sammy Jr. had a nice grin, a big happy football-playing body, and an aloof-wistfulness that you had to like at sight. Jud Brownford looked, talked and acted like a rodent. I took their word for it they were brothers, but they were as unlike as two men can be.

"Didn't think we were news," said Sammy. "Fancy a reporter coming down here to dig us up! Well, be careful what you write, because I don't want Dad to get worried about us. We'll stay here awhile—if the Professor will board us. I managed to salvage some painting things—I'm an artist, kind of; and this is a swell place to paint. Jud has other ideas, too."

"That's right," said the rat-faced Jud. "But I don't want any damned story about it in the papers. How did you ever find out about us, anyhow? Hell, a feller can't even have a private little wreck."

He grinned, but it wasn't nice like his brother's grin. I took a slap at his ego:

"I didn't come down here just for you boys," I said. "There is a rumor that somebody found a chunk of gold down here. That could be a story. Know anything about it?"

The silence that followed that was just loud. And long. Brother looked at brother. Both looked at the Professor, who hadn't said a word. All three of them looked at me as though I had been reading their private letters.

It was the old Professor who spoke, finally.

"But—*c'est incroyable!* How could such a report get out?"

Suddenly I stepped on something soft, and I gave a yell. Then I flopped. Everything was black.

"Navas news service. Probably through the radio station on Ushant," I said, guessing. "News is like murder. It outs. Is there anything to the report?"

Silence again. Then:

"It is—true. But it is not quite what you imagine, monsieur," he said. "There is no gold mine on Bihanoc'h, monsieur. I have been endeavoring to dissuade this young man—" He indicated Jud Brownford.

"Going gold-hunter, eh?" I asked him, just kidding a little.

He said, aggressively:

"Why not? Anybody's business?"

"Not mine, feller," I said, not understanding why he should be so touchy.

"You must not, my young friend—" This was the professor. "Already there is enough trouble—"

"Trouble?" I asked. "What's wrong?"

Jud Brownford had a nasty laugh.

"Spooks," he said. "These hicks out here are all worked up. Look, Nielen: an old drunk comes into Men-mor—that's the name of this village—with a nugget and a crazy story about dragons, and gnom-ies and such-like, and these sappy people are so superstitious that they're all worked up about it. The hell with that. I don't believe there is any gold, really. The nugget hasn't been assayed, even. But I'm going to have a look, anyhow."

"*Mais non!*" said the Professor.

"Better not, kid," said Sammy, Jr. "Why stir things up?"

ALL this was over my head, and I said so.

"What's the story? You're not making any sense. Let me in on it, if there is anything," I said.

"Better let the Professor tell it," suggested Sammy, and I turned to the old man.

"It is not an easy thing to explain, this thing," he said. "You do not live on this island; you will never credit the thing which is here. . . . Superstition? Call it that. But this gold was found in a place which is protected by—by unhuman creatures. It is doomed. It is cursed. To dig in there,—even to go into the place,—will cause trouble, my young friends. Do not, I beg of you."

"Tell me, Professor," I urged him.

"You do not know, then, the legend of the city of Ys?" he asked.

"Ys? Never heard of it."

"Ys—it was a great, rich city, but very wicked. Long ago in the time of the Druids, monsieur. Like your Atlantis of the Western World, it was swallowed up in the sea. It was there, monsieur, where lived the sorceress known to myth as *Fata Morgana.*"

Jud Brownford blared his laughter.

"And now, little Children of the Radio House," he laughed, "Uncle Willy will tell you about Snow White—"

But the old Professor never cracked a smile. He just went on, solemnly:

"It was the black magic of Morgana, monsieur, which gave Ys its golden riches. No other city in the world has had such wealth. And when the flood came and overwhelmed the city, all was lost in the flood. And that hill, it is the temple of Morgana. It was there, monsieur, where the gold was hid."

He waited for the effect. I said:

"You wouldn't be kidding us, Professor?" But he just ignored me.

"The little hill where the temple of Morgana was, monsieur, was not quite lost in the flood. And that hill, it is the island of Bihanoc'h."

Then I caught it:

"So you want to say that if this old man's nugget is really gold, it is part of the lost treasure of Ys? Pretty fantastic, isn't it? You admit it is legend—"

"What, monsieur, is legend? Legend is a thing believed by one age which is not quite believed by another. Where there is smoke, there is also fire. If there is, or was, belief, there must have been fact—of some sort."

"Well, that's over my head," I admitted. "But why not dig wherever the man found the gold, and see what's there? It doesn't seem very dangerous to me."

Jud Brownford wagged his head.

"That's what I say!" he shouted, and I found myself disliking him so much that I wished I hadn't said that.

"LISTEN, messieurs," the Professor said, as if talking to a class. "It is not a question of gold or no gold. It is a deeper question. One does not have the right to bring terror among innocent, simple people."

"Terror?"

"The terror of fear. The terror of superstition."

"Explain, please."

"The islanders, monsieur, believe that the progeny of the fatal Morgana are still living on the island—strange, unhuman creatures of evil who belong not to this world but to the *bed-bihan,* the half-world which is between humanity and the place of Damned Souls. Therefore the gold is tainted and cursed. To touch it, is to bring a doom upon the island. These creatures are the *morganed,* messieurs, the spirits of evil which dwell in the sea and in the rocky caves of the island. I do not ask you to believe; but I ask you not to bring fear to this island."

"What do you care, Professor? You aren't a Breton. If they're so ignorant as that, to hell with them!" That was Jud Brownford, and typical.

"Is gold, after all, that important?" I asked him. "You've got plenty of money."

"Nobody has plenty of money, Mister," he said. "Even Rockefeller can use another million, any day. But I want the fun of looking at it. Sure, I don't believe in it; but I wanna play."

Sammy said quietly: "Perhaps we'd better not, brother. No use starting trouble."

But Jud sneered at him:

"Quitter, hey? Just a softy. Well, you can't kid me out of it with spooks and gnom-ies. I'm going out there tomorrow. I salvaged our ship's radio and a storage battery. I've worked a week to build a little radio-balance out of the tubes. That's like what the prospectors use out West. I'm going to prospect that cave. Probably isn't anything. Fool's gold. Maybe some melted bars left by some of your old French

pirates. Anyhow, I'm going to find out. You guys can come along or not. To hell with the islanders!"

And he walked out on us.

It still wasn't very clear to me, but I sensed that Professor d'Aulie knew that it was all wrong. Besides, there is never any use getting a rural community stirred up in its pet superstitions. Remember the Salem witchcraft business? It seemed pretty useless to risk starting a panic among these little people. Still, Jud Brownford was one of those boys who didn't care as long as he had his way. . . . Well—it was none of my business.

NEXT day I learned a little more. Jud had already started trouble with his radio. It seems nobody on the island had ever seen one, and when they saw him sitting beside a box with a woman's voice singing—from Paris, I guess—and no woman there, they began to think of black magic. They didn't like it. It wasn't natural.

I asked the Professor about the islander who found the nugget.

"The best thing to do is to take him and his nugget back to France and have it assayed. Where is he?" I asked.

"Dead." Just one word. That gave me a start, too.

"How come?"

He shrugged. "The man was a drunkard. He lived alone out on a little promontory at the western end of the island, and he drank much of this island cider which is called *zist*. Drunk, he fell into the opening of a cave which is called the *Kao da Morgan-ed*, the grotto of Morgana. His story is disconnected and incredible. He spoke of dragons roaring, and a hot breath upon him. Then he slept. When he came to, he had, in his hand, what he thought was a stone. That stone was a gold nugget, monsieur."

"And then?"

"He came to town to buy more *zist*. He returned toward his home, but they found his body upon the moors—very dead. There was no mark on him. Possibly heart-failure and age. But the villagers believe otherwise—the punishment of the *morgan-ed*."

"All that could be easily explained," I said: but the old man just shrugged.

"This island is a queer place, monsieur. I have lived here for fifteen years, and there is much which I do not explain. How can you prove that there are not, in this world, existences which are not animal nor human? Is not history and legend full of fairies, gnomes, elves and such-like? Is it perhaps that your civilization has driven them out, to linger in such remote places as these. Ah, laugh if you will, monsieur; but there is much which science cannot prove by Einstein. Or disprove, either."

He had me there; I couldn't argue that.

Grapevine telegraph! It works everywhere, but more especially among primitive people. Jud Brownford and his crude box of radio gold-hunter went out to the end of the island where the *morgan-ed* cave runs deep into the pile of boulders which bristle at the edge of the sea. Brother Sammy went with him, still protesting and not wanting to, but feeling a brotherly responsibility. And I went along too. Sure, I did. So would anybody, let alone a newspaper man. I had to spend a week on this place, like it or not, and I might as well see what went on. So I did.

But although we didn't talk about it, the grapevine telegraph of the island started working, and the people knew we were going out there before we even got started.

And they didn't like it.

"Eul lezen a zo bennekment-se," they gurgled in that crazy language. "A law on it, there is a law on it. It will bring a doom. The law of the *morgan-ed*."

And maybe they were right, at that.

THE *kao da morgan-ed* (I love to exercise my little vocabulary of Breton, so forgive it) or grotto of the Morgans, isn't much to look at from the outside. "Wasn't," I ought to say, for reasons which you will see. Just a hole in a cliff, with a stretch of white sand running down to the sea from it. The sand was the only remarkable thing, because it happened to be the only sandy spot on the island's twenty miles of shore, the rest being solid and broken rocks. A great boulder of quartz seemed to make a sort of roof over the entrance to the cave; and a little narrow coal-black rivulet ran from a spring at the mouth, deep inside, as though it were the alimentary canal to the island's inner belly. Queer, that boulder. It might have been a *cromlec'h*, a Druid stone. It was big enough, odd enough. Might have been cut by human hand. I wouldn't know about those things.

I didn't go in. Not then. Sammy Brownford wanted to make a sketch of

The whole island was convulsed. A great gap opened up. . . . Houses just dropped out of sight.

the glorious gray-mist sea where it poured its anger up over the sand. "Catch the mood," he called it. Me, I wanted to eat. We had brought some flatfish, nicely dried, a *la Bretonnaise,* and the inner-man screamed to broil them. So I did that, and Sammy painted.

But not Jud. That lad had a single-purpose mind. He had his crazy treasure-seeker—a sort of scaffold about four feet long with two boxes, one on each end, containing the radio tubes and batteries. He rigged it so that he could carry it, walking between the boxes and wearing headphones.

"If I can catch one of those gnom-ies," he said with his usual wise-cracking leer, "I'll bring him out. So long, boys —I'll catch you a nugget or maybe pieces of eight."

And off he went.

He was gone an hour before we worried. Sammy had urged him to unravel a ball of string or yarn as he went into that black hole, just in case the passage went double on him; but Jud Brownford wasn't using anybody's else ideas, thanks. He just lighted a torch made out of a resinous knot from some shrub which grows abundantly; and in he went, eager and reckless, like a kid going into a haunted house to show off.

But when an hour was past, we began to wonder.

"I'm going in," said Sammy. "Jud's headstrong, and always doing fool things. Anything might happen to him. Not that I believe in fairies—"

I joined him.

Weird place, that cave. Caves always are, somehow. But this one was dripping with a cold sweat, and the light from our torches made fantastic shapes out of the crystal salt stalactites that dangled around. Queer, too, because some of the side stones and the roof seemed to be made of blocks—crudely cut chunks which might have been man-made. Then there was a smell. I noticed it after we had gone on for about half a mile underground. Sweetish—sickly. Made you gasp and gag. Mineral smell. I thought little enough of it until it got me.

Suddenly I stepped on something soft, and I gave a yell. Then I flopped. Everything was black until I came to—maybe half an hour later—out on the sand where Sammy Brownford had dragged me. How he did it, I can't imagine. He was plenty strong, that boy; but dragging a limp body—two, with his brother's—is no good time, and over those slippery, treacherous stones.

I woke, hearing him say:

"Thank God—thank God!" I felt the same way, and said so. "What hit me?" I asked him.

"I'd say gas. I don't know. Look at Jud."

I looked at Jud. He was sprawled out in the sand, still unconscious, and looking like Death warmed up. White as a ghost, greenish-white. In the war I've seen faces like that—after a chlorine attack. . . . Well, we won't talk about it.

"Not dead, is he?"

Sammy shook his head.

"No, but it's gas; he's badly gassed. I smelled it, and dunked a handkerchief in the brook inside, and held it over my nose. I feel pretty wabbly, myself, coming back with my nose uncovered and my hands full. How do you feel?"

I felt rotten. I felt awful.

JUST then Jud Brownford came slowly out of it. He was sick, copiously, but he came through it.

"God! What a dream!" he said. "Dreamed of a city—people—faces—awful faces—queer things moving around. Walls tumbling. Sea rushing in. Horrible—" He was pretty badly shaken, but he was still skeptical. "Of course it's just an association-dream. The old Professor's story working on my subconscious. Say—how did I get here? What happened?"

We told him about the gas. He must have been hit by it suddenly, in a sort of current or blast.

"I just noticed that the two oscillating currents were making heterodynes in the same pitch, meaning that metal was under me—some kind. I stooped over to look at the meter, and there was a warm, almost hot current of air, like a hot breath, on my neck. Then I flopped. Gas, you think? Must be. That is the 'dragon' of the old man who—who found the nugget. Often find gas in these old caves. Well, we learned something—"

And he went on, not in the least disturbed by his experience, to tell what he was going to do that very night.

GIVE the boy credit, though I don't like him: but he had ingenuity—to spare; he had not only salvaged his ship's radio, but he had hauled off a shotgun and a dozen boxes of smokeless shells which weren't too wet to use for his purpose. He was going to take out the powder and use it to blast in that cave. Crazy? Well, maybe; but that idea wasn't.

"Why not let it alone now?" Sammy urged. "That gas might be very dangerous. You can't tell. Besides, I didn't like the faces of the villagers when we went through town. I think the old man didn't exaggerate much. Maybe we'd better let it go now, Jud."

"I'm not a quitter," he said. "Besides, it isn't the principle of the thing; it's the gold I want—ha-ha! Let the people have their fairies. I'll play bogey-man. Give 'em a good scare when I blow up a few rocks out there."

You see? You can't argue with a man who has the gold-bug. The rodent-nature of the boy was pretty close to the surface, to my way of thinking. So we let it pass, hoping for a change of heart, and hiked back to town.

If I thought the villagers were resentful before we went, it was mild compared to what they showed now. They said things at us as we walked by. They growled. They used awful jaw-breaking sounds in their fantastic language. They yelled at the three of us, and shook fists.

"Kit! Kit d'aman!" they yelled a lot—which, I learned, means substantially get-to-hell-out-of-here.

Nice going, what?

At the Professor's house there was a scene of excitement. The priest was there—he was the Abbe Trévidic, a grand, saintly, bearded old fellow who was almost part of the soil there; and so was a squat little man who proved to be the mayor of the town.

Agitated is the word.

"Messieurs, messieurs!" puffed the Professor, his face round and red. "It is come, that which I feared. Trouble, messieurs. The people here, they are distraught. You must leave the island at once, messieurs. It is not a good thing which you have done here, to enter the *kao da morgan-ed.*"

"What the hell?" That was Judson Brownford. "A swell bunch of insular xenophobes, they are! So full of prejudice they think everybody but themselves is crazy and bad. What is it now?"

Spluttering conversation from the mayor. Calmer but tense words from the good priest. The Professor explained:

"All afternoon they have crowded the marketplace. They have demanded of Monsieur l'Abbe that he exorcise you like devils. This radio box of yours, it is black magic. That is what they say. Terror walks the island, messieurs. You will bring a doom, they say. It is dangerous for you to remain. You must leave at once—tonight."

"In what?" I asked. I was willing enough, God knows; but the launch didn't come for a week.

"*Monsieur le Maire,* he has a boat. He can sail you to Ushant. It is not far. You can get a pilot boat from Ushant to Brest, even to Cherbourg, maybe. But it is that you must leave the island—somehow, and at once."

"Well, if that's the way they feel about it," Sammy Brownford began, but his brother cut in harshly:

"Nuts! What do we care about their fool superstitions? A bunch of dumb clods, they are. They aren't going to scare me away. I've found out there is metal, or ore, or something in that cave, and I'm going to find out what. Tonight, too. To hell with them! I'm not impressed by their fairies and gnom-ies, and you can tell 'em so. This is a civilized world, and if they don't keep up with it, to hell with 'em! Black magic, hey? Wait till I turn lose my little blast—ha-ha-ha!"

HE stood pat on that. He even thought it was funny. Personally, I wasn't so sure. I didn't like the things I read in those peasant faces when we came back from our hike. Ignorant people are all right—until you stir them up. I'd rather have a college professor mad at me than a six-foot bohunk, any day.

The Brownford brothers stalked out—Jud did the stalking; Sammy was arguing with him and trying to make him see sense; but I knew he'd stick with his brother when it came down to finals. I stayed there with the Professor. The priest spoke fairly good French, and he started all over again to tell me.

"These are good Christian people," he said. "They are my children, monsieur. But in spite of the Church, in spite of Saint Pol and his Christianity, which came here eight hundred years ago, there is something pagan which lingers. Animism, monsieur. Superstition which is very real, very strong. It mingles even in their worship of God. I pray you, monsieur, urge these two countrymen of yours to go, before—before tragedy—"

But I couldn't. I knew that.

FINALLY the Mayor and the Abbe Trévidic left, and I sat alone with the Professor. It was growing dark now, and we sat in almost complete silence for some time. Finally young Jud Brownford came in, laughing. He had been drinking, from the way he acted. Swaggering—showing off.

"Here's where the gnom-ies catch hell," he said. "Wanna come along?" He had his bag of shell-powder in his hand, and he was ready to go back to that damned cave, but I wasn't having any. "No, thanks," I said. "How about the gas?"

"I'll risk it," he said. "Now that I know about it, it isn't so dangerous. Didn't kill us, did it? Apparently water absorbs it. I'll use a wet rag over my face."

And off he went, in spite of all we could say.

It got very dark, and yet I could see a bright light pouring through our window. Looking out, I saw that there was a great bonfire built right in the middle of the marketplace, and that a crowd of islanders were gathered around it, in little groups. Suddenly there was a long, low chanting—call it that; it was almost like a prayer. It had a rhythmic, eerie quality, as if hundreds of throats, singing it, were parched with tension and fear.

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried the Professor. "*Regardez!* It has come, it has come!"

We went to the window, and what I saw was a weird sight.

Set up in the marketplace was an ancient wooden statue of Saint Yves, the patron of the islands, and the crowd were making a ring around it, with the light of the fire casting strange shadows over the mossy, rotting figure. They were hatless. They were holding out their hands, as though the figure were alive, and talking to it in a sing-song way. And the staring empty eyes of the ancient saint seemed to be understanding them. Which was a lot more than I did.

"Well, what is it?" I asked d'Aulie.

"Prayer," he said. "Only—not quite Christian prayer. When the islands were Christianized, years ago, Christian names were substituted for pagan idols and

gods. Missionaries often find it easier to do that than to cast out old ideas entirely. The statue, who knows? *Is* it Saint Yves? They are singing to it in the name of Teutates, the Ancient One of the Druids. Even I do not altogether understand. I have never seen this thing. It was the Abbe who warned me. They are beyond Christian intervention now. They have reverted to something primitive. God help us all now!"

It didn't mean very much, but I *felt* it. And it was no pretty feeling. It was as though mystic forces had been turned loose and were invisibly crushing us in that little room.

Suddenly d'Aulie gasped: "There is Trévidic. They'll kill him!"

IT was the Abbe, but they didn't kill him. Martyrs of old must have felt as he felt. He walked in among them, holding a cross high over his head, and singing a canticle in a high, quavering voice:

Te Deum laudamus; te dominum confitemur.
Te æternum Patrem; omnis terra veneratur—

And suddenly there was almost a miracle. The vibrant, exultant strains of the glorious Te Deum pierced through the monotone of their pagan chant, cut it like a knife, blasted it. It was like a vivid struggle between two terrific but invisible forces.

And then the chanting stopped, and there was a background of silence as the little old man's quaver shrilled the holy anthem. One by one the voices of the crowd picked it up. Centuries of devout Christianity could not, in a single moment, be shaken off. And presently the island rang with the noble Gregorian canticle. The rich Latin words—perhaps not even understood by half of them—rose up with their mellifluous vowels, and drowned even the roaring of the sea. It was simply wonderful. A bit of psychology, of psychic mastery not to be learned from books.

Now the crowd was roaring it, full-throated, as though inspired, as though ashamed before the fearlessness of that simple, good little man who walked out into their midst.

The glorious company of the Apostles praise Thee.
The goodly fellowship of the Prophets praise Thee.
The noble army of Martyrs—

God had overthrown Teutates. An entire epoch of Christian conquest was enacted there in ten minutes. The Brownford boys, if they had been in danger, were saved.

Only—just then, it happened.

THERE was a sudden little shock, a little blast, a little dull thudding sound that might almost have been inside your own conscience. And then there was a terrible blast. The whole sky lighted up; the entire island trembled. Flames shot far into the air. Far away in their light, out toward the western tip of the island, I could see great shadowy masses of débris flung far into the air. This was no blast. No handful of gunpowder could have done a thing like this. The Professor and I, like the crowd outside, stood frozen. I must have gasped something, something stupid. For the Professor gave me one look which had nothing but vital terror in it.

"The doom!" he said. "The doom. *C'est le grisou! Que le bon Dieu prend pitie de nous!*"

I felt the same. Whatever it was, it spelled nothing but death to me. I mentally echoed his prayer. "God help us now!"

Then there was only darkness—a faint pinkish glow in the west, and that was all. What had happened? I didn't dare to guess. But the crowd did. If ever a mob of people went wild, and completely reverted to something past,—and, thank God, forgotten,—those people, like a single body going insane, did that thing. The poor priest—he might have been chaff to be blown away by some wind current. They swept him from his feet. He vanished in a sea of bodies. Some one shrilled a strange cry. Others echoed it. A woman screamed and prostrated herself, flung herself onto her face.

And then, as if it were a portent, the old rotting statue of Saint Yves, which had stood there through centuries, defying the worms, tottered and slowly crashed from its decayed support onto the ground.

It was as though the forces of evil had, in that wild instant, conquered God. Personally, I'm not long on religion in a showy way, and I don't go in for miracles; but that thing, so easily explainable but so terrible just then, had me staggering. The mob went insane. They screamed. They began a new wild chanting. They started dancing,—if you call it that,—marching with a queer high step around the fallen Saint, calling out

words which I could not understand precisely, but whose meaning I could feel. It was a call of passion to the Ancient One to drive away the devils which were bringing their curse upon the people.

Then suddenly a cry—a shrill mad cry from some one back out of the circle. A man was pointing up to the crest of the hill behind the village, where two figures were struggling down the little path which gives over the moor.

"*Deuont!*" he cried. "They are coming. They have escaped the doom. *Kreigit! Skeit! Leskeit!* Seize them, burn them! Give an offering to Teutates, the Ancient!"

"*Da tann! Da tann!*" roared the mob. "To the fire with them!"

Hundreds of feet charged up the hill to meet those two figures. I could just make out the form of big blond Sammy Brownford against the still glowing sky. He was hurt, I could see that. He half-dragged, half-carried his brother, who could barely struggle along. I doubt if he even guessed what the mob intended. He stopped and held up his hand as though to ask them to give him help, and then suddenly he must have seen their faces—faces without souls, faces of men gone mad. He dropped Judson to the ground and stood like a wild boar at bay, ready to fight. A big man, this Sammy Brownford, but he was like nothing, like a puff of smoke in a wind. They simply overwhelmed him, I saw them swallow him as a wave swallows a frail boat. I saw him flung into the air, caught, flung again, and carried away. I saw the limp body of his brother Jud torn from hand to hand, dragged and flung. They dragged them both down the hill. They stripped them bare, both of them unconscious by now. Women were piling fagots on the raging bonfire, and the flames bit into the velvet of night. I got it then. This was to be a sacrifice—a human sacrifice to a forgotten god. Anything to appease the wrath of the Ancient One—anything to shake off the *morgan-ed* curse.

IT wasn't bravery that made me start toward the door. It was what anybody would try to do. I couldn't look at it. I couldn't watch it. I couldn't take it. In that instant I would rather have died myself than watch what I knew

He had been trampled and crushed in the hysteria of the mob, but he was stronger than they.

was coming. But the firm, sane hand of d'Aulie caught me and held me back.

"Don't," he said. "They're beyond help now. Only a miracle of Heaven can save them. You'll only go with them. For God's sake, monsieur, *je vous en prie!*"

Even then I might have torn away from him and thrown my own puny strength against that mob. But Heaven had one more miracle to offer, the best for the last, and it happened right then.

Call it an explosion of subterranean gas; call it Divine intervention; call it —well, don't call it anything, except the fact of its happening.

The whole island was convulsed as though some giant hand were shaking it, underneath. A great gap opened up, running from a cluster of houses which just dropped out of sight, and the little church, which didn't, down to the sea; and the water poured in foaming, right up into the middle of the village. Not quite like an explosion—worse. Fragments of stone, bits of the vanished houses, powder and dust and flying thatch, were hurled across the whole marketplace, pelting the crowd. A fierce yellow light filled the sky, flared up and died again, leaving absolute blackness and absolute silence. I swear that even

the sea stopped its rumbling for a moment, and the screaming gulls paused in their flight.

The mob before my eyes fell to the ground, groveling. I thought again of Caliban on his island, grumbling and preening himself, and belittling Setebos —and then the thunder sending him skulking and whining back to his niche.

And while the whole world stopped breathing, the torn, tattered, bleeding figure of the little Abbe leaped up on a broken cart, crying out:

"*Pidit Doue deread!* Pray to God, O blind children. Harken to His voice. He has spoken in His thunder. He has overthrown your false Teutates! *Dizerc'het!* Abandon your heresy and your blindness, O my children. Go to your homes, and pray."

A glorious old man, that priest. It is things like that which shame you and your pettiness, shame the smallness of mere men. It takes a miracle, sometimes, to make us sense the vastness of the Power which can lift men out of themselves and give strength and fearlessness to withered aged limbs.

His white beard was still dark with blood. He had been trampled and crushed in the hysteria of the mob. But he was stronger than they. His old face was alight with a noble ferocity, and there was a ring of fighting knighthood in his voice as he rang out the shrill, high words of his *Te Deum:*

We praise Thee, O God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord. . . .

Praise and acknowledgment and damnation to false gods.

And it filled those hungry, frightened souls with its biting power. Men and women and ragged urchins, who only a moment before would have torn him asunder, listened to their priest. They who would have burned human flesh to propitiate a werewolf god, flung their souls into chanting:

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth—

It filled the island. It rumbled through the rocks and ledges and was flung back by a million echoes. A mad joy was in it, and a madness of freedom. Pitiful human souls knowing their insufficiency, wanting to cling to the supernatural, wanting a leader strong enough to banish their terror.

Not Teutates, but God. Not a blood sacrifice, but a Cross.

And then it was over, and I knew the Brownford boys were saved.

IT was a queer little story I brought back to the Inter-Press office some days later. Perhaps it wasn't honest—I don't know. Perhaps it wasn't enough. I don't know that, either. You read it, of course. So did six million other Americans—if they happened to notice it. Little blurbs like that don't attract much attention, because they don't tell about things that are close to us. Still, if anybody had an eye for the curious, it would have been interesting enough.

Remember the headline?

VOLCANIC ISLAND
OFF FRENCH COAST
SUFFERS BLAST

That just about covered it, in a way. That was the rational explanation. I could have told a lot of detail. I could have told about the tiny blasting of a handful of gunpowder which must have opened up or loosened some pressure which had held the gases in place for centuries. I could have told a weird story about a couple of American boys who thought there might be gold. I could have told about the legend of Ys, and the *morgan-ed* and their vengeance. I felt a little guilty, writing that story. Dishonest, almost. Still, you really can't print things like that in newspapers. You have to keep close to common sense in newspapers.

Then too, I omitted any mention of the gold, because I couldn't have proved it. There isn't any peninsula at the end of the island now; it has vanished into the sea. There isn't any cave nor any ruined temple. Not even a *corpus delicti.* Lord knows what quantities of gas under pressure, in what far-reaching caverns had erupted in that blast. It was like a minor earthquake, and quite as destructive.

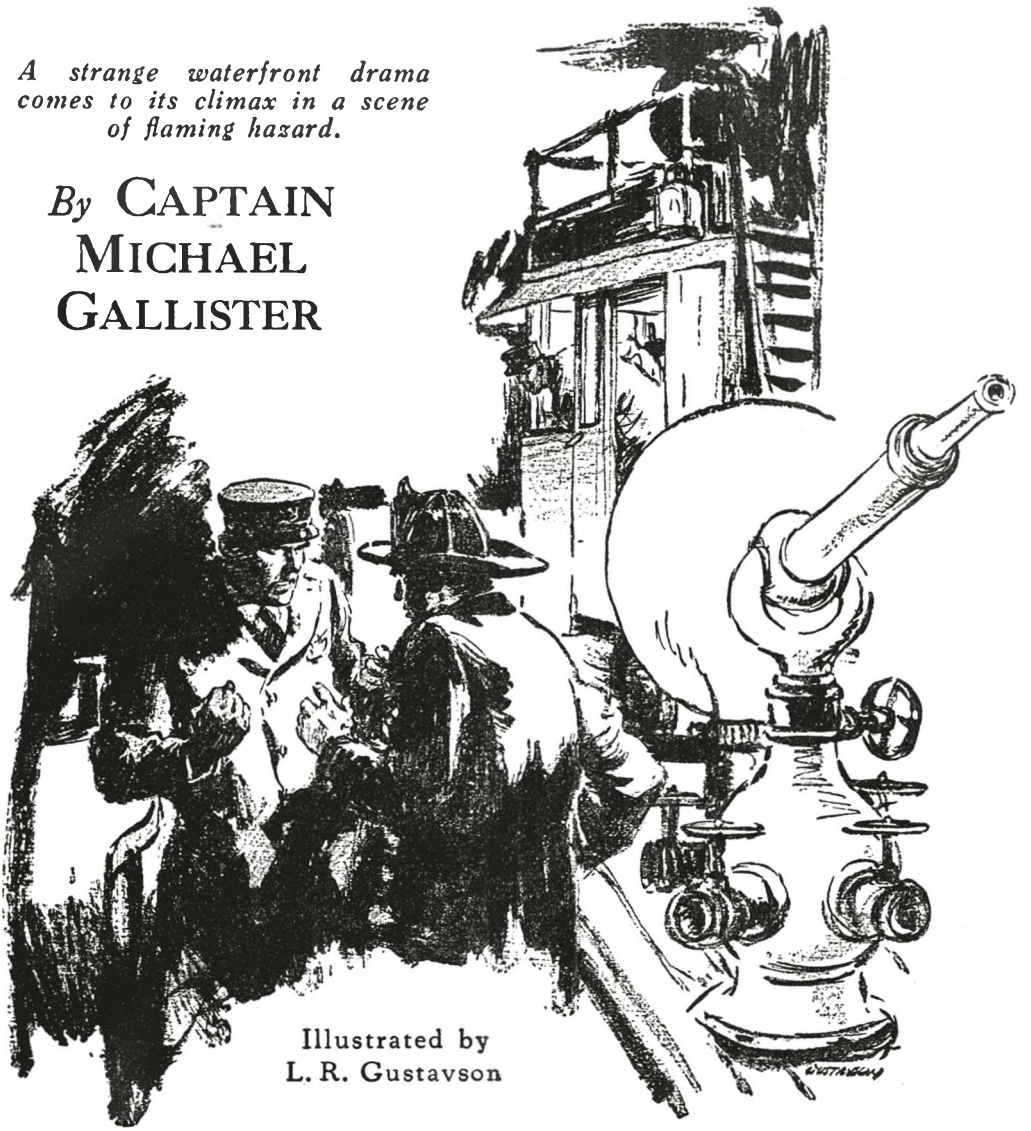
What about the Brownford boys? Nothing much. They went home and returned to college. I saw a note in the paper about Sammy's holding an exhibition of his paintings, which was to be expected, because the boy had real talent. But I also saw another note announcing that Judson Brownford had been appointed as an assistant professor at Dewar University. And his course was labeled "Celtic Mythology."

I should like to attend one of his classes.

Another unusual story by Fulton Grant in our next issue.

A strange waterfront drama comes to its climax in a scene of flaming hazard.

By CAPTAIN MICHAEL GALLISTER



Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

Doghouse Blues

BLAKE sat before Rosie Vidiano's lunch-counter, ate his meal unhurriedly, and looked often at Rosie Vidiano. She was good to look upon, with her sparkling vitality, her gold-bronze mop of hair, her trim feminine allure. Blake knew her story—a bride of a month, her husband killed in the Terminal Warehouse fire. Now she supported herself and her young brother by this lunch-counter.

She came over to him for a moment, with her swiftly flashing smile.

"What are you doing in this part of town? Haven't seen you for so long—"

"That wasn't my fault," Blake rejoined. "You're going to see a lot of me from now on, Rosie. I'm reporting at two o'clock to the *Viking*."

Her face changed. Her eyes probed him sharply with dismayed incredulity.

"No!" she exclaimed. "You're joking. Not you—oh, it can't be true!"

Blake nodded. "On my way down and out? Maybe so, maybe not. Where's the kid?"

"Jimmy? At school. Do you know Ironhead? He's coming up the street."

"Sure. We entered the department together."

"So here you are, fire-prevention engineer!" he jeered. "Thought you were to report this morning, Blake?"

She nodded and moved off. Blake's gaze followed her warmly. . . .

Outside beneath a hot sun lay the long, shabby road with its sooty dock-sheds on one hand, and on the other its dingy seamen's hotels, cheap-john stores and dance-halls. Far as the eye could reach, north and south, were berthed the tramps of the sea, spewing forth brown laughing men with rings in their ears, dignified dark men with caste-marks, furtive yellow men, bold, boasting white men: officers, firemen, deck-hands, longshoremen. And Rosie Vidiano, earning a living with a smile amid all these tongues of Babel, but with never a salty oath along her counter. Men who knew no better were soon taught their manners by other men.

The door opened, and Captain Murphy tramped in—Ironhead Murphy. His bulk filled the little entrance. He shoved back the cap from his massive features.

"Ha, Rosie! Eggs and beans and a kiss for a fire-chief, lass!"

"You'll get the kiss when you've got the chief's badge, Cap'n," she rejoined.

BLAKE met the hot eyes of Murphy, and nodded greeting.

"So here you are, fire-prevention engineer!" jeered Murphy. "Thought you were to report this morning, Blake?"

"Two o'clock's the orders," said Blake coolly, and jerked a thumb toward the clock on the wall.

"Then make it to the minute, or your record's off to a bad start on its last lap," growled Murphy; and planted himself at the counter without further regard. Blake flushed slightly. Last lap, eh? True

enough. He could fully comprehend the dismay in Rosie's eyes at hearing he had been transferred to the *Viking*.

And as he finished his meal, as his quiet, searching gaze touched here and there, he could comprehend that Murphy knew a good thing when he saw it—and that Rosie Vidiano did not wholly appreciate the flattering attentions. When Blake paid his check at the front end, he looked into Rosie's eyes for an instant.

"I'll be seeing you," he said quietly. She made change, lifted her gaze to his.

"It won't be hard," was her brief reply; and what he read in her face was enough to bring out his quick smile.

Thoughtfully, he went on to the end of the street, a hefty figure of a man though lacking Murphy's obvious brawn. Ahead of him loomed the Doghouse, once a ferry terminal but now a fireboat station, where the *Viking* berthed.

THE two new fire-tugs could handle ordinary hazards along the waterfront. Only when gigantic work lay ahead was the *Viking* called in, with her powerful six-thousand-gallon pumps. Usually hers was the ignoble task of pumping out sunken barges and other craft after the new boats had flooded the fire in them.

The Doghouse quartered the crews of the *Viking*, Foamite Company No. 4, and the spare triple-combination all-service rig; and Ironhead Murphy was kingpin here. Like most of his men, he had originally been sent here for punishment; unlike most, he had stayed on, becoming an asset instead of a liability to the department.

Murphy had a free hand here; the battalion chief seldom visited Engine 72, as the Doghouse was officially known. Murphy was a brute. He was not efficient, but he was a master at ramrodding the men sent him—booze-fighters, department deadbeats, gold-bricks, inepts, insubordinates. Here was the jumping-off place, sometimes literally. Out of the service or overboard or back to a steadier job. Headquarters cared little which exit the Doghouse crew took, and breathed freer for having Murphy on hand.

When a man landed in the Doghouse, he was on his way out, with odds-on betting that he would not last till next payday. Murphy, surprisingly enough, put many a "finished" man back into the service; but he was not loved.

Blake looked over the place—rickety, dirty, with a rusting hulk of a fireboat that defied the efforts of fifteen men to keep her clean, and a hard-boiled captain who defied his fifteen men not to keep her clean. Every large fire department has its "doghouse"—its remote companies where useless men wait until authority has enough on them for a discharge under the civil-service regulations.

AT two o'clock, to the second, Blake walked into the foul den of an office. Murphy cocked a hard eye at him.

"So you got enough reverse seniority to make the Doghouse, huh?"

"It's a revelation," drawled Blake. "I never believed such a place could exist in the department. Looks like a hog-pen and smells like a monkey-cage."

"It'll smell worse now, with a firebug around. Making money on the side, eh?" Murphy grinned wickedly when he saw Blake go white at the thrust. "You're not the first slicker to make money out of his job. Oh, I know it's not proved on you! But I say what I damned please. And you say 'sir' when you address me. You're not in your palsy-walsy Fire Prevention Bureau now. We got discipline here."

"Looks like it," sneered Blake. "Rats too, apparently. And bats in the hose-tower and in your own belfry. Don't kid me, Ironhead. We came on the job together."

"We won't leave together." Murphy siphoned a stream of tobacco-juice at a long-neglected spittoon. "You'll go first, with a can tied to your tail. And I saw you making sheep's-eyes at Rosie a while back. Lay off, or your neck will be broke; she's my property. And watch your step around here, firebug."

"Watch your tongue," Blake said quietly. "You lay that name to me before one witness, and I'll have you jerked up so hard you'll leave a vacancy in this soft berth. And lay it to me once more in private if you want to go to the hospital. Right now."

Murphy regarded him with a grin. "Nope. Nothing's proved on you; I'll wait till it is. Now change clothes and turn to. Your station is the nozzle-room, and that takes in the water-tower."

"That's the job for new men, Murphy!" Blake spoke in astonishment. "I'm an engineer and—"

"So far as I'm concerned, you're a rookie. You've been in fire-prevention so long you don't know a Gleeson valve from a circulating nozzle. But you'll learn, so ditch your dude outfit and turn to. I make inspection at ten. The man

whose station aint up to snuff stands floor-watches all day and does the evening K. P. Beat it now; and mind one thing you've forgotten. What is it?"

Blake nodded. "Very well, sir."

WELL for him that of late he had been bitterly schooled in self-control; he was white to the lips as he went his way. "She's my property—" The blatant, lying words burned into him, all the more because he knew them to be lying words. And he knew that Ironhead Murphy would make life hell for him here, unless he did keep his self-control. Firebug, eh? He had nearly slipped the leash at that word, but Murphy had backed down.

In the nozzle-room, he grimaced. This rectangular compartment abaft the pilothouse was a mess. The night before, or the week before, had seen a fire; everything was greasy and corroded with salt water. Enough work here to keep three men busy all day.

There were rows of ponderous three-and-a-half inch shut-offs and nozzles weighing sixty pounds, which could only be handled by half a dozen men with a hundred pounds of pressure on the hose-line. There were rows of two-and-a-half inch nozzles, and in front of these the handier metro inch-and-a-half nozzles.

Blake surveyed the Siamese connections used to make many smaller lines from one large hose; a dozen of them, all sizes. Reducers, adapters, spanners, sprinkler shut-offs, circulating nozzles, deck and rail standees for securing and holding the big pipes under high pressure during long hours of cooling down the ashes of a dock or building. Here were the smoke-mask boxes with their hoses, air pumps, leather helmets for use in smoky ships' holds. Ponderous Gleeson valves, with intricate machinery for controlling water-pressure between the pumps and hose-lines. Crowbars, sledges, hose-straps, shallow-water diving pump and whatnot, all mingled in one indescribable tangle.

Over everything hung the musty smell of old smoke. The canvas turn-out coats in the lockers had seen many fires, and no one thought of airing them. Limp on their hooks, eaten away by acids, burned by cinders, spotted by oil, chemicals and salt water, the names of forgotten firemen stenciled across their backs, they were mute testimony to neglect. Over them hung battered helmets, the property of anyone who got here first after the alarm came in, their black front pieces starred with the legend: *"Fireboat Viking, Engine 72."*

Blake hung up his own outfit and pitched into the seemingly hopeless job.

"Discipline, eh? Serves me right," he muttered, pausing to rest after half an hour which had effected little to the eye. "I should have resigned. But I'll stay in this junk-pile and fight it out. Lord, what a mess! What junk!"

"Junk!" came an echoing voice.

He looked up. Framed in the starboard door was a fantastic figure limply hung with old garments, a burlap sack over its shoulder, a heavy cane in one arthritis-twisted claw. George the Slav, a junky.

"Hello, George!" grunted Blake in surprise. "What are you doing here? Thought your beat lay uptown?"

George the Slav rattled his stick. "Not any more. Gimme some junk!"

"Plenty of junk here, all right, but not for you." And Blake laughed. "Better scram before Cap'n Murphy sees you."

"Yah! I know Murphy. I know you, too. Sp'iled my business uptown, you did." The unshaven lips twisted in a grimace. "No more junk in the alleys for George. No more business. Now I come here and find you. Yah!"

HE turned away and disappeared disgustedly. Blake flung an uneasy oath after him, and fell to work again, frowning.

George the Slav, eh? That junky was his evil genius, and hated him bitterly, like every other junky in the city; this was part of the job of fire-prevention engineer. He had cleaned up alleys and back-yards and cellars, removing trash and débris; and in obviating fire-hazards he had spoiled business for the nameless, furtive wretches who flit from alley to alley. Not that their hatred worried him. It was odd to find George the Slav over here in the waterfront district, however.

To Blake's suspicious astonishment, Ironhead Murphy came along on inspection, grunted on surveying the place, and walked out without comment. There was a certain decency to the man, thought Blake; a certain justice. He would make life hell for this new member of the Dog-house crew, but he would do it in his own way.

Blake was right about this. When, a couple of days later, he dropped in at Rosie Vidiano's lunch-counter for coffee and doughnuts, there was a grim set to

"You know how kids are—sooner monkey around with junk, than eat! George the Slav tells Jimmy stories by the hour."

his jaw that told its own story. The place chanced to be empty.

"You look as if you'd been working," she said, inspecting him.

Blake smiled.

"I have. It'll do me good, maybe."

"I've heard stories," she told him flatly, and looked him in the eye. "I'd be interested in learning the truth. You're the last person I'd think to see in the Doghouse."

Blake looked at her. "Interested? Well, you're the one person I'd like to have know the truth. Who's been talking to you?"

"Never mind," she said. "And no kidding, now. How does a fire-prevention engineer get into the Doghouse?"

"By setting fires," he retorted grimly. "Clearing up fire hazards is a tough job. More'n one man wearing a badge has picked up soft dough by calling a dirty spot clean and non-hazardous."

"Not you," she said laconically.

Blake's hard, direct gaze softened.

"Thanks. I did raise hell cleaning things up for a while. Then fires began to break out right along in places I had called clean—and they *were* clean. The insurance people put their experts on the job. The arson-squad worked overtime. All they could find was that some of those fires had been set deliberately. A lot of folks in the industrial district haven't made money and weren't a bit sore to rake in some insurance; but nothing could be pinned on anyone. Looked like somebody was in league with somebody else, and somebody who knew all the dodges, too."

"Why would they pick you?" she demanded, watching him intently.

"Plenty of reasons," Blake said. "It had to be somebody who knew every blind alley and rat-hole and basement, and where fires could be set and remain undetected till they got a roaring start. Somebody who knew where chemicals were stored, what was in the basements and storerooms."

"They wouldn't pick a man in the department without reason," she said in her blunt way.

BLAKE shrugged. "Anonymous letters; somebody had it in for me. They shadowed me and got nowhere. But I was on the spot. When they looked into my bank-account and found it was fat, they just jumped. No proof, of course; they just sent me to the Doghouse, hoping I'd resign. Too many firemen have

gone into the incendiary business when off duty. Too easy to draw down a cut from interested parties. Well, I'm here, and I'm staying; and by the Lord, I'll land the right guy one of these days!"

"Who? Who do you think?"

"Can't suspect a soul, Rosie."

"Where'd you get the money?"

Blake met her direct gaze again. "Race track—and I couldn't prove it. My cousin's a trainer and sends me tips. I've picked up quite a little coin that way. They wouldn't believe it, and claimed I had merely covered up. Satisfied?"

She put her hand across the counter. "Shake. I like you."

"That goes double," Blake said quietly. "I've liked you a long time, Rosie."

"Don't be a fool." She jerked her hand away, flushing a little. "Customers coming in, too. If I pick up any loose talk, I'll let you know."

Blake finished his coffee and paid for his meal. "Where's the kid? This is Saturday."

"He went off with George the Slav. He likes the junky, and George likes him." She shrugged. "You know how kids are—sooner monkey around with junk than eat! I guess the old buzzard is safe enough. He tells Jimmy stories by the hour. I've watched 'em."

Her tone told Blake plenty. If she had watched them, she had missed nothing. If she had concluded that George was harmless, she was right. His admiration for Rosie Vidiano went up a notch. That girl had brains.

Blake went back to work, wondering who had talked to her about him. Murphy, no doubt; it was an open secret that Murphy was courting Rosie Vidiano. Her name did not recur between the two men, but there were black looks enough.

AS time wore on, as days passed into weeks, the black looks grew into blacker words that boded ill. Sooner or later an explosion was coming, and the crew awaited it with gleeful anticipation. That the two men were deep and bitter enemies was evident to all hands, and not to them alone.

The boy Jimmy, when not in school, spent much of his time aboard the boat or in the office. He was a boon companion with the men, who relished his boyish impudence; even the dour Ironhead relaxed in his company, gamming with him by the hour. Blake, who had formerly been fast friends with Jimmy, fancied that the boy was avoiding him, until one day Jimmy suddenly showed up in the nozzle-room where Blake was at work alone.

"Hi, stranger!" said Blake cheerfully. "Where you been keeping yourself lately?"

"Nosing around." Jimmy regarded him with serious mien. "Look here, Blake: you and me are friends, aren't we?"

"We've been friends a long while, Jimmy. Are you in a jam?"

"No, but you are," said the boy unexpectedly. "Say, I've heard a lot of talk, and Sis let out something about people setting fires and so forth. I bet a dollar I know who's been doing you dirt."

BLAKE gave him a quick glance. "Who?"

"Well, I been running around with George the Slav quite a lot. He's a regular guy most of the time, but he takes queer streaks—"

"And you'd better lay off him, son."

"Aw, I can take care of myself," said Jimmy. "But all of those junkies hate you like poison, see? Your fire-prevention work hit 'em under the belt, honest; and what you started, the department keeps up. They blame you for doing 'em out of business, and they got some kind of association that talks things over. Yes sir, I'll bet anything that they're the ones who are after you! I'm keeping my ears open, and I'll find out something about who's been setting fires, you see! Maybe it's George himself, only I hardly think he'd do that. He was the son of a noble back in the old country, and he's told me a lot about it."

Blake nodded. "Well, Jimmy, thanks a lot! By thunder, it makes me feel good to have a friend like you around! You may be dead right about the junkies; that's occurred to me, but of course I couldn't prove anything. Still, I hate to have you running around with those birds. You should be in better company."

"Well, I got reasons, and that makes it okay," said the beaming Jimmy. He turned to leave, then paused. "I hate to break bad news to you, partner, but I got to do it: Ironhead has it in for you, all right. He's going to make you acting captain, to rule the Doghouse when he has his day off. So long, and good luck!"

With a wave of the hand, he was gone.

Acting captain, eh? This news drove Jimmy's hypothesis about the fires being set by junkies and blamed on him, clear out of Blake's mind. And when, an hour

later, he was actually detailed as acting captain, he did not set it to any warped sense of justice on Murphy's part. Far from it.

As the days passed, he was confirmed in his belief. Murphy had simply saddled him with a killing detail that would be certain to get him in bad with all hands.

Blake went at the entire boat in the same manner he had tackled the nozzle-room, aiming at clean efficiency. He worked the men hard, and they came to hate him. Expecting this, he accepted it grimly. When he had his chance to fight a blaze, he did it with such efficiency that the battalion chief was jubilant, and made the remark that Blake did a better job than Murphy. This remark was like oil flung on a fire.

The growls and ill-will passed beyond words. Fighting in the department was punished by dismissal, and therefore it never occurred, but black eyes began to appear aboard. They were gained in mysterious ways. Blake's big knuckles began to be barked all the time. Visiting firemen grinned at the black eyes and tipped winks; but Blake kept his mouth shut. Somewhere, somehow, a blow-off must come—everyone knew it.

Business, meantime, was picking up, as fires recurred with regularity. Each time Blake had a day off, that same night a blaze hit somewhere in the district. He saw Rosie from time to time, but seldom ran into Jimmy; probably the boy had forgotten his impulsive endeavor to discover anything, he reflected, and it was just as well.

He knew that suspicion was fingering him, and that he was being shadowed whenever off duty. He played no more race-track tips, and had every moment of his time accounted for, watching himself and everyone around him like a hawk. None the less, fires increased in the waterfront district, and the strain began to be almost past bearing.

ON a Saturday evening, his off day, Blake came back from downtown. Outside Rosie's lunch-counter he came face to face with Murphy.

"You're in charge tomorrow," said Ironhead. "I'm going fishing."

"Suits me." Blake met the hard gaze with his own hard gaze. "What's biting at your alleged brain? You look like you were trying to think."

"I was just wondering where the blaze will be tonight or tomorrow," retorted Murphy significantly. "And who'll come aboard with black eyes tomorrow. . . . I know your mark, Blake. I know you like to tap an eye and leave it black."

"There's a pair of eyes I'd like to tap," Blake said. "It'd be not one but two shiners the dirty louse would be wearing if he ever invited me into that old shed to look at the spiles there."

Murphy's big jaw set hard. "Aye, like enough; if he was an officer, you'd just love to get a black mark on his record! But he'd be too smart for you. He could lick the pants off you with one hand and make a ruin of that big nose of yours to boot."

"Talk's cheap." Blake grinned. "If you're all through spouting, I want to go in and get my supper. I've some business with Rosie."

"I've warned you once," said Murphy in a low, intent voice.

"This is a nice public place if you're not afraid to argue the matter."

"To hell with you!" snapped Ironhead Murphy, and stamped away. He was not letting himself in for any fight with the whole town looking on.

CHUCKLING, Blake settled himself at the lunch-counter and ordered supper. When the chance offered, Rosie came and arranged the counter in front of him. She looked him in the eye as she shifted the salt and sauce about.

"Two men were in here awhile ago," she said then. "Strangers. Looked like under-cover guys to me. They talked in Italian; and my folks were Italian."

Blake tensed to the look in her eyes. "Thank God and your folks that you're what you are, Rosie!" he said smilingly. "I wouldn't have you one bit different for the world. When are you going to listen to me?"

"Shut up, you fool; this is important," she said, drawing back a little as he touched her hand. "They'd been asking questions about you, at the slip. Somebody got another of those letters you mentioned to me. The fire-chief himself, I think it was. Saying you had boasted you were going to set a blaze this afternoon or tonight that would bring out every boat in the harbor."

Blake whistled softly. "Hello! My unknown friend is getting crude," he said. "So they were trying to find out whether I'd been talking to any of the crew and boasting of my firebug exploits! As if I'd be such a fool! Headquarters must be jittery."

"Aboard the boat—everybody!" shouted Blake.

"You'd better run down the firebug who's really at work," she said earnestly. "Tell me: who hates you so much?"

"Well, I've got lots of unfriendly faces around, for a fact," he answered soberly. "Lord! This is important and no mistake. I can't thank you enough, Rosie. I'll keep an eye open, you bet. Remember, girl, tonight we have a date for a movie—"

"No," she said. "Tonight, you keep an eye open! This is important."

"But I'm on duty tomorrow night—"

"Never mind. We'll make it Monday, or the first night you're free," she said firmly. "The big thing now is for you to get cleared up with your job."

"Okay. And when are you going to listen to me—seriously?"

"The minute you're reinstated and cleared."

"You mean it? Is that a promise?"

"And not one minute before," she added; but as she departed, the smile she flung over her shoulder brought joyous warmth to Blake's eyes.

HE was on tenterhooks that night, but nothing happened. No alarm came in. Blake sat around the quarters with the crew, got into a card game, and the evening passed. As he later learned, a throng of police and under-cover men were about the whole district that evening, thanks to the anonymous warning; and nothing happened. When the pilot finally went aboard the *Viking* and tumbled into his bunk, Blake followed suit.

No alarm that night. Nothing happened Sunday. Ironhead was gone fishing, and Blake was in charge, and it was a dull, hot day, with the white sunlight burning the old docks and rickety warehouses to tinder. All ready for a spark, morosely thought Blake, and he savagely kept his men busy.

Evening found him reading the paper in the captain's office, while the men gammed or played cards. Suddenly the door opened and the pilot came in, with a disgusted look.

"Here's Ironhead, and drunk, with a bag o' fish. Who the devil wants fish!"

Murphy it was, dumping a sack on the floor.

"Mackerel, yellertail, tuna," he sang out boisterously, then quieted as he caught the stare of Blake. "Oh! Blake, I want a word with you. Private. Come outside."

Blake nodded, joined him, and they went out to the street. Murphy halted and jerked a thumb at the deserted shed adjoining.

"How's it look to you? I s'pose you had nothing to do with Rosie turning down the fish I brought her, huh?"

"Are you crazy? Or just plain drunk?" snapped Blake. "What are you talking about?"

"You know, blast you!" exclaimed the other in a fury. "She wouldn't have 'em. Said she was able to buy her own. Your doin's, you damn' lunkhead! And I s'pose—"

It dawned on Blake that the skipper was actually drunk.

"I'm on duty and responsible," he said curtly. "Go home and sober up."

But Murphy's fist met the side of his jaw and knocked him reeling, to bring up against the wall.

"How about it now? Dark enough to suit you?" jeered Ironhead. His jeer ended in a gasp, as Blake came into him with a rush. The street was dark, empty, deserted, for it was close to eight o'clock.

Perhaps two minutes later, Ironhead Murphy collapsed for the third time.

"If you weren't drunk, I'd give you the shiners I promised," rasped Blake. "I'll do that tomorrow when you're worth taking on. Right now, you pull yourself up and—"

He swung around suddenly and stepped out from the building into the lighted street, as he heard his name called. A figure was running toward him.

"Rosie! What's wrong?" he demanded.

"Thank heaven!" she gasped out, clutching at him, unaware of Murphy, scrambling in the shadows. "Jimmy's gone, with him—you've got to get busy! Jimmy left a note for me—"

Blake suddenly froze, gripped her arm with such force that a cry of pain escaped her. A long shrill ringing came from the Doghouse. She began to speak, and he hushed her with a sharp word. The staccato identifying-signal was coming in over the alarm signal—*One! One-two-three! One-two-three-four!* And repeated three times.

