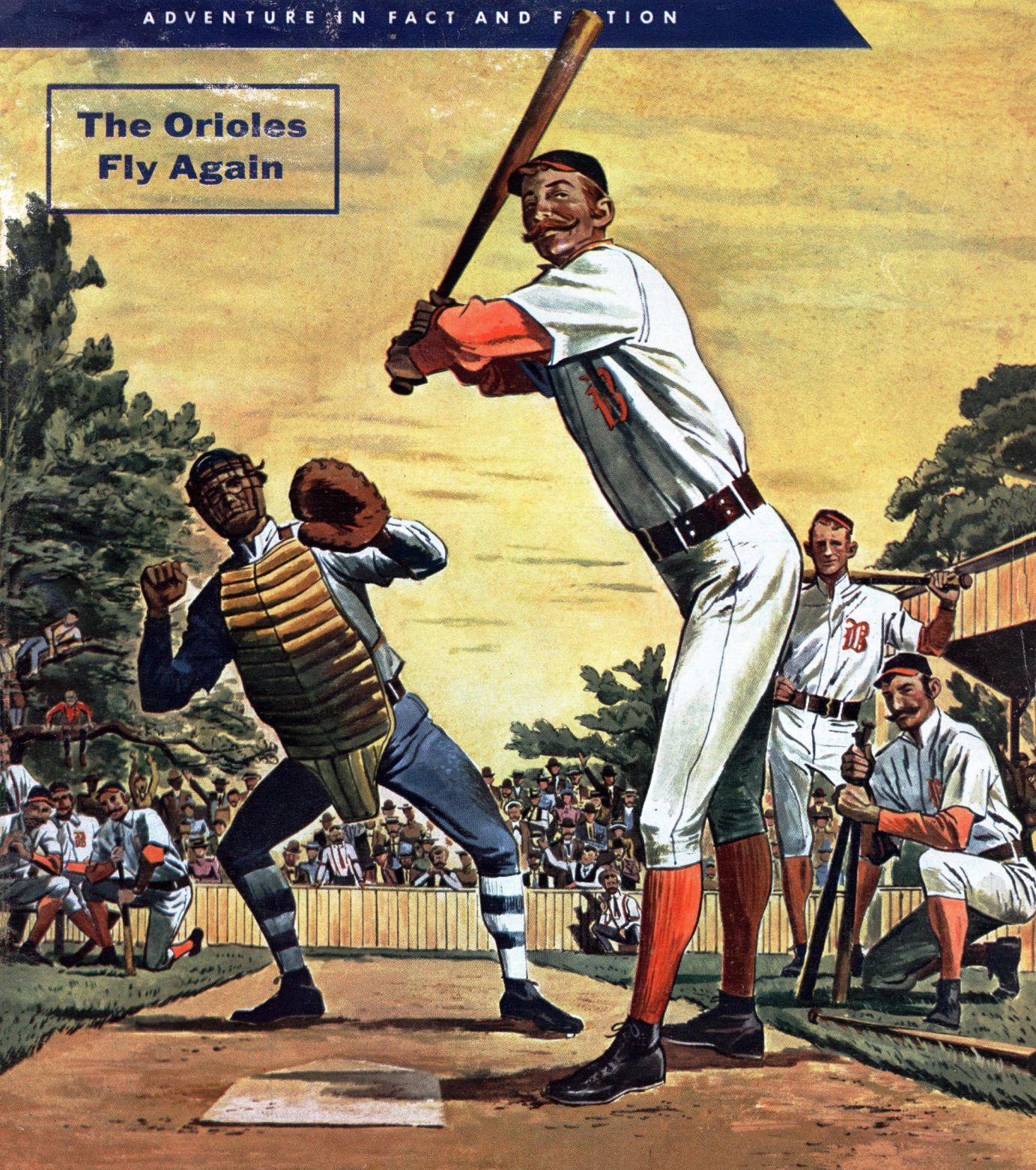
The World's Richest Buried Treasure

Bluebook

ADVENTURE IN FACT AND FICTION

25c
APRIL

The Orioles Fly Again



Who wrote what in this month's Bluebook

Purely Personal

So that no one will begin thinking we made up the story on 60-67 ("Presenting: The World's Richest Treasure"), we hereby show you the man who wrote the story, who knows where the treasure is, and who is planning right now to

go back and get some of it. This lucky chap's name is **Bill Dillingham,** and, far from being an idle dreamer, he is a solid citizen, an engineer with more than twenty years service in South American mining operations, and a guy who knows the Andes as you know your address.

Bill's career of building railroads and highways down below the equator, of fighting Indians, tigers, alligators, boa constrictors, head hunters and head shrinkers, fades into the background when he starts talking about his favorite topic, the lost Inca treasure. As to where it is exactly . . . well, he has an accurate map. But, if you think he's going to give you the exact details, you're wrong.

"Not that I have any great fear of someone else getting there before I do," he writes. "Not when you consider that men have been looking for it for more than 400 years. But if anyone thinks I'm going to take him by the hand and lead him to it . . . well, let him get his *own* map. I've got mine."

* * *

"Mantapus" (pages 54-59) is far from being **Egbert N. Bowyer's** first story, and behind that statement lies a lesson in stick-to-itiveness. Starting out some twenty years ago with the idea of writing for a living, Bert gave himself three years to sell his first story.

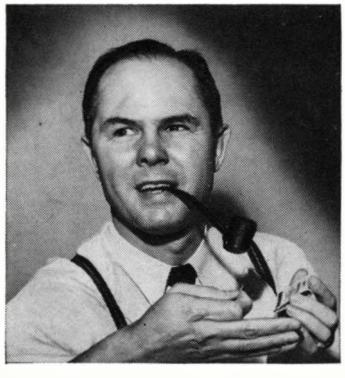
Three years passed, and he sadly wound the paper into his mill and began what was to be his last attempt to get an editor to buy at least *one* of his pieces. Naturally, that one sold, and he's been incurable ever since.

A native Floridian, Bert loves the state, and centers most of his stories around it and its people. Does he ever think of taking a regular 9-to-5 job?

"Hardly," he says. "It interferes with the things a man wants to do."

* * *

George Nelson Meyers, author of "The Pioneer" (pages 82-86) knows the Alaskan territory of which he writes



because his home address, from 1939 to '49, was Fairbanks, Alaska, where he edited *The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner,* "America's Fartherest North Daily Newspaper." At the moment, he makes his home in Seattle, where he's a reporter on *The Seattle Times.*

Asked why, since his story's about homesteading in Alaska, and he knows the territory so well, he didn't try it himself, Meyers replied, ruefully, "I've written so much about the hazards of homesteading in Alaska, I wouldn't dare try it."

* * *

We'd been looking for a good poker story for a long time when **Al Spiers** sent us "The Framed Hand" (pages 71-75). One reading was enough to convince us the search was over, and that the author was a pretty fair poker player himself.

Al began his newspaper career in Michigan City, Indiana, in 1933, and he's still at it, in the same spot, only now as editor and featured columnist of the paper. It's been a lively existence, what with the Indiana state prison being just down the road a piece from Al's desk. This contretemps has resulted in the lad's covering everything from the Dillinger crash-out of that particular stir, in 1933, to a variety of murders, suicides, airline crashes, births of quads and Siamese twins, and an occasional clambake.

His favorite: predicting on the front page that Ike and Adlai would be nominated, and that Ike would win in a landslide. Okay?

* * *

Will Henry, who wrote "This Was Wyatt" (pages 92-128) is a Missouri boy who's never been east of the Big Muddy. Today he hangs up his Stetson in California, where he moved as a sprout. "Worked the best part of my manhood away," he tells us, "at two professions which rate pretty high out here—mining and ranching. Couldn't make an honest

dime or keep a crooked nickel at either, so gave up working at them and started writing about them." He sold his first Western historical novel in 1950 and has turned out nine more since.

Bluebook

ADVENTURE IN FACT AND FICTION

April, 1954 **MAGAZINE** Vol. 98, No. 6

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The short stories and novel herein are fiction and intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

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PRO and CON

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Another Old War

To the Editor:

I've just read Keith Monroe's pipe dream in the January issue, a thing you called "The Oldest War in the World."

"I'm sure it isn't easy to find good articles to fill up your many pages each month, but do you have to fall for such crap as this? Not only did I find it dull, I had one helluva time trying to convince myself that any of it was real and that Monroe didn't make it all up.

I will be as surprised as it's possible for an old guy like me to be if you get so much as one letter praising this trash.

Ed Clarkson.

Des Moines, Iowa

To the Editor:

Just a note to let you know how much I enjoyed reading "The Oldest War in the World," in the January issue. It was a honey of a story.

Bluebook is tops with me when it comes to good magazine reading matter—tops in both fact and fiction stories.

Here's hoping the rest of the 1954 issues will be as good as this January number, or any of the 1953 copies.

Floyd Spellman.

Wayne, Mich.

Shaggy Dogs

To the Editor:

The only thing pulpy about *Bluebook* is the paper on which it's printed. Many of the so-called slicks suffer by comparison with it otherwise.

I especially enjoyed the shaggy-dog article in the January issue. But it is amazing to me that the authors should fail to mention the original shaggy-dog story which surely must be familiar to many.

Briefly, here it is:

An Englishman advertises internationally for a shaggy dog. An American reads the ad and, after much effort and hardship, personally delivers the dog to the Englishman's London home. Answering the doorbell, the Englishman adjusts his monocle, peers at the animal, and exclaims, "But, my word—not *that* shaggy!"

Daniel F. Osborne.

Evansville, Ind.

Roman Holiday

To the Editor:

Will Oursler, in his article, "So You Want to be a Newspaperman," in the December issue, states that Walter Howie scored one of the biggest newsbeats of the year when he reported the Iroquois Theater fire, in the early part of the century.

In the incident mentioned, Howie is said to have discovered some men and women emerging from an open manhole dressed in Roman togas. He interviewed them and found they had escaped from backstage at the Iroquois Theater, which then was on fire.

All of which is fine for Mr. Howie, except that I'd be interested in why these escaping actors were dressed in Roman togas. The play being presented that night at the Iroquois was "Mr. Bluebeard, Jr.," and any escaping actors would have been dressed in the modern dress of the time (circa 1903), altho a few of the chorus girls may possibly have been scantily-clad, again, however, in the tradition of the time.

Mr. Oursler is guilty of lousing up his facts—or is this another one of the typical, unfounded legends of the newspaper business?

Art Ronnie.

Los Angeles, Calif.

Beats us, Art.—Ed.

Secret Code

To the Editor:

I read with interest the story in your December issue by Christopher Monig entitled "The Red Candle." I was especially interested because the author states that prisoners in their cells communicate with one another by tapping out the Morse Code on the water pipes. This is ridiculous; no one can tap out Morse Code on a water pipe, and, if you don't believe it, try sometime to do it yourself.

And now you tell me how to tell the difference between a dot and a dash in a tap on a water pipe.

G. M. Hauger.

Alexandria, Minn.

Dear Mr. Hauger:

You are undoubtedly correct in saying the Morse Code can't be pounded out through pipes—but somebody neglected to tell convicts it was impossible, and they've been doing it for years. I'm sure there are many ways in use, but I know of two. One is to

"I realize you are doing the work of three men. I hope you see what a serious thing it is when you're late!"

have the space between blows represent the code; short space a dot, longer one a dash. The other is to use one blow on the pipe for a dot and two quick blows for a dash.

These methods have been in use in prisons almost as long as the Morse Code has existed.

Christopher Monig.
New York, N. Y.

Knife Play

To the Editor:

I have just read "The Iron Mistress," by Paul Wellman, which is a story about Jim Bowie. In the book, he does not give an adequate description of the Bowie knife.

Can you tell me where I can find an accurate description of the knife?

Dr. Montague L. Boyd.
Atlanta, Ga.

How about asking Wellman, Doc? —Ed.

Murder Allowed

To the Editor:

I wonder if the inventors of the automobile would have completed their work had they known what a monster of modern life it has become compared to its utility.

Lester David's article ("Murder Allowed Here," December) is very good, excellent, and I heartily agree that the passive education of our people, and others in the mechanized countries, is worthless to halt the ill use of the automobile. The best campaigns against bad driving which I have witnessed have lasted but a month or two. . . .

It may sound a little far-fetched, but I believe there is a field here for international relations, so that each country can help the other benefit from its own experiences. The goal in each country is the same, and it makes no difference who benefits, since, in the main, the life at stake is man's . . .

. . . Stating my own ideas on the subject, I believe that:

1. An international meeting of traffic officials and government officials (concerned with the problem) should be held, and continued.

2. The control of traffic and motor vehicles should be on a national rather than a local level, with the basic laws for the safety of all enforced impartially. Naturally, certain regulations always will have to be left to local governments to fit changing conditions.

3. A federal system of education and punishment should be instituted, and the emphasis on the punishment be made educationally corrective.

4. The practice of a person being allowed to hide behind his insurance policy should be modified to cause the person causing an injury at least some discomfort.

Perhaps I've been long-winded about this, but the few dollars with which a driver's license can be purchased is not equal to the worth of a man whose life is lost to his family and his country.

Lt. Thomas W. Case.
Ludwigsburg, Germany

What Is a Man

To the Editor:

This is a long time in arriving, and probably way out of date, but I still think it's worth passing along to you.

My wife's father, a fine old gent and a local lay preacher in the Methodist Synod, seldom reads magazine articles —or magazines, for that matter—but I have belatedly shown him the piece, "What Is a Man?" which ran in your issue of last August. He asks me to tell you that it is the finest statement of principles he's seen. And, even after two readings, and a long separation in between, I am inclined to agree with him slightly more than one hundred percent.

Bruce McKie.
Nassau, Bahamas

Simple

To the Editor:

My 8-year-old daughter has, I believe, solved that riddle of the goose in the bottle your readers were arguing about a few issues ago.

In brief, you draw a picture of a bottle, with the goose shown inside. Then you take an eraser and erase the picture of the goose.

Trust an 8-year-old to solve a puzzle like that.

J. B. Davis.
Oak Ridge, Tenn.

Royalist

To the Editor:

In your January issue, a filler item reads as follows: "Johnny Longden, who has ridden more winners than any jockey who ever lived . . ."

Why don't you ask Ray Ferris if he ever has heard of Sir Gordon Richards? Maybe you editors don't read your short pieces, but I do.

In any case, I forgive you and Mr. Ferris, and will continue to buy *Bluebook* every month.

Marvin Pyle.
Sacramento, Calif.

Next Question

To the Editor:

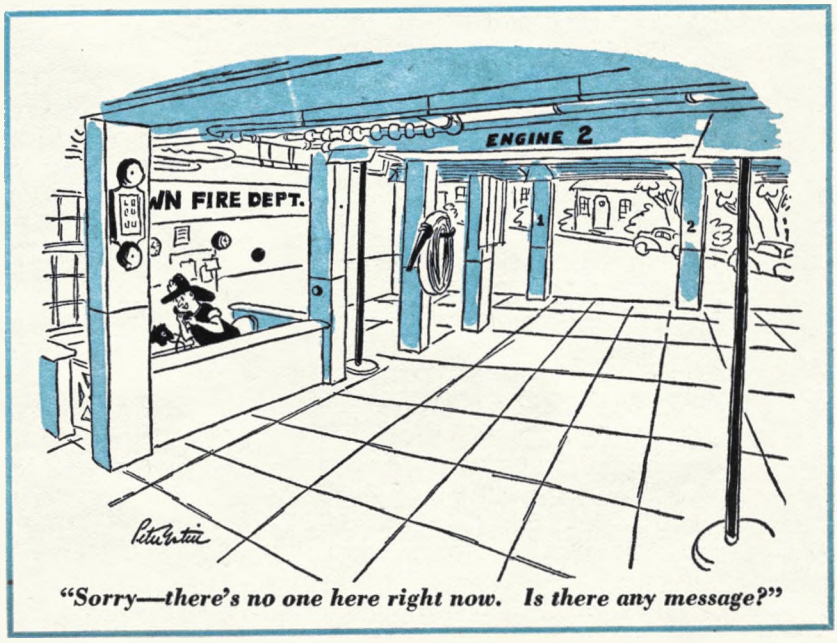
In your January issue, under "What Next," you make a statement I just can't get. It reads as follows:

"In Indianapolis, firemen stood by helplessly and watched a house go up in flames because the nearest fire-plug was across the railroad tracks and a speeding passenger train had gone by and chopped their hose in *three* pieces.

So, okay, I give up— How?

John O. Jefferson.
Camp Pickett, Va.

You lay a hose across a railroad track, Johnny, and wait till the next train comes by. Only use your own hose; because you'll have three of the damndest pieces of useless hose you ever saw.—Ed.



"Sorry—there's no one here right now. Is there any message?"

Thinking Out Loud

When writer Joe Millard drifted into our offices one day and announced that he wanted to do a story about the moon which he guaranteed "no reader would dare put down till he'd read every word," our first reaction was to sweep this guy out and tell him to go find a music publisher instead of a magazine house. After all, the moon's their baby, not ours.

Then Cousin Joseph started talking. And, ten minutes later, he had me rushing for my telescope, and running around like crazy and pointing up at the moon. Because, if what Joe says in his piece makes any sense at all, this easily is the most sensational yarn about the moon that's come along since the cow jumped over the damned thing.

Briefly, Joe—in his essay on pages 44-51 of this issue—cites the strange conspiracy of silence as regards the moon which has been carried on for some time now by astronomers. The boys with the high-powered lenses, in other words, simply clam up and go away when you ask them the simplest question about the love planet.

Mars? They'll tell you anything you want to know about that, including how soon they'll be selling excursion tickets. Venus? Same thing. Jupiter? You can get a complete book on the gases that surround it, the weight of the atmosphere, and exactly what those little white spots are that you see down in the corner of your telescope (specks on your eyeglasses).

But, the moon . . . well, sir, you read any good books lately? And how's your new car working out?

In short, here's a story that could have scientific circles buzzing like a triple-A sawmill; and, starting right about now, we are going to crawl into the editorial storm cellar and put our ears to the ground.

At least it's a comfortable position.

* * *

As an old Marylander, I get probably more of a kick out of George Toporcer's story on the old Baltimore Orioles (pages 6-11) than anyone this side of the Mason-Dixon Line. They were one of the great teams in baseball, the Orioles, and it's going to be interesting to see how close the modern Orioles come to emulating them.

It's a cinch they'll never duplicate the gay spirit of the old-timers; baseball's too big a business today for that. In particular, I wonder if they'll ever develop a screwball like the one H. Allen Smith tells about.

This bucko, it seems, was celebrating his birthday, and his wife planned a big party in his honor after the game. Accordingly, she urged him to get home as early as possible from the diamond, in order to help her crack the ice and make the sandwiches.

So, the guy figured, the way to do that was to get thrown out of the game—early. And the umpire hardly had yelled "Play ball!" before our hero was making himself thoroughly obnoxious. He argued on every strike call, he kicked dust, he spat on the arbiter's shoes, he threw his bat into the air. The umpires ignored him completely.

Finally, they were well into the fourth inning, and the afternoon was moving along, when our boy came sliding into second-base, his spikes high, his legs thrashing. He was out a mile; but he came up fighting—and that's when the ump gave him the business.

"Look, Pete," the peacemaker murmured quietly, "we know you're trying to get the heave so you can go home and get a head start on the party. But, knock it off, will'ya—the rest of us boys are invited to the party, too, and we can't get there till the game's over. And, by golly, you're going to stick around here as long as we do!"

He did, too.

* * *

The subject of buried treasure seems inevitably to be one which fascinates a large number of readers. They all want to know where they can get something for nothing. As an editor—a notoriously underpaid group—we sympathize with them completely.

In any buried treasure story, however,

...AND YOU CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT 'EM

"What's for breakfast, dear? Pancakes? Is that what you said, pancakes?"

the reader invariably asks one simple, obvious question—if this guy knows where the stuff's buried, why doesn't he go dig it up? Why does he waste time writing about it and telling *us* how to dig it up?

These are legitimate questions insofar as most buried treasure stories are concerned—and it's the reason we've turned down a lot more such yarns than we've bought. But the one on pages 60-67, "Presenting: The World's Richest Treasure"—well, sir, that's gold of a different weight.

In this case, the author knows where the treasure's buried—at least 21 millions of it—and he has been there and virtually seen it. What's more, he even now is making plans to go back again.

The catch is that just about everyone who has gone in after this particular loot has failed to come back alive. When they do get back, as in the case of our author, they are farther over on the side of being dead than alive.

But, if you're one of those guys who doesn't scare easily, who could use an extra 21 million, and who has some time on his hands, by all means read the story in this issue. After all, it's better than wasting your time in the pool halls.

* * *

Which, however deviously, brings this department around to the time to say *au revoir* to the readers of *Bluebook*. With this issue, the present editors wind up their stewardship, and turn the pastepot and shears over to the new regime. Starting with the May number, there'll be a new staff turning out your favorite monthly men's magazine.

We know of at least one or two readers who'll be overjoyed to receive this gladsome news, and for these folks we pen a hearty salute. We know and hope there'll be many more who will receive the word of our departure with regret.

We've had a lot of fun these last several years at the helm of this half-century-old magazine, and the figures would indicate that a lot of you readers have had just as much fun as we've had. At the same time, we leave with the sure knowledge that the future for *Bluebook* is brighter than it's ever been before, and we predict that the coming months and years are going to be exciting ones for you readers, probably more exciting than they've been in a long time.

Our editorial successor, André Fontaine, is a veteran editor and writer, who has proved his ability in a number of topflight editorial jobs, and as a writer on most of the leading magazines in the business today. He cannot help but be a great asset to this fine old publication.

To him, and to all you readers who have been so wonderful to us and to *Bluebook*, we say a hearty—thanks and good luck.

MAXWELL HAMILTON

OUT OF THE MONEY . . . In York, England, the city council closed the poorhouse to busted patrons of the nearby racetrack. During the racing season, said the poorhouse manager indignantly, not a night would pass without at least 20 broke gamblers coming in for food and a night's lodging.

THAT'S NO BIRD . . . In Storrs, Conn., a woman asked ornithology Professor Jerauld Manter to identify a bird whose strange cry she couldn't place. The professor, after journeying to the scene, identified the cry as that of a bulldozer in need of oil.

SABOTEUR . . . In Poland, a man pondering an unhappy love affair strolled along railroad tracks and then sat on a large tree-trunk fallen across them. Hearing an approaching train whistle, he ran down the tracks and stopped the train, thus preventing a serious wreck. He was rewarded by a fine of 150 zloty or three days in jail. In Russian-controlled Poland, walking railroad tracks is against the law.

DOWN THE CHIMNEY . . . In Newark, N. J., an auto repair shop called Ben Hummell to tell him his car, repaired after a minor accident, was ready. When he reached the shop, he found a strong wind had blown a brick chimney down on the car as it stood in a side yard. The car was a total wreck.

WRONG CENTURY . . . In Hamburg, Germany, a centenarian who applied for an official birth record learned that for almost 100 years she had been celebrating her birthday on the wrong day.

DOCTORED RELATIONS . . . In Corinth, Miss., it was revealed that Mrs. Hortense S. Patrick is the granddaughter of a doctor, the daughter of a doctor, the wife of a doctor, the mother of a doctor, and the mother-in-law of two doctors.

TAKING NO CHANCES . . . In Melbourne, Australia, 19-year-old Dorothy West had a simple explanation for having bigamously married two men within 13 months. Said Dorothy: "I wanted security."

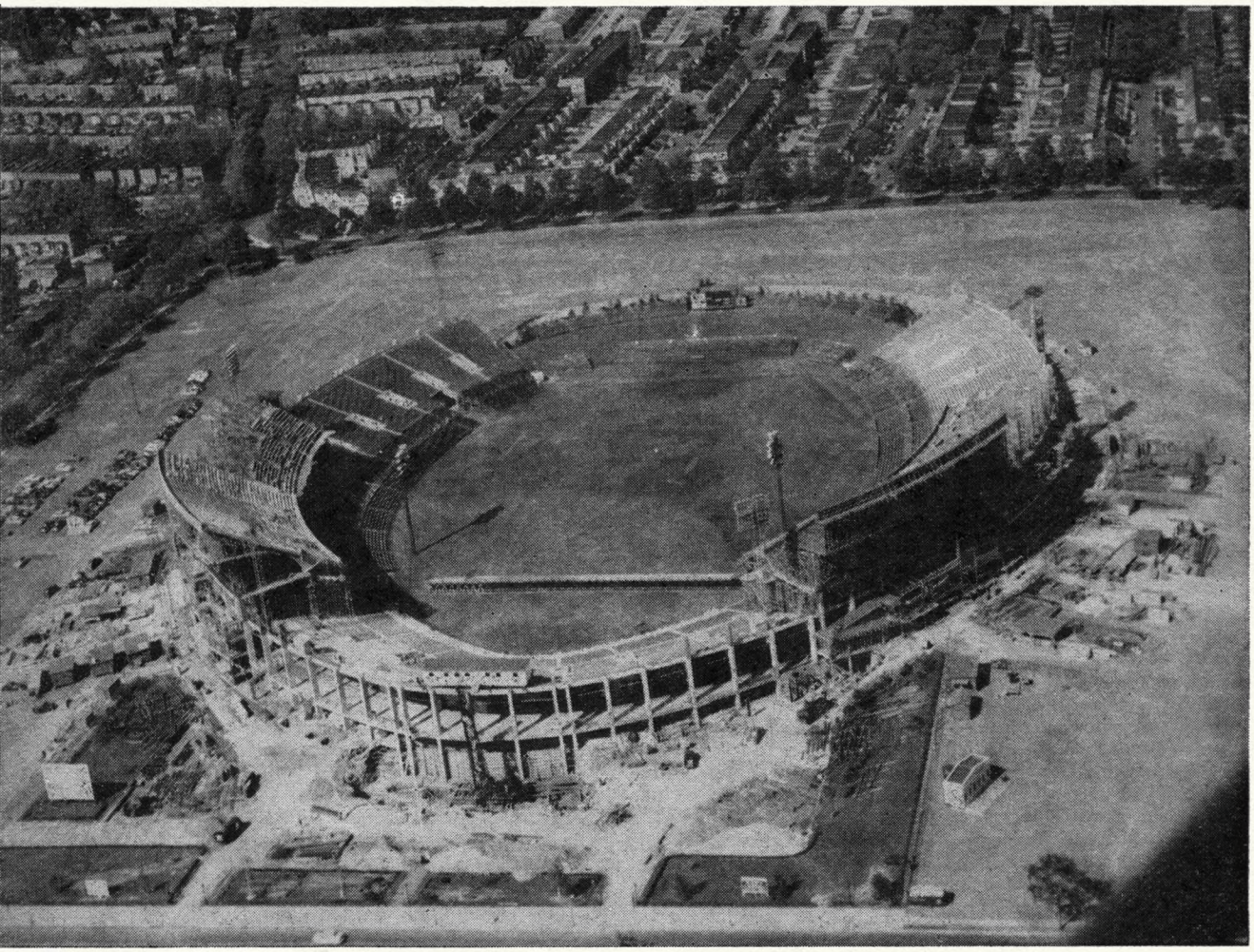
GOOD RECEPTION . . . In Athol, Miss., a fisherman found he'd forgotten to take along his trout rod. He attached his gear to his car's radio antenna, caught 12 trout, the legal limit.