"Box 134, Front and Dock—why, it's right here!" Blake wheeled. Looking up the street, he could see a figure at the alarm box under the arc-light. The old bent watchman from Pier Two, sending in a second alarm. "Pier Two, Rosie—that means your stand will go up! Clean out everything valuable—"

"Wait, wait!" She caught at him, screaming. Blake had a brief glimpse of Murphy's figure, staggering for the Doghouse entrance. Everything had passed in a flash of time, it seemed.

"I'm trying to tell you—Jimmy's gone there, with him! With George the Slav—Jimmy left a note about it. Suspected something wrong—"

"I've got to go," snapped Blake. "I'll see about it—do what I can. Good God, Pier Two's full of shellac and scrap rubber!"

He was gone with a rush.

MURPHY was on the afterdeck, helmet over his ear, roaring maudlin oaths. Blake leaped to the fireboat's rail and darted forward. The pilot was anxiously leaning out of the wheelhouse door, and yelled at him:

"Where to? That damn' fool Murphy's drunk as a hoot-owl. I'll conk him with a spanner if he comes in here. Where to, dammit?"

"Take it easy," rejoined Blake. "Pier Two—right on top of us. Ah, there she goes! Get going, for the love of Mike!"

Fire had suddenly leaped into the night sky. Blake watched; through his brain the words of Rosie jangled with engine-room jangles, vibrated with the full speed ahead throb of the engines. The pilot was yelling to the men to cast off, Murphy was shouting furious orders—no time to think now of anything but duty. Fire came first.

Blake found himself beside the furious Murphy, gripping him into attention.

"I'm in charge. Belay or I'll give you more of the same! Take charge of the hose if you want to get in on this with me—are we together or do I go to work on you?"

"Fire comes first, damn you," said Murphy. Curious, thought Blake, how the man had caught the very words out of his brain. "Okay, Blake. . . . I'm all right now."

The pilot was bawling to the mate, at the wheel. "Hard starboard—ease her now; steady! We'll go alongside that standpipe under Door 35."

"Aye." The mate peered ahead at the smoke in the slip, and the leaping flames above.

"Port a spoke—so! Steady as you go!"

The *Viking* surged down the slip, her stack belching. Half-speed now as the pilot rang down the annunciator. Back came the answering jangle.

"Hey, Blake!" shouted the pilot. "Fenders and grapnels—ready? Stand by, then. All right—heave!" He swung back to the mate. "Hard over—port!" The twin annunciators went to "full astern." The boat vibrated and her ancient engines jumped in their bedplates as the headway was killed and she came to rest. The pilot went to the pump annunciator in the after end of the wheelhouse and rang for two hundred pounds pressure.

"All right, out you go!" he told the mate.

Blake had taken charge in the nozzle room and now came out on deck with swift orders.

Murphy had subsided, now, and the hose was coming out.

"Bend on two Gleesons to two sections of three-and-a-half inch. Put six shut-offs on the manifolds, port and starboard. Two of you aloft in the tower—train your stream where you see the most fire. Two more for'ard and two aft on the monitors. Another on the wheelhouse. Work together, now, use your heads! Pilot, stand by to shift around bows on, if we have to work it that way."

Suddenly everything was moving like a well-oiled machine. Fifty-foot sections of hose were run to the dock, the brass nozzles on. Quicker than speech, training had taken effect, muscles had reacted, the men were on the job like one. Water towers were up, pouring their streams on the bright spots amid the smoke. The deck monitors fore and aft, handled like guns by their two-man crews, shot in their full force. But smoke and flame and cinders rocketed skyward from the hell-broth on the pier.

"She's a goner," said Murphy, at Blake's elbow.

"Good God—I forgot her!" Blake swung around. "Rosie—her stand's at the end of the damned thing! And the kid's gone. She came to tell me something about it—"

"Better get up some standees," warned Murphy. "This is plumb hell and getting hotter. I'll keep things in shape here."

With a shout to four of the men, Blake leaped for the dock edge. Here they set up standees to hold the heavy tips and butts; it was burning hot here. As they worked, a hoarse tooting from the water announced the other two fireboats, nosing in with ladders and towers ready.

DIRECTLY opposite was a doorway, from which the door had been blown by the first explosion. It formed a wide frame for a murky hell within, drifting smoke shot athwart by flames. A faint popping announced tins of shellac and turps going off somewhere. Blake was

turning up his coat-collar, when a gasp and a thump beside him showed Ironhead at his elbow.

"Better get a line in there," he said. "What about it, Ironhead?"

"Aye. Let's take a look."

PULLING helmets over their eyes to fend the heat, they dashed for the opening. Then Blake halted, gripping Murphy's sleeve.

"Look—for God's sake, what's that? See it?"

They peered. Something was moving. Something that fell and rose again. A small shape, a boy's figure.

"Rosie's kid brother, by God!" roared Murphy. "There, he's down for good. Nobody can't get through that hell. What about it, damn you?"

"I can lick you at any game. Get a line up!"

All in half a dozen heart-beats, Ironhead Murphy was already roaring for volunteers.

"Two inch-and-a-half lines, there! Four men—keep us wet down. Move, blast you!"

The lines, charged but shut off, came up, and four men clumping with them. Blake was in through the gap of hell on the jump, with Ironhead plunging after him. Voices were megaphoning from the boats, ordering all hands back. Flames seared the air like shrapnel bursts as shellac tins exploded.

Blake tripped and went down, almost on top of the boy's limp form. He clutched it, and Murphy yanked them up. The streams of water played on them, around them, then stopped as the men at the lines were forced back. Clawing at each other and the boy, the two burly figures staggered out, tongues of flame licking the air greedily behind.

"Aboard the boat—everybody!" shouted Blake through blistered lips.

High time, too. The other boats were backing out of the firetrap of a slip. The boy was dropped aboard, Murphy and Blake scrambled after. The pilot let out a blast with the whistle-cord, and axes sheared the mooring lines.

"Half over to starboard!" yelled the pilot at the mate. Three more blasts. "Hold her!" And the *Viking* came out of the spouting inferno under full-speed bells. . . .

An hour later, in the dingy office of Engine 72, Rosie Vidiano sat with the boy inside her arm. Chief Evans himself sat at the desk. Murphy and Blake, still blackened and freshly bandaged, stood listening.

"Then George the Slav is still in there?" demanded the chief quickly. As the boy nodded, he flung a glance at Blake. "That explains everything, huh? I guess there'll be no more anonymous letters and no more firebug work—hey, Jimmy! You say you saw him set the thing ablaze?"

Jimmy nodded eagerly. "I knew he was up to something, Chief. He had a boat under the pier, and when he went up, I snuck along and came up the ladder after him and took a look. He had a basin with scrap rubber and a lot of paper around it. Looked like he poured gasoline into it. He set a block of wood floating in it, with a candle on the wood, and lit the candle. I seen what was up, and let out a yell at him, and the hatch came down on me and knocked me silly. When I woke up, there were flames all around and I couldn't get down through the hatch, so I came on up through it and worked loose my sleeve that was hooked on a nail, and set off through the warehouse to find a door—"

Almost incoherent with his own haste, Jimmy exhaled a deep breath and started in again, but nobody was listening. Chief Evans had turned to Blake.

"Report at headquarters in the morning, Blake," he said. "I guess we'll talk it over and make up for lost time. Murphy, you did a good job tonight."

"Aw, hell, chief!" said Ironhead. "I didn't do nothing. It was this mug here." He jerked a bandaged hand at Blake. "It was my day off. He was acting cap'n. I hope to hell I aint going to lose him now."

CHIEF EVANS glanced at Rosie Vidiano, caught the look she exchanged with Blake, and his lips twitched.

"I guess you've lost him already, Murphy."

"Yeah?" Murphy turned, eyed the two, and nodded. "What about tomorrow, Blake, and them shiners you promised me?"

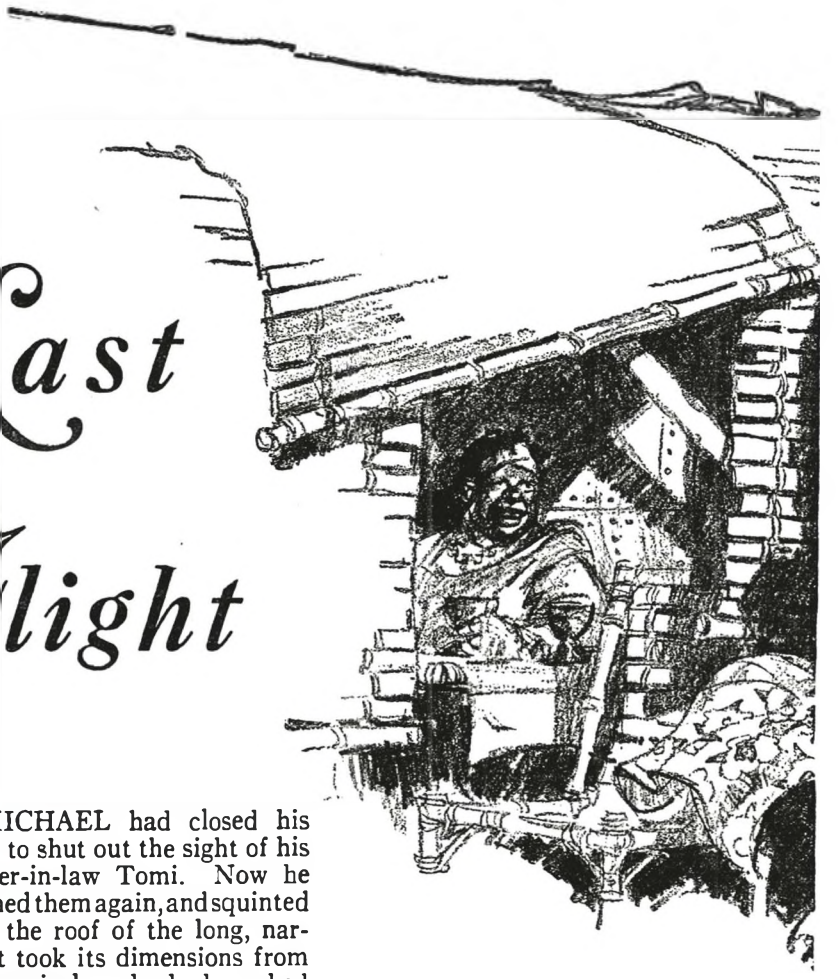
Blake met his eyes, and suddenly put out a hand to the bandaged hand.

"Ironhead, you said a mouthful a while back: Fire comes first. Tomorrow's another day—shake!"

Rosie Vidiano hugged the boy, her eyes shining.

Captain Gallister will contribute another spirited story of the seagoing smoke-eaters in an early issue.

Last Flight



CARMICHAEL had closed his eyes to shut out the sight of his father-in-law Tomi. Now he opened them again, and squinted straight up at the roof of the long, narrow hut; for it took its dimensions from one wing of the airplane he had crashed on the island over a year before. The belly of the wing curved smoothly down and ran out to the two strong posts which supported the tip. As for walls, there were sections of matting which could be rolled back during the day and allow the cool of the sea-wind to flow through the hut.

This was the left wing of the plane. The right wing had crumpled when he had made that forced landing, staggering down out of the sky toward the green bit of an island as toward a paradise of safety, only to find that there was hardly a level acre to receive him. It was as rough as a stormy ocean, the jumping waves frozen in green ridges; but of course he had been a fool to venture out over the ocean in a land-plane, when a sea-plane was so clearly indicated. He looked back and up at that wild self which had flown out over the great Pacific as a tame duck might look up at its wild brothers, flying toward unknown horizons. His wings were clipped, now. . . . He would keep, he knew, to this barnyard existence.

For it was a barnyard existence. Tomi, there, for instance: Fat wrapped the entire body of Tomi; it widened his nose; and the jowls of Tomi, like nicely counter-balanced weights, exerted exactly the right pressure to maintain a ceaseless smile. Touched anew with disgust, Carmichael turned his head to shut out the picture of his father-in-law; and in so doing, found himself looking at Tanya, his wife. She had been a mere golden flash of a girl, a year ago; but now she was great with child; and there would be no return, he knew, to that light-footed loveliness which had been almost like the beauty of thought. Carmichael closed his eyes, but he could not stop his mind. For in the house of Tomi half a dozen pots of food were simmering by the fire all day long, and the sweet odor of cookery never left the air. He was be-

DOES air adventure offer the last field for chivalry in this strange world? Or has knighthood flowered—and gone to seed? This dramatic story by the able author of "The Flaming Finish" gives a significant answer.

By MAX BRAND

coming like the islanders, he knew. Those good clean Christian muscles, neatly incised all over his body, were now sleeked away under a growing layer of fat; and what happened to the body was happening to the mind also.

THEN he heard metal scrape on metal in the cabin of the plane, just behind his head. His nerves still extended, as it were, through the vitals of the wrecked machine; and everybody on the island knew that it was strictly forbidden to tamper with anything in the fuselage of the plane. He sat up suddenly, so that the thin necklace swayed out from his chest, and the little golden "H" which hung pendant from it glittered under his eyes. He caught the pendant, scowling, and hid it in the palm of his hand, as he wished he could hide the entire past, darkening the whole face of the other life with a gesture.

Now that he was sitting up, he could look down the brief slope where the palm trees were always a-flutter in the sea-breeze like dancers who do not move their feet. Beyond the trees he saw the ragged white line of the beach, a smooth wave swelling through the lagoon, and the great ocean exploding on the coral reef beyond. He saw these things as he got hastily to his feet and stepped into the open. The sand, white and hot under the sun, almost scorched the tender skin between his toes as he went back to the fuselage and jerked open the door. Within, there was nothing but a voice murmuring so small and far away that it was like a speaking conscience. However, he reached inside and pulled away a big tarpaulin. Under it, curled up small like a golden cat in a nest, was not one of the curious, prying boys of the

village, but Tanya's younger sister Rika. She covered her face with both hands and sobbed: "Beat me! Beat me! But do not speak angry words!"

"Get out!" said Carmichael.

She slipped out from the plane and stood in the sun, appealing to him silently. She had been a slip of nothingness, a child, a year before; but like some night-blooming plant, suddenly she had become a woman. The eyes of Carmichael fell away from her.

"You've turned on the receiving-set of the wireless, Rika," he said. "And you mustn't do that. It uses up electricity. There isn't much strength left in the batteries. . . . Don't you understand? Now, look here. These batteries are like a sick child, which has to sleep. Every time you waken it, it loses strength. Isn't that clear?"

"Ai! Ai! Ai!" mourned Rika, softly. "I am killing something you love?"

She laid her hand on the arm of Carmichael; and he, after looking down at it for a moment, put it carefully away.

"Run along, Rika," he said, and leaned back into the cabin to turn off the wireless receiving-set.

So he brought his ear close to the voice, which was saying quietly: " . . . *fifty miles west and south of Tanayo Island . . . A small atoll that the first big waves will wash over . . . Food and water gone . . . Broken propeller . . . plane intact otherwise . . . Henry Pearson speaking . . . down with Silver Glide . . . Fifty miles west—*"

He turned off the sound, and stepping back to close the door, he saw that Rika had not moved. "Go on, Rika. Run along!" said Carmichael; but the girl had grown amazingly bold. As he made the gesture of dismissal, she took his hand in both of hers and held it, and laughed so softly that the sound was no more than the wirelessed voice. Even when he scowled at her and spoke sharply, she could not stop that laughter; and all the while her eyes were taking quiet and assured possession of him.

CARMICHAEL went down to the sea, cursing, and calling himself a rat, a rotten rat, until he heard feet whispering in the sand, and then saw Rika gliding along behind him like a golden shadow. She pretended not to notice his anger, but extended her arm with an insolent grace toward a gleam of white rocks on the side of the nearest hill. He realized with a cold shrinking of the heart that she was pointing out the heaped barrow of stones that covered the grave of Kamakama. Rika made in her throat a sound like the plucking of a musical string; she struck the back of her hand lightly against her forehead as though to mimic the blow with which Carmichael had beaten down Kamakama on that unlucky evening of too much gin and too much talk.

TO the islanders, Carmichael was a hero because he had killed big, swaggering Kamakama. There had been too much liquor in his brain for him to remember exactly how the fight had gone; but Jameson, the trader, who was the one witness of the night, avoided Carmichael from that moment forward, and when they chanced to pass, Jameson looked at him as at a dangerous beast.

To the natives, Carmichael might be a hero; but to Jameson, plainly, he was a murderer; and though the trader might be content to let the story remain untold here on the island, certainly he would not hold his tongue if Carmichael tried to return to civilization. An ugly ghost and rumor would follow him all the days of his life. So that white heap of stones was to Carmichael a monument of a dead past, and of a future into which he never would dare to go.

He cried out to Rika in a passion of anger: "Away with you! Go home!" But she refused to be afraid; and when he hurried off to the beach, she remained smiling on the hillside. On the beach, Carmichael sat for an hour watching the trembling flag of mist which streamed into the northwest from Mount Tanayo, with little clouds snapping off the tip of the flag from time to time, and scudding briskly along the arch of the sky. Old Mosabi, the fisherman who was bleaching white with time, like a bone in the sun, came by and begged for tobacco. Carmichael gave him a handful.

"When does the wind change?" he asked.

"One, two, three days," said Mosabi, glancing at the sky with knowing eyes.

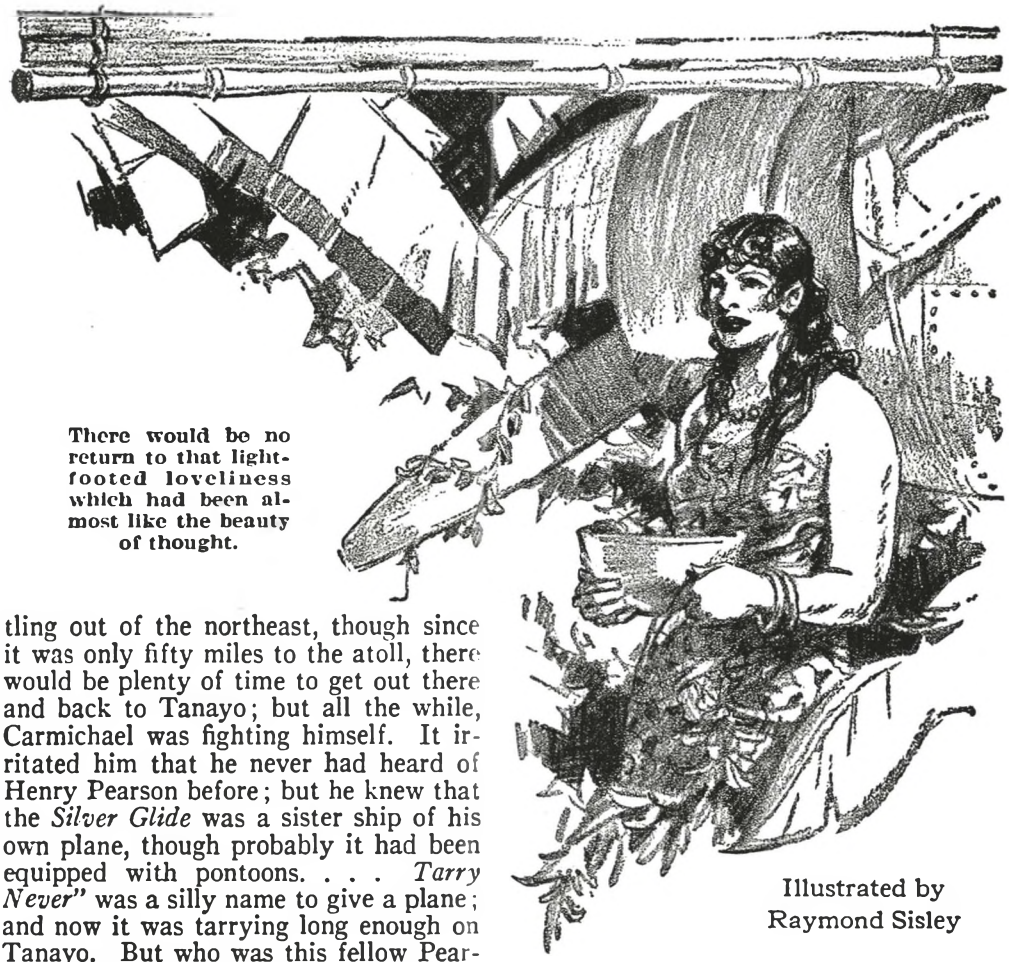
"And then?" asked Carmichael.

"So!" said Mosabi, and beckoned a wind out of the northeast.

"How big?" asked Carmichael.

Mosabi considered the sky again; and as he did so, he filled the big barrel of his chest until his ribs stood out; then he expelled the air in a long hiss.

It was a plain way of stating that, in three days, the wind would come whis-



There would be no return to that light-footed loveliness which had been almost like the beauty of thought.

Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

tling out of the northeast, though since it was only fifty miles to the atoll, there would be plenty of time to get out there and back to Tanayo; but all the while, Carmichael was fighting himself. It irritated him that he never had heard of Henry Pearson before; but he knew that the *Silver Glide* was a sister ship of his own plane, though probably it had been equipped with pontoons. . . . *Tarry Never"* was a silly name to give a plane; and now it was tarrying long enough on Tanayo. But who was this fellow Pearson, into whose hands that great, swift monoplane had been entrusted? Well, the youngsters kept coming on like the waves of the sea.

FOR another hour he pondered, knowing quite well that in the end he would have to go. Then he went back to the wreck of his ship which was also his home, and took off the great propeller with the help of young Tabai, and carried it down to the shore; but it was Rika who helped him load the outrigger with water and food. It was twilight when he launched the boat, and she wanted to go with him. It was not that the large cargo of provisions seemed strange to her, for all the ways of the white man were inexplicable; but she had set about giving herself to him. When at last he convinced her she could not come, she stood breast-deep at the side of the boat, and held up her face and her arms to him, shamelessly. But after all, on Tanayo it was an act of exquisite propriety to marry two sisters. Carmichael took her by the wrists and held them hard.

"Tell Tomi that I am sailing around the end of the island. I may be gone for two, three days," he said.

"*Ai! Ai! Ai!*" wailed Rika. "In three days I shall be dead of grieving. What shall I do for three days?"

"Talk to Tanya and keep her happy," said Carmichael.

"Tanya? She is already an old woman; and old women can talk to themselves," said Rika. This thought pleased her so much that she began to laugh, and she still was laughing and waving and holding out her arms to the future as the wind carried the boat into the lagoon.

She was such a child that it had not even seemed odd to her that he was sailing the tricky little craft alone, clumsy as he was at the business; and as a matter of fact, he had yearned to take along a crew of helpers, but then it would be almost sure to come out to Henry Pearson that he was the lost flyer Carmichael, and that he was married and housed and about to become the father of a half-breed on Tanayo Island. Moreover, while the wind hung in this quarter,

Pearson came back for one short circle, stooping over

he could make smooth going of the trip to the atoll, and the return.

So, with the clumsy sail of matting hoisted, he stood away on his course, and the wind bore them on with a soft, steady hand all night long. Sometimes, in the gleaming valleys between the great ground-swells, the breeze was cut off and left the sail empty and rattling against the mast; otherwise, he drowsed under the stars until, in the dawn, he heard the waves on the reef, and saw the plane like a big silver fish in the smooth waters of the lagoon. A little figure, black against the sky, danced and waved frantically on the top of the left wing of the big ship.

That was Henry Pearson. He wanted water first, and then food; but when he saw the propeller, he was almost unable to eat or drink. He was a long, lean, desert-dried Southwestern youth; and a quarter of his twenty-five years had been spent in the air.

"But who are you, and how in the name of God did you rise out of the sea with this propeller?" cried Pearson.

"I'm just one of those things, and my name is Happenchance," said Carmi-

Carmichael in a sort of air-gesture, a last salute

chael dryly; and Pearson asked no more questions. He had been down several days since his propeller—an unheard-of accident—cracked up in a prodigious hailstorm. The grace of God permitted him to slant down into the temporary safety of this lagoon.

They got the substitute propeller on at once; but then they discovered, when they started the motor, that the carburetion was all knocked in the head. Pearson, keen as an eagle for the air, was only a half-hearted mechanic, but Carmichael went after the job with patient care. He worked for endless hours, checking and re-checking, grimly patient.

"Give yourself a chance," urged Pearson. "You'll kill yourself working day and night. What difference do a few hours make, more or less?"

"Suppose a heavy wind comes along and begins to knock a man-sized seaway? What would happen to the *Glide?*" asked Carmichael.

But during the second day he began to give out. His nerves jittered. It wasn't a question of muscular strength, but the gradual softening effect of the easy island

life semed to have drained away and corrupted his nerve-strength also. They went over to the bit of red beach, and he lay on his back in the sand.

"I'll not make a sound. You get some sleep," said Pearson.

"Sleep? I'd go crazy if I went to sleep," answered Carmichael. "Sit here and talk to me."

"About what?" asked Pearson.

"Anything. Tell me about your girl. . . . No, damn all that. Tell me what you want to do in the world, anyway."

"Me?" asked Pearson. Suddenly he laughed. "I want to keep up in the air; all I want is to do something that'll make me a Halcyon!"

The left hand of Carmichael slipped up on his chest and covered the little golden *"H"* hanging pendant from a necklace.

He said, after a moment: "'Halcyon?' That's some sort of bird, or weather, or something, isn't it?"

"You never heard about the Halcyon Club?" asked Pearson, eagerly. "Well, you know, I don't suppose there are fifty people in the whole world who know about it. And who they are, *I* can't tell. Silence is part of their rule, I suppose, but a great thing like that is sure to be whispered about, like buried treasure. And I've heard some rumors. It's like this: You do something that's really tops in aviation—or a lot of things; and you're not a rotter—I mean, you're just human, and all that, but you've never done anything dirty, you see?"

"YES," said Carmichael in a strange voice. "Yes, I see."

"I don't pretend that I'd ever be good enough to get in," said Pearson hastily. "But you know, you asked me what I *wanted,* not what I expected to get. But suppose I got across the Pacific, flying alone. That—that would be something, wouldn't it? You know, even Carmichael flopped when he tried it."

"Did he?" said Carmichael. "Who was he?"

"Carmichael? Well, you *are* a funny fish if you've never heard of him! Why, I saw him once myself!"

"Did you?" said Carmichael.

"Yeah. Three years ago. Mitchell Field. I was only a mechanic then. He'd come all the way up from Texas, bringing a boy along for some funny kind of operation on the spine. He had to fly blind about half the way. It was the damnedest storm you ever saw. And he came down out of it in the middle of the night. The field was one white, crazy whirl of snow. And he came down like a sea-gull. A bird-man, air-sense. All that is easy to read about but when you *see* it, it drives you crazy. They carried the boy on the stretcher away from the plane with Carmichael walking beside it, talking to the kid and forgetting himself. But, my gosh, he was done in! On edge for twenty hours, going it blind, feeling his way through the dark. But he kept smiling. He was a thin, hard, fine-looking fellow. Not old. But you could see he'd lived. In the air. Up high! There was something noble about him. You saw him, and you wanted to say: 'Carmichael, take everything I've got! It's yours. It's on the table for you!' . . . Does this sound sort of crazy?"

CARMICHAEL, gripping the little golden *"H"* until it cut into his hand, said nothing.

"Well," said Pearson, "I only saw him once, that one flash, in the storm, with the lights dazzling through the snow; but when I saw him, I saw something great. He was the sort—why, he was the sort that might have been a Halcyon. It's a club, they say, in London. International. Suppose you do something really great in the air, one day, and you're asked to come to London. Your way is paid. You go into a big, quiet house. Like a fine home. There's a room with a tremendous whacking big table in it. And the chairs are named. Some of the chairs are pulled back against the wall. That's for the dead members. It doesn't matter who you are—maybe you're a Russian, or a Jap, or a German, or an Englishman, or whatever; but when you become a Halcyon, you take an oath, and everybody in the Club is like a brother to you, all at once. And if you're ever in trouble, they'd come around the world, and get you out. But just being a Halcyon keeps you *out* of trouble, I suppose, because you'd rather die, after that, than do anything low or rotten; because a blot on your life would be a blot on the whole club, and every man would feel as though his wind had been cut off."

Carmichael could see. He closed his eyes, and still he could see the red face and the dauntless eyes of that glorious dead Englishman Dunsbury, whose picture hung in the great room with his own fine words beneath it: *"Peace in the air."*

He got up and went back to his work on the plane. He had the motor in perfect shape, presently, but he said

nothing of that to Pearson, for still he had to add up certain accounts of the spirit and see what his debt was to this world. And the words of young Pearson kept dinging back into his ear. It was true that every sin of a Halcyon member was a sin for the entire fraternity. He knew, suddenly, that for him there was no return. It seemed to Carmichael that as he had walked for a year through the blue and golden days of peace, he had been passing all the while deeper and deeper into a trap. Now he realized it. The teeth of the trap were so fixed in him that if he escaped from it, his honor would be left dead behind him.

He had come to this grim conclusion when he was surprised to feel the wind on his back, instead of his face. He looked up at the sky, saw the drift of the clouds streaking out of the northeast, and knew that God had finished the argument for him. Old Mosabi had been right. The wind had changed, but it had changed a day sooner than the prophecy.

For a long moment Carmichael stared at those fleeing clouds, whipped along by a wind already powerful in the upper stratum of the air, and soon to rush over the sea, whitening the face of it. He never could sail the little outrigger back to Tanayo against such a storm; and if he headed before it, there were eleven hundred miles of open sea. . . .

He tried the motor. As he expected, it sang out with a bellow and a roar, like a thundering herd; and Pearson looked at him with a sudden smile.

The smile went out as he pointed to windward.

"You better come along with me," he said. "The sea's kicking up. . . . You'd better come right along with me."

"And spoil your solitary flight?" asked Carmichael, smiling a little in his turn.

"I know. . . . But it's not safe, here. You come along," pleaded Pearson. "At least, leave that silly boat and let me fly you back to Tanayo in ten minutes."

BUT Carmichael turned, facing into the wind—toward Tomi, and Tanya, and those dark possessive eyes of Rika. "I'll tell you what," he said: "when you make your bed, you damned well lie in it, or else. . . . Besides, these outriggers are made for any weather. I'll be as safe as a duck in a pool. Good-by, Pearson. And good luck for the Halcyon Club. . . . By the way, before you go—ever hear of that English aviator, Archie Lamont?"

"Archibald Lamont? Heard of him? Why, he's one of the greatest names that was ever in the air," said Pearson.

"I've got something of his that I should have sent back a long time ago," said Carmichael. He detached the golden *"H"* from the necklace and put it into Pearson's hand. "Give Lamont this," he said.

"Who shall I say it's from?" asked Pearson, staring in puzzled fashion at the little emblem.

"You won't have to say who it's from," said Carmichael. "Lamont will understand—everything. Good-by again. Get going before the waves begin to topple into the lagoon. . . . As for the outrigger, why, these boats can outlive any storm," he lied cheerfully.

"You've been great," said Pearson. "You've been a great fellow. You've saved everything for me. There's no way on God's green earth that I can repay you, of course; but if there's anything you possibly can let me do—"

"One thing," answered Carmichael. "Never tell a living soul how you got that second propeller."

"What?" cried Pearson. Then he added, nodding: "I don't understand, but I'll do as you say."

He was gone five minutes later, the big plane lifting its pontoons lightly out of the water. Pearson came back for one short circle, stooping down over Carmichael in a sort of air-gesture, a last salute, then shooting away into the north, where the big monoplane turned into a sailing hawk, a swallow, an instant that dissolved into distance.

OFF to the northeast, toward Tanayo, a squall was coming down on Carmichael, rapidly drawing an opaque curtain from the sky to the ocean, which it swept over with a white fringe. Carmichael knew well what lay in the heart of that darkness for him; and he was half of a mind to let the fragile little craft lie still and take the death-stroke at once; but he had fought for every chance through so many years of his life, that he could not help fighting against even the inevitable, now.

The first breath of the fast-approaching storm sent the outrigger staggering with speed across the water; and now the voice of it began to thunder at his ear like the roar of a great motor that was bearing him alone through the high adventure of the sky.

We plan to offer another unusual story by Max Brand in an early issue.

Arrest for theft? Why, it was absurd! He burst into a passionate resistance.

ONE astonishing thing in this life is that you never know what's in the past of a man, even if he be your best friend, until somehow it leaps out to give you a shock of surprise.

One evening in a famous Los Angeles café I was talking with John Oakledge, who runs the place, and watching the floor-show. He was a hard-jawed West of England man, with a cold eye for any question of business, like all these hotel autocrats. Somehow there was mention of sailing-ship days, and Oakledge let slip a word or two.

"And what would you be knowing about square-riggers?" I asked, smiling.

"I was around the Horn aboard one at fifteen," said he. "And a cadet aboard the old training-ship *Mersey*. And I saw the last keelhauling that ever took place on her, when one of the lads was put down one side of the ship and hauled under and pulled up dead from the barnacles that caught and held him there."

Before I had recovered from this shock, he fished in the pocket of his Tuxedo and held out something to me. It was a bit of sisal hemp with a bright scarlet thread centered in the twist.

"No," I answered his query. "How would I know what it is?"

"There's a story in it," he said thoughtfully, and his eyes lifted to the girl who was doing a torch song with the band. "The story of the greatest private navy the world ever saw; and Dan Curlew, who got it a-going; and what reward he had for his genius. But no magazine would ever print it."

"Why not?"

"Because it's a tale of hard bitter life and reality, not of young love and kisses." Oakledge nodded at the orchestra. The

By H. BEDFORD-JONES *and*

Illustrated by George Avison

Rogue's Yarn

This twenty-first of the already famous "Ships and Men" series deals with the adventurous and colorful East India trade and the stout ships that carried it around the Cape of Good Hope.

red lights were flashing, a sign that the broadcast radio hook-up was about to begin. "Those lads play hot music—because it's what the people like. Classical stuff—bah! There's real life in the hot music."

"Your argument is involved," I said, "and isn't consistent. Any other reason why your story wouldn't get printed?"

"Yes. Because it goes back to old days and times, back to Bombay of the 1680 period, when the city was being built, and the seven little islands that formed it made up the worst plague-ridden spot in the world."

"And the East India Company," I said, "was the most romantic private venture the world has known."

"There's no romance in Dan Curlew's story," he rejoined. "Except, maybe, that it answers a question. There's a lot of questions about ships that have no answer. Who rigged the first wheel? Nobody knows. Who built the first teak ship? You seek in vain, unless you ask me."

"I'm asking you," I said. Oakledge looked up at the dials in the broadcast-room. He spoke softly, reflectively.

THE East India Company was stingy in those days, too niggardly to employ any engineers; so Bombay was built by rule of thumb. The island channels were silting up, turning the place into a pestilential hell-hole. Men sickened one day, and were buried the next. Promotion was rapid but few men waited for it. John Company's rule was absolute, cruel and sordid. So everybody, from officials to cabin-boys, went out for what we'd call graft today. They looted everybody, from natives to the Company itself. This was natural; it was get out quick, or die if you stayed. . . . The Company itself looted where it could. The coast was a pirates' paradise. Dutch and Portugese and English looted one another. Moral sense was at its low ebb. Life had no value, especially at Bombay. The government of the Company was established at Surat in those days.

There's the setting for Dan Curlew, clerk. You must see him as no brawling

CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS

braggart, but a slim, quiet man, lean of face and deep of eye, holding a circumspect course through the troubled waters. Tyranny, disease and greed passed him by; perhaps he seemed of no importance. He watched the Company's troops mutiny, heard men talk in barracks and bazaars, saw fellow-humans hanged for little and clapped into a death-cell for less—and held his peace.

One day he was invited to Government House for dinner, perchance by some mistake. He went, dressed in his sober best. On his left hand sat Captain Keigwin, who had done notable things at sea, a hard but impulsive man; on his right hand was Edmund Yates, a Member in Council who had a hand in many things, a soft-spoken, shrewd-lidded man of tremendous influence and some wealth.

Dan Curlew made no mistakes. When the cloth was removed and the wine passed, he filled only one of his two glasses, for the King's health. He listened much, applauded the beefy, truculent Governor, ventured no stories. But he heard Keigwin mutter at some of the things said, and caught the low words:

"Egad, the right man could end all this tyranny and seize India!"

"It could be done," said Curlew calmly. Keigwin's head jerked around.

"Sir? Are you addressing me?"

"No sir—myself. It could be done, by taking the right measures."

The eyes of the two men held for an instant, questioning, answering. On the other side of him, Curlew heard Edmund Yates addressing him, and turned.

"I think you said, Mr. Curlew, that it could be done? I was speaking of vastly increasing the Company's fleet, and stopping the leaks of treasure."

Dan Curlew smiled slightly as the humor of it struck him—his one remark so differently interpreted on either side.

"Oh, very readily, Mr. Yates," he replied. "The type of ships employed are at fault. Some day I'll draw up a memorial pointing out the needed improvements. And as for the leaks, that's fairly simple."

"I haven't found it so," Yates observed sharply.

THE most quiet and reserved of men may talk too much, when the chance and listener appear. This is a failing of human nature; and for all his caution, despite all his wary aloofness, Dan Curlew was human enough.

"Take one thing alone—cordage," said he. "The losses in this department are enormous. Why? Because the Company's cordage is pilfered right and left."

He did not say what was in his mind; that not only was it pilfered, but that officials sold it wholesale to native shipowners and pocketed the money.

"And how might that be stopped, sir?" inquired Yates.

"We have a shipyard here; we have a rope-walk at Madras. Most of our rope is made here; we send the hemp home to the Blackwall yards to make the rest. What simpler than to weave a colored yarn in all Company cordage—and if it's found elsewhere, we have proof positive whence it came!"

"Oh!" said Yates, and extended his snuff-box. "You interest me, sir; damme, but you interest me! If you have the same excellent notions in regard to other matters—for example, ships—I'd like to hear them."

Dan Curlew smiled.

"Notions, Mr. Yates? I've more than that. Plans and figures—but this is no place for such technical discourse."

"You say well. Dine with me tomorrow evening, sir, at my house, if you'll do me the honor. I'd be vastly gratified to learn your mind on such matters."

WHEN the Governor, after two hours of wine and talk, lifted his glass and gave the toast, "A good afternoon!" as a signal to break up, Dan Curlew went away walking on air, his thoughts in the clouds. A mere clerk, to dine with a Member in Council? A humble nobody, to be entertained by one of these moguls who ruled the fringe of India with more than despotic power?

There was fortune made, if rightly handled. Promotion, favor, and inside of five years enough wealth to go home for life. When a ship captain could count, what with legal and illegal fees and graft, on from ten thousand to thirty thousand pounds' profit in a round voyage, even a minor official could ask no more than five years in which to thrive on India takings!

But that same evening, in the factor's house where he lodged, Dan Curlew had a visitor, who came in palanquin and with servants, but sat alone with him in the big cool room overlooking the factor's garden.

"I'm no man to mince words, Master Curlew," said the bluff and hard-eyed Captain Richard Keigwin. "What I saw in your eyes today, what I heard on your lips, brought me here tonight."

Curlew's brows lifted.

"There must be some mistake, sir," he said quietly.

"Don't get off soundings, now; and don't let go your kites and jump at things," Keigwin replied grimly. "It could be done, says you. Come, let's out with it! This place, like the other factories of the Company, is a hell-hole of injustice, misrule and oppression."

"I'm a clerk of the Company, sir."

"Thank God I'm not! I'm an officer in His Majesty's navy—or was, and may be again. Come, sir! No evasion. What I've seen in this city makes my blood boil. You know India better than I do. I read the truth in your face today."

Dan Curlew yielded.

"And I heard the truth on your lips," he said. "The right man? Why, yes. But who's the right man?"

"I am," Keigwin said abruptly, a hidden flame in his eyes. "And others are with me in a pinch. The Company has ships and troops and power—all of it rotted through. You've dreamed a dream or two, else I miss my guess."

"I think your brains are touched by the sun; but then, so are mine." And Dan Curlew smiled whimsically. "The right man, if he seized all India, would find things ripe. The Company's troops are mutinous to the core. Their servants, from governor down to clerks, are inefficient, covetous, selfish. Bombay might be seized at one stroke, if the fort were grasped. But then what?"

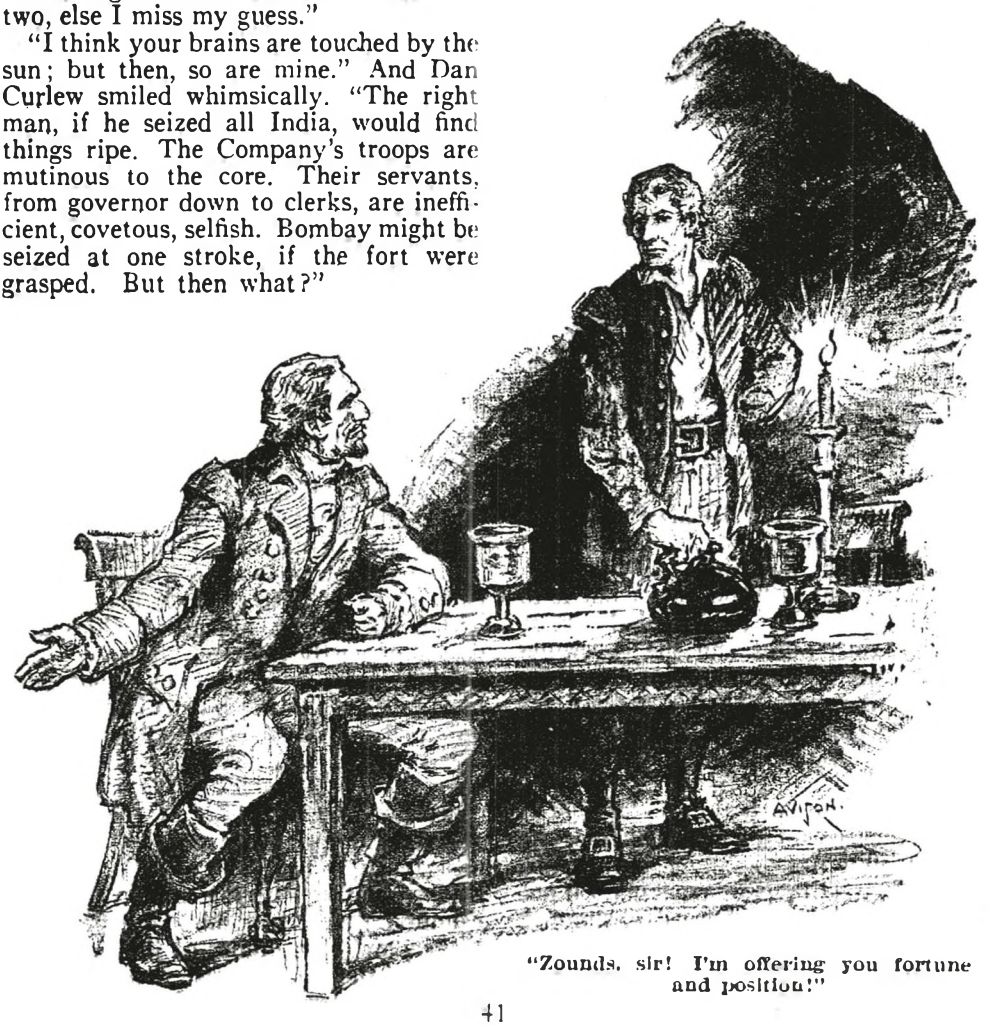
"That's what I'm asking." Keigwin relaxed, with a gesture. "Go on. Talk."

Curlew shrugged. "The first thing—could the right man seize Bombay for himself? No. But for the King, yes! If the Governor were clapped into irons and the right man voted into power, he'd get the votes of the Council—by force, if needful. Then, if he acted in the King's name, he'd have everyone behind him."

"But after that?" queried Keigwin. "Trade and commerce would fall off—"

"No. Company trade be hanged! Throw open the port to interlopers, as they're called—free traders. Abolish the monopoly of John Company! Keep the judges in power, but moderate all penalties. Reform the taxes that grind down the natives. Three things, and no more."

"By heavens!" exclaimed the other, a flush in his sun-bronzed cheeks. "You've hit the nail on the head, sir! I'll not withhold the truth. There's a movement afoot, and I've been asked to lead it."



"Zounds, sir! I'm offering you fortune and position!"

"That's taking your life in your hands," said Curlew slowly.

"That's what my life's for," was the brusque response. "And now I put it to you straight: Will ye join us? First Bombay, then Surat and the governing headquarters of the Company, then Madras and the rest. There's a place for you, a big place."

Caution gripped Dan Curlew: caution, and honesty.

"I can dream such things, for there's no lock and bar on a man's thoughts," he said. "But I'm a Company servant, sir. And while the Company pays me, I'll not share in any plot against it. Very simple."

Captain Keigwin grimaced.

"Zounds, sir! I'm offering you fortune and position!"

"Indeed? The gallows offers the same things, in another meaning." Curlew shook his head. "No; a good servant doesn't betray his master, right or wrong."

"Men higher placed than you think otherwise about it."

"I'm answerable only for my own actions, sir. We've talked in confidence. I'd not betray honor in one respect or in another, so have no fear that I'll tell any tales of what has been said here. But I'm a Company servant."

And with this response, Keigwin had to be content, if not satisfied. . . .

Dan Curlew—like many another honest man—could keep his mouth shut, but not at the proper moment most to further his own interests. After the mutinies, the general dissatisfaction with Company rule, the executions, he was not astonished that rebellion was rife, even in high places.

"Men higher placed than you—" Aye, Keigwin had backing in his amazing audacity, no doubt of it; and strong backing. As Dan Curlew went about his work next day, the words recurred to him many a time. He could almost put his finger on some of those men. He himself was a fool; his blood tingled to think what a chance he had passed up, but there was no help for it. Better an honest fool than a rascally wise man, he told himself with a shrug.

And tonight he was dining with Edmund Yates. Once he had interested Yates in his proposed memorial to the Company, his fortune would be made, and he could look himself in the eye with a clear conscience to boot. So reflecting, Curlew went about his work with an energy and vim that made his lackluster fellows regard him in slack-jawed wonder. He even neglected the customary siesta in the heat of the day, to wander down by the waterfront and look at the Company ships in harbor, sleek black ships with a white ribbon along their sides, and dream of vastly different ships.

These were good bottoms, stout bottoms of English oak; but he knew a better wood and a better ship for the purpose.

Evening at last. Not for his slender purse the palanquin and servants and other luxurious adjuncts of the officials of John Company; he walked, and dignity mattered no whit. Like a fairy palace was the glittering establishment of Edmund Yates; just the two of them at dinner, and that dinner of the finest.

Then the cloth was removed, the glasses and decanters set forth, and they

were alone. Yates, his shrewd eyes and soft tones all most courteous, had played the perfect host. Curlew felt at ease by this time, felt assured.

"Y' know, Curlew, your words of yesterday were devilish interesting," Yates drawled lazily. There was no laziness in his glinting eyes, however. "So our Company ships are at fault, eh? Our Indiamen aren't better than the Dutchmen?"

"They may be that, but still at fault." And Curlew smiled a little. "They're good cargo-ships or good fighting-ships; they should be both, and passenger-ships to boot. Think of the Company servants crowded into each ship that comes, penned in like sheep! Think of the invaluable cargo space that must be used for provisions and guns and stores of every kind! Not to mention the safety of the return voyage."

Yates drew down his brows.

"Egad, man, I don't get your drift! They're good ships. Our Blackwall designers have built 'em for speed—"

"We don't want speed; we want comfort and safety," Curlew broke in. "Here; let me show you this sketch I brought along." And he spread a sheet of paper on the table. "Here's our present Indiaman, adapted to the purpose. Here beside it is a different design, built for the purpose. Built to batter storms around the Cape, built to carry cargo without leakage or spoiling, and also built to fight. A massive, stately ship that can carry the Company's flag proudly. Built with passenger quarters on the orlop deck, room and to spare."

THE bilious features of Yates lit up. "Ha! Now I begin to get your notion, Curlew; and you're right. You spoke of figures. I see none."

"All in my head." Curlew began to reel them off, making swift approximate comparisons between the two types of ship. Yates listened, staring thoughtfully at the paper, and finally nodded.

"Damme, sir, you have something well worth while here!" he said at length. "But you mentioned a better wood than oak? There's none in England."

"There is here. Teak wood," Curley said quickly. "A thousand times better. And out here it's dirt cheap. The oil in it makes it last forever against worms and the sea. We'd have to bring out shipwrights and lay down a shipyard here; later we could ship the wood back home to Blackwall. Look at the native craft along the coast—you know how stout they are. A teak ship could stand any battering sea. Instead of losing one ship in every three, we'd not lose one in ten. And besides all this, the design allows for gun space. There's a ship both for fighting and for cargo."

YATES drew a deep breath, his jaundiced eye kindling.

"A noble thought, 'pon my word, Curlew! Magnificent, all of it. But look you. By the time your memorial reached England and got consideration, think of the time that would pass—months, years! It should go first to Surat, be passed on by the Company's officials out here; and with their approval, go to the governors of the Company at home. It should include all figures, all facts, even to the comparative cost of teak and oak."

"I have everything in my head," said Curlew. "If you would do me the honor of furthering such a memorial—"

"Why, damme, I'll back it with every bit of influence I have!" exclaimed Yates with enthusiasm. "I'll get it approved by the governors here and at Madras, before it goes to headquarters at Surat; and from there straight back to London town. Eh? Why, it'll cause a revolution in the Company's management and business! And for the man whose brain conceived it, there's fame and fortune."

"I hadn't thought of that primarily—"

"But ye must. Fortune, Dan Curlew! That's the greatest thing in life. Gold means power. Here's gold for the having—promotion, rewards, a title. Aye! It'll be Sir Daniel Curlew, I'll stake my oath upon it!" His flush died out. He bent glittering eyes on his guest. "Come! When can you supply all facts and figures? Down to the last detail, remember. You must show the Company where such a scheme will increase their profits, mind. Cursed stingy devils, they are."

"That's the easiest thing of all," Curlew responded. "The facts are eloquent; the figures prove themselves. When? Ah, there's the rub! I've small time for it after working-hours—"

Yates gestured brusquely. "I'll have you relieved of all clerkly duties in the morning, assigned a room in the factory for working, and left alone. When can you produce the finished results?"

Curlew thought swiftly. "A fortnight."

"Then account it done. We'll have a fancy scrivener write up the memorial in a good fist. The *Guzerat* will be leaving for home in six weeks, when the monsoon breaks; by then, I'll have the

approval of the officials out here, and send back the papers by her, direct to the governors of the Company. To work, lad! Five years from now, Sir Daniel Curlew will be getting his nine-gun salute when he comes sailing in, and here's to the wish!"

The glasses clinked. Presently Curlew rose and took his leave.

"Have you thought," he asked, "about any plan such as the one I suggested, to help stop thievery and looting?"

Yates gave him a queer sharp glance.

"No. That's a petty thing. Here's the big thing to put our brains upon! Let the other wait its time."

AGAIN Curlew was walking on air as he started homeward. Thought of Keigwin and any plot dropped back and was lost before greater things. Only, there lingered with him the memory of that queer glance Yates had darted at him, when they parted. At times, it worried him. Something in those sharp, glinting eyes disquieted him; but he put away the faint worry. A man's not responsible for his looks, always.

In the days that followed, Curlew lived as in a dream. A work-room to himself, his plans and figures and estimates to be labored into definite shape—oh, it was a great thing!

A week passed, and another. He was ahead of his promise by two days, finally. Everything was here, even to rough sketches of the new type of ship, detailed drafts of her layout and rig. All his estimates were checked over and verified to the last farthing. He himself was amazed by these estimates, by the savings and profits they revealed; no sane Company official, he thought, but must see instantly what a tremendous thing this would be in a financial sense alone.

Captain Keigwin, he understood, had gone to Madras on some personal errand. He could guess dimly what it must be: more men and backing. He was doubly thankful now that he himself had held aloof from that plot. The unrest, the discontent, were increasing here in Bombay. Harsher and harsher measures were being employed by the judges to crush it down; no man, white or brown, had any rights. But gripped now by his own vision and work, Dan Curlew gave little heed to such matters.

He took the finished work to Edmund Yates, who went over every figure with him and gave minute care to the whole.

"Superb!" exclaimed Yates at last, in a glow of admiration. "Curlew, you've done a magnificent job of it. Why, these estimates will sweep those crusty old moguls in London off their feet! As soon as it's copied, I'll get the governor's approval and then be off with it to Surat myself. We must catch the *Guzerat* with the papers. I'll not bother about Madras. Government House at Surat is the important thing."

As Dan Curlew went back to his own lodgings in a glow, he passed an execution-squad of sepoys, taking to the gibbet a poor shrinking devil of a seaman who had been condemned to the noose for stealing a gill of rum. Another man might have read an ill omen in this meeting, but Dan Curlew's eyes were on the horizon, and his hopes and all ambition.

More days passed.

One morning Curlew heard that Edmund Yates had departed for Surat in a Company barge. He looked out at the harbor and the proud *Guzerat*, outfitting for the voyage home, and his heart leaped. She would carry all his future this trip; when she came back again, there would be news from his memorial. Long months away; well, the months would pass swiftly now!

A bit odd, he thought, that Yates had sent him no further word.

SUDDENLY, with a rush, destiny was upon him. A scrivener's clerk came for some papers that must be copied fair. Curlew turned them over to him, and the clerk gave them a sharp glance.

"Eh? Why, Master Curlew, these figures be in the same hand! Only last week we completed a task for Mr. Yates—"

"Oh!" Curlew smiled. "My memorial, eh? Yes; he was assisting me in preparing a memorial. So you did the work!"

"Aye, but your name was not in it." And the clerk gave him a curious glance. "Have a care of your tongue, I warn you! It may be you drew up figures and estimates for him; but steal no credit there, or you'll kiss the whipping-post."

A chill touched Dan Curlew's brain.

For an instant everything went black before him. Then he sat clutching the edge of his desk, his face drawn and white.

"Fortune! That's the great thing in life. Gold means power." The words of Yates sang at him in memory; the queer

glint in the shrewd eyes came back to him. Stolen, stolen! His name not in it at all! Like a fool, he had turned over everything to that fine gentleman. He had turned over fame, fortune, credit, rewards, a title—everything. His vision was thieved; his dream was stolen.

And he, mere petty clerk that he was, could do nothing, dared do nothing. If he so much as breathed an accusation against such a man, he would get a flogging or worse. A shiver took him. Helpless, helpless! Loyalty to the Company—and this his reward!

For hours he sat stupefied, immobile. He still sat there when an officer walked in with a file of sepoys, read a document which he scarcely heard, and walked him out of the factory under arrest.

Desperately, then, he wakened. Arrest? Arrest for theft, for sale of the Company's stores? Why, it was absurd, ridiculous! He burst into a passionate resistance. A gun-butt hammered on his head, and he dropped to the flagging.

DAZED, hurt, bewildered, Curlew found himself before the judge and the packed court. Men he knew, men who knew him; and no mercy in them. He heard the lengthy addresses; necessity of stamping out theft and disloyalty, new regulations in force. Absurd, all of it! He broke out hotly, and was knocked back into his seat in the dock.

His brain ceased to function. There was the evidence; here were the witnesses: natives, caught with Company cordage aboard their craft. They confessed to everything. They identified Dan Curlew as the man who had sold it them. Damnation heaped upon damnation. The Company prosecutor was speaking.