DISPIRITED YOUTH . . . In Memphis, Tenn., first prize in an anti-alcohol essay contest sponsored by the Woman's Christian Temperance Union was won by Edward Lazar, 12. His father runs a liquor store.

FREE PAINT . . . In Sherman, Texas, Cal Williams had his house painted at no charge to him whatsoever. The painter had the wrong address.

CALL HIM AN ATHLETE . . . In Crowborough, England, Charley Macey won a bet by hopping around a pub on a pogo stick for 90 minutes. Macey, a local golf pro, has in the past distinguished himself by walking at a rate of six miles an hour while swinging a yo-yo; walking 16 miles backward in three hours and 55 minutes; playing 12 rounds of golf in 16 hours, averaging 79, and racing a train down a mountain. The enterprising fellow now is toying with the idea of setting a new distance record rolling a hoop.

The Orioles Fly

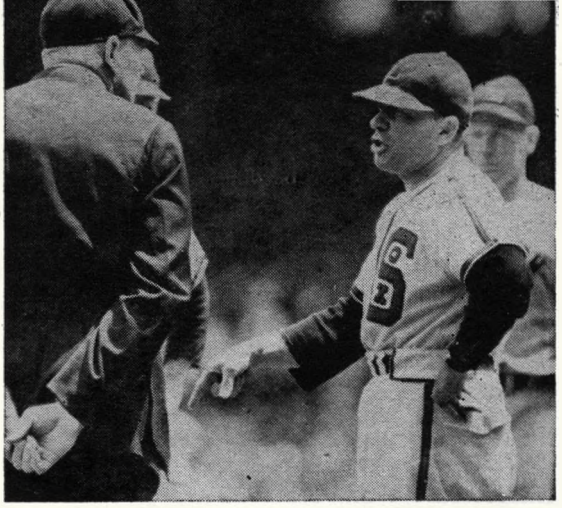


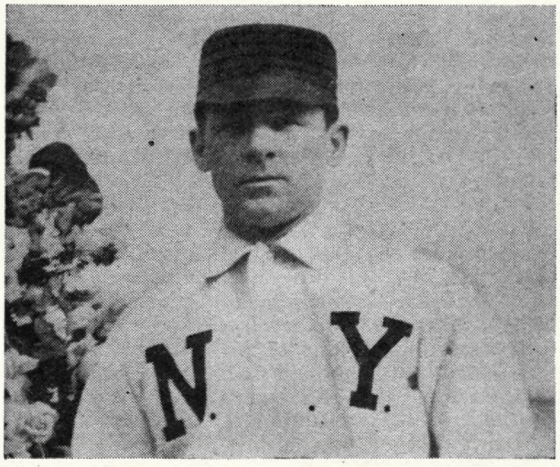
The Orioles' new home, Municipal Stadium in Baltimore, being expanded to seat 51,750.

Again!

Once again Baltimore is a major-league town. Can this modern club live up to the legendary feats of those rip-roaring, hilarious Orioles of the golden past?

By GEORGE "Specs" TOPORCER





Above: Oriole manager Jimmy Dykes when piloting the White Sox. Below: John J. McGraw, early Oriole star, in 1907.

On September 29th, the day before the 1953 World Series got under way, Baltimore once again officially became a major-league city. It took the biggest financial deal in the history of baseball to shift the franchise from St. Louis, where the hapless Browns finally gave up the ghost. A cool $2,475,000 was turned over to the Mound City team's owners by Clarence D. Miles of Baltimore and his associates. So, after a lapse of over a half century, the famous Oriole emblem will again emblazon the shirts of an American League entry.

Just a year earlier the Boston Braves made the first major-league franchise change in 50 years when they moved over to Milwaukee. It proved a bonanza in every way. And so should the Baltimore move. At this writing there is well over $300,000 advance ticket sales in the Orioles' till, a figure that could run as high as a half million by the time the gates open for the 1954 season. Thus there can scarcely be any doubt that the season will be a financial success.

But will the Orioles emulate the Milwaukee team by becoming a contending club? Since the quality of the team brought into Baltimore is only too well known, one wonders just what is prompting the optimism indicated by Baltimore's adopted slogan, "Beat the Yankees."

Are the Oriole backers counting on enthusiastic fan support, and the willingness to make sizable financial outlays for additional player talent? But worthwhile players aren't for sale at any price. As for the psychology of spirited fan support—let them not be misled by the Milwaukee precedent.

Yes, the Milwaukee Braves did jump from seventh to second place after the shift from Boston. But even though fanatical support of the good Milwaukee burghers contributed to their success, too much emphasis seems to be placed on this. The big factor is that the Braves added six new regulars to their lineup last season, with Del Crandall and Johnny Antonelli returning from military service, Don Liddle and Billy Bruton moving up from a sound farm-system, and Joe Adcock and Andy Pafko being acquired in trades.

Yet there is a tremendous factor in the Orioles situation that was missing in the Braves'. And that is the strength and inspiration of tradition. For these new Orioles are assuming the mantles of the first great team in major-league history—the legendary National League Orioles of the 1890's. There's a truly glorious past to live up to, and it may provide the spark that will enable the 1954 Orioles to set the baseball world on fire.

It was in 1892 that Baltimore joined the National League, when the circuit was increased to a 12-club league. Among the Oriole players involved

in the franchise shift from the American Association, of which Baltimore had been a member, was an aggressive young third baseman named John McGraw, destined to become the most famous Oriole of all time. The team was very ably handled by Ned Hanlon, the era's best manager and McGraw's teammates ranked with the greatest stars of that day. Yet McGraw is generally credited for the rapid rise and triumph of the Orioles of the 1890's. He wasn't even captain of those teams, that honor going to Uncle Wilbert Robinson, the portly catcher—who later had a long tenure as manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers. (It was because of Robinson that the Dodgers were known as the Robins or the Flock; the latter name is still often used.) Even in those early days, McGraw manifested the leadership, the pugnaciousness, the keen baseball brain, and the winning habits which characterized his 30-year career as manager of the New York Giants starting in 1902.

In 1894 the Orioles won their first of three successive pennants by winning 24 of their last 25 games—18 of them in a row. McGraw, a bitter loser, always recalled that this 18-game streak was broken by a slip on a muddy field by Uncle Robbie. Many years later, McGraw was said to have continued to remind Robbie of his clumsiness in failing to handle a ball.

Sadie McMahon was the team's leading pitcher. Robinson caught, slugging Dan Brouthers was at first, Heinie Reitz at second, Hughie Jennings at short, McGraw at third, and Willie Keeler, Steve Brodie and Joe Kelly in the outfield. The deeds of this colorful aggregation of 60 years ago are still talked about by old timers.

BASEBALL has never been exactly a parlor game, but compared with the way it was played at that time, it could be called that today. No quarter was asked or given. There was no handshaking with the opposition and every game really was a pitched battle.

Bitter feuds between individuals and teams were the rule rather than the exception. They would consider a player a sissy if he stayed out of action with anything less than a broken leg. With a 14-player limit for each team, minor injuries had to be disregarded, and colds, sniffles, or a bad bruise were deemed trivial reasons for remaining on the sidelines.

To this day it is still fairly common to hear a player shout "be an Oriole!" to one of his teammates when one of them happens to be injured. Those old scrappers had the reputation of squirting tobacco juice on an open spike wound, or they'd stick a split finger into the dirt to stop the flow of blood and then go on playing.

Yes, sir, they were a rough, tough, swashbuckling crew. But their main contribution was bringing science to the game, which up to that time had been more or less a hit-or-miss affair. Led by the irrepressible McGraw they pioneered the hit-and-run play, the bunt, and other innovations which we now accept as standard play. On and off the field they plotted and schemed in an effort to learn new ways to win ball games. Many of the tactics they employed would never be allowed today.

For instance, having developed bunting skills through constant practice, they had their groundskeeper slope the third-base side of the infield, making a low spot between the foul line and the pitcher's box. This caused almost every bunted ball to remain in fair territory, and since the Orioles had perfected bunting into an art, they had a distinct advantage over their rivals, who had not concentrated on learning how to bunt.

Those Orioles never overlooked a bet. There being no rules to prevent them from doing so, they had the groundskeeper soak the field thoroughly each morning around the pitcher's box, and between the mound and the third-base line. The heavy ground would slow down the bunted balls, and cause the third baseman and the pitcher to flounder around in fielding them.

Finally, the baseline down to first was built slightly down hill and made hard and firm by the addition of clay. Except for Robinson and Brouthers, every Oriole was a speedster. So whenever any of them laid down a bunt, the combination of a sloping ground, a wet field, and a firm downward path to first base usually enabled them to reach first safely. Though the opposition soon saw what was going on, they could do nothing about it. It was more than two years before they too learned to bunt and began giving the Orioles a taste of their own medicine, after which the practice was abandoned.

The wetting of the pitcher's box served another purpose. Visiting pitchers with perspiring hands would invariably stoop down to pick up some dirt to aid in their grip of the ball. However, the wet soil would make the ball more slippery than ever. The Oriole pitchers would come prepared with dry soil in their hip pockets, or would have their infielders squirt a small amount of tobacco juice on the ball, rub it in well, and make the ball sticky enough to grip well. Robinson would whip it down to Brouthers between outs for this purpose.

Years later, when new balls were used by the dozen in each game, this tobacco treatment was used for the same purpose, as well as to discolor the ball and make it more difficult to see. Today the rules forbid any such tampering with a ball.

When the Orioles entered the National League there was only one umpire officiating at each game. But the tactics of the Orioles soon changed that, and soon a pair of umpires were always assigned. Obviously, one umpire found it impossible to watch both the ball and one or more base-runners at the same time.

Umpiring was tough enough in those days, and it took real courage. Fans and players alike viewed the ump as a necessary evil. The Orioles, led by the belligerent John McGraw, who was perhaps the greatest umpire-baiter of them all, made life miserable for the umpires. Until the two-umpire system was adopted, the Orioles made a mockery of the rule requiring that each base be tagged in making the circuit. They'd cut in yards short of the base so as to reach their objective quicker via the shortcut. In time the opposition followed suit, thus discounting the Oriole's advantage in this respect.

MCGRAW had two pet tricks at third base, both of which he used effectively as long as only one umpire was on duty. One of these was to give the hip to a base-runner as the runner approached third on his way home. The base-runner would be slowed up by being thrown off stride, or would actually be thrown sprawling into the dirt. This action evoked some fist-fights, but that didn't bother McGraw as long as he gained his point. The single umpire rarely ever spotted such interference plays, and when he did there was no rule to invoke giving the runner an extra base.

McGraw is said to have been cured of this habit when a runner dug a small iron spike into McGraw's rear end as McGraw moved over to give him the hip.

McGraw's other trick was to grab a runner's belt just as he was about to take off for home after tagging up on a fly ball to the outfield. A sharp tug on the belt would often delay the runner enough to get him out at the plate on the throw-in.

McGraw got away with this stunt for a long time. Then Pete Browning, a Louisville player (Louisville was in the National League at that time), loosened his belt before McGraw moved over to the bag. As Browning started homeward, McGraw gave his usual yank and found himself holding the belt in his hand as Browning sped gleefully homeward.

It was rare for more than one ball to be used during the course of a game. After a few innings it would

become quite discolored. And it was especially hard to see if it passed beyond the outfielders on the ground, since the grass out there was usually quite long. So the ingenious Orioles conceived the idea of placing two emergency balls at convenient spots in left-center and right-center fields before each game. If a batter drove a ball beyond those points one of the fielders would reach down and return the hidden ball with nobody the wiser. This, too, worked well for a long time. The ruse was uncovered when center-fielder Steve Brody returned one of the hidden balls to the infield after failing to note that left-fielder Joe Kelly had already fielded and returned the legal ball.

With the trick unmasked, it could no longer be repeated, since from then on umpires and opposing players were constantly on the lookout for such chicanery. And the forfeiture of that game also discouraged any ideas of a repetition of the hidden-ball trick.

Serious though they were in all matters pertaining to baseball, the Orioles had their lighter moments, too. One of their younger pitchers was a left-handed kid named Charley (Crazy) Schmidt. Schmidt used to keep a dope book in which he listed the strength and weakness of every opposing batter. He went so far as to take this aid with him to the mound. As each batter came to the plate Schmidt would pull out the small volume to find out how to pitch to him. Then, nodding in agreement with the knowledge gained from the book, he'd go to work.

He was always careful to hide the book, but one day McGraw, who had been looking for such a chance, discovered it in Schmidt's locker and read it to a group of players gathered around for the fun. Next to the name of Pop Anson, one of the most fearsome sluggers of that period, was inscribed, "weakness: base on balls." Evidently Schmidt had found it difficult to find a chink in Anson's batting armor. The discovery of his beloved dope-book, and the severe kidding he underwent from that time on, was more than enough for even an individualist like Schmidt. Nobody ever saw him take his dope-book out in public again.

THE Orioles were inseparable pals. This was particularly true of McGraw, Jennings, and Robinson. The red-headed, freckled-faced Jennings, who later managed the Detroit Tigers during most of the years of Ty Cobb's best seasons, remained one of McGraw's staunchest friends. In fact he ended up his active days as a coach under McGraw, where his famous "Eh yah!" yell resounded throughout the stands of the Polo Grounds during the 1920's.

McGraw had the same affection for Uncle Robbie. At Baltimore, the two bought a large, three-story building which they converted into a sporting emporium, later known as "The Diamond." In addition to a bar, there were bowling alleys and billiard tables. As a meeting place for the sports fraternity, it flourished during most of McGraw's Oriole years. He and Robbie were reluctantly forced to sell the sports' center when McGraw left Baltimore to manage the Giants in 1902.

Later, Robbie was a Giant coach before he moved over to Flatbush to assume the managerial reins of the Dodgers in 1914. However, in later years a rift developed between them which was never entirely healed, nor fully explained. Never again was there anything but coolness between the two former cronies.

As Orioles, McGraw, Jennings, Robinson and Wee Willie Keeler worked constantly in devising new ways to confound the opposition. Keeler developed into a wonderful place-hitter. When asked the secret of his success, he replied, "I hit them where they ain't"—a phrase which has lived through the years. Keeler's skill is evidenced by the fact that he batted .432 one season, second only to Hughie Duffy's .438, high-water mark of all time.

McGraw became a past master at fouling off pitches. A foul was not counted as a strike at that time, so he practiced fouling off pitches deliberately in order to work the pitcher for a base on balls. He is reported to have fouled off 27 balls in one time at bat, which should be something of a record. It was directly as a result of his skill in this department that the rule was adopted whereby the first two fouls count as strikes.

McGraw and Keeler thought up and developed the hit-and-run play. McGraw was lead-off man, when he got to first he would bluff a steal to see which of the infielders would break to cover second, after which Keeler would give the signal for the hit-and-run play and McGraw would be off with the next pitch. Keeler's amazing place-hitting ability enabled him to drive the ball through the spot vacated by the infielder dashing to cover second and McGraw would invariably wind up on third base.

The success of this daring and aggressive maneuver had as much to do with the Orioles pennant winning years as any other factor involved. Not only would the hit-and-run accomplish its original intention of

Willard (Uncle Robbie) Robinson, for many years the beloved manager of the Dodgers, was catcher for the old Orioles.

opening a hole to hit through and advancing the baserunner an extra base, but it would upset the opposition and put them always on the defensive. The hit-and-run play was a trademark of any McGraw managed team in later years, but the birthplace of the play was Baltimore during those days of Oriole supremacy.

The Orioles not only played physical tricks on the opposition. To make their aggressiveness still more effective they staged psychological warfare from the bench before the first game of every series. As the visiting team would come onto the field, several of the Orioles could always be seen busily engaged in filing their spikes to razor-like sharpness. Then, making sure the visiting players were within earshot, one of them would growl, "I hope one of those blankety-blank infielders gets in front of me today!" An opposing infielder, being human, was bound to pay heed to such a remark if he was later called upon to face a hard-sliding, charging Oriole coming into a base. The threat of being cut by those sharp spikes could be quite discouraging, even to the brave souls who played in those hell-for-leather days.

If the players were rough, so were their accommodations. Conditions were in sharp contrast with those of today. Sumptuous clubhouses, fine hotels, the best of food, and protection from fans were unknown to the ballplayers of those days. Instead of a half-dozen shower baths for the use of the players, as is the case today, a few wooden tubs filled with water were provided for bathing purposes. The clubhouse was usually a rough structure with no lockers, the only appointments being a wooden bench and a few nails for hanging up civilian attire.

In the early 1900's the players began dressing at their hotel, after which they would be driven through the streets to the ball park in open, horse-drawn carriages. This was undoubtedly a good promotional stunt, but it had its drawbacks. On occasion, the visiting team would be subjected to a stoning by partisans of the home club. However, the players evidently took such stonings as a matter of course, since they made no effort to change the custom of riding in these carriages. It must have been quite a sight to see horses prancing down city streets, drawing a carriage full of uniformed players, many with mustaches adorning their upper lips. (About half the players sported mustaches in those days. Some, like George Van Haltren, took great pride in raising a long handle-bar affair that was the envy of most players.)

Another picturesque aspect was the habit of some players of inserting a piece of beefsteak in each shoe. This improvised in-sole prevented blisters and served as a cushion against spike rivets in the poorly constructed shoes then used. This crude aid to foot-comfort was hardly as sanitary as the air-foam pads invented by Dr. Harrison Weaver, of the St. Louis Cardinals, just about a dozen years ago, but they did serve the same general purpose.

It makes one wonder what the athletes would have done to preserve their feet had the price of beef been then what it is now.

In 1900 McGraw succeeded Ned Hanlon as manager of the Orioles when the latter shifted over to Flatbush to take over the Brooklyn Trolley Dodgers, as they were known then. Despite having Iron Man Joe McGinnity for its pitching mainstay, the club fared poorly that season. McGinnity got his nickname because of his ability to pitch double-headers frequently. He apparently had an invulnerable arm, even though he was a curve-ball pitcher, a delivery supposedly tough on the arm. In later years he joined Christy Mathewson as the one-two pitching punch for McGraw's Giants.

Since the National League was beset with many difficulties at the turn of the century, it was felt that the league would be sounder if the unwieldy 12-club circuit was reduced to eight clubs. Baltimore was one of the four clubs dropped, and McGraw and Robinson were sold to the St. Louis National League club for the 1900 season. Both were hold-outs, since they did not want to leave Baltimore and their lucrative sporting emporium. They finally reported—but only after forcing the St. Louis owner to insert a non-reserve clause in their contracts, leaving them free to sign wherever they wished at the close of the season.

Meanwhile the present American League was being formed by Byron (Ban) Johnson. He chose Baltimore as the site for one of his clubs, and it was an easy matter for him to entice McGraw and Robinson to return to their favorite city. McGraw became manager and part owner and returned in a happy frame of mind. But this jubilation faded quickly in the light of subsequent events.

While the club had some good performers, such as Roger Bresnahan, one of the all-time catching greats, and two slugging outfielders of old-time renown, Cy Semour and "Turkey Mike" Donlin, it did poorly, both on the field and at the gate. Johnson, who from the start made a fetish of supporting his umpires in an effort to promote clean baseball, got under McGraw's skin by subjecting him to frequent fines and suspensions. This, together with the Oriole financial difficulties and a tempting offer from the rival National League's New York Giants, finally led to McGraw's desertion of the Ban Johnson circuit in the summer of 1902, thus dooming Baltimore to a return to minor-league status. The move caused a furor in

"Which one of the Birdwell daughters did he marry?"

the baseball world, and it started a life-long feud between Johnson and McGraw.

Much more could be written about those fabulous old Orioles, but suffice to state it was a Baltimore team which revolutionized the game and added more style, color, glory and tradition, than any other team in the game's history. Two records, one by a team and the other by an individual, still adorn the books. The 1894 Orioles had a team batting-average of .348! Granting that averages were inflated in those days, it still represents quite an achievement. Wilbert Robinson set the other record by smacking out seven hits in as many times at bat—six singles and a double in a nine-inning game. After almost 60 years the mark is still untouched.

No Oriole background would be complete without some mention of the Baltimore teams of the Jack Dunn era. True, their deeds were accomplished in a minor-league atmosphere, but nevertheless they deserve full recognition, especially since so many major-league stars were developed during this second period of glory in Oriole history. Jack Dunn was the magician who operated and managed the team to seven straight International League pennants from 1919 through 1925. A shrewd leader, Dunn put together perhaps the greatest minor-league team of all time—though some fans might prefer Newark of 1937 or Rochester of 1930.

Among the players who developed into major-league stars at Baltimore were Moses (Lefty) Grove, George Earnshaw, Jack Ogden, Tommy Thomas, Jack Bentley, Max Bishop, Joe Boley, and Fritz Maisel. Grove, who threw a ball almost as hard as the immortal Walter Johnson, struck out 330 batters one season with the Orioles, averaging 10 per game. Later he blossomed into one of the greatest pitchers in American League history.

In the summer of 1944, the wooden tinderbox called Oriole Park, which had housed so many of the game's stars, burned to the ground. That forced the Orioles to use the newly constructed Municipal Stadium for the remainder of that season. Under Tommy Thomas, the team drove on to an International League pennant. In the Junior World Series with Louisville that Fall, the Orioles drew an all-time minor-league record crowd of 53,000 at the opening game, with many thousands standing on the field to watch the contest.

Perhaps that mammoth crowd is an augury of good things to come, especially as the revival of major-league baseball at Baltimore will find the 1954 entry playing in that same Municipal Stadium, now completed with a double-decked concrete grandstand with a seating capacity of well over 50,000.

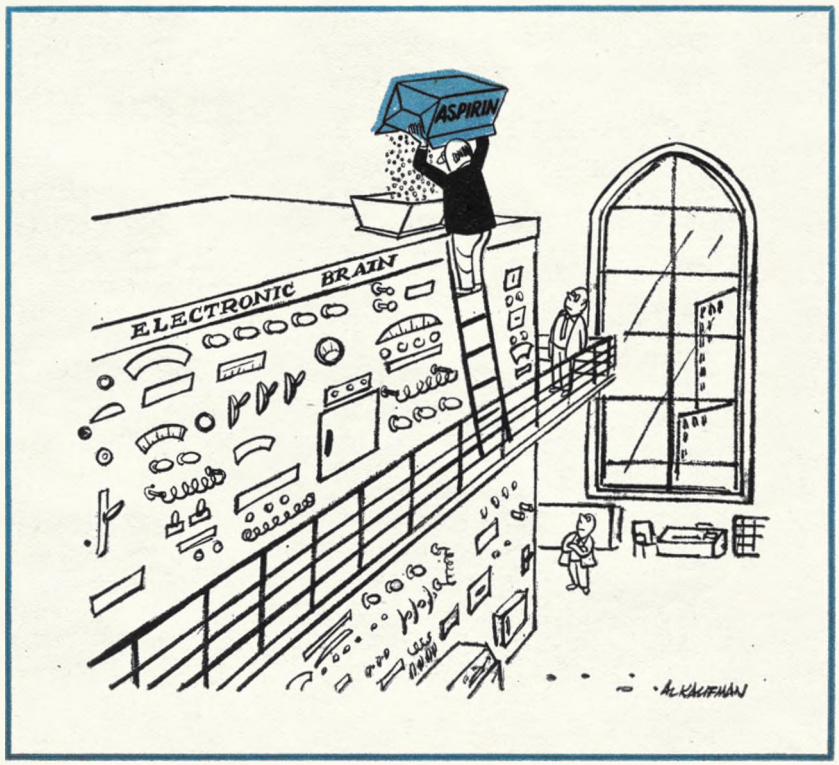
A new phase in Baltimore's baseball history is about to begin. The club has a real major-league ball park, good financial backing, and a very capable pair in charge of the Oriole's destinies. Arthur Ehlers, as general manager, and the popular Jimmie Dykes as manager, should form a fine duo. The 1954 team is already assured the support of Baltimore fandom, so almost everything seems to point to a glorious season. The one unhappy element is that Jimmy Dykes' charges, as they now stand, are something less than a first-division team. Dykes has a genius for getting the most out of poor ball clubs. On six different occasions he led his White Sox and Athletics into the first division, and some of them were little better than the team he now inherits. And if one looks back to the Browns of last year, it will be noted that Marty Marion's club had two of their longest losing streaks on their home grounds at St. Louis, where only a handful of fans greeted them daily. It is reasonable to assume they would have played better ball at home with the kind of fan support the 1954 Orioles are going to receive.

Another cause for optimism is the chance of improved performances by two or three of last year's Brownies. Bob Turley showed great promise on the mound last season, and Don Larson could also become a valuable pitcher. The veteran Dwayne Pillette is still a good hurler, and Vic Wertz, the husky outfielder, can still bust them a mile. At short, Bill Hunter may be ready to justify the $100,000 outlay made by Bill Veeck, former Brownie boss, two years ago. So all in all the cause is far from hopeless.

However, all this conjecture may be beside the point. Perhaps it is more interesting and pertinent to ponder over the possibilities of whether some of these new Orioles are destined to become latter-day McGraws, or Keelers, or Lefty Groves. Will there be a return to the glamour, the color, the blazing spirit of those old Orioles? And will there be a rebirth of the glory that once was Baltimore?

Perhaps John McGraw, who always had a warm affection for the Chesapeake Bay town, would have been greatly disturbed by Baltimore's return to the majors as an American League city. McGraw, a National Leaguer to the core after his rift with Ban Johnson in 1902, would undoubtedly have preferred to see it join the senior loop.

But few if any among present-day fans and baseball men will be pulling for anything less than the best for the town made famous by the deeds of the great stars of yesteryear. Let's hope that the Orioles, inspired by those living memories, will flame to a revival of their glory, and that the future will unfurl new traditions comparable to those of their resplendent past. •



The Deserter

By DONALD KEITH

Illustrated by CAROL JOHNSON

He betrayed his country in Korea and fled to escape punishment. Now he had to turn and stand or fall. There was no longer a choice.

Steve Bishop read the note again, for the tenth time in an hour.

He still could not think what to do about it. He paced the room, blundering against furniture now and then, pausing sometimes for another look through the window at the enormous mountain vistas and the moving speck on the lower road.

He felt as if he were still desperate in the North Korean prison compound. Studying the note, he tried once more to calm himself and figure out how to evade his pursuers.

An American in Rawalpindi is asking for news of another American, said to be an employee of the Pakistan government. The hurriedly scribbled words on the scrap of paper said only this. Nor had his acquaintance Syed Khan, the caravan-leader, said much more as he pressed the note into Steve's hand. "Someone in 'Pindi asked me to give you this," he murmured.

"Thanks, Sid," Steve said mechanically. "Have a good trip."

Then Syed cracked his whip and the mile-long train of donkeys trudged on up the mountain road. Steve stood, paralyzed by indecision, watch-

ing them climb northward toward the citadels of eternal snow which rimmed the descent into Occupied Kashmir.

For an instant he almost obeyed the first impulse of every hunted man: to start running. He wanted to jump into the caravan, lose himself among its pack-animals and peddlers, leave the bungalow empty for the Americans to find if they came this way.

But then he realized the Americans would come by car. They could follow so fast that he would have no hope of reaching Srinagar on foot before they caught up with him.

That moving speck on the road far beneath might be the Americans already. If so, the warning note had come too late, and he was done for. He had wasted an hour since the caravan left—wasted it in packing his few belongings, and in futile attempts to plan what his next move should be. Then he had caught sight of the speck and realized that it blocked his only path to escape.

"It may be anybody," he said. He was startled to hear himself muttering aloud. In these months of loneliness, he seemed to be slipping little by little into a new habit of talking to himself. "Never mind that! Concentrate!" he told himself fiercely and tried to make his brain stop whirling like a squirrel in a cage.

The moving speck must be either a truck or car or motorcycle—but it wasn't necessarily someone hunting for him.

It might be Pakistan Army personnel, or a team of UN observers going up to inspect the cease-fire line. It could be an envoy for the Rajah of Kashmir. It could be a foreign correspondent, or maybe even a diplomatic courier from London or Washington. There had been more travel on the road lately, now that trouble seemed to be brewing again in Kashmir.

If it proved to be anybody but the Americans who had been asking about him in Rawalpindi, he might be able to beg a ride. His relief was due in a few days anyhow—the Ministry of Interior had notified him last week that he would be transferred to the government bungalow at Landi Kotal, in the Khyber Pass.

"Okay, okay," he mumbled. He could just skip out now, and his Pakistani friends in Rawalpindi wouldn't suffer for having helped him get this job. The bungalow would still be in perfect shape by the time the new caretaker arrived. His departure would merely be one of those mysterious disappearances which happen all the time in Asia, and cause little comment.

Maybe he would try to hitchhike to Srinagar. But what if this approaching speck should turn out to be the Americans?

He slapped his fist into his hand. He had to think of something. There was still time. The speck had thirty miles of road to cover, and four thousand feet to climb, before it would be here. If only he had a car, or even a motorcycle.

This would have been a perfect hiding-place if the Pakistan government furnished some kind of vehicle with its rest houses. But he wasn't supposed to go anywhere—just stay here and keep the bungalow comfortable for an occasional accredited guest. Just wait alone week after week by the side of the road.

This damned road was a trap. There was no way to get very far off it. It clung to the cliffs for a hundred miles, with no crossroads or sidepaths, nothing but the precipice above it and the Jhelum River far below.

Steve found binoculars and went back to the window. The speck might be big enough now for him to make out what it was.

A jeep, with only one person in it, a stocky man who wrestled with the wheel as he forced his way up the switchbacks. The man still had a long way to drive, scaling the outer face of this gigantic wall which held the Vale of Kashmir cupped in the Himalayas.

Probably the man was an ordinary messenger, on business for the UN or one of the six governments which traveled this lonely highway across Asia's corner. But still, one man as well as four could be hunting a deserter. Steve had no idea how the CIA might work.

He lost sight of the jeep for awhile as it climbed through the speckled shadows of a steep forest of deodar. Turning back into the room, he wondered if this would be his last half-hour of freedom.

For five months now, no one had bothered him. He had almost believed that U. S. agents had stopped looking for him. An occasional American diplomatic courier had stopped overnight at the bungalow, but had never shown special interest in him. Steve had always taken care to play the part of a self-effacing janitor and butler, avoiding chattiness.

But now he knew he had chosen too remote a spot. Tsinan had been better; when American snoops started making inquiries there, he had heard about them days before they got near him. Even in Shanghai, where they came within an hour of nabbing him, there had been plenty of alleys to lose himself in, and plenty of tramp steamers on which to find a stokehole job. But there was no bazaar gossip in this great empty valley, and no quick way to leave.

Maybe he could hide in the storeroom. The jeep driver, finding the house apparently deserted, would be likely to roar on into Kashmir in foolish pursuit if he were looking for Steve. Then Steve could take off down the road in the other direction. Even on foot, he might make 'Pindi and lose himself in the Punjab plains before the CIA man could double back.

It was his one chance. The storeroom was full of crates. He would hide behind them, and hope that his pursuer wouldn't stop for a search.

He carried his bedroll into the darkness of the storeroom, and closed the door behind him. Nothing to do now but wait, like a rat in a hole.

If a guy could only see ahead, he thought. He remembered the weeks in the gook camp only in scraps, like bits of a disconnected nightmare, but at the time playing along with them had seemed the only thing to do. Now he was bitterly sorry—but then he had thought that there was no hope for him unless he said the words they put in his mouth. Maybe there hadn't been, at that. A lot of his buddies had died.

Well, he wouldn't die now. He'd get away somehow. Pressing his face against the storeroom wall, he found a chink through which he could watch the road outside.

When the jeep finally pulled up in front of the bungalow, the driver shut off the motor and stretched himself. He jerked a duffel bag out of the rear and strode toward the house, dragging the bag regardless of the dust it raised.

Obviously, he intended to stay the night. He was in no hurry, and didn't even seem interested in the house, so he couldn't be looking for a deserter there. Steve had nothing to fear, for the moment.

With a sigh, Steve pushed open the storeroom door and went into the parlor to meet the stranger. The man was heavyset and ugly, but he made no move toward the gun strapped to his belt.

"Bishop?" he asked roughly.

Steve's heart jumped in panic. How did this man know his name?

Without another glance at him, the newcomer pushed past to the fireplace, slinging his bag onto the table. Evidently he took Steve's silence for acknowledgment.

He warmed his big dirty hands for a moment at the crackling fire, then pulled off his parka and fished an envelope from an oiled packet inside his shirt.

"I am Carl Adler. You are to Landi Kotal transferred. I take your place here."

"You're a couple days early," Steve said. "I didn't expect you so soon."

"Too bad. You will have to leave at once." The man thrust the envelope at Steve. "Show me your register book. Where is it?"

Steve motioned toward the record book on the desk in the corner. Adler stepped over quickly and opened the book. Then he turned to stare at Steve. "The last entry here is two days old. You have not had a United States official? Today or yesterday?"

"Nobody in two days except a Turk newspaper man, on his way up to the cease-fire line. Why do you ask?" Steve's voice was cold. Already he disliked the bullying manner of this stranger.

Adler flipped the book shut. "You are American. Not so?"

"I was once," Steve growled. "What are you?" He could see that Adler wasn't American or English. From his thick accent, Steve guessed he might be Austrian.

Adler did not answer for a moment, but watched him from under thick eyebrows. When he finally spoke, his voice was suspicious. "If one should forget to register a visit from a foreigner, the penalty is severe. Especially if perhaps it was an American diplomatic courier."

"Don't worry. The register shows everybody who's been here."

"I do not worry." Adler shrugged his heavy shoulders. He took a quick glance into the bedrooms, then strolled to the door and looked along the deep blue gulfs of the valley, scanning the road up and down. "Consider me officially installed. The jeep is for you. You leave now."

"Suppose I'm not ready?" Steve snapped. He intended to leave, all right, but he was not going to be ordered around.

"I think you are ready," Adler said. He pointed to Steve's bedroll, where Steve had dropped it after emerging from the storeroom. "You are packed."

"My orders say I'm not due to leave until two days—"

"Fool! You stand here and argue?" Adler broke in. "Don't you know that the American Embassy was asking questions of the Ministry of Interior last week in Karachi? Who else could they be asking about, but you?"

Steve's hollow cheeks flushed at the contempt in Adler's voice. He felt the old fear churning within him. If this man knew he was a runaway, it must be common gossip.

"I don't know what you mean," he said defiantly. "Nobody's looking for me. However, if you want to take over ahead of time, okay." He hoisted his bedroll onto his thin shoulder.

Outside the door, the icy wind from Tibet hit him. He stumbled across the yellow dirt toward the jeep, blinking in the sun, struggling to hold the heavy blanket-roll on his shoulder. Adler followed. There was a malicious grin on his thick lips.

"You should have known better than to go on a government payroll," Adler drawled. "It is too easy of access by other governments. You had better get out of Pakistan, my friend."

That's for sure, Steve thought to himself. He hated this lonesome country now—hated its enormous mountains and emptiness. He was sick for the hard pavements, the packed subways, the crowds of talkative people—American people. But he would never see them again. He turned to grunt a good-by to Adler.

At the sound of a metallic click behind them, both men turned quickly. Two filthy, bearded Kashmiri villagers stood watching them from among the poplars near the bungalow. One had a rifle in his hands.

Adler made an angry gesture, and the two brown men scuttled back out of sight. Adler laughed uneasily, as he turned back toward Steve. "These goat-herders are too inquisitive. Do they make you much trouble?" He spoke casually, but he was watching Steve's face.

Steve shrugged, and hoisted his bag into the jeep. It was none of his business if Adler had a rendezvous with some of the mountain riffraff. His business was to get going. Any hour, Americans might arrive with handcuffs and extradition papers.

Then he saw the flat tire. His wordless exclamation was half a groan, half a yelp of fear. He threw a glance along the thin zigzag line of the road down the mountain face. Then he began fumbling for a jack among the tools in the jeep.

Adler cursed, and to Steve's surprise hurried to help him. The unexpected kindness made Steve regret his unfriendliness toward Adler. The man's gruff way must be forthrightness, not arrogance.

As they worked together wrenching the tire off and then putting on a dry patch, Steve finally broke into conversation. "Thanks for helping, Adler. You were right, I'm not going to Landi Kotal and wait to be caught."

Fear gave him a compulsion to babble, as it always had since the gooks made him talk. "I'm getting out," he went on. "Any direction I can. Northwest to Afghanistan—northeast to Sinkiang—or south to India, which do you think would be best?"

"Shut your mouth and work," Adler barked. "Hurry."

Bending to the task, Steve stole a look at the Austrian's face. His first impression had been right. It was a brutal face. There was no sympathy on it. He wondered why Adler was helping him.

Adler looked like the kind of man who would turn him over to the CIA without mercy, if he saw a chance to collect a bribe or a bounty. Yet he was watching the road as anxiously as Steve was and hurrying to get Steve started.

Maybe he expected someone else! Maybe Adler was looking, not for U. S. agents to whom he could deliver Steve, but for someone he didn't want Steve to see. Who could that be? Then he remembered Adler's oblique question about an American diplomatic courier.

Evidently this man was surely after bigger game than a mere Yankee renegade. Here in the disputed state of Kashmir, where India and Pakistan were teetering on the brink of war and Russia was secretly egging them on, a hand-delivered message to or from Washington might be a key to great affairs. If the message should be intercepted, the courier murdered—

Murder of a diplomatic courier! It almost never happened, because the governments on both sides of the Cold War had couriers always in tran-

sit through each others' countries, and reprisals would be too easy. But if a Russian agent killed a courier at this lonely way-station, it would be blamed on the Pakistan government or on bandits. This wasn't Red territory.

Steve put the thought out of his mind. What did he care? Let the American take his chances. A government courier was in work of his own choosing. He had full knowledge of the risks. He hadn't been drafted, as Steve had—snatched away just as he was getting started in a decent profession, after he had served a full hitch in the Navy and had every right to be exempt from the draft.

The patch was on now, and he sweated at the tire pump. His eyes strayed again over the mountainside, and a gasp came from his dry throat. Not five miles to the north of them, on the road down from Srinagar, a car was crawling around a hairpin curve.

Adler followed his gaze, then dashed inside for the binoculars. As he stood in the doorway studying the approaching car, Steve unscrewed the pump with ice-cold hands. Then he slammed the rim onto the wheel and groped for the lug wrench.

Adler snatched the wrench out of his hands. *"Dumkopf!* You are too slow! Your hands shake! I do it for you."

Steve released the wrench to him and straightened his aching back. If the car was on his track it was going to be close. Too close. His jeep would be in sight for miles. He had virtually no chance—unless Adler detained the pursuer.

Adler grabbed for another nut. Steve had dropped them, in his haste to yank the tire off, and the shuffling feet of the two men had kicked them about in the dust. Three nuts seemed to have disappeared.

Adler straightened up, red with anger. "You do not wish to be found here, *hein?* Then find the nuts quickly."

Steve studied the ground helplessly. "They must be right here," he said.

"Do not talk," Adler shouted. "Find them! Once you are gone, I will see that the car does not follow you."

Steve tried to thank him as he scrabbled through the dust. Sweat ran into Steve's eyes, and he jerked out his handkerchief. As he did, a nut came with it and rolled at their feet.

He pounced on it with a gasp of relief, but Adler froze, and stared at him with narrowed eyes.

"So. You hide them in your pocket. Must be I am wrong. Must be the American is someone you do wish to meet, after all?" Suddenly his gun was in his hand. "You will not interfere. You go, or you die with him."

Steve stupidly fluttered his hands. "I must have put the nuts in my pocket without thinking," he said. "All I want is to get away. Just help me, and I'll clear out."

"I do not lay this gun down until you go. Put on the tire yourself. No more chattering."

Steve reached blindly for the lug wrench. His hands were wet and quivering, but he managed to thread a nut on and fit the wrench over it. He twisted it down and started on the next.

"Why does your own countryman hunt for you?" Adler asked, watching him with a thoughtful scowl. "You stole his wife, I suppose."

"I surrendered to the Commies in Korea," Steve mumbled. "Then they made me talk on a newsreel, about germ warfare and all."

"You were offered repatriation after the truce?"

"Yeah. But I didn't want to go back."

"You were wise," Adler said. "Yankee warmongers never forgive. If they catch you now, they will torture you to make you talk. Then they will hang you."

"I hate 'em all," Steve snapped, twisting in panic at the wrench. The sound of the car was now audible in the thin mountain air. It would be here in a few minutes. "They call me a traitor, but I couldn't help myself, and anyhow I skipped out of China as soon as the gooks let me loose from prison camp."

Adler seemed to come to a decision. "It is too late for you to run now. But we can work together, and perhaps I help you save your skin. Come inside."

"I'll do anything," Steve said. He dropped the wrench and hurried toward the house in obedience to Adler's gesture.

"I give you a chance to kill your enemy," Adler said.

Steve clamped his jaws. "I'm not going to kill anybody," he said. "Just let me hide. Tell him I've left."

Still holding the gun on him, Adler leaned back against the table and faced him with a cruel grin. "I give the orders here. You listen. There are two men in the car. If they are after you, they will point guns when they arrive, but they will not shoot. They wish to have trial, with newspaper stories. Not so?"

Steve could only stare silently at him, like a trapped rabbit.

"It is so," Adler said firmly. "They will bring you into the house here. I am concealed. They think you are alone. At night they will lock you up, or put handcuffs on. Then they sleep. At last I come out from hiding-place. I have two men here to help, and we make you loose. We all go in where the Americans sleep. We all have guns—but you will have the pleasure to shoot them both, like a good comrade."

Steve tried to coax him. "That's your dish, not mine. Just let me get away after they go to bed. I never shot a man, ever. I only—"

"Silence! If the men are looking for you, you will kill them. But I do not think they look for you. I think this is a courier I look for. If it is so, there is a different plan."

Steve's baffled face brightened. "The courier is up to you. Handle him your own way while I hit the road."

"We are comrades now." Adler waggled his gun. "You be a good comrade, or you get bullets in the stomach. When you walk out to greet our guests, you carry the big wrench in your hand. If they do not point guns, you give them nice greeting. You invite them in, you open door and stand aside. They must enter first. You see?"

Steve nodded. He knew he had blundered into something worse.

"When the first one comes in the door, I am waiting with my gun. The other is still outside and you are behind him with that wrench. You hit hard." Adler illustrated with a vicious gesture.

The car was louder now. It could be only a few hundred yards away. But Adler went on talking. "Very hard, you understand? Behind the ear. Then you can take their car and go where you like. . . . So. It is time. Now we act. Where is the large wrench? Quickly."

Steve nodded dazedly at the storeroom door. Its key was still in the lock. Adler turned it with a savage twist, and jerked open the door. He stood in the doorway and felt along the inside wall. "The light," he shouted. "Where is *das verdammt licht?*"

Taking a deep breath, Steve obeyed the impulse that popped into his head. He lunged at the door and slammed it shut, knocking Adler headlong into the dark storeroom.

It felt good. Now he was through running—through feeling ashamed and scared. Let the Americans handcuff him.

A shadow darkened the door and he turned calmly to face the newcomers. Then he went cold. In the doorway stood, not Americans, but the two Kashmiris who had been lurking among the trees. He could still hear the approaching car's motor from a distance up the road.

On the other side of the locked door, Adler kicked it fiercely. One of the natives pitched Steve aside, while the other unlocked the door.

Suddenly Adler's gun was in his hand. "It is too late for you to run now."

"I fix you later," Adler said grimly to Steve. "Stay here. If you cause trouble when I bring the Americans in, I shoot you first and make up explaining afterward." He strode outside, followed by the natives.

The dust-covered car was just pulling up. Now that his burst of defiance had come to nothing, Steve stood hopelessly inside and watched through the window. One of the visitors had a brief case chained to his wrist. It was lead-sealed, padlocked, and tagged in big letters: *Diplomatic Pouch, Dept. of State, U.S.A.*

Both men were young and capable looking, but they seemed unsuspecting as they greeted Adler. The one with the brief case dug a wallet from an inner pocket of his fleece-lined jacket, and showed credentials to Adler.

Steve felt a pang of long-forgotten pride as he watched the Yanks. They were his countrymen, and they were strong and decent. He had nothing to fear from them—evidently they were diplomatic couriers, not CIA men. He still might escape, if he found a way before Adler shot him at leisure.

Suddenly he felt hot and angry. He hated Adler and all the Reds who had kicked him around in Korea and China. He hated himself, because he could never look an American in the face again.

Then he remembered the side window. He could slip through, and make a getaway on foot. The only way down the rock face was along the road, where he would be visible for hours, but Adler would have to let him go. If forced to choose between letting Steve escape and giving up his plan to kill the courier, he was shrewd enough to play for the bigger game.

Steve threw a leg over the sill.

An American voice came clearly to him. "I'm in a hurry. If I get down to Rawalpindi tomorrow, I can catch a plane direct to our message center at Shanghai. All I really need is a lube job. Grease. Oil in the bearings. You know?"

"But of course," came Adler's voice, bland and friendly now. "We are equipped for such work. Come inside for hot tea. These natives will take care of your car."

Of course they would come. They didn't suspect anything, and Adler would shoot as they entered the door. He'd kill two men just to grab that diplomatic pouch. It must be important, a bad loss to America. To America! His pale cheeks went hot.

His eye fell on a long-snouted oilcan standing on a shelf. He stared at it for a moment. Then he turned for a long look at the inviting way of escape out the window. With the resigned sigh of a man who is giving up his last hope of freedom, he pulled his leg back from the window.

He moved across the room, picked up the oilcan, and thought a little longer.

Then he plodded out to the group around the car. There was no more fluttering in his belly, no scared feeling. Only a numbness, as if he were watching himself act in a tragic play.

Adler saw him coming, and turned so that his right hip was out of sight of the Americans. His hand eased its revolver out of the holster. But Steve did not even glance at the visitors. He shuffled directly to Adler.

"Want I should oil his bearings?" he asked indifferently.

The Communist was puzzled and angry, but he put on a careless smile for the benefit of his guests. "A little later," he said, and motioned Steve toward the house. "We all go inside now, and get our friends a hot drink."

The two Kashmiris had been fingering their weapons, but they relaxed as Steve turned back toward the house. As he turned, the long nose of the oilcan swung toward Adler's face. Steve squeezed, and a stream of oil shot into Adler's eyes. With a roar he stumbled back, pawing at his eyes with one hand and trying to aim his gun with the other. Steve slapped it out of his hand.

The two Kashmiris leaped for him, but the first got a faceful of oil. Steve hurled the can at the second, who avoided it with a jerk of his head and caught Steve by the throat. With his free hand the native pulled out his knife.

"Hold it!" one of the Americans barked. "What goes on?"

THE Kashmiri paid no attention, but forced Steve downward and lifted his knife. A shot from the other American's pistol put a bullet through the native's wrist. Steve wrenched himself free, and dived for Adler's revolver in the dust.

"I said hold it," the American repeated. "Nobody move." He was pointing his gun at Steve now. Steve froze, his hand on the fallen revolver.

"Watch the native," Steve cried, pointing to the man with oil in his eyes. Half-blindly the man was clubbing his long rifle. The other American spoke a sharp word in Urdu, and brought his own revolver up. The Kashmiri scowled, dropped his rifle.

Nobody moved. The only sounds were the choking and spitting of the two victims of the oil volley, as they tried to get it out of their mouths, and the groaning of the man with a shattered wrist.

"Start talking," the first American said to Steve. "Who are you?"

"I'm the rest-house custodian. Name is Bishop. These three men came here to waylay a State Department courier, and they nearly did it. You better disarm them before they get the oil out of their eyes."

"Take your hand off that gun," the man ordered Steve. "Stand up slowly, and leave the gun where it is. Bert, you collect all the guns and knives. And frisk everybody."

The American with the brief case did a thorough job of searching everyone. When all the weapons lay in a pile behind him, the other American turned to Adler. "What's your story, friend? Who are you, and why?"

Adler answered calmly. "It is good that you came when you did. I am the custodian of the rest house. This man Bishop is an American deserter and spy. Your government is tracking him down for broadcasting for the Communists in Korea."

The man with the revolver nodded. "That checks. Bishop was the name of the man I'm looking for." He stared coldly at Steve.

"All right, you got me," Steve said defiantly. "But I *am* the custodian here, and Adler did bring these two natives here to kill you. He'll do it yet, if he gets a gun in his hand."

Adler spread his big hands and smiled. "If this renegade's lie has worried you, examine my credentials. I do not blame you for taking precautions. But must we stand here in the wind? You will find comfortable chairs inside, and hot drinks."

"Good idea," the man with the brief case said to his companion. "Give me a hand with the arsenal."

A glance passed between them, and then the two Americans stooped to gather up the assortment of weapons. Aghast, Steve saw them turn their backs on their enemies. He had given up his chance of life to save a pair of fools.

In the split-second before it happened, he knew exactly what was going to occur. Adler could not miss such a wide-open chance as this. As soon as the Americans bent down, Adler and the two Kashmiris leaped like animals. The wounded native clamped his good arm across Steve's thin chest. The other caught the brief-case carrier in a fierce grip, while Adler's thick forearm slid across the throat of the first American.

Steve screamed a warning, but before it was out of his mouth he saw it was unnecessary. The Americans' seeming carelessness had been a trick. Adler's forearm was jerked down across the American's chest; suddenly his feet left the ground and he somersaulted across the young man's shoulder to land sprawling and unconscious. A revolver miraculously appeared in the other American's hand. It spit once, and the arms around him dropped away as the native staggered back with blood seeping through the side of his dirty coat. The other Kashmiri released Steve and scuttled away among the trees.

"Very neat, buddy," the American with the dispatch-case said to his partner. He looked down at Adler's unconscious figure with a hard smile. "I thought his line of talk was too big."

The other American nodded. "But next time try to give me some warning, will you? For a second I thought you must be nuts. I'm not as quick on the uptake as I used to be." He was chuckling—but he kept his gun in his hand, and motioned Steve to proceed him into the house.

"I still can't figure you, Bishop," the courier said as the three of them sat in the guest house, watching the sunset flare windy-red over the high snows of the horizon. "You must have guessed that my friend here was looking for you. When we turned up, why did you stay? You could have made a getaway out the window."

"I'm tired of running away from Americans," Steve mumbled. "I decided I'd rather stay and try to warn you about Adler."

"Lucky for us. We weren't expecting trouble. Adler was supposed to be a Pakistan government worker, so we felt safe."

Steve nodded, without taking his eyes from the pink shoulders of the Himalayas. He might never see another sunset except through bars.

"Your smart move was to take a powder and let us get clobbered," the other American joined in. "Now I've got to take you back. Makes no difference that you saved my hide. Pakistan is extraditing you."

"I guess Uncle wants me bad," Steve said bitterly.

"Your newsreel spiel about germ war did us a lot of damage with the United Nations. I can't under—"

"Understand? How could you guys in the States understand?" Steve burst out. "Back home everybody was going to ball games, making money, eating three meals a day and watching TV at night. They didn't give a spit what happened to us in Korea. It burned me up. So I read some leaflets the Commies dropped. Finally when our company started moving back I just lay down and let the Reds catch up with me."

"DID you like it with the Reds?" the courier asked.

"It was worse. They gave me that brainwashing routine. But when I said what they wanted, they gave me decent food. And finally they offered me a job with Radio Peking. I was afraid to say no. But when they gave me a train pass to Peking I went on the lam instead."

"You quit us, then you quit the Reds," the American mused. "You really are a man without a country."

"I'm ready to go back. My country is America, from today on."

The agent sounded husky. "You stuck with the Yanks today, Bishop. We won't forget it. My report will show that you gave yourself up voluntarily, and attacked three armed men with only an oilcan, to save our lives because we were on American Government business."

"You mean—you think maybe I might get only a prison sentence?"

The Americans exchanged looks. "You've got a lot of information that Washington needs," the agent said. "As for the lies you told on the Chinese film—well, that was treason. But we understand brainwashing better now than we did then. I'll lay odds that you're watching a ball game this time next year." •

STAMP ACT

Facts and figures about the world's biggest hobby.

■ *JOHN T. DUNLAVY*

THE U. S. Post Office receives about 2 billion dollars a year in revenue for handling some 50 billion pieces of mail. Of this amount about 22 million pieces yearly are undeliverable. The Post Office will not buy back unused stamps, but postal laws guarantee that postal service in the value printed on the face of an unused stamp will be given no matter how old or obsolete the stamp may be. Although regular stamps may be used for special purposes such as airmail, special delivery and the like, special purpose stamps cannot be used for regular postage. In 1951 the Bureau of Engraving, which prints all U.S. stamps, delivered to the nation's 41,000 post offices a total of 21,179 million stamps, the most stamps ever produced by any country in one year.

* * *

THE greatest stamp collector ever known was Count Phillip La Renotiere von Ferrary, a German, who inherited 55 million dollars from his father in the 1860's and devoted the rest of his life and a good part of his fortune to stamps. He allowed himself $9,000 a week to spend on stamps and at one time owned 85% of all the rare and valuable stamps in the world.