"If it please the court, this cordage can be readily identified by a secret mark now being employed for the first time. At the suggestion of Mr. Edmund Yates, a scarlet thread is being woven into the cordage made for the Company. This is the first occasion when the value of such an idea becomes evident—"

Curlew burst into a fit of wild, hysterical laughter, so horrible to hear that the court broke into commotion. He saw everything now, everything! His ideas stolen, with which to close his mouth; his memorial stolen, with which to enrich his betters. False witnesses, false testimony—his laughter went into bitter oaths. He lost his head completely. He cursed Yates; he cursed the court, the injustice around him.

A blow stretched him out, quivering. He heard the sentence, and was dragged off to a cell and manacled. He sat broken, bruised, lost to all hope, crushed by the most bitter possible torment of thought before which his very brain reeled. . . . And there he fades from our sight.

OAKLEDGE had finished his story. A burst of applause rocketed through the café and I looked up, startled. The applause was not for him, however. It was for the dancer who had just finished her number.

"Well," I exclaimed impatiently, "go on with the rest of it!"

"Yes?" Oakledge's eyes flickered to me with their touch of blasé and sardonic weariness. "You could put an end to the tale yourself, no doubt."

"Of course; it's a natural!" was my warm response. "Keigwin came back from Madras, seized Bombay, and saved Dan Curlew's life. Eh? That is, if the story of the plot is historical."

"Oh, it's historical," said Oakledge. "Keigwin did seize Bombay and held it for the Crown, but his plan to seize the other settlements failed. And when orders came from the King to turn Bombay back to the Company, he complied. He was given command of a frigate in the royal navy, and was later killed in action. All that his revolt did, was to bring some sadly needed reforms into the rule of the Company."

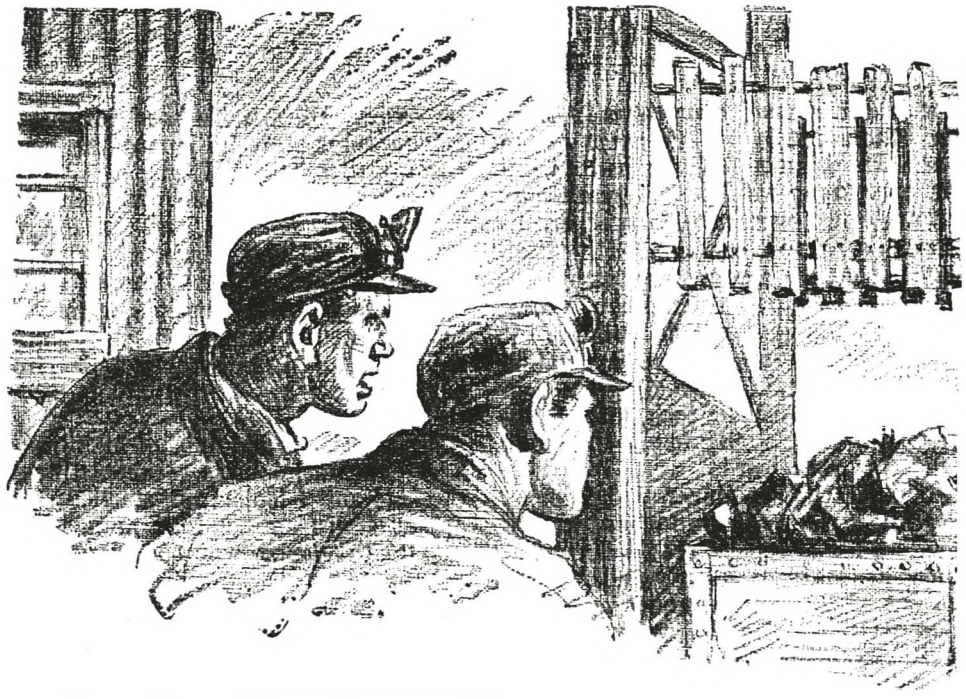
"But Dan Curlew?" I asked abruptly.

"I was back in England a couple of years ago, back in Devon." Oakledge fingered the twist of hemp with the scarlet thread in the middle. "I found this among some of the family heirlooms. Rogue's yarn, they called it. This was brought home from India by one of my ancestors who served the Company."

"What's that got to do with Curlew?" I said. "Evidently his memorial went through. The teak Indiamen became famous—"

"Aye," said Oakledge, a thin and bitter twist to his lips. "But Dan Curlew didn't. I told you this was real life, and not romance. The reason this little twist of rogue's yarn was brought back from India as a memento, was because it was cut from the rope that hanged Curlew."

Another picturesque story of this great series will appear in our next issue.



Nevada Gold

The Story Thus Far:

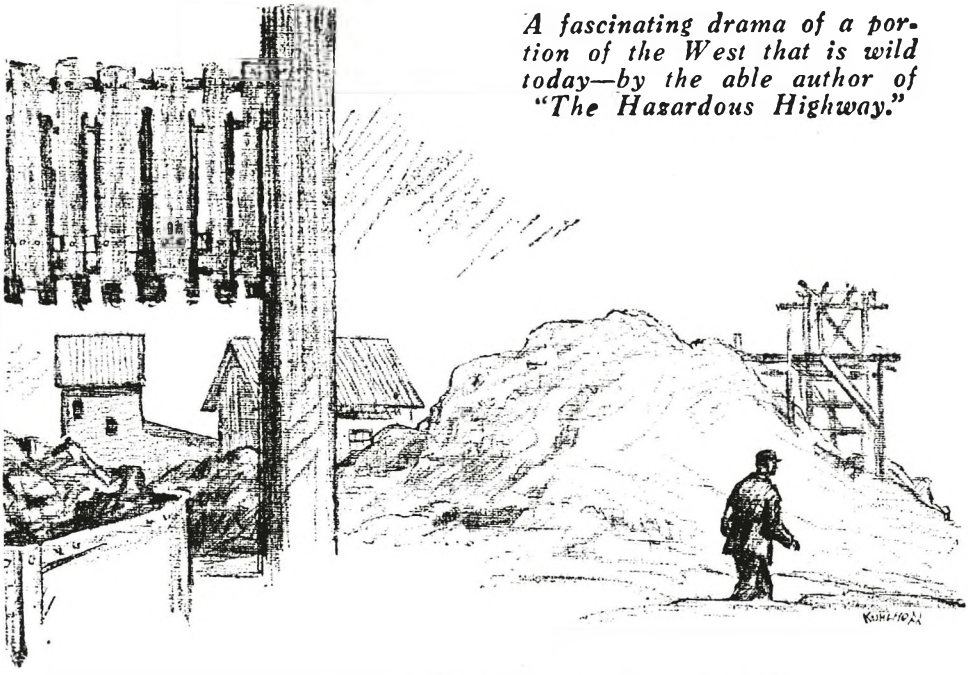
TWO eager young men seeking their fortune in the 1938 Nevada gold-fields: And one night in their camp in the Wild Rose Hills north of Golconda, as Red Murdoch skillfully whirled out the water and the ground-up quartz-specimen from the skillet, a fan of gold glowed clear against the iron in the lantern-light. They had found it—but they had yet to get it!

For they had no money for development work; and they decided that Lawton should earn what they so imperatively needed by getting a job at the Rust Water Con, the one mine active in the district, while Murdoch held down the claims they had staked.

"Dangers gather as treasures rise." All too soon they learned the truth of that. A spy in the employ of the gang of high-graders who were looting the Rust Water mine, was encamped in an old shaft just over the ridge; and correctly interpreting Lawton's departure, laid plans for a bit of claim-jumping.

And Lawton ran into even more serious danger. He stopped to buy gas for his car at Ball's Corral, an abandoned stage station, and was puzzled by suppressed excitement among the men there. Afterward he was caught in a sudden mountain storm; and while waiting for the water to subside in a deep-flooded arroyo, he heard a faint cry for help. Wading and swimming, he came to an all-but-submerged car just in time to save the girl alone in it: Nancy Henry, daughter of the man who owned the Rust Water Con. Too strong a word, *owned;* for when he had carried Nancy to his car, and had driven her to the shelter of an old freighter's shed, and they were seated before a fire he had built, she confided in him that her father was in danger of losing the mine; his option was about to expire, and because the mine profits had so mysteriously fallen off, he'd been unable to make the stipulated payments. . . . Then it was that, opening the rear door of the car in search of a blanket for Nancy, Lawton discovered a dead man huddled there. *(The story continues in detail:)*

AS the fire flared, the lifting flames brought the white face into sharp relief so suddenly that it was as if the body had moved forward. Lawton started back involuntarily. He got himself in hand again, and stood there gazing at the huddle of dead flesh, with an ugly wound marring the forehead.



A fascinating drama of a portion of the West that is wild today—by the able author of "The Hazardous Highway."

By FREDERICK BECHDOLT

Illustrated by Peter Kuhlhoff

The shock of the sudden discovery passed. Lawton's mind began to work once more. And his first thought was of Nancy Henry—who had gone to the car to fetch the ax a few moments before, and had returned with her face strangely pale. She had gone through one terrifying experience down there in the gulch; and then she had come face to face with this dead man!

"No wonder she was pale," he told himself. Then his solicitude for her was interrupted by the memory of what had taken place at Ball's Corral: the dusty sedan and the pair beside it; and as he recalled how they had kept between him and the car, he recalled also that there had been someone—or something—in the rear seat. This was the thing which they had been concealing.

Other things came back to him: the pair on the ranch-house porch; the man scrubbing the floor-boards, and the rag which he had thrown away into the darkness, and the dark stain which it bore. He knew the reason they had locked the door upon him: to shut him away from the front of the house while they agreed upon their plans and transferred the body from the sedan to his car. And after that, the owner of the sedan had driven away.

It seemed to him that this was a clumsy thing which they had done—to put their victim where discovery was sure to come. They must have realized that he would be certain to put two and two together; that he would surely report the matter to the authorities as soon as he arrived in Rust Water. But still, perhaps they were not so dull-witted, for he was a stranger in the camp; the story, if he were to tell it, would sound bizarre; and there were four of them to swear to their tale—whatever it might be—against his unsupported statement.

No, his situation wasn't so secure. And that brought his mind back to Nancy Henry. It was anxiety for her that awakened him to action.

He dragged out the blanket-roll and threw it over his shoulder. He closed the door, and at the sound he saw her start, but by the time he had come into the firelight, she had recovered herself.

Then her eyes met his—and there was no aversion in her look, as she said quietly:

"You did not know that it was there."

IT was not a question; it was a statement, as if she had found something which made her certain of what she was saying. He threw down the bed-roll.

"I'm glad you've so much trust in me," he told her. "No. I didn't know."

"If you had known," she went on steadily, "you'd not have sent me for the ax. I've been thinking it over. There

wasn't any need for you to do that. And if you'd made a mistake in asking me to go, why, you'd surely have remembered when I started for the car. And anyway, you're not that sort—" It was as if she were speaking to herself now, rather than to him. "I'm sure of that."

It seemed to him as if nothing else mattered, as if the opinions of others had no bearing on the matter. In her eyes he was acquitted, and this was sufficient. The very fact that appearances were so black for him made her faith in him of higher value.

"Thank you for saying that." As he was speaking, he dropped on his knees, but his eyes remained on hers. He felt for the hitch which held the lashing ropes, and released it with a deft jerk. He opened the bed-roll and took a blanket from it. He rose and placed it over her shoulders. He threw more wood upon the fire, and the red light of the flames filled the long interior of the shed; the car showed as a vague dark shape now, outside the circle of radiance.

"When I saw it there in the back seat," he resumed, "it came to me how badly it must have frightened you—and what you must have thought."

"As soon as I had time to think," she said, "I was sure of you. I had that feeling. But I knew that wasn't enough, and I made myself go back over everything—from the time when you risked your life to get me out of my car. The way you looked, and what you said—all the little things. And when I'd gone over it all,"—she smiled,—"I had evidence enough. I don't mind telling you, I was relieved." She was striving to speak lightly now. "It isn't pleasant to think you've got to spend the night with a man who's just been guilty of a killing."

He nodded. "Right. And now I'm going to tell you about it—what I know."

HE began with his departure from the camp, and Red's injunction to stop at Ball's Corral for gas. He was describing his arrival at the ranch-house, when she halted him.

"The man with Ball, the one who stood between you and the sedan. You say he was a short man?"

"I wasn't noticing him particularly," Lawton replied, "but I'm sure of this; he was one of those short-legged fellows; you know the build, whose bodies are full length. I couldn't miss that. Oh, yes—there was one thing more: he was chewing tobacco—"

"Not as most men chew," she interrupted quickly.

"You're right. He was munching it; his jaws were moving all the time."

"And his car." There was an old insistence in her voice.

"His car," he repeated slowly. "Why, it was dark-colored—black, I guess. I couldn't tell for the dust. And, I remember now, the outside of the door, on the driver's side, was all stained with tobacco juice."

SHE drew a deep breath. "Go on," she bade him. And when he had finished, she asked: "What are you going to do now?"

"There's only one thing to do: when I get to Rust Water, I'm going to hunt up the authorities. I suppose there's a deputy sheriff in the camp—or a justice of the peace."

"A deputy sheriff sometimes," she answered. "And the justice of the peace—we have him always." There was that in her tone which puzzled him.

"Once the body is identified," he went on, "it's going to make matters more simple. Chances are, it will explain everything."

"Maybe." She shook her head. "I'm not so sure. You see, so far as the identification is concerned, it's already made. He is—he was—the hoist-man on the day shift at the Rust Water Con. That's one of the puzzling things about this matter. What was he doing out there in the hills? And it isn't the only complication. The man who was with Ball when you drove up—the one who drove away in the sedan before they let you out of the house—there isn't any doubt of your description: he's Sam Dolton. And he's justice of the peace at Rust Water."

Lawton whistled. "The hoist-man at your father's mine. And the justice of the peace. A nice combination!"

When she spoke again, her voice was hard.

"I think it's lucky that I got caught by the flood down there in the gulch. For if you hadn't rescued me—"

"It would have been my word alone against all the rest of them," he finished for her.

"It's an ugly situation." She was speaking thoughtfully, and the frown was still between her brows. "Somehow it seems to me as if it ties in with other things. I wish my father were here!" She turned to him impulsively. "You see, you're not the only one who is alone. In

Lawton started back involuntarily. He got himself in hand again and stood gazing at the huddle of dead flesh.

all that camp, I don't know anyone that I can trust." She broke off abruptly, and after a moment's silence she said: "There's Barclay, of course. He's the superintendent. But—no." She shook her head. "Somehow or other, I wouldn't care to tell him. It's you and I alone until my father's home again. . . .

"You may as well understand the way things are. It will help us both. . . . The reason my father went away: You see, the mine isn't doing as well lately as it should. The ore has fallen off in values. Oh, it's still rich. The mill receipts show a thousand dollars to the ton. But up until a few weeks ago, we were getting a good deal of rock that had twenty times that much. And there's something queer about the falling off. No reason for it that anyone can tell. Unless it should be the story—"

"You mean high-grading?" he asked.

"That's it: high-grading. Miners are hard to get just now in this part of the country, and we take what we can find. That's what my father says. There are bound to be ore-thieves, of course, in a bunch like that. But if they were getting away with enough to make it really count, it should have been discovered almost from the start. Barclay has made every effort, and that sort of thing is almost impossible to hide when the owners are keeping a proper check. It's been a mystery. And that isn't the worst of it.

"You see, my father had counted on the values keeping up, and—well, he needed it. I told you how he'd bought the property on an option, and how we were really very poor at the time. You understand those things better than I do, how it is when you are paying for a mine from its output. That's what my father is doing, and this month there is a payment due—a hundred thousand dollars.

"My father had written, telling the men he bought it from that he might need a little more time. And the answer he got to his letter didn't sound right. He thinks that someone has been talking to these men. They'd had another offer, you recall, that was much larger than the one my father made: and the company who wanted to buy would do a lot to get hold of the property. It's possible that they're still after it.

"You see how it all ties up. The stealing of the ore—if it is being stolen—has made it impossible for him to meet his payment. And if he doesn't make it on the dot, there's a strong chance that he may lose the Rust Water Con."

"Which brings us back to this body in my car," Lawton said. "You think it might have something to do with the high-grading?"

"I don't know. It's funny, what that truck is doing at Ball's Corral. And Sam Dolton—he's crooked. I'd swear to that. And Martin was hoist-man on the day shift. At the end of the month he was to go on nights."

"I see," Lawton interrupted. "And you can't do much ore-stealing excepting at night, and excepting with the hoist-man in on the play. Anyone who comes across the shaft-collar comes with his knowledge."

"And Martin," Nancy went on when he had finished, "was an honest man. My father had known him for years." She turned to Lawton with the impulsiveness that she had shown before. "You're the only one that I can tell this to."

"You'll remember," he said, "I'm coming to Rust Water looking for a job."

"And I could get you on," she cried. "And if you were working underground, perhaps you'd find something."

"If there's anything crooked going on, I'm pretty certain I'd run across some evidence mighty soon." As he spoke, he was thinking of other men who had taken jobs in mines with the same purpose—and of the things which had happened to those men. They were not pleasant things to contemplate, but he did not hesitate. "Yes," he said, "I think that I can help."

The flames had been ebbing, and the wood was out; he went into the darkness, and while he was gathering an armful of rails from the ruined corral, he thought that he caught sight of the glow of headlights in the direction of the camp. But the faint shine vanished as he was looking, and it did not reappear.

IT was two hours later and the first signs of the approaching dawn were beginning to show along the eastern skyline; their sodden garments had dried out; the two of them were trying to forget the gruesome presence in Lawton's car. He had been talking for some time, telling Nancy of other camps where his work had taken him, describing strange little towns in the high arid mountains down across the Mexican border, when he noticed that she was leaning forward, white-faced, looking out into the night.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I thought I heard a step." She was pointing toward the shadow which enclosed Lawton's car. They listened, but there was no sound. "It was my imagination," she said at length.

The light seeped slowly over the eastern mountains, and now small objects were becoming visible. The tumult of waters had died away in the gulch.

"I think," Lawton told her, "we can make the crossing now."

When they neared the car, he stepped ahead of her, for he wanted to stand between her and the rear window as she passed it. By this time the sky was throbbing red, and day had come. He halted abruptly, frowning.

Footprints showed here: the tracks of a man. There were two sets of them, one leading toward the road, which showed plainly, a gray streak between the sage-clumps half a mile away, and the other coming from the road to the east. And when Lawton flung the door open, the body in the rear seat was gone.

CHAPTER VIII

AT Rust Water the tent saloons had sunk into their brief nocturnal silence; the only sounds of activity throughout the camp came from the summit of the ridge where the lonely head-frame stood out against the paling sky. The sighing of the hoist-engine still endured. At regular intervals there came the rasp of wheels upon the rails as the ascending skip appeared above the shaft-collar, and this was followed by the crash of ore in the bin. Up there on the hill-top a cluster of scattered lights showed like a constellation, beginning to take on their first pallor under the coming of the dawn. Along the flanks of the slope below, one or two all-night tent saloons gleamed like discouraged glow-worms—but aside from these, only a single lamp revealed the sign of anyone awake.

It was one of those incandescent lamps fed by a storage battery, the electricity generated by a small windmill; the power for this latter was rarely lacking on this hillside during any hour of the twenty-four. It looked much like a miniature airplane-propeller, and it stood upon the roof of the building whose front window shed the solitary stream of radiance into Rust Water's winding street.

Of all the buildings in the place—save those of the Rust Water Con upon the hilltop—this was the only one with any pretensions toward stability. It stood forth among the flimsy shacks and canvas

Presently the roar of the compressed-air drill was rising into the shaft like the noise of a whole battery of machine-guns.

makeshifts, which desecrated the sage-dotted sides of the amphitheater in the hills, with a sort of rude solidity: a one-story structure, its thick walls made of old railroad ties which had been hauled by truck one hundred miles across the desert flats and mountains.

The roughness of those gray outer walls was in marked contrast to the measure of quiet luxury within. It was a long room and its pine floor was covered by a half a dozen of those brightly colored rugs which are for sale in every tourist shop down in New Mexico and Arizona. Blankets of goat wool with similar design and a number of Indian baskets mingled with several large landscape photographs upon the walls. The chairs were heavily upholstered, and there was a buffet with cut glass and dull sterling silver to set it forth. The taboret between the two men who were seated near the window held a bottle of whisky, a decanter of brandy, some ice-cubes in a bowl, and a siphon of mineral water.

Barclay, superintendent of the Rust Water Con, set down his glass and picked up his cigarette; he edged back into his big chair with an impatient movement and gazed through the window at the wedge of radiance on the narrow roadway. He was lean, big-boned, somewhere in his early thirties, beginning to grow bald; and his eyes were restless.

"He ought to be getting back now." He shot a quick look at his companion. "How long's he been gone?"

THE other man turned his arm to look at his watch; it was a thin platinum watch, and looked fragile on that hairy wrist.

"Two hours now." As he answered, he regarded Barclay without expression: his flat face was so pale that it suggested a white china plate; but the chin receded; and this, together with the width of the mouth, made the latter look as if it belonged to a man-eating shark. Rust Water had not known him very long, and the name by which he went now was a new acquisition.

"And in half an hour it'll be broad daylight." Barclay swore. "It's a mess, Sloan."

"It *was* a mess," the man with the shark mouth said quietly. "When Dolton gets back, we'll know what it is now. I think he'll follow orders; if he does, the harm's undone."

"Dolton's a thick-headed fool," Barclay growled.

"Most crooks are." Sloan shrugged. "If he was wise, the chances are, he'd be two-timing us. Remember that. As a matter of fact, the whole bunch of them were dumb. And scared, on top of it. If they'd any brains, that prospector would never have driven from Ball's Corral. They'd have grubbed him out, the same as they did Martin. But they lost their nerve and let Ball talk them out of it. If it hadn't been for that cloudburst, this prospector would have brought the body into town, and Dolton would have to hold an inquest. And then, maybe, we'd have something to worry over. It's lucky I was up when Dolton got back to the camp. And it's lucky he did get back. Supposing he'd been storm-bound too!"

"Supposing," Barclay suggested, "he doesn't find this fellow?"

"He'll find him." The shark mouth widened into an unpleasant smile. "And he'll not come back until he's followed out instructions. Don't worry about that. I put Judge Dolton on the pan, good and proper, when he told me how they'd switched the dead man to the prospector's car."

Barclay swore again. "Of all the bone-headed plays!"

"Matter of fact," Sloan said, "it just missed being a bright idea. This prospector's a stranger here; it was his word against the four of them. If it came to a showdown, we could have hung the killing on him. The only trouble is, there are too many of them, and it would have taken a good lawyer to make their stories agree. As it is—" He rose and stepped to the window. "Here comes our justice of the peace."

THE headlights of Dolton's car were pale against the growing dawn. And when he stepped into the room, his heavy face was colorless; he was breathing like a man who has been running hard; his little eyes went from Sloan's face to Barclay's, and from Barclay's to the bright Navajo rug.

"This," he said thickly, "has been one hell of a night."

"If you're going to tell us that you've skipped down on us again," Sloan announced quietly, "you aint going to help things by wasting time on alibis. Come on. Talk fast."

The justice of the peace shifted from one foot to the other, and Barclay said: "Better give him a drink." He did not wait for Sloan's acquiescence, but poured the liquor out.

"The breaks were against me." Dolton wiped his coarse lips on his sleeve, and glanced at the shark-mouthed man. "I found him, all right. Just where I figured, across the gulch a few miles out. He was waterbound. I had to wait nearly two hours before I could make the crossing myself. Well—"

He looked wistfully at the whisky—then sighed and went on:

"There was a car down in the gulch. Jim Henry's big sedan. I saw a fire at the old freighter's station. I left my car on the road and I went afoot. And he was there, all right, in the shed. He had Jim Henry's girl with him."

"Get to it." Sloan bade him sharply. "You didn't kill him?"

"Not with her there."

"It's the first time tonight that you've shown good sense," the shark-mouthed man muttered. The justice of the peace drew a deep breath, and when he spoke again, his voice held more assertion.

"His car was at one end of the shed, and the two of them were standing by the fire at the other. I was able to slip up to it without their hearing me. The body was there, all right." He passed his tongue between his lips. "In the back

seat. I managed to get it out and pack it off; and once the girl said something; she was looking toward me, but she couldn't see me, off there in the dark. It was a heavy load, and I'd slipped in a patch of slick mud. She must of heard that. I froze right where I was, and by and by the two of them started talking again. So I made out to get away."

"What did you do with the body?" Barclay asked.

"Buried it. At the far end of the sand dunes, a hundred yards or so off the road." Dolton glanced with some uncertainty at Sloan.

"The way things stand now," the latter said slowly as one who is arranging all the elements of the situation in his mind before he makes his pronouncement, "we have this prospector's statement—provided he gives it—to the effect that he's seen Martin's body; but there's no corpse to bear him out."

"And maybe," Dolton suggested eagerly, "he's never seen the corpse."

"Perhaps not." Sloan paused and studied the highly colored rug. "And on the other hand, there's a chance that he's seen it, and Henry's daughter has seen it too. But that," he added with more certainty, "is not very likely. All right, Judge. The thing for you to do is to sit tight and pass the word to the others to

When Dolton stepped into the room, his heavy face was colorless. "This," he said thickly, "has been one hell of a night."

keep their mouths shut. Far as we're concerned, there never was a body."

"I could stand another drink," Dolton announced.

"Help yourself." Sloan shoved the bottle toward him, and then: "I'll see you later. You needn't stick around."

AFTER the door had closed behind the justice of the peace, the two men looked at each other.

"That's the trouble with this sort of business," Sloan muttered. "The chances you run are bad enough, but the real danger is petty crooks like Dolton. You can always depend on them to do the wrong thing in a jam. The only mistake he didn't make tonight was when he failed to kill that fellow with Henry's daughter for a witness."

"I don't like it." Barclay mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. "There are too many of those fellows. Once things start going wrong, some of them are sure to talk."

"Suppose they do?" Sloan's mouth widened in another of those tight-lipped smiles which heightened the suggestion of a shark. "There isn't one of them who's ever had any dealings with you or me—all their contacts are with Dolton."

He regarded the superintendent from under lowered eyelids, and then went on with the assertion of one who realizes that he must supply encouragement:

"It's not as if we had to keep this combination up much longer. But in the meantime, it's tight enough to hold. If it had been in the old days when every crooked assayer could buy up high-grade, it wouldn't have been possible; but as it is, these miners are glad to sell the stuff at a low figure, and Dolton is their only market. That's all those fellows know. They steal their ore and bring it to him, and he pays them for it. They haven't any idea what he does with it."

"There's the truck driver and the man who helped him, and there's Ball," Barclay reminded him.

"I was coming to them," Sloan said. "Dolton hired them to go over to Seven Troughs and get the equipment from Ben Thomas' mill; they hauled it to Ball's place and stored it there. But their knowledge doesn't go any further than our good justice of the peace. He gave them orders, and he paid them cash out of his own pocket.

"Now let's see where you and I stand: This is a one-mine camp. The Rust Water Con is the only property that's shipping ore. When the discovery was made, a lot of men came galloping into the district and staked everything in sight. They did the work on their claims, and sat down to wait for some one to come along and buy them out. Which might have happened before now, if it hadn't been for the fact that all of a sudden the big values in the Rust Water Con stopped. The miners knew that this was because they were getting all the high-grade stuff, and they probably suspect that there's something going on that they don't understand, or else the stealing wouldn't be so easy. But they're not saying anything—naturally.

"All right. And now—pretty soon—Henry loses his mine because he can't make good on his option. The high-graders have milked it dry. The camp goes into a tailspin. In the meantime we've set up that mill machinery and put the high-grade through, which isn't going to take more than one night. I'll dispose of the gold through parties down in Los Angeles, and we'll buy up those eight good claims we know of, along the extension of Henry's vein. We'll get them cheap, too. Later on, the new owners of the Rust Water Con will get things moving, and the word will go around that they're in rich ore again. Then we can sell out our holdings for a million on the line."

"There's one person you've forgotten," Barclay interposed, "and that's Judge Dolton."

"You mean he might get sore?" Sloan asked.

"Either that," Barclay replied, "or, supposing something else should happen—like tonight, for instance: There's always Dolton, if a jam comes. He's there, to talk. And to connect us up."

SLOAN shook his head. "No. I've not forgotten Dolton. When the pay-off comes, he gets a cut and he leaves the country or else—" He looked at his companion across the taboret. "It would be simple to get him out of the picture, any time we need to. Whichever way the play comes, he's the only link."

DAWN had come, and the shadows were beginning to grow sharp and black between the clumps of sage beside the roadway. Where Sloan was sitting, the lower end of the winding street was visible through the window. He started.

"That," he announced, "would be the prospector and Miss Henry."

Nancy was in the front seat of the sedan beside Lawton, and she was evidently giving him directions, for she was pointing when they saw her. But Sloan was paying no heed to the girl; his eyes were fixed on Lawton. And as the car drew nearer, he moved back from the window with a certain abruptness.

The car went by. Barclay rose from his chair. "I've got to get back to the mine," he announced. Sloan spoke, and his voice was sharp.

"That prospector: we've got to do something about him."

"I thought," Barclay said, "you had it figured we were sitting pretty as far as he's concerned."

"Chances are," Sloan went on as if there had been no interruption, "he'll drive her up to the mine. Find out about him, Barclay. Where's he stopping in Rust Water, and where's his camp out in the hills? Get me word today."

And after Barclay had departed, Sloan sank into his chair, his lips tight.

The morning grew on toward noon; the awakened camp was going about the day's activities; two ore-trucks came down the hill from the Rust Water Con and departed on the long road between the sand dunes for the distant railroad. The roar of the rock from the unloaded skip sounded at regular intervals on the ridge. It was getting near the lunch-hour, but Sloan was still sitting by the window when Barclay's car stopped before the building.

"That prospector," Barclay announced: "You want news of him. Well, here it is. He's on our pay-roll. He goes to work this afternoon."

Sloan uttered an exclamation of relief. "How did that come?" he asked.

"Miss Henry asked me to put him on."

"Suppose," Sloan said, "you get word to Dolton. That's all you need to do. Just tell him this fellow's going down the shaft with the afternoon shift."

"That," Barclay said, "is an idea."

"We're jest about going to make it, boss." the helper announced. "All right, Tony," Lawton nodded. "Clear out and give me the skip."

CHAPTER IX

"THIS is the upper spring. It's here my father and I camped that night when the wild horses came down to water," Nancy said; and Lawton nodded.

"It's a good spot," he said. "If anyone comes within a quarter of a mile, he's in plain sight. No danger of our being overheard."

He seated himself upon the slope beside her. Below them, where the gulch forked, a cluster of dwarf willows surrounded the little pool of water, almost hiding it; and among them several wild-rose bushes were in blossom. The tracks of birds and jack-rabbits made involved patterns in the tiny patch of sand at the water's edge. Far beneath them, the wide sage-brush plain stretched away to the range of mountains where a triangle of green, that looked no larger than the palm of one's hand, marked the cañon mouth at Ball's Corral. Off to their right, two hundred feet or so above them, the head-frame of the Rust Water Con scarred the skyline at the summit of the ridge. The canvas roofs and the pine buildings of the camp were strewn along the lower slopes of the mountain. The whole landscape seemed to be sleeping in the hot sunshine of early afternoon.

"I had a letter from my father," Nancy announced. "It came in the noon mail. He'll be away several days yet."

Lawton saw the trouble in her eyes; and he said: "I haven't much to tell you. I'm sorry."

"We can't expect to uncover this thing right away," she reminded him.

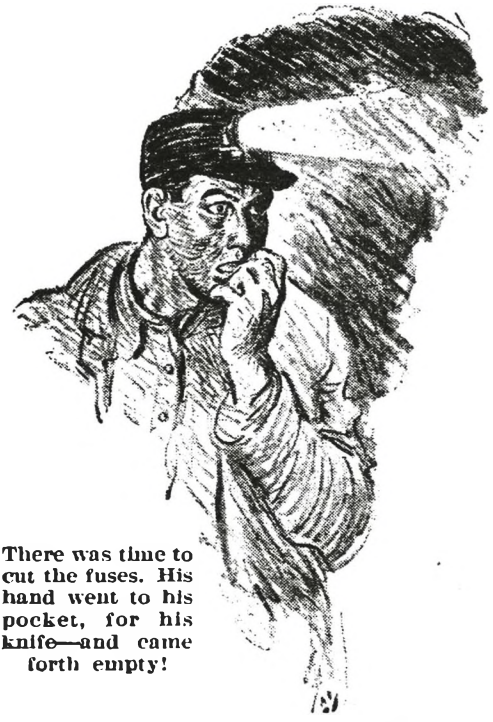
"There's something to find, all right," he went on quickly. "The first time I saw the camp, I suspected that; now I'm sure of it. Any man that knows the signs of high-grading can see plenty of them over there." He waved his hand toward the scattering of tents and shacks along the hillside. "A one-mine camp, with a hundred men on the pay-roll—and the mine's output falling off—has no right to be as lively as Rust Water. Why, more than half the men who've staked claims have done their work and left the place. It ought to be in a slump. Instead of that, the saloons are doing well, the games in every place are getting a nice play. Two nights ago one miner dropped four hundred dollars at roulette; and last night some fellow beat the faro bank at the Sierra Club for more than a thousand. There isn't a barroom in the place where you can't see specimen ore being handed around. And that means a lot of fellows are in the money."

"WELL, then, you have found something." Nancy's eyes were bright.

"Only generalities," he warned her. "Not a bit of evidence. But enough to make me know the evidence is here. And if I'd not seen it in the camp, I'd have realized it the first time I stepped over the shaft-collar. You can tell how men are feeling toward you—miners especially—if you're used to them. And this bunch in the Rust Water Con don't fancy a new hand. It's not what they say, so much as what they don't say. Matter of fact, the whole atmosphere underground is distinctly wrong."

He broke off abruptly; and when he spoke again, he was watching her face.

"What about Barclay?" he asked.



There was time to cut the fuses. His hand went to his pocket, for his knife—and came forth empty!

"Barclay?" She hesitated. "What do you want to know?"

"You didn't tell him why you wanted me to have this job?"

"When I asked him to put you on, I said it was because you'd saved me from drowning that night, which was the truth—as far as it went. You don't trust him?"

"I don't know anything about him," Lawton said. "And I'd like to find out some things—what you think about him, for one."

"You mean about his honesty." She frowned. "I don't think there could be any doubt about that. He came to my father with the finest recommendations."

"How does he impress you? Do you like him?" Lawton continued, watching her as he put the question.

"No. I can't say I do. I don't know why, but—anyway, I don't."

"All right," he said. "I was just wondering. That's all. You see, if I was superintendent of a mine, under such conditions as these, for instance, I'd be making it a point not to miss any bets. I'd be underground every time they blasted—just to have a look at the ore. I'm not touting myself, understand; I don't want the job. I couldn't take it if I did, for Red and I have our own proposition to look after, in the Wild Rose Range. But I'm just telling you what any competent superintendent would do. Barclay's not been much in evidence underground, as far as I can notice."

"You don't think he's mixed up in this?" she cried.

"I haven't any idea that he is, or is not. It's just one of the things that looks different than it should look. There's one thing that I'm sure of. The ore-stealing here has been carried on with the connivance of one or two of the hoist-men. The man who was murdered the other night held down that job—and he was to have gone on night-shift in a very short time. Now, you understand, there's a rule that when the skip carries anyone up to the surface at night, the hoist-man must blow the whistle three times as a signal to the watchman."

"The watchman?" Nancy interrupted. "Old Ned MacLean—I'd swear by him!"

"So would I." Lawton nodded. "He's got honesty sticking out all over him. But if the hoist-man fails to give that signal, MacLean's not on hand, and the man who comes up with the skip could carry a sack of high-grade out to the dump or somewhere near by, and hide it there without anyone being the wiser. And it only needs a hundred pounds of high-grade every night to make a tremendous difference in the yield of gold from a mine like this. So, you see, there's plenty of opportunity for a number of miners to get together and do all this stealing."

He rose. "I've just time to get down to the change-room. I've been thinking, perhaps it might be better next time I met you, if you could arrange it, to have it after I come off shift. Here in daytime we can see anyone coming; but on the other hand, anyone can see us from a long ways off, and there's a chance some one might notice us who shouldn't."

"That's true." She was on her feet now. "Suppose, then, we make it day after tomorrow, just after midnight. I'll drive down from the house, and I'll pick you up where the footpath that passes the bottom of the dump joins the road."

ON his way across the sage-dotted hillside to the cluster of new buildings about the head-frame of the Rust Water Con, Lawton was thinking of the superintendent.

"She doesn't like him," his thoughts ran. "But she doesn't say why. Maybe it was a woman's intuition." Then his mind went to something which he had failed to mention to Nancy. "He's wrong; if he wasn't, why would he be meeting this fellow Dolton after midnight in his office with the shades drawn?"

Perhaps, if he had known the cause for this meeting which he had been lucky enough to witness just before the drawing of the shades as he was passing the superintendent's office two nights before, he would have felt more uncomfortable. As it was, he had good reason to suspect that his presence in the mine was unwelcome. There was another matter which he had not mentioned to Nancy, the knowledge that he must keep on his guard from the time he went on shift until he left the change-room at the end of his day's work. There was, he told himself, no profit in alarming her by telling her that, for eight hours out of every twenty-four, he was in constant danger.

And of this, he was quite certain. A mine is not the safest place in the world, even when all hands are striving to observe the rules of safety. Any one of the small lapses into carelessness, which would pass without grave consequences on the surface, is laden with deadly possibilities underground. A tool dropped down the shaft takes on the destructive potency of a chunk of shrapnel by the time it has fallen a hundred feet; the missing of a signal by the hoist-man may carry a passenger who is riding the skip aloft, and dump him into the ore with several tons of broken rock on top of him.

There are a hundred possibilities.

So the feeling that he was not wanted here was giving Lawton plenty of food for thought, and he would not have returned to work today, if it had not been for two things: His only opportunity to earn a grubstake for himself and Red Murdoch lay at the Rust Water Con. More powerful was the promise he had given Nancy. Whenever he thought of the distress he had seen in her face while she was telling him of her father's ugly situation, any idea that he had of quitting his job vanished. He was not going to desert her, come what might. . . .

The sunlight was very white and vivid on the pale hillside as Lawton took his place with a half a dozen others in the skip at the shaft-collar. The skip-tender jerked the bell-cord; a moment later they were shooting down through dense blackness, wherein the flames of the carbide lamps glowed like tiny yellow stars. The close cool air of the underground passages enwrapped them when they stepped out on the plank platform at the station, one hundred feet below the surface.

It was a perpendicular shaft; and if it had not been for the heavy timbering and the ore-skip, suspended by its steel cable, it would have looked like an unusually large well, except for the fact that it was square. At the hundred-foot level they had run a crosscut to make contact with the ore, and from the point where this had met the vein, they had drifted, north and south, following the trend of the ore body. Now they were sinking the shaft farther down to make another crosscut.

That was the spot where Lawton worked, down in the sump, with a helper —the two of them, at the bottom of a square hole. The helper—Tony, a wiry young Bohemian—was busy selecting several lengths of steel, when Lawton ran across him on the station platform.

"That wop on the day shift, he tells me the ground aint so even now," Tony said. "Mebbe he thinks we can't get our round down and shoot before the change." He nodded and smiled. "We'll show 'em."

Lawton returned the smile. "Okay," he said. "We'll show 'em, Tony."

THE skip took them down to their narrow quarters in the sump. And presently the uproar of the compressed-air drill was rising into the shaft like the noise of a whole battery of machine-guns.

The afternoon passed; in the early evening they knocked off and ate their lunch; and as the night wore on, they drew near the end of the round. It was, as the man on day-shift had said, bad ground; but they were finishing in good time, and Tony was grinning widely when they tore down the machine. Anyone seeing him would never have dreamed there was anything sinister in the back of his mind to mar the admiration which he had expressed more than once for Lawton's drill-running.

It was a little after eleven o'clock when Tony signaled for the skip, and when it arrived, the two of them loaded in the machine, the tools and steel, their lunch-buckets and such bits of paraphernalia as they had with them. After they had taken these off at the station, some fifty feet and more above the sump, Tony got giant powder and fuse and caps, and they returned to load the holes.

There were nine of these holes, six of them around the outside of the rectangle of rock floor; these made up the side round; and three arranged to enclose a triangular space in the center; the latter were called the cut holes. Lawton counted out the sticks of giant powder and handed them to his helper,

who slipped them into the holes and pressed them down with the loading-stick. The topmost stick of powder he slit with his pocket-knife, and he thrust a dynamite cap into the slit. He cast in some loose gravel and tamped it down. So with each hole.

Tony was talking while he worked. As the hours had gone on, he had grown more voluble. By the time he borrowed Lawton's knife and began cutting the fuses to their various lengths, so that the holes might pull in proper rotation, it was getting near the change of shifts.

"We're jest about going to make it, boss," the helper announced.

LAWTON nodded and looked up; he was whistling now. It was the first time since he had come to the Rust Water Con that he had forgotten the presence of danger. He took the fuses and bunched them; he wrapped their ends together. But he forgot the knife which Tony had slipped into his own pocket.

"All right, Tony," he nodded. "Clear out and give me the skip."

The helper climbed into the iron car and waved his hand. "See you later, boss," he called as the skip shot upward.

Lawton stood alone with his carbide lamp throwing a wavering patch of light into the darkness of the sump. Some moments passed, time enough for Tony to take the loading-stick and get out on the station platform. The skip came down again. It stopped some distance above the sump, hung for a second and then came a few feet farther. This showed that the hoist-man had got the proper signal, and knew that he was lowering the car into the sump to carry out the man who lighted the fuses for the firing of the round.

Lawton took the carbide lamp from his hat and touched the flame to the bunched fuses. . . . The slight sound of sputtering powder was drowned out by a louder noise—the skip had shot upward.

CHAPTER X

THE hissing of the lighted fuses was the only sound. It was as if the whole mine were listening for the explosions which would fill this narrow hole with flying chunks of rock. The tiny flame of Lawton's carbide lamp wavered under a cool draft; the shadows closed in upon him, then receded. Little jets of pale smoke twined from the glowing ends of the fuses.

In these first moments of his danger the enormity of the discovery did not strike him. His mind was centered on the proper thing to do: There was time to cut the fuses—time enough and to spare. His hand went into his pocket for his knife—and came forth empty; then he remembered that he had lent his jack-knife to Tony, and that the helper had not returned it.

His mind was working swiftly now. The conspiracy was simple enough. All that it needed was the connivance of the hoist-man—to lower the skip, to hold it just long enough for the lighting of the fuses, and then, before Lawton had time to board it, to throw the lever wide open and take the car upward at full speed. No wonder Tony had been talking more than usual tonight. The man had been in a lather of nervous excitement.

The fuses were cut in different lengths, according to the holes to which they led. And the shortest ones went to the holes in the center. It should be at least three minutes from the lighting to the first explosion, and after this, the others would follow, according to the position of the holes. Three minutes—and of that time some thirty seconds had already gone.

It was more than fifty feet to the station, and the shaft was perpendicular; the ladder which led upward was close to the wall. As Lawton started climbing, he was thinking that after all this had been a poor plan which they had made for his extermination. They should have realized he would have time to reach safety—provided those fuses were cut to the proper length.

He glanced downward; little trails of red sparks squirmed in the darkness there beneath him. How fast were they traveling? How long was the distance which they must go before the first load of dynamite smashed the living rock and filled with great chunks of flying stone this narrow hole where he was climbing? Why had he not thought of this possibility before? He should have been watching every move that Tony made.

Out of the blackness above him came the dull thudding boom of a distant explosion. They were blasting up there in the face of one of the drifts. But on the surface no one would know whence the sound came. He had a picture of the hoist-man, standing in the little house near the shaft-collar, with the huge drum before him and the metal disk with the

pointer which showed the location of the skip; standing there, with one hand clasping the long lever and the other hand on the throttle; standing rigid, listening. He would have heard the sound of the blast; it would have come out of the long drift and up the shaft, and it would have reached his ears—a dull, jarring impact. And he would think it was the shot in the sump for which he had been listening.

Another muffled boom, and almost at once a third. It would be exactly like that, to those who were hearkening above him, when the dynamite began to get to work down in the sump.

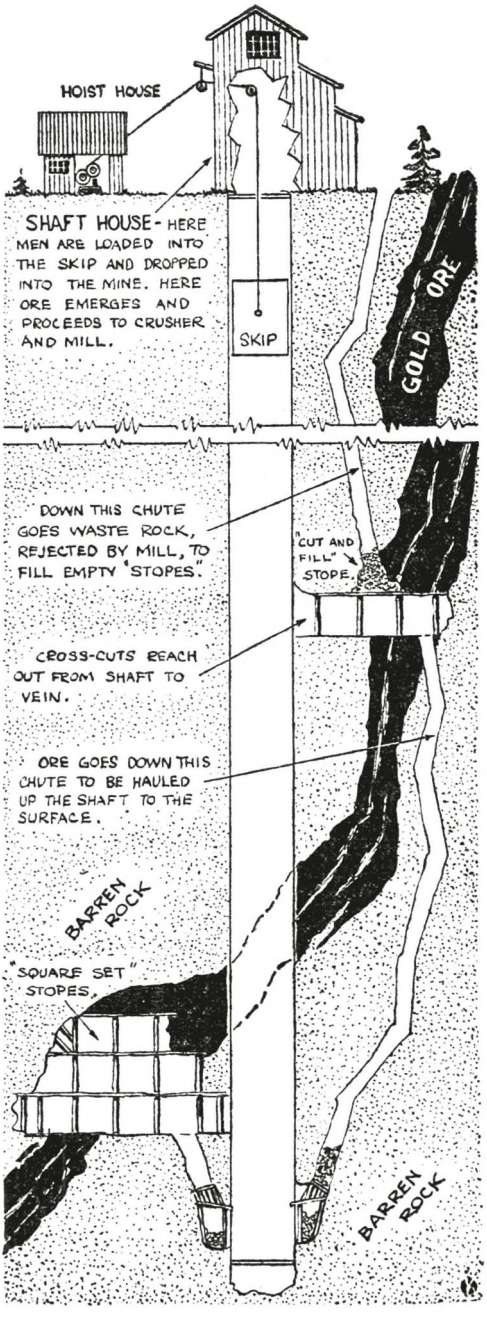
During the time that these thoughts assailed him, he was climbing the steep ladder. His heavy boots tugged at his limbs. Once, where there was a little wider distance than usual between the rungs, he missed his hold and almost fell. And a moment later—his outflung hand found nothing but thin air. He caught himself again just in time.

The rays of his carbide lamp cut the gloom above him for a short distance, and in that interval the space was empty. So they had not been so short-sighted as he had thought! They had provided for this contingency, just as he might have known they would. They had gone about it carefully and with precision. He was trapped.

ONE remote chance there was: He had climbed some thirty feet. And the cribbing which braced the shaft walls offered a semblance of shelter. The stulls were light,—for timber is expensive in this sage-brush country,—not more than eight inches thick. If he could get behind one of them and flatten his body, it was barely possible that he might escape the rain of rock. But if death passed him by, the gases that followed the explosion would creep up and overcome him.

He shook his head and began descending. He had another idea. It was a large hazard, a gamble against high odds, but it was his only chance now.

He held the sides of the ladder, and his feet barely touched the rungs as he slid down; their contact was just enough to ease the speed of his descent; and as he slipped into the depths, within whose gloom the little red sparks moved along winding fuses, the splinters tore his palms until they bled. He fell the last ten feet and lay a moment, breathless from the shock. Then he leaped up.



There were nine fuses. As he looked upon their glowing ends, he realized that the suspicion which had come upon him after the departure of the skip was correct. Tony had cut them a good foot shorter than the regulation length. He had been cheated out of a full sixty seconds. He had already used up more than two minutes. He had another half-minute left—that much at the most.

He started pulling the fuses.

At the end of each fuse there was a nitro cap, and this was buried in a stick of giant powder. It was an easy matter to drag the cap forth from the slit and

on through the tamping of gravel which had been pounded down by the loading-stick. Just a light tug, and it came free. But every one of those copper caps was so sensitive that it needed only a slight blow to set it off. If it scraped too roughly against the rock side of the hole, or struck a pebble in the tamping, it would explode just as surely as if the fuse had burned down. And he would be standing directly over the hole when the explosion came.

Lawton took the three cut holes first, for the lengths which led to these were the least. When he seized the last of them, there was not two inches between the burning end and the tamping at the mouth of the hole where the load of giant powder lay buried. As he pulled each fuse free, he laid it aside and without losing an instant, turned to its neighbor.

He felt the perspiration running down his face; his palms were slippery with it; his eyes were smarting. Every time he gripped one of those slim black cords, he knew that the next movement he made might bring the explosion.

THE three cut holes were done; he jerked the first fuse from the side round. A sharp flat report sounded; it was hardly as loud as a shot from a small-caliber revolver, but it smote his taut nerves with the weight of a mighty explosion. He stumbled forward; he was on his knees, and the blood was running warm over his face. His head was reeling. Then he understood. One of the fuses which he had laid aside had burned down; he had heard the crack of the exploding cap. A flying fragment of copper had cut his cheek. Fear had made him fall.

He went on to the next hole; and then to the next. Five gone, now. Another cap cracked as he was pulling the sixth. Then there was silence. He finished the last three before the miniature bombardment was resumed.

Nine gone. Or was it nine? He looked over the floor of the sump to to make certain; and when he knew that he was safe, he felt his knees buckling under him. He passed his arm across his forehead, wiping away the dampness. And then the rage that comes to a man who knows he is about to face his would-be murderers took possession of him.

They would be waiting up there now, wondering what had happened. And he was going to confront them. Then he realized that if he betrayed knowledge of their intent, the chances were he would never reach the surface. He fought down his anger, and considered the situation.

ONE word of accusation, and he was undone—and on the other hand, if he were to ignore the matter, he would arouse their quick suspicions just as certainly.... He remembered something similar to this which had happened in a mine where he had been working years ago. Some men had said it was carelessness, and others had maintained the thing had been intentional. On that occasion the miner who had come so close to death had climbed out to safety. Then he had hunted up the hoist-man, and the story of the beating he had given the latter was a camp epic. Lawton made up his mind to follow the same course of action.

He went to the bell-wire and signaled for the skip; and when it took him to the station, he stepped out on the platform. The hour for the change of shifts was near; some of the miners were beginning to gather from the nearer workings, and the eyes of all of them were on him as he climbed out.

They remained silent, gazing at him, waiting for him to speak. He looked them over slowly, and he saw his helper. If there had ever been a possibility of doubt as to Tony's guilt, it would have vanished when Lawton's eyes met his. Tony's face was like a white mask. Lawton walked across the platform, ignoring the miners about him.

"You fool!" he swore. "Give me my knife." The helper reached into his pocket and held the knife out; Lawton snatched it from his hand. "If I didn't know you were so dumb, I'd tear your head off," he growled. He turned away and strode back to the shaft. He got into the skip, and before he jerked the bell-rope for the signal to take him upward: "Wait till I get hold of that hoist-man," he told them.

It was, he assured himself, successful. In the brief interval before the ascending skip had borne him from their sight into the darkness of the shaft, he had seen relief, like a light, stealing over the face of more than one in the group.

The miners of the oncoming shift were beginning to gather under the lights at the shaft-collar when Lawton stepped out on the surface. The foreman of the off-going shift was standing a little apart from the group. Lawton walked over to him. Their eyes met for an instant.

A sharp report sounded: it smote his nerves with the weight of a mighty explosion.

"I'm quitting that job in the sump. You can put some other man down there," Lawton growled.

"What's wrong?" the foreman asked curtly. Lawton told him the story, with the exception of the attempt to escape by climbing out and the discovery of the missing lengths of ladder.

"If your hoist-man had been figuring on murdering me, he couldn't have done it any better," he added grimly. The foreman was gazing at the shaft-collar as if it held some secret which he would have liked to solve.

"Okay," he said. "You go to work in the north drift tomorrow."

One of the miners who was standing within earshot looked up at the announcement. He was still regarding the speaker with a mingling of surprise and disfavor when Lawton turned away. The foreman said no more; nor did he change his expression in the slightest, until the departing figure had passed through the crowd and was well beyond hearing. Then he edged closer to the miner, and spoke too quietly to be overheard:

"If he takes that job, it will be his last shift."

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Lawton left the shaft-collar, he was cherishing no illusions. He knew that the luck which had kept every one of those nine fuses from scraping the rocky sides of its narrow hole, was not going to abide with him always. And he did not believe for a single minute that he had managed to destroy suspicion among the men who had conspired to kill him. He had succeeded in reaching the surface, and that was all. As surely as he went underground again, or remained here in Rust Water, they were going to make new plans to put him out of the way; sooner or later they were going to get him.

The path from the shaft-collar went up the slope to the change-room. A short distance ahead of him another path branched off to the left, and this led to the hoist. All he needed to do was to go straight on, to get into his other clothes, and he would be down the hill before the members of the off-going shift had reached the surface. But he had declared his intention to have it out with the hoist-man, and there were a dozen in the group around the shaft-collar who would be watching him as he went up the hill. If he failed to carry out his threat, they would report it to the men underground. So he turned left.

For he was going to stick it out. He was not thinking of himself, but of Nancy; he had promised her he would do this.

IT still lacked five minutes of the change of shifts. Behind him a few tardy souls were hurrying down the path from the change-room to the shaft-collar; there was time for him to speak to the hoist-man before he was relieved. And this was what he wished—to confront the man before there was a chance for any other to have a word with him.

It was a little building where the hoist-man worked. Its sides and roof were of corrugated iron. On the wall opposite the doorway there was a wide

hole through which the cable stretched upward to the sheaves at the summit of the head-frame. On this wall there was a large brass gong, and near it a round iron disk; on the disk a pointer, which was moving like the hand of a clock, but the movement was much faster. The cable stretched from a huge drum, and this was revolving swiftly with a great noise of spinning gears which filled the little room. Near by the drum, with his back toward the open doorway, the hoist-man stood; one hand was on the throttle which controlled the power; the other hand clasped a huge lever.

The uproar of the gears had drowned the sound of Lawton's footsteps. He halted in the doorway. The revolving drum, and the progress of the needle around the circumference of the iron dial, told him that the skip was being raised to the surface. By the swiftness of their movement he knew that it was laden with ore.

The hoist-man stood like a statue; he was intent upon the dial where the pointer swung toward two chalk-marks, one denoting the shaft-collar, the other marking the ore-bin on the head-frame. As the pointer neared the former of these, the gong on the wall sounded a single sharp stroke. He was a tall young fellow, in the mid-twenties. A heavy face, the lips were parted and the eyes were fixed upon the dial across the room; they held the same dumb unquestioning concentration which one sees in the face of a good retriever dog seeking a bird at its master's bidding. There was nothing there which seemed to fit with cold-blooded murder.

The pointer on the dial had passed the mark which showed the shaft-collar; it was approaching the last sign. The tall young form swung forward; the extended arm moved back, and then the body with it. The left hand shut off the power. The uproar of the gears ceased; the crash of ore sounded from the head-frame as the skip tripped, unloading its contents into the bin. The cable vibrated slightly where it passed through the wide hole in the opposite wall. Lawton said:

"I want to talk with you."

The hoist-man glanced around. His face showed no change of expression. His eyes met Lawton's fairly; they were undisturbed. Then the gong sounded. Without speaking, he turned to his work; his hands were busy with the throttle and the lever. Lawton waited until the

empty skip had descended to the station at the hundred-foot level, and after it had come to a stop, he announced sharply:

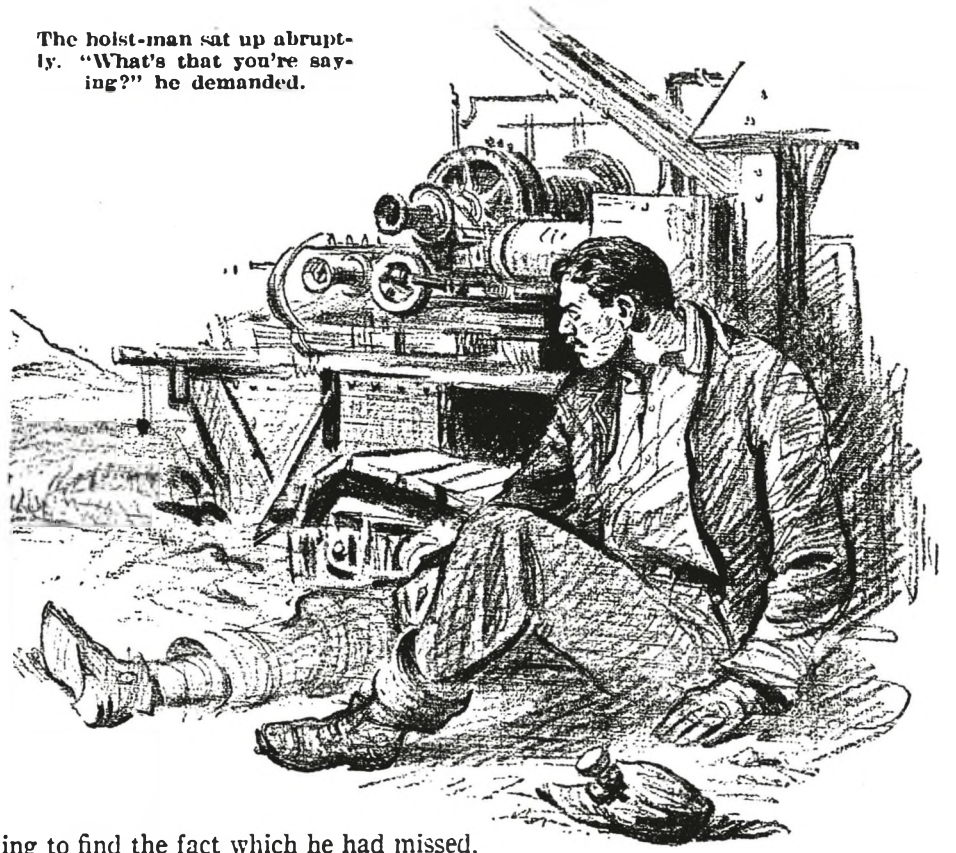
"I'm the man you tried to kill down in the sump."

The hoist-man's smile was wide. "'Pears like I didn't make it, buddy."

The gong signaled again; his eyes returned to the dial; his face resumed its intentness. Lawton watched him for a few moments with a puzzled frown; then he walked away into the darkness. There was a second path leading from the hoist directly to the town whose scattered lights were visible far down the hillside. It was by this route that the men who worked on the surface and did not use the change-room came back and forth from camp. He followed the narrow trail until it reached the foot of the waste-dump; then he sat down upon a huge fragment of wall rock to think.

There was no doubt of the serenity on that heavy face when he had proclaimed his identity. The fact that he was still alive and whole had not brought enough surprise to cause the flicker of an eyelid. The most hardened murderer would have betrayed more emotion if confronted unexpectedly by his intended victim. Some element there was in this situation, which Lawton had overlooked.

He reviewed the things which had taken place down there in the sump, try-



The hoist-man sat up abruptly. "What's that you're saying?" he demanded.

ing to find the fact which he had missed. He started with the departure of Tony in the skip, and he went over the details slowly: the lowering of the skip, the lighting of the fuses, the discovery that the skip was being taken away, his moment of indecision, the climb up the ladder, and then—

He understood it now. It was so simple that he wondered why he had not seen it when he looked into the hoist-man's face and found no sign of disturbance there. The sound of footsteps on the hillside above him told him that he had made the discovery just in time.

THE hoist-man halted when he saw the form that blocked the trail.

"It's you. I wondered where you'd gone." His voice was belligerent. He set his lunch-bucket down on the ground and came forward a step. "Well, what do you think you're going to do about it?"

"We'll see about that later," Lawton told him. "I'm not sure yet, whether I ought to tell you or just beat you up."

They were standing within a foot of each other, and they were looking into each other's eyes. The hoist-man was breathing thickly now. He said:

"You dirty spy!" He swung with his right fist as he spoke; the blow would have ended the fight right then if it had landed, but Lawton jerked his head aside, and it merely glanced from his shoulder. He was leaning forward as he crossed with his left. The hoist-man's knees sagged; Lawton's right fist swept to his body, and he went down. He was lashing out blindly when he got to his feet. Lawton ducked and stepped inside the flying arms; he felt his knuckles sting as he landed his next blow.

"Okay," he growled. "You were looking for it."

The hoist-man was hiccuping in the darkness where he had fallen. Lawton found him, dragged him back to the trail. He heard a sudden movement of the other's limbs, and he said:

"Stay where you are until you feel able to answer questions." The hoist-man swore. Lawton made no reply. A minute passed. The crash of an unladen car came down to them from the head-frame.

"You can talk now?" Lawton asked.

"Not to you," the other answered thickly.

Lawton laughed. "Then you can listen." His voice was easy now. "The idea was, that when I lit those fuses, you should take the skip away, before I had time to make it. Is that right?"

"So what?" the hoist-man growled.

"So, when I started to climb to the station," Lawton went on quietly, "and got about thirty feet above the sump, I found the rest of the ladder had been removed."

THE hoist-man sat up abruptly. "Wh-what's that you're saying?" he demanded.

"The rest of the ladder had been taken away," Lawton repeated sharply. "And Tony had cut the fuses short—"

"The murdering—" The bloody lips spat epithets. "You're telling me the truth?"

"I'm telling you the truth. You didn't know they were going to take away the ladder? Is that right?"

"I didn't know!" The voice was shaking with sincerity.

"You were getting your cut," Lawton went on, "out of the high-grading. They passed you the word that I was probably a spy for Jim Henry, and that they were going to scare me off. They told you what to do, and when you did it, you thought I'd be scared out—that I'd go down the hill and not show up again. You didn't know that you were mixed up in an attempt at murder."

"If this is straight," the hoist-man demanded, "how did you get out?"

"I pulled the fuses." Lawton told him the story in full. "It was a long chance," he added.

"A long chance! You said it." The other swore. "The murderers!" He laid his hand on Lawton's arm. "I'd never have stood for that."

"If they'd pulled it off," Lawton reminded him, "you'd have had to stand for it. You'd have been in it, right to the neck, the same as the others."

"I was up against it when I got this job." The hoist-man was talking swiftly now. "I'd been working on the Mother Lode, and I had bad luck. The skip went up to the head-frame, and there was two men riding in it. It was the bell; it had been missing strokes for a week. But that didn't do me any good. And there I was, flat, me with a wife and two small kids. Then Hanley, the shift-boss, got me on here. It was him told me there was a chance for a little easy money, if I kept my mouth shut and followed orders. It wasn't much I got; sometimes the velvet went as high as twenty bucks a week. All I had to do was let a man come up, once every night, without giving the whistle to the watchman. And anyhow there wasn't any out—it was either that or lose my job. High-grading—that don't mean a terrible lot. But this is different."

"Tomorrow," Lawton told him, "I'm going to work in the north drift. It may be my last chance. If I knew what time the man with the high-grade comes up with the skip—and if I could ride up, just before he goes, without you sounding the whistle—"

"He goes a few minutes after they blast. And I'll do that for you," the hoist-man said. "I'll do more if you ask. I'll quit my job the next day."

"No need for that." Lawton laid his hand on the young fellow's shoulder. "You stick, and in a few days, we'll have this bunch cleaned out. And now we'll go down the hill."

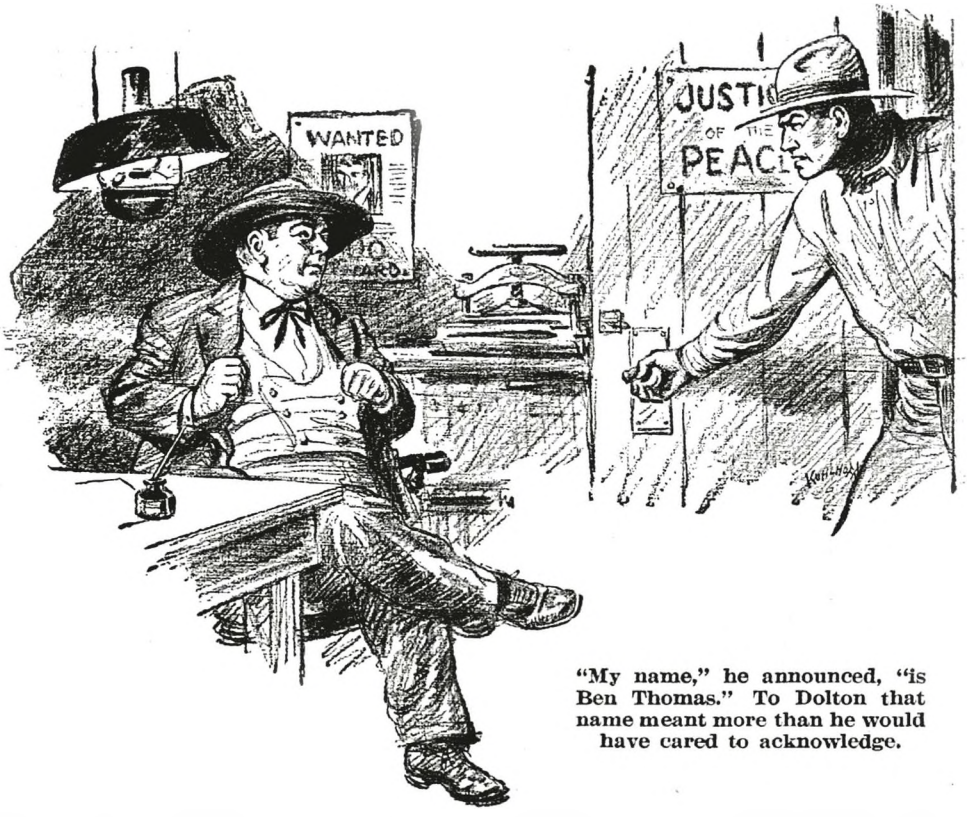
CHAPTER XII

SOMETIMES, when various men are working along diverse lines for the accomplishment of their projects, it happens that the things which they have done accumulate, until their very number makes them dangerous. They have piled up, like a load of water behind a dam; and when the first break comes, the entire flood bursts forth. Then events move so swiftly that it needs a cool head to keep pace with them.

In Rust Water, on the next evening when Lawton was working his first—and only—shift in the north drift, matters had come to such a pass. The several events, which were in full process before the hour of midnight, were never fully known except to a few persons.

As is usually the case in such denouements, some of these events were transpiring simultaneously, although their localities were separate; and as is also so often true, the most vital was apparently of small consequence. It came about two hours before midnight.

Dolton, the justice of the peace, happened to be in his office at the moment. As a matter of fact, he was killing time, for he had business on hand which would take him abroad at eleven o'clock, and there was no use in seeking his cabin, which was at the upper end of the camp, during the interval. So he was leaning



"My name," he announced, "is Ben Thomas." To Dolton that name meant more than he would have cared to acknowledge.

back in the unpainted chair, with his feet, on the battered secondhand desk over which he occasionally dealt out what he was pleased to term as justice to the town's minor malefactors; and he was munching tobacco industriously, when a car drove up the winding street and halted before the building.

It was a new car of expensive make, but the casual observer would not be likely to guess at either fact, for the gray dust of the Nevada sage-brush flats lay upon it in a thick coating, and the rock outcrop along the flanks of more than one gulch had left deep scars on the fenders. Its occupant was clad in khaki-colored trousers and shirt; his thick calves were encased in laced boots. Wind and sun had stained his face a deep dull red; and there was anger in his eyes as he alighted in the dusty path before Rust Water's Temple of Justice. He flung open the door, and stood upon the threshold, scowling. "My name," he announced, "is Ben Thomas."

DOLTON removed his feet from the desk. To him that name meant more than he would have cared to acknowledge, but the face he turned to his visitor was as devoid of expression as a pine board. He waited long enough to rid himself of an exhausted cud before he replied:

"Come in. I've heard of you. You own the mine at Seven Troughs."

"The mine and mill." Thomas seated himself with the abruptness of one who needs physical vent for his emotions. "I'm on my way to town—to see the sheriff. I thought I might as well drive by and let you know. Somebody's walked off with my mill."

Dolton swore softly, regarding him in mild amazement. "Walked off with your mill?"

"I mean exactly what I'm saying. Took everything but the building. It's a twenty-five-ton mill. The mine's been shut down this last six months. I had a watchman there, but he's disappeared. Not hearing anything from him, I drove out this afternoon—and found the place gutted."

"Sounds funny," Dolton murmured.

"Maybe it does to you. Me, I can't see the joke." The visitor's frown bore witness to the truth of his assertion.

"To get away with a whole stamp mill!" Dolton said mildly.

"It's a ball mill," Thomas corrected him. "That makes it a little easier. Three truckloads would have done the business. Judging by what's left of the tracks, that's what they did—made three trips. The trail shows plainly enough as far as the gravel road; and there—of course—it quits."

"Ought to be easy to trace a thing like that." Dolton opened a desk drawer and brought out a sheet of paper; he found a pencil in his pocket. "You can't hide a lot of machinery without leaving some signs. Now, if you'll give me a description of the stuff—"

FIFTEEN minutes later the door closed behind the visitor; when the sound of the latter's motor was growing faint, Dolton rose from his chair. His movements were not unhurried now; and his face was no longer wooden. He made his way to the tie cabin at the lower end of the winding street. It was sometime past ten o'clock when he knocked at the door. . . .

It was a little after half-past ten when Sloan gave the justice of the peace a last word by way of instructions and watched him depart. For several minutes then, Sloan paced up and down the length of the room, his hands clasped behind him, his lips pressed so tightly that his mouth looked like a huge crescent-shaped scar.

"There's time enough," he strove to reassure himself. "The sheriff won't start out until tomorrow morning, and it will be afternoon before he gets as far as Seven Troughs." But this was not his first experience, and he knew too well how swiftly all the elaborate fabric of a nicely woven conspiracy can unravel. His face was calm when he left the cabin and got into his car; to one or two roisterers who spied him from saloon doorways, he looked the picture of prosperous security as he drove up the winding road toward the buildings of the Rust Water Con. But the light of panic was lurking behind his lowered eyelids.

In this manner one chain of events was set in motion by the news which Ben Thomas had brought to Rust Water, and at the same time when these occurrences were beginning to gather momentum, other things were taking place in the town. Not the least important of these was going on at Jim Henry's house.

IT was the only building in the town to boast a coat of paint, a one-story bungalow, with a wide screened porch which overlooked the entire hillside and the flatlands below. Nancy Henry was seated here, in one of those swinging chairs which have supplanted the hammocks of the last generation, and she was gazing at the scattered lights below her, thinking of her father, wondering how things were going with him now. He would lose all, unless he raised the money he was seeking. This crowning disappointment would be too much for him. If Lawton would only find something now while there was time—

The woman who did the housework was coming through the living-room; she was more of a friend than a servant, the widow of a small stock-man who had lived near them down on the Humboldt, a tall woman, big-boned, with stooping shoulders, and on her face the deep lines of worry were like the scars of battle.

She paused in the doorway.

"One of them men went by just now," she said. "He was looking for Barclay. There's been an accident." Her voice was steady; and to Nancy it seemed, for some reason, like the voice of fate. "Two men in a raise; a car of ore was dumped on them; they were killed, both of them."

Nancy heard her own voice asking:

"Who were they?" The answer came slowly, and it seemed to her as she was waiting for the names, that her heart had stopped. She knew—for what reason she could not understand, but the knowledge was there—what one of those names would be. And now the voice from the doorway was saying:

"Hanley, the shift-foreman; and the other was a new hand; they took him on the other day. . . . Lawton. That's the name—yes, Lawton."

Nancy made no reply, and the woman turned away; her heavy step receded through the living-room; a door slammed within the house, and then there was silence. The girl opened her eyes; she breathed again.

Lawton. . . . the young fellow who had stood in the hot sunshine where the one-way road passed through the pale sand dunes; she was seeing his face and the smile with which he answered her thanks when she speeded up her roadster to pass his car a few moments later; and again his face came before her mind, tightened with gravity; she heard him saying: "Yes, I think that I can help." It was that night in the old shed by the abandoned ranch-house beside the gulch, less than a week ago.

It seemed to her a long time while she sat here. Until the moment she rose, she had not realized how much Lawton had meant to her, how firm a place he had taken in her scheme of living. And now he was gone. They had got him, as they had got the hapless man whose body she had seen in his car that night of the cloudburst. And she had asked him to do this;

she had asked him, and he had not hesitated for an instant; he had given her his word.

"Yes. I think that I can help." And when he was saying it, he must have realized exactly what the undertaking meant; he must have seen the danger, as she should have seen it herself!

She was on her feet now, looking at the cluster of lights on the ridge two hundred yards away. The messenger would have gone to Barclay's office. And by this time the superintendent would know the news. And the thought brought her mind back to her father, for whom this sacrifice was made.

HER sorrow was still with her, a poignant presence; but the knowledge that this errand which she had given Lawton to perform, which he had risked without a word of remonstrance, still remained to be done, was spurring her on now. For she came of a stock which did not give up readily; she had been brought up in a land where the women had learned to carry on when their menfolk were gone.

There still remained one man who might be able to help. She crossed the porch and hurried down the steps. The lights were showing the windows of the superintendent's office. Barclay would be there. And if she hastened, she would reach him before he went down to the shaft-collar to look after the details which the accident had entailed.

For some reason she had not liked Barclay. And because of this dislike, she had never spoken to him of her father's problems. But this was no time, she told herself, for giving way to her feelings.

She must tell him the whole story; and when he understood the reason why she had asked him to put Lawton on the payroll, then he would know—as she knew—that this tragedy which had taken place was not the result of accident. With his eyes open to the facts, there was the chance that he might discover something which otherwise he would overlook. . . .

The office of the superintendent occupied a one-story wooden building. There were two rooms, one in the front and the other in the rear; and there was an entrance from the front. The rear room was used by Barclay as a sort of private sanctum; the other and the larger was the one where general business of the mine was transacted.

No one was here. She was about to call Barclay's name when the sound of voices in the rear room checked her. She stood there for a moment, hesitant. Then she recognized Sloan's voice, and the words froze her to immobility.

CHAPTER XIII

BARCLAY was at the desk in his private office when Sloan came up the hill. It had been his intention to catch up with some back work this evening, and he had spent an hour in the large front room, bending over some profiles on the long drawing-table, but his mind refused to concentrate on the task. For the last few days the imminence of his own affairs had been monopolizing all his thoughts, and tonight he hoped to find some relief by centering his attention on the new crosscut which they were going to drive when the shaft reached the two-hundred-foot level. At last he realized it was no use; he left the drawings spread out on the table, and he went into the back office; he closed the door and sat down before his desk, to face the torturing of his imagination.

This was his first departure from honest dealings, but he was in one respect unlike most men who are new to the ways of crime and criminals, for there was nothing trusting in his nature. He was a quiet-spoken man, and behind the taciturn exterior, there lurked a suspicion of anyone with whom he happened to be doing business at the time. This he had always managed to conceal until he met the man who called himself by the name of Sloan; and from the first these two recognized, in each other, a common trait. There is an old saying, "honor among thieves,"—but neither of them cherished that fallacy.

It was on the night of the cloudburst that this cynical outlook began to make Barclay restless. As long as the ore-stealing had been going on without any complications, the plan had seemed secure, but the murder of the hoist-man and the events which followed it had awakened him to the realization that the intricacies of Sloan's scheme spelled danger; there were too many men involved to suit him; let something happen like this killing, with its attendant blundering, and someone was going to talk. All it needed was a slight accident to set the whole structure of conspiracy to tumbling, like a row of cards which have been stood on edge and will collapse at the touch of a finger.

And there was Lawton. When Nancy Henry had asked him to put the new man

to work he had acquiesced because there was nothing else to do. The presence of a mining-engineer underground just now was enough to arouse his fears; and on top of that the high-graders had been warned against Lawton by the justice of the peace—which meant another murder in the offing. . . . Whenever Barclay thought of this, the sweat came out on his forehead.

And always this thought brought to his mind the picture of Sloan's face when the latter received the news that Lawton was on the pay-roll. It was just for a moment that Sloan had held that look, but whenever Barclay remembered it he turned a little cold. He was going to be glad when the whole thing was over and he was done with Sloan.

For he meant to be done. That idea had been growing stronger during the last few days. It had taken possession of him. Just how he was going to accomplish this, he did not know. But he did know that a man whose face could take on that cold murderous expression, would never hesitate, no matter whom he had to sacrifice, once he thought himself in danger. Sooner or later he must free himself of this entanglement—and the sooner the better.

HE was sitting at the desk, staring at a powder-company's calendar on the wall, and he had gone over the entire business from the beginning—the same old details which he had reviewed a hundred times during these last few days. He had arrived at the inevitable conclusion: Get free from Sloan. . . . He heard the outer door open. A heavy footstep sounded in the next room. He called:

"Who's that?" The footsteps came on across the floor, and the man entered. It was one of the muckers from the north drift; the dust was thick on his digging clothes; his carbide lamp was still burning. His face wore a peculiar expression; and the eyes lingered ever so briefly on Barclay's, then they dropped.

"Two men killed." The mucker glanced at Barclay again, and looked away at once. "It was in the raise. They were bringing a machine down from the stope, and some one dumped a load of ore. It got 'em both."

"Who?" Barclay's throat was so dry that he had to repeat the question before it was audible.

"Hanley and the new man. Lawton's his name." He raised his eyes and held them on Barclay's with an effort which was all too evident. "They're in the ore-car under the chute. You can see the foreman's feet."

For some reason which he could not understand Barclay felt a little ill. Such tidings were not a new story with him; he had worked in the mines of this western country ever since he was a youth. But this time it was different—

He heard himself saying: "Tell them to bring the car to the station. Don't meddle with anything. I'll send word to the justice of the peace." He was cool now. "It's a case for the coroner."

The door closed, the man departed. And Barclay sat staring at the wall.

TWO of them killed! That was how things went. Always some unexpected complication—some accident which marred the plan. He wondered what had happened in that raise. How had Hanley come to die along with the intended victim? For that was the way it must have been arranged—Lawton was to have gone to his death by one of those accidents which are so easy to explain. Then the plan had miscarried for some unknown reason. He could see the pair of them in the narrow hole which led up through the solid rock; the shift-boss and the victim. And the men in the cavernous stope above them. Probably there was to have been a signal given. And then, at the last moment, something had gone wrong.

That was the way it had been the other time. A man had blundered then. And the chances were a man had blundered tonight. It would be so the next time—

Or maybe there would be no next time. Maybe this was the mistake which would set the whole row of cards to falling, which would send them all,—the miners who were stealing the ore, the justice of the peace, the truck-driver, Ball, Sloan,—the whole crowd,—seeking safety, every man for himself. He sat there staring at the calendar and saw again Sloan's face, with that ugly look in the eyes. This was a man who would never hesitate when it came to choosing means by which to save himself! . . . .

He had not heard the footfall in the other room; he was not conscious of another's presence until the door swung open and he looked around. Sloan was standing on the threshold; it was no figment of fancy this time. Barclay said:

"Lawton was killed, and Hanley along with him."

Sloan nodded; it was the only movement in his whole body. Then he closed the door behind him.

"The two of them?" He shrugged his shoulders then. "Well, we've got rid of Lawton anyhow."

It was those words that Nancy heard. They held her motionless. But there was no surprise in this blow which had struck her. It was as if, without being conscious of it, she had been expecting to learn of Barclay's turpitude. Now she understood why she had never liked him.

The knowledge that she was alone now, that there was none to whom she could turn for help, had taken the strength from her limbs and left her numb. She stood gazing at the door through which the voices of the two men came, and she was dimly conscious of the words at first; then she began to hear more clearly and, as she listened, the numbness passed; alertness returned.

The two men in the other room were looking into each other's eyes. Sloan dropped into a chair; he took out his handkerchief and wiped the drops of perspiration from his forehead.

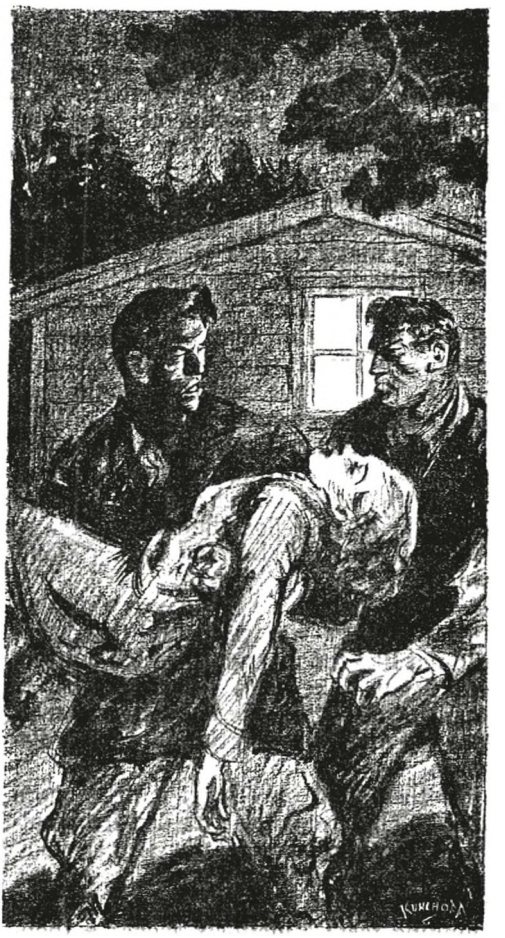
"Another of these sticky nights." His voice had turned fretful. Barclay did not appear to notice the remark.

"We're rid of Lawton. Yes. But I don't like the way things are going. Those fellows always manage to make a mistake—"

"Forget it," Sloan interrupted sharply. "We've not got time to sit here growling about that bunch of miners. I've got some news for you. Ben Thomas went to Seven Troughs today and found what's happened to his mill. He's on his way to the sheriff's office now and by this time tomorrow night there'll be a half a dozen deputies combing down this end of the country."

Barclay uttered a choked exclamation. The color had drained from his face. Sloan repeated the story which the justice of the peace had told him. While he was talking he was thinking of Barclay's fear; he knew the possibilities of treachery which it entailed, and he was wishing that there were some way in which he could carry through the final details of their plan without this other's aid; but that was impossible. "And now," he said when the recital was ended, "you and I have got to start moving right away."

WHEN Nancy had heard Sloan's first words she was inside the open doorway; she had come further into the room now and she was standing before the wide drafting-table, with her hands resting on the profiles over which Barclay had been working a short time before. She turned swiftly and started for the open door.



"We're going in my car," Sloan said. "We're taking her along."

Barclay was speaking; she could not understand what he was saying, but when the shark-faced man replied the words came clearly, and Nancy halted, listening.

"No sense in letting yourself get frightened, Barclay." Sloan's voice held evident scorn. And he never let his eyes leave the other's face as he went on: "I gave Dolton his orders. He's picking up a sack or two of high-grade right now. He's taking the truck. There's just about five tons of ore out there—ninety-six sacks. He says that he can haul it over and have it unloaded by three o'clock. Ninety-six sacks." His voice was thoughtful. "That stuff should average a thousand dollars a sack—"

"How did it happen Thomas came to Rust Water?" Barclay asked. "Do you suppose he got some lead that brought him here?"

I'm not wasting time trying to figure why Thomas came—or what the sheriff is going to do," Sloan answered curtly. "I'm figuring on keeping at least one jump ahead of them. You looked the mill over last night?"

"I was there till daylight," Barclay told him. "Everything's in place. It's all ready to make the run. I wish," he added swiftly, "it was done now."

"It won't be long." Sloan rose and his chair scraped the floor as he thrust it back. "We're starting right away—you and I. We can put the last sack through and make the clean-up by dawn. We'll take the amalgam back to camp and you can do the retorting tomorrow night. Then the sheriff is welcome to what he finds—if he ever does find the place."

"He'll find it," Barclay said. "Don't worry."

"Okay. Let him." Sloan was thinking this prophecy was probably true. He did not like the manner in which matters had begun to come to a head any better than Barclay did. He knew how narrow was the margin separating him from disaster. . . .

If there had only been a little more time! That was all he needed for winding up the necessary details. But the mischance of Ben Thomas' discovery had made it necessary to act at once. He was thinking fast: Ninety-six sacks; a thousand dollars a sack; ninety-six thousand dollars.

"Better than doing time," he reflected.

It was not what he had hoped for; it did not approach the golden visions in which he had indulged when he first embarked on his large project. But a man can do a great deal with ninety-six thousand dollars.

"And leave this fellow to hold the bag," he told himself. Then he said:

"Come on. Let's get going."

But Barclay was staring at the closed door. His lips moved; the words barely reached Sloan's ears:

"There's some one out there."

THE sound of the chair scraping across the floor made Nancy turn to flee. She was hurriedly crossing the floor on tiptoe when she heard a footfall outside. She halted and stood irresolute. Someone was coming up the steps.

She drew a deep breath and as she hurried on, a man confronted her in the doorway; it was one of the miners and he stopped upon the threshold, regarding her curiously as she brushed by him. She ran across the porch and as she plunged into the darkness she heard the door of the inner room open with a bang. Then her ankle turned on a stone and she sank down on the dry earth. A stab of pain made her wince as she was getting to her feet. Barclay's voice came through the open doorway:

"Well, what do you want?"

The miner was starting to answer when Sloan demanded:

"Was anyone in this room when you came?"

That was as far as Nancy heard. The twisted ankle was paining badly and it took all her will power to keep moving as she slipped away through the night.

IN the outer office Sloan and Barclay were listening to the miner's statement of his brief encounter with Nancy. The speaker was frankly bewildered.

Sloan shrugged.

"She must have been frightened by something," he was saying calmly. "I think I'd better go look for her. Stay here, Barclay, and 'tend to this man. I'll be back directly."

He was on his way toward the door while he said the last words, and there was no hurry in his movements as he crossed the veranda. He did not increase his pace as he went down the pathway; and after the darkness had enfolded him he halted; he stood there for some moments, listening. Then a slight sound caught his ear; he smiled as he ran toward the place whence it had come.

The hard earth along the hillside had been gouged out into little gullies by the heavy rain of the other night and it was one of these pitfalls that had caught Nancy the second time. At the sight of Sloan's big form in the doorway panic had seized her and she was trying to run when the disaster happened. She was lying in a little heap when he came upon her.

She made no sound; she did not move; as he bent over her, he saw that she had fainted.

He was still standing beside her when the miner hurried out across the porch, and after the man had vanished down the path which led to the shaft-collar, Sloan leaned down and lifted the girl in his arms. So he was holding her when Barclay reached him.

"We're going in my car," Sloan said. "We're taking her along."

The exciting climax of this fine novel will appear in the next, the October, issue.

The Way to Freedom

Two stories each come to a dramatic climax here: one the story of the strange escape of a Briton from France; and the other—but read for yourself.

By GORDON KEYNE

Smith took the letter. "I'll read it when my parole is up," he said.

THE trusty guiding Cotterel—who required no guide—looked at him with unfeigned envy. "How does it feel to be back in stir, but a free man?"

Cotterel laughed. "Not so good, if you want to know. I had to come back, to see Manning. The Warden says he's not so good."

The trusty shook his head. "Nope. They took old Finger Tricks to the hospital yesterday. He went to pieces after you left. I guess he just don't want to live. There's the doc now. He can take you along."

The prison doctor shook hands with Cotterel. They all knew him here, knew he had been here for months, knew he had been found guiltless and pardoned out. They all had warm looks for him.

"Come along." The doctor nodded. "You have permission, of course—oh, as long as you like! Good. You'll cheer the old fellow up. Can you talk with him?"

"I was his cell-mate for months," said Cotterel simply.

Finger Tricks—a good name for the old forger, a doubly good nickname. He was in for life, and it would not be long now. In a bad way, said the doctor. What his lungs needed was Arizona air, high and dry. He was in hospital merely for tests, not because of disability; not yet.

Cotterel shivered a little. Then his shoulders squared, and he smiled once more, gayly, hopefully, cheerfully; old Manning must be cheered up. . . .

They were alone together in the big ward; no other patients here, as it chanced. Prepared as he was, Cotterel was shocked by the change in his old friend. Manning's gray features were lined and drawn and tired; his sunken eyes were less bright than of old. His long, slender fingers, the fingers of a born artist, the fingers of a forger, were nimble as ever, however.

The joy in his face, his eyes, his hands, was a thing electric.

"Heard a few days ago you were not so well off," said Cotterel, sitting down. Smoking was allowed here. He produced cigarettes.

"I'm done," said Manning. "It's the finish, boy."

His fingers spoke for him. During many years Manning had been dumb, due to throat trouble, and Cotterel, his cell-mate, had learned the finger-talk; it

had come in handy many times when no talking was allowed. He did not need to use it now, however.

"Manning, you did a lot for me when I was in here," he said abruptly. "You did every possible thing one man can do for another."

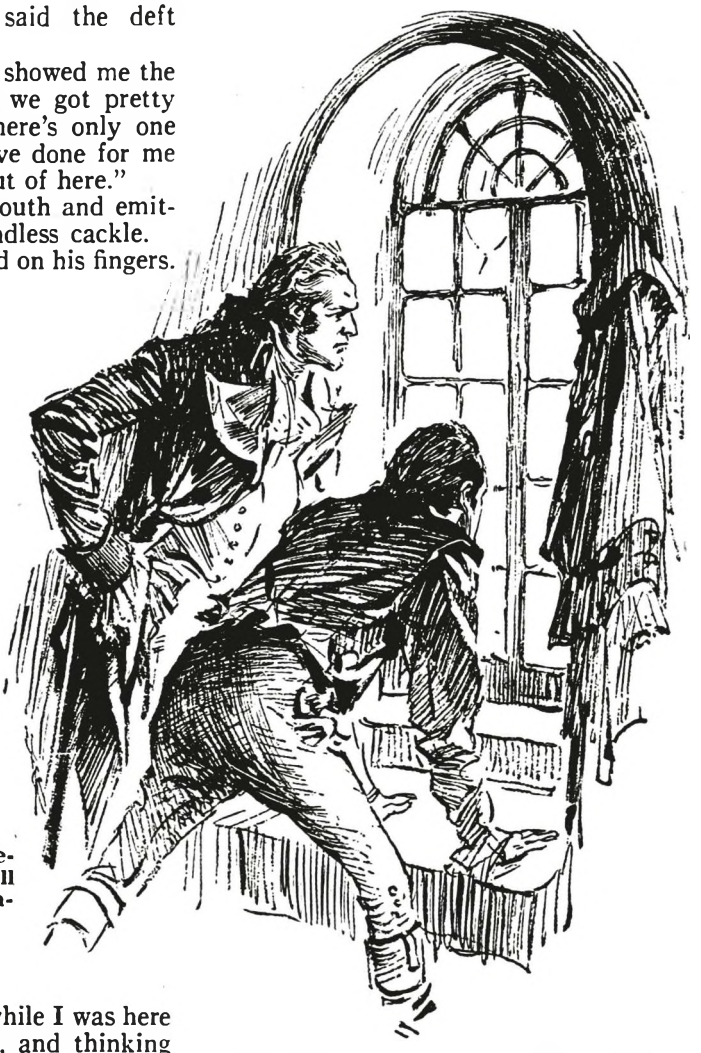
"Steered you right," said the deft fingers.

"More than that. You showed me the real man inside of you; we got pretty close, in those days. There's only one way I can repay all you've done for me—that's by getting you out of here."

Manning opened his mouth and emitted a hoarse, almost soundless cackle.

"Escape? Me?" he said on his fingers. "Don't talk foolishness."

Illustrated by
L. F. Grant



"Go and enjoy yourself below," Smith murmured. "I'll think up some way to communicate with her."

"And," said Cotterel, "while I was here and half out of my head, and thinking day and night of escape, you held me back with your wisdom. Your stories of other escapes. Did you ever hear of Sir Sydney Smith?"

Manning frowned. Well-educated, talented, versatile, Manning had been unable to escape his one weakness, the one great gift so terribly misused. He was a gentle, kindly man; his real affection had kept Cotterel from going mad in this same prison.

Now he said slowly:

"I vaguely recall the name; a British admiral, I think. Wasn't he the man who beat Napoleon at Acre and changed the whole destiny of the Corsican?"

Cotterel nodded, with a sudden flashing smile.

"So there's something I can teach you, is there?" he observed. "Yes, you've got the right man in mind. Sir Sydney was a brusque, forcible and forthright seaman; also, he was a gentleman, willing to endanger his whole career to avoid dishonor. Well, he learned something when he was a young captain, the most dashing and popular captain in the fleet. He learned something that you should learn, that you must learn."

Manning smiled. "My friend," said his flying fingers, "I see that you're giving me a dose of my own medicine. Yes, I'm willing to learn. But nothing will do me any good now—nothing."

This evidence of a despondent, hopeless heart touched Cotterel deeply.

"That's what Sir Sydney felt too. Back in 1796, when the French Revo-

lution had passed its bloodiest height, when the Directory was in power, when Bonaparte's star was rising brilliantly, Sir Sydney didn't know the lesson of the simplest way; but he learned it."

"The simplest way?" Manning's head came up. His sunken eyes searched Cotterel with sudden swift alertness. "You mean, of escape?"

"Precisely. And God helping me. I mean to teach you that lesson if I can," said Cotterel solemnly. "The simplest way! But let me tell you about Sir Sydney. He had led a boat raid far up the Seine River, into the very heart of France, when he was captured; with him was a French nobleman, the Marquis de Talfort, exiled and sentenced to death by the revolutionary government. Luckily, Talfort was not recognized by their captors; he adopted the position of Sir Sydney's servant and the fantastic dress of a jockey. As the jockey and valet, John, who pretended to speak little or no French, he remained with Sir Sydney. The ignorance of the French regarding English customs and manners was extreme; the people in power at that time, remember, were not people of education and knowledge.

"The Directory were overjoyed at Smith's capture. They declared him to be a spy and had him sent to Paris. There, for two years, he was most rigorously confined in the Temple, the former prison of the royal family. Every effort of the British Government to effect his release or exchange was flatly refused. But you must see those two men in their prison, in this historic and terrible Temple. It was a tiny place, able to hold only a very few prisoners—"

A TINY place indeed, a tower with a wall about it, six hundred years old; a tower and wall and garden, and outside it the city encroaching closely—noisome tenements, huddled old structures that housed workmen and loose women. A little tower, a hundred and fifty feet high, the last relic of the once glorious stronghold of the Templars.

Here, then, was Sir Sydney, in the second year of his captivity; a handsome, fluent, vivacious man of thirty, a man filled with the ardent flame of reckless adventure, and quartered in the very rooms from which Louis XVI had gone to death four years previously. With him was Talfort, his supposed valet, now passing by the name of John; a merry soul, gay and clever, a fascinating man liked by everyone, always wearing his extravagant costume of jockey's buckskin breeches and boots—facing immediate death if that disguise were penetrated.

Such men are not to be contained by iron bars.

DURING the weary months they had planned escape with tortuous care. Three other men confined in the Temple, dangerous royalists, had joined in the attempt. But one of them had turned traitor at the last moment. Now, in the high room whose barred window overlooked the street and the tenements opposite, Sir Sydney sat in the utmost dejection.

"No use," he said despondently. "Now they watch us more closely than ever; our every movement is noted; our very food is inspected. What was difficult before, has now become impossible."

The valet John, who had been sitting for a long time at the window, turned to him.

"Bah! Don't let them break your spirit, my friend. Look at me! They

take me for a servant. They give me liberties. I can drink with the guards, eat in the kitchen, make love to the jailer's daughter! And she's not so bad, I give you my word. Something may yet come of it."

Sir Sydney's lips twitched.

"A good thing your wife's in England, you rascal!"

"Madame la Marquise," said John under his breath, "is sitting at a window opposite, looking at me."

Smith's head jerked up. Luckily, he was too astounded to speak, for at the moment steps sounded at the door. A guard had come to look in through the wicket at the two prisoners; they were

"None of that. Trying to attract their attention, are you? Stop it."

Alone again, Smith looked at his companion. His dejection was gone. Hope had flared up anew; schemes, stratagems, possibilities, surged within him.

"Go and enjoy yourself down below," he murmured. "I'll think up some way to communicate with her. Ah! I have it! Call in the guard."

THE guard appeared promptly. Smith pointed to the two windows, and begged for some old newspapers with which to kill the flies that were abundant.

"Kill them with your hands like other people, aristocrat," guffawed the soldier.

watched at all times. When the steps retreated, Smith ventured a word.

"Is this a joke?"

"Come and see."

Smith sauntered to the window. It was midsummer, beastly hot, and flies were everywhere. Looking out and down at the houses opposite, his gaze came to rest upon a broken window at which sat a woman, knitting. She looked up, and made a gesture. Her face, despite the frowsy shawl which framed it, was intelligent, handsome, lovely. Smith made a gesture, and she replied.

"Here, what are you doing?" The door was flung open, and a guard clumped in. "Whom are you looking at, there?"

Smith turned, with a smile, and pointed to the street where children were playing. The surly guard looked down, and grunted.

"A spy needn't be afraid to soil his hands!"

"Very well," said Sir Sydney, and going to the window, fell to work at the flies. "Ha! John, I've discovered a new amusement. Thanks, my good soldier, thanks!"

The guard laughed; John departed to the kitchen, and Sir Sydney went on with his amusement. Inside of an hour, he had reached an understanding with the woman at the window across the way.

Within three or four days, the two of them had formulated a code of signals which permitted exchange of messages.

So closely had houses encroached upon the Temple, that at one point outside the little garden where the prisoners took daily exercise, a narrow little street barely ten feet wide separated the old tenements from the nine-foot-thick wall.

It was at this point the project of escape was aimed.

One afternoon as the prisoners, a scant half-dozen in all, were walking about the little garden, Smith stopped to converse with one of the others. Immediately a guard charged down upon them roughly, seized them, and shoved them apart.

"No talking allowed, you rascals!" he roared. "Keep apart, or back to your rooms you'll go!"

Smith, as he was shoved violently away from the other, felt the folded paper thrust into his hand by the guard, and slipped it out of sight.

Later he got a moment to look at the writing before chewing up the paper:

That particular guard was bribed, and might perhaps be trusted. A tunnel was being dug beneath the street at the narrow point designated. It would be slow work; patience!

He told John, that night; the two men rejoiced together.

A VERY singular relation existed between Sir Sydney and the chief jailer, Lasne, who was a ferocious republican and an implacable prison chief, but who was accustomed to deal with the nobility. For the Englishman he had conceived a high respect, frequently inviting him to dinner—for which Smith paid well—and treating him with courtesy.

One hot, sweltering evening, Lasne astonished his prisoner.

"It is insufferable here, monsieur. If I might have your word of honor not to

The mason, whether by design or accident, had pierced through the wall!

so much as think of escape, I'll conduct you past the guards and give you an hour on the boulevards."

Smith's jaw fell, till he perceived that the offer was serious.

"Upon my word of honor!" he said. "I'll not even think of escape."

Fifteen minutes later he was wandering the streets of Paris, free.

Incredible as it may seem, this offer was repeated more than once. Orders came every now and then to redouble the severity of the prison regulations, and Lasne obeyed them harshly. None the less, he allowed Sir Sydney an hour or two of absolute freedom, always upon the same promise.

One evening as Smith strolled at liberty, a man came up to him, addressed him by name, stating he was from the Marquise de Talfort and wished to speak with him.

"That is impossible," said Sir Sydney. "I can communicate only from within the Temple—I have given my word."

"Then take this letter, read it, give me an answer."

Smith took the letter and pocketed it. "I'll read it when my parole is up, and give a reply in the usual way," he said, and turned back.

A man capable of such quixotic honor would be capable of anything. Lasne knew this very well, and made up for his periods of indulgence by redoubled severity when Smith was not on parole.

WEEKS passed. By means of the bribed guard and the window-signals, Smith was kept in touch with the progress of the work across the way, proceeding slowly but surely. The Marquise was in touch with several royalist agents, who had flung themselves into the task of freeing the prisoners of the Temple.

A charming young woman with a child, who had numerous gentleman callers, leased the entire building opposite the garden wall. Her callers came frequently and remained long, which would certainly have attracted unfavorable attention anywhere else in the world; revolutionary Paris, however, had discarded all moral and other inhibitions.

These callers were or had been gentlemen, which was a very bad thing for the enterprise in hand. However ardent or patriotic a gentleman may be, when it comes to digging a tunnel from a cellar beneath a street and under a wall on the other side, he is extremely liable to error, as any ditch-digger knows. There are occasional advantages in not being a gentleman, in the world of practical affairs.

The tunnel lengthened, and there was no suspicion. Sir Sydney, over on the other side of the wall, was filled with hope and eagerness. His valet John, however, was rather skeptical.

"If you can get word to them," he advised, "tell them to put a mason on the job, even at the risk of raising suspicion."

Smith managed the message, and the Marquise, at her broken window opposite, signaled that it would be done; also that the tunnel was nearly finished, and would be broken through the next evening. Be ready to escape at once!

Here, then, came in sight the end of these long weeks of suspense. One more day! Then escape into the seething turmoil of Paris, disguise, evasion to the frontier, and rescue! Two years of imprisonment, of harsh treatment lightened only by occasional favors, were at an end. The volatile Smith could hardly contain himself.

NEXT morning, in the cellar of the house across the way, a mason was brought into the affair, properly blinded by gold. He consulted with the gentleman laborers, and gave his opinion that while their tunnel was the proper length, he thought it ran too low in the ground. He was promptly engaged to work all day on the job and bring it to a proper finish—but not, of course, to pierce through the other side. That must be reserved for the hours of darkness.

So the mason fell to work. Hours later, he came upon stone, as he worked at the end of the tunnel, and began to remove the stone. It did not occur to anyone concerned that the tunnel, instead of being too low, might be too high.

Smith, that afternoon, was taking his exercise in the garden with the other prisoners, under the eye of watchful guards. One of these guards was stationed beside the high wall that closed off the street. The burly fellow, leaning on his musket, was drawing comfortably at his clay pipe, when something scratched on the wall beside him. He glanced at the wall, and his jaw actually dropped; his eyes bulged out, and he let fall his pipe with one low oath of dismayed stupefaction.

For, untouched by human hands, moved by some invisible power, that nine-foot stone wall seemed all a-crawl!

"So!" Sir Sydney exclaimed indignantly. "I'm to receive still further persecutions?"

A bit of rock was dislodged and fell at his feet. Then another. The *tap-tap-tap* of a hammer was heard. Then a whole chunk of rubble fell away.

At the wild, startled yell of the guard, Sir Sydney perceived the frightful truth. The mason, whether by design or accident, had pierced through the wall!

The alarm was sounded; drums rolled; guards came running; the prisoners were bundled away to quarters. Sir Sydney, from his room, caught sight of the watcher opposite and made frantic signals. They were understood. By the time the head jailer and the officers he summoned had traced the matter to the right house, and discovered the tunnel—no one was there.

"I feared as much," muttered the valet John, when the two friends could exchange a word later. "They got away all right, but they failed. They'll always fail."

"What? You, of all persons, have lost heart?" exclaimed Smith. The other nodded despondently, glanced at his fantastic garments, and spat out a curse.

"Yes; I give up. If all the efforts made to free the royal family from these very rooms could not succeed, how can we succeed? I'm about ready to give up, tell them my name, and let them kill me."

"Don't be a fool! I'll tell you how we can succeed!" exclaimed Smith with a burst of passionate energy. Then he caught sight of a flicker at the door-wicket. His tone changed instantly. "You lazy, disgraceful rascal, look at these boots of mine! You were supposed to have cleaned them. You've nothing else to do, and yet you neglect your work like a damned surly dog!"

He buffeted the Marquis in furious anger. There was a low laugh outside the door; the guard, satisfied, withdrew. Talfort rubbed his cheek and grinned,

"Well done; they nearly caught us. Well, how to succeed, then?"

"The simplest way, of course—always the simplest way!" exclaimed Sir Sydney. "I never thought of it before; of course, of course! All this slow, laborious effort is sheer waste of time."

"I agree with you. What, then, is your way of simplicity?"

Sir Sydney made a gesture of caution. "Tell you later—when I think it out."

This attempted rescue of the prisoners kicked up a fearful row. That Smith was the objective, could be guessed; he was the most important prisoner in French hands, and the most closely guarded.

His little promenades were brought to light. The Directory, who ruled France, did not know whether to be lost in admiration of his quixotic sense of honor, or in fury at the chief jailer's trust in him. Lasne was removed at once, and another took his place.

John's wife did not reappear. The bribed guard, no doubt in fear lest his bribery become known, refused with vicious oaths even to speak with Sir Sydney. All communication with the outside was cut off—but not before Smith had smuggled out a note directed to his friends in England.

The result of this became apparent one morning, when the valet John was summoned to pack his effects and clear out. As a prisoner of war, he had been exchanged.

Hearing this, he gazed at Sir Sydney with actual dismay.

"But I can't leave you alone here! How this was managed, I don't know—"

"I do," said Smith, laughing. "I arranged it, my friend. You're in more danger than I am. I simply directed England to effect your exchange at once—the simplest way, you understand? It should have been done months ago, a year ago! Unfortunately, I had not learned my lesson then. Now I have. You shall go, and become the means of rescuing me."

"I?" demanded the other. "How?"

Smith, who appeared to be in excellent spirits, whispered in his ear, and drew back, laughing at the astonishment of the other.

"The simplest way—you see?" he observed. "You can get word to agents here in Paris; the whole thing is a matter of half an hour."

"You're out of your head!" ejaculated the valet John, staring at him. "But I'll tell them. Good-by, my dear kind master," he added, as guards appeared. "It grieves me to part with you—"

"It doesn't grieve me," broke in Smith. "You're an idle, lazy rogue, and I'm glad to be rid of you!"

Thus the Marquis de Talfort, ridiculous jockey rig and all, departed from the scene, safely reaching England with a batch of exchanged prisoners.

THE rigor of Sir Sydney Smith's confinement was redoubled by the new jailer. He received no favors, no liberty; new and more severe orders were received from the Directory, and were obeyed harshly.

"If the accursed English hope to get you out of here," said the jailer, after changing him from the moderately comfortable rooms to close solitary confinement, "they'll have to conquer all Paris!"

"Ultimately," said Sir Sydney, with his gay smile, "they'll probably do just that, my friend!"

Upon a late Saturday afternoon, word was brought to the prison governor of a carriage at the gates, containing Adjutant L'Oger and Colonel Lafarge, on official business. He ordered the carriage admitted, and received the two officers with ceremony.

"Citizen," said the adjutant, throwing down a document, "the Directory desires to transfer one of your guests to less comfortable but perhaps safer quarters. Here's the order. If you'll be so good as to hand him over to us, we'll be on our way."

"Eh? The Englishman?" The jailer seized the document, examined the signatures of Barras and other directors, the seal, the stamp of the minister. "A moment, citizens, till the registrar assures me that all is correct."

He bustled away to the *greffier* or registrar, who presently returned with him and sent for the prisoner. Sir Sydney was brought in between two guards,

and informed that he was to change prisons.

"So!" he exclaimed indignantly. "I'm to receive still further persecutions? As though I were not bad enough off here—"

"Citizen," broke in the adjutant stiffly, "the Government does not wish to aggravate your misfortunes. You'll be very comfortable in the place to which I'm taking you." And as he spoke, Adjutant L'Oger winked significantly at the prison governor, who grinned in delight at the jest, and then motioned the guards.

"Take him away, help pack his effects, and be smart about it."

As the officials waited, the governor and chief jailer beckoned the registrar.

"Give the Citizen Adjutant the book; the discharge must be signed."

The big book was produced; the discharge was written in; and Adjutant L'Oger signed it with a flourish.

"You have no guards?" asked the registrar anxiously.

"I," said Colonel Lafarge promptly, "am in charge of the prisoner."

At this moment Sir Sydney was brought back, with his personal belongings. The registrar nodded.

"Yes, Citizen Colonel, but you must take at least six of our men properly to guard this man. He is most important."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Lafarge, and turned to Smith. "I am an officer; you're an officer. Your parole will be sufficient to do away with an escort. Your honor is well known."

Smith bowed. "Thank you. I swear on the faith of an officer to accompany you wherever you may take me."

"Enough! To the carriage," said Adjutant L'Oger, and out they went.

The carriage rolled away. The gates clanged shut. On the strength of a forged order, Sir Sydney Smith was out of prison and on his way to freedom—a matter of half an hour's work in all.

"SO," concluded Cotterel, smiling, "you see the lesson, my friend? Circumstances alter cases, in other words. When all else is useless, the simplest way may succeed."

Old Manning wakened from his absorbed attention, came back to the present, and with a sigh glanced around the infirmary.

"That may be true," he said, on his nimble fingers: "but I don't see why it should apply to my case. Unless,"—and he suddenly transfixed Cotterel with a startled, intent look,—"unless you have some crazy scheme!"

The younger man, indeed, was suddenly in obvious suspense. He glanced at his watch, frowned, and wiped beads of perspiration from his forehead.

"Yes," he admitted. "Yes, I—I had a scheme—but I don't know—"

"Good Lord, man!" The other stared at him, aghast. "What have you done? You haven't forged anything—"

Cotterel made an urgent signal of caution, as the door opened and the prison doctor came in. He went to Manning seized his hand, and pumped it, beaming at him.

"Upon my word, Manning, I'm delighted! I understand there's some good news for you. Anyway, you're wanted in the Warden's office. You can walk, all right; shall I have an orderly help you dress?"

"No, no, I'll do it," broke in Cotterel anxiously. "We'll be ready in five minutes, Doc."

"I'll be waiting." And the other departed.

Alone, Manning caught Cotterel by the arms, stared into his face, then freed his hands to talk.

"Answer me! Don't you know that forged papers will only make more trouble later? What in the devil's name have you done?"

"Taken Sir Sydney's advice," said Cotterel with a shaky laugh. "I went about it the simplest way, that's all. You know, the Governor was much interested in my case, on account of my proven innocence. It wasn't hard to see him. I got him interested in you. He almost agreed to parole you in my care, to Arizona. Said he'd get in touch with the Warden this afternoon, by telephone. This means that he's decided. He's done it. You're going with me—away, free—understand?"

Manning turned away, to hide the tears on his cheeks.

"But why," he asked, when he was dressed and ready, "why didn't you tell me before?"

"I wasn't sure," said Cotterel in wild delight. "Don't you see? I didn't dare give you hope that would only be dashed. I tried to break it to you with that story while I sparred for time, and waited for the word to come through. Old man, you're walking out now—thank Heaven, we're done with all this forever!"

And they were.

THE END

PANAMA PERIL

THIS fine novel by a favorite writer is fascinating as a story—we print it complete in this issue. And it is significant and timely for the first-hand facts it gives about the crossroads of the Western hemisphere and the possibilities of world-shaking events to come there.

"'Panama Peril,'" writes Robert Mill, "is fiction. There never has been an attempt to destroy the Panama Canal. It is the hope of every right-thinking person, regardless of nationality, that such an attempt never will be made.