* * *

IN the 1880's and the 1890's in America a language of stamps became fashionable until discouraged by harried postal authorities. The position of the stamp was the key to the message. A stamp inverted in the right-hand corner meant "Do not write me any longer," a stamp centered on the top of the envelope meant "Yes" and at the bottom "No." A stamp in the right-hand corner at a right angle meant "Do you love me?" and in the left-hand corner at an angle meant "I hate you."

* * *

BUYING stamps for investment is considered as risky as any other type of speculation. However the investment of approximately $50.00 a month from 1926 to 1936 to purchase 20 sheets of each U.S. special or commemorative issue, available at any post office at a total cost of $5410, would now have a catalogue re-sale value of $130,000.

* * *

STAMP forgery came into existence only a few years after the first stamp appeared and a book on stamp forgery appeared in 1862. Most forgeries are created to cheat collectors rather than to avoid postage. On at least one issue of stamps, the U.S. Molly Pitcher Commemorative, experts believe there are more forgeries than the entire original issue of this series.

* * *

ERRORS in printing, particularly when limited to a few sheets or a few stamps, add tremendously to their value and are highly prized by collectors. In 1918 a single sheet of 100 U.S. 24c air-mail stamps was printed in error with the picture of the plane upside down. Today that sheet of 100 has a potential value of over $400,000, and four of the stamps were sold in 1952 for $22,000. A classic example of multiple errors occurred in the 1852 Modena stamp in which the word "cent" was misspelled "cnet, eent, ce6t, cene and cetn" adding much to their value. A Spanish error of printing a 2-reales stamp with the shade of blue reserved for 6-reales stamps is the sole reason why the 2-reales blue is today worth $12,500.

* * *

THE most popular stamps with collectors are those of the United States and Great Britain, the least popular those of India, mainly because of poor quality and numerous forgeries and reprints. The world's most beautiful stamps are those of Liechtenstein, a sovereign state of 12,000 population located between Austria and Switzerland.

* * *

THE rarest and most valuable stamp in the world is the magenta one-penny British Guiana issued in 1856. Intended to be a 4c stamp through a misprint it was issued as a 1c stamp. There is only one copy of this stamp in the entire world. The last time this stamp was sold at private auction in 1926 it was purchased by an American for $32,500. Today it is listed in the catalogues at a nominal value of $50,000 although stamp experts believe it could bring considerably more.

* * *

ALTHOUGH postal service dates back to ancient Roman days, the first modern postage stamp, a one-penny black, was created in England and issued on May 6, 1840. Since then a total of 200 recognized stamp producing countries have issued a total of 135,000 different varieties of stamps. The United States was the 6th country to issue postage stamps. Since its first in 1845, it has issued 1000 different varieties.

* * *

RARITY and condition rather than age determine the value of a stamp. For example the U.S. Chinese Commemorative 5c stamp of 1943 sold in sheets of 50 at any post office for $2.50 and is today worth over $12.00 a sheet. The 1940 Famous American series has increased in value 500% since issue. On the other hand a copy of the first postage stamp issued by Great Britain 125 years ago is only worth $1.00 to $4.00.

* * *

THE only American mother to have her likeness reproduced on U.S. postage was Whistler's mother shown on the 1934 Mother's Day stamp. . . It is not true that living persons cannot be portrayed on U.S. postage stamps. Many have been and a recent example was the Iwo Jima flag-raising stamp issued while three of the men depicted were alive. . . Stamp collecting as a hobby began in England in 1842. . . It is estimated there are over 10 million stamp collectors in the world.

Sure, he was an American Intelligence agent. He was also a native island boy. Could you trust him on this perilous South Pacific deal?

Hotel rooms are the same everywhere. The home away from home, except they're never quite like home. They're all stamped from the same decorator's mold: the twin beds with the white iron heads and footboards, the dresser with three drawers, the night table between the beds, the water pitcher and the two glasses on the metal tray. The basic ingredients, no matter where you are.

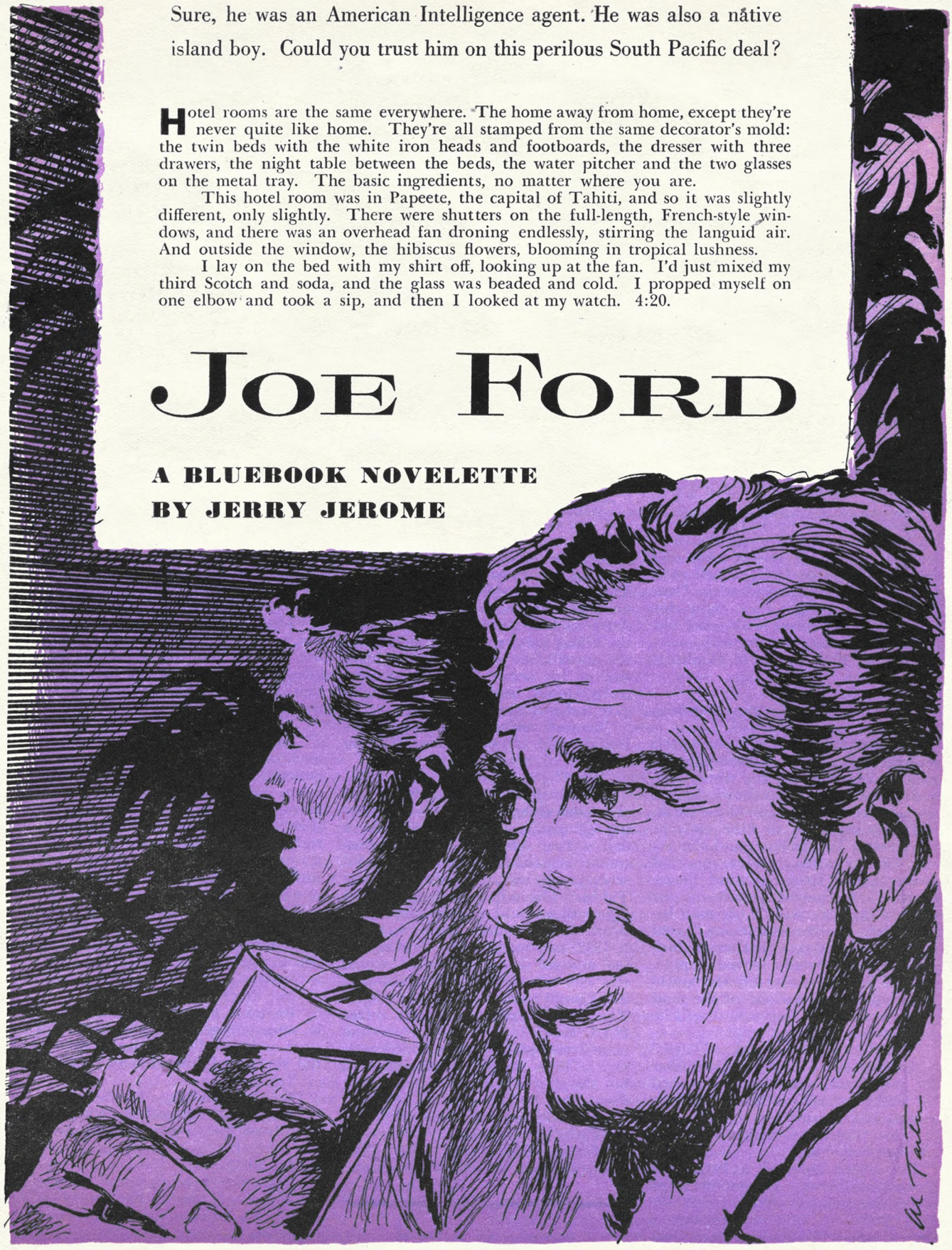
This hotel room was in Papeete, the capital of Tahiti, and so it was slightly different, only slightly. There were shutters on the full-length, French-style windows, and there was an overhead fan droning endlessly, stirring the languid air. And outside the window, the hibiscus flowers, blooming in tropical lushness.

I lay on the bed with my shirt off, looking up at the fan. I'd just mixed my third Scotch and soda, and the glass was beaded and cold. I propped myself on one elbow and took a sip, and then I looked at my watch. 4:20.

JOE FORD

A BLUEBOOK NOVELETTE

BY JERRY JEROME



Joe Ford had left the hotel at 11:35, and he'd told me he'd be back in an hour. He'd showed me the sarong, and the earrings, and the necklace he'd acquired shortly after our plane landed. He'd told me he was going out to sniff around, and I'd let him go —alone—and now I wondered if he were ever coming back.

I lay back on the bed, with my undershirt sticking to my skin, and the perspiration sheening my forehead. I lay back, and I thought, *Maybe the General was right, maybe a person does revert to type.*

And maybe Joe was out there now, somewhere, and maybe he was calling himself Jowanda again. Maybe he was out there on some damn surfboard, or whatever the natives ride; or maybe he was down on the beach eating clams, or maybe running around with a flower between his teeth, chanting at the moon.

Maybe you were right, General, I thought. Maybe you were right, and, if you were, I've got no business being here; because I don't know Tahiti from a hole in the wall, and if Joe is gone . . .

I swung my legs up over the side of the bed and looked through the shuttered window. It was a long way from Washington, D. C., a hell of a long way. I wondered what the General was doing right now, right this minute. A few beers with some old cronies? Or some paper work, maybe? What time was it in Washington anyway?

IT had been 9:35 two mornings before.

The General had paced before the map on the wall of CIA headquarters, back and forth across the tinted reds and blues and pale yellows, like a worried beetle on the face of the earth.

There was a lot of blue on that map, South Pacific blue, and the Society Islands dotted the blue, sprawled across it like spattered mud drops. General MacDonald puffed on his cigar, a big man with a big map behind him. A wreath of smoke floated up past the mud spot that was Tahiti, and then MacDonald moved a quick nervous finger down and to the Southeast, and he stabbed one of the mud drops, keeping his finger on it as if he were pinning it to the map.

"Project X-15," he said. "Taru."

Joe Ford and I looked at each other for a moment, and then Joe turned his attention back to the General, attentive but puzzled.

"Taru," the General repeated. "Ring a bell, Joe?"

Joe leaned forward a little and cleared his throat. The sun splashed across the Potomac and through the long banks of windows, putting a high gleam on his jet-black hair, limning his strong profile. He sat on the edge of his chair, his big hands folded in his lap. "Is this some kind of joke, sir?" he asked.

"Joke? No, Joe, this isn't a joke."

"Then why are you labeling Taru X-15? I mean . . ."

"What would you say, Joe, if I told you Taru was inhabited?"

"I'd say you were kidding, sir."

The General smiled. "We have reason to believe it is inhabited, Joe."

"General, Taru was . . ."

"Taru was your home, Joe, I know that. And I know you haven't been back there since you were 14, and they told you the island had been demolished by a volcano."

"You mean it wasn't . . .!"

"Don't let me mislead you, Joe. Taru was demolished, completely and utterly. A few survivors, yes, a handful, a dozen, most of whom drifted to the other islands. We've had no reports of your family, Joe, I'm sorry to say. It's reasonable to believe they . . ." The General sucked in a deep breath. "They were not among those who survived."

"Why are you telling me all this, sir?" Joe asked. I watched him, and I saw the muscles in his jaw tighten, and the General's words reminded me that Joe *was* Polynesian, and that he hadn't worn anything but a loin cloth until he was 14. You could see the Asian in him if you looked closely—the tilted eyes, the slight flaring of the nostrils, the sunburned, beachboy tint of his skin. I'd never looked really closely because I never much gave a damn about skin tints.

"Because you're going back," MacDonald said. "You're going back to Taru."

"Why?" Joe asked.

MacDonald spread the fingers of one hand wide, and then began ticking off points like a lecturer on a dais. "Item one; *SS Kalark,* an Australian merchantman bound for Sasebo, Japan, with a scheduled stop at Tahiti. The ship picked up a radio signal they could not decode. Item two: International Airlines plane N-3132, two weeks later, were receiving a voice weather forecast which was cut off with a coded message. They could not decipher the message." The General paused. "Item three: *U.S.S. Hanfield,* DD 100, on routine maneuvers, picked up a coded message. They could not decipher it, but the ship is a picket ship carrying directional finding gear. They fixed the originating point of the message."

"Taru?" Joe asked.

"Taru," MacDonald said. "All right, I know it sounds ridiculous. You don't get coded messages from a pile of ash. But the destroyer did pick up the message, and it *did* originate from Taru, and the ash sure as hell wasn't sending it."

"Who was, sir?" I asked.

MacDonald sighed heavily. "We've sent three men there to investigate already. I believe you knew them, Jack. Wilkerson, Hurdman, Davis. All fine boys."

"Yes, sir," I said. "I know them."

"None of them have returned. I don't think we'll hear from them again." The General turned to the map again, pressing Taru with his forefinger, almost viciously this time.

"THERE it is. X-15. Taru. We've taken aerial photographs of every inch of it. There's nothing there, not even a tree. But we know the radio signals came from there, and so we have to conclude that our eyes and our photographs are lying to us."

"Martians, sir?" I said, smiling, but the General wasn't buying any humor. He looked at me solemnly, and then put his cigar down in the ashtray on his desk.

"There's something going on there, Jack, sure as hell. Whatever it is, we want to know about it, and we want to know without telling the rest of the world we're even suspicious."

"Yes, sir," I said.

"That's where you two come in. Joe, you were born there. You know the islands, and you know the language, and you know the people. If there's anything to be found, you're the man to find it."

"Thank you, sir," Joe said.

"Jack, you'll serve as Joe's contact man. You can work out the details between you. I'll give you a little extra briefing because you're unfamiliar with the setup. In the meantime, Joe, would you see Vanneman right away about your orders and transportation. This is top-secret stuff, remember. I'll send Jack along in a little while."

"Yes, sir," Joe said. He went to the door and then left, and when he was gone, the General extended the cigar box to me.

"Smoke, Jack?"

"No, thank you."

"Reason I kept you behind, Jack," he said, biting off the end of a fresh cigar and then lighting it, "I want to tell you a little more about this."

"Yes, sir."

"Not the briefing. That's not important. You can pick up what you need from Joe. I want to talk about Joe himself."

"Joe, sir?"

"Yes," the General said. "You're his contact, of course, but you're going to be a lot more than that, too. I hope you understand me."

Illustration by AL TARTER

"I'm afraid I don't, sir," I said.

"All right, I'll spell it. Joe Ford's one of the finest men in Central Intelligence. He's done a lot of jobs for us, and he's done them all well. But this is something else again, Jack. I don't mind telling you I objected to his being assigned to this particular job."

"I still don't understand, sir."

"Do you know Joe's background at all?"

"A little. I know he's Polynesian, and I know his athletic record, of course. And something of his activities during the war. But . . ."

"I don't mean that," MacDonald said. "I mean—before that."

"I'm afraid not, sir."

"He was born on Taru," the General said. "You know that."

"Yes."

"When he was 14, still a kid named Jowanda, he was chosen above all the other boys on the island to represent Taru at the *Fete Nactionale.* That's a big deal, Jack, the annual *gymkhana* held at Papeete to determine the finest young athletes in the islands. Joe's father sent him to Papeete with an elderly retainer named Kuma. You know, someone to look after the boy, see that he changed his sarong, brushed his teeth . . ."

"Yes, sir, I understand."

"Well, Joe won the javelin throw and attracted the attention of Tim Ford, who was then track coach at Notre Dame. He saw the makings of a great natural athlete in him, and he wanted to bring Joe back to America." The General shrugged. "Joe turned him down cold, said his place was back home with his people, that sort of thing, you know. Then came word of the erupting volcano, and Joe learned that his home and family had been wiped out, and he didn't have much choice after that. He came to America with Tim Ford."

"That was when Ford adopted him, wasn't it, sir?"

"You know the rest then," MacDonald said. "Notre Dame all-American, Olympic decathlon champ, Yankee bonus rookie, Medal of Honor winner. Hell, he made headlines all the time. But not since 1948. He joined CIA then, and as you know, CIA men don't make a habit of getting into headlines. Well, I don't have to tell you how we operate."

"No, sir." I paused. "But he still sounds like the perfect man for this mission."

"Maybe. And maybe not."

"Sir?"

"He hasn't been back to the islands since he was a young boy. In the meantime he's proved himself to be quite an American. The question is, what happens when he gets back to the tropics, when he begins to smell the hibiscus again, when he hears the native chants? Does he still remain 'American'—or does he revert to type?"

"I'm afraid I don't share your doubts, sir," I said a little coldly. "Nor do I see why the color of his skin should make it necessary for him to constantly prove his . . ."

"Look at it this way, Jack," the General said, "and for God's sake don't think what you're thinking about me. I'm only interested in the success of this project, do you believe that? I wouldn't give a damn if Joe's skin were purple!"

I didn't say anything, mainly because I'd heard Protectors of the Purple Skin before, and I'd never quite believed any of them.

"But those natives are a superstitious lot, Jack. And suppose they blame the volcano's eruption on the white man's intervention? Suppose they feel that modern man and his sciences angered the Fire God? Or that . . ."

"I don't see what that has to do with Joe, sir," I said. "Begging your pardon, sir, but Joe is not an ignorant, superstitious native, and I very much doubt . . ."

"Oh, damn it, shut up!" the General shouted. "Stop being so damned smugly superior and listen to me." He waited, his face flushing angrily.

"Suppose Joe runs into some people he once knew, survivors of the eruption? Suppose these people are now working for whoever's been sending those coded messages? Suppose they're convinced that Asia *is* for the Asiatics, and suppose they think the message-senders are helping them toward that end? And suppose they can convince Joe Ford, even now, of the justice of their cause? Damn it, Jack, they're his *people!* And a man's roots run deep, you know that. Do you understand me? How the hell do I know what Joe's reactions would be? But I do know the possibility exists, and I didn't want to endanger a mission because of it. That's why I objected to Joe, until the pressure came from upstairs. This thing goes beyond Joe Ford, and beyond you, and beyond my personal liking for him. Do you understand now?"

"I think so, sir," I said.

"Then stop bristling, damn it!"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"And go get packed."

"When are we leaving, sir?"

"Today," MacDonald said. He paused and stroked his chin. "Keep an eye on him, Jack. Maybe he doesn't need it, but be careful, anyway."

"I don't think we have to worry about Joe," I said.

"I hope not," the General answered. "Get a move on, boy."

We got a move on. Central Intelligence Agency, a big machine with a lot of cogs and wheels and interlocking gears. And the General pressed a button, and all of that machinery suddenly whirs into motion, as if the only important people in it are Joe Ford and Jack Blake, as if the only important spot in the world is an island in the Pacific named Taru.

We were on the San Francisco plane that afternoon, and we caught the midnight flight out to Honolulu. And the buildings of Washington weren't there any more below us, square and white and regal in the sunshine. There was lush growth now, and the long white stretch of Waikiki, and Diamondhead jutting up from the water like a half-submerged shark's fin.

And then, like a picture that's formed and then twisted abruptly out of focus, Hawaii was behind us, and we were in the traffic pattern over Papeete, swooping in for a landing among the palm trees, with the sky a pale delicate blue, a blue you wanted to lick right off the page. We caught a cab at the airport, and Joe made a stop at one of the local shops to pick up some stuff he said he needed. The stuff was the native getup, and, as soon as we unpacked, Joe took to the streets, and there was an excitement in his eyes; and it made

THE SECRET PUNCH

This is a story of a great fighter who lost his greatest fight—a minute before he stepped into the ring.

His name was Terry McGovern—Terrible Terry, they called him—and in some ways, in the books of many, he was, pound for pound, just about the most devastating fighter who ever came upon the pugilistic scene.

He became champ of both the bantam and flyweight divisions and beat the welters with aplomb too—and, perhaps the most amazing thing of all, he ruled the roost of pugilism while he was only twenty-one.

For his Nov. 28, 1901, fight with Young Corbett he was, as was generally the case, the overwhelming favorite. Sure, Young Corbett was supposed to be a very brainy fighter and all that, but what chance did he have against the unconquerable Terrible Terry who carried a devastating punch in either hand and, for all his tender years, was a ring vet and plenty savvy to boot?

And it was with superb confidence that Terrible Terry McGovern got ready in his dressing room for the fight and then calmly waited for his moment of entry into the ring.

Naturally, the challenger, Young Corbett, was to make his appearance first, with the invincible champ climactically coming through the ropes a minute later for the larger ovation of the admiring crowd.

On his way down the corridor for his fateful appearance in the ring, Young Corbett stuck his head into his seemingly unbeatable opponent's dressing room and sneered, "Are you ready, McGovern, to come into the ring and get the stuffings knocked out of you?"

Then he chuckled and kept walking.

It had been a long time since the incomparable McGovern had been treated so patronizingly and a trainer had to restrain him from going after Corbett there and then.

In the ring a few minutes later, Terrible Terry threw all caution to the winds and went after his opponent hammer and tongs from the opening bell.

The trouble was—from McGovern's point of view—that he ignored the conception of even a token defense, so bent was he on the sudden destruction of his opponent. And thus it was that, incredible as it seems—and some old-timers still insist it was the biggest upset of all times—young Corbett knocked out Terrible Terry in the second round.

It was such a startling thing that Terrible Terry never got over it and, although only twenty-one, never was able to come back, but continued on the skids thereafter, becoming a completely washed up fighter at twenty-two. While Young Corbett, although relatively unknown then, remained in the glory spotlight for many years to come.

Thus it was that one punch startlingly changed two pugilistic careers—a psychological punch that was thrown a couple of minutes before the fight began.

—Harold Helfer

me wonder for a moment if he weren't actually happy to be getting into the native garb.

"I'll be back in an hour," he'd said. "I want to see if I can pick up any information."

That was four hours and forty-five minutes ago.

So what do you do now? I thought. Get a message off to Washington? DEAR MAC; REGRET TO REPORT JOE HAS GONE AWOL. PLEASE ADVISE.

Or *had* he gone native? For God's sake, suppose they'd tipped to him? Suppose they'd tipped and he was lying dead in some alley right now? Did you ever think of that possibility, you dumb cluck? You're here to help him, not to sit around and wonder whether or not a sarong has gone to his head. And you can thank Old MacDonald for those thoughts. So the hell with MacDonald, and let's start worrying a little about Joe Ford.

I put down the Scotch and went to the dresser, throwing on a clean shirt. From the dresser drawer, I took out the holstered Colt .45 automatic, strapping the holster under my armpit, and then checking the gun's clip. I slammed the clip home, put the gun back into the holster, and then pulled on my linen jacket. I was heading for the door when it opened.

I reached for the gun, and my fingers were curling around the walnut stock when Joe said, "Don't shoot, pal."

"Where the hell . . ."

"Easy boy, easy now."

"You said an hour! If this is your idea of a . . ."

"I was sniffing around," Joe said. "Sorry, Jack, but it was rough going." He walked to the bed and dumped a bulky package onto it.

"What's that?" I said.

"Huh? Oh, the native getup I wore. Couldn't walk in here that way."

"Did you find anything?" I asked, still angry.

"Not a thing. I didn't see anyone I knew, and everyone else isn't talking about Taru."

"Well, that's great."

"Yeah," he said. He took off his jacket and shirt, tossing them onto a chair. "I'm tired, Jack. Let's have some supper and hit the sack."

"Next time you plan on sightseeing," I said, "kindly take me along."

"You mad?" he asked, smiling.

"No. I just thought you had a few slugs in your head by now. I just thought . . ."

"I'm gonna take a shower," Joe said.

"You can go to hell, for my part," I told him.

We went down to the docks the next day, working our way along the rotted wood planking. We were still

playing the tourists, and we ogled everything in sight, taking pictures, posing alongside fishing boats and sampans, oohing and ahhing like a pair of grade school teachers on sabbatical.

When we spotted the two fishermen, Joe said, "There's something, Jack."

The fishermen were dressed in dirty khaki pants and sneakers, cleaning their boat. They were white men, burned dark by the tropical sun, and they worked silently, puffing on their cigarettes. They didn't interest us half as much as the boat did. It was a power launch, with a high cabin up front. We sauntered over to the boat, and Joe lighted a cigarette and then said, "Hi."

One of the men looked up. He had a craggy, seamed face with blue eyes deepset on either side of his nose. The cigarette dangled from one corner of his mouth, a long ash at its end.

"Hello," he said.

"Any chance of getting a boat around here to take us fishing?" Joe asked.

"Maybe," the man said.

"How about this boat?"

"This boat's not for hire."

"We could pay well," Joe insisted.

"It's still not for hire. Shove off, mister."

"Look . . ."

"Mister, we're busy. I told you the boat's not for hire. We're fishermen, not wet nurses. Besides, the fishing here isn't good for tourists."

"What do you mean?"

"It's no good. You got to go 'way out if you want anything."

"Well, we hadn't planned on staying around here," Joe said. "We thought we might put out for some of the outlying islands."

"Yeah, you'll do better there," the man said. "But not on this boat."

"Years ago," Joe said, ignoring the man's statement, "I used to live on Taru. We had some wonderful fishing there."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah." Joe paused. "Think you could take us out there?"

The fisherman looked at Joe curiously. "Maybe you don't understand English," he said. "I ain't taking you to Taru, and I ain't taking you nowhere. This is a private boat. It's not for hire."

"I see," Joe said.

"Besides, Taru is dead, finished, forgotten. Look, you want some advice?"

"What kind of advice?" Joe asked.

"Good advice. Stay away from Taru. Leave it dead. Forget it."

He took the cigarette from his mouth and flicked it onto the dock. Then he nodded his head for emphasis, picked up his brush and bucket, and went below, the other man following him.

Joe waited until they were gone, and then he picked up the burning stub of the cigarette.

"Chesterfield," he remarked, disappointed.

"What'd you expect? Some exotic foreign blend?"

Joe shrugged. "What'd you think of those two?" he asked as we started up the dock.

"Nice," I said. "Very pleasant."

"Suppose there's a transmitter on that boat?"

"Could be," I said.

"Well, anyway, we've started something. If they're connected with the coded messages in any way, we might stir up some activity on Taru. And that's sure as hell what we're looking for."

"*If* they're connected," I said.

"If," Joe answered. "Let's see if we can scrape up a beer."

We left the docks and headed for town, stopping at shops now and then, playing the tourist role to the hilt. I was looking over a bolt of silk at one of the shop stalls when Joe suddenly grabbed my arm.

"Hey!" I said, and then I saw him staring wide-eyed into the street. I followed his gaze to a cart drawn by a mangy, flea-bitten donkey, and then I saw the ancient, white-haired native leading the donkey.

"Kuma!" Joe shouted. "Kuma!"

The native turned slowly, his tired watery eyes squinting to locate Joe's voice. And then Joe rushed forward and threw his arms around the old man, and then held him away, and then clasped him close again, all the time babbling in their native tongue.