"The foreign nations that figure in the story are nations of fiction. The reader who attempts to identify them will be wrong, for the author had no particular nations in mind. The international scene changes so rapidly in 1938, with the logical enemies of today the potential allies of tomorrow, that any other course would be ridiculous."

TWO young men, both tall, both tanned, and both clad in spotless white linen, sat on the porch outside Army Headquarters in Quarry Heights. Below them twinkled the lights of Balboa, in the Canal Zone; and beyond that the lights of Panama City, in the Republic of Panama. Colored beacons marked the Pacific entrance of the Panama Canal.

Walter (Dex) Harrison shifted his legs to a more comfortable position. He had three or four engineering degrees, and his office door in the Administration Building bore an imposing title; but he spoke of himself as "one of the ditch-diggers."

"When you are summoned into the presence," he told his companion, "bow three times. And don't forget to say 'sir' to the General."

James (Speed) Bruce,—a lieutenant in the Canal Zone Police,—grinned, thereby transforming his bronzed face into a network of wrinkles. Then he inspected Mr. Harrison carefully.

"Socks pulled up? Check. Neck clean? Check. Behind ears? Just fair. Here!" He leaned forward, seized Mr. Harrison by the neck, and pummeled him vigorously.

Mr. Harrison broke away.

"That's right," he protested. "Fiddle while Rome burns. By the way, what do you suppose the gold braid wants with us?"

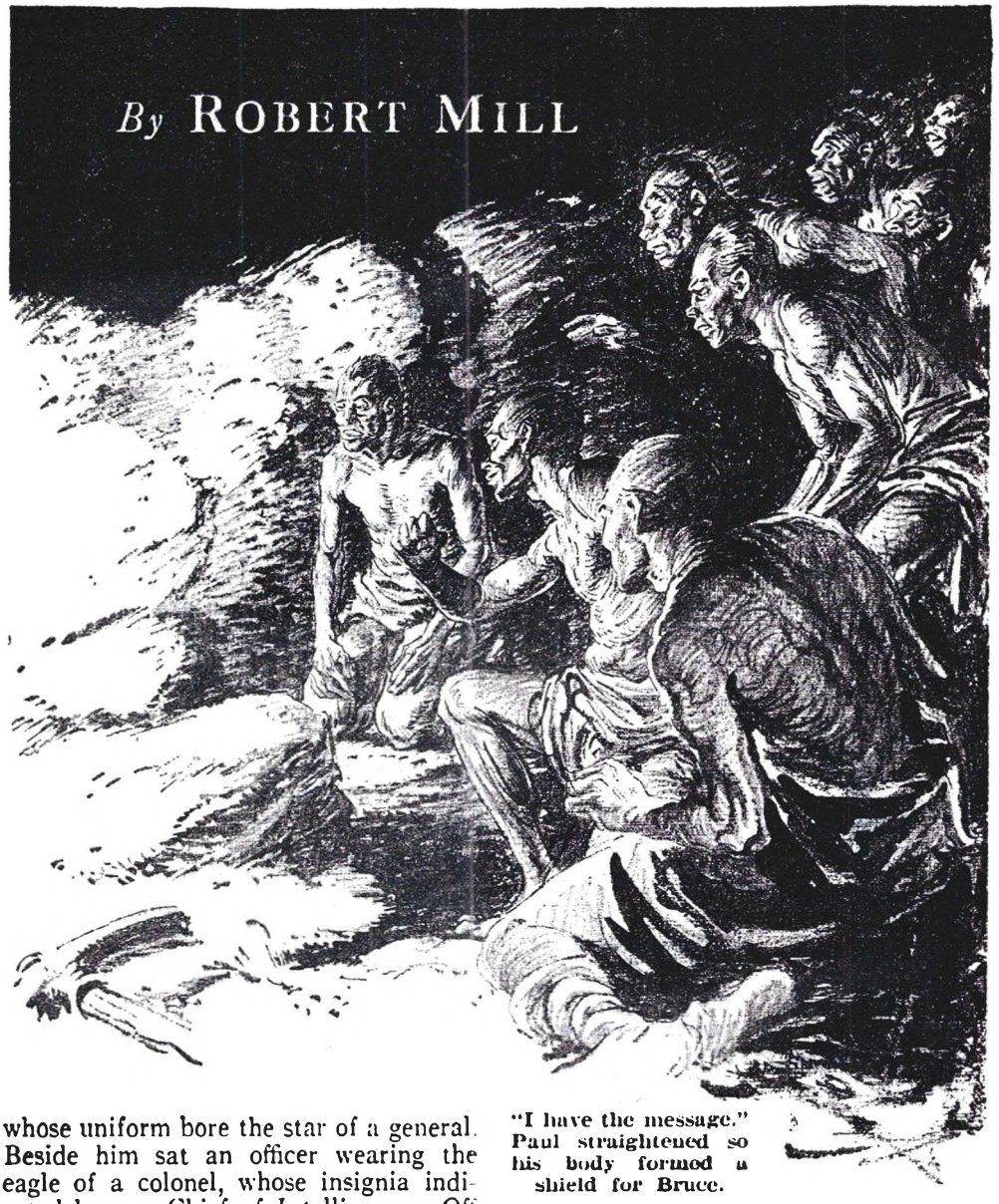
An orderly appeared in the doorway.

"This way, please, gentlemen."

"That," declared Bruce, "means me."

Seated at a desk in the room they entered was a distinguished-looking man

By ROBERT MILL



"I have the message." Paul straightened so his body formed a shield for Bruce.

whose uniform bore the star of a general. Beside him sat an officer wearing the eagle of a colonel, whose insignia indicated he was Chief of Intelligence. Off to one side sat a man in the conventional white of the tropics. His name was Jack Wilkes, and his official title was Inspector of the Canal Zone Police.

"Be seated, gentlemen," said the General. His keen eyes studied the two men who had just entered. "A few years back I would have scoffed at what I am about to tell you, as the product of a disordered imagination. Today, however, we are living in the era of undeclared wars. Aggressor nations strike, cripple their foe; and formal declarations of war come later, if at all."

He leafed through papers on his desk.

"No doubt you have heard of the alliance the newspapers refer to as the Mad Triumvirate, which is composed of two European powers and one in Asia."

He produced a decoded dispatch.

"Washington"—he refused to be more specific, and his face revealed all the distaste of the professional fighting-man for espionage—"has received information it regards as reliable. While the three nations in question are united in their purpose to control the world, differences of opinion have developed regarding methods of procedure.

"The two European countries advocate delay; but the Asiatic country demands immediate action—not open war, understand, but secret attack, calculated presumably to make us give our attention to

"Damn this fighting in the dark! When you know what you're up against, you can wade in, give all you have. But this—"

this continent and give them a free hand in Asia. It has declared its ability and willingness to destroy the Panama Canal, and make the United States a country divided, vulnerable to attack in the Pacific. Obviously, the hostile European countries would welcome that condition, which would keep us very busy at home, and remove us as a factor in European affairs."

There was a significant pause.

"We do not fear an open attack," the General continued. "We think we can defend this big ditch of ours. Even if we lost it, the attacking power would suffer such heavy casualties it would be unable to follow up its gains. No, we do not fear an open attack, but we do fear sabotage. A 'suicide ship' blown up in one of the locks. Perhaps some other and even more effective method." He swung around to face the engineer. "What would be the logical method of striking, Mr. Harrison?"

Dex Harrison shifted in his chair.

"Wipe out Gatun Lake, sir."

The arched eyebrows of the General indicated a question, so Harrison drew a hasty diagram on the back of an envelope. His sketch showed the Canal, which starts at the Atlantic at sea-level, with an approach canal that runs to the door of the Gatun Locks, where three flights lift vessels eighty-five feet into Gatun Lake. There the Canal becomes a lake canal that extends through the Cut and all the way to the locks on the Pacific side, Pedro Miguel—Peter McGill, they call it. Those locks ease vessels down to the sea-level canal that leads to the Pacific. But the heart of the lake canal, and the whole works, is Gatun Lake, which is fed by the Chagres River, and which covers about 164 square miles. It is the reservoir; without it there would be a dry ditch.

So it was at the site of Gatun Dam that Harrison made an X mark on his little sketch before he handed it to the General.

"The whole thing adds up to: no Gatun Lake, no Canal," he observed.

The General nodded. "We know how to defend Gatun Lake against an open attack. Where is it vulnerable to sabotage, Mr. Harrison?"

The engineer leaned forward.

"Not the dam proper, General. We ditch-diggers think we did rather a swell job on that. It comes about as near to being a mountain as anything mere man can construct. The weak point is the concrete dam with spillway gates, which is necessary for flood-control in the rainy season. It could be had."

"Not so easily, Dex." The interruption came from Inspector Wilkes. He was a fine figure of a man, with a handsome, sensitive face. "The Army and Navy have airplanes protecting it from the air. To get at it by water, you have to get by our launch patrols on the lake. On land, you have soldiers and policemen to contend with. There are some civilians authorized to live in that area—they are engaged in what they jokingly call agriculture; but our men ride herd on them."

"That's your headache, Inspector." Harrison's laugh robbed the words of any offense. "But if I wanted to throw a wrench into the works, that is where I would heave it."

The General's keen eyes twinkled as he turned to Speed Bruce.

"From now on it will be your headache, Lieutenant Bruce. Inspector Wilkes has agreed to detach you from all other duty." The amusement vanished from his face. "You and Colonel Maxton have your work cut out for you."

The Intelligence officer nodded.

"Yes, General," he said, "we do. We can thank our Panamanian friends that the Oriental fishing-fleet is out of the picture. Panama ordered them out of their waters, so now the reserve officers are playing at being fishermen off Costa Rica, instead of around our fortified islands. That leaves us our Oriental barbers. Far more of them than the business warrants. But all able to pay their rent, and take an occasional trip home. We also have our Oriental business men. Then, we mustn't forget our Oriental ladies, both in the segregated districts and in the cabarets."

SPEED BRUCE spoke for the first time since he had entered the room:

"Also, Colonel, we must not forget Mr. Yoshenko. When bigger and better wrenches are thrown, it is my bet that Mr. Yoshenko will be throwing them."

Silence followed this statement. The General studied Bruce through half-closed eyes. He saw a man almost pitiably young, lounging indolently in a comfortable chair. There was nothing about his manner to indicate that he sensed the gravity of the situation, or the weight of the responsibility that had been placed upon his shoulders.

Inspector Wilkes sat to one side, twin fires of amusement dancing in his eyes. He was a keen judge of human emotions, and he sensed the General's indecision. He fought back an impish desire to add to that doubt by saying in a casual tone: "In his spare time, that young man collects orchids." He also withheld the information that Speed Bruce, to a certain extent, had grown up with the Canal Zone and Panama—he knew every phase of its multi-colored life, and was familiar with all of its polygot population groups. But Inspector Wilkes remained silent.

The quick-thinking Army officer rose. His hand rested on Bruce's shoulder.

"We have heard fine things about you, young fellow. At the risk of disturbing your modesty, I don't mind telling you that Inspector Wilkes called you his ace in the hole." He made an impulsive gesture. "Perhaps we are a group of nervous old women, planning to combat a menace that does not exist. However, I doubt that. I think that is all, gentlemen."

They stood for a moment on the screened porch, where trailing branches of bougainvillea brushed their shoulders.

"How about Mr. Yoshenko?" Speed Bruce asked.

The Intelligence officer lighted a cigarette with an airy flick of the wrist.

"Mr. Yoshenko," he said, "is your baby. Good night."

Inspector Wilkes stood beside Bruce.

"Nice voyage?" he asked.

Bruce had returned from the United States on the S.S. *Ancon* the day before.

"Yes sir."

"Learn anything?"

The younger man, who had attended a session of the school conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice, grinned.

"Mr. Hoover seemed to think I did, sir."

Inspector Wilkes lighted a cigar.

"He should know, son. But before you start out, remember that we are at peace with all the world, officially. Don't start any wars. Night."

Speed Bruce and Dex Harrison walked forth into the fragrant tropic night.

"Where will we find Mr. Yoshenko?" asked Harrison.

"I," Bruce corrected him, "will find the gentleman at the Alamo. I don't know what his real nationality is. His name suggests Oriental Russia, but is almost certainly phony. But I do know his tastes—which run to light wines and dusky women. . . . You, my lad, will be about your ditch-digging."

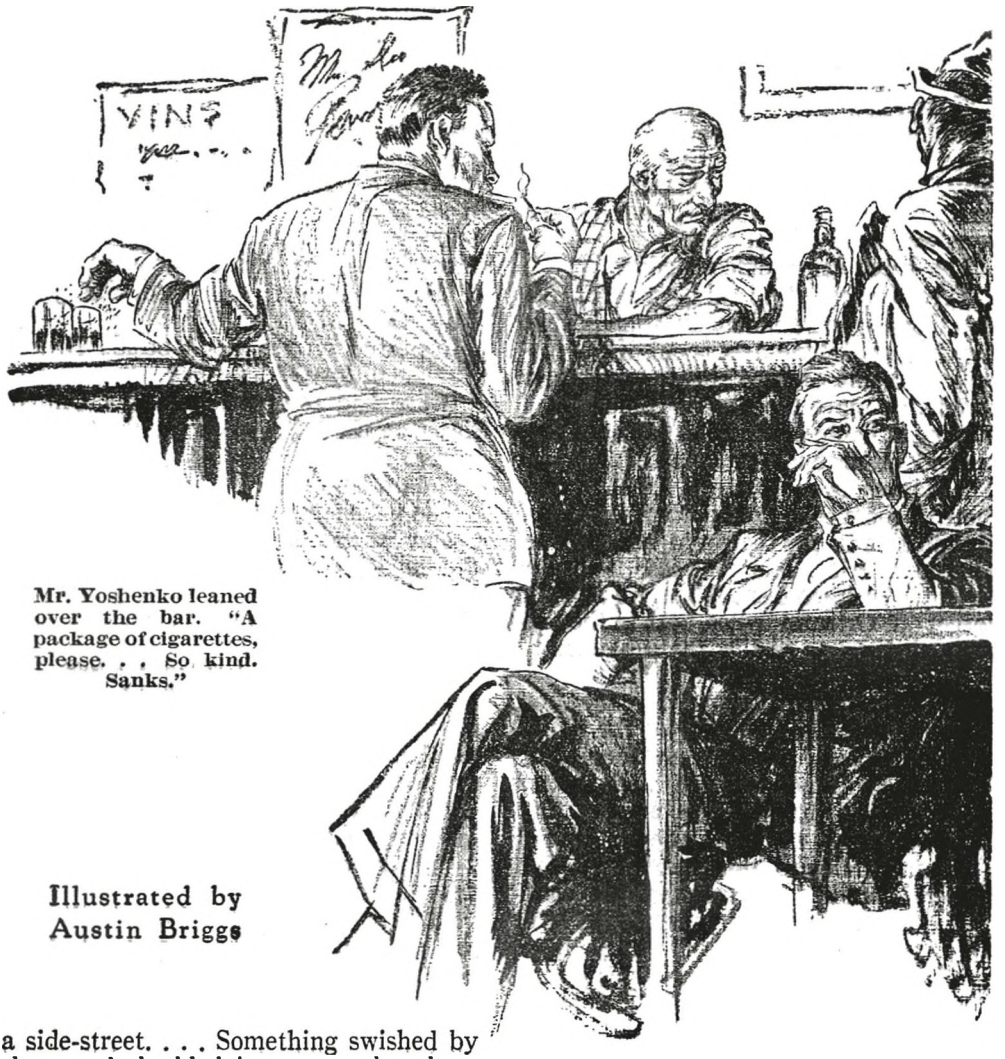
Mr. Harrison shook his head sadly.

"The official booklet says that Canal Zone residents are known for their democracy, and that the most cordial relations exist between employes of the various departments. You wouldn't make a liar out of the booklet?"

THEY passed through the orderly and beautiful streets of Balboa Heights. They went by the Tivoli Hotel, run by the United States Government, where broad verandas were ablaze with lights. Then they crossed a street, and by that simple act entered Panama City, and another civilization.

Narrow streets, with the traffic keeping to the left. Overhanging balconies. Hags selling lottery tickets. The click of a roulette-wheel coming from an open window. Shops tended by alert Hindus. Girls with laughing dark eyes.

They turned their backs on Central Avenue, a main thoroughfare, and entered



Mr. Yoshenko leaned over the bar. "A package of cigarettes, please. . . So kind. Sanks."

Illustrated by Austin Briggs

a side-street. . . . Something swished by them and thudded into a wooden door.

They stood looking at a dagger imbedded in the wood. Bruce was poised on his toes, his hand in his hip pocket. But the steady stream of polyglot pedestrians passing along the main street doomed any attempt to catch the thrower of the weapon.

"Stand behind me," Bruce ordered.

"You go to hell!" Harrison retorted. He glanced about. "This isn't my territory. So it isn't a present from any little mother for me." He bent over, and pretended to read from an invisible card. "'*For Speed Bruce. Glad you are back. Regards from Mr. Yoshenko.*'" He straightened. "That demands an answer. I'll go along and act as your secretary."

CHAPTER II

MR. YOSHENKO, his bulky form molded by a white suit fashioned of some rich silken material, sat at ease in his home in the best residential section of Panama City. His home, as befitted the Panama representative of the Oriental Barber Supply Company, was a pretentious villa perched atop a hill.

It had been a hot and tiring day. To this villa had come most of the operatives employed by the Oriental country to make their reports. Now, however, the day was over and only a little unfinished business stood between Mr. Yoshenko and the sort of relaxation he enjoyed most. There would be a report from an agent who had been given a commission to execute. Also there would be a visitor.

The muffled ringing of a bell was followed by the appearance of a young, rather handsome Oriental, whose clothes screamed of Broadway, and whose speech and mannerisms were so American as to be ludicrous. Mr. Yoshenko lost some of his air of apathy as he asked:

"He is here?"

"You bet!"

Mr. Yoshenko frowned reprovingly.

"He is agreeable?"

The younger man was not squelched.

"And how!"

"Show him in," Mr. Yoshenko directed. "And wait outside," he added.

"I gotcha," said the irrepressible youth.

A dusky-skinned young man entered the room. At first glance, he appeared to be a Panamanian. A more leisurely inspection disclosed Anglo-Saxon features—a youth whose heart and mind were destined to be the warring place for two cultures and two civilizations.

Two designations are visible almost everywhere in the Canal Zone. "Gold," which is for white employees, who formerly were paid in that metal, and "Silver," for colored employees. This boy was never quite American, never entirely Panamanian. Neither gold nor silver, but alloy.

"What is your name?" asked Mr. Yoshenko.

The dusky young man smiled bitterly.

"They call me Paul."

He was on the defensive. That part of him that was American caused him to look down upon this patronizing foreigner. It made him hate himself for what he was about to do. But the eternal struggle was raging within.

"Where is your place?"

"On Gatun Lake, between Escobal and the Gatun Locks."

"You have a lease?"

"Yes." There was added bitterness in his smile. "Leases have been hard to get. They made no trouble for me, because—because of my father."

"You have a house large enough to accommodate ten or twelve men?"

"More than that. I raise bananas. When prices were better, I had as many as twenty men working for me."

"You are on friendly terms with the authorities?"

"Oh, yes." He hesitated. Then he went on, trying to justify his act to himself. "The police often stop at my place on their patrols. They say, 'Paul, have a cigarette,' or one of the older men will say, 'Paul, if you need anything, let me know. Your old man was a regular guy.'"

His face was contorted with hate.

"But never, 'Paul, when you are in Cristobal, come out to the house for dinner.' Never, 'Paul, I want you to meet my sister.' No! Not that. Not—"

Abruptly he fell silent.

Mr. Yoshenko drew in his breath in a noisy expression of sympathy.

"It is an unfortunate situation," he admitted.

Outwardly he was the picture of sympathy. In reality, he was gloating. This was the weapon he needed. His victim had delivered it to him.

"However," Mr. Yoshenko continued, "it is a situation that can be remedied to a considerable degree. The remedy is fairly simple."

HE opened a teakwood chest, and took out bills of a large denomination. He started to count them, apparently thought better of it, and tossed the entire roll into the hands of the young man.

"Merely a first payment," Mr. Yoshenko explained. "Money means travel, and a chance to get away from scenes that are painful. It causes people to forget trivial things, such as accidents of birth."

He closed the door of the teakwood chest.

"All that you need know is that you will have visitors. They will cause you little trouble."

He clapped his hands. The youth with the Broadway mannerisms entered.

"Good night, Paul," said Mr. Yoshenko.

Left alone, the Oriental relaxed, sinking deep into the depths of his comfortable chair, waiting. The tinkle of a telephone bell aroused him. He answered it eagerly. But a look of rage crossed his face as he listened to the message.

"You have failed," he said, speaking in his own tongue. There was an ominous note in his voice. He listened briefly, and then without ceremony hung up the receiver.

BACK in the comfortable chair, he shrugged with Oriental resignation. The barbarian detective lieutenant still lived. That must be attended to.

Otherwise, Mr. Yoshenko reflected, the game was going very well indeed. The youth named Paul had been a gift from the gods. He was bound by ropes that the secret agent knew only too well how to manipulate.

Even now a force of expert and trusted men was in Costa Rica with the fishing-fleet, waiting. Certain materials would be needed, but they would bring them. Barring a few minor details, which he would settle this same night, the time had arrived to shift the game from the Pacific to the Atlantic side of the Canal. Mr. Yoshenko believed in paying attention to detail. He called the Washington Hotel, in Cristobal, and made a reservation.

He was smiling with satisfaction as he turned away from the telephone. It was hot in Panama City, and Mr. Yoshenko disliked heat. He recalled with pleasure that the Washington is situated on the shores of Limon Bay, where the Caribbean trade-winds make its rooms cool and delightful. But that fact accounted for only a portion of his good humor. What pleased him even more was the knowledge that the Washington Hotel is owned and operated by the United States Government.

It appealed mightily to Mr. Yoshenko's sense of humor that the final stage of the game would be played under the very noses of the barbarians from the North.

But for the moment duty called him to the Alamo. The dog who had reported failure, had also stammered out the information that his quarry was in the cabaret. That was good. It made it possible for Mr. Yoshenko to concentrate his efforts at one point.

The secret agent was smiling as he walked to the bathroom, obtained a bottle filled with a white powder, and placed it in the pocket of his white silk coat. That done, he left the house and entered a car, waiting for him. "The Alamo," he purred to the driver. . . .

"Our boy friend," said Speed Bruce, "has not arrived."

Dex Harrison peered about the native cabaret: A long bar was separated from the dance-floor by porticoes; tawdry drapes hung from the walls; a marimba orchestra held forth upon a raised platform at the far end of the room. The patronage was mixed: Native—American—representatives of the various races that make Panama a racial melting-pot; soldiers and sailors, a tourist or two; also, scattered among the patrons, the "hostesses" thoughtfully provided by the management, who constituted a "League of Nations" of the Central and South American countries.

"My big mistake," said Harrison, "was taking up engineering. When I am seen in a joint of this sort, all my good friends say: 'There is that bum Harrison off on another toot.' While you, my boy, would draw: 'There is Bruce, of the police. Probably working.' Not to mention putting the check on the old expense-account. And speaking of expense-accounts—" He clapped his hands. "Rum and soda," he told the answering waiter.

A FLOOR-SHOW was on. A routine number quickly developed into a strip-tease act. Mr. Harrison moved his chair to obtain a better view.

"This," he declared, "comes under the heading of duty. By the way, I—"

A commotion at the entrance of the establishment caused him to break off abruptly. Bowing, smiling waiters made way for a portly Oriental-appearing man who was escorted to a reserved table.

Bruce spoke without moving his lips: "The boy friend."

Mr. Yoshenko seated himself, and glanced about. The barbarian policeman was here. That was good. There would be no dependence on blundering underlings. But the night was young. Mr. Yoshenko settled back, and prepared to enjoy himself.

An overconfident mistress of ceremonies faced a microphone:

"We now have something special: Marita, a hot number from Chile. She dances! I know you will like her."

A girl, dusky of skin and beautiful, moved out on the floor. The lights picked up her full but youthful figure.

Her supple body moved in answer to the call of the music.

She held the attention of the crowded room. Quite unobserved, a Panamanian entered the bar. He stood for just a moment in the entrance to the other room. Speed Bruce saw him; it verified his guess. The man was Florenzio, the under-cover man the Canal Zone police used in Panama City. His presence here meant that he had discovered what he deemed unusual activity.

The girl danced on. First she drew the tribute of hushed silence. That changed to thunderous applause; the girl bowed and was gone.

"'A hot number from Chile,'" Bruce repeated the introduction. "Maybe. But it is my guess that she came here by way of Asia. And she is much too good for this dump."

Harrison halted a passing waiter.

"The dancer? She is very good. I have a friend I know will want to see her. She will be here tomorrow?"

"Alas, señor. Tonight is her last. She goes to the Silver Spray, in Colon." He gathered up the empty glasses.

"The same," said Harrison. "Rum and soda."

Mr. Yoshenko left his table, and made his way to the bar. The waiter, who was serving two tables, had placed his order. The two tall glasses intended for Harrison and Bruce were filled and placed on one tray. The waiter stood off to one side, talking with a girl cashier. The bartender worked on the drinks for the second table.

Mr. Yoshenko leaned over the bar.

"A package of cigarettes, please."

The Oriental's hand was outstretched above the glasses. The fingers opened. Grains of white powder sifted down into the two glasses. Mr. Yoshenko accepted the cigarettes, and carelessly tossed a coin on the bar.

"So kind. Sanks."

He returned to his table.

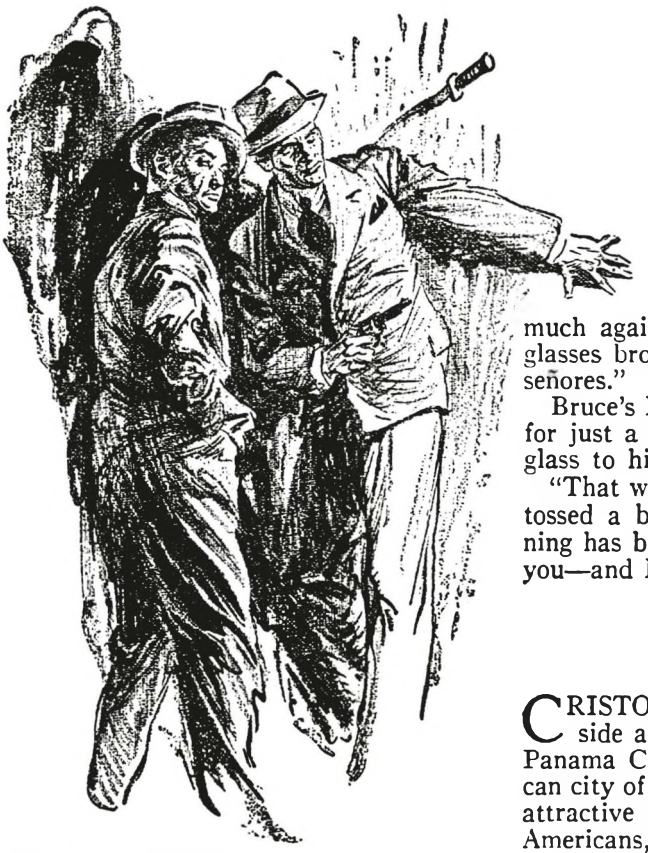
THE dancer, who had changed her costume, reappeared from the dressing-rooms. She made her way among the tables, and approached Mr. Yoshenko.

The waiter placed the glasses before Bruce and Harrison.

Mr. Yoshenko stood up. His manner combined the suave and the obsequious, but inwardly he was exulting. This, according to his Oriental standards, was the supreme insult, an outward admission that there was some connection between the dancer and himself, and designed to show the barbarian how lightly he was rated. Mr. Yoshenko, thanks to what had happened at the bar, could afford that luxury. He produced a bill, folded it, and handed it to the dancer.

She accepted the money disdainfully, almost as if it were her due. Then she

She came from Chile—by way of Asia.



"Stand behind me," Bruce ordered. "You go to hell!" Harrison retorted.

passed on, and slipped into a chair at an unoccupied table. A Panamanian headed for her; a waiter blocked him deftly.

Bruce took a sip of his drink. Harrison lifted his glass, and drank deeply.

A tall American entered the room. He glanced about, saw the dancer, and made his way to her table. She smiled a welcome. The American sat down by her.

Harrison leaned across the table, and spoke in a low tone:

"His name is Bracor. Carried on the gold roll in engineering. Stationed at the Gatun power-house. Business is picking up, isn't it?"

"And moving," said Bruce. "We are bound for Colon. Let's get going." He motioned for the waiter. "No use hanging around this joint any longer."

Harrison gestured at their glasses.

"Drink up," he ordered. "Never turn down a drink—when an auditor is buying."

The solicitous waiter hovered near by.

"The dancer will go on again later."

"She has a nice night for it," said Bruce. "The check, please."

The waiter shrugged.

"The señores are not pleased with the service? There was a delay, yes. But not my fault, señores. Just as I was about to serve you, that donkey of a Florenzio—he has been drinking overmuch again—brushed my arm, and the glasses broke on the floor. I am sorry, señores."

Bruce's hand, holding a glass, faltered for just a moment. Then he raised the glass to his lips and drained it.

"That was to Florenzio," he said. He tossed a bill to the waiter. "The evening has been very pleasant. We thank you—and Florenzio."

CHAPTER III

CRISTOBAL and Colon lie side by side at the Atlantic entrance of the Panama Canal. Cristobal is an American city of trim office-buildings and airy, attractive living quarters, occupied by Americans, who have brought American efficiency to this far place, who live sane, happy lives, and who have given the lie to the common fallacy that the United States is too young a nation to administer colonies successfully.

Colon lies across an invisible line: Front Street, with its Hindu bazaars; Balboa Avenue, otherwise known as Bottle Alley, with its cabarets and cantinas; Herrera Avenue, or if you prefer, Cash Street, for this street's main industry, duly licensed by the Republic of Panama, is transacted on a cash basis.

Then, beyond all this, and again in Cristobal, the Washington Hotel, the social hub of this transplanted bit of the United States, with a country-club atmosphere that is as American as Pasadena or Miami.

There, sharing a double room, were Speed Bruce and Dex Harrison, who were listening to the report of a young man with all the earmarks of a wealthy playboy tourist, but who was carried on the rolls of the Canal Zone Police as Patrolman Ralph Williams.

"Bracor met the girl in the Silver Spray last night. I managed to hold down the next table. They have a date to meet at the parking space near the Maintenance Department docks at one this afternoon. Bracor sold her on the idea of a ride on the lake."

"Where is Harriman with our boat?" asked Bruce.

"Standing by for orders, sir."

"Nice going, Ralph. I'll be with Harriman. Anything else?"

"Yes sir. Clausen checked on Bracor. Had an engineering job in the States until the depression hit him. His wife didn't like Panama, and left him. Since then Bracor has been on the prowl. The dancing lady seems a step upward, if you get what I mean."

He paused in the doorway. "By the way, sir, your boy friend is holding down a chair out front."

Bruce grinned. "I'll send him down a magazine," he promised.

Mr. Yoshenko, however, felt no need for amusement. He had noted with interest the arrival of Williams, whom he recognized at once. That was the fool who had been at the cabaret last night. They were clumsy fools, these policemen. . . . But not the one upstairs, Mr. Yoshenko amended. That dog of a barbarian was both clever and lucky. The fact that he was alive proved that.

Inwardly, Mr. Yoshenko gave thanks for Marita. She was clever. With his coaching, she would be more than a match for the barbarians. Let them trail her. . . . Mr. Yoshenko waited patiently until Williams reappeared, rang for a taxi, and departed.

Some fifteen minutes later Mr. Yoshenko walked to the edge of the veranda and pressed a bell twice, indicating that he wished a taxicab, rather than a horse-drawn vehicle. After a short delay a car appeared. The driver, a negro from Jamaica, repeated his instructions:

"Strangers Club."

LESS than two hours later that driver entered the police station in Cristobal. He went toward the office of the captain with the air of a man covering familiar ground. Had he been questioned regarding his nationality, he would have paused to declare, with some austerity: "Sah, I am a British object." Despite that fact, his name appeared on the roll of Canal Zone policemen. Originally employed to patrol the "silver" districts, exceptional ability had won him a plain-clothes assignment. He, and others of his race, have not allowed the fact that they are "British objects" to interfere with their giving loyal and efficient service to the United States.

In the office with the Captain he found Lieutenant Bruce, who was preparing to depart for Gatun. At a signal from the Captain, he began his recital, speaking in a patois which combined the accent of an Englishman, the slurring soft tones of the negro, and here and there an idiom or two:

"He say for me to go to da Strangers Club, and to hurry, so I mash da gas. He have one drink, and I wait. We drive by da water, and dere are many *cayucos*. He say to stop. He see San Blas fellow, and he walk to his *cayuco*. They talk. I walk near to hear, but he look very angry, and I think maybe he box me, so I go back to car. He buy fruit from the San Blas fellow. . . . He hand San Blas fellow money, and get no money back. San Blas fellow has yet fruit, but he get in *cayuco* and sail away. We sit and look until *cayuco* pass breakwater. Then I drive him back to hotel."

"What time was that?" asked Bruce.

"That about nine o'clock, sah."

"What did the *cayuco* look like?"

"Like most *cayuco*, sah. She very low to water. Her sail patched at top. That patch, she blue."

SPEED BRUCE picked up the telephone. "Get me the commanding officer of the Naval Flying Base, at Coco Solo," he told the operator.

He fidgeted about while the connection was being made.

"Hello. Lieutenant Bruce, of the police. A *cayuco*, sailed by one San Blas Indian, left the harbor about nine. The sail of the *cayuco* has a blue patch at the top. Can you have one of your patrols spot this craft, keep an eye on it, and report to me?"

The voice of the Naval officer came over the wire.

"Can do. He has a favoring wind, and should be rather well along by now. We will let you know what we learn. Where will you be, Lieutenant?"

"The Washington."

"Very good."

Bruce replaced the telephone, and turned to the police captain.

"Will you tell Harriman to carry on alone? I'll be at the hotel."

Three hours later the telephone-bell in Bruce's hotel-room rang.

"Lieutenant Bruce?" The Naval flying officer was speaking. "Not a sign of that *cayuco*. Had three ships out, and they went over a distance beyond which the *cayuco* could have made. Not a sight of any sort of small craft southward bound."

A pause.

"Maybe I pulled a boner," the officer continued. "You said that it was a San Blas *cayuco,* so I naturally assumed it would be heading for home. Care to have us take a look in the other direction?"

Speed Bruce laughed bitterly.

"The boner was mine," he declared. "I am afraid it is too late now. Thank you just the same."

He turned away from the telephone, and glanced seaward. Out in the Bay, just a short distance away, one of the great airplane-carriers of the United States Navy rode motionless, awaiting the arrival of a small-boat containing a Canal pilot. Once he was aboard, the huge ship, with her hornets of death and destruction, would begin the transit of the lifeline that makes the two great oceans, from a standpoint of defense, almost as one.

There were nations who wanted that lifeline cut, who would pay almost any price to accomplish it. The defense of that lifeline was exacting, never-ending. Bruce realized that he, one of its defenders, had lost a round in that game.

A TINY *cayuco,* propelled by a tattered sail, with a patch of blue near the top, headed toward the breakwater in Limon Bay. The brisk wind had stirred up the sea, so that even in the comparatively sheltered harbor the little craft had tough going.

The single occupant of the boat sat in the stern, holding a crudely fashioned paddle, with which he steered. His skin was copper-colored, his hair dark and long. His one garment was a patched pair of trousers.

Once he had been a *saguila,* or chief, among his people, the San Blas Indians —who, because of the remote position of their lands, have been a favorite target of armchair explorers and sensation-seekers.

Truth, usually prosaic, forces the admission that civilization has more or less caught up with the picturesque San Blas people. The airplane has served to demolish distance. Canal people not infrequently pass their vacations in the San Blas country. The Indians, in turn, have made their way to the cities of Panama, and the Canal Zone, in increasing numbers. For the most part they are industrious and well-behaved.

However, when a primitive people are exposed to the complexities of civilization there are bound to be casualties, and the Indian sailing the *cayuco* was one of them. Civilization had shortened his own unpronounceable name to Juan. It had taught him the value of money and earthly possessions. Along with that knowledge came the realization that money could be earned by performing various services, and the sort of services one class of people would frown upon, and punish, would earn rich rewards from another. Mr. Yoshenko had played a not inconsiderable part in the acquiring of that knowledge.

BUT all this had not impaired Juan's seamanship. As the *cayuco* nosed through the breakwater, to meet the full force of the waves, his rather sullen expression vanished, and was replaced by one of joy as he prepared to do battle with the elements.

He was well out into the bay when, instead of turning south toward his home, he began a tack, seaward, that would carry him north, and to the east. He held to the course for some time, and then tacked again, this time landward, and toward the north and the west. He kept repeating this procedure, driving the *cayuco* almost abreast the entrance of a small bay. He lowered the sail, and used the crude paddle to work the *cayuco* to the deserted beach, where he landed, pulling the boat up on the sand. That done, he squatted on his haunches and waited. . . .

An hour passed. Juan sat motionless, a statue in bronze. The sun had climbed toward its zenith, but the Indian noticed its fierce rays not at all. Soon his vigil was rewarded. . . . A tiny dot appeared in the sea. The Indian stood up, shielding his eyes with his hands. The dot assumed form, and became a cabin cruiser heading for the entrance of the bay.

Juan waited until he was sure he was visible to the men in the boat. Then he raised his arms in a prearranged signal.

The motorboat entered the bay. The Indian stood watching it, his face expressionless, as it came to anchor a short distance from the shore. Hoarse commands carried over the water as a small-boat, carried near the stern of the cruiser, was lowered. More commands followed, and various crates were loaded into the small-boat. Men tumbled into it, seized the oars, and the boat pulled away from the cruiser, and made for the beach.

As the bow of the boat grated on the soft sand, twelve men, twelve well-built

Orientals, jumped out. The crew of the boat, remaining at the oars, watched them dispassionately as they unloaded the crates. That done, the boat returned to the cruiser, where it was taken aboard —after which the cruiser put out to sea.

The twelve men stood on the beach, looking about them. Outwardly they were very calm. There was nothing to show that they were embarking on a venture which, as they well knew, would cost their own lives. Nothing to denote that the great event, for which they had been trained for years, was drawing very close. Just twelve Orientals, stolid and sphinxlike.

They wore tattered clothing, these twelve men. Their hands were gnarled and roughened by hard manual labor. Yet even a casual observer would have got the impression that they were men of rank in their own country. There was something about their very bearing that made it evident. And indeed one of them had resigned the commission of an admiral, and shipped as a seaman in the fishing-fleet—all in preparation for this day. Another had renounced the rich inheritance that was his without raising a hand, entered an engineering school, and done back-breaking work—also in order to participate in what was about to be done. The others were of the same caliber. . . .

The leader barked an order, and they went to work. The crates were opened. From them they drew tools: spades, picks, shovels and drilling-instruments. These were divided among certain of the twelve, obviously in accordance with a prearranged plan.

One of the crates yielded three large boxes, each of which had been equipped with carrying straps. A man bent over. Carefully they slung the box upon his back, transforming him into a human beast of burden. The same procedure was followed with the other two boxes. That done, they removed the débris from the beach, hurling it into the jungle. Only then did the leader turn to the Indian, and speak in Spanish.

JUAN nodded brusquely, and led the way into the jungle. What appeared as a solid mass of tangled vegetation, gave way as the Indian entered. The twelve men followed in single file.

For a time they followed a clearly defined trail. Obviously it had been cut recently; otherwise the riotous jungle growths would have closed the opening.

The silk merchant produced coded credentials and proved he was in charge.

Juan knew this country. He had hunted or fished through almost every mile of the surrounding bush. He knew just how far to hack this trail, and where it would become a menace.

Now they were nearing the end of that trail, and Juan derived a malicious pleasure from the thought of the suffering ahead for his companions.

He drew his machete, and attacked the solid green wall. The Orientals, each of whom carried a similar weapon, followed his example. With a trace of arrogance, Juan showed them the correct procedure, how many men could be used to advantage, and how to break through without leaving an obvious trail.

They learned quickly, these men, and they made no attempt to shirk their share of the task. Juan gave them silent and grudging admiration as the long hours wore on. They were driving straight through the jungle, heading for

He was one of those appealing and childlike Jamaicans.

a point on Gatun Lake between the tiny village of Escobal and Gatun Dam.

Juan was without a compass. There were not even occasional glimpses of the sky. Some unfailing instinct guided the Indian. The fleeting moments of haze that pass for twilight in the tropics were giving way to the dark of night.

Now their way led along the bank of the river. Enough of the light of the moon, climbing ever higher in the inky sky, filtered through to make it possible for them to move forward. One of the men carrying the boxes slipped as his foot encountered a slimy stone. He gave no exclamation of alarm; but before he fell, two of his companions steadied him. Then they came upon a clearly defined trail which led through jungle much less dense. They followed it easily, with Juan a good distance in the lead, ready to sound the alarm. But nothing served to halt their steady progress.

It was well toward midnight when the trail emerged into cleared acres, situated on the shores of Gatun Lake, which had been planted with banana trees. There Juan motioned the twelve men to remain in the shadows.

Silently the Indian passed among the trees until he came to a house. He imitated the call of a nocturnal bird. The door of the house opened. Juan slipped through. The young man Paul stood by a crude table.

"They are here," said Juan, speaking Spanish.

"Bring them in," Paul ordered.

THE Indian departed; and when he returned, the twelve men followed him. Paul led the way to a rear room, fitted with bunks, which were ranged in tiers of three. The Orientals stowed their burdens, taking particular care with the boxes. That done, they stumbled into the bunks, seeking rest after the grueling trek through the bush.

JUAN and Paul sat on a bluff overlooking Gatun Lake.

"This—this is dangerous." Paul spoke the thought aloud.

Juan grunted.

"It was only the grace of God that I knew you would be here tonight. The girl dropped the note as she drove along with that fool of an engineer. But I was afraid to pick it up then. The Blessed Virgin preserved it until later."

Juan grunted. Things such as these interested him not at all. They bored him. He sought his bed.

Paul sat alone, gazing out over the lake, staring at the range lights which make it possible for a pilot to steer an unerring course. Queer people, Indians. You never knew what they were thinking about.

He thought of the sleeping Orientals. They too were hard to understand. For that matter, so were Americans, thought Paul; they were all alike, those North Americans.... They labored, dedicating their whole lives to the Canal, which they affectionately called, "The Big Ditch." They cursed easily—cursed the climate of Panama, and in the next breath cursed the ruling whereby they were forced to return to the United States on vacation at stated intervals. Cursed themselves as fools, forgotten at home, and rotting away in a tropical hell. Then they cursed the Governor, who had refused to sign a bill providing quarters for retired employees, thereby making it necessary for them to pass their declining years at home. They cursed the work, the hours and the pay. Then, quite unasked, and nearly always unrewarded, they turned around and worked twice as hard and twice as long, in order that their Big Ditch could keep sending ships through.

They cursed the black men who worked under them; cursed them heartily but without rancor; and at the same time sheltered those black men, fed them and watched over them.... They growled and swore, but they made a game of their work. He had seen them in "The Cut," where nature won't stay whipped, and where the dredges work night and day. They shook their fists at the slides, and roared their challenge. They used those same fists to knock an impudent black boy from Barbados into the Canal, and then jumped in themselves to pull him

out. They were like that. Hard to understand. Hard, that is, for one in whose veins the blood of his Panamanian mother blended with the blood of his American father. There had been times when he thought he did look at life through their eyes. Then some word of theirs, some act, even though it was not meant unkindly, had restored the gulf. . . .

Paul jumped up with a start as a boat, which had noiselessly been skirting the shore of the lake, grated to a landing on the beach beneath the cliff. Two shadowy forms leaped out; a voice hailed him:

"Hello, Paul."

He remained there, held by fright, as they climbed up to him. Both men wore the uniform of the Canal Zone Police. He recognized the man in the lead, Patrolman Harriman, in charge of the lake patrol. The second man stepped forward, framed in the moonlight.

"Paul," said Harriman, "this is Lieutenant Bruce."

Paul's hand was seized and held in a firm grasp.

"Hello, there. I knew your dad. He was all man. Malaria caught up with me out in the bush. Your dad found me, carried me six miles on his back, and tossed me onto a hospital train."

There was a pause.

"Seen any strangers, Paul?" asked Harriman.

Paul hesitated. Then he said: "No."

The two men nodded, and prepared to return to the boat. Then Bruce paused.

"Ever think of joining the police?" he asked.

"Gold or silver?" Paul demanded.

Lieutenant Bruce laughed.

"Gold, of course. We need lads like you." He climbed into the boat. "Think it over, Paul."

CHAPTER IV

MR. YOSHENKO, reclining in a comfortable wicker chair, and fanned by the breezes that entered his hotel room, presented a picture of physical comfort that belied his perturbed mental state. Superficially, all was well. A report from Paul, relayed through the girl called Marita, who had access to the Gatun Dam area, thanks to the fool of an engineer, had told Mr. Yoshenko of the safe arrival of the twelve men and their equipment. Subsequent reports, received through the same medium, had assured him that work was under way.

But this morning a second Oriental business man—he dealt in silks—had registered at the Washington Hotel. Before calling upon the trade in Colon, he had paid a visit to his old friend Mr. Yoshenko, who received him without enthusiasm. The very fact that the higher powers had deemed it necessary to check upon his work was distasteful—and when his visitor produced coded credentials and went through a complicated ritual that proved he was in charge, and was to be obeyed implicitly, Mr. Yoshenko's spirits dropped even lower.

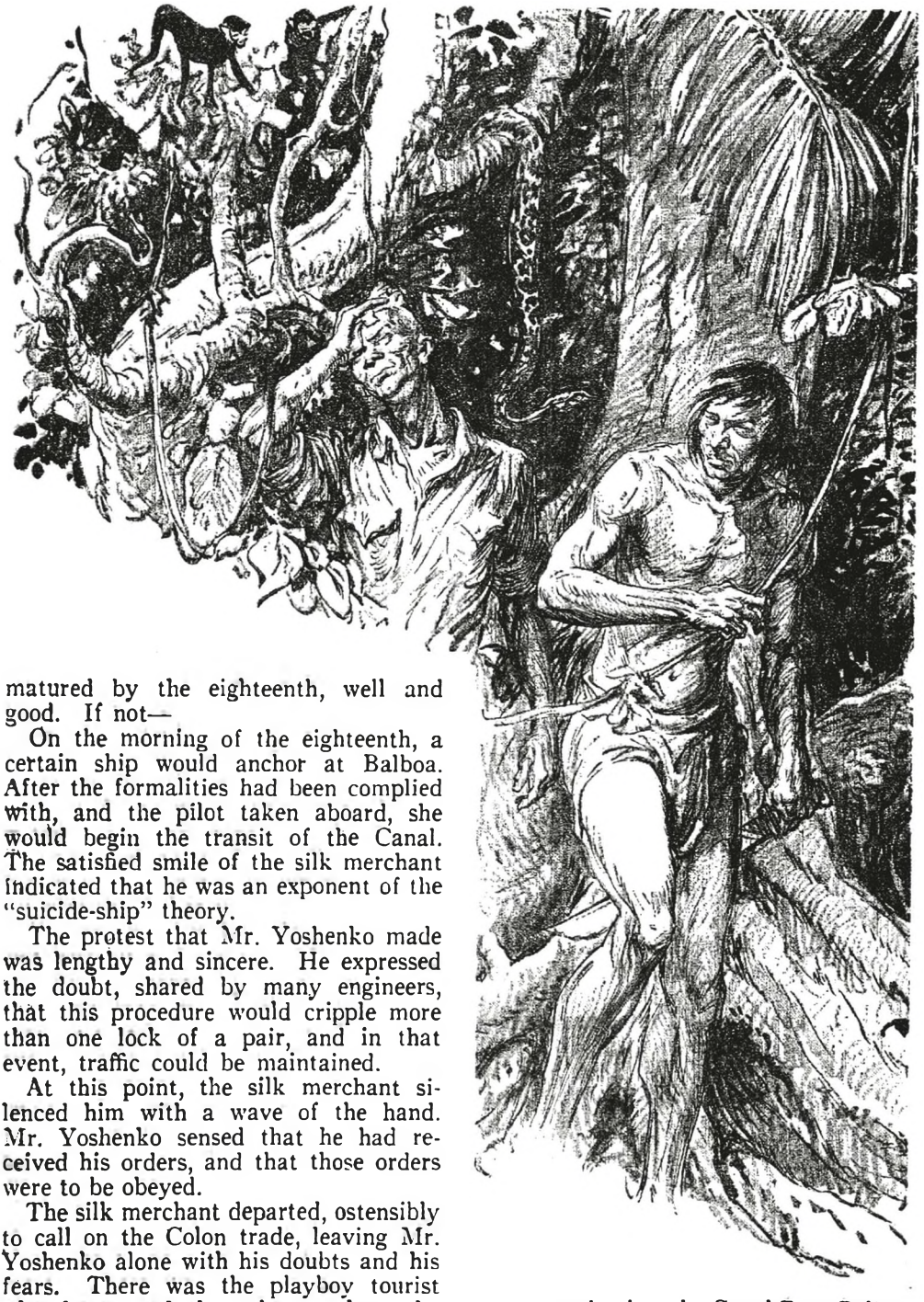
The silk merchant had tried to be diplomatic. He had explained the need for haste, and the slight change in plan.

The trouble, it appeared, was centered in Europe, where Power A of the Triumvirate had recently completed an audacious land grab. It had been timed opportunely. One country—she had most at stake, and should have been relied upon to take decisive action—had been temporarily without any government. Another power—her stake was much the same—had only recently weathered a cabinet crisis, and her affairs, including her foreign policy, had been in such a tangled state that apparently none, including her ministers, knew her policies. A third country, also bound by treaty to block things of this sort, had been in the throes of a domestic crisis. So the grab had succeeded. But it had aroused the three opposing nations to the peril they faced. There was a new solidarity, and blocking the future plans of Power A loomed above domestic problems. And each passing day found these three countries better prepared to block those plans.

Therefore Power A had determined to strike at once. The power to which Mr. Yoshenko and the silk merchant swore allegiance had offered to destroy the Panama Canal, thereby creating the diversion necessary for the success of Powers A and B in Europe. Very well. Only—the Canal must be destroyed at once, for delay made the European situation still more dangerous. The eighteenth was the deadline he established.

Mr. Yoshenko said that was impossible. He pointed out that undue haste increased the possibility of discovery, thereby jeopardizing all that had been accomplished.

The silk merchant smiled in a superior way, and delivered his ultimatum: Mr. Yoshenko could proceed with his own plans. A wave of the hand dismissed them as rather unimportant. If they



matured by the eighteenth, well and good. If not—

On the morning of the eighteenth, a certain ship would anchor at Balboa. After the formalities had been complied with, and the pilot taken aboard, she would begin the transit of the Canal. The satisfied smile of the silk merchant indicated that he was an exponent of the "suicide-ship" theory.

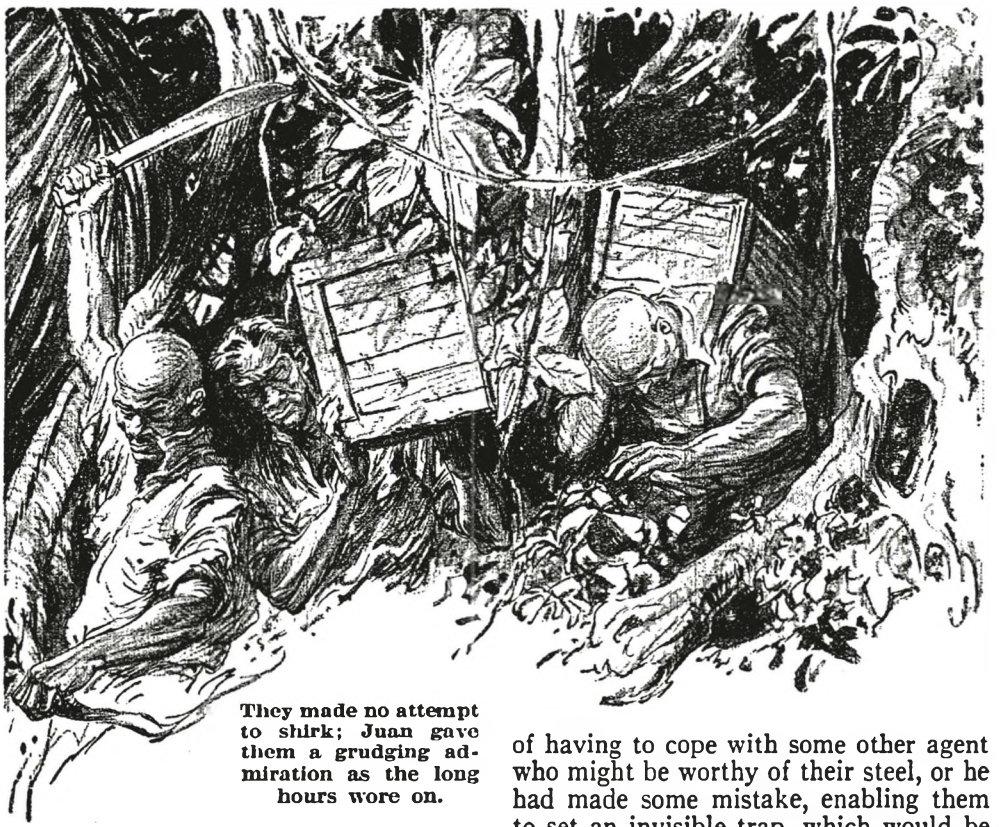
The protest that Mr. Yoshenko made was lengthy and sincere. He expressed the doubt, shared by many engineers, that this procedure would cripple more than one lock of a pair, and in that event, traffic could be maintained.

At this point, the silk merchant silenced him with a wave of the hand. Mr. Yoshenko sensed that he had received his orders, and that those orders were to be obeyed.

The silk merchant departed, ostensibly to call on the Colon trade, leaving Mr. Yoshenko alone with his doubts and his fears. There was the playboy tourist who frequented the cabaret where the girl called Marita danced. There was the negro from Jamaica, who almost always answered Mr. Yoshenko's signal for a cab. Mr. Yoshenko had spotted them; and that, to a certain extent, removed them as sources of worry. But the mere fact they were active proved there were other sources of danger, not visible.

Counter-espionage had established the fact that all these men were from the same organization, the Canal Zone Police. Lurking in the background, and more of a menace because of no outward signs of activity, were the Intelligence services of the Army and the Navy. Then, to add to Mr. Yoshenko's worries, there was the tall young man known as Speed Bruce.

Superficially, Bruce's showing, to date, had hardly been brilliant. Some of it might even be classed as heavy-handed detective work. At one time he was



They made no attempt to shirk; Juan gave them a grudging admiration as the long hours wore on.

lounging about the Washington in civilian garb; at another, in uniform, openly emerging from police headquarters in Cristobal. One night giving a fairly convincing impersonation of a patron in the Silver Spray cabaret, the next prowling about the Gatun Lake district with the patrol.

Mr. Yoshenko was too old a hand to list this young man under the classification, *"Stupid."* The Canal Zone Penitentiary, in Gamboa, which is known as "the Stockade," housed a collection of inmates who had made that mistake. Marita's part in the game had been purposely clumsy. Despite that fact, no attempt had been made to take her into custody.

Mr. Yoshenko had been in Panama two years. He had played the game carefully, even cleverly, as he was the first to admit; but he knew that he was listed among the suspects. That was inevitable. The unusual activity of the Canal Zone Police proved they knew a crisis of some sort was near at hand. Yet he, Mr. Yoshenko, had not been arrested. These facts suggested unpleasant possibilities to Mr. Yoshenko:

Either the Canal Zone Police rated him so lightly that they allowed him to continue rather than face the possibility of having to cope with some other agent who might be worthy of their steel, or he had made some mistake, enabling them to set an invisible trap, which would be sprung at their pleasure. Right now, judged by any standards, the picture was a gloomy one. And the silk merchant, with his demand for speed, had complicated matters. Yet he dared not fail, for the price of failure would be his life.

BUT Mr. Yoshenko had no monopoly upon worry. Speed Bruce, sitting in another room in the same hotel, talking with Dex Harrison, revealed that emotion very plainly upon his tanned face. He had just returned from a conference in Balboa, called by the commanding general.

Operatives of the Army and Navy Intelligence had been there, only to admit they had little or nothing to report. Then the military men had turned to Inspector Wilkes and Bruce, of the Canal Zone Police, which is a civilian organization. Bruce, at a signal from the Inspector, had made his report.

"I told them," he explained to Harrison, "just what we had. Lord knows it is little enough."

The tall engineer, sipping slowly at a tall glass, nodded.

"Just what do you have, laddie?"

Bruce made a gesture of impatience.

"We know there is unusual activity. We didn't need the report from Washington. The girl got hold of Bracor, and

then moved over here. Yoshenko, the big boss, followed. All that indicated the activity was centered on this side. What you told me about the workings of the Canal strengthened that belief." His smile took any offense from the statement that followed. "That was my hunch from the start, but I wanted one of you unimaginative technical guys to confirm it."

Harrison waved his glass in mocking tribute.

"We—I, rather—lost one trick. That was the San Blas Indian in the *cayuco*. He didn't go south. Therefore he landed somewhere north of the Atlantic entrance to the Canal. I put that on the table at the conference." There was embarrassment in his grin. "It isn't pleasant to go on the air with your boners, but the Inspector took it right in his stride. When one of the Navy Intelligence crowd registered pain, the old boy and the general—God love them—both put the record straight by pointing out that one of the Navy boys had also decided San Blas waters were a good place to hunt San Blas Indians.

"Then, to get away from the family fights, and back to the very little we have, we know that the girl has Bracor right where she wants him. He meets her here, and she meets him at Gatun. But they don't go near the dam or the power-house. He couldn't take her there. He knows that. She must know it too."

Harrison took a long sip, and nodded.

"Bracor," Bruce continued, "is very junior, and not too much interested in his work. As far as getting information is concerned, they would fare about as well by reading some of the public documents."

"Much better," was Harrison's comment. "The Government printing presses have kicked out more than one, 'Handy Hints for Unfriendly Powers.'"

"Very well," Bruce went on. "But the girl keeps visiting the Gatun district. Yoshenko makes contact with her, before and after the visits. We keep as close tabs on the girl's visits as we can, and we are sure she doesn't talk to anybody but Bracor. And that brings up the question: what is she doing there?"

WITH a gulp Harrison finished his drink. Then he ventured a guess:

"Paving the way, laddie, for the time when there will be somebody in that district for her to deal with."

Speed Bruce shook his head impatiently.

"That doesn't fit in with the General's information. Washington's pipeline has come through with the dope that the Oriental power has informed its European allies they can go ahead with their party as per schedule. That means very soon."

"Is the Oriental power prepared to fulfill its share of the bargain?" Harrison demanded.

"According to the General's dope, yes."

HARRISON whistled softly.

"How did the General take it?" he asked. "I am betting the old thoroughbred never turned a hair."

"He seemed calm enough," Bruce admitted. "No dramatics. But he used his dope to punch some fine holes in our theories."

Harrison tried his glass, found it empty, and tossed it aside.

"Right, laddie!" he exploded. "In that case, I would say that right now there is somebody in the Gatun District for the lady to work with, and that she is doing it."

Speed Bruce leaped to his feet.

"But there can't be," he protested. He rushed on, obviously repeating arguments he had advanced at the conference: "We've gone over that ground, almost foot by foot. We have covered the lake front for miles. We've checked every authorized resident. We've poked about in the native villages. We've kept in touch with all our sources of information—we have some good ones. The Army and Navy have done the same thing. Nothing there."

Harrison made a gesture of surrender.

"Right, laddie. Nothing there. In that case, all you can do is keep the home fires burning. Keep tailing the lady and Yoshenko. They may slip on the ice in Bottle Alley, and give you something to work with. No use rounding them up. You could skin them alive,—not that you high-minded boys would do anything like that,—and they wouldn't talk. And I'll bet my chances with that new schoolteacher in Balboa, that even with them out of the picture, the work would go on. That is why I say, keep the home fires burning, and carry on as you were."

He laughed apologetically.

"Harrison is the name—Harrison, the ditch-digger. Don't get me wrong. Not Harrison of the police."

Bruce ignored the levity.

"You have the dope, Dex. But Washington is acting up. They have the jit-

ters worse than we do, and God knows we aren't breaking out in a rumba of joy. But they're howling for action—demand an immediate round-up of every known suspect. The General—he is tops—sees our side of the picture, and he's trying to hold them off. He will intimate, very diplomatically of course, that if they have so much positive information, we would appreciate some of it, so that we can establish an exact deadline, up to which we can work along as we are going, and beyond which we will go ahead with the last desperate try. He may be able to sell them a bill of goods."

"And if he doesn't?" The engineer asked the question.

"Damn this fighting in the dark!" cried Bruce. "When you know what you're up against, you can wade in, give all you have, and take your licking, if that is in the cards. But this—"

The tense expression vanished from the engineer's face as he turned away from the window, and studied Bruce through narrowed shrewd eyes. Then he spoke in a casual tone:

"Ever tell you about my Aunt Bessie? One day she overheard some kids say: 'Let's beat up Dex, that so-and-so, who lives in this gingerbread house.' 'Land's sake,' says Aunt Bessie, 'I always knew Dex was a so-and-so, but I won't stand for anybody calling this a gingerbread house.'"

He studied the unsmiling face of his companion.

"Not good," he admitted. "But laugh at it, will you? Otherwise, you'll crack."

CHAPTER V

TWELVE human moles were at work. Their burrow began in the jungle, where tangled vegetation, dense and rank, served as a made-to-order screen for its entrance.

That had been the most dangerous task: the construction of that entrance. It had been done at night, with armed sentries pacing almost within earshot. The work had gone on, shielded by the growth of the bush, while searchlights made the cleared space just beyond the jungle light as day. The twelve men had done that preliminary work with Juan, the Indian, lurking noiselessly in the surrounding bush, an ever-alert scout, ready to report the first sign of danger.

But there had been no alarm. They had dug out the necessary chamber. They had disposed of the dirt. They had constructed the shield of vegetation, and in that work Juan assumed the leadership.

Then, working behind that shield, they had settled down to the major task. That was the construction of a tunnel, which ran under the jungle growth to the edge of the clearing. There it became a pit, which went down until it was beneath the surface of the cleared space. Then it became a tunnel again.

IT was a long, narrow, sinister tunnel, barely large enough to permit a man to advance on all-fours. Its air was dank and foul. The temperature was unbelievably high. It was a foul underworld, from which any normal man would flee.

But the twelve human moles toiled in it gladly. Naked save for cloths wrapped about their waists, they worked steadily. It was slow, heartbreaking work. The cramped quarters threw most of the burden on the man in the lead. They overcame that by changing places constantly.

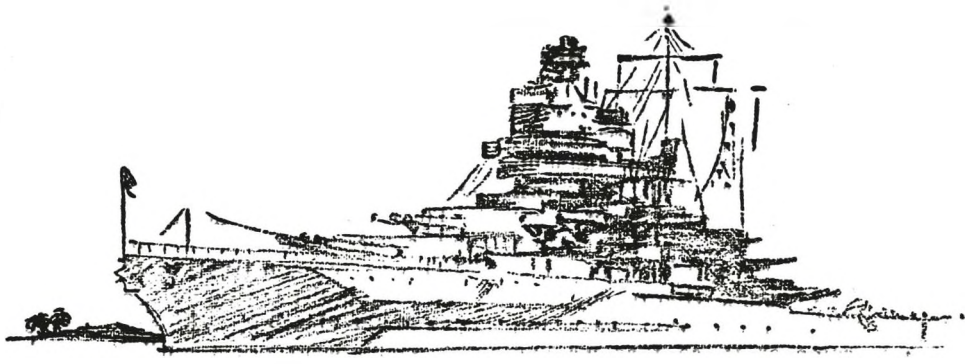
The disposal of earth was a problem. They solved that by placing it in canvas buckets, and passing the buckets back along a human chain. When the buckets reached the end of the chain, the dirt was scattered beneath another protecting shield of vegetation.

Here a nature usually adjudged hostile was friendly to their mad plan. No other type of country would have made it possible for them to work undetected so near to what was an armed camp. Here, also, even the very earth seemed to be their ally. The soil of the jungle gave way to a harder stratum. That meant slower progress, but also it lessened the danger of cave-ins.

The twelve human moles toiled on with a patience that was almost unbelievable. Work that required hours, resulted in progress so small that it could not be noticed. There were long delays while they built crude braces in the worst danger spots.

So, slowly but steadily, they drove their burrow toward its goal.

That goal was the Gatun Dam. Not the dam proper, which forms the lake. That is a man-made mountain, nearly one and one-half miles long, measured on its crest; nearly half a mile wide at its base, about four hundred feet wide at the water surface, and about one hundred feet wide at its crest, which is twenty feet above the level of the lake.



In it are twenty-one million cubic yards of material. The ditch-diggers put that there, and they put it there to stay. They graded its surface, seeded it, and made a golf-course. "A two-million-dollar golf-course," they called it, for that was what the dam cost, in round figures. In far-off Washington a Congressman had climbed ponderously to his feet and roared his disapproval. "This wanton extravagance!" he howled. "Two million dollars for a golf-course!" And the ditch-diggers howled with laughter.

No, the twelve human moles were well content to leave that dam alone. They aimed, instead, at its Heel of Achilles, a concrete dam, placed in a hill of rock nearly in the center of the dam proper. It is built in the form of an arc of a circle, this concrete dam, making its length over eight hundred feet, although it closes a channel with a width of less than three hundred.

The crest of the concrete dam is sixteen feet above the normal level of the lake—which is eighty-five feet above sea level. On the top of this dam there are thirteen concrete piers, and between these there are mounted regulating gates, which are of steel, and which are equipped with sealing devices to make them watertight. These gates can be raised or lowered in approximately ten minutes, and they are used to maintain the lake level at about eighty-seven feet above sea-level.

Beyond the dam is a concrete-lined spillway. Adjacent to the north wall of the spillway is the power-house, which generates power for lighting the locks and Zone towns, operating the lock machinery, machine-shops dry-dock, coal-handling plant, batteries, and if desirable, operating the Panama Railroad, which furnishes the only land transportation across the Isthmus.

THE concrete dam, in the vicinity of the power-house, was the goal toward which the twelve human moles crawled. They burrowed toward it inch by inch. They had a very definite goal, one particular support of the dam. Some of the best engineering brains the world can produce had picked that as the vulnerable spot.

There was nothing hit-or-miss about the direction of the tiny tunnel that climbed forward so slowly. Its way was plotted by one of the human moles. He used the same care, and the same genius, that he had employed in the designing of a super-battleship, the creation of which had caused shivers in more than one section of the world. But outwardly he differed not at all from the other human moles. He wore the same abbreviated garb. He breathed the same foul air, suffered in the same oppressive heat. He shared the actual labor, which was made doubly difficult and painful because of the cramped quarters.

This, to him, was merely another job of work. Here, however, there were circumstances he did not enjoy. The enforced secrecy, and the desperate need of haste, forced him to do things that caused his soul of a craftsman to revolt. There should be more bracing. The lack of it worried him. Not so much because it endangered the lives of the human moles, but because it imperiled the success of the task, and because it was poor workmanship. There should be more provision for ventilation. Not because it would add to the comfort of the human moles, but because it would increase their efficiency, and drive the job forward to completion.

But always there was the demand for haste. That demand was made by Mr. Yoshenko. It was relayed by the girl called Marita, who gave the message to Paul, who in turn made contact with Juan, who took the message on its final lap. The engineer who was one of the moles had little love for Mr. Yoshenko and his ilk. He had raged inwardly when he received the message, which established a deadline. But he drove his fellow-moles on, inspiring them to new efforts.

Now it was the night before the day set, and the eleven moles were near the point of open mutiny. They had reached the limit of human endurance. The air was so foul they were unable to breathe. They demanded that they be allowed to dig upward in quest of life-giving air.

PATIENTLY the engineer heard them through. The work would continue. He was firm about that. The man who dug into the roof of the tunnel would die. Fools! Didn't they know where they were?

Hours ago, according to his reckoning, they had neared the base of the concrete dam and spillway. Right above them the ground was cleared, and the beams of searchlights were playing over it. Sentries walking the walls cast wary eyes on that ground.

That was when they had attacked both sides of the narrow tunnel, as well as pressing straight ahead, with the result that as the work continued, an underground room was constructed. When the far wall of that room had become broad enough, he had given them a signal, and they had confined their efforts to pushing that wall forward, which increased the size of the room.

Now, if his reckoning was correct, they were about to strike the underground base of the concrete structure.

But there was a worried frown on the face of the engineer, who was bearing the brunt of the work, as the digging continued. It vanished as the short digging tool in his hand struck something solid. He withdrew the instrument, and struck again. Once more the solid object was encountered.

He gave a little cry of triumph, and went to work feverishly. Soon the dirt fell away, and the light from the flashlights revealed a dark stone wall. The men working on both sides of him also struck that stone wall. Soon that wall—it proved to be concrete—was revealed for the entire width of the chamber.

Obeying the commands of the engineer, they drilled holes along the length of that wall. Only when that was done did the engineer fall back exhausted.

They pressed a bottle to his lips, and he recovered. He spoke hoarsely:

"We are ready!"

The cry was passed from the chamber and back along the human chain. There was a long wait. Then the chain was in action again. Something was being passed forward, and being handled tenderly all along the line. Soon, one by one, the three boxes equipped with carrying straps appeared beside the engineer.

They opened two of the boxes, and drew from them metal cylinders which they placed in the holes in the concrete. The third box yielded batteries, wire and a switch.

The engineer worked slowly and methodically. First he tested the batteries, and saw that their strength was not impaired. He used wire to connect the metal cylinders. A pair of wires which led away from them, he connected with the switch.

There he was, on his hands and knees, gazing somewhat ruefully at the short length of wire. But only for a moment. Then he wired the batteries together, and connected them with the switch. That done, he leaned back against the wall of the chamber.

He fumbled in the cloth about his waist and produced a watch. Sixteen minutes of five o'clock, on the morning of the eighteenth! His fellow-moles, who had formed the human chain, had crept forward, and gathered about him.

He pointed to his watch. At five o'clock, the task would be completed. They passed the word around. It created only a little ripple of excitement. Then they all sat back, waiting for death.

Not a man made an attempt to leave the tunnel. Long before they could reach safety, a hundred and eighty-three billion cubic feet of water would be released.

To attempt flight would be to court discovery, and endanger their work. So not a man moved. It was well. The man at the end of the line, away from the engineer, had a pistol in his hand. But his fellow-moles needed no restraint.

The engineer, holding the switch in his hand, sat looking at the face of his watch. The job supreme, for which all his life had been a preparation, was virtually accomplished.

CHAPTER VI

"NOTE for you, Mr. Bruce."

The hotel clerk handed the message to Speed Bruce, who tore open the envelope, and read:

SLIDE IN THE CUT. THEY SENT FOR PAPA. SEE YOU TOMORROW.

DEX

Bruce smiled as he folded the note, and placed it in his pocket. Then he

made his way to the veranda, and rang for a cab.

His first stop was the Cristobal police station; in the office of the captain he found Inspector Wilkes, chewing nervously on an unlighted cigar.

"Hell pops tomorrow morning at five, son," was his abrupt greeting.

"That means?" Speed Bruce suggested.

Inspector Wilkes tried to soften the blow.

"That means the General's diplomacy has a limit, son. He did his best—we all did, for that matter; but Washington's case of jitters is getting no better. They came through with an ultimatum today. They want all known suspects rounded up by noon tomorrow, which is the eighteenth."

The Inspector's finely veined hand rested on Bruce's shoulder.

"We are stretching it by giving you until five in the morning, son. It will mean fast stepping for us to pull it from then until noon." He chuckled. "Five Navy ships pulled in today, after a long cruise. They paid off this afternoon, and there will be liberty parties tonight. Three large cruise ships are in. It won't be exactly a quiet night in Cristobal and Colon. Just in case we might be a little shy of men at five in the morning, I brought a few over with me."

Speed Bruce sat staring at the floor. "I tried, Inspector." His voice was lifeless. "I tried harder than I ever did before. I tried to make it fast, just as fast as I dared. But can't they see—won't they see?—that one false move will undo all that we have done? Don't they realize that in that case we would have to go back and start from scratch?"

"Evidently not," said Inspector Wilkes. "You will have to learn not to expect too much from men sitting in an office a thousand or more miles away." He threw the unlighted cigar away. "Hell, son, you are not licked yet." He glanced at the clock. "Nine. Eight hours to go. A full working day."

He stood up abruptly.

"I'm not blaming you, son. You knew what you were up against, and you played it safe. Maybe a little too safe." He raised a restraining hand. "I am not saying you did, but it is possible. However, it won't get us a single thing to sit here doing a lot of second guessing. The thing I want you to realize is that all bets are off tonight."

He walked up and down the room.

"You played it safe," he repeated. "But here and there, as you went along, things must have suggested themselves to you—ways of digging in, and forcing a showdown. You turned them down because there was too much at stake." His voice was hoarse with emotion. "Try them all tonight. You can't spill any apples, son. And what if you do? Hell, at five o'clock we are going out and upset the whole damned cart!"

He fought for self-control. "Get the hell out of here, son, and get started."

Cristobal seethed with activity as Bruce emerged from the police station. Along its lighted streets moved hundreds of American sailors clad in clean whites, their white caps perched at jaunty angles.

They were a laughing, care-free, boisterous crowd. Young America on the loose. Ready for anything the night, and Panama, might have to offer. Perhaps no better, but certainly no worse, than any like number of youths from any walk of life, freed from restraint and turned loose in the same setting, with money burning holes in their pockets. Ready to dance. Equally ready to fight. Potential dynamite.

Canal Zone policemen tightened their belts, and prepared for the worst. Now the tide was surging toward Colon, and the hot spots. Later, much later, and with shore patrols riding herd upon the delinquents, it would surge back toward Cristobal and the ships. With it would come the hangover of Colon drinks and Colon feuds. Tempers would snap, and fists would fly. The harassed Zone policemen would go into action, cracking heads impartially, and with no rancor.

Now, however, as Bruce crossed to Colon, the white-suited gobs were taking possession of Bottle Alley. Panamanian policemen walked in pairs, and walked warily. Members of the shore patrols flexed their muscles and twirled their nightsticks.

Bruce pushed his way into the Silver Spray cabaret, took a look around the room, and crossed the floor to the table where Ralph Williams, his plain-clothesman, was seated.

"Sit down," Williams begged. "I'm having the devil's own time holding this table."

Bruce dropped into the chair. "What's happening?" he asked.

Williams grinned. "The night is young, as Colon nights go." He lowered his

voice. "Bracor is holding down the fort, two tables over to the right. He and the gal friend arrived on schedule. She is getting ready for the eleven-o'clock show. I happened to be out at the bar, and heard her giving the manager an argument. She wants to skip the two-o'clock show. Evidently she and Bracor plan to duck out after her turn."

"Your car here?" asked Bruce.

"Yes. In Front Street. Parked across the street from the Flower of India bazaar."

"Good! Slip me the keys. I'll leave ahead of them, and fix things so they will have to pick me up in Gatun. You follow them. Grab a taxi. Stop at the station, and pick up three or four men. Spot us, but don't cut in on the party unless I call for you."

"Good enough," said Williams. The light of anticipation was in his eyes. "I gather that we are going places."

Bruce smiled ruefully.

"We are going places," he admitted, "but I don't know just where."

"Well,"—Williams spoke without moving his lips,—"we aren't the only ones who are stepping out."

In the doorway stood Mr. Yoshenko. Bland. Faultlessly groomed. Wearing a suit of his favorite white silk material.

An obsequious head-waiter hastened to his side, indicated the crowded tables, and wrung his hands in an expression of regret. Mr. Yoshenko was not perturbed. He produced a bill, folded it, and handed it to the head-waiter. That factotum clapped his hands, and gave a sharp order. Soon his men reappeared with a table, which they set up on the edge of the dance-floor, making that postage-stamp space even smaller. Mr. Yoshenko seated himself with obvious satisfaction.

"After the girl dances," Williams explained, "he will place money in an envelope, seal it, and give it to a waiter with orders to deliver it to the girl. There are two possibilities: either it is a message to the girl, or a message she is supposed to deliver. We could have made a try for the envelope, but you were very emphatic about not forcing a showdown. Besides, I have a hunch the envelope wouldn't mean much to us."

"Right," Bruce agreed.

"What I would like to know," continued the detective, "is who gets the message, eventually. But no luck. We have tailed every one of these Gatun trips, keeping as close as we dared, and not a soul did she speak to but Bracor. Not a soul did she meet, for that matter, but Bracor."

To Mr. Yoshenko, right now, the picture was a gloomy one.

The music started, and the tiny dance-floor became crowded. Speed Bruce sat at the table, sipping his drink.

The girl would dance. The waiter would deliver the envelope from Mr. Yoshenko. The girl would deliver the message somewhere in the Gatun district. His lips tightened at the knowledge that he would be there, prepared to prevent that.

But suppose he failed. Suppose, after all, the girl was unimportant. Yoshenko was the pivot about which all the deviltry revolved. Right now, common sense prompted Bruce to stake his chances of success upon the part played by the girl. But Yoshenko must be eliminated, and made powerless. That must be done so that when his companions heard of his elimination,—they undoubtedly would,—they would not be alarmed, and take to cover, thus complicating the problem.

Bruce spoke in a low tone to Williams.

MR. YOSHENKO was engrossed in thoughts much at variance with his bland appearance. He too was racing a deadline. Yet he was forced to sit here, impotent, and unable even to visit the section in which were bound up all his hopes and fears, for in that section he would be a marked man. It was desperately necessary that he communicate with that section, and equally necessary that he receive a reply. Yet he was forced to

depend upon this frail slip of a girl. More, even communicating with her was fraught with peril. There sat the fool of a detective, who tried to look like a tourist. With him was the lieutenant of police, who looked and acted like a fool, but who was far from being one. Mr. Yoshenko gave inward thanks that his method of procedure was so obvious and so clumsy that they might refuse to rise to the bait.

The music ceased. The dancers applauded. The orchestra played a medley, which contained several bars of "Dixie." A wild rebel yell went up from a table next to Bruce and Williams.

Bruce turned; at that next table were four American sailors, clean-cut lads in their teens. The lad nearest the lieutenant had fiery red hair, and a contagious grin.

Bruce leaned toward him.

"Where you-all from, Dixie?" he asked.

The grin became broader. "Norfolk, suh. Wish I was there right now. And you, suh?"

"Not far from there," said Bruce. The banter was gone from his voice. "Take a chance on a man from home, sailor? I don't want to sell you anything, and I don't want to take you anywhere. But I do want to talk to you. In a minute or two, walk out to the street. I'll meet you there."

He was a quick-witted lad, this sailor. For just a moment he studied Bruce through narrowed eyes, seeking some connection with the slimy traffic in which Colon abounds. Then the strong, clean, tanned face reassured him.

"Right, suh."

Bruce turned to Williams. "I won't be back. I'll stop at the Colon police station, and then get out to Gatun. Carry on as we agreed."

"Right," said Williams. "But how about Yoshenko?"

The trace of a smile appeared on Bruce's face.

"As that Southern sailor would say: I reckon Yoshenko will be right busy."

THE orchestra began again; the dance-floor filled. The red-headed sailor, after a word to his companions, left the table, and walked from the room. The music had ceased, and the spaces between the tables were filled with returning dancers, when Bruce yawned. Then he glanced at his watch.

"I have had enough of this," he told Williams. "Night."

The music struck up again. There was a disturbance at the bar, where a drunken Indian asked for, and got, service. Then the red-headed sailor reappeared from that direction, and returned to his table.

"They handle drunks right rough here," was his only comment.

Then the floor-show began. Chorus girls, who established new standards in nudity. Singers, who paused before tables to croon risqué ditties that would have brought blushes to the faces of a stag audience. Then the girl called Marita, dancing.

Dancing in the smoke-filled room like a feather tossed about in the clouds. Grace incarnate. Pausing for applause, and when it thundered forth, bowing in mock humility. Then ignoring it, as she vanished.

MR. YOSHENKO produced his wallet, and drew forth a bill. He fumbled in his pocket, and produced an envelope. He placed the bill in the envelope, and sealed it. Upon the envelope he wrote one word:

"Marita."

He wrote slowly, and with care. That word was the message that must be delivered. The shading of certain letters had a meaning. The size of others conveyed his wishes. In reality, it was an elaborate code, and one that defied decoding. The message concealed in the word was:

"Haste more urgent than ever. Advise at once when you will be ready."

Mr. Yoshenko clapped his hands. A waiter appeared.

"For the dancer," said the secret agent.

The waiter, after bowing low, made his way to the dressing-rooms.

The applause continued, for the crowd expected the dancer to reappear. The orchestra leader made a sign in the negative. The applause died down, and the crowd relaxed. There was a steady tramp toward the exits.

Mr. Yoshenko sat watching the room clear. There was Bracor, the fool engineer, making his way to the door. He had no long wait ahead of him, for the girl called Marita would throw a cloak over her costume, and join him. There was the fool of a detective, calling for his check, and prepared to follow them. Yes, there he went. Small good that would do him.

Mr. Yoshenko sat back at ease, and glanced about him. Despite the steady

movement toward the doors, the room remained crowded. White uniforms predominated. Mr. Yoshenko studied the faces of the lads who wore them. He studied them with interest, for soon these youths would be at grips with youths from his country who wore a somewhat similar uniform.

The husky bodies, the eager faces and the keen eyes caused him a moment of discomfort. He put the thought aside.

"Bah," he told himself, "just children!"

Mr. Yoshenko sipped his drink with relish. Now that the business of the evening had been disposed of, at least for the present, he could devote himself to pleasure. There was a little blonde in the chorus. Not to be compared with the girl called Marita. But Mr. Yoshenko never mixed business with pleasure.

The movement in the room had ceased. The members of the orchestra took advantage of the lull to steal puffs at cigarettes. Only the low hum of conversation was audible.

DISTINCTLY, then, a lone voice sounded above the hum:

"When I got back home after running away, my pappy meets me at the doah. He wants to know where I has been and what I was doin'. I was right smart ashamed, and I didn't want to tell him. But he makes me."

Mr. Yoshenko turned. A red-headed sailor was speaking. The hum of general conversation died down, as more persons gave their attention to the speaker.

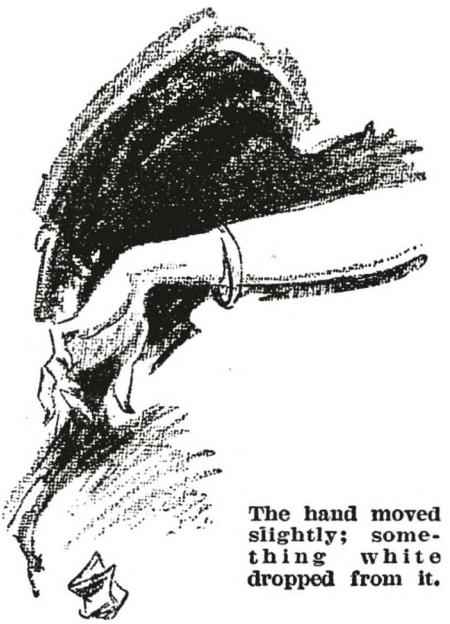
The monologue continued:

"'Pappy,' I says, 'I don't like to tell you-all this, but I been cleaning cuspidors in a saloon in Richmond.' Gentlemen, my pappy looks at me for a minute, and then he breaks right out laughin'. He hauls off, and slaps me on the back. 'Son,' he says, 'that aint nothin' to be ashamed of. It's honest work, aint it? But you had me a-goin' for a minute, there. I was right scared you was going to say you had been in the submarine service!'"

The red-headed sailor ceased speaking. His face was cherub-like in its innocence. A sailor whose sleeve had a rating mark that included a torpedo, bore down upon the table.

"I didn't quite get that crack, sailor."

The red-head looked up at him trustingly.



The hand moved slightly; something white dropped from it.

"Brothah, I was just tellin' my mates that my pappy would stand for cleanin' cuspidors, but he sure would crack down on pigboats."

The sleeve bearing the torpedo made a lunge. Another white sleeve blocked it. More white sleeves and white legs piled in. A girl screamed. There was the sound of breaking glass and cracking furniture—grunts, oaths, groans. Bone upon flesh. An hysterical scream blended with a muffled boom as a foot crashed through a bass drum. A whistle sounded its shrill summons.

Mr. Yoshenko jumped away from his table. A white-clad leg shot forward. It was hard to identify that leg, but it seemed to have some connection with a red head. Mr. Yoshenko tripped over that leg, and went sprawling. The struggling mass surged over him.

The one mass was matched by other masses, as various groups went into action. Men from the submarine base at Coco Solo clashed with men from battleships. Sailors from the scouting fleet divided their forces. Some went to the rescue of their brothers from the submarines. Others cast their lot with the lads from the battle-wagons.

All the while the whistles were sounding. Now Panamanian policemen entered, and went to work. Blood called to blood, and the sailors presented a united front against the traditional enemy. Two shore-patrols arrived at once, one from the battleship, the other from the submarine base. Their efficiency was somewhat hampered because their members showed a tendency to go to work upon each other.

Mr. Yoshenko struggled to his feet. A weaving white wall blocked his escape. He flung himself upon it, striking short, rather feeble blows with fists that were clenched in the manner of a schoolgirl.

A brown-clad arm—it belonged to a lieutenant of the Panamanian police—reached out. Fingers descended upon the collar of the handsome white suit. Mr. Yoshenko, speaking in Spanish, protested his innocence. The lieutenant, using the same language, retorted with the equivalent of the American, "Tell it to the judge!" Then Mr. Yoshenko was put in a patrol-wagon, along with other civilians of assorted nationalities.

Meanwhile the shore-patrols were loading their own wagons. The red-headed sailor, he whose father had decided ideas about the submarine service, drew the tender mercies of a burly lad who resembled a gorilla, who obviously enjoyed the task at hand, and who recognized his prize as an old acquaintance.

"Gurrr!" growled the gorilla, as he hustled the red-head along the street. "Are my eyes going bad on me? The skipper's pet! Studying for the Academy. And the spick behind the bar tells me you were the lad who started the shindig."

"Listen, Buck," protested the red-head. "Give me a break, will you? If you-all will call the Zone cops, at their station, they will tell you that a lieutenant guy named Speed Bruce asked me to start that ruckus. He asked me—"

"Horsefeathers!" said the gorilla. "If I don't fall for that, I suppose you will tell me you can't be clapped in the brig because you have a date to meet the skipper at the Washington for breakfast."

The red-head sighed with resignation, and submitted to being loaded, none too gently, in an already overcrowded patrol-wagon.

"Here, you guys," said the gorilla. "Get up and give this bird a seat. He rates it. Had a brand-new one. Said the Zone cops asked him to start that shindig."

GINGERLY the red-head seated himself on about three inches of board, and glanced about. A street-light revealed that his companions bore scars, while he was quite unscathed. This, he decided, was not pleasant. But in due time he would obtain the ear of his skipper. The telephone-call would be made.

Meanwhile he must put the record straight. The contagious grin appeared on his face as he addressed the gorilla, who was riding the tailbuck of the swaying patrol.

"Understand, Buck, I aint apologizing. As those things go, it was a right nice ruckus."

CHAPTER VII

ACROSS the Isthmus in Panama City, the "silk merchant," he who delivered the ultimatum to Mr. Yoshenko, had put in a restless day. The steamship *Kahrinkle*, in which he had more than a passing interest, was due in Balboa on the seventeenth. Now, with the afternoon well under way, there was no sign of the vessel.

The "merchant" left the Central Hotel, where he was registered, and made his way to the waterfront. There, seated on a bench, which was in the shade of a monument erected to the memory of brave Frenchmen who lost their lives in an unsuccessful attempt to build the Canal, he kept vigil. Before him was the Bay of Panama. To his left, like an arm reaching out into the sea, Fort Amadore. Beyond that, the breakwater. At an even greater distance, the fortified islands, which contain military secrets that are closely guarded.

But the silk merchant was not interested in these sights. He sat calmly awaiting the arrival of the *Kahrinkle*.

Meanwhile, in an office in near-by Balboa, a radio-man placed a message before the port captain, and at the same time recited its contents:

"Steamship *Kahrinkle*, Orient to New York, general cargo. Will arrive off breakwater about five P.M."

The port captain nodded, and then went into action, shouting orders to a clerk in an adjoining office. Soon a little group of men assembled in the room. There was a Panama Canal pilot, who rejoiced in the rather picturesque name of Hell's-bells McNinty, and who would take the vessel through to Cristobal. Standing beside him was a capable-looking gentleman known as Stoker Braun, who would be stationed in the engine-room, and who would see that commands from the bridge were obeyed. Also present were a port doctor, and Lieutenant George Manners, of the Canal Zone police, the latter man to be in charge of the boarding-party.

The port captain addressed himself to Mr. McNinty.

"Bring her in to an anchorage. Too late to make a transit today. You and Braun stay aboard; and if everything is satisfactory, take her through first thing in the morning. By the way, take it easy through the Cut. Bad slide. Dex Harrison is there. And if you even suspect that anything is wrong at any time during the transit, don't hesitate to stop her, and throw out your anchors."

He turned to Lieutenant Manners.

"We haven't anything definite, but any craft from that neck of the woods is on the suspect list. No need to tell you this, but I am building up my own alibi in case anything should happen later." He grinned. "Here goes:

"Remember, she is a vessel flying the flag of a supposedly friendly power, but go over every foot of her. Use the whole bag of excuses. Tip on narcotics. Variance on Panama Canal tonnage, and an excuse to take measurements. The Doctor can help you by finding some interesting diseases among the crew. After you get started, cook up a plausible excuse to send for more men, and we will rush them to you. Got that?"

They all nodded.

"Very good. After we are sure she is clean, we will take damned good care to keep her that way. Two or three police launches will play around there most of the night. Two gunboats are tied up near that anchorage, and we will move in several destroyers." He grinned. "A lot of searchlight-drill tonight."

He stood up. "Good luck, gentlemen."

THE silk merchant, sitting in the square, spotted the smudge of smoke that was the *Kahrinkle*. He watched with interest when the launch carrying the boarding-party started to meet that smudge. The launch was so far away that he could not tell definitely, but he rather fancied that the number of officials was not unusually large. He was still waiting when the ship, a large freighter, rakish but rusty, entered the bay, the harbor, and then passed from his view as she neared the anchorage off Balboa.

The silk merchant hailed a taxi and drove to the Balboa piers. He arrived in time to see a second boarding-party, composed of capable-looking and husky Zone policemen, go aboard the vessel. It was then that the silk merchant decided it might be well for him to shun that neighborhood. He returned to the Central Hotel. He had only passing interest in what might happen aboard the vessel. His worries had ceased when the smudge of smoke had appeared on the horizon.

But another person had been interested in the arrival of the *Kahrinkle*. Florenzio, the Panamanian under-cover man of the Zone police, noticed the presence of the silk merchant, and his hasty departure. He trailed him to his hotel. Then he called the Balboa police-station. That message was relayed to the vessel. It caused the search to go on with renewed vigor.

IT continued until shortly after four o'clock the morning of the eighteenth, when Lieutenant Manners sought the master of the vessel. The search had been carried from bow to stern, from keel to masthead. The cargo had been broken open and examined. One entire hold had been emptied and then reloaded. The doctor had done his bit by ordering thorough fumigation. That necessitated ripping out the quarters of officers and crew. A dispute over the amount of toll had made careful measurements necessary, and they included tapping that proved there were no secret compartments.

Now, however, Lieutenant Manners and his men had exhausted their bag of tricks. The vessel was "clean." They knew, as every sane man knew, that with the affairs of the world in their present state, every vessel flying that flag was a potential danger as it passed through the Canal. Officially the two countries were at peace. This, however, was the era of undeclared wars. But the United States would play the game according to the rules.

So Lieutenant Manners nodded pleasantly to the skipper, and said: "All clear, sir."

The little Oriental smirked. He bowed. He drew in his breath with a hissing sound as he said:

"Sank you."

He was the acme of politeness, almost of humility; yet at the same time there was colossal insolence hidden in his manner. Lieutenant Manners turned hastily, and almost bumped into Hell's-bells McNinty, who was perched atop a railing.

"Not sleeping?" asked the policeman.

"No," said the pilot. He looked at his watch, the same action which was being taken by a human mole in his

Bruce seized the arm that was wielding the weapon.

burrow fifty miles away, and saw that it was ten minutes of five. "Not sleeping. Just sitting."

TRAFFIC was light on the road leading out from Cristobal to Gatun, for it was after midnight; and Canal Zone residents, despite their proximity to the night-life of Panama, for the most part lead rather staid and uneventful careers.

Speed Bruce piloted his borrowed car to a halt at a spot along that road a short distance from the outskirts of Gatun. Then he alighted, raised the hood of the automobile, and proceeded to give a convincing impersonation of a young man afflicted with engine trouble.

He had worked but a few minutes when an automobile pulled to a stop beside him. A deep voice asked:

"Can we help?"

Bruce looked up, and saw a man in the uniform of a major in the Army. He smiled.

"Hello, Hugh." He turned to the woman sitting beside the officer. "Good evening, Betsy. Thanks, Hugh, but I don't need any help."

"Don't be foolish, Speed," the woman protested. "Leave the car here, and let us give you a lift. We might even be able to shake up a cocktail."

Bruce shook his head, and the Army man said:

"Pipe down, Betsy. I gather that we are in the way here. Good night, Speed."

The minutes ticked on. Five times a car approached, and five times a car stopped. Canal people are impulsive, kindly and quick to go to the aid of anybody in trouble. Five times Bruce explained patiently that he was not in need of assistance.

Then a car approached from the direction of Cristobal. It was hugging the left side of the road, as is the custom in Panama. The headlights picked up the car parked by the curb, and revealed the man working over the engine; but the steady whine of the motor of the approaching car indicated its driver had no intention of stopping.

Speed Bruce straightened. He stepped to the center of the road, and raised his right arm. The car—it was an open roadster—slowed down, and stopped beside him.

"I am having a bit of motor trouble," Bruce explained. "Don't like to inconvenience you, but I am afraid I'll have to ask for a lift."

Before Bracor, who was at the wheel, could answer, Marita said something to him in a low voice. The engineer hesitated. The girl, obviously, had urged him to deny the request. But Bracor hesitated because of the unwritten law of the country, and the fact that the request came from a fellow-American.

"We—we aren't going very far," was the best he could manage.

"That is quite all right," Bruce assured him. "Every little bit helps." He walked toward the rear of the car. "I'll just open up this rumble seat."

"*Non!*" the exclamation came from the girl. "Why do zat?" The fright that sounded in the first word vanished. Now her voice was throaty, seductive. "You zit right here wiz me. *Non?*" There was mockery in her laugh, as she crowded over against Bracor. "Zat ees, eef you are not afraid."

Bruce slipped into the space she had vacated. The car started. They passed through the military reservation that is part of the fortifications near Gatun. The girl's head was thrown back, and she hummed the words of a gay song, slightly suggestive in Spanish, that had to do with the plight of a little country girl who visited Mexico City.

Then the car was running along a street lined with rows of banyan trees, the tops of which met above the roadway. The song ceased abruptly.

"Herbert! You haf forgotten."

The car slowed down.

She leaned forward, turning a little, so that one shoulder was a shield between her and Bracor.

"Zis, I call eet my street." The words were addressed to Bruce. The melting glance also was directed in his direction. "Eet is zo beautiful." When she turned, her body had been pressed against the policeman. She made no attempt to move. "Zee trees, zey are so straight." Her right hand, which had been resting on her wrap, shot out in a gesture. The wrap fell away, revealing a glimpse of the scanty costume, which served only to accentuate the beauty of the ivory-tinted flesh it pretended to conceal. "Yust like soldiers, zey zeem. Always, I tell Herbert to drive slow. But *là, là, là!* Always he forget."

The slowing down of the car sounded a warning to Bruce. Here was the unusual. Here, bound up in what appeared to be merely a whim on the part of a beautiful girl, was danger.

Her throaty voice, her flashing eyes, the pressure of her body, and the perfume of her, these all served to dull quick thinking—and, his mind told him, all were designed for just that purpose. Her right hand shot out in the gesture, and a picture flashed through his mind:

A classroom in Washington; a discussion under the heading of psychology:

"There is nothing better," the instructor said, "than a quick, obvious gesture to attract attention from the direction in which things actually are happening."

Her right hand was extended toward the center of the road. He glanced away, ignoring the completion of the gesture, and ignoring the flash of ivory-tinted flesh that had been revealed by it. Her left arm, resting on the top of the seat, extended across Bracor's back, with the hand trailing over the side of the car.

SHE was leaning forward, using all her wiles; and that made it possible for Bruce to watch the left hand. The right hand reached the climax of its gesture. . . . Then the left hand was extended, and from it emerged a small patch of white. The left hand moved slightly, and something white dropped from it, disappearing from sight in the darkness among the banyan trees.

The car rounded a turn in the road.

"Was zat not beautiful?" she demanded, looking him full in the eyes.

"Beautiful," he agreed. There was the ring of authority in his voice as he turned to the driver. "Stop here, Bracor. I won't trouble you any longer." The car halted. "Friends of mine live right across the way."

He was half standing, watching their indecision, and noting Bracor's surprise at the use of his name. Out of the corner of an eye he saw the headlights of a following car come around the turn. The girl's right hand shot toward the horn button in the center of the steering-wheel. He seized it; at the same time, he clapped his other hand over the girl's mouth.

"Police in that other car, Bracor," he warned. "Don't do anything to make it harder for yourself."

The second car came to a stop beside them. Bruce gave his orders in a low voice:

"Two of you in here. Don't let her scream, or get at that horn. Take them to the Gatun station. I want Williams and Day with me. The rest of you, pull ahead about half a mile, and wait."

AS the two cars drove away, he turned to Williams:

"She threw a message among the banyan trees around the corner. It landed somewhere near the tenth tree from this end, and on this side of the road. The man waiting for it wouldn't stand too near the road, and he must have seen the lights of your car coming on, so he probably is in there now hunting for it. I'll go in from this end. You circle around, and come in from the other side."

They separated. Bruce approached the grove of banyan trees. They were beautiful, silhouetted against the night tropical sky. The light from the street caused their gnarled limbs and roots to assume grotesque shapes.

Bruce crept forward noiselessly. Inwardly he gave thanks that he had chosen a tan-colored gabardine suit. The moon was high in the sky, and almost full, but it was dark among the trees. He dropped to the ground, and wormed forward, pausing to take shelter behind each tree. There was not a sound; but the moonlight, filtering through the branches, made eerie, dancing shadows, which served to distract him.

Off to his right, and deeper in the shadows, a branch snapped. He changed his position, and wriggled toward that sound. He went forward slowly, knowing he might be visible to the man lurking there. There had been no other sound, so he assumed the man was not

moving. He was breathing fast from the exertion, and he rested a moment on the ground behind a tree.

The sound came again, and this time it was behind him. A little chill crept up his back at the thought that his quarry might be stalking him. He worked his way around the tree. He could see nothing, and there was no noise, but some instinct seemed to warn him that the man he sought was very near.

There was a rustling, and again it was instinct that caused him to throw his body to one side. A machete swished through the air, and plunged into the ground at the spot where he had been. He threw himself upon the weapon, and seized the arm that was wielding it. A jerk pulled his opponent to him, and they were locked in a furious struggle, with Bruce's arms pinioned so that he was unable to reach his revolver.

They swayed back and forth, their bodies crashing among the undergrowth. There was no longer any need for concealment. If the man he was fighting had confederates, they must have vanished when the struggle started. So Bruce called out:

"This way, Williams!"

His adversary swore as a whistle sounded in the distance. They fought on, straining and panting. Bruce gained the upper hand, and was choking his opponent into submission, as Williams and Day, a revolver in one hand, and a flashlight in the other, rushed to their side.

Rays of the flashlights played over them. The man on the ground covered his face with his hands. Bruce pulled them away.

"Paul!" cried Bruce.

They pulled him to his feet. Bruce's practiced hands went over his body. He found no weapon; but from inside his shirt he pulled an envelope. It bore the name, "*Marita.*" Bruce thrust it into his pocket, and faced the youth, who glared at him defiantly.

"WHAT is it all about, Paul?" Bruce asked.

"You can't make me talk," Paul retorted. "You can cut me to little pieces, but I won't talk! You can't make—"

"No," Bruce admitted, "we can't make you talk." He stood studying his prisoner's face, which was revealed by the beam from the flashlight. "But you are going to talk, Paul."

"Why?" the youth demanded.

The Zone policeman hesitated. Inwardly he was elated at the first sip of the heady wine of success. This was the break! The pieces of the puzzle were beginning to fall into place. But the identity of each new piece must be obtained from the piece before. And the building of the complete picture now was a race against time, with the deadline drawing nearer. This sullen youth standing before them held the secret they needed. He, perhaps unknowingly, was juggling with the fate of the United States—yes, maybe the fate of the world—while he hesitated. And speed was vital.

BRUCE fought back an almost overwhelming urge to throw himself upon the youth, and literally beat the truth from him. His common sense held him back. He was proud, this son of a Panamanian mother and an American father. He was sensitive, and he had a martyr complex. It had been no idle boast when he had declared that he could not be forced to talk.

"Why?" Paul repeated.

"Because you have made a bad mistake," Bruce told him.

Paul was silent.

The Zone policeman staked all his hopes of success on one line of attack:

"You have gone through life hating the world. You hate Americans because of your father. You hate Panamanians because of your mother, and because you believe Panamanians are inferior to Americans. You won't see that both nations have qualities that are cause for pride. You won't admit that men of both countries like you, and wanted to help you. I asked you to come and see me about joining the police. You didn't come. I know why—now."

He stood beside the youth, his fingers gripping his shoulders.

"These Orientals came. They flattered you. They sympathized with your imagined wrongs. They gave you money. They turned you into an enemy of the United States. They made you an enemy of Panama, because the United States and Panama are bound together. They made a fool of you, and laughed at you."

He saw the youth wince, and he drove the blow home.

"They are serving their country. But they made you a traitor. You know what a traitor is, Paul."

Bruce stepped back. The dice were rolling, thrown with all the cunning at

his command. The outcome was in the lap of the gods.

Paul moistened his lips with his tongue. "Yes, I am a traitor."

They stood watching him. Bruce motioned Williams to be silent. The dice were coming to rest.

"But you must believe this: I went to school so that I could be a good American; but there I learned that that could not be. 'All right,' I said to myself, 'the good God has willed that my skin shall be yellow, so I will be a good Panamanian.' But that could not be, and I was an outcast.

"'What is this difference between races and countries?' I ask myself. I hear Americans say to Panamanians: 'We are the same. We are full friends.' They know that is not true. I hear Panamanians say: 'We are equal to Americans. There is no difference. We are good friends.' That, also, is not true.

"One country is so big, so strong and so rich. The other country is so small, so weak and so poor. There can be no love and understanding between two countries like that."

HE rushed on, his pent-up bitterness, and his pleasure in finding an interested audience, overcoming his dismay at his own plight.

"It is like two men, who go fishing together. One man owns the *cayuco*. The hooks and the lines are his. He has provided the bait. He brings the food. The other man has nothing, and he is ashamed. That makes him hate the rich man. To cover his shame, he says: 'You have all these things, but you do not know where to fish. See, it is I who show you.' That makes the rich man hate him.

"Panama and the United States are like that. Even I, who am a poor boy, can see that. I say to myself: 'How can this be changed?' I know there is only one way. Maybe the United States is in great danger, and unable to help herself, and Panama helps her. That would be as if the two men fishing had each brought their share. Then I laugh. I know that never can be. I know that Panama—"

He broke off abruptly. Suddenly his face was transfigured.

"Yes, yes! I see it all now. It is a clear vision. It is as if the Blessed Virgin had stepped from the golden altar in the Church of San José, and said to me: 'Paul, you are to do this.'

"Listen to me, Lieutenant:

"The Orientals are under the concrete dam in a tunnel. The message you took from me came from Yoshenko, and was for them. I was to deliver it to Juan, who is waiting just inside the jungle. He is an Indian, so it is safer for me if I am seen here. Juan was to deliver the message in the tunnel and get an answer. I was to take that from him, and deliver it to Marita, when she returns. She has the engineer drive slow, and holds out her hand. I place the message there, while I am standing behind a tree. The message tonight will tell Yoshenko at what hour they will be ready to blow up the dam. This morning Juan said they had only a short distance to go."

Bruce stood tense.

"Hurry, Paul," he ordered.

"Yes. I will meet Juan. I must go alone, because he is an Indian, and cannot be fooled. You must trust me. Juan must die. There is no other way. He would make it impossible for us to succeed.

"Then I will return to you. I will find the tunnel, and enter. It is very dark there, and they will be working at the far end. You can remain hidden behind me. Other policemen can follow us, but not too close. The Orientals must not suspect anything. When we approach them, I will tell them that Juan is sick, and that I have the message. Then we must fall upon them, and stop what they are trying to do."

He drew himself erect.

"I will die." The zeal of a fanatic was mirrored on his face. "That is better than dying as a traitor. You also may die. You are a brave man. But first you must promise something."

He saw the Zone policeman hesitate.

"It is nothing dishonorable. Tell the other policemen nothing about my dishonor. Tell them that I was glad to do this. Instruct them, that when they talk about this, and when they put it in reports, they say that I was a Panamanian. I give that to my mother's people. Then they will no longer be ashamed, and they will not have to make idle boasts. You will promise that?"

SPEED BRUCE's voice was husky. "Yes, Paul." He turned to Williams. You must be sure to attend to that."

"Yes, but you'll—"

"Never mind that, Ralph," Bruce interrupted. "Come. We must hurry."

They returned to the road. A blast on a whistle summoned the police car.

"Gatun station," Bruce ordered. . . .

There they gave Paul a revolver and, at his request, a knife with a long blade. As he disappeared into the night, Bruce felt a shiver of distaste.

"I feel like a murderer," he said.

"Forget it," growled Williams. "The lad is right. It is the only way."

They sat on the steps, waiting. Stretched out before them was Gatun Lake, its waters shimmering in the moonlight. Off to one side the control-towers of the locks stood framed against the inky sky.

"Think he will be back?" asked Williams.

"Yes," said Bruce. "He'll be back."

PAUL returned within the hour, emerging from the darkness so quietly he was almost upon them before they saw him. He nodded in the affirmative, as they stood about him, tightening their belts, and preparing for what was ahead.

Seven Canal Zone policemen—unemotional, more or less hard-boiled. They made their final preparations quickly and quietly. There were no dramatics. One of them laughed as he said to the man at his side:

"I was supposed to be off duty at three."

Bruce turned. "Go home, if you want to."

"Like hell I will, Lieutenant," retorted the man.

They entered two cars, and drove a short distance. Then they alighted and set out at a steady dog-trot for the fringe of the jungle near by. When they reached it, Paul took the lead. They followed in single file, with Bruce close at his heels, and the other six a short distance in the rear.

Paul led them along at a fairly rapid pace. They followed him easily. Soon the youth halted.

"We are near the entrance to the tunnel. There may be a guard inside. Wait here."

They watched him walk forward, and kneel beside what appeared to be a tangled mass of vines. He vanished. They waited tensely. He reappeared, and rejoined them.

"No guard," he whispered. "They are at the far end. That means they are nearly ready."

They approached the entrance to the tunnel, and Bruce paid silent tribute to the clever manner in which it had been constructed.

"There is a drop of about five feet," Paul whispered. He disappeared through the vines.

"Wait two minutes," Bruce ordered his men. "Then follow us."

He pushed his feet through the vines, felt himself falling, and landed beside Paul.

"We must crawl," the youth whispered. "Keep your shoulders even with my knees. We'll keep together that way, and you'll be hidden. There's another drop, where the tunnel goes under the spillway. They have a ladder there."

They started off through the inky blackness of the tunnel. The ground beneath them was damp and unwholesome. Even here, near the entrance, the air was foul, and the heat was oppressive.

They reached the top of the ladder without incident. Paul descended; Bruce followed. They started through the second branch of the tunnel.

When they had proceeded some distance, crawling on their hands and knees, they saw rays of light flashing ahead of them. Paul's efforts at silence ceased, and he moved along noisily. Bruce's heart missed a beat at the thought the youth might intend to betray him.

"Who is that?"

THE cry, in Spanish, came from where dark forms were grouped about flashing lights.

"Paul. I have the message. Juan is sick."

Paul, on his knees in the tunnel at the entrance to the chamber, straightened up, so that the upper part of his body formed a shield for Bruce as the rays of a flashlight traveled in the direction of the voice. The policeman flattened himself on the floor of the tunnel.

The youth moved forward awkwardly. He reached the side of the man most distant from the head of the tunnel, the man who held a revolver in his hand.

Paul held out his left hand. "Here is the message." He stood peering into the gloom. His eyes were becoming accustomed to the change from complete darkness. There, about seven feet away from him, was the engineer who was in charge of the Orientals. This man was sitting with his back braced against the far wall of the chamber. In his hand he held a switch, from which wires extended.

"You can cut me to little pieces, but I won't talk!"

"Give the message to me," the engineer ordered.

Paul took half a step forward. His right hand came up, and a revolver barked, the report echoing and reechoing in the confined space. The engineer slumped forward. Paul, who had leaped as he fired, was upon him, tearing the switch from his lifeless hands, and ripping the wires away.

The man who had been an admiral fired as Paul leaped forward. Bruce fired at him; and as he fired, the policeman leaped forward to complete the work of destruction Paul had started. He found the batteries, sent them crashing; and then grunting, straining bodies descended upon him.

More grunting, straining bodies poured on, and thrashed about in the small chamber. They fought furiously, these Zone policemen. Flashlights went on and off. There was no room for escape. It was easy to identify a foe by the touch of bare flesh. They did their work quickly and well. . . .

It was Williams, sweat-stained, bleeding and grimy, who played the rays of his

flashlight on the pile near where the batteries had been, and then began to work frantically, pulling Bruce clear. He bent over him, with exploratory hands.

"Just knocked out," he told the policemen who were pressing about. "I can't find anything serious."

Bruce opened his eyes.

"Is it—"

"Everything's fine," Williams said.

"Paul?"

Williams half turned, and sent the rays of his flashlight toward the supports of the dam, where the bodies of Paul and the engineer were locked in a close embrace.

"Paul," said Williams, "made that present to his mother's people." He turned back to Bruce, who had struggled to a sitting position. "Easy, there. You took a swell pounding. And you've lost plenty of blood."

Bruce braced himself, and tried to make a count.