"It's Kuma!" Joe called to me. "Old Kuma! He's the guardian who was sent with me from Taru, Jack, when I came for the games."

He swung back to the old man and began talking excitedly again, with the old man's amazement slowly giving way to excitement; and the excitement showed in his eyes and the curve of his mouth, and then his pale eyes flooded with tears as he embraced Joe again. Joe put his arm around the old man's shoulders, and I smiled, and we walked down the street together to a small cafe, where Joe ordered drinks for all of us in honor of the reunion.

The old man didn't touch his drink. He kept the tall glass in his gnarled hands, and he sat there and listened to Joe, his eyes wide in wonder and pride. They talked and talked, forgetting me completely, and I thought again of what General MacDonald had told me, for here were strong roots, and the old man held all the memories that Joe Ford had cherished. I ordered another drink, and I sat there while they jabbered away, catching an occasional word that was obviously direct English with no translation in the foreign tongue, names of cities mostly or places. In a little while, Joe lowered his voice to a whisper, and the old man leaned closer, and they talked with their heads together, with the old man nodding a lot. The old man stood up finally and shook hands with Joe, and then me, and went out to his donkey cart after saying something further to Joe.

"He's a grand old guy," Joe said, watching him lead the donkey through the crowded streets.

"What was all the whispering?"

"He's getting us a boat," Joe said. "He's taking us out to Taru."

I didn't say anything, and Joe added, "Tomorrow."

We met Kuma at a tumble-down dock a little before dawn the next morning. He stood beside a weather-beaten yawl that obviously belonged to some native, and which showed signs of having been rented out many times to fishing parties. The "signs" were overpowering in that they clung to the boat in a heavy miasma of fish stink. We climbed aboard, the stench almost overwhelming, but we made ourselves as comfortable as we could, and Kuma cast off the lines.

The sun came up like a slow motion jack-in-the-box, splashing the water with livid reds and oranges and yellows. It was like the picture postcards you always see, or the ads in a travel magazine, except that you could feel the warmth here, feel it spread over your skin as the sun climbed into the sky. And you could feel the mild breeze caressing your neck and lifting the hair on your head, gently, the kind of breeze that made you want to take off your shoes and lay on your back, and look up at the sky with a blade of grass between your teeth. It wasn't a setting for intrigue, not at all.

I saw Joe standing in the bow of the boat, silhouetted against the sun as it rose from the water. There was a curious, thoughtful expression on his face, a look of mixed hope and defiance.

Joe was going home.

For three days and two nights, we held our course steady at 110° SE. On the third night, Joe suggested that we cast anchor until morning. "We should be getting close now," he told me as we lay opposite each other in the rickety bunks. "I don't want to miss an identifying island and get thrown off course."

"The old man knows the way, doesn't he?" I asked.

"Well, I suppose . . ." Joe faltered. "Do you want to see the island in the morning? Is that it, Joe?"

He didn't answer me, and I regretted having given voice to my thoughts. You don't question a man's motives when he's coming home. Unless something more important hinges on the homecoming.

"Joe, what happens when we get there? You know what happened to Wilkie and the rest. Don't you think we're rushing things a bit?"

I saw the glow of his cigarette in the darkness, and I listened to the gentle slapping of the waves against the wooden sides of the boat. He was silent for a long time, and then he said, "We've got to see what's going on there before we can draw any conclusions." I heard what he said, but I got the uncomfortable feeling he didn't care *what* was going on there. He was going home, and that was all that mattered.

"Sure," I said. "I suppose so."

THERE was excitement in Kuma's eyes on the fifth day. He hauled on the halyards in the bow, and he seemed to stand a little more erect, and I knew we were getting close to Taru. We passed a small, palm-fringed sand bar which Joe identified as an island called Ilehi, and from time to time we sailed close to fishing sampans containing natives who pulled at their nets or simply stared at us disinterestedly. I looked back at them and wondered if any of them were from Taru, or if they'd had anything to do with the coded radio signals.

But then we saw the island itself, and I didn't wonder any longer. No one could live on Taru.

It was nothing more than a smear on the horizon at first. Kuma pointed to it excitedly, and Joe raised his binoculars, but we were still too far to see anything. The wind caught our sail, and the boat leaped through the water, the bow parting the waves. We got closer and closer to the island, and then I lifted my own binoculars and took a good look at it.

It clung to the water like a curling, rotted banana peel. It was brown and black, and a ghastly gray color. Not a tree stood anywhere on its gnarled surface. Not a bird wheeled overhead. There was only rock, and crushed lava, and lifeless ash. And desolation.

Joe put down his glasses suddenly. "Home," he said, and I felt some of the desperate disappointment in his voice. That was all he said as we cruised the length of the island, swinging around and starting down the other coastline. He stared grimly at the home he'd known for the first fourteen years of his life, his eyes dim, his fist clenched. We circled the island twice, and then Kuma swung into a small cove where the shoreline at least afforded some semblance of sandy beach. He ran down the sail, and Joe and I checked the magazines in our .45's, and then Joe said, "I guess we ought to go ashore," as if the last thing he wanted to do was see the island at close range.

We holstered the .45's, and we went ashore, working our way over the barren stillness of the island. The silence was complete. There was no sound but the scrape of our shoes against the lava and rocks, the ragged hoarseness of our own breaths. It was like opening the sealed door to a tomb. The island was a complete wasteland. There were no weeds clinging to outcroppings, no indication of any life whatever, not even a nest to show that just a small life form had found Taru habitable. Any radio message originating here must have indeed been transmitted by the gods. And yet, despite the stillness, despite the obvious absence of life, I felt as if I were being watched, as if unseen eyes were following every step we took. I turned to look over my shoulder more than once—but there was nothing, nothing at all.

We went back to the yawl in silence, with the sun dropping into the water, tinting the horizon in glorious fiery hues. We hoisted anchor and sailed downwind for more than an hour, and then we cast anchor again at Ilehi. We carried our sleeping bags ashore and spread them on the still-warm sands of the island. I lay with the bag zipped up to my chin, looking up at the stars poked into the sky overhead. I could hear Joe breathing beside me, and beneath that the myriad sounds of the island, the birds, the insects, the sounds of life, the sounds that were unheard anywhere on Taru.

"You know," Joe said reflectively, "I didn't even see the lagoon."

"What lagoon?" I asked.

"The sacred lagoon, we used to call it. Isn't it funny how the mind works, Jack? I mean, that lagoon was a part of my childhood, and I didn't even think about it today. In all that . . . emptiness, I didn't even think to look for it."

"Why was it sacred, Joe?"

"Oh, I don't know if it really was," he said, almost embarrassed. "Every year at festival time, all the girls of marriageable age stood in a circle around the idol in the lagoon, and then each one who was announcing her betrothal would take a black pearl from her ear and throw it into the lagoon. It was her sacrifice to the water god." He grinned in the darkness. "I guess it *was* kind of silly," he said, a touch of remorse in his voice.

"All those pearls don't sound silly," I said. "If the lagoon is still around, there ought to be a fortune down at the bottom. That is, if the custom's been going on for any amount of time."

"For centuries," Joe said. He paused a moment, and then, as if a gate were suddenly opened, he began talking about the customs of his people. As he talked, a strange look came into his eyes, and I don't think he even knew I was there listening to him. I wondered again how close the General had been in doubting the loyalties of Joe Ford—Jowanda—if he were ever put to the hardest test of all, that of choosing between a return to that old, idyllic, indolent life and the one to which he'd been dedicated these past fifteen years.

"Well," I finally said, "them days is gone forever. You saw Taru, Joe. It's really dead. No lagoon, no nothing."

Joe nodded. "What do we tell the Pentagon?" he asked.

I shrugged. "That the reports were wrong? Damned if I know. I don't see how any radio signal could have originated there, do you?"

"No, I don't. But let's check again. Hell, we want to be sure."

We spent the next three days cruising back and forth and around Taru studying every inch of the shoreline with our glasses, watching until our eyes ached for a sign of life, for one indication that what we were seeing was not the absolute desolation it appeared to be. We finally gave it up, and, four days after that, just at sunset, we entered the harbor of Papeete, our spirits as barren as Taru itself.

"I don't know about you," I told Joe as we leaped ashore, "but I feel like tying one on. Let's get our report off to Mac and then do the town."

Joe smiled. "Suits me," he said. "Let's see what Papeete has to offer a couple of American tourists."

WE went back to our hotel room, encoded a cable to MacDonald, had a quick supper, and then checked with the desk clerk about the available night life in town.

He was a bright young islander, intensely proud of his education in the missionary schools. He flashed a full set of sparkling white teeth and said, "I'd suggest The Pagona Club. Our visitors seem to find it most charming, yes."

We headed for The Pagona Club, which was not exactly charming, yes, but which would serve our purposes well. It had the usual atmospheric bar of bamboo and lattice-work, a five-piece dance combo which abortively struggled with American tunes, and thirty or so square tables surrounding a postage stamp dance floor. The

The idol was like a prehistoric sea god. Eighty feet below the surface, it was frighteningly forbidding. The eyes seemed almost alive.

place was fairly crowded, but we found a table near the dance floor, and I ordered Scotch and soda and Joe ordered a whisky sour.

The drinks arrived, and we clinked our glasses together, and I toasted, "To success."

"Success of what?" Joe asked.

"Everything. I always toast to success. You can't lose that way. Success covers life completely. Health, wealth, happiness. To success."

"To success," Joe answered, smiling. We were lifting our glasses when the voice sounded behind me.

"Well, well, as I live and breathe this fetid air, if it isn't Joe Ford! Hello, Joe, remember me?"

I turned and looked at the man. He was white, somewhere in his middle forties, with neatly combed blond hair and a trace of a sneer that curled over his upper lip. He held a drink in one hand and a cigarette in the other, and there was an almost taunting amusement in his pale gray eyes.

Joe pushed back his chair and rose slowly. "I'm sorry," he apologized. "I'm afraid I don't. I . . ."

"Why sure you do, Champ. Sam Fuller. *Inter-Island News.* Remember now? Why, I took the first pictures of you to go back to the States, when you were playing glory boy at the *Fete.* Remember now?"

"Yes, yes, of course," Joe said. "Forgive me, Mr. Fuller, it's been a long time."

"Sam, Champ. Call me Sam," Fuller said. He pulled out a chair and sat before anyone had a chance to invite him, and then he leaned over toward me. "I knew this boy would make it," he said. "Minute I laid eyes on him. No sir, he couldn't miss. And we've been mighty proud of you, Joe. You sure made headlines for us natives."

He smiled, and I saw Joe's big hands tighten on the table cloth. "Nice of you to say that, Mr. Fuller," he said, "but it's all part of the past now. I guess we all have to stop playing sometime."

"Sure, Champ," Fuller said. "But what brings you back to the Paradise of the Pacific? A little sightseeing? A little hunt for souvenirs to take to the boys at the University Club?"

I looked at Fuller, and my own hands tightened when I understood what he was driving at. In Sam Fuller's book, Joe was a native who'd hit the jackpot. But he was still a native, and that rated a big fat zero as far as Fuller was concerned.

"Mr. Blake and I are on a tour," Joe said. "Naturally, we didn't want to miss Tahiti."

"Naturally," Fuller commented. "Or Taru." He said it casually, but his eyes tightened, and he studied Joe's face carefully.

"Taru?" Joe asked innocently. "I'd understood there was no more Taru."

"There isn't," Fuller said, squashing out his cigarette. "Taru is finished, dead, *kaput.*"

"Then there's nothing there to interest us," Joe said. "Besides, we're here for . . ."

We heard a roll on the snare drum, and then the lights dimmed, and the pianist toyed with some bass hand chords, sprinkling them with a light melody from his right hand.

An amber spot swung around the small room and then settled on the microphone and the girl standing there. The girl wore a native costume with a sprig of hibiscus in her raven hair. Her skin was a deep burnished copper, her high breasts rising as she stood at the microphone, out of breath. She smiled at the audience, her nose wrinkling, her eyes saucily tilted. She nodded at the pianist then, and he played a short introduction, expanding the chords, modulating into the girl's key.

She began to sing, and The Pagona Club was suddenly very quiet, as silent as Taru had been. She sang a haunting, fragile, searching chant, and I sat there and watched her, almost hypnotized. I felt Joe stiffen beside me, and then, in a whisper, below the keening loneliness of the girl's voice, Sam Fuller said, "That's not for tourists, fellers."

The girl finished her song, and the applause shattered the stillness of the small club. She slapped her hands together, and suddenly changed her pace, singing a popular American jump tune, stepping out onto the floor and working her way around to each table. The spot followed her, putting a glistening sheen on her hair, flashing from the single piece of jewelry she wore.

A black pearl.

I saw Joe start in recognition, and then suddenly remember Sam Fuller sitting beside him. "She's lovely," he said softly. "Who is she?"

Fuller smiled. "There's a prior claim, Champ."

"Is there?" Joe said, watching the girl.

"Uhm," Fuller grunted. He looked at Joe distastefully for a moment, drained his glass, and then said, "I need another drink." He walked away from the table, and Joe hastily scribbled something on a scrap of paper, calling over the waiter and handing it to him.

"What's up?" I said, leaning close to him.

"I don't know yet," Joe said. "But we may be in luck. Did you notice the pearl?"

The girl had moved around to the other side of the room, and she was winding up her song in the direction of some British seamen at a table near the bandstand.

"Sure," I said.

"There's only one place in the world where girls wear black pearls in exactly that way—in one ear. Taru. She's from Taru, Jack."

"So?"

"So, maybe she knows something. I think we should find out. I've invited her to our table."

"Is that the only reason that you have invited her to our table?" I asked.

Joe smiled, and then chuckled, and I saw the waiter hand his note to the girl. She studied it briefly, and then looked over to where Joe and I were sitting. She smiled and walked across the room, moving lithely, the sarong molded close to her body. At the same instant, Sam Fuller shoved himself off the bar and started back for the table. He spotted the girl and quickened his pace, and he reached the table almost at the same moment. He took her elbow, smiled graciously, and said, "I suppose introductions are in order. Mr. Ford, Mr. Blake, may I present Popea, whom we affectionately call Poppy."

If anything, the girl was even more beautiful when she was close. She sat down and I couldn't take my eyes from her. There was an island charm and freshness about her, almost an aura of innocence, but it was coupled with a primitive, provocative savagery that was irresistible.

Sam Fuller dropped his hand onto hers, covering it, and she moved it away quickly, artfully raising it to rearrange her hair. I wondered about Fuller's *prior claim,* and I wondered if the claim were aware of the claimant's stake.

"I like your singing," Joe said, smiling.

"Among other things," Fuller said drily.

"I like that pearl you're wearing, too," Joe said.

The girl's hand went to her ear, lingered there for a moment, and then dropped when she'd assured herself the pearl was still in place.

"Are you from Taru?" Joe asked.

"Why, yes," the girl said, surprised. "How . . ."

"Mr. Ford is a native himself," Fuller said tightly. "He's returned for a nostalgic look at the islands."

"You're from Taru?" the girl asked.

"Yes," Joe said.

The girl said something in the native tongue, and Joe laughed, and then she suddenly began talking about the island in English, rambling on about her childhood, her expression changing to one of sadness when she discussed the eruption and the loss of her home and family. Fuller sat with his drink in his hands, listening, a bored expression on his face. The girl became animated again, probing Joe to refresh her own memory. They were like two kids who'd been to school together, or who'd seen a sunset for the first time.

"But you still have your pearl," Joe said at length.

"I was too young," she explained. "I left Taru before the ritual for the virgins. My family all died in the . . . the volcano. I . . . I married a white man who rescued me."

"You're . . . married?" Joe said slowly.

"Not any longer," Poppy said. "He was killed. He is dead now." Her voice lowered, and she added, "He was very good to me. There was much confusion when the volcano . . . he . . . saved me . . . and he was very good to me."

"Are we going to sit and reminisce all night?" Fuller said, leaning over and taking Poppy's hand again. "Why don't we get out of here?"

Poppy pulled her hand back gently. "I go on again in a few minutes," she said. She rose and smoothed her sarong over her hips. "It was very nice meeting you," she said to both of us, but her eyes were on Joe.

She walked away from the table, and Joe followed her with his eyes until she was gone.

"How'd her husband die?" he asked Fuller.

"He was shot," Fuller said.

"Who shot him?"

"How would I know? Maybe someone who didn't want her to have a husband."

"You look like someone who wouldn't want her to have a husband, Fuller," Joe said lightly.

Fuller chuckled. "I might add, Champ, that I've made the same observation about you."

Joe reached into his wallet and put a bill onto the table. "Come on," he said to me. "Let's go."

Joe rose, and Fuller placed a hand on his arm. When he spoke his voice was very low. "Champ," he said, "I wouldn't get any ideas about Poppy, if I were you."

"No?" Joe said.

"No. It might not be . . . smart."

"I'm just an island boy," Joe said. "Island boys aren't supposed to be smart, Fuller." He shook Fuller's hand off his arm, and walked out of the club. I followed him, and finally caught up with him.

"What's the rush?" I asked.

"I want to get another cable off to MacDonald," he said.

"What the hell for?"

"I think we'll be staying a while."

"Joe, you know there's nothing on Taru. We've already made our report. There's no excuse . . ."

"There's something on *Tahiti,*" Joe said.

"Sure, but the government isn't paying for a pleasure cruise. Look, Joe . . ."

"I think we'll stay a while, Jack," he said tightly.

I didn't answer him.

We hung around the hotel for two weeks, two weeks during which my role as tourist began to weigh heavily on my head. Joe left me alone most of the time, and I bought more curios, saw more native shrines, bazaars and mountain gods than I'd ever thought possible.

And Joe went about enjoying himself. He swam with Poppy, and he rode with Poppy, and he dined with Poppy, and he talked of nothing but Poppy; and I thought, *Okay, MacDonald, you were right. He's gone native. So what the hell do we do now?*

I thought about it a lot, and I finally figured we'd have a showdown. I'd tell Joe I was heading back for the States, with or without him. If he wanted to stay, well, that was up to him. I waited up for him one night, and when he came into the room, I put down my book and lighted a cigarette.

Joe walked directly to the dresser and opened the top drawer, taking out his .45.

"What's that for?" I asked.

"We're going back to Taru."

I blew out a cloud of smoke and looked at him steadily. "Joe don't you think it's time we . . ."

"We're going back to Taru, Jack," he said.

"Why? Has Poppy planted an idea about visiting the lovely homeland again? Do you figure on . . ."

"Poppy wants to go back to the lagoon," he said.

"What lagoon? You know the damn' thing isn't there any more."

"That's what I thought. But Poppy told me differently. It's still there, Jack, and she knows where to look for it."

"We covered every inch of that island with a fine . . ."

"But we didn't look *underwater,* and that's where the idol now stands, and that's were the lagoon is, and that's where all the black pearls still are."

"Look, Joe, we're not pearl divers! For God's sake . . ."

"I know. But we're going back anyway."

"Why? Joe you're talking like a nut."

"All right, listen," Joe said. "Poppy was married, you know that."

"I know," I said.

"Her husband wasn't exactly a reputable character, I gather, and he wanted to go back for the pearls on Taru. There's a fortune there, Jack."

"So?"

"So he found the fortune, and he found the lagoon, and all he had to do then was get some diving equipment and go back for the treasure. Unfortunately, someone shot him in the back before he had a chance to do that."

"To keep him away from the treasure?"

"Possibly. Or to keep him away from Poppy. Or possibly to keep him away from Taru."

"I don't follow. Why would anyone want to keep him away from Taru? I mean, unless the treasure were involved?"

"Because he found something besides pearls there, Jack. And that's why we're going there again."

"What did he find?"

"He found a honeycomb of caves. Underwater caves, Jack. With an entrance through the lagoon. That's what he found."

"So what has that got to . . ."

"Don't you see, Jack? We explored every inch of that island, but we looked only on the surface. What's to stop anyone from setting up a transmitter *underneath* the island, in all those caves? Hell, what's to stop them from setting up *anything* down there?"

"I'll be damned," I said.

"So we're leaving—tomorrow evening."

"Good," I said. "I was beginning to stagnate."

"You'll have plenty of opportunity to unstagnate," Joe said. "Sam Fuller is coming along."

"What!"

"He's getting us a boat, Jack, a power launch. I couldn't see making the trip in a yawl again."

"But . . . you know, sometimes I think you've lost your marbles. If we're going to look for a transmitter, won't Fuller cramp our style just a little?"

"I don't think so," Joe said smiling. "There's something there that'll interest Fuller much more than any transmitter would."

"And what the hell is that?"

"Pearls," Joe said. "Black pearls."

We met Fuller at the dock the next evening—Joe, Poppy, and I. He led us to the power launch, and when we saw the boat I began to wonder if we hadn't bitten off a little more than we could chew.

The sailor stood amidships, his hands on his waist. He wore khaki pants and sneakers, and his face was craggy and seamed, burned dark from the tropical sun.

"Well, well," he said, "the tourists. You still want to go fishing?"

"Yep," Joe said, "we still want to go fishing. I thought your boat wasn't for hire."

"Mr. Fuller talked us into it," the fisherman said. "He's a good talker, Mr. Fuller."

"I'll bet he is," Joe said. "Want to help us aboard with this gear?"

"Lend a hand there, Frank," Fuller said, and the fisherman leaped to the dock and began loading our stuff, almost as if Fuller had shouted a command. . . .

We put out to sea about five o'clock. The boat was a trim craft, with a top speed of about fifty knots, and Frank pushed it hard all the way. So where it had taken us five days to make the trip in Kuma's six-knot yawl, we made the trip in less than 14 hours in the launch.

It could have been a pleasant trip, but it wasn't. There was the same exotic scenery, crowding the eye with tropical splendor. There was the same sun, and the same languid breeze; but this time there was Sam Fuller, and Frank, and the other seaman whose name I never did discover. And there was also Poppy.

Whenever Joe and Poppy were together, Fuller clung to them like a dirty shirt. He lounged on the rail, or sat on a deck hatch, never letting them out of his sight, watching every move they made. He didn't pay a hell of a lot of attention to me. I was just somebody along for the boat ride.

We passed Ilehi, and when we were close to Taru, Fuller, Poppy, and Joe went up to the bow for a better look. Frank stood amidships, with the other

" 'By George,' I said to Ruth, 'that story's too good to keep. Let's stop in and tell the Cranes.' Anyhow— it seems there was a traveling salesman, and—"

seaman at the wheel, and I stood in the stern, lounging against the gunwale.

Frank pulled out a cigarette case and lit up, and the sun glanced down onto its burnished gold, splashing wildly, reflecting crazily. I waited for Frank to snap the case shut, but he didn't. And then the reflections weren't so crazy anymore. They became a series of flashes, regulated, controlled.

Frank was signaling to Taru!

I tried to read the message, but it was apparently coded, and then Fuller came back to the stern and began talking to me, and I couldn't pay much attention to Frank any more.

I called Joe aside later and told him about it, and the news seemed to disturb him. "Just our damned luck!" he said.

"How do you mean?"

"Wouldn't it be ironical if Fuller hired just the boat that was 'in' with whoever's on the island?"

"And wouldn't it be more ironic if Fuller were in with them, too?" I said.

Joe looked at me in amazement. "I hadn't even thought of that," he said.

"Maybe you're too busy considering Fuller a rival."

Joe scratched his head reflectively. "I'll be careful from here on in," he promised.

We reached Taru, and Poppy guided us around the island to a point almost opposite the site of our first landing. We dropped anchor and prepared to go below. We didn't talk much as we strapped on our oxygen tanks and adjusted our masks. There was a strained silence on the boat, and our feet flapped on the deck grotesquely as we walked to the side in our webbed rubber flippers. Four of us went over the side—Poppy first, then Fuller, then Joe, and then me. Frank and his seaman stayed aboard the launch, and I wondered if that were a good idea. Joe and I had guns in our packs, and I'd hate like hell to return and find them gone. But we sure as hell couldn't have taken them with us. It's a little difficult to trigger off a .45 underwater.

We swam downward, not seeing much because the long fingers of lava reached out to block our view. The lagoon was just around the point, Poppy had said. The idol would be there, if it hadn't been destroyed, and so would the pearls. And somewhere, there would be an entrance to the caves. We swam around the point, and I concentrated on the tricky current, and then I looked up.

The idol towered above us, immense and nebulous in the wavering water. It dwarfed us like a prehistoric sea god out of a living past. Its base was sunk into the soft bed of the sea, eighty feet beneath the surface of the water, as frighteningly forbidding as it had been for centuries. We gathered at its base and began walking around it clumsily. The pressure made us move slowly, like mechanical dolls. We looked up at its towering height. The eyes seemed almost alive, almost moving as the water swirled past them. I remembered uncomfortably that these were alleged to be sacred waters.

I looked at Fuller, who wasn't missing a trick. He was beside Poppy, and she seemed to know just where she was going. The pearls should have been right at the idol's feet, and that's where Poppy headed, with Sam Fuller close behind her. Joe moved his head slightly, and I followed the gesture and spotted the cave directly behind the idol. It was a huge thing, at least fifty feet wide and as many feet high. Beyond that cave, there could be anything.

We started looking for pearls, itching to get at the cave, but not daring to make a move with Fuller around. We spread the beams of our flashlights over the ocean floor, and, after quite a time, it began to dawn on me that there *were* no pearls. Fuller made an upward motion at about the same instant, and we all headed up for the launch again.

One by one, we surfaced. Fuller was already on board and out of his mask. Poppy climbed up over the side, and Joe and I followed. I was wondering what our next step would be. Joe had figured Fuller would be occupied with pearl-hunting, enough so as to leave us alone while we explored the cave. But he hadn't counted on several important items first, that the cave's mouth was so close to the idol; second, that there would be no pearls; and third, that Fuller might very well be in with the boys on the island.

He was mentally adding all these facts up now, and I knew he was planning our next move.

Fuller said, "Well now, no pearls." There was menace in his tone.

"I can't understand it," Poppy said.

"It's fairly simple to understand," Fuller said, smiling now. "Someone just got here before us, that's all."

"I suppose so," Joe said, and I saw the tic start at the corner of his mouth, and I knew the gears were grinding inside his head.

"It's a real shame," Fuller said, the smile expanding into a smirk. "It's a real shame you're not going to get what you came after."

Beyond Fuller, Frank came out of the cabin, and there was a rifle in his hands, and he swung the rifle around to cover us.

"What is this, Fuller?" Joe asked.

"Don't you know, Native Son? You've had your fun, but it's all over now. What the hell made Washington think you could be a spy? Brother, that beats all!"

Joe didn't wait for more. He shoved Poppy to one side, and he made a flying leap for Fuller. They both went down to the deck, and Frank triggered off the rifle. At the same time, I made a lunge for the packs stacked along the rail. Frank didn't know who to shoot first. He reloaded, swung the rifle back to Joe and Fuller, and then waited for a clear shot. But the .45 was in my hand by that time, and I thumbed off the safety, and the gun kicked in my hand.

The rifle went off, firing up into the air, and Frank backed into the cabin, the blood sprouting on his tee shirt. Fuller was on his feet now, and Joe hit him square in the mouth, and he backed up against the rail, and then he sprang from it like a tiger, a switchknife open in his fist. I didn't wait for more. I triggered off two fast shots, and Fuller clutched for his face, and then dropped forward to the deck, dead before he hit.

"The other guy!" I yelled, and Joe ran into the cabin where the Silent Seaman was sitting at the radio transmitter, ready to get off a message to the island. Joe pulled him out of the chair, and when he hit him I swear I heard the shock rumble up the length of his arm. The seaman collapsed like an empty potato sack, and Joe hauled him out of the cabin and dumped him over the side, his face grim. The seaman made a splash when he hit the water, and then he sank rapidly and silently, and we saw the trail of air bubbles come up behind him and then stop.

"Did he get a message off?" I asked.

"I don't think so," Joe said tightly. "But we'd better work fast anyway. Whatever the hell it is down there, they sure didn't want us to see it."

Joe and I got into the diving equipment again, forcing Poppy to stay behind, even though she protested strenuously. We went over the side then, and down, down, swimming fast, not sure whether we were expected or not. We went past the idol, and then into the yawning mouth of the cave, immense and terrifying. It was darker in the cave, and as we left the surface light farther behind, the darkness became a nothingness of black. We poked at the blackness with our underwater flashlights, swimming partly by their light, partly by touching the rough walls of the cave and guiding ourselves that way.

Then, gradually, the water started to turn gray, and then a muddyish lighter gray. We could see where we

were going again. We doused the lights and swam rapidly, and we began to feel a difference in the water pressure as we approached the surface. We swam until our knees scraped sand, and then we stood and got out of the water quickly, ducking behind a large boulder.

We looked along a narrow beach, scarred by loading docks, dotted with cranes, alive with dock hands. Twenty workmen were wheeling supplies down a ramp that led to the dock. And, at the dock, like a sleek metal fish—*a submarine*. Big and black, and surfaced for loading.

"Look at it," Joe whispered. "Look at it closely."

I looked closely, and then I saw what he meant, and I knew then what all the secrecy was about. Covering the bow of the sub, just forward of the conning tower, were firing platforms. And firing platforms meant one thing, rocket missiles.

We worked our way closer to the sub, watching the steady stream of men as the ship was loaded. And if they *were* loading it—God, how close were we to something really big?

But how big *could* it be? I mean, what the hell are a few rockets, even a few guided missiles?

Joe went into the water again, and I followed him. We swam underwater until we reached the dock, and then we came up in the shadows near the piles, treading water silently. Fifteen missiles—shiny and new—were lined up on dollies. Workmen were busily wheeling others into line, ready for loading. They handled the missiles gently, almost tenderly, and Joe watched them, and then ducked underwater again, and we swam back to the shelter of the rocks.

About two hundred feet back from the dock was a large, flat building, joined by two smaller ones. Joe indicated the buildings with a movement of his head, and I nodded and wondered how the devil we could get there. The cave was lit up like a circus tent, and crawling with men. We worked our way carefully, clinging to the shadows and the protecting rocks. We dropped to our bellies and crawled the rest of the way, sticking to the shadows, freezing whenever we heard a sound or spotted any movement.

We got to the rear of the building and looked up at the small windows, high over our heads. I cradled my hands and boosted Joe up, lifting him to the window ledge. I looked over my shoulder toward the docks where the men still worked, loading the missiles, handling them like crated eggs. Joe peered through the window, and I felt him start, and then I saw him grip the window ledge tightly. I nudged his leg with my shoulder, reminding him that there wasn't time to enjoy the view. He jumped down lightly, and I brushed off my hands.

"What'd you see?"

"This is something, Jack," he said. "*Really* something. They've got an assembly shop in there. Jack, they're assembling atomic warheads!"

"What!"

"Atomic warheads. You know what that means, Jack? They're loading that sub now, and they're not loading it for fun. Hell, you saw the launching platforms."

"All right, but . . ."

"Come on," he said.

We worked our way down to the water again, and then behind the boulder. I was nervous now, really nervous. I'd never fooled with atomics before, and this place was alive with them.

"What do we do?" I asked.

"You get back to the boat," Joe said.

"What do you mean?"

"Get back to the boat. Get Poppy out of here."

"Why? We're just supposed to make a report, Joe. We're not supposed to . . ."

"With them loading that sub! They'll be out of here in no time. For God's sake, Jack, don't you understand? They're not going on a pleasure cruise."

"But our orders . . ."

"The hell with our orders. Orders change, and I'm changing them right now."

"Okay," I said, "I stay with you."

"No. You get back to the boat and the hell out of here, and you make your report. The breaks may not run with me, Jack, and someone's got to tell Washington."

"What do you mean, the breaks may not . . ."

"Get out of here, Jack! Give Poppy a kiss for me."

"Joe . . ."

"Get the hell out of here," he said.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'll cross from here, underwater, and surface at the end of the dock where they've got the missiles lined up. With an atomic bomb, two fluids must come together to make the explosion. Okay, maybe these warheads have a timing device I can set. If they do, I'll set 'em and run like hell. If not, I'll . . . I'll turn the knob that releases the fluid."

"What do you mean, turn the knob? How'll you get out, if you . . ."

"I'll give you time to clear the island," he said. "How's three hours? You should be a good many miles away by then."

"You're crazy," I said. "You think I'm going to leave you here to . . ."

"Three hours, Jack. Unless I see the sub is ready to leave before that. I doubt if she'll shove off before dark, though, so you should have plenty of time."

"No! I'm not . . ."

Joe glanced at his watch. "I've got 0900, Jack. Synchronize, will you?"

"Joe, listen to me, Joe. You can't . . ."

"Somebody's got to get a report off to the General, in case I miss here. Come on, Jack, you're wasting time."

I took his hand, and Joe smiled and looked up at the roof of the cave. "It's good to be home again," he said. And then the smile dropped from his mouth, and he added, "Now scram."

I swam back to the launch, and Poppy's eyes opened wide when I surfaced.

"Where's Joe?" she asked.

I went directly to the cabin and started the launch, shoving Frank's body away from the wheel. "He's staying behind," I said.

"What for?"

"He . . . he's got something to do."

Poppy came into the cabin, and her fingers closed on my arm. "What do you mean? *What* does he have to do? Tell me, Jack."

"Poppy, he . . ."

"What is it?" she asked, terrified now. The launch was already moving across the water, and I pointed her prow for Tahiti and began speeding up.

"He's staying behind," I said doggedly.

"Why? Jack, *why* is he staying behind? Is he in danger?"

"I . . . I guess so," I said.

She didn't say another word. She whirled and ran for the stern of the boat, and then she poised on the rail for a moment and made a clean dive into the water.

"Poppy!" I shouted, but she was swimming back for the island and the lagoon, and for whatever waited for Joe there. I took a last look at her, and at Taru, and at the sky beyond that, and then I gunned the launch forward.

The blast came at 1230.

I saw the sky grow bright for a moment, and then it seemed to dissolve and mushroom upward, and I heard the detonation as I threw myself to the bottom of the cabin.

And then there was only a vast silence; and then later, much later, the rush of water against the sides of the boat, even at this distance. I got up after a while and made my way for Papeete.

There was no rush now, none at all. But there was still a message to get off to MacDonald, and something else with the message, something that would tell him how wrong he'd been, how very damned wrong he'd been about Joe Ford. •

By ROBERT LAXALT

Pity The Poor Gambler

Hottest news in the gambling world today are the fabulous casinos in Nevada. They are being taken for millions by the ancient fraternity of crossroaders. Here's why they are helpless.

A crossroader switches his palmed dice with the house dice.

The couple playing cards at the 21 table of a casino in Nevada—where gambling is a legalized business—were obviously having the time of their lives. They should have been. From what they'd told the dealer, their winnings amounted to more than the husband made at his job in a year.

The man, garbed in the conventional tourist attire of sport shirt and slacks, turned to his wife and said excitedly, "Wait until the folks back in Kansas hear about this. They'll never believe it." His wife nodded and smiled mildly. A few minutes later, they walked out of the club with $5,000 in winnings.

The dealer regarded the unlucky deck in his hands and ruefully mumbled something about bad days. Then he noticed what he thought was a faint mark on one of the cards. He turned the card over. It was an ace. Spreading the deck out on the table, he looked closer. The cards were amply sprinkled with marks. The dealer clapped his hand to his forehead. "Crossroaders," he moaned. "I've been taken again."

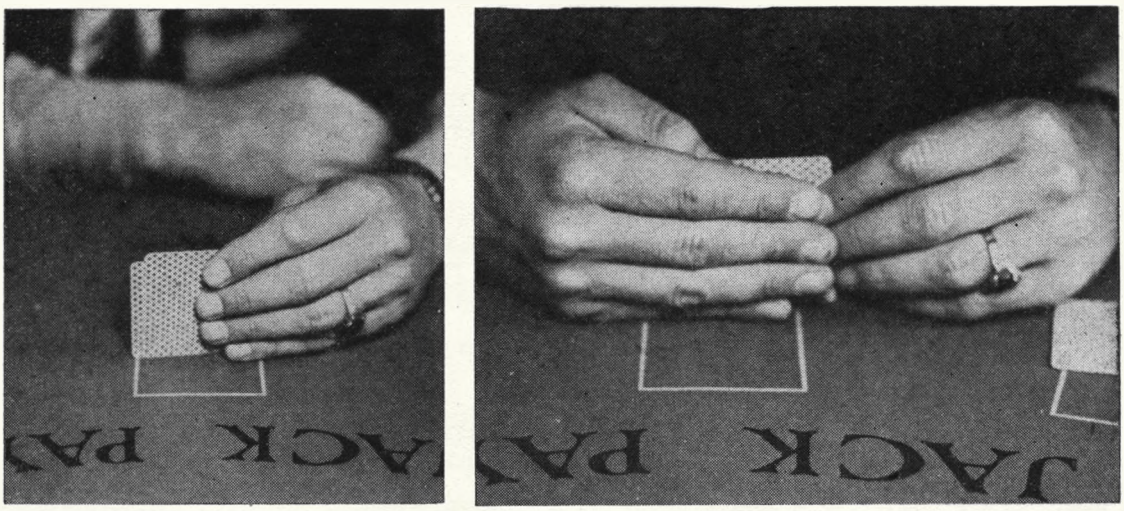
This lament is becoming a familiar one in Nevada, where club-owners—taking a twist on the old adage about never trusting a gambler—are complaining that it's getting so a gambler can't trust anyone.

In the colorful vernacular of the gambling world, the crossroader is one of an unofficial, highly esoteric society of professional cheaters who make their way by clipping professional gamblers, no easy task in itself. And though the society had its roots long ago in other parts of the globe, Nevada and its gilt-edged gambling halls have become home base for the best in the business.

There was once a day when the so-called society of the crossroader was an exclusive one made up of men who, as one gambler describes it, "took pride in their profession." These were the masters of disguise and sleight-of-hand who could palm winning cards, make dice perform peculiar antics, or control a roulette wheel—all from the customer's side of the table.

Oddly enough, gamblers in that day had a respect of sorts for the clever crossroader. There were times, of course, when detection had its fatal repercussions. And at one time in the Midwest, it was a common practice to cut a finger off a crossroader every time he was caught. But more often than not, he was simply told to take his business elsewhere.

A girl dealer in Reno handles a 21 table. Since odds only slightly favor the house, marking a deck can give a big advantage.



Hand-mucking or card-switching: A 21 player palms a card in his right hand, gets it into play by bringing hands together.

The Treasure of Horror

"The Treasure of the Sierra Madras," a piece of fiction about the ironic fate that fortune had in store for some men who sought gold only for the sake of gold, was an academy-award-winning picture. Since Aesop, the Greek slave turned fable chronicler and, no doubt, even before his time, writers have been fascinated by imagining classic examples of fate for men who became enamored of gold, and live only for treasure.

But the most classic example of all time—now all but forgotten—of the effect of gold and treasure on a man who has forsaken everything for it is one that happened in real life. For no man ever tasted more literally of the doom that is inherent in all treasure garnered only for the sake of treasure than did Pedro de Valdiva.

Pedro de Valdiva was a Spanish conquistador, a term which in itself has taken on the connotation of a ruthless seeker of gold and treasure. And Pedro de Valdiva was the worst.

Swooping down with an army of men on Chile in the middle of the 16th century, he plundered that country from one end to the other. He did not care that he profaned, destroyed or mutilated. He was after only one thing—treasure. The more gold and jewels he could get his hands on, the better. He didn't care how many lives might be lost in the process or to what ends he might have to go.

But finally his brutalities reached such extremes that the downtrodden Indians arose, beat back their invading tormentors and, in December, 1553, captured the man who was principally responsible for their suffering and humiliation—de Valdiva!

The natives also recovered some of the gold and treasure he had stolen.

And with it they executed the most perfect example of all time of the horror treasure can bring to those who go after it unscrupulously.

For no man ever tasted more terrifyingly of the fortune he had taken than this conquistador.

The Indians he had betrayed and run roughshod over for their gold and jewels finished his days on this earth by melting down the treasure he had taken and pouring the hot molten metal down his throat.

—Harold Helfer

The past few years, however, has seen a mushrooming growth in the ranks of the country's crossroaders. Though the original masters have all but passed from the gambling scene, to retire on their wealth or go into legitimate business, they have been replaced by an army of fresh-comers with a myriad array of cheating ways and devices, so many in fact that there are dozens of illegal business houses catering to their wants.

Today, gamblers estimate conservatively that there are thousands of crossroaders yearly touring the nation's gambling circuit, and many times more in the salons of ocean-going ships and in international gaming centers. And in Nevada—where state-sanctioned gambling volume has brought all the cheating ways into sharp focus—crossroading is a million-dollar business.

In one quick and recent assault of Reno and Las Vegas, for example, a team of four crossroaders lifted upwards of $100,000 in less than a week. And many is the Nevada gambler who can complain of losing $20,000 to a professional cheater in a single sitting.

There is a sharp distinction between the slicker and the punk. The former is the one who will work quietly and almost always alone. Naturally, he is loath to divulge to anyone the new cheating twist he has developed after long hours of solitary practice. Because he realizes that detection and widespread recognition in the gambling fraternity spells the end of his career, he works hard to avoid being caught. And when he is, he will often assume a disguise to cover his tracks as best as possible. He drinks lightly while gambling, and he is a perfectionist in cheating. Winning in moderation is his byword. In this way, he avoids suspicion and can come back to the same table again. For him, crossroading is a lifetime profession.

The mark of a punk is his greediness. Though he may also be highly proficient, he usually ignores the future in preference to a single killing. Eventually, he becomes what is known as a rounder—one whose face is so familiar that he is either removed from a game upon recognition or turned away from the club.

Still, detection of the rounder is not as easy as it seems. In many of Nevada's clubs, thousands of visitors trek through on a round-the-clock basis, and a crossroader can easily slip in unnoticed and win several thousand dollars before he is recognized and either arrested—if he is caught with a cheating device—or ousted if he is not.

In the semi-exclusive hotel casinos, however, detection is a different matter. Since the gambling tables and the customers are far fewer in num-

ber, a crude crossroader is spotted instantly by trained dealers or floor men. Because of this, the punks rarely frequent the casinos of the big hotels. This territory is left to the polished slicker and his ways of moderation.

Most Nevada gamblers maintain that they can almost always recognize a crossroader simply from his demeanor. They point out that the ordinary player focuses his attention on the game he is playing. The crossroader, by contrast, must be constantly on the alert in all directions, keeping his eyes on the dealer in front of him or guarding against the possibility of a floor man looking over his shoulder.

Sometimes, even the house can have its sense of humor about crossroaders. Jim Hunter, floor manager at Harold's Club in Reno and one of the best crossroader spotters in gambling, claims that he disposed of a card-marker at a 21 table without a spoken word.

The crossroader had just begun playing at a 21 table—regarded as the most vulnerable of all gambling games—when Hunter noticed a suspicious action. The man seemed to be adjusting his cuff-links overly much. Hunter stopped at a distance and watched the player for a moment. His suspicions were correct. The player was a crossroader, marking the backs of the cards with a paste concealed in his cuff-links.

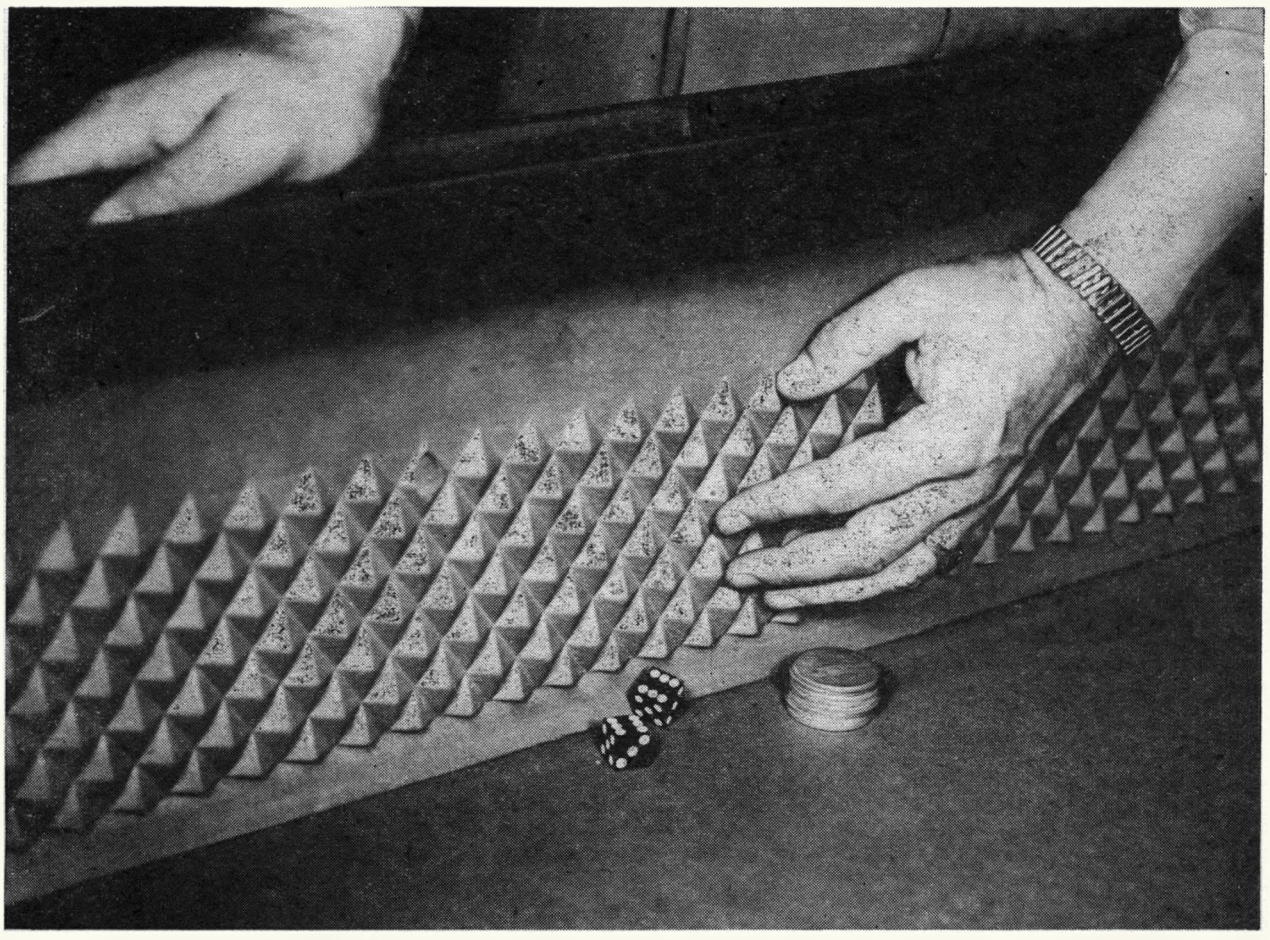
In 21—where the object of the game is to make 21 points or closer to it than the dealer, without going *bust* or over that number—the common method of crossroading is the marking of cards. This way, the cheater knows at a glance what the dealer has in his hand and what his own next card will be, should he chance a *hit* card to boost his point total. Since the mathematical advantage in 21—slightly in favor of the house, marking as in most gambling games—is only slightly in favor of the house, marking tips the odds heavily in favor of the crossroader.

And though some crossroaders will mark cards with a tiny prick from a pin concealed in a ring and others with a dab of sandpaper under a fingernail, again the most common method is with a paste that is barely perceptible to any but the practiced eye. The crossroader with the cuff-links was using this method, touching his thumb to the paste and applying it to the backs of the cards as they passed through his hands.

Jim Hunter decided to have some fun. Calling a girl relief dealer, he sent her to the crossroader's table. Her instructions were, first, to take no heed of the cheater. She was simply to wait until he suddenly raised his bets, and then break out a new deck.

It took the crossroader only a few minutes to finish marking the deck to his satisfaction. Through the preparatory plays, he had been making token bets of fifty cents and a dollar. Now, he put down the limit, fifty dollars, and waited for the killing to start. The girl dealer nonchalantly reached under the table and broke out a new deck.

The crossroader looked sharply at the girl, but when he saw the bored, working expression on her face, he be-



Here rubber pyramids have been set into the back of a casino crap-table to tumble the dice and thwart a player's attempt to control his throw.

Manager Mert Wertheimer of Reno's Riverside Hotel casino inspects dice with micrometer calipers. The dishonest dice most in favor with crossroaders are minutely imperfect cubes designed to fall a certain way.

gan all over again, methodically marking up the new deck.

Since there were other players at the table, it took nearly a half hour before all the cards had passed through his hands. Again, he raised his token bet to fifty dollars. And again, the dealer indifferently reached under the table and broke out a new deck.

Before the silent battle of wits was finished, two hours and four decks had come and gone. So had the crossroader's patience. He left in an incoherent rage, railing out loud against blind fate and unpredictable womanhood.

Probably one of the most anonymous crossroaders is a man reputed to have made a few million dollars in a lifetime of professional cheating, yet only a handful of gamblers have the faintest conception of what he looks like without a disguise. His favorite one is that of a bearded sheepherder and his dog—not an uncommon sight in Nevada. For years, this man has plagued 21 tables and poker games throughout the state without once being caught, although one club-owner who watched him operate for years finally discovered what he was doing to the cards. But even he will not reveal what it is. "I couldn't guarantee what would happen to business gambling if this gimmick ever got out to other crossroaders," he said. And this in a state where cheating methods are transmitted as quickly as possible from one gambler to another.

The more cautious of the crossroaders who specialize in marking cards do so by crimping and waving. Both methods are essentially the same. The man who waves his cards does so by pressing the ends together so that the card has a rise in the center, and thus will not lie flat to the table or deck. The crimper simply turns the corners of the high cards up and the low ones down. In both waving and crimping, however, the imperfection is so slight that only the most cautious of dealers will suspect that the cards actually have been tampered with.

ANOTHER instance of wordless humor has to do with the tipsy crossroader who was spotted entering a gambling club in Reno. The floor man recognized him immediately as a renowned card-crimper. Secretly summoning the dealer, the floor man instructed him to check his cards carefully, and whenever he saw one with a corner turned up, to turn it down, and vice versa.

The crossroader sat down to play, and after a quick look around the club to satisfy himself that no one had recognized him, began crimping the cards, coasting along with token bets.

When he calculated the time was ripe, he not only upped his bet to the limit, but began playing two hands. He never knew what happened. In the space of a few minutes, all the money he had was gone. He walked out of the club in utter confusion.

The modern-day expert of sleight-of-hand is the *hand-mucker,* who follows either one of two plans of attack, depending on his nerve. The *hand-mucker* will first determine what kind and color of cards the table is using, and then go out and fill his pocket with an ample supply of high cards of the same type. With a winning hand concealed in his palm, he will bide his time until he can exchange it for a losing hand. This can lead to trouble, however. One crossroader who was not paying enough attention to the other hands down the table faced up a winning black jack consisting of an ace of spades and a queen of hearts. It would have been all right, except for the fact that a respected businessman at the table turned up the same combination. And in a Carson City club recently, one careless crossroader slipped a blue card into his hand. He didn't win. The deck was red.

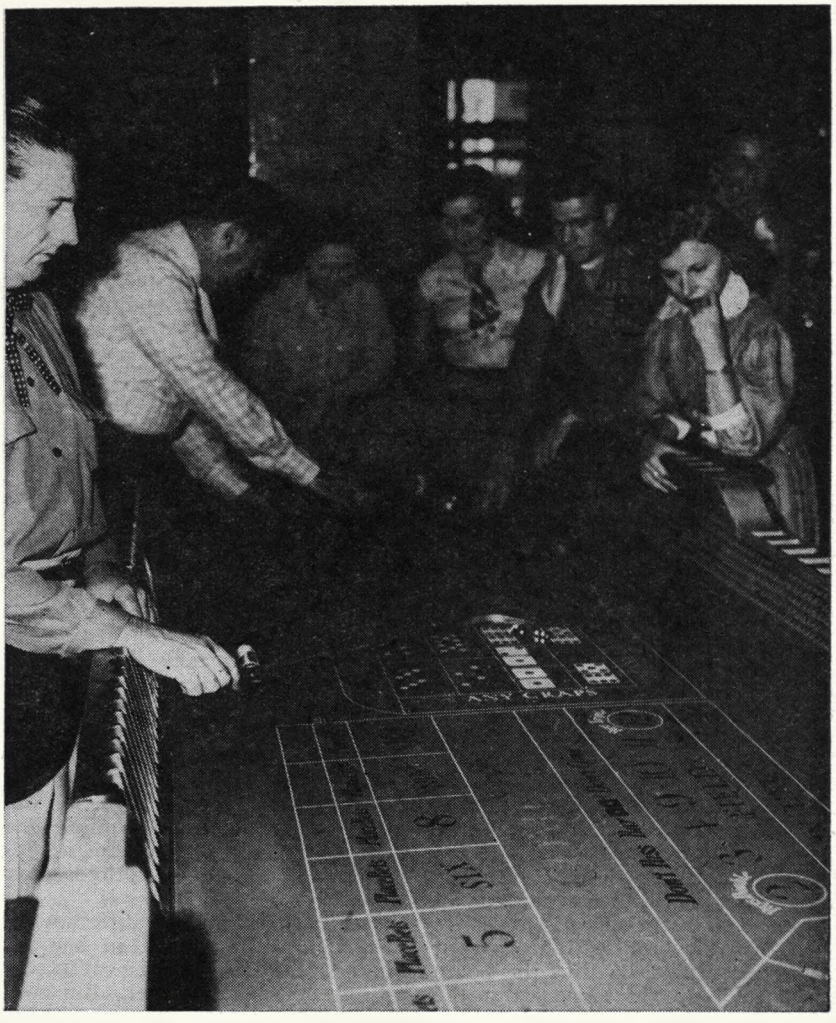
The conservative *hand-mucker* will perform his sleight-of-hand exclusively with the house's cards. He palms off an ace in early play, for example, and a little later, he will palm off a face card. The next hand will see him exchanging the winning black jack combination for his dealt cards.