"Did we lose anybody else?"

"Mason stopped some lead with his shoulder," said a policeman.

"I'll live," said a voice from the floor.

"Good!" said Bruce. "Let's clean up here. Pull out those charges. Handle 'em with care. Then get the wounded out of here. You go on ahead, Williams. Call the Inspector. Tell him we made it." He glanced at his watch. It was two minutes after five. "We *barely* made it!" he amended.

CHAPTER VIII

AT seven o'clock that same morning, signal flags fluttered from a mast on a hill overlooking Balboa Harbor, and the *Kahrinkle* hauled in her anchors and began the transit of the Canal. Hell's-bells McNinty was in the wheelhouse, where the Oriental quartermaster who was at the wheel obeyed his commands. The master of the vessel also was on the bridge. Stoker Braun was in the engine-room, keeping an alert eye upon the manner in which signals from the bridge were acted upon.

The ship slipped into the Canal, and at quarter speed began the run to Miraflores. She handled well, and McNinty inwardly approved the smart way in which his orders were followed. He relaxed a trifle, for he had an eight-hour run ahead of him.

As the *Kahrinkle* approached the first lock at Miraflores, McNinty signaled "*Stop*" on the telegraph. The engines ceased to turn. The vessel drifted forward, and came to rest just before the restraining chain at the entrance to the lock. Four electric "mules" put lines aboard the ship. Two on each side, one forward, the other aft. The man in the control-tower of the locks pressed a lever that dropped the chain. At the same time, the gates of the lock swung open.

Apparently without signal, the "mules" got under way, pulling the vessel into the lock, and also manipulating their cables so that the ship was held in the exact center of the chamber. There were neither visible nor audible signals. There was no shouting, and no confusion. Here was American efficiency of the sort that prompted one foreign ship captain, encountered it for the first time, to exclaim:

"It can't be real! It's too blooming perfect!"

THE "mules" halted the ship in the chamber. The gates swung shut; and as they closed, the hand-rail atop them crept upward into correct position, a final touch of mechanical perfection. The culverts opened, and water flowed into the lock, until its surface was on the level with the surface of the water in the lock beyond. Then the gates opened, and the "mules" pulled the ship into the second lock. There the process was repeated, until the vessel was on the level of Miraflores Lake. The gates leading into that body of water opened. The "mules" pulled the vessel clear of the lock, had her well under way, and then cast loose.

The *Kahrinkle,* a prosaic tramp, was no ocean greyhound, and so McNinty took her across Miraflores Lake at half speed. He cut that in half as he neared the lock at Pedro Miguel, familiarly known to all Canal employees as Peter McGill.

The vessel entered the lock. The task of raising her to the level of the lake canal, which extends from Peter McGill to Gatun, began. It was hot at the bottom of the lock chamber; McNinty quit the wheelhouse, and lounged on a wing of the bridge. The rise of the vessel brought the bridge on a level with the top of the lock, where armed patrolmen and several civilians were standing.

"There is a God!" cried a voice from the lock. "They caught up with him at last, and took him off the big babies. Put him on a tramp, where he belongs.

Next week, after he has piled up some of the small stuff, they'll put him on a launch."

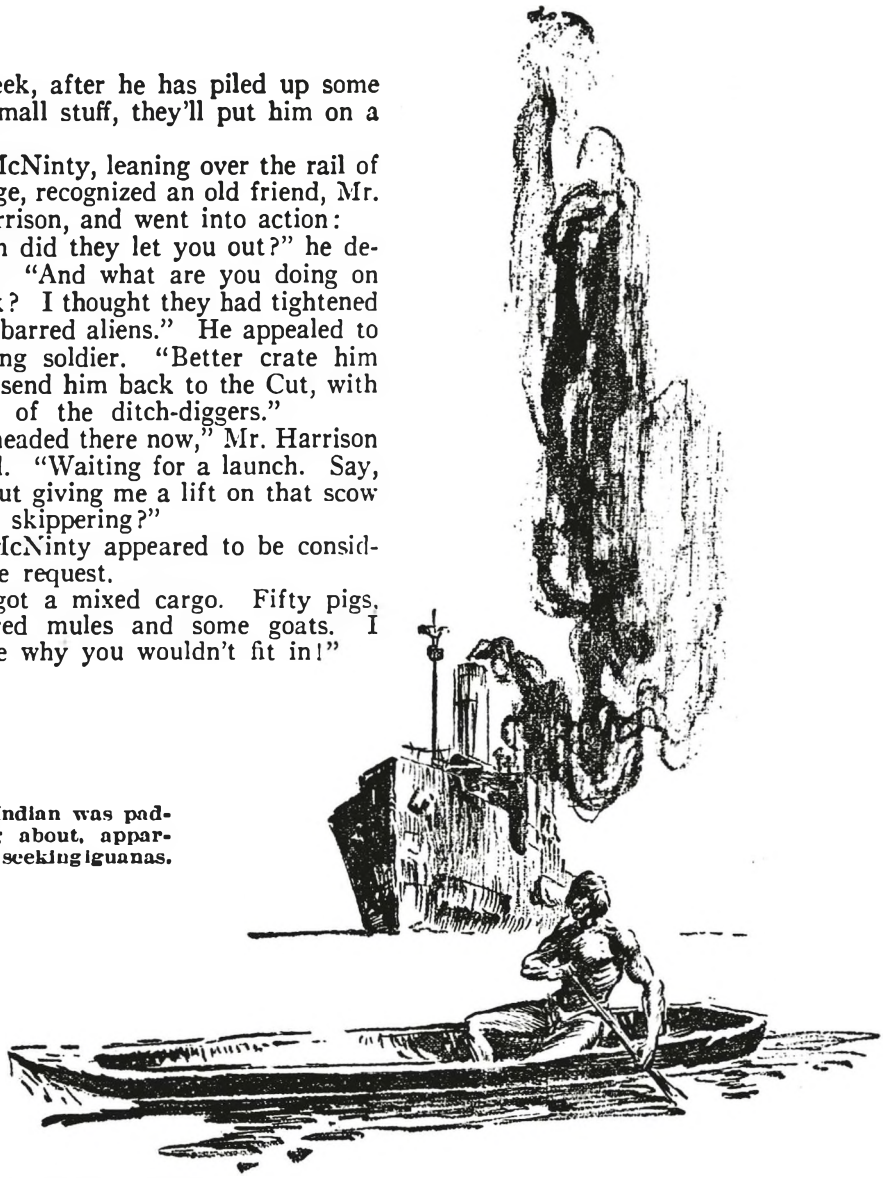
Mr. McNinty, leaning over the rail of the bridge, recognized an old friend, Mr. Dex Harrison, and went into action:

"When did they let you out?" he demanded. "And what are you doing on that lock? I thought they had tightened up, and barred aliens." He appealed to a grinning soldier. "Better crate him up, and send him back to the Cut, with the rest of the ditch-diggers."

"I'm headed there now," Mr. Harrison admitted. "Waiting for a launch. Say, how about giving me a lift on that scow you are skippering?"

Mr. McNinty appeared to be considering the request.

"We got a mixed cargo. Fifty pigs, a hundred mules and some goats. I don't see why you wouldn't fit in!"



An Indian was paddling about, apparently seeking iguanas.

Whereupon Mr. McNinty entered the wheelhouse and informed the captain that he had taken it upon himself to give a high official of the Canal passage as far as the Cut. The captain bowed his assent.

Mr. Harrison turned to a civilian at his side:

"Call Dredge No. 2, and tell 'em to cancel the launch, but ask them to pick me off this hooker as she goes by."

He waited until the forward rail of the vessel was on a level with the top of the lock, jumped and landed safely on the forward deck. Then he made his way to the bridge.

"Stand over there," Mr. McNinty greeted him. "Don't touch anything, and don't ask questions. If you are a good boy, maybe we will let you blow the whistle."

They cleared the lock; the "mules" cut loose, and they headed for the entrance to the Cut, a man-made passage between towering hills, and abounding in sharp turns. Mr. Harrison, after expressing his belief that they would wind up on a mud-bank, settled back to watch Mr. McNinty in action.

The quartermaster was waved to one side as the Canal pilot took the wheel. First he got the "feel" of the vessel. Then he proceeded to give a performance that proved just why he was assigned to the largest vessels that used the Canal.

The nose of the ship poked around a bend, and appeared almost to graze a miniature mountain. He held her on that course until the bow seemed about to come to a rest on a mud-flat. He had the speed of the vessel calculated to a matter of feet. He eased her off, and

changed the course just when disaster seemed inevitable.

It was beautiful piloting, and only a few men could do it; but exhibitionism was not the motive. By holding on for those few extra feet, the next course, when the ship turned in answer to his command, became just that much safer and easier.

"I couldn't do much better myself," Mr. Harrison admitted as a difficult turn was negotiated. He stepped out of the wheelhouse to take a look at the wake.

ASTERN of the vessel an Indian was paddling about in a *cayuco,* apparently seeking iguanas, those giant lizards much esteemed as an article of food by the natives, and which furnish the base for a goodly portion of the "chicken salad" served in the Republic of Panama.

The next thing that caught his attention was a line trailing from the stern of the vessel. It resembled the patent log that ships trail to record their speed; but the engineer knew this device would not be used during the transit of the Canal, where there would be no doubt regarding the ship's position.

Then he saw that the Indian had paddled his *cayuco* to where the rope was moving through the water, at a slow pace because of the slow speed of the vessel. The Indian dropped his paddle, and lifted an object, which he appeared to be attaching to the trailing line.

Dex Harrison returned to the wheelhouse, trying to keep his face expressionless. The Oriental captain was gone, but the quartermaster remained. Before the engineer could decide on a plan of action, the skipper returned, mounting the ladder on the other side of the bridge. He was bland and smiling as he resumed his station.

Harrison addressed himself to McNinty:

"Sure seems good to see you again."

McNinty was suspicious of this offering.

"Yeah! Well, if it was a choice between you and malaria—"

Harrison turned to the captain.

"Mr. McNinty and I are old friends," he explained. "Ever since the World War. Remember when we were in Paris together?"

"Oh, yes," said McNinty, who was completely in the dark, but who sensed something unusual was going on.

"Remember that little blonde singer at that cabaret?" Harrison continued. "I'll never forget that dame. Even now, I recall a few of the words of that little *chanson* she used to sing."

He began to chant, singing in French:

Paris in the spring;
Do not display surprise.
Tra, la, la, la, da, la;
An Indian in a canoe,
Tra, la, la, la, la,
Tied something on a line,
To be taken on this ship,
That's Paris in the spring.

He ceased his song.

"Don't remember the rest of it," he said in English. "Foolish little thing." He shot a look at the captain, and saw only polite interest on the Oriental's face. "But it kind of got you."

"Yes," said Hell's-bells McNinty, busy with the wheel, "it got you. It got me the first time I heard it, even though I didn't understand much French then. Do you speak French, Captain?"

The Oriental smiled.

"No. My own language, yes." There were footsteps on the stairs, and a burly Oriental whose three stripes indicated he was the mate, appeared on the bridge. "Yours, a little. That is all."

A little chill ran down McNinty's spine. He knew that the man was lying. Knew that the ship's master was on his guard, and that death would be the penalty for a false move.

THE ship was rounding a turn in the Canal. McNinty, gritting his teeth, decided to ground the vessel. But before he could put the plan into action, the burly mate brushed against him. He felt a revolver thrust up to his side.

"Move away!" came the command.

McNinty, looking death in the face, obeyed, and the quartermaster took the wheel.

Harrison, who had taken a step forward, found himself staring at a revolver in the hand of the Captain.

"Pleeze!" hissed the little Oriental. "Do not make necessary!"

Harrison halted.

The mate issued a sharp order to the man at the wheel, and the vessel straightened out on the correct course. Three sailors appeared on the bridge. A sneer crossed the face of the mate.

"Fools of Americans! They put up range lights and markers, so that a child could take a ship through."

He indicated the next signal to the wheelsman.

The *Kahrinkle* approached the heart of the Cut, where the dredges were working. Harrison tried a bluff.

"This," he told the Captain, "is where I get off. And if I don't get off, it will be just too bad for you."

The revolver came up until it was aimed at his heart.

"You stay! When the boat comes out for you, you tell them you go on to Cristobal. You tell them more, and you die."

Harrison shrugged.

"I would sooner live," he admitted.

Ahead, a power-boat put out from a dredge, and bore down upon the tramp. The smaller boat then circled and ran alongside the steamer. The engineer in the small craft stood up, and called:

"Coming aboard, Dex?"

Harrison leaned over the railing of the bridge. The captain stood beside him; and a revolver, hidden from the small-boat by the canvas of the bridge, was pressed against him.

"Nope," said Harrison. "Going through to Cristobal." He hesitated, then added: "Tell Speed Bruce, will you?"

He held his breath, but the man in the boat merely said:

"Right!"

The power-boat pulled away, and headed back to the dredge. The *Kahrinkle* waddled on her leisurely way, bound for Gatun Lake.

Hell's-bells McNinty faced his captors.

"How about letting the condemned men have a cigarette?"

CHAPTER IX

INSPECTOR WILKES worked through a hectic day. On the dot of five in the morning the round-up of all known suspects had started. Canal Zone policemen, accompanied by Panamanian policemen, and with the latter making the formal arrests, scoured the highways and byways of Panama City and Colon for their quarry. Soon the "bag" began trickling in: Barbers, taxi-drivers, merchants—among them the "silk merchant." Waitresses, cabaret girls, women from Coconut Grove in Panama City, and Cash Street in Colon. Small fry and large.

The drive was hardly under way when Williams reported the seizure of the human moles under Gatun Dam. Inspector Wilkes heaved a sigh of relief as he reported to his superior, the Chief of Police. The military authorities were notified. The governor was advised.

A very little questioning established the fact that Bracor, the engineer, had been only an innocent dupe. Even less effort brought out the fact that the girl called Marita was far from innocent, but additional questioning, no matter how lengthy or severe, resulted only in more eye-rolling, and more, *"Là! là! là!"*

Wearily, Inspector Wilkes ordered her returned to a cell. Then, accompanied by a stenographer, he visited the Cristobal Hospital, prepared to concentrate upon the eight survivors from the tunnel.

Intelligence officers of the Army and Navy were working when he arrived. Several of the Orientals were at the point of death. All had been disavowed by the government they served. They accepted that stoically. They turned imperturbable eyes upon their questioners, and fell back upon Oriental calm as the ordeal continued.

Inspector Wilkes left the hospital shaking his head, a grudging tribute to their courage. After all, they served their country, in the way which that country would be served.

HE was back at the Cristobal police station; a hot, humid afternoon was well under way, when the door of the office opened. Speed Bruce entered. He was a trifle pale beneath his tan, and a bandage covered his head above the eyes.

Inspector Wilkes glared at him.

"I thought I told you to stay at the hospital," he barked.

Bruce grinned.

"I thought it would be quieter here, what with the way you were shouting at those poor devils."

Inspector Wilkes prepared for action by placing an unlighted cigar in his mouth.

"You are just in time to hear some more shouting," he declared. "I am going to work on your friend Yoshenko." He pressed a button. "Yoshenko," he told the officer who answered.

They waited.

"By the way," said Inspector Wilkes, "there was a telephone-call for you. Some chap in Engineering."

"It wasn't Dex Harrison?"

"No, not Dex. I was busy as hell. He insisted that he had to talk to you. I told him to try the hospital, and hung up on him. Sorry."

Bruce shrugged.

A patrolman led Yoshenko into the room.

The Oriental was not happy. His first experience with a Panamanian jail had been a bitter one. When he entered the cell, he was the sixth occupant. Before morning there had been fifteen men in the same space, and standing-room was at a premium. His unhappiness was increased when the prison "grapevine" reported that "something had happened at Gatun." The next report, which was to the effect that "lots of Orientals had been taken to the hospital," also failed to reassure him.

As the day passed, Mr. Yoshenko resigned himself to fate. He had failed. That was bitter. The white barbarians had the last laugh. Ah, but did they? They had the silk merchant still to reckon with. He prayed silently for the success of his rival's plan. The comforting thought that it might succeed, sustained him when he was led to face Inspector Wilkes. He stood before the desk for a good five minutes while the Inspector wrote on a piece of paper. Speed Bruce, the other occupant of the office, was engrossed in a newspaper. Then Inspector Wilkes looked up.

"All right, Yoshenko. You don't have to say a word. I'll do the talking. Your precious pals tell me that you are the main works here in Panama. Your grateful country says that it never heard of you. Where does that put you?"

Mr. Yoshenko smiled blandly. "It puts me here, thinking that you are trying a very old bluff."

Inspector Wilkes warmed to his task. "Think so?"

He surveyed the man before him.

"Nice suit you are wearing. But it is in terrible shape. I am going to send it out to the Stockade, in Gamboa, for a good cleaning. And you are going to be in it. Now what do you have to say?"

"I demand my—"

"You'll have to speak louder," interrupted Inspector Wilkes. "My hearing is getting worse and worse. But I can hear that," he added, as a telephone-bell buzzed. He answer the call, and then turned to Bruce. "It's for you."

KEITH WILSON, the engineer on Dredge No. 2, had tried to obey orders. He had been told to give a message to Speed Bruce, but on his first attempt he had been greeted with the information that the telephone was reserved for Army, Navy and Police calls. He explained that his call concerned police business. There was a long delay. Then he was connected with police headquarters in Balboa, only to be told Bruce was in Cristobal.

BY that time he was called away to attend to urgent work of his own. Then he returned to the task, and after an even longer delay was connected with Cristobal.

There were more delays and interruptions. Finally he heard:

"Lieutenant Bruce speaking."

"Hello, Speed. This is Keith Wilson. Phew! You are as hard to find as snow in Panama! Speed, Dex Harrison went through the Cut this morning on an Oriental freighter, the *Kahrinkle.* I had orders to take him off, but he yelled down from the bridge that he was going on through to Cristobal. He told me to notify you."

Bruce whistled aloud.

"Yes," Wilson agreed. "The more I think of it, the less I like it. He didn't act like himself, and the skipper of the tub was standing right beside him, apparently very much interested in what was going on. And another thing: McNinty was the pilot. I saw him on the bridge, and he didn't have a thing to say. That isn't like McNinty!"

"How long ago was this?" demanded Bruce.

Wilson did some figuring.

"If you step on it, you can knock her off on the lake, before she hits the locks. I think she rates a going-over."

"Right!"

Bruce turned away from the telephone. His words were addressed to Inspector Wilkes, but he watched Yoshenko.

"I am going out to Gatun. An Oriental freighter, the *Kahrinkle,* is coming through. I am going to knock her off before she hits the locks."

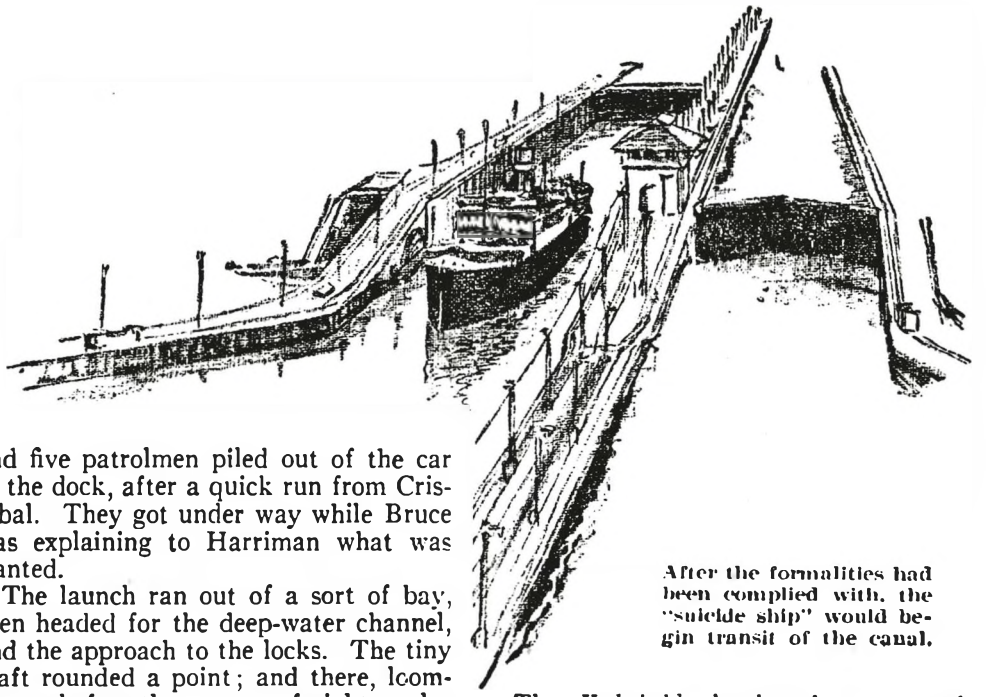
For just a fraction of a second Yoshenko changed countenance. Then he became his usual bland and inscrutable self.

"Right," said Inspector Wilkes. "Give Harriman a ring, and the boat will be waiting. And take enough men with you."

The Inspector also had noted the brief lapse on the part of Yoshenko. He seized upon the new lead.

"Now, Yoshenko, about this freighter, the *Kahrinkle*—"

Sergeant Harriman had the motor of the police launch running when Bruce



After the formalities had been complied with, the "suicide ship" would begin transit of the canal.

and five patrolmen piled out of the car at the dock, after a quick run from Cristobal. They got under way while Bruce was explaining to Harriman what was wanted.

The launch ran out of a sort of bay, then headed for the deep-water channel, and the approach to the locks. The tiny craft rounded a point; and there, looming up before them, was a freighter, also approaching the locks, but from another direction.

"That's the baby!" cried Sergeant Harriman.

"Go get her!" growled Bruce.

Harriman shouted a command to the Panamanian in the forward compartment of the launch. The motor roared, coughed once or twice, and then settled down to work. The bow of the launch went up as the speed increased.

It was an uneven race. The freighter was loafing along. She was unable to increase her speed, for that would arouse suspicion. But from the standpoint of distance, all the advantage was with her.

Bruce swore under his breath. He knew to a certainty what was about to happen. A glance through marine glasses showed him the signals were flying that gave the incoming ship right of way into the lock. The launch would not be in time to intercept the vessel. The launch carried no radio. The attention of the men on the locks, naturally, was directed on the incoming vessel.

All this, the Canal Zone policeman admitted to himself, was his fault. A telephone-call to the locks, a routine precaution against missing the vessel on the lake, would have prevented it. He had been in too much of a hurry to take that simple precaution.

He barked an order for more speed; but Harriman, who was bending over the motor, looked up to remark:

"Gar Wood didn't happen to design these launches, Lieutenant."

The *Kahrinkle* lumbered on toward the locks. Harrison and McNinty had been held on the bridge for exhibition purposes, so watchers on the locks would not suspect anything was amiss. Both men had revolvers pressed against them. Below decks, Braun had been overpowered, and trussed up neatly.

AS they neared the locks, engineer and pilot exchanged furtive glances. Those glances meant that they would die in an effort to prevent what was about to happen.

Harrison had a plan of action—he was prepared to leap forward, seize the whistle-cord, and sound a blast that would warn the men on the lock something was wrong. That would draw a bullet, but Dex Harrison had lived a life in which death had often been a factor to be considered.

McNinty quietly resolved to throw himself on the wheel, and perhaps send the vessel against the concrete wall that constituted the approach to the lock. The damage there would be small. He knew the penalty would be death. But he, like Harrison, was willing to pay it.

Both men had almost childlike faith in Speed Bruce. Harrison was certain Wilson had delivered the message. He was equally sure that Bruce would realize something was wrong, and take action. During the entire transit of the Canal, they had waited patiently for some sign that Bruce was on the job.

It was McNinty who saw the police launch approaching the locks at an an-

gle. The ship's officers also saw the craft. They debated increasing their speed, and then decided against it.

McNinty calculated the speed of the two boats, and measured the distances with his eyes. His heart sank as he realized that the launch was doomed to lose.

Bruce made his way forward in the launch. He reached the forward deck, used the flagstaff to steady himself, and stood erect. He pulled out his service revolver, and fired into the air until the gun was empty.

A SOLDIER, standing guard on the locks, shouted to the man in the control tower, who acted at once. A signal ordered the *Kahrinkle* to anchor.

But the ship came on. A bell rang in her engine-room, and the telegraph dial read: *"Full speed ahead."*

McNinty's jaw tightened as he saw the move. They were going to try to ram the lock gate. That would be interesting! The ditch-diggers had provided for that.

The ship, gaining speed every minute, entered the concrete-lined approach. A whistle sounded on the locks. An Army officer barked a command. Soldiers came running forward.

The police launch swung in toward the locks. Sergeant Harriman ran to the bow. He carried a rope ladder; it had grappling-hooks attached to one end.

The bow of the *Kahrinkle* crashed into the great chain that was stretched before the lock gate. The chain slackened a bit. Hydraulic springs yielded just enough to compensate for that slack.

The burly mate ran to the forward deck. He shouted an order. Three sailors appeared from the forecastle hatch. They pushed a metal drum before them. The mate joined them, and they bent over, preparatory to lifting the drum, and sending it flying against the lock gate.

The Army officer on the lock gave an order. A volley of shots was fired. The mate and the two sailors fell to the deck. The metal drum began to roll, and came to rest against a winch.

Sergeant Harriman tossed the ladder aboard the stern of the freighter. The hooks caught the railing. The ladder held. Led by Speed Bruce, the policemen swarmed up it.

Dex Harrison lunged out, and caught the Oriental captain square on the chin. The bow of the freighter was grinding away against the chain, which had reached the limit of its slack. The chain held.

McNinty leaned forward and threw the engine-room telegraph to *"Full speed astern."* Harrison grappled with the quartermaster.

Bruce led the rush to the bridge. A policeman joined Harrison. The quartermaster went down.

Hell's-bells McNinty took the wheel. The vessel lost its forward motion, and began to back from the lock. Sergeant Harriman led the charge toward the engine-room.

"They have Braun down there," said McNinty. He glanced up at Bruce. "Hello, Rollo! You might take a look at that valentine rolling around on the forward deck."

The vessel continued to back. Bruce bent over the drum.

"It has a trigger device on one head," he called up to the bridge. "I'll lash it fast, so that it won't do any more rolling around. Then we'll begin hunting for some more of the same."

"Where we going?" asked McNinty.

"To an anchorage about one mile out," said Bruce. "That's a nice place for the *Kahrinkle.*"

"Aint it the truth!" was Mr. McNinty's contribution.

NIGHT in Panama.

Early morning of the next day in Europe, where lights had burned all night in the government offices of a dozen countries. Sleepy-eyed foreign correspondents in various vantage-spots prepared dispatches for publication in the late morning edition of newspapers in the United States. The stories they wrote were much the same.

One of them said:

> A strange and unexplained calm descended upon Europe today.
>
> Despite rumors of two unsuccessful attempts to cripple the Panama Canal, the tension here, which has been mounting for months, seemed relaxed. Mobilizations have been halted. There is a growing tendency to submit long-standing disputes to arbitration, rather than force of arms.

Back in Panama, the locks of the Big Ditch were ablaze with light, and they teemed with activity. All along the line the range lights twinkled. Airplanes hummed through the skies. Great searchlights made vantage spots as bright as day.

A goodly portion of the battle fleet of the United States, which had been stationed in the Atlantic, was being moved to the Pacific, there to present a firm front against whatever might develop. The Canal, ordinarily not operated after dark, was working at its efficient best.

Speed Bruce and Dex Harrison, who had returned after disposing of the *Kahrinkle* and her crew, stood on the locks at Gatun. McNinty, who had been with them, had departed hastily, pressed into service, as he said, "to slip one of the big babies through."

IT had been a long, harrowing day, and the overwrought nerves of the policeman and the engineer made sleep an impossibility. So they stood on the lock, watching the big parade, and although they would have denied it hotly, thrilling to it.

Twelve "mules" pulled a big battle-wagon into the lock that opened into Gatun Lake. She was the pride of the United States Navy, the newest, the largest and the most powerful fighting machine afloat. Her designers had forgotten limitations imposed by now discarded treaties. Her guns established a new record in caliber. As she crawled along, her armored sides cleared the walls of the lock by inches.

The "mules" halted. The great ship strained at her cables, then came to rest. A figure appeared upon her navigating bridge, and Hell's-bells McNinty, resting his elbows comfortably upon cold steel, peered down at the crowd on the lock. Soon he spied Speed Bruce and Dex Harrison, and went into action.

"Hello, heroes!" His caustic voice carried above all the turmoil. "Waiting for your medals? Why should Congress do anything for you? You can't vote."

Mr. Harrison came to life.

"You made a swell mess of the last tub they trusted you with! Take a look at her as you go by—then don't try to bring this one up to the lock gate at full speed. We put those chains there for guys like you."

Mr. McNinty ignored this outburst.

"At that," he decided, "you guys have something coming to you. For once in your misspent lives, you put in a full eight-hour day. Congress may not get around to you, but I will. Here. Take this." He fumbled in a pocket, produced the stump of a pencil, and threw it in their general direction. "More useful to you than medals. That pencil is good to sign chits with at any bar in Colon."

Mr. McNinty ducked behind a steel wall, and disappeared from view. A grizzled officer, trim in white, appeared in the space he had vacated. The Navy man glanced down, saw the tall, bronzed policeman, and noted the bandage about his head. The fingers of his right hand snapped to the visor of his rakishly worn cap.

"Well done, Police!" he called. "We're proud of you."

A flaming red head emerged from the cab of a "mule."

"How about the ditch-diggers, Admiral?" yelled the owner of the hair.

The Admiral threw back his head, and roared with laughter.

"God loves 'em, son," he called. "And so does the Navy."

The outer gates of the lock swung open and the "mules" glided forward. The big battle-wagon slipped noiselessly toward Gatun Lake. Then the "mules" cut loose. From somewhere within the depths of the great vessel there came the muffled clang of a gong as Hell's-bells McNinty rang for forward speed.

The mighty turbines began to pulse, singing their song of speed and power. White-clad gobs, thronging her decks, waved gay farewells. The razorlike bow bit into the waters of Gatun Lake. The great ship moved on, cloaked in beauty and majesty. Now the song of her engines was deeper.

"Here we come!" they seemed to say. *"Steel, men and guns. Not for conquest. But always ready to defend that which is rightfully ours."*

The song became fainter.

"Peaceful nations need never fear us," purred the engines.

The hum became a growl as the engines obeyed McNinty's signal for more speed.

"But let the mad-dog nations beware!"

BRUCE and Harrison walked toward their car. They were silent. They had moist eyes and tight throats. Then, without any word to each other, they both turned for a final glance at the scene.

Out on the lake, the wave that washed away from the bow of the great battle-wagon was pure glistening silver. The troubled wake she left behind her, thanks to the moonlight, was molten gold.

THE END

Reilly of the

This sixteenth of the colorful "Warriors in Exile" series takes you to remote Madagascar and the Foreign Legion's weird and little-known campaign of conquest.

By
H. BEDFORD-JONES

PICARD flung a book down on the table with a horrible explosion of oaths. "This author has a Legionnaire say *'Mon Caporal! Mon Sergeant!'* He even has some one say *'Mon Maréchal!'* to a marshal. And I bought the book because the blighter claimed to have been in the Legion!"

Campbell pulled over the book, glanced at it, and grinned.

"Oh, this fellow! The nearest he ever got to the Legion was a girl in Bel Abbès who wasn't a bit particular. Why, Picard, don't you know the Legion has branded this book a fake? So has the French Government. You'll find some wonderful things in it, sure—things we never knew when we were in the Legion!"

Picard cursed anew. But old Manukoff intervened calmly.

"Wait, my friends. The book is a fake, but not for the reasons you allege. It is not actual, not human. It's a sensational lie. Still, the language—"

Picard glared at him. "You served three hitches in the Legion, Manukoff. Twenty-one years. Did you ever in that time hear a private address a sergeant as, *'Mon sergeant'?* Of course you didn't."

"But I did," said Manukoff. "And the other errors of speech you're growling about, also. It was before your time, you young fellows; it was in 1895, my first campaign, the Madagascar affair. And I heard all these so-called errors in the book yonder take place in real life. Of course, this does not excuse the wretched fellow who wrote the book; certainly he never heard them. But Reilly used to make those mistakes all the time. Reilly spoke French poorly. He seemed incapable of learning the language."

"An Irishman?" queried Campbell with interest. And the bearded Russian nodded.

"One of our recruits; we had many in the detachment. I remember seventeen deserted in one night as we came through the Suez Canal—overboard and ashore, you comprehend."

He puffed reflectively at his pipe. Campbell, who had served in the Legion cavalry, cocked a finger at the bartender. Picard, who had drawn all three together here in New York, calmed down.

"Madagascar! That campaign was a push-over, eh?" he observed. "Never was a slice of this earth won with as little effort!"

"Nor with greater suffering," said Manukoff. "The Hovas were not brave, true; we had no real combats, for the

Legion

Illustrated by
Jeremy Cannon

artillery usually broke up the enemy. Still, there were bullets enough. Every one of our hospitals buried twenty to forty men a day, and plenty of them from lead-poisoning, as you Americans say.... But more of the Legion committed suicide than were touched by enemy bullets. It was a continual suicide parade! Now, doesn't that make you stop and think?"

Picard nodded frowningly.

"Yes, of course. But this book—well, you've actually heard those classic errors of language in the Legion?"

"Often." The old Russian chuckled. "This Reilly, he was a cherub with red hair and an earnest resolve to make good. He had a fixed idea that it was proper to prefix '*my*' whenever he addressed any kind of an officer. When we told him it was only used to certain ranks, he thought we were kidding him. The poor devil really understood little French."

Campbell grunted. "And I bet you raised hell with him in consequence."

"Why not? You know the Legion," said Manukoff. "There was mighty little sentiment in the Legion; or in the world either, back in those days. We grabbed Madagascar then, just as everyone was grabbing. Bah! This sentimental talk makes me sick. Look at Madagascar today, happy, civilized, prosperous!"

"That's one way of looking at it," Campbell said curtly. "At least we didn't massacre the natives in Madagascar."

"No; we lost more men than the Hovas did," assented Manukoff. "We made a fine up-country march, and then we were stuck; we had to stop and build a road so supplies could reach us. Those Hovas devastated the country and burned the huts as they retreated. We burned what they left, from fear of plague. And all

the while we knew they had forty thousand well-drilled, well-armed men ready to jump us; easy enough now to say they were cowards, but at the moment we didn't know it. Then there was Reilly. We tormented him, yes; and he was a gadfly to us."

He paused, shook his bearded head, and told us about it.

AH, that red-head! Enlisting for glory, he had found none. Our artillery sent the Hovas scampering, so that except for sniping and skirmishes, we had no hand-to-hand work. Instead we labored endless weeks building the road so a light column might push on to Tananarive, the capital, and finish the conquest.

Starvation, vermin, sickness, physical exhaustion—no wonder Reilly cursed the Legion! We played tricks on him, thanks to his inability to learn French. Oh, we made him suffer, be sure of that! When a recruit curses the Legion to its face, you know how we treat him. But Reilly was one of those stubborn little men who never know when they're licked.

He worked like a dog, and so did we. The sickness of Madagascar, you know, does not hit suddenly; it saps the life and energy gradually, eats away the endurance and the will to live. The filth of that land and its people was beyond description, and this of course helped to spread the contamination.

Under a broiling August sun, a sergeant addressed Reilly some question regarding the work. Reilly dropped his "1895 model rifle," as the men called the pickaxes, grinned and saluted, and responded: *"Mon sergeant—"*

The sergeant, himself a walking bag of fever-shot bones, snapped savagely and cursed poor Reilly as only a Legion sergeant can curse. He went on, leaving Reilly white and shaking with futile rage, while everyone else laughed.

That night Reilly disappeared.

This was not unusual. When any of the Legion went to hospital, he died there; it was logical, because a Legionnaire worked until he dropped, and had no energy left with which to fight death. The men did not think it logical, however. They thought it meant sure death to go to the hospital. Some disappeared, and patrols went out every morning to bring in the corpses. Or, as on this particular night, a shot would ring out, then another. Here one of the Legion, there an Algerian *tirailleur* perhaps. Men lay awake listening for the shots. They wagered on who would be the next suicide.

But Reilly did not turn up as a corpse. The paymaster cursed bitterly, since it was his job to establish the fact of death; and how to do this, without a corpse?

This did not worry Reilly a bit. He had deserted, and was glad of it.

He was one of those happy-go-lucky Irishmen who, in normal life, are liked at first sight. There was no crime in his past; an impetuous love-affair, too much drink, a romantic idea that the Foreign Legion offered glory—and there he was. Now his romantic notions had died, his face was gray and drawn, his eyes were older; but his cheerful smile still persisted. His sole ambition, as he slipped away in the night and headed for the hills and the Hova country, was to be done with the Legion forever.

"I'll die before I'll go back!" he muttered, over and over, until assured that his escape was an accomplished fact. Toward dawn he found an abandoned hut, and slept there until noon.

Then on again, and in the afternoon he walked into a native village and was at the crossroads of destiny.

The strapping brown natives in their white cotton robes were friendly. A party of Hova soldiers were friendly Reilly was friendly; and everyone was quite happy, what with native liquor, a bit of song, and even a dance. Reilly was charmed to find that the natives, far from being bloodthirsty savages, were mild and amiable as their Polynesian ancestors; the village even possessed a church; and from what he could make out, his hosts were Christians.

THIS scene of more or less innocent merriment was rudely interrupted. The natives scattered; a horse pounded in and was reined short. Reilly, left alone, stared up at a black-clad man who sat his saddle like a centaur, and looked down at him with black angry eyes—a white man.

"Who are you? A French soldier?" came the rasping question.

"Devil a bit," said Reilly. "My name's Larry Reilly, and I'm wearing this uniform for my sins. And who may you be?"

The Reverend David Gwynne announced his name and missionary status with acerbity. He was not a pleasant man; and like most of the English missionaries here, he disliked the French conquest rather acutely. Unlike most

"What are you squirming about for?" asked Gwynne. "Hang on!" But Reilly was getting rid of his uniform.

of them, he had money and position, was able to import a saddle-horse and other luxuries, and believed in ruling his converts harshly. Which, for the Reverend Gwynne, was just a bit of bad luck.

"Are there no soldiers here?" he snapped out.

Reilly looked around.

"There were, but there aren't now," he said. "Apparently they didn't like your looks and skipped out."

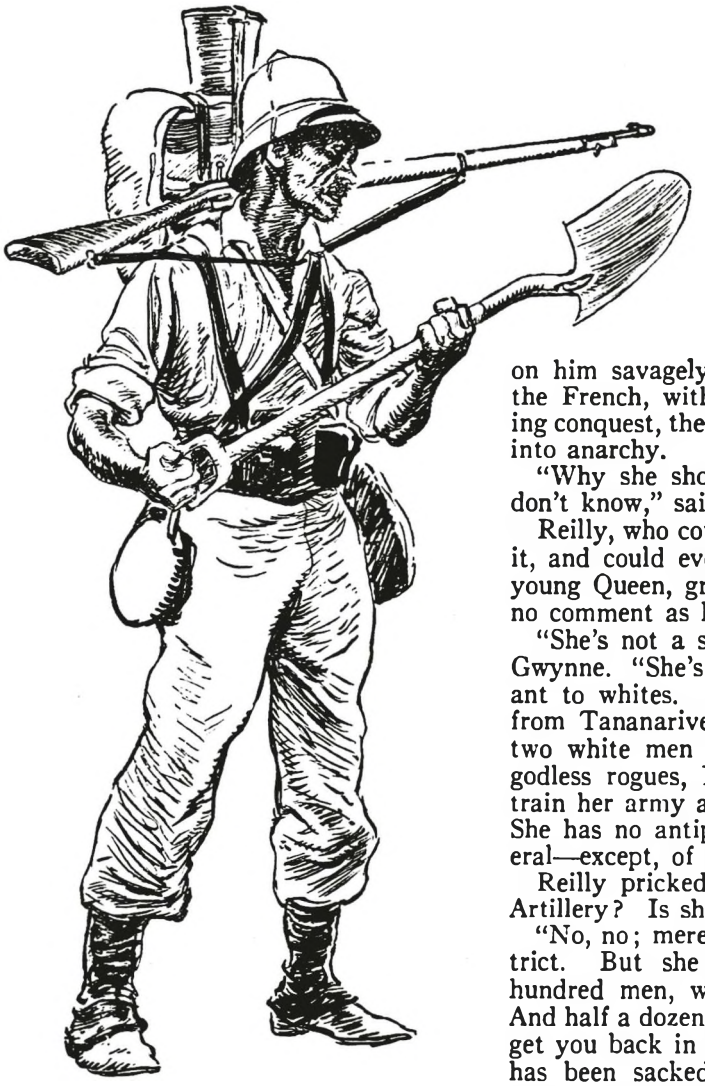
"I'll not allow this carousing and dancing," began Gwynne, then checked himself and bit his lip. He was scarcely in a position to give orders, at present. "Look here, Reilly! Climb up behind me, like a good fellow. There's trouble at the mission; I've ridden ten miles to get help, and you'll be more good than all these natives put together. I take it you're a deserter from the French force?"

"Me? A deserter?" Reilly was admitting no such thing. "I got lost from the column and found this village; you'd not call that deserting! Trouble, you say? What kind?"

"The worst kind," rapped out Gwynne. "Queen Maorani's soldiers are looting the place, perhaps have burned it by now; my daughter's gone out of her senses; my wife's in danger of her life; and the Queen has threatened to murder me. I must get back with help. The sight of a uniform will accomplish wonders. Jump up, man, jump up!"

Reilly ran for his rifle, clambered up behind the missionary, and the horse started off.

Now, Reilly was nobody's fool. He had really tried hard to make good in the Legion, but he just wasn't born to it. He had picked up some Malagasy, had tried to learn about the natives and their



Starvation, vermin, sickness, physical exhaustion — no wonder Reilly cursed the Legion!

ways, and was actually more at home with them than with the French. And with Gwynne, he was back among his own people. Disagreeable, harsh, hidebound as Gwynne might be, Reilly could at least understand him.

And Reilly could understand how so uncompromising a man might be scandalized daily by the easy-going natives. He knew, too, that local queens were scattered all over the island. One such queen and her ladies had met the Legion with open arms when it landed—so literally that even the French were taken aback!

AS the big horse pounded on into the hills with its double burden, Gwynne gave some explanation of his plight. He lived alone with his family at this station, under the protection of Queen Maorani; but the Queen had finally tired of his everlasting interference with her pleasure-loving people, and had turned on him savagely. With the coming of the French, with their steadily advancing conquest, the island had been plunged into anarchy.

"Why she should want to kill me, I don't know," said Gwynne.

Reilly, who could perfectly understand it, and could even sympathize with the young Queen, grinned widely but made no comment as he jolted along.

"She's not a savage, really," went on Gwynne. "She's always been most pleasant to whites. We have many visitors from Tananarive, the capital. She has two white men in her town now; two godless rogues, I'm bound to say, who train her army and handle her artillery. She has no antipathy to whites in general—except, of course, to the French."

Reilly pricked up his ears. "Army? Artillery? Is she a big queen, then?"

"No, no; merely ruler of this hill district. But she has an army of two hundred men, well trained and armed. And half a dozen pieces of artillery. If I get you back in time, before the station has been sacked and my family murdered, the sight of another white man will give those rascals pause. . . . Here, what are you squirming about for? Hang on!"

But Reilly was getting rid of as much as possible of his uniform. Not that it would mean any particular danger to him from the natives; but if word got around of a white man in French uniform, particularly in Legion uniform, a day would come when the French would certainly gobble him up as a deserter. And he knew what that meant.

"You don't want to take a French uniform home with you, Reverend," he said shrewdly. "Then the natives would certainly lose their heads and wipe us all out. I'll get rid of this one; then you give me a suit of yours when we get there. I take it there was no actual attack before you left?"

"No," said Gwynne; "but it threatened at any moment. Unluckily, my interpreter and all my servants have run off, and I don't speak the language yet, with

any fluency. In fact, I haven't wanted to learn it, because I've made our converts speak English."

Reilly blasted the stiff-necked Englishman—strictly to himself. Such a man, trying to win the souls of these laughing, gentle, indolent natives! He began to pull holes in the story, as the horse toiled on. It was not likely these natives would try to murder Gwynne and his family. Suddenly he recollected the two white men Gwynne had mentioned.

"Who's behind this attack on you? The Queen?" he demanded.

"Of course," said Gwynne over his shoulder. "And those two rogues who train her army. Schulte, the German, isn't so bad; but the other one should be strung up. He's a thorough scoundrel—an American soldier of fortune named Harrison, who has sold guns to the government at Tananarive and to the Queen here—a dissolute, godless rascal! He's the one who has driven my poor daughter out of her wits, hypnotized her, led her on to disgrace and ruin and everlasting shame!"

Big words for a few kisses, thought Reilly, and grinned again. He was beginning to get the proper slant on this missionary now. He had met quite a few missionaries in this island, and none of them had been of this stripe. Not that Gwynne was not an earnest, sincere man—he was just too earnest altogether.

"Not a bad idea, that, about your uniform," said Gwynne. "Yes, I can give you clothes. No use stirring up the natives more than necessary, I suppose."

REILLY was stripped close to buff and boots, by the time the mission was sighted. Gwynne did not come in through the queen's town, which was a huge collection of thatched huts and fruit-groves down the valley; instead he came in by a back trail that brought them out at the mission.

"They burned the church early this morning," he said bitterly.

The smoking ruins of it showed at one side. The residence, with its compound and sheds and gardens, remained quite untouched. Reilly reflected shrewdly that if murder was on the program, it would have been done when the church was burned. No natives were in sight; no maddened assailants were at hand; everything was drowsy with the peaceful repose of approaching sunset.

"No mob scene," said Reilly, slipping off, clinging to his rifle, looking about.

"Evidently the threatened attack is holding off. I'll put up the horse and then get you fixed up with other clothes," said Gwynne, and cantered off around the house.

Feeling rather puzzled, Reilly went to the veranda, slipped off cartridge-pouch and musette, and put them aside with the rifle. He was not a pretty sight, with a blur of red beard covering his cheeks, and his unconventional garments. At a step from within the house, he hastily ducked out of sight until Gwynne reappeared; then Reilly followed him inside.

"Here are clothes." Gwynne threw open a closet. "Help yourself. If—"

FROM somewhere close by, a rifle crashed, then another; a wild yell sounded. Gwynne departed on the jump. Reilly, wondering if he were caught in some nightmare, clawed at the garments, found a shirt, climbed into a suit of regulation black ministerial garb, and hurriedly buttoned it in place. Another shot, and a burst of yells; he darted out, clumped down the hall to the veranda again, and grabbed for his rifle.

He saw Gwynne out in the open, facing the gateway, a revolver in his hand. At the gate was a mass of soldiers in white *lambas*, brandishing rifles and shouting something. One of them fired point-blank. The bullet slapped into the veranda thatch over Reilly's head; Reilly promptly went to one knee, aimed, and the shot crashed out. The Hova who had just fired whirled around and dropped. Two of his companions lugged off his body; the others vanished.

Gwynne turned and stalked back to the veranda, flourishing his revolver.

"I'm glad you have cartridges," he said. "I haven't one. I hoped to hold them off with this empty weapon."

Reilly grinned at him. "These natives puncture like a balloon," he observed. "The chances are they're still running."

"Thank God you're here!" Gwynne looked at him. "How shall I account for you?"

"Well," said Reilly, "I don't suppose you want to lie about it?"

"I never lie," Gwynne replied stiffly. "I detest lies."

"Then tell the truth. You just met me. I'm a beachcomber or something. Who cares?"

"My wife cares," said the other, and stalked into the house.

Reilly squatted there and laughed; he could not help it. The whole situation

struck him as funny, deliriously funny. He was still laughing when, as he eyed the gate of the compound and the trees beyond, he caught sight of a man out there, a European in whites, cautiously reconnoitering the house. No natives in sight at all.

On impulse, Reilly left his rifle where it was, hopped up, and strode down past the flower-beds. The man outside had vanished. Reilly came to the gate, passed it, and halted.

"Come out," he said. "And sharp about it!"

THE man dodged out from behind a tree and approached him—a springy, lithe, lean man with a quick eye and a quick smile. Reilly liked him at sight.

"Who the hell are you?" said the stranger.

"Name's Reilly."

"Are you another sky-pilot?"

"Not by a damned sight!" And Reilly grinned. "Say, are you the godless American?"

"That's me, I guess. Jim Harrison. How—"

"Oh, I met up with the Reverend and came along to save him from massacre." Reilly chuckled. "He's the wrong kind of missionary. Glad to meet you. Shake."

Harrison shook hands, looking rather bewildered.

"Was it you who shot that native?" he said. "Well, you played hell. Lucky you didn't kill him. The Queen's hopping mad about it; she's liable to start real trouble."

"Lead me to her," said Reilly cheerfully. "I don't know what all this bobbery is about, but I can make a guess or two. I'll show her what the right kind of missionary is like, for a change. What about a drink before we meet the lady?"

Harrison surveyed him with twinkling eyes.

"Where'd you get the Irish accent?"

"Honestly," said Reilly. The other laughed and caught his arm.

"Come on, then! I don't know who the devil you are, or what, but you're okay."

"Which, I suppose, means you're satisfied? So am I," said Reilly. "If you're hoping to see the Reverend's daughter, she's probably busy right now soothing her mamma."

He said the word in the Irish way, and Harrison chuckled.

"We say *momma* in the States. Look here, stop in with me and have a drink. Want to shave those whiskers before you see the Queen?"

"Not me. I'm growing a beard; reasons of State. And make my name O'Reilly, in case the French get here."

Harrison gave him a quick glance, a grave glance. "So? Okay with me. I hear the French have a walk-away; the Government armies just melt before them."

Reilly was puzzled by the American slang, but got the general drift. The town opened up before them, and he accompanied Harrison to the latter's quarters, a small house with two native servants. Harrison mixed a drink.

"Well, here's luck!" Reilly remarked. "Now, what's all the shindig about?"

"Poor Gwynne is a square peg in a round hole and doesn't know it," Harrison confided. "He's one of these harsh, uncompromising Britons—square as a die. The idea was to scare him out, what with the war and all. I should have had sense enough to know that an Englishman doesn't scare."

"Ah!" said Reilly sagely. "It takes an Irishman to do that. You don't know how to handle him. So you were back of it—and you in love with his daughter?"

"To save his life, you fool!" snapped Harrison. "The Queen has exaggerated notions of what a queen should be. She's capable of shooting him down, and dislikes him enough to do it. I want to get him out of here before the French arrive. That won't be many weeks off, and when they come, there'll be hell to pay. Schulte and I have everything fixed to lick hell out of those French."

REILLY chortled. "With two hundred men and six guns?"

"You don't know me and Schulte—especially Schulte. Well, never mind all that. We've got to fix the Queen somehow. I don't want to see Gwynne murdered tonight."

"Let me talk to her," Reilly said. "Introduce me as the man who shot her warrior, and as a missionary. The right kind of a missionary. Tell her I've come to take Gwynne's place. I'll stay awhile, then get back and clear Gwynne out of here by morning."

"You fancy yourself," said Harrison dryly. "What about Elsie? And me?"

"Well, what about you?" Reilly gave him a look. "You wanted Gwynne gone; then what?"

"I get you. Yes, we've got things fixed up, if her folks get to the capital safely. I'd go along with them, meet her there, get married, and be back here to help Schulte."

Reilly stared. "Back here? She'd come back here with you—to fight the French? What kind of a woman is she, to want to come back into hell—"

"Forget it, forget it! We'll fix those French. And she's the right sort, true-blue and a yard wide," said Harrison. "All I'm worried about is you and the Queen and Gwynne. My God, what a sight you are in those clothes and with those whiskers!"

"You see that the Queen and I get a drink or two," said Reilly, "and trust your luck to the Irish, me boy. Lead on!"

Harrison shrugged and obeyed.

ABOUT this entire situation, the love-affair, the mock mob scene, the young queen who was capable of murder—was a grotesque flavor which Reilly thoroughly enjoyed. It was like the whole island, like the campaign itself, wherein armies fled at a few cannon-shot. And yet, behind all this *opéra bouffe* lay horrible grim reality, with death ever jogging one's elbow. Even Harrison's apparently puerile threat of destroying the French column with his two hundred men and six guns, struck Reilly as perhaps holding a certain frightful possibility. Harrison was that sort of man; he knew his business.

They went to the "palace," a widespread collection of huts surrounded by a stockade, in the center of the town. This was flickering with lights, seething with excitement. Schulte was here, and Reilly met him—a bearded German, very intent and earnest. Reilly was beginning to be afraid of men who were too earnest.

The Queen received them at once. She was a young woman, rather plump, very angry, a mixture of arrogance and dignity and effusive welcome. Her councilors squatted around her; a bevy of girls was at her feet. The appearance of Reilly created vast excitement. Harrison promptly introduced him as the new missionary who had shot the warrior, and left Reilly to save his own neck.

He did it efficiently. A few words of Malagasy, his amiable grin, his audacity—and he had captured the scene. In two minutes he was seated by the Queen;

"Leave everything to me," Reilly said.

he kissed her ladies and her own royal lips, drank her health with gusto, turned the place upside down with joyous zest, and conducted himself with a mad extravagance that left Harrison aghast. Yet it went over.

Reilly had no inhibitions. He promised anything and everything; with his magic gift of personality, he captured everyone from the Queen to the old councilors. An hour later he started back for the mission station with a dozen torchbearers, gifts of food, fruit, wine and flowers, and promises galore.

The arrival of this procession was singular. The Reverend David Gwynne was out at the gate, firmly convinced that murder was at hand; he had Reilly's rifle, and came near shooting Reilly with it before he found all was peaceful.

"BUT what does it mean?" he demanded, when the natives deposited their gifts and withdrew. "I thought you had run away—"

"It means plenty," said Reilly. With the island government in chaos, with no chance of a reckoning facing him, he gave his fancy free rein. "The Queen and those two godless ruffians, Harrison and Schulte, intend to murder you and

Beside one of the guns was a very obvious missionary with red hair and whiskers. He had a bullet through him.

your family. The council has more sense; the old men have things in hand, at least for the moment. They want you to get off for the capital in the morning. They'll furnish bearers, palanquins for your wife and daughter, and so forth. They're sending messengers to the government, asking that the Queen be deposed and that you be placed in charge here. You present a similar request, and the government will be only too glad to agree. Understand? You'll be back here in a week or two, the Queen will go to her estates in the country, and all will be quiet."

Gwynne was delighted. This project appealed to him as perfectly natural; it was the sort of thing he could understand, with law and order and a proper respect for his dignity supplanting what he called anarchy. He was overjoyed, and tremendously grateful to Reilly, whom he took inside to dinner.

REILLY found Mrs. Gwynne a quiet woman, plump and fortyish; and met Elsie. His quick appraisal of her rather dashed romantic notions. She was the cold type, level-headed and blonde, with prominent teeth and a masterful eye. And the gay Harrison was madly in love with her! Reilly gave up; it was of a piece with the whole mad situation.

Reilly made no secret of the fact that he was remaining here. He even promised to keep inviolate such effects as Gwynne might want to leave until his return. When Gwynne went off to pack, Reilly was smoking on the veranda, and Elsie came up to him.

"Did you see Mr. Harrison?" she asked.

"I did," said Reilly. "He'll join you on the way to the capital, tomorrow."

"I don't think you told my father the truth," she said bluntly. "Queen Maorani would not let the council dictate to her. I don't like lies at all, Mr. Reilly."