Because this latter type of *hand-mucker* can be so adept at palming, it is a difficult matter for the house to detect them at work. In Reno's Riverside Hotel casino, Manager Mert

Wertheimer watched one suspicious-acting player for a half hour before catching the flash of a card in his hand. Moving quickly, he grasped the man by the shoulder, and with the aid of a floor man, marched him into the office.

There, while the crossroader protested his innocence, Mr. Wertheimer and his floor man literally undressed him, searching in vain for the card. It was nowhere to be found, probably because the crossroader had dropped it into the floor man's pocket.

For those crossroaders who are not proficient at sleight-of-hand, the machine age has been a blessing. These unfortunates overcome their handicap by the use of a hidden rig strapped to their chest and arms. The rig consists of a supply of winning cards, and a system of pulleys and mechanical fingers that will lever one of these cards down a man's sleeve and into his hand. It is set into motion by pressing a bulb or electrical button concealed, for example, in a cuff-link or coat button. But this method of cheating can be dangerous. A machine-man playing in a Las Vegas club suddenly sat bolt-upright on his stool and screamed, "I'm being electrocuted!" He began tearing off his clothes. As luck would have it, a floor man had to be the one who helped him take off his coat.



While an assistant rakes in bets lost on the previous throw, a crap-table croupier gives the dice to a new player. It's sometimes tough to spot gamblers who palm the house dice and substitute their own crooked ivories.

THE most brazen of the card crossroaders is the *cold-decker*. This type of cheater will actually substitute a stacked deck for the house's cards. A reformed crossroader—one of the rare few who will talk about this profession—described his plan of attack in this way:

"First, we would case the club to see what kind of cards the house was using and how many players there were at the table. The fewer players, the better. And if the table were empty, it was made for the picking.

"The car was loaded with stacked decks of all kinds. I'd pick up the right one and go inside. Meanwhile, my plant had already started playing. I'd wander up as if I didn't know him and begin making small bets. When I figured the dealer was almost ready to shuffle the deck, I would take out my handkerchief. My cold deck was inside.

"After the dealer shuffled, he would put the cards in front of me to cut. My plant would spill his drink or ask the dealer a question—anything to attract his attention. When he turned his head, I would switch the stacked deck for his."

Naturally, the next five minutes of play before the deck had been run through would be devastating for the house. The crossroader and his plant would begin betting the limit, and the unsuspecting dealer would be forced to deal them winning hands. The reformed crossroader—who could reel off the number sequence of any stacked deck by memory—calculated that even with a low betting limit, he made upwards of $2,000 in a few minutes of play, and could drop as many as ten cold decks in a single night. Some Nevada clubs with a $500 limit have lost as much as $10,000 to one stacked deck. . . .

Dice or craps comes in for the second best working over by the crossroader. Here, the same principle covers all the forms of cheating. Barring the traditional seven or eleven winning combination on the first throw, the main object of the game is for the player to repeat his point—the number he made on his first roll. Since a seven is a losing number after a player is trying to repeat his point, the crossroader naturally tries to eliminate the possibility of a seven coming up when he throws.

The old *Army blanket-roll* was the common cheating method used until recent times. Here, the primary object was to control one of the dice so that it would always come up with a six, thereby eliminating all but one of the fatal sevens.

With the old-type crap tables and their flat backs, an expert crossroader could come up with the necessary six on a die more times than not. This was called *freezing* a die, or controlling it so that it would seem to be tumbling, but was in reality spinning on its base, even after it bounced off the back of the table.

But gambling clubs—profiting by bitter experience—have almost nullified this form of crossroading. In the old days, a player was required to arch

his dice over a string. Now, the simple cure is by doing away with flat-backed tables and replacing them with ribbed and checkered patterns that make a die bounce and tumble in all directions.

With *freezing* all but gone from the crossroader's bag of tricks, he has been forced to resort to the more perilous tactic of slipping crooked dice into a crap game. As in cards, he does this by concealing crooked dice in his hand until it is his turn to throw, then palming off the house's dice and inserting his own into the game.

In a time of transparent dice, the old-school method of loading them with tiny shot or weights has almost disappeared. Now, crossroading depends on more artistic means of doctoring cheating weapons—again with the same general end in mind of killing off the losing sevens.

Some do it with a thin film of paste that will make dice cling to the felt of a crap table, and others with *edgework*—beveling the edge of a die so that it will roll to the desired number most of the time. But the adroit crossroader does it with *shapes*—dice that are not perfect cubes. Yet, the difference between a *shaped* die and a legitimate cube is so minute that it cannot be detected without the use of a micrometer calipers.

Here, the distinction between the moderate slicker and the punk again comes in. The slicker will not chance more than a few rolls with his crooked dice. After that, he slips the house dice back into the game. But the punk will generally ride his illegal luck until the wrong tumble occurs. Then he leaves the table.

This strategy leaves house gamblers in a quandry. Usually, they cannot detect the crooked dice until they have been in the game for some time. By then the crossroader is usually gone, and the innocent fall under a suspicious eye. Though house men are extremely reluctant to question anyone unless they are positive, there are cases when it has happened.

In a Reno club, the dice passed from a crossroader to a conservatively-dressed, bespectacled man next in line. The crossroader unobtrusively left the game, and the man started to roll. After he had won eleven straight times, he could not help but fall under the suspicious eye of the management. Still, they could not be certain. The man's bets—even though he was winning—were very small. Nevertheless, the croupier stopped the game and tested the dice with a micrometer calipers. Without a word, he summoned a floor man, and together, they accosted the player. He colored violently and did not make a scene. Thinking they had their man, they took him to the privacy of the office to question him. A few minutes later, the man—still crimson to the roots of his hair—left the club, and his questioners sheepishly trailed out of the office. The man was a minister, dabbling incognito in a bit of off-hours relaxation.

The international game of roulette offers the single greatest challenge to the crossroader. At first glance, it would seem impossible for a playing customer to cheat at this game, where the ivory ball spins inside a protected track, and where no one's hand but the dealer comes in contact with the inside of the wheel.

Maybe so, but never underestimate the conniving mind of a crossroader. Even this game can be had.

A Las Vegas casino was losing heavily at its roulette wheel, particularly to one man who was betting his money directly or straight up on a small group of numbers, thus realizing the heaviest winning odds. Finally his luck began to smack of the unreal, and a floor man was designated to watch him.

But it was a practical impossibility that the lucky winner was doing anything wrong. The roulette wheel was at the other end of the table. The floor man was about to give up his fruitless task when he noticed something.

Earlier, he had taken little note of a woman with a drink in her left hand, ostensibly leaning relaxedly against the roulette wheel. But now, it was twenty minutes later, her drink was still half full, and she was still leaning against the wheel in exactly the same pose. She hadn't changed her position in all that time.

The floor man took up a hunch and began to watch her instead. The first thing he noticed was that a light coat was draped over the woman's right hand, and that the coat was touching the wheel. Still uncertain, the floor man began watching the inside of the wheel. It was a long vigil before he saw what he was after—a thread-like needle that darted through the track and tripped the spinning ball into one section of the wheel. And since a roulette wheel is divided into sections of numbers that correspond to the betting board, that section just happened to be the one where the lucky winner was betting all his money.

The floor man approached the woman and removed the coat. In her hand was a gun-like mechanism. One part of it was a tiny hair drill with which she had been boring completely through the side of the wheel, and the other was the flickering needle that had been tripping the ball.

When word of this newest crossroader gimmick spread throughout the state's gambling halls, many clubs began to make it a rule that no one could lean against the wheel. But this served to offer only a slightly stiffer challenge to the crossroader. Not long afterward, a Reno club was suffering the same type of abnormal losses to a player.

Profiting by the Las Vegas experience, house men immediately disregarded the player himself, since he was on the far end of the table from the wheel. But at the wheel itself, there seemed to be nothing suspicious. Even though there were players near, no one was touching it. After a solid hour of constant surveillance, one floor man gave up in disgust. The other was just turning away when he caught the barest glint of moving light on something. It had come from the purse a woman was holding in front of her on the table. The floor man strained his eyes before he found out what was happening. Instead of going through the wheel, this woman's mechanical tripper was actually curving over the side to control the spinning ball. As the house was to discover later, the purse was in reality a precision mechanism that shuttled the tripper out through an innocent looking clasp.

But all the house got from this instance of detection was satisfaction. When the floor man grasped the woman's purse, she thought at a speed comparable to her purse mechanism and began to shout, "Purse snatcher!" Two men at the table immediately laid hands on the floor man, and in the confusion, the crossroaders scooted out of the premises.

Today's running duel between business gamblers and crossroaders is a hectic, behind-the-scenes battle of wits. Gambling clubs are constantly on the alert for new schemes to thwart professional cheating. Some are experimenting with specially-made cards and dice bearing identifying marks known only to the house, and one casino is toying with the idea of installing television cameras for round-the-clock observation of every table.

But so far, every time the house has devised a new twist, the crossroaders have sidetracked it and gone the club one better. As Eddie Moss, gambling manager at the Sahara resort hotel in Las Vegas, sums it up:

"The state and its gambling agents protect the customer, but the gamblers have to protect themselves. We can't expect the police to keep tab on thousands of players day and night. So the only thing left for us to do is keep one step behind the crossroaders. We gave up trying to keep ahead of them a long time ago." •

Top Hand

Darn shame about Rafter C, getting a woman owner that way. And what a woman! Wanting to know what time they milked the steers!

By WILLIAM HEUMAN

Reb McAllister sat on the seat of the buckboard and frowned at the two shining steel rails which, sweeping past Fremonte City's tiny depot, headed west toward the mountains. The half-smoked cigar in his mouth tilted skyward, he stared at the switching tails of the matched grays in the harness in front of him, and then, with a gesture of annoyance, took the cigar from his mouth and threw it into the dust.

Stepping from the buckboard, he crossed the road to O'Toole's Bar. When he pushed in through the purple and green glass bat-wing doors, O'Toole said, "Reb," and looked up from the two-week old newspaper he'd flattened on the bar.

"Whisky," Reb said, and O'Toole looked at him.

"Early for whisky," O'Toole observed. It was noon, and the barroom was empty. In the back, Reb could see the big, high-topped black shoes of John Tormey, the floorman. Big John lay prostrate on the pool table, huge hands folded across his capacious chest like a corpse, his derby hat across his face as

Illustration by DAVE STONE

protection from the flies. Flies moved in and out of the entrance way between the barroom and the back. One swirled around Reb's black, flat-crowned hat with its skimming of whitish road dust picked up that morning on the ten-mile trip in from Rafter C. He slapped at the fly with his hand, and said:

"Never too early for whisky—now."

O'Toole nodded sympathetically, took a bottle from the shelf and moved it in front of Reb, along with a shot glass.

"She's comin' in on that train," he said.

Reb McAllister inclined his head slightly, and he frowned again as he poured the amber colored liquor from the bottle.

"Old Man Carrington never should o' died," O'Toole stated. "Had no right to die an' leave Rafter to a woman."

Not a woman with the name, Henrietta Van Cuyn, Reb thought. He had his picture of her—tall and thin and a school teacher, her nose sharp and tilted, a thin slit of a mouth, and snapping blue eyes. She would try to run Rafter C the way she'd run her classroom back in New York, and in six months J. B. Carrington's prosperous outfit would be ready for the ash heap.

O'Toole flattened the paper with both hands, rubbed his fat chin, and said, "Man can allus quit, Reb."

Reb shook his head. He'd been with Rafter for eight years now, working for Old Man Carrington as top hand for six, and the last two years as foreman. Rafter C was his brand. The brand was bigger than the man or woman who owned it. He had his respect for J. B. Carrington, and he was sure the old man would have liked him to stick around and keep the ball rolling for Henrietta, his niece, and only living relative.

"No place for a woman," O'Toole said. "Don't see why she didn't sell the outfit.

"Maybe she will," Reb told him, and then he heard the distant train whistle. Lifting the shot glass, he downed the contents, O'Toole watching him thoughtfully as he put the glass down on the bar.

"Have another on the house," O'Toole encouraged. "Know what you're goin' through, Reb. Damn near got married, myself, once to a woman."

Reb McAllister looked at him, dark eyes glowering. "Not marryin' the woman," he said.

"I know," O'Toole nodded. "Have it anyway."

"Maybe later," Reb said morosely, and he pushed out through the doors, wiping his lips with the back of his sleeve. He crossed the road again and stood in front of the buckboard, watching the train move down the track. He noticed that he was the only one waiting for a passenger. A town like Fremonte did not have too many visitors, an occasional drummer, a cattle buyer, and that was the end of it.

Jed Hodges, the station agent, came around the little waiting room with his handcart and waved to Reb as the train thundered toward them. Reb nodded to him, and Jed shook his head sympathetically.

A fat man with two heavy suitcases stepped down from one of the cars. Henrietta Van Cuyn came from the other end of the car, the conductor placing several traveling bags beside her.

Reb McAllister had a glimpse of a rather trim ankle as Miss Van Cuyn stepped to the ground. He noticed before he picked up the bags that she was fairly tall and slender, but not thin. He also noticed that she had gray eyes and not the cold blue ones he'd anticipated, and that the face which went with the eyes was not displeasing, definitely not cold. Her nose was not sharp, but it was upturned slightly, and there were a few freckles around it, which did it no harm. It was a small pert nose.

As he picked up the bags he caught the aroma of violet perfume, and he wrinkled his nose slightly. He said, "McAllister."

Then he nodded toward the waiting buckboard, and moved that way with the bags. He heard her coming behind him, small shoes tapping the wooden platform.

"Sure you have the right party?" she said, suddenly. "You haven't asked me my name."

There was a slight hint of laughter in her voice, and Reb stopped, turning half around.

"Reckon you're Miss Van Cuyn, ma'am."

She nodded, still smiling, and he saw the humor in her eyes. "You could have been wrong," she said.

"Not many woman passengers in this part of the country," Reb observed. He wished that she weren't so pretty because it was going to be more difficult disliking her now.

"You received my letter, Mr. McAllister?" she asked.

Reb nodded. He dropped the suitcases in the back of the buckboard and waited for her to come up so that he could give her a hand up to the seat. She stopped a few feet in front of him, looking at him, and then at the buckboard.

"I've never ridden in one of these before, Mr. McAllister," she said.

"No trick to it," Reb said. "You just sit."

She was smiling at him again, looking at him steadily, and he was conscious of the fact that she was sizing him up, studying him coolly, calmly, and he resented this. A woman had no right to look at a man like that.

"I had thought," she said, "that you would be different, Mr. McAllister."

"How so?" Reb asked. He saw O'Toole's bald head over the bat-wing doors across the way.

"Older," Henrietta Van Cuyn told him. "You've worked for my uncle for eight years?"

"Started when I was 19," Reb informed her. "Ready to go now, ma'am? It's ten miles out to the ranch."

HOW'S THAT?

(Translated from Rules of a German Fire Department)

■ If a house is on fire, it is above all things necessary to try to protect the right wall of the house standing on the left, and the left wall of the house standing to the right respectively. For if, for instance, we proposed to protect the left wall of the house standing to the left, the right wall of the house lies to the right of the left wall and consequently, as the fire also lies to the right of this wall and the right wall (for we have assumed that the house lies to the left of the fire) so the right wall lies nearer to the fire than the left, and the right wall of the house could catch fire, if it were not protected, before the fire reached the left wall, which is protected. Consequently something might catch fire which is not protected, and indeed sooner than anything else would catch fire, even if not protected; consequently the former must be left alone and the latter must be protected. In order to impress the matter thoroughly on one's mind, one may merely note: if the house lies to the right of the fire, it is the left wall, and if the house lies to the left, it is the right wall.

—Dache M. Reeves

He saw her eyes flick, and her chin went up a fraction of an inch higher, and he realized that she thought he was giving her orders, and she was not taking orders. On that score he'd been right in his conception of her.

"I'd like to look around the town before we ride out to the ranch," Henrietta Van Cuyn said.

Reb McAllister looked at her, and then up the single main street of Fremonte City, dusty, hot, a few horses standing three-legged at the tie racks, a half dozen stores, five saloons, a livery stable, a hotel, the dance hall which was opened on Saturday nights only, and that was all. At this hour of the day there was no activity.

"I'd like to look in the stores," Henrietta said.

Reb nodded, and he looked the other way, his jaw tighter than it had been. It was like a woman to want to look in store windows when Rafter C had been without a boss for five weeks, and he'd been hesitant about making any real decisions until he'd spoken with the owner. There were eight thousand beeves on the Rafter C range, along with half-a-hundred head of Morgan horses, and nearly forty men working the range, and Henrietta Van Cuyn wanted to go window-shopping.

"Reckon you're the boss," Reb said.

She was smiling again, almost grinning now because she'd won her point. She said, "Would you care to accompany me, Mr. McAllister?"

"Wait for you to come back," Reb said.

"You are a drinking man, Mr. McAllister?"

Reb looked at her, a little surprised at the question. He said, "No."

"I smell liquor on your breath, Mr. McAllister."

"I had one," Reb said, and he let her figure it out. He was not a drinking man as drinking men went in this town. He had an occasional drink, and sometimes more than one, but he did not let liquor get the better of him, and never would. A drinking man did.

Henrietta said, "I believe we have plenty of time to get back to the ranch, Mr. McAllister. What time do you milk all those cows?"

"What?" Reb asked weakly.

"I understand that you have quite an extensive herd on the ranch, Mr. McAllister. Cows give milk, I presume?"

"Steers," Reb muttered. "Mostly steers, ma'am. We don't do no milkin' at Rafter C."

"Oh," she said. "Steers are male cows?"

Reb McAllister swallowed. "Yes, ma'am," he said.

He watched her walk primly down the shady side of the street, and then he took a deep breath and crossed to O'Toole's Bar. Both O'Toole and Big John Tormey were waiting for him when he came in, and O'Toole said, "Pretty bad?"

"Wants to know when we milk the cows," Reb told him.

O'Toole scratched his head and looked at Big John, who was grinning, cracking his knuckles as he leaned his weight on the bar. O'Toole then pointed to the bottle and the glass on the bar.

"You need that now, Reb. Drink up."

Reb McAllister had the drink. When he put the empty shot glass down, he said, woodenly, "Wants to know if a steer is a male cow."

"Have another," O'Toole invited. "This is a bad day for Rafter C."

"One more," Reb said, "and she'll call me a drunkard. Thinks I drink too much now. She smells it on me."

"Soberest man in town," Big John said. "Never had to throw you out of this establishment once."

Reb looked at him, and the two stiff drinks were warming his stomach, giving him a loose, confident feeling, a feeling, too, of power and great strength held in reserve.

"Never could," he stated. "Drunk or sober, John."

Big John rubbed his huge hands together. Then he shrugged and said, "A question, Reb."

Reb pushed away from the bar and stepped to the door, looking out over the doors he saw Henrietta Van Cuyn standing in front of Mrs. Trumbull's dress shop on the opposite side of the street.

O'Toole and John Tormey joined him at the door, and the three of them watched silently. Henrietta walked on, still moving west toward the other end of town, and they saw two riders coming in from that direction, and O'Toole said, "Here's trouble, Reb."

Reb recognized Buck Riordan's bay gelding, with Buck's square frame in the saddle. Riordan was ramrod for Henhouse, the outfit facing on the north side of Rafter C.

"Kind of a lady's man that Riordan," O'Toole murmured, "an' there's a lady. Kind you don't see twice in a town like this, Reb."

"Once," Reb said, "is twice too much."

He watched Buck Riordan and the Henhouse man with him slow down as they came abreast of Henrietta on the walk, and Riordan took his time looking her over. Reb didn't like the way he looked her over; he didn't like the way Riordan turned his head to look back even after he was past. He told himself that it was because Henrietta Van Cuyn was now part of Rafter C, and Rafter C was his brand.

"That Riordan's sure itchin' for trouble," he said.

"Just as I suspected. The same fish cut in half!"

"Never get in trouble over a woman," O'Toole advised. "Ain't worth it."

Riordan and the other Henhouse rider dismounted in front of the Empire General Store, which also served as the post office. They watched him go in and come out in a few minutes with a sheath of mail which he stuffed into his pocket. Then both men headed for the Longhorn Saloon two doors down from the Empire Store, Buck Riordan looking up the street first in the direction Henrietta Van Cuyn had taken. She had stepped into the dry goods store run by Max Cohen.

"She'll be buyin' a roll o' material for a dress," O'Toole said. "How many dresses kin a woman wear?"

Neither Reb McAllister nor Big John Tormey answered that question. Reb was still watching Buck Riordan across the way. Riordan seemed to be in no hurry to leave Fremonte now that he'd picked up Henhouse mail. The Henhouse foreman lingered out in front of the Longhorn, stepped in for a drink at the bar, and then came out again to put his back against one of the uprights supporting the overhead awning. He stood there, scratching his back against the post, looking up toward the dry goods store.

The other Henhouse rider came out of the saloon, wiping his lips on his sleeve, grinning. He sat down on a wicker chair out in front of the saloon, and Reb saw him say something to Riordan.

Riordan had rust-colored hair, close-cropped, and a wide, bony face with a flattened nose and close-set blue eyes, very pale in color. His jaws were heavy, solid bones.

"Here she comes," John Tormey said.

O'Toole looked at Reb McAllister, grimaced, and said, "Have another drink, Reb."

"Had two," Reb told him.

"You like a game o' pool?" John Tormey said. "She might be a while comin' this far, Reb."

"Reckon I'll stay here," Reb said.

Henrietta Van Cuyn paused at several stores on her way back to the station. When she came up to the Longhorn Saloon, Buck Riordan was still in the same place, his back against the post, hands hooked in his gunbelt.

Reb saw him say something, and Henrietta slowed down, looking straight at him.

O'Toole said, "Take it easy, Reb," but Reb was already pushing out through the doors, letting them swing behind him.

Henrietta passed on, and Riordan turned to grin after her. He didn't see Reb until Reb came up on the walk a few feet away from him, and then he turned his head slightly and said, "Reb."

Reb watched Henrietta Van Cuyn slow down and then turn around instead of walking on toward the buckboard by the station. She'd seen him angling across the road from the saloon.

"Miss Van Cuyn," Reb said. "New Rafter C boss, Buck."

"Figured that," Riordan nodded and he spat.

"What'd you say to her, Buck?"

Buck Riordan grinned broadly. His blue eyes were tough, narrowed a little now. "Ask the lady," he chuckled.

"Askin' you," Reb said.

"You come over here bustin' for a fight?" Riordan asked him. "Then you got yore man."

"Never started a fight in my life," Reb said. "Finished plenty."

"You won't finish this one," Buck Riordan retorted.

"What'd you say to her," Reb said.

"Go to hell," Riordan told him. He glanced at the Henhouse man still sitting on the chair in front of the saloon, and the man got up, only to sit down again as Big John Tormey angled across the road, derby hat on the side of his head, eastern shoes squeaking.

Henrietta Van Cuyn spoke now. "Are you driving me out to the ranch, Mr. McAllister?"

"Pretty soon," Reb murmured. He was looking straight at Riordan.

"He'd better be in a hurry," Riordan grinned. "That right, Reb?"

Reb McAllister moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue. "You want to accommodate me, Buck?" he said. "Behind Jansen's livery?"

"Anywhere," Riordan chuckled, pushing away from the post. "On the head of a pin, even."

Reb turned and walked down the street, Riordan following him, walking with an easy swagger. The Henhouse man came after him, and Big John Tormey brought up the rear.

When Reb reached the livery stable alley he stopped and turned around. Henrietta Van Cuyn was coming on behind Big John, walking grimly, a frown on her face.

Reb let Buck Riordan walk on ahead of him, and then he stepped back and stood in front of the tall girl. He said, "You better wait by the buckboard, ma'am."

"Is there going to be a fight?" Henrietta demanded.

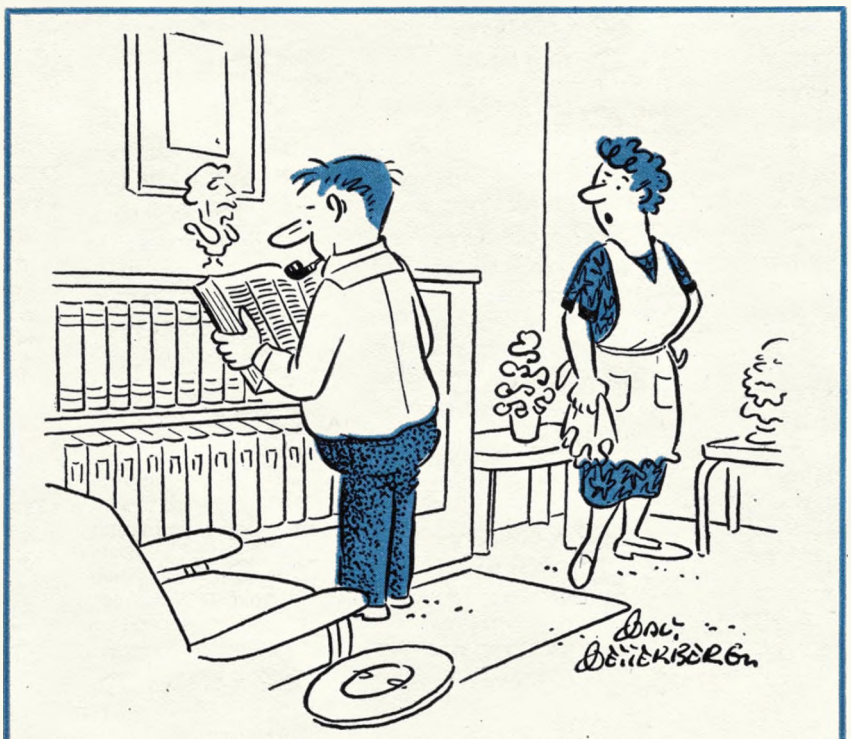
"Won't be much of a fight," Reb promised. "You better wait by the wagon."

"Is it about me?" Henrietta asked him softly.

Reb McAllister looked up at the sky. "Fight between Rafter C an' Henhouse," he said. "Could be about anything—a cow, a fence post."

"You are not very flattering," Henrietta snapped. "I almost wish he whips you."

"He won't," Reb said.



"Of course I'm right. I looked it up before I started the argument."