"Faith, I'd cut off my right hand rather than lie to the likes of you," said Reilly. "So go get an ax and stand by to cauterize the wound."

She could not understand him at all, and went off in a huff to pack, which was what Reilly wanted. . . .

Reilly was up at dawn to see them off. The bearers came as promised, with two native palanquins to carry the women. Gwynne shook hands with Reilly and

rode off on his horse. When Jim Harrison showed up with a couple of guides, Reilly sighed and pitied him.

"Miss Elsie said to give you her love," he commented. "She's an angel."

"She's the most wonderful girl in the world!" said Harrison. "And she'll defy her father to marry me. Old man, you've accomplished a real miracle! I'm your debtor for life."

"God help you, I think you are," said Reilly. "When will you be back?"

"In three or four days. By the way, we had a courier this morning; a French column is advancing and will be here in a week to occupy the district. Fifty men of the Legion, a couple of hundred Algerians, some black troops and a mountain battery. Schulte hates the French like poison. . . . Well, I'm off. Good luck! You stand ace-high with the Queen."

Reilly got out the big green umbrella that Gwynne had left behind, and headed for town.

HE stopped at the palace, invited the Queen and her ladies to hold a dance at the mission station that evening, then began a hunt for Schulte. One of the native officers finally led him three miles out from the town, and here he found the bearded German. What was more, he found the surprise of his life as well. Schulte, who had been drinking heavily, made no secret of the matter.

"There!" he said, waving his hand. "There, my friend, look for yourself and see what these damned French will run into! My men have been working. Have some beer; I have a whole barrel of it in the tent."

Reilly did not refuse. He needed a drink to steady him after what he beheld.

In this one campaign, he had learned enough of fighting to realize that Harrison had made no idle vaunt. This, the chief road to the village, mounted along a pleasant valley and then plunged into a ravine, very narrow at either end. Here Schulte was posted, with his six masked and hidden guns that could hurl death into the ravine. Here, at either end, were laid mines ready to blow in the road ahead and behind, bring down the side walls, hold any column trapped at the bottom until the last man was wiped out.

"Suppose they send advance scouts, as they will?" asked Reilly.

"They'll see nothing. They'll go on to the town and be killed there." Schulte let loose a blasphemous storm of invective against the French. All his calm was gone, and with the liquor in him, he was a different man. Even if most of his men ran away, he was capable of firing the mines and working the guns almost single-handed—and would do it.

Reilly invited him over to the dance that evening, and went home to make himself comfortable in the mission station. He was unable to do so.

Fifty of the Legion—his own former comrades! He was not thinking so much of their fate, as of what would happen to this little town and the amiable Queen and the friendly brown men here. The first French column would be destroyed, assuredly. But others would come, and swift revenge would be taken.

That night, amid the songs and dancing and the merriment, Reilly stayed surprisingly sober. He talked with Queen Maorani, with her ladies and councilors and chief men. He found there was no particular animosity against the French, no particular knowledge of them; but there was a childish greed for glory. Schulte had persuaded them all that the French could be wiped out at one blow. The Queen wanted to be the savior of Madagascar. Harrison, who had been fatly paid for arms and munitions, had seconded the blond-bearded German. And this Schulte had a fanatic hatred of the French, an obsession.

Reilly was not the man to neglect any opportunity of drinking, feasting and love-making. Before the night was over, he was a prime favorite with everyone, and half the court was sleeping off the carouse in and around the mission when the sun came up. Reilly, however, held his aching head and tried vainly to figure out some way of spoiling the plans of Schulte without revealing his own identity to the French. It was impossible. He could not send a note of warning, for he had no one to carry the message. Nor would he have dared send any note. Two natives, who had sold bullocks to the French, had been shot a couple of days previously. The Queen's army of two hundred men were eager to fight. They would run at the first artillery blast, of course, but that did not help Reilly now.

Vainly he cursed Schulte and Harrison, for leading these smiling, happy brown folk to certain ruin.

DAYS passed. Word came from Harrison: he'd been delayed, but would be back as soon as his marriage took

place. Reilly, who had decked himself out in all sorts of clothes left behind by Gwynne, attached himself to the Queen and did his best to bring her mind to some reason and make her see the truth; he had scant success, however. With the men of her council, it was different. He managed to impress them to some extent.

So the brown folk laughed and loved and danced, and Reilly followed suit; but terror was growing in him: terror for them and all this sweet valley. He had no fear for himself. His beard had grown quickly; it made him look twenty years older, and he trimmed it to a point, with overhanging mustaches.

Still Harrison did not come, but another came one morning: a brown runner, spent and gray with exhaustion and horror. Columns of the French were advancing. The armies of the Government had broken in panic; the invaders had terrible cannon that spread death from miles away. Wherever they met resistance, they burned and slew without pity; their march from the sea was marked by a swathe of desolation. And the column heading this way was close behind. It would be here next day. Its advance scouts were not ten miles off.

THE town hummed and buzzed; soldiers ran about; Schulte cursed the absent Harrison, and ordered his two hundred men out to their post. The Queen and her council were in panic, and Schulte, raging, turned upon Reilly.

"You damned Irisher!" he fairly foamed. "I've heard what you've been doing and saying—I know all about it! A French spy; that's what you are. Very well—I'll treat you to a spy's fate. Wait, curse you, till I get my revolver—"

He went off at a run.

Now, all this broke unexpectedly and swiftly upon Reilly. This was his first intimation that Schulte was on to his game. He had no weapon; only the Queen's bodyguard were allowed to carry arms in town. News that the French were upon them had the whole population in wild uproar. The army had promptly disbanded, and even the bodyguard of the Queen was ready to bolt *en masse*.

Reilly went up to the Queen, slipped his arm around her, and kissed her.

"Leave everything to me," he said. "I'll protect you from this crazy German and from the French. Don't run, but stay right here!"

Then he did the wisest thing possible. He abandoned the green umbrella, and went hell-bent for the mission and his rifle.

He got it, and started back to town. On the outskirts he heard several shots. A dozen horrified natives met him. Schulte had shot two of the army commanders and was herding as many as he could round up to reach the camp at the ravine. The German, obsessed by his furious determination, meant to push through his plan at all costs.

"Guide me to the camp ahead of him," said Reilly; and two of the natives obeyed.

He followed them blindly by hill paths and no paths at all. He knew now what he must do—the only thing he could do. He had his Legion cartridge-pouch, and his old rifle; a Lebel, 1893 model, magazine rifle. Schulte could spring the trap single-handed, true; and he would have enough terrified native soldiers,—more afraid of him than of the French,—to play holy hell with the column that was coming. And the advance scouts would be along any time now.

"The poor little Queen!" muttered Reilly, as he sweat and strode. "I'll stop that devil if I swing for it! Thank God, Harrison hasn't come back."

All the grim reality behind this laughing care-free dream-world had suddenly emerged.

He reached the camp, the masked battery above the ravine, the places ready for the riflemen, and found it entirely deserted. Below, along the road, were coming a few parties of natives. His two guides descended the sharp slopes, exchanged a few words, and came back with the information that the French advance was close behind these fleeing folk.

Then the two guides took to their heels, and Reilly saw Schulte coming over the hill, driving a score of most unmartial soldiers ahead of him. With a sigh, he settled down by one of the Gatling guns and adjusted his sights.

It had all happened so suddenly! He had not been prepared for a crisis. And he could sympathize with the sheer panic of the pretty little Queen and her bewildered people. Upon this thought, he squeezed the trigger, and his first shot spanged out, the echoes volleying along the ravine below.

GRIZZLED old Sergeant Bauer of the Legion, with Manukoff and a dozen more of his men, and a group of Algerian *tirailleurs*, was feeling out the road and scouting the country as he advanced,

hoping to occupy Queen Maorani's town without a fight.

When the first shot reached him, he took warning. At a half-dozen more shots, he sized up the situation and ordered his men to scale the heights above the ravine that lay just ahead. The Algerians to the left, he and his own comrades to the right.

"Apparently no one's firing at us," he said; "but nobody with rifles has any business up there when the column comes along below. We'll occupy the place for luck."

The shooting continued, then came to an abrupt end. Several native soldiers in their white robes came into sight, evidently making for shelter. Sergeant Bauer flushed them, and they froze in acute terror without firing a shot.

What he learned from them, made him send on his men at the *pas gymnastique,* rocks or no rocks. When he and the rest came up to the guns with a rush, only two men were in sight. Schulte lay dead, out in the open. Dropped beside one of the guns lay a very obvious missionary with red hair and whiskers. He was not dead, but he had a bullet through him.

In no time at all, Sergeant Bauer had all the information he needed from the prisoners, whom he set to bury Schulte. The guns were dismantled. A litter was rigged; and after Reilly's wound had been bandaged, the sergeant set out for the town ahead. He had a supreme contempt for all the armed natives in Madagascar, and was quite competent to occupy the town himself.

"AND what's more, he did it," concluded old Manukoff, pawing his big beard and glancing around the table at us, with his air of beaming delight. "The Legion did many such things, back in those days—"

I came back to reality with a gasp of dismay.

"But that's not all the story, surely?" I exclaimed. "And what has the yarn to do with a private addressing a noncom as *'Mon sergeant?'*"

Manukoff chuckled.

"Plenty, plenty!" he said. "You see, Reilly was taken to the palace, and the Queen herself took charge of him. Meantime, the sergeant had discovered the Legion cartridge-pouch and also the rifle —our regular issue Lebel rifle. He said nothing at the time, but he did a lot of questioning around town; and that evening he came to the hut where Reilly lay under care of Queen Maorani. He brought me along with him, because I had a bit of skill in surgery and was treating Reilly's wound. We found Reilly conscious, his wound doing very well, and nothing to worry about. Now, the sergeant spoke no English, but I did. And I had been very good friends with Reilly before his desertion."

MANUKOFF paused, with another chuckle.

"Sergeant Bauer looked down at him, asked a question, and Reilly disclaimed any knowledge of French whatever. The Sergeant cut loose, using me as interpreter. Reilly had deserved well; he had saved us, and possibly the entire column. If he was a missionary, the Sergeant desired to thank him. When I translated, Reilly looked up, and I saw the old cheerful grin come to his lips. And what do you think he said?

"'Merci, mon sergeant!' Just like that. It slipped out before he thought. The old Sergeant went red, then snapped an order at me. I followed him outside.

"'Did you ever see that man before in your life?' he demanded.

"And then I did it." Manukoff grinned widely at us. "I myself uttered those classic words. *'Jamais de ma vie!'* I said. 'Never in all my life, *mon sergeant!*' And he stood there glaring at me. Then he turned away, and I saw his shoulders shake as he walked off."

Manukoff had really finished his story this time. He picked up his drink and swigged it, and called for more.

Picard leaned forward.

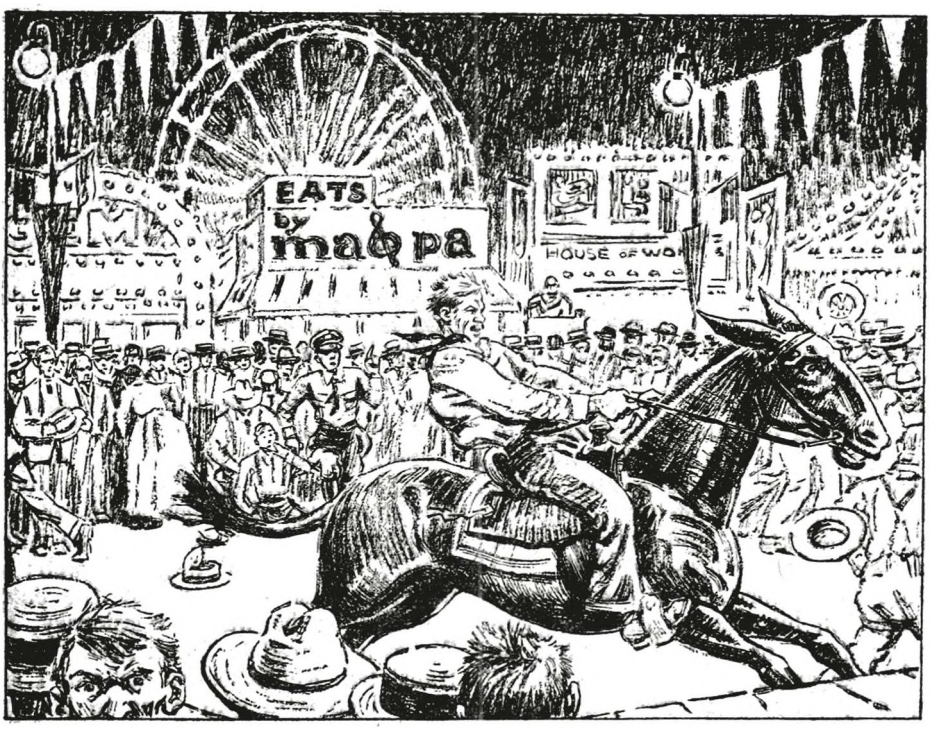
"So the deserter Reilly was never recaptured?" he asked. "Then what became of him?"

Manukoff sighed, accepted the fresh glass that was set before him, and lifted it high.

"I only wish I knew!" he rejoined. "You know, in that campaign we had a very true saying: A French soldier goes into hospital in order to get sent home; a *tirailleur,* in order to be cured; a Legionnaire, in order to die. Well, at least that wasn't true of Reilly. Whether he married the little Queen or not, I never heard. But anyhow—here's to Reilly of the Legion!"

We drank the toast standing.

Another picturesque story of the Foreign Legion will appear in our forthcoming October issue.



Prize

The famous author of "Sixteen Hands" and other noted books tells here a new story of his beloved mule Sixteen Hands.

SWEENEY BLISS was a natural-born mule man, just as some men are natural-born horsemen. And he was just as much interested in mules as any Kentuckian is in horses.

He had been a hired hand once, which goodness knows is starting at the bottom; but he had been such a good one and so ambitious, that he had managed to buy an eighty. Cuzzie Ransom taught the school; there was a pump in the yard, and Sweeney used to come to fill his jug. It wasn't often a teacher married a hired man, but Sweeney was such a pushing, energetic, likable sort, that she proved the exception. And she was glad she had, for he was a good husband.

It wasn't long till Lola was born, and it wasn't long till he had a quarter of a section, and finally a section—which is a good deal of land in the corn-and-hog belt. In other words he became downright prosperous—which, among farmers, is almost history. They moved to Junction City and bought a house on North Maple Avenue, so they could see their old friends and neighbors drive past. . . .

Sometimes Sweeney was astonished to find there were actually people in the world who didn't know a mule was the offspring of a male ass and a mare; that it has the large head and the long ears and the small hoofs of the ass, and the size and form of a horse; that it is a hybrid and can not reproduce itself—or as a mule man puts it: "A mule is without pride of ancestry or hope of posterity." And it has a stubbornness that has come straight from hell, and a proclivity to run away. But a mule never balked or ran away unless it had a good reason. Unfortunately, sometimes only the mule knows what this reason happens to be.

Sweeney was raising one big mule-colt which he had named "Sixteen Hands," because he thought the colt would reach sixteen hands, and he had. Most mules of the farm or draft type run only thirteen or fourteen, or sometimes fifteen and a half. It's only the exceptional animal that reaches sixteen hands, and Sixteen was exactly that.

"Finest piece of mule-flesh I ever had on the farm," he told Cuzzie. "I believe I've got a ribbon animal, honey."

He entered him in a tri-county fair, and Sixteen Hands walked off with first. Sweeney floated back on wings of triumph.

Mule

By HOMER CROY

"I told you! Do you know what I have a mind to do? Enter him in the State Fair at Sedalia!"

It was so wholly beautiful, so completely captivating, that he had to sit down and drink it in, as a painter might, who suddenly comes upon an enthralling sunset.

Instead of shipping him in a truck, as he had when he had taken him to the local fairs, he decided to step out a little and buy a regular horse-trailer. There was always danger in a truck of joggling the animal around, scuffing him up, or possibly injuring him. A horse-trailer was smaller, and the sides were padded, and the animal would be more comfortable.

When they arrived at North Maple, he backed Sixteen out of the trailer and gazed at him rapturously. "Funny, aint it, how a fella develops a fondness for a dumb brute? But I guess it's only natural, after you raise him from a foal. I mind once he got the colic—eat some musty oats and swelled up on water. I couldn't bring him any relief. Well, I purty near died myself!" He laughed a bit self-consciously. "But I pulled him through, and here he is—aint that so, Sixteen Hands, old boy!"

Sixteen flipped his long sensitive jackrabbit ears.

A little crowd came in to see them off and wish them well, and they gave a cheer.

"Better not, folks," called Sweeney hastily. "It makes him jump around. I wouldn't want anything to happen to him."

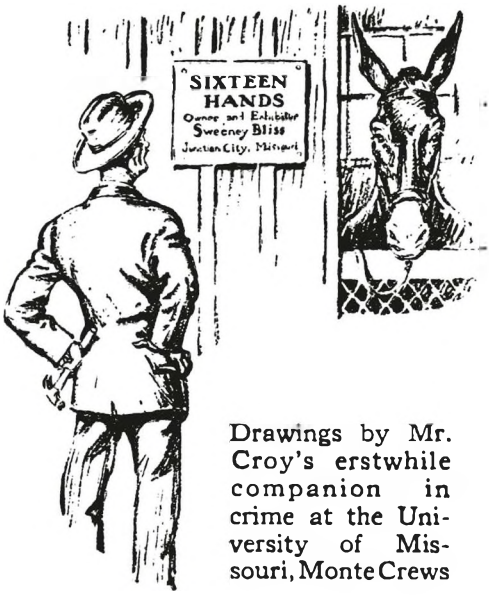
"You sure got a soft spot in your heart for that mule," said Walt Huggins.

"I don't want him to trample on himself," explained Sweeney.

He felt at home, when they arrived, for he had gone to many fairs; of course this was the first State fair he had ever shown at, but he knew the tricks of the trade—the pen where there seemed to be the least chance for noise; the aisle where there would not be too many people. Kids you had to watch. One time he saw a boy blow a squawker in a mule's face. Mule jumped around, tramped on himself, lost the ribbon.

He went to the entry booth, got his placard, and proudly tacked it up.

SIXTEEN HANDS
Owner and Exhibitor, Sweeney Bliss,
Junction City, Missouri



Drawings by Mr. Croy's erstwhile companion in crime at the University of Missouri, Monte Crews

He took him to be weighed in. Fourteen hundred and twenty pounds. Had stood the trip fine; coat was good, too. But still seemed nervous.

He went to look at the other ring stock. This was not so well, for there were some very fine animals entered, and more to come. Especially there was a sugar mule that worried Sweeney. Bigger animal than his, must run sixteen and a half hands; named Big Mike. That was going to be his competition.

CUZZIE and Lola liked the pleasant state of excitement a fair arouses: the crowds out for a good time; the sense of movement and life; the exhibits of home-canned goods; the little theater where a self-operating and continuously-running machine showed motion pictures of living models dressed in the latest "creations." The busiest and noisiest of all was the Midway. This was where the shows were gathered together, and some of them very questionable, Cuzzie decided. For instance, there was the fan dancer, who did all sorts of things, no doubt; and there were the Hollywood Madcaps. They came out in front and stood on a little platform as Cuzzie and Lola were passing. A gramophone played seductive music, and a hoarse-voiced man explained they were real Hollywood studio girls, and had created a great sensation with their dancing, which had been viewed in film form by millions. "Show us the Hollywood Wiggle, Lois."

Lois showed the Hollywood Wiggle.

More mules had arrived and were quartered in the mule section; and Sweeney's face grew long. Never had there been so many entries; and good ones too—farm mules, draft mules, cotton mules, railroaders, and a couple of pit mules. But the best, the most outstanding, was still Big Mike.

Suddenly there was an ear-splitting blast, and Sixteen Hands' ears shot up and he began to dance in his stall-box. "Whoa, there!" shouted Sweeney, and rushed up and finally managed to quiet him.

The noise had come from the loudspeaker. Some one was wanted at a committee meeting, and the call had been sent out over the grounds.

"You see how nervous he is? I sure wish I could work some of that off." He lowered his voice and nodded in the direction of Big Mike. "Did you see how he took it? Didn't do anything except flop his ears!" Sweeney shook his head.

"Do you know what I have a mind to do?" he said to Cuzzie the afternoon before the judging. "Take him out on his lead-rope and exercise him. Four points is four points."

"Well, be careful."

The owner of Big Mike eyed Sweeney, as Sweeney led Sixteen out. Once he started toward Sweeney, then turned back without speaking. Sweeney had a curious feeling: what if there should be a pill—

He tied Sixteen, then went to his stall and padlocked the feed-box. He looked back—the man was still eying him. . . .

It was calm and peaceful at the edge of the grounds. Here were stacks of hay and feed for the exhibition animals, and some of the trucks and trailers they had come in. And cots where the men slept, and a game of pitch going on, on a horse-blanket.

He came to a camp of cowboys who did fancy and trick riding; they were loafing on bales of hay "hurrahing" each other, waiting till time to put on their show. Immediately their eyes were taken by Sixteen, and almost as soon there was a group around him. They had seen him in his stall, but this was a better view, and a chance to see him in action. Sweeney was pleased with their admiration, for these men knew livestock.

As he fell in with their easy ways, an idea came to him: he might get one of them to put a saddle on Sixteen and give him some real exercise. Most mules are not broke to ride. One reason is that a mule's gait is not suited to riding, and his manners are a bit queer.

But Sweeney had broken Sixteen when he was only a yearling; and sometimes Sweeney did ride him. Sometimes he even said he enjoyed it. That is the test of a real mule enthusiast.

The thing would be to ride him himself, he decided; he explained to them that Sixteen seemed a bit overtrained and asked them if they would give him the loan of a saddle. Instantly they were sympathetic.

He hesitated as he thought of the bit which he had casually picked up. It was not jointed as a mule-bit should be, but was straight and smooth and round. It would have been all right for plowing corn, where a mule has it in his mouth all day, but it was not a good riding-bit. Especially if a mule got ideas. But it was too late to go back; he would take a chance.

In a few minutes the saddle was on Sixteen, and Sweeney was on the saddle. "I'll be back in a jiffy."

He rode away a bit nervously, for now that he was up there, he wished he had been more circumspect; but he couldn't come down before all those professional riders. Sixteen tossed his ears and snuffled, but this passed away, and everything went nicely. "I think I'll trot him a little." And he did; this took a bit of pommel-holding.

Sixteen began to warm up and stepped out faster, which Sweeney liked, even if it did take a bit more holding. Ten minutes of this would do him more good than an hour of poking. Sixteen was a three-gaited mule, and Sweeney began to shift him from one to another. This took some rein-pulling and heel-kicking, for a mule's nature is such that once he gets an idea, he is not easily persuaded into something else.

Sweeney's blood began to warm up too, the jolting being what it was, but that was all right since it was doing Sixteen good. This it exactly was, for Sixteen's ears stood up as straight as a jack-rabbit's, and he arched his neck, and tossed his head.

THEY came closer to the fair-grounds; the sound of festivity grew louder, and there were more people. The merry-go-round music came distinctly, and the lights of the Ferris Wheel made a pretty circle; men were walking about, leading ring stock. They looked at him a bit surprised, for it is not every day you see a man riding a mule. But that was all right; it was doing Sixteen good.

A boy, plodding along by his father's side, set off a squawker, and Sixteen's ears flicked back and forth; and for a terrible moment Sweeney felt Sixteen's bed of muscles tighten. But he heaved on the bit and pulled him down.

"There, now! Nothing is goin' to eat you. You've got to get used to such things. Blow it again, son."

He drew him in even closer to the main part of the grounds, guiding him with the half-skill, half-intuition a mule man has for his animal, talking to him as he would to a child, sometimes chiding him and sometimes fondly scolding him.

The lights of the Midway were now quite bright and gay, and Sweeney pulled up Sixteen and sat watching them twinkle. Purty!

AT this moment a most unfortunate thing happened. They were getting ready for a parade, and a man had got onto the seat of his calliope and had come up behind where Sweeney was enjoying the twinkling lights. He wished to see if it was working properly, before he got into the procession; and he touched the keys. It gave Sweeney a start, but this was nothing to what it gave Sixteen, who began to go, seemingly, in half a dozen directions at once; and so did Sweeney.

This was for only a moment; then Sixteen straightened out and began to run, in the most unfortunate of directions —toward the grounds.

"Whoa, you fool!" cried Sweeney.

Sixteen Hands promptly increased his pace, which had been fast enough as it was. At first his fright had been real, but this passed. His blood was up, and he began to have a good time of it. Sweeney didn't, and began to pull mightily, but this seemed only to make Sixteen Hands want to do even better. He was puzzled, when he began to get near the grounds proper; lots of people here, and lots of confusion; but the cry went ahead that something terrible was happening, and the people rushed from the middle of the grass lanes, leaving them clear for Sixteen. Faster and faster he went, which brought him to the Midway. Sweeney pulled the hardest of all here, and shouted the most commandingly; but Sixteen was going so fast that he shot into it, whether he wished to or not. It was not to his liking, and he began to run first this way, then that; and so did the people.

Sweeney, thoroughly frightened, pulled with all his strength, but Sixteen Hands

had the bit firmly in his teeth, and dashed here and there looking for a way out. There was one awful moment when he started straight for the Hollywood Madcaps, who let out fearful shrieks and darted off the platform and into the tent—led by Lois, who did the wiggle of the week.

IT was at this moment that Cuzzie and Lola, leaving a church booth, heard a commotion, and walked toward it. Cuzzie had the curious illusion of seeing a mule darting this way and that; then she had the even more curious illusion of thinking the man on the strange-acting animal was Sweeney. She looked again.

"Oh, my God!" she cried.

The crowd, convinced that Sixteen Hands was not really going to do them damage, began to enjoy it thoroughly. And all had good advice for Sweeney. Some even told him to hold on tight.

There were forces working against Sixteen Hands, forces that were determined to put an end to the matter. State police were helping the city marshals handle the crowds, fair week, and immediately they began to take a most active and vital part. They were trained men, used to calming cross-continent truck-drivers and speeders from the cities, and they ran toward Sixteen Hands and tried to seize his bridle-reins. Sixteen became frightened, and moved more swiftly and even more skillfully, and succeeded in avoiding them. Besides, he had weapons that even the State police did not wish to argue with—his heels. And he kept stopping and whirling and trying to get into position to use them.

A different spirit laid hold of Sixteen. These men were a real danger, and he decided to get away from them as fast as he could. In a few moments the officers were on their motorcycles and after him; this indeed frightened Sixteen Hands. His neck was no longer arched, but was almost straight, and his ears almost flat; and out the Midway he sped. But the devilish chugging and snorting demons did not fall behind; instead they came closer and closer, and grew more threatening and terrifying. He was growing winded; his nostrils were distended, and his flanks were wet.

Suddenly, and with the incredible speed of a mule, he stopped, and Sweeney went over his head and struck upon the ground, and there he lay motionless and dead. Immediately the police had the bridle-reins, and Sixteen Hands was a captive.

But Sweeney was not dead, as the officers discovered when they turned the reins over to a man who came up, and were able to attend Sweeney. It had been a nasty fall; bones might be broken, and even if they were not, recovery for a man of his age would be slow.

Gentle hands took him to the first-aid station in the tent—gentle, for he had become a hero. He had furnished them fun and thrills, and a touch certainly no fair had ever had. But there he lay, still and motionless on his cot; and the voices outside grew hushed. Sweeney Bliss. They could not, they must not, lose him. He would be the hero of a hundred stories and legends wherever mule men gather to show their hobbies. Sweeney Bliss, the greatest, the mightiest of them all. And Sixteen Hands, too, was the greatest and the mightiest mule that had ever come down the pike.

It was, of course, hardest of all on Cuzzie and Lola, as they sat in the stuffy little tent most of the night, and most of the next day, too. From time to time he opened his eyes and seemed about to speak, but the strain was too great and the lids fluttered back. But the doctor's word was encouraging; no bones were broken. He had had a severe shock, but he would recover from that.

NOT until evening of the second day did Sweeney's eyes brighten; then he recognized Cuzzie. And when she put her hand on his, he smiled. He was going to speak, as she could see, and she bent near to catch the words.

He spoke louder and more plainly than she expected, for he was asking about a subject that was vital.

"Hello, honey. Where's Lola?" Lola put hers on his too, and he smiled; at least he seemed to. "How's Sixteen Hands?"

"He's fine!" asserted Cuzzie. "He's down at the pavilion eating his oats."

"How much was he hurt?"

"He was scuffed up a bit, but that was all. I tell you he's fine."

"You wouldn't tell me that just to make me feel good?"

"No, Sweeney. And that's not all. He won the ribbon!" Her hand went into her bag and came out with a blue ribbon with a golden fringe. "Here it is."

A look of ineffable peace and happiness spread over his face. "I guess I can take a little snooze now."

Beyond the Limit

In the belief that truth may be as interesting if not more strange than fiction, we each month print a group of fact stories contributed by our readers. (For details of our Real Experience Contest, see page 3.) First a newspaper man tells what happened when he was marooned on Rum Row.

By J. C. CHEVALIER

DURING the Tough Twenties, New York City and Chicago were in a two-way tie for the palm as the toughest spot in the western world, with each party declining the honor.

As a leg man with the Eastern bureau of a large Chicago daily, it became my chief task to dig up and wire west all the stories likely to prove New York a tougher town than the Windy City.

Then came Rum Row—the name some anonymous copy-desk slave gave to a fleet of liquor transports that had begun to hover on the horizon just beyond U. S. jurisdiction, and was selling bottled goods to runners able to elude the vigilance of the Coast Guard and smuggle the stuff into Long Island and Westchester on racing speed-boats.

When Rum Row broke into the news, I got the assignment from the home office with orders to file a first-hand story. I had earned a reputation for protecting my sources. This made it easy for me to get an "in" with the right person to put me aboard a rum-runner.

So it happened that early one misty morning I boarded a small boat, and together with a crew of rum-runners dropped down the Hudson River, bound for Rum Row, where my companions planned to pick up a load of bottled goods, and I an eye-witness story.

The boat chugged clumsily along, breasting an incoming tide; I wondered at the slow headway we were making, and rightly guessed it was a device to avert attention. A little later, however, we passed Ambrose Lightship, which marks the entrance to the harbor of New York. And then the indolent chugging of the engine burst into a crescendo roar. The deck lifted under my feet as the bow climbed skyward. The entire craft sang like a fiddle-string under the terrific impulse of its mighty engines now yoked to their task with wide-open throttles and no fear of attracting the attention of enforcement officers. A great foaming wake raced away from under our stern, and Ambrose Light receded with a rapidity that soon left it below the horizon.

Shortly after midday we sighted a vessel, and the skipper made straight for it. As we approached it, I could see it was a dingy little tub riding rather low in the water. This, one of the men advised me, showed she was still well loaded and had not yet made many sales.

Through the skipper's glasses I identified her flag as one belonging to a smaller European country. The nearer we came, the more dilapidated the vessel appeared.

There was some activity evident on the side of the boat toward us.

"They seem to be shooing us off," I told the skipper, and passed him the binoculars.

"That's what it looks like," the skipper agreed; and then he shouted: "Look! A Coast Guard cutter!"

I didn't need the glasses to see the shark-gray hull of the Government boat that had edged from its hiding-place behind the runner. There was a medley of shouted orders, and a second later we were showing a white tail of foam to the cutter.

"They can't touch us out here—we're beyond the limit," the skipper explained. "But we can't afford to be identified, and we got to shake 'em before we can come back and load up."

SHAKE them we did, for our boat was built for that very purpose, and her designers knew their business. Not until nightfall, however, did the skipper venture back in search of the rum boat. It was after midnight when we slid alongside.

A line of silent shadowy figures leaned over the ship's rail; but nobody dropped a ladder or made any effort to let us aboard. Presently two new figures appeared at the rail.

"Where you from?" a voice asked, and sounded as though it belonged to a boy, which I later discovered it did.

"We come from Broadway," the skipper said, and I guessed this was some sort of password.

"You got money?" asked the boy.

"I got five dollars," replied the skipper; and I remember thinking five dollars wasn't much capital even with booze at wholesale prices.

"All right. You give," the boy ordered; and with that, he lowered a canvas bucket at the end of a line.

The skipper opened a wallet and carefully extracted the ragged half of a five-dollar bill and placed it in the bucket, which the boy immediately hauled up.

While the men above inspected the bill, the skipper explained to me:

"They got the other half, you see," he told me. "Before the ship sails from the other side, her owner gets a sheaf of torn bills, sometimes dollar bills, sometimes bigger. The other halves are kept by his agent in this country. If the agent makes a deal with a right guy, he gives him one of the halves as a pass. It's got to match with another half on the boat before the captain will let us aboard.

"There's a lot of hi-jacking going on," our skipper continued. "They've got to be careful. Of course there aint much danger anybody would try to hi-jack this tub yet—she's too low in the water. That means she aint sold much of anything, and aint got no cash in the safe. The hi-jackers watch the water-line; and when a ship rides high, they know she's sold out and has the cash aboard."

Meanwhile the ship's captain appeared to have satisfied himself we were on the level, by matching our half of the bill with one of his, and a rope ladder was lowered overside.

"Up you go," ordered the skipper; and nothing loath, I reached for the swinging ladder and a moment later climbed over the ship's rail.

At that moment the blazing beam of a searchlight cut through the night, and pandemonium broke loose. The jittery ship's crew yanked the ladder back over the rail. There was an ear-splitting roar as the speed-boat's engines sprang into life; and in less time than it takes to tell it, my bootlegging companions were racing off into the dark Atlantic, with the Coast Guard cutter in eager pursuit. I was marooned on Rum Row!

My unpleasant reveries were interrupted by the boy, who had so far been the only one to utter a word aboard the boat. "Come, captain say," he told me, and tugged me by the arm.

The boy led me along the untidy deck and into the captain's quarters amidships. It was a cluttered, smelly room, largely taken up with a gigantic safe bolted to the floor, and a chart-table. At the table sat as scoundrelly a looking fellow as ever intruded on the imagination of a pirate-loving youngster. He muttered something to the boy.

"Captain wants to know what you do now," the boy said.

"Do?" I asked. "Why, there's nothing I can do. My friends will be back later, I'm sure. We'll just wait." This was no time, I decided, to try to explain that I was only an inquiring reporter. I wondered whether I could explain what a reporter was, and whether if they understood, I might not be in an even worse predicament than before.

There ensued conversation between the captain and his youthful interpreter.

"Captain no wait," the boy interpreted. "He no like this business. He say we go back home now."

"He can't do that," I expostulated. "I can't go all the way back to Europe on this boat. I've got to stay here."

"That what captain say," was the boy's ominous answer.

AN instinct for self-preservation drove me to the side of outlaws and disorder. "The captain has nothing to be

afraid of," I heard myself saying with poorly assumed nonchalance. "He is outside the limit here, and the United States can't touch his ship or him."

There was another conversation between captain and boy. "What does he say?" I asked, when I could stand the suspense no longer.

"Captain say he go home tomorrow, maybe," the boy translated; and with this I had to be content. The captain closed the conference with a gruff order to the boy, who urged me through the door and out onto the deck.

I strained my eyes into the dark; but no flicker betrayed the approach of my late companions. I looked down at the black water lapping against the hull. I recalled with a shudder what the captain had said about leaving me "here." I asked the boy what he had meant.

"Maybe he give you life-preserver," the boy replied, callously undisturbed. Then he added: "Maybe sell you small boat. You got money?"

Reporters are not usually supplied with large sums of cash. I rapidly computed my wealth. "I have twelve dollars and a wrist-watch," I told the boy.

"Too small money," remarked the boy laconically.

THE situation was bad: I was within a few miles of home, but faced with the possibility of finding myself in some European port after a week or more on a filthy tub, minus money and without any identification other than a press-card and several letters. It was preposterous to think the captain would throw me overboard with a life-saver, or even put me adrift in a boat. But as I recalled his appearance, I was almost willing to believe he would.

To add to my worry, the boat got under way. I had no idea of direction. With the boat on the move, I knew the chances of my companions picking me off were reduced with every mile we steamed.

Presently, however, it was dawn—a miserable, murky sort of dawn. I was leaning disconsolately on the rail where the boy had left me hours earlier. My clothes were dank and clammy, and every bone ached when the lad returned and called me to breakfast. I ate a bowl of watery porridge with several grimy sailors, and drank a cup of coffee which made up in temperature for its lack of flavor.

Afterward I resumed my watch at the rail. I saw the captain shambling back and forth on his bridge, but he paid no attention to me, and I left him alone. It was the middle of the morning when my straining ears detected a faint hum. "The boat!" I thought. It had located the rum ship again. I would not have been disappointed had it been the cutter.

A few minutes later the boat came into view. But I realized this craft was neither my speed-boat nor the cutter. It was apparently just another runner.

The newcomers laid to alongside, and the ceremony of the night before was repeated. The skipper compared the torn half of a bill, and finally let the men from the boat aboard. I scanned their faces as they climbed over the side, weighing my chances of getting them to take me home, and wondering whether they might not be more likely to throw me overboard than the captain.

"Hey, look who's here!" one of them shouted excitedly; and at his cry, I turned to see him pointing at me.

"Who are you?" asked the man who seemed the boss of the speed-boat's crew.

Before I could frame a reply, the man who had first spoken came to my aid. "This is that newspaper guy we saw going out yesterday with—well, with you know who."

My spirits rose, and my story came tumbling out. The men listened with grinning faces. "Well, this is a tough racket, buddy. He might have done it," their chief said when I had finished.

"But will you take me off this tub with you?" I asked, and wondered if this chance identification was enough to earn their confidence.

"Oh, sure, sure," said the chief. "We'll take you off, but we got to buy a load first. We've been out ever since you and your crowd left, and this is the first lot of liquor we've seen bobbing. Our gas is almost used up. You may have to swim the last mile, after all," he added with a grim humor.

I FELT like scuttling overside and into their boat without waiting longer; but after all, it was a story I was after. I jittered around until the gang had made their dicker with the now smiling captain, and loaded the last case. . . .

I put the story on the night wire and got one of the boss' famous thank-you telegrams next morning. But it wasn't this story I sent the paper. You see, this story wouldn't have made New York City look so tough. Why? Because I'm a New Yorker myself.

The Conquest of

If profound anger disturbs you too much, do not read this vivid story of things happening today—as told to William Hopson

THE telephone in the Metropolitan Hotel, in Nanking, jangled noisily as I happened to cross the lobby. It was noon of the day that the Japanese had made their first bombing raid on Nanking, at six-thirty that morning, carrying out their threats to blow Nanking off the map. Seventy-two twin-motored bombers had come down to rain death upon the city, but we'd managed to turn back most of them. I had shot down one in flames. He blew apart in the air when one of the explosive bullets from my four Browning machine-guns struck a bomb, just as I dived on him from behind. Four of the crew had died in the holocaust. The fifth had either been blown out or had tried to jump with his parachute, which did not open. . . .

The clerk in the Metropolitan doesn't speak much English, but he can pronounce my name without too much difficulty. He picked up the receiver, spoke excitedly in Chinese, then called to me.

"The Missie Chiang Kai-shek," he said. "She want you quick."

I had been personal pilot to the American-educated wife of China's Number One man of war. In her huge twin-motored Douglas I had flown her over most of China, while she went about her work of keeping up the morale of her panic-stricken people.

"Captain Martin?" came her voice through the receiver. "This is Madam Chiang. We've just had reports that two of those bombers that were driven back this morning slipped around and bombed a small village about fifteen miles away. I want you to drive me there at once. Meet me at the National Health Administration Hospital."

I told her I'd be right out. By this time a half-dozen foreign correspondents had gathered around. We all got into the new car assigned me for my personal use and hurried to the hospital.

Madam Chiang and her Australian adviser, Mr. Donald, had just driven up when we arrived. A striking, very beautiful woman, she was dressed in her famous blue slacks, black blouse and straw hat—an outfit known to about every inhabitant in Southern China.

She'd taken command of the situation, and was ordering all available doctors, nurses and medical supplies to be dispatched to the scene as quickly as possible. The reporters were machine-gunning questions at her.

"You may print anything you wish about China," she stated. "And you may have access to any part of China you wish, as long as you tell nothing but the truth. But if we hear of any untruths printed, or falsifying of what you see, your passes to come and go on any Chinese railroad, and to enter any war zone will be promptly canceled. We want the world to know the truth about the brutal bombings of helpless non-combatants."

She turned to me: "We'd better take your car to save time. Let's hurry."

My car had the Air Service insignia on its windshield. It also had special passes signed in three different Chinese dialects. I could go anywhere at any time without once being stopped. One glance at the passes on the windshield was enough to have it waved on through without pausing.

Without any other guards other than Mr. Donald and myself, we headed over the road toward the village. The reporters had stayed behind, waiting to cover more bomb raids expected down the river from Pootung. And after all, what was another Chinese village?

They'd seen plenty of others.

But they'd never seen anything compared to what Madam Chiang Kai-shek, Mr. Donald and myself witnessed when we drove into what was left of that farming village that afternoon. In all my twenty-three years as a flying soldier of fortune, in which I've seen service in about every country, never have I witnessed such a scene of slaughter.

The village lay in a little cup among the hills, and had contained about six thousand inhabitants. Now more than two thirds of them were dead or wounded. They lay in heaps everywhere, all nude from the terrific concussion of the bombs. Legs and arms and heads lay bleeding everywhere—all women and children and very old men, the rest being at the front or in training. Not a house

a Chinese Village

By

CAPT. R.W. MARTIN

of all the flimsy structures had been left whole.

We pulled up at the edge of town and got out, there being no room to drive between the mangled bodies. In a splintered post by a gutted storekeeper's place I saw embedded a human hand, blown off at the wrist. The screams of the wounded and of the survivors who had escaped filled the air.

At the first narrow street we entered, lying on her back with one arm blown off, was a young Chinese mother. Her clothes had been blown off too, most of them, by the concussion. Near her lay a round-headed wailing baby about nine months old. Its right hand dripped red. Three of the fingers were missing.

They say that the Chinese are stolid —that perhaps they don't cry. Madam Chiang Kai-shek was crying softly as she knelt and took up the blood-covered infant in her arms. She motioned for my first-aid kit, which I'd brought along from the car. I opened it, and handed her scissors and bandages. While I held the struggling infant's hand, she cut away a few strings of dangling flesh and bandaged it up the best she could. The front of her black blouse and blue slacks was covered with blood.

"I'll devote the rest of my life not only to caring for the wounded and homeless, but to do everything possible to stop this inhuman brutality!" she said.

AN old man came hurrying up with quite a number of others. He spoke rapidly to Madam Chiang; and through her, Donald and I got the story.

Two huge twin-motored bombers, of the kind I had shot down that morning, had made the raid just a little while before Madam Chiang had telephoned me. Evidently they had been a part of the second squadron who had come down about noon, and had spotted the village while circling to get around the twenty-three Chinese planes defending Nanking. They had known, of course, that the little village and its surrounding farms had no military value, for they had roared over it at one hundred feet altitude, while four machine-gunners in each machine mowed down everything in sight.

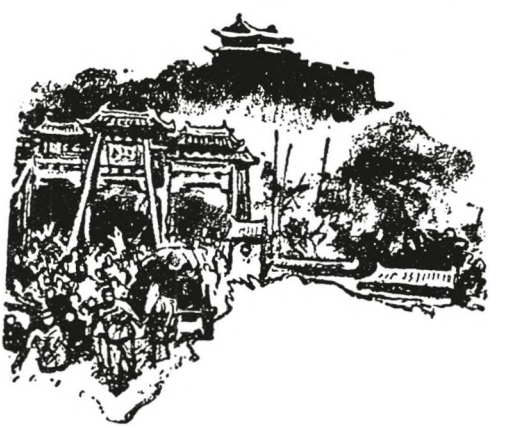
Then the helpless quarry was driven from cover again.

Bombs did this. They blew down the houses and flushed the terrified victims, and again the low-flying machine-gunners, standing in their cockpits behind swivel machine-guns, raked the streets again and again. This had gone on and on and on, until the huge machines had at last emptied their thick bellies of bombs, and all the drums of ammunition lay empty among the fired shells in the bottom of the cockpits. Then the ten eagles of the Rising Sun had lifted their ponderous bombers up out of the cup, and gone winging back along the Yangtze to announce one less Chinese village to bar Japan's path of progress.

We drove back to Nanking in silence, Madam Chiang Kai-shek, Mr. Donald and I. The intelligent little First Lady of China sat between us, her blue slacks stained with the blood of helpless villagers, machine-gunned as they tried to flee. Her eyes were wet. She kept dabbing at them with my handkerchief, hers having been left tied around the arm of a woman in the village over the hill.

"I pray the day will come when China can take her place with the other cities in the sun, and this useless slaughter of our people will cease."

That was all she said in fifteen miles.



The Dog Was

An ex-soldier crippled while alone in the North Woods is cared for by his best friend.

THE popple trees were half naked; the ground was covered with golden and red leaves that rustled and crackled underfoot. A sharp knife like edge of ice rimmed the shores of Larder Lake as my partner called a cheery good-by, dug his paddle deep into the icy water and headed out across the lake to the trail that would take him out to steel and the nearest town,—nearly a hundred miles away,—where he would register our mining-claims, get the assayers' report on our ore samples and bring back food supplies.

A few yards from shore he backed water with his paddle, squinted up at the open sky and called back: "Better kill a moose and hang it up to freeze. I feel snow in the air, and you don't want to get short on meat."

I watched the rhythmic swing of his paddle until he disappeared around a point of land. I was not quite alone, for with me was my Airedale dog, Bill.

My partner had been my sergeant during part of the war. An old-timer in the North country, he had filled me full of tales of the wonders of that vast virgin wilderness with its marvelous hunting, and the untold quantities of gold and silver just waiting for the pick of the hardy prospector; and shortly after the close of the war, he had persuaded me to take a fling at prospecting and hunting in "God's country."

I returned now to our tent camp, and remembering what he had said about snow in the air, I spent the rest of the day chopping wood for our sheet-iron camp-stove, a contraption that consumed fuel at an alarming rate. By nightfall I had enough wood ricked up before the tent to last a week or ten days. My partner would not be back for at least two weeks, and tomorrow I would go out after a moose, for our supplies of beans and bacon were running mighty low.

I gave the dog his dinner of boiled fish, broiled a lake trout for myself and turned in, weary with the day's task of cutting wood. Sometime during the night I was awakened by the howling of the wind, and the tent felt like the inside of an icebox. I pulled the blankets closer around me, and gave thanks that I had a good shelter from the wind.

It was strangely quiet when I got up next morning. A thick coating of frost crystals lined the inside of the light silk tent, and a glance at the small thermometer that was a part of our kit showed ten degrees below zero, a drop of over thirty degrees while I had slept. But five minutes after I had lighted the kindling in the camp-stove the tent was warm and the frost melting fast. I untied the tent-flaps, and looked out: everything was covered with a white mantle of snow and it was still coming down in big feathery flakes that settled with a grim finality.

I forced my way through the snow down to the edge of the lake. It was covered with a thick sludge of snow and ice that at this low temperature would soon be frozen solid. Canoeing was impossible, and it might be days before the ice would be thick enough to support the weight of a man. With the lily pads frozen over, the moose would be yarded up until the storm was over. Chances of getting meat now were about a hundred to one against me, for it was one of those mysterious years that come in cycles of seven, when there are no rabbits. It was impossible to fish through the newly formed ice, and the small game was holed up. The only thing to do was to go on short rations until the storm was over.

For four days and nights the snow drifted down. The morning of the fifth broke clear and sparkling: the thermometer showed thirty below.

With my pocket-knife I fashioned a pair of snow-goggles from birch-bark and moose-hide; they had cross slits through which I could see, but which cut down the blinding reflected sunlight. Crude though they were, they worked perfectly.

a Woodsman Too

By RICHARD MAINSON

I loaded the rifle, called to the dog and started out to buck the snow in search of meat. Having no snow-shoes, I had to plow through the two-foot snow, and it was just plain hard work.

The going was almost impossible for the dog, and he had to stick close to my heels, trailing in my tracks, where he was no use in ferreting out game that might have been hidden from sight but which he could have scented out.

I headed for a small stream about three miles from camp, where beavers had built a dam. In the shallow lake above the dam were a dozen beaver houses of sticks and mud—and roast beaver tastes a great deal like roast duck. It took me three hours to break trail to the beaver dam, and when I got there, only the bleak covering of snow met my eyes. And then, with a sickening suddenness that didn't give me a chance to save myself, my feet slipped on the icy covering of the dam, and down I plunged through the loose-packed ice and snow into the slush of an air-hole below the dam.

The shock of the cold water almost paralyzed me. The water was only waist deep, but every time I took a step, the ice gave way and in a minute I was soaked from head to foot.

The Airedale raced back and forth, barking wildly as though he realized my predicament but was afraid, or too smart, to trust himself to the ice. It seemed hours that I battled to get to the shore; in reality it was probably fifteen minutes; and then I was up against the greatest danger of the North, freezing to death in my wet clothing.

With as much haste as my awkward freezing hands would permit, I investigated my waterproof match-box and thanked my lucky stars that it had proved really waterproof. With my belt-knife I cut birch-bark and soon had a roaring fire burning in the shelter of the end of the beaver dam.

Dried out as well as I could be by an open fire, I started the trek for the home camp, thankful I had escaped serious damage. But as I climbed the bank from the beaver dam, I tripped over a buried log and plunged headfirst into the snow. I landed hard—and the universe seemed to burst into flame before my eyes. . . .

Ever since the second battle of Ypres, in May 1915, when I had been wounded by a piece of shell-casing in the back, I had been having attacks of this kind, coming as swift as a stroke of lightning, lasting sometimes for a day and at other times for weeks, something that the doctors had been unable to cure, possibly due to shifting of the piece of shell-casing that still lay somewhere in my back.

I struggled to my feet, but when I tried to straighten up, the pain was unbearable. The old wound had me, sure enough. Doubled over almost at right angles, I staggered over my back trail, the dog leaping and barking ahead of me as if to lend encouragement.

I DON'T know how long it took me to make that three or four miles. Somewhere in my struggles I had lost my snow-goggles, and before long my eyes began to burn and my sight to blur. Fortunately I had my open back-trail to follow, but the last part of that trail was a nightmare. I realized that the dog had his teeth in the shoulder of my moose-hide coat and was lending the weight of his thirty-five pounds to help me along. I closed my eyes tight to keep out the blinding reflection of the snow, and the next thing I knew the dog was growling in my ear, and I opened my eyes in the semi-darkness of the tent. I was lying under the flap, half in and half outside. I had crawled, or the dog had pulled me, under the tent-flap that I had tied tight on my departure.

I felt that if I could just make my bed and lie down, everything would be all right. But the dog seemed to have other ideas. Not for a second did he cease his barking and hauling at me; so finally in despair I managed, after many awkward attempts, to light the kindling that I had left ready laid in the sheet-iron stove. The dog snuggled up against me, and when the pain from my frosted

hands and feet subsided, I dozed off to sleep.

As the fire died down and the chill again took hold of the tent, I woke up, put the only remaining piece of wood into the stove and tried to drag myself outside to the woodpile. I made it, but wasn't sure that I could make it again, so I put the job up to the dog. He cocked his head to one side and looked at me, but when he finally caught on, he almost filled the tent with wood.

BILL had been four months old when my partner and I started on our trek. For months we had talked to him as to a third member of the party, and I believe he understood every word that was said to him; there is no other way to explain some of his actions. He was a natural-born bear-dog, treeing his first bear when he was six months old. He would tree partridges and point them perfectly. I've watched him lie on an overhanging rock for an hour, then plunge into the water and come out with a good-sized fish in his mouth. Now he kept me supplied with wood.

I managed to move around enough to melt snow-water and put on a pot of beans. For six days I contrived to eke out an existence on the meager supply of beans and bacon; then I dug into the dog's supply of smoked fish. On the eighth day Bill failed to bring in more wood, and when I crawled to the tent opening, I saw that where the woodpile had been was now just a bare spot. The next day we divided the last fish.

The cold had subsided somewhat, but my back kept getting steadily worse, and now I could hardly move. I kept wrapped in the blankets as a protection against the bitter cold that seemed to seep into the very marrow of my bones. Occasionally I could hear Bill outside giving vent to wild barking, and would catch the chirping call of a pine squirrel as it mocked him.

We'd been without food for three days, and I had just about given up hope. I tried sitting in the door of the tent with the rifle, hoping to get a shot at one of the squirrels, or even a chattering camp-robber, but I had no luck. I did fire one shot, which missed; but I accomplished results that surprised me.

In the distance I heard the answering report of a rifle—once, twice, three times in rapid succession came the faint reports: The signal in the North country of a person lost or in distress.

With bounding hope I thrust the rifle into the air to answer the shots, when off to the right came three more shots, and almost as an echo, a full mile to the left of the first signal came a third salvo of rapidly fired shots. Three persons lost, three signals at least a mile apart! Hastily I fired twice, then paused to listen. From all three angles came answering shots: they had heard.

I didn't have enough ammunition to lie there firing signal shots, and I couldn't afford to pass up this chance of succor. The dog Bill was trying to talk in low-throated growls. Like a flash the answer to my problem came to me.

"Speak to 'em, Bill! Talk to 'em, boy! Talk to 'em!"

Excitedly he started to bark, cries that could not have been heard two hundred yards away. "Come, come," I chided him. "Speak up like a big dog—make a big noise."

To make it more certain, I tried to howl the way I thought a dog should howl, as if he were baying the moon. He caught on at once, raised his nose into the air and let out a long-drawn mournful cry that went rolling and wavering across the muskeg. For an hour I kept him at it; then in the distance we heard an answering call. An hour later three weary forlorn hunters made their way into our camp. They had been hunting on Lake Abitibi, got lost and wouldn't believe their compass, and traveled in the wrong direction—to my salvation. The best part of it was they had food in their packs!

Two of the hunters pitched in with a will to cut firewood, while the third tried to rub some of the kinks out of my back. It was a cheerful camp that night for all of us, plenty of food and a warm tent.

TWO days later, as we were swapping stories around the camp stove, the dog rushed madly into the bush, and presently my partner appeared, breaking trail along the edge of the lake. Behind him were four Indians loaded down with packs of supplies. They had been five days breaking trail from steel.

He never was much of a hand to talk, and now all he had to say was: "Guess you know something now about the trials of a sour-dough." But he scratched the Airedale behind the ears, and with more expression than I had ever seen in his leathery face, I heard him say: "Good dog, Bill, good dog."

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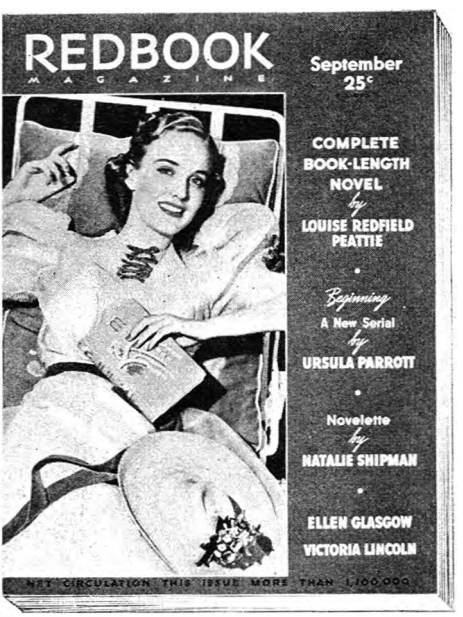

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