He started up the livery alley, and, when he was halfway to the end of it, he turned his head and saw Hendietta Van Cuyn following him. Buck Riordan waited at the corner of the livery stable, grinning, rubbing his hands. Big John Tormey had one shoulder up against the wall of the building, watching, waiting for the fight to begin.

There was a little cleared space behind the stable, and then a pile of rubbish, old horseshoes, old iron, scattered in the weeds beyond.

Buck Riordan said, "Come an' get it, Reb."

He'd handed his gunbelt to the Henhouse man, and Reb unstrapped his and gave it to John Tormey.

"Hit him in the belly," Big John said. "None of 'em like it there, Reb."

Reb McAllister frowned at Henrietta Van Cuyn who'd come around the corner of the building and was standing a few feet from John Tormey.

"No place for a lady," Reb said.

"I'm not a lady," Henrietta retorted, a little grimly.

"We're wastin' time," Buck Riordan observed. "I come back here fer a little fun."

"Here it is," Reb said, and he swung with his right fist.

Riordan went down, came up to his feet immediately, and knocked Reb down with a swinging blow to the jaw. Reb got up unhurriedly.

They stood toe to toe hitting each other very hard, and then Reb stepped back, came in again immediately and knocked Riordan down with a stiff punch to the chin. The Henhouse foreman shook his head from side to side, spat, and got up leisurely. "Reckon you're in for a fight, Reb," he said.

"I'll stay with it," Reb told him.

Riordan rushed and knocked him down with several short punches to the body and head. He circled as Reb rolled on the ground, and he came up directly in front of Henrietta Van Cuyn.

Buck Riordan was grinning a little as Reb started to get up, and then the grin died on his face. He gulped, his eyes glazing a little, and then he took two steps forward and collapsed on the ground.

Reb heard something metallic strike the ground to the left, and the weeds over there moved slightly. Henrietta Van Cuyn was looking at Riordan on the ground, her face pale.

Big John Tormey came away from the wall, gaping. The Henhouse man had dropped Riordan's gunbelt, and he was staring at Henrietta.

"She slugged him," Big John mumbled, "with a horseshoe!"

Reb got up from the ground, rubbing his jaw. He looked at Buck Riordan who was sitting on the ground, shaking his head from side to side, his mouth working but no sounds coming out.

"Slugged him," Big John repeated. "Woman slugged him."

"Ain't fair," the Henhouse man muttered.

Reb walked around to the front of the stable, coming back with a half-filled bucket of water. When he threw the water into Riordan's face, the Henhouse foreman gasped, spluttered, and shook his head vigorously. He didn't get up, however, but he looked at Reb with an injured air, and he said,

"How in hell you git behind me so fast, Reb?"

"Buy you a drink," Reb said. "Reckon you need one, Buck."

He watched Henrietta Van Cuyn walking down the alley. She turned right toward the railroad station when she reached the street, and Reb saw her sitting on the seat of the buckboard as he entered O'Toole's with Buck Riordan, the Henhouse man, and Big John Tormey.

O'Toole said, "A quick one; an' not too much damage done from what I kin see."

"Good fight," Big John said, "till that woman slugged Buck with a horseshoe."

"For goodness' sakes," O'Toole murmured.

"Wasn't fair," the Henhouse man said. "Buck wasn't even lookin'."

"Whisky," Buck Riordan said. "Reb's payin'." To Reb he said, "Maybe she ain't as tough as Old Man Carrington, Reb, but she'll do."

Reb paid for the drinks and went out. Crossing the road he climbed up on the seat of the buckboard, turned the grays around in the road and headed out of town. They were half way up the grade of Buff Hill before he spoke.

"Wasn't your place to get into that fight, ma'am."

He watched her out of the corners of his eyes. She was staring straight ahead, sitting very stiff on the seat.

"Rafter C is my outfit, too," she said.

A slow smile slid across Reb's face. As they went over the top of the rise, he sat back a little on the seat, letting the grays take over. He said softly, "Reckon that's right, ma'am."

There was respect in his voice, and possibly something else. He didn't know whether Henrietta Van Cuyn understood this, but he hoped that some day she would.

She said, "It was nice that you fought for me, Mr. McAllister."

When he looked at her he saw the color in her face, and he knew, then, that she understood already. It was a good beginning—a very good beginning. •

BASEMENT BATTLE

■ This Dirk Taylor was supposed to be the boxing champ of Kansas and didn't he know it!

An employe of a sporting-goods store, he was always bragging about his fistic prowess and otherwise throwing his weight around.

He was really quite annoying but he was a huskily-built person and there was no doubt that he was right handy with his fists and so people tried to step out of his way and leave him alone.

One day a young man decided he'd had enough of Dirk's swaggering. Back home from the East where he'd been attending school, the blond young man decided that the aggressive Dirk was a frontier anachronism and ought to be put in proper perspective.

So he challenged the champ to a fight. The news spread like wildfire. Merchants, professional men and just about everybody else closed shop or quit doing whatever they were doing and went to the basement of the sporting-goods store where an area had been marked off for the fight.

It was quite a scrap but the blond young man soon evinced his superiority and finally gave the self-touting champ a decided trouncing, laying him low.

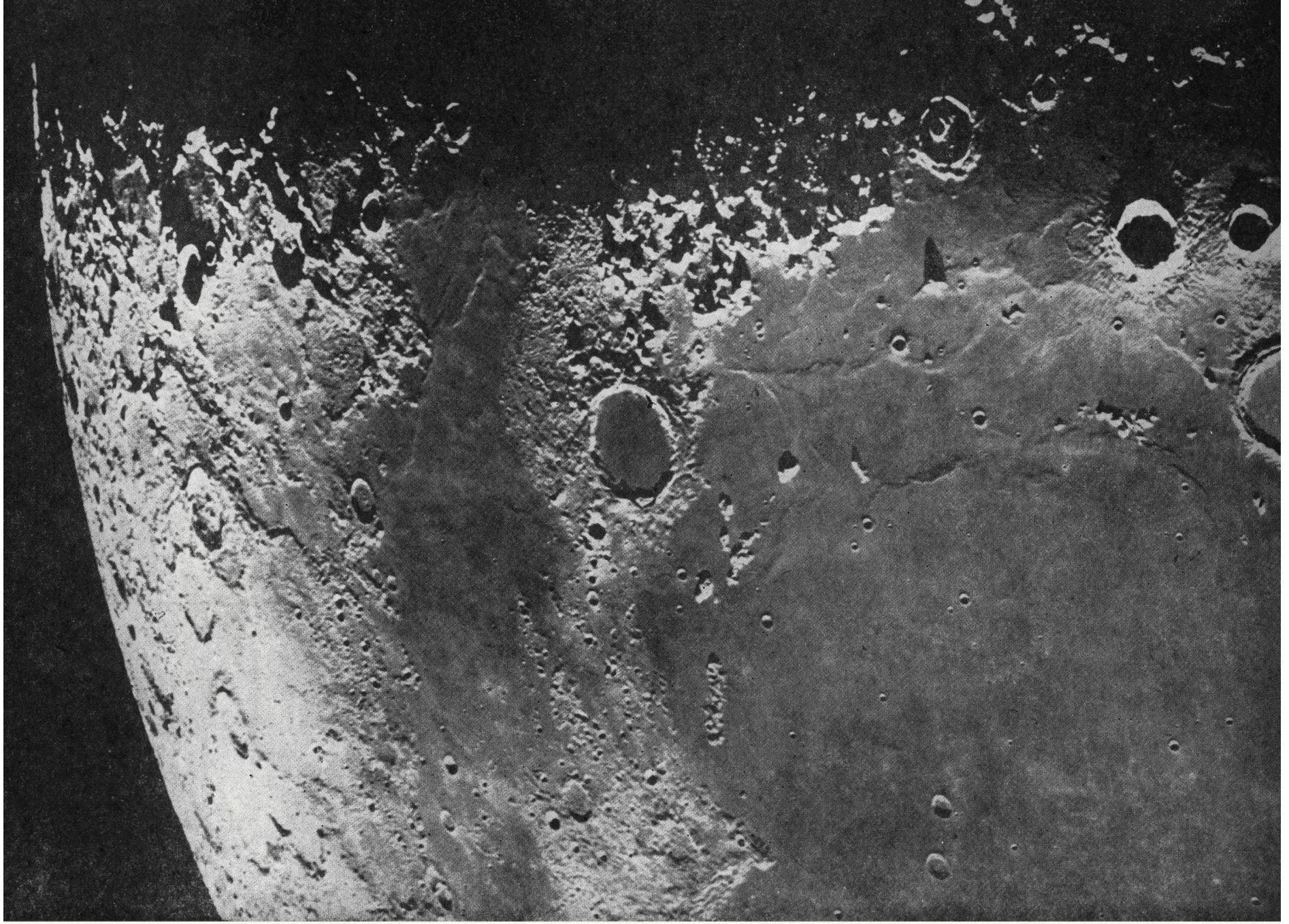
A mighty cheer went up from the spectators.

And Abilene, Kans., had a bright new hero.

It wasn't, however, to be the last cheers to go up for this blond young man.

Dwight D. Eisenhower went on to sort of make a career of putting aggressors in their place.

—Harold Helfer

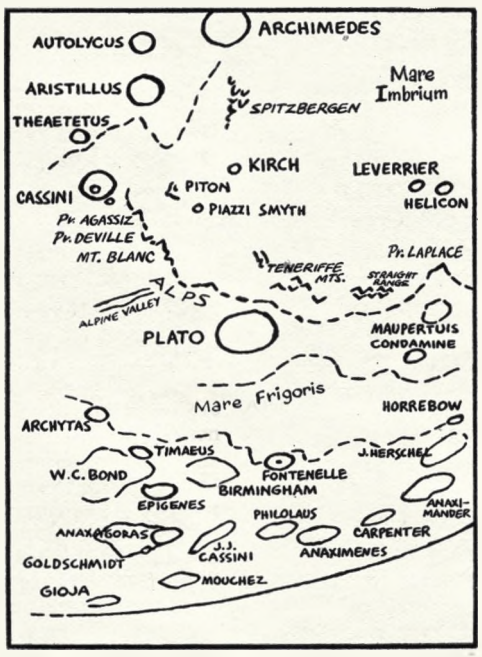


TOP SECRET

Why Astronomers Won't Talk About the Moon

Cities that grow, signal lights, explosions, and strange, geometric shadows—these and other fantastic matters unexplainable by known natural laws have now been sighted on the moon by reputable scientific observers. What's behind the top-echelon curtain of secrecy being drawn over these sensational discoveries?

BY JOSEPH MILLARD



Joseph Millard is a well-known contributor of historical and scientific articles to leading publications. The following hard-hitting article is, we feel, one of the most exciting and important pieces Bluebook *has ever published.*—THE EDITORS.

Back in our high-school days, we were taught a moderately full set of "facts" about the moon.

We were told that the moon is incapable of supporting life, is airless, cold, covered with the craters of extinct volcanoes, a globe of dead rock.

The information was all very definite and pat. Trouble is, those "facts" can no longer be accepted. Take a look at the current scoreboard:

1. Something *is* running around up there—shooting rockets, waving lights, moving mountains, and building cities, pyramids, cathedrals, walls, and tunnels.

2. If the moon has no air, it has a darned good substitute—something that supports clouds, refracts light, and rubs meteors to incandescence.

3. It looks cold, but some of it is warm.

4. Science knows now that the huge lunar craters couldn't be volcanoes—yet some of them erupt.

5. The moon isn't a globe, and if it's made of rock, it's the strangest rock any geologist ever heard of. As for being dead, it has something that grows and changes with the seasons.

6. That "cipher" affects everything in our lives. Aside from changing our existence with the tricks it plays on our love-life, it fouls up radio and time signals and — literally — shoves New York a measurable distance closer to London.

The really fascinating point is obviously the one about life on the moon. It's always titillated mankind. Back in 1835 the *New York Sun* managed to pull itself out of the red with The Great Moon Hoax, the bright idea of a loose-scrupled reporter named Richard Adams Locke.

The *Sun* published what it said was a report by the astronomer, Sir John Herschel, of the discovery of a race of of bat-winged apes on the moon. The story made monkeys out of the whole country for a month. Even the good gray *New York Times* broke down and congratulated the *Sun* on its scoop. Before the gag blew up, Locke had the nation wild.

Well, a number of discoveries have now been made about the moon that are actually considerably more startling than any race of bat-winged apes. This gradually accumulated pile of evidence doesn't yet offer airtight proof of the presence up there of an intelligent civilization. But it does give the no-life-at-all crowd some rough nights.

THE eeriest items of evidence are the curious formations of criss-cross lines and squares that bear a startling resemblance to long-range aerial photos of city blocks and streets. The astronomer Gruithuisen found the first one north of Schroeter (the craters are named for famous scientists) over 130 years ago, but the battle he started in scientific circles is still roaring.

Gruithuisen was branded a crackpot for calling his discovery a city, but none of the branders could offer any better explanation of the formation. Now others like it have been discovered. There are large ones in the craters Plato and Gassendi. And some of them are growing! Gruithuisen's city has added new blocks and lengthened several streets in the years it's been under observation.

There may be a lunar building boom on. Nininger has found what appears to be a glass-lined tunnel 20 miles long connecting the craters Messier and W. H. Pickering. If it wasn't built it may have been formed as he thinks, by a glancing meteorite.

In December, 1915, the crater Aristarchus unwrapped a Christmas surprise for observers in the form of a nice, new black wall that hadn't been seen before. It runs from the center to one rim.

In 1922 the lunar mound-builders cut loose. Three long artificial-looking mounds showed up on the floor of Archimedes. Presently three more were discovered not far away, set in the form of a triangle and connected by low walls or earthworks. Then the French journal, *L'Astronomie,* reported both a long curving wall and a straight one with arches that bore a startling resemblance to a viaduct.

New puzzlers are discovered each year. Many are obviously newly formed, but nobody wants to suggest how.

Selenographers — the fellows who chart and analyze the physical geography of the moon—have for generations been sketching and photographing and quarreling over a thingumajig near a crater known as Birt. This object is long and spooky and shaped like a sword or a cathedral.

A few years ago a group of bright white spots appeared on the floor of Littrow, arranged in the form of a Greek letter *Gamma.* Then the crater Eratosthenes produced something resembling a gigantic construction in the shape of a letter X. In Plinius is a figure so baffling that nobody can make anything out of it.

And yet, despite the existence of these and other enormously intriguing enigmas observed on the moon, professional astronomers for mysterious reasons have of late rung down a Silver Curtain on lunar goings-on. *Monthly Notices,* the journal of the Royal Astronomical Society, hasn't listed the moon in its index of subjects in the last 10 years. Most of the other long-hair magazines in the field have clammed up in the same way.

Modern astronomical texts come right out and tell you that practically all lunar study is being done these days by amateurs. The professionals, it seems, are all too busy peering into Einstein's curved universe on the offchance they'll get a glimpse of the backs of their own necks. The moon, old boy, is too common.

When the great 200-inch telescope was being erected at Palomar, a wild story spread that astronomers had merely to turn the giant on the moon and immediately see the answers to a thousand mysteries. Unhappily, nothing was further from the truth.

The Big Eye magnifies the moon, but it also magnifies all the little atmospheric disturbances too small to bother lesser instruments. On the stars and planets, this factor is of negligible importance. On so detailed an image as the moon, it produces chaos. Astronomers estimate that perhaps one night in a year would conditions be perfect for lunar observation, and nobody wants to tie up astronomy's mightiest tool on such a hope.

You don't just swing a 200-inch mirror around when someone yells, "Look at the moon—quick!" Hours of intricate adjustments are necessary for what may be only a fleeting glimpse. The camera is still inferior to the human eye for lunar study, so selenography is still carried on largely by cheap little six-inch and 10-inch telescopes, often home made.

For around $10 or less, anyone can buy all the parts for a reflector telescope and get into the game. Major discoveries have been made by amateurs through ordinary binoculars, and even with the patient naked eye.

Another big reason the professionals have practically abandoned the lunar field to the amateurs is one that the pros don't talk about: Outer space is a blamed sight safer for guessing. Astronomers will glibly rattle off the size, weight, mass, temperature and physical content of a dwarf star a billion light years away. But they can't tell you a one of those facts for sure about the moon.

THE moon seems to take a malicious pleasure in making asses out of scientists.

There was to be a total eclipse of the moon on the night of March 19, 1848, and astronomers were at their posts. It was all routine. The earth's shadow was expected to nibble across the disc of the moon, darken it completely at totality, and then slide away. But something went hysterically haywire.

The moon suddenly turned blood red. Then, instead of getting dark it got brighter—three times its normal mean illumination, in fact. "As perfect with light as if there had been no eclipse whatever," reported the astronomer Walkey in complete bafflement.

They never did see the eclipse, nor decide what became of it. It's probably still wandering around in some cosmic Lost & Found department, along with another one that forgot to keep a date with Scott's Antarctic Expedition in 1903. "There may have been an eclipse that day," Scott reported later, "but you couldn't prove it by any of us."

On April 28, 1930, the moon was due to eclipse the sun. Exacting calculations showed that the band of the shadow would be half a mile wide. This time the eclipse came right on schedule . . . but the band of shadow was *five miles* wide.

On something close to a note of hysteria, Dr. Jeffers, staff astronomer at Lick Observatory, issued a statement that this did not necessarily prove the moon was much closer to the earth than it was supposed to be. There had to be some other reasonable explanation. Unhappily, he was unable to give that reasonable explanation.

Let's just say that in 1848, in 1903

and in 1930, the moon somehow managed to get everything abominably and inexplicably fouled up. . . .

Even the crude calculations of the ancient Greeks came surprisingly close to modern science in placing the moon at a mean distance of roughly 235,000 miles from the earth. Until quite recently, astronomers could show by intricate measurements that the moon was gradually drawing closer to earth.

Now astronomers can show by intricate measurements that the moon is gradually drawing away from the earth.

When an astronomer gets mad he doesn't say "damn" like an ordinary mortal. He says "moon." That's the nastiest word in his vocabulary.

It is ridiculous and embarrassing to him to have that great big beautiful orb hanging right over his back yard and not be able to explain how it got there or what it is made of. Was it torn from a fluid earth by centrifugal force during the formative days of our universe? Or did it wander in from outer space, looking for an easy pickup, and get trapped by earth's gravity field?

The astronomer can take his choice, because with happy impartiality, the moon will offer as much support to one theory as to the other.

They used to say the moon was a hunk of solid rock. Then they said it was rock, but overlaid with pumice or lava or meteoric dust. Then they said the hell with it, and went back to Aldebaran and Betelgeuse. The way they've been treated, you can hardly blame them.

Take what happened to Dr. Nininger, the leading authority on meteors and one of the few astronomers besides Dr. Lincoln La Paz and Walter Haas of Ohio State University, who will come right out and admit they still look at the moon.

By Nininger's calculation, some 70,000 meteors should fly at Luna every hour. With no deep blanket of atmosphere like ours to burn them up, the majority must smack into the surface at speeds of 40 to 70 miles per second. So by simple logic, the surface of the moon should be blasted and churned and pulverized to a depth of many feet.

Haas figured a meteorite of 10 pounds would make a blast big enough to show in a telescope. In 1941 he organized a team of observers to watch for such flashes, with excellent results. The night of July 10, 1941, Haas himself saw two within the space of five minutes. In a total of 170 hours of observation, the group also saw 12 fireballs or meteors flash across the dark disc of the moon.

Army Ordnance muscled into the act. After a period probably spent hurling GI meatballs at a sergeant's heart, they announced that even a very tiny solid object meeting another solid object at speeds of only four to five miles per second would explode like a cannon shell. A 10-pound meteorite smacking the moon at 70 miles per second should produce practically a lunar Bikini, and the dust to go with it.

Every evidence stood firm behind Nininger's theory of a chewed-up lunar. surface. Even astronomers, who will usually bicker about anything, found little quarrel with his viewpoint.

So in 1946 both the U. S. Signal Corps and Z. Bay of Hungary started independently to take the first radar soundings of the moon. They found that the average depth of dust on the lunar surface was one millimeter—or about 1/25th of an inch!

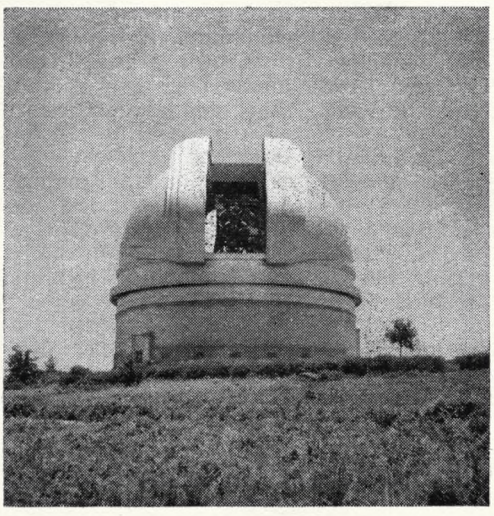
But that's only one whirl of a merry-go-round that had astronomy walking loop-legged and looking cross-eyed. Hang onto your hats while we go around again.

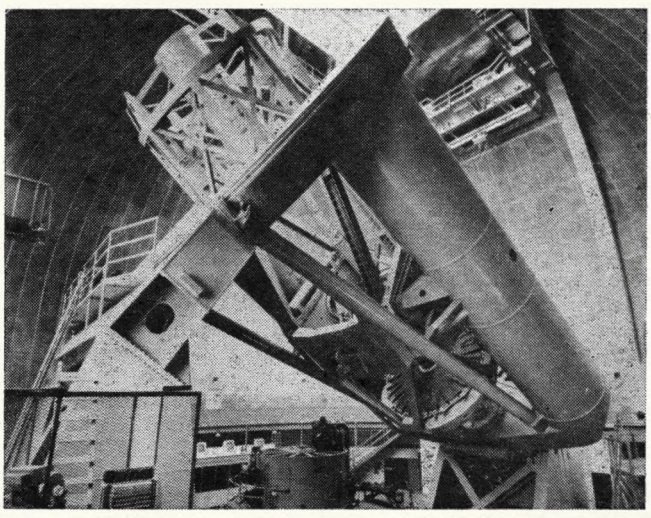
Another group turned the new science of analysis by polarization toward the moon, read their instruments and said, "Volcanic dust, and no mistake about it."

Then they took a gander out into space and got exactly the same reading from the planet Mercury and from Vesta, an asteroid so tiny it couldn't hold dust unless it was dipped in glue. They were still dizzy from that when a new radar survey showed that if that stuff was dust, it was thumbing its nose at the law of gravity. The soundings showed that same "dust" clinging to the same depth on the faces of cliffs that ran straight up and down.

That maniac moon even steals radar beams. Astronomers will be squirting electrons up at it and bouncing them back as nice as anybody could want. Then suddenly all they get back is a large chunk of nothing. Everything seems to be in working order but the laws of physics. The foul-up may last seconds or days, but nobody has yet figured out just where little Sir Echo goes when he plays hooky.

But that's no worse than the atmosphere hassle. Any half-pants mathematician can prove that it is scientifically impossible for the moon to have atmosphere. Lunar gravity, one-sixth that of earth, is too weak to hold fast-moving molecules of atmospheric gases, even at ordinary temperatures. With daytime readings of 212° Fahrenheit, it is obvious that all





The Mt. Palomar observatory. It's not as simple as it might seem for this giant eye to probe the mysteries of the moon.

the little molecules have long since galloped away into space.

They could prove it, too. Atmosphere produces clouds and nobody had ever seen a cloud on the moon.

Nor did the moon refract stars. Atmosphere refracts, or bends, light rays as water does, only much less. When a body with atmosphere occults, or passes in front of, a star, this refraction makes the star's image jump out of place at the last moment. When they saw no jump, astronomers said, "Look, Ma, no atmosphere."

They expended so much hot air proving it that some must have floated to the moon and stuck there, because reports of star refraction began to come in. Now sometimes they see none, and sometimes a star image jumps like a goosed moose. It's confusing, to say the least.

CLOUDS? Now observers see them in white, gray and red. Some are so dense they cast visible shadows. On occasion the crater Plato, near the lunar north pole, is clouded over much of its 3,000 square miles, while a whitening like frost or snow has been noted on crater rims near the poles.

The fireballs seen by the Haas group and others could only have glowed from being rubbed to incandescence by friction with some kind of atmosphere. Yet a few scientists still insist the moon has none!

But for a real head-spin, pull up an aspirin and try lunar geography—or selenography, as they call it after Selene, Greek goddess of the moon. Selenography has started more fights than a Russian peace move.

You can see how dizzy selenographers get if you'll note that most lunar maps and photos are printed upside-down, with north at the bottom and east to the left. This is because a telescope inverts the image, and that's how they see it.

Some 600 or 700 lunar features have been given names. The *Maria*, or seas (which aren't seas at all), have fancy Latin names like Mare Serenitatis or Mare Nubium. They get much more vitriolic names during the endless argument over whether or not they're ancient lava beds.

The mountains are named for terrestrial ranges like the Alps and Apennines, but there the resemblance ends. They are incredibly wild and rugged, with peaks towering up to five or six miles. Some glisten as if coated with ice, which would be a neat trick at 212° F.

The Liebnitz Range at the south pole is so high its peaks stand in sunlight even when the rest of the moon is dark, earning them the romantic title, "The Mountains of Eternal Light." If they'd shed some light on how lunar mountains were formed, astronomers would be more inclined to rhapsodize. There's proof they weren't created by any of the forces that formed mountains on earth.

Lunar craters are as bad. Selenographers have been squabbling for a hundred years over their origin. As you can see in photos, the moon is peppered with craters. Over 300,000 have been counted, ranging in size from babies a quarter-mile across, to the giant Bailly with a diameter of 180 miles. There may be chumpteen thousand more too small for telescopes to spot.

Originally they were accepted as dead volcanoes and everybody was happy. But there always has to be a wise guy in the crowd. Somebody proved volcanoes 180 miles across couldn't erupt like that. Somebody else found the crater floors were not level, as they would be if they were solidified lava. And what about craters with mountain peaks standing up in them?

The result was a Donnybrook that will probably be raging a hundred years from now with nothing settled. Professor Pickering thought they were caused by earth's tidal pull. Some stuck to volcanoes. Others saw them as meteor scars, or exploded gas bubbles. It's a grand fight, Mom—but as usual, nobody's winning.

Currently the meteorite school is ahead by a nose, thanks to such boosts as Haas' impact-flashes, the Army Ordnance findings on exploding objects, and others. But until they can dig up answers to such skull-busters as Nininger's missing dust, and the peaks inside craters, they won't cash any tickets at the pari-mutuel window.

ONE of the moon's most baffling mysteries concerns the rays. You can see them in the photo, streaming out like huge splashes from many craters. They all have a silver luster, but those from Kepler and Aristarchus are the brightest. The rays from Tycho are up to 10 miles wide and 1,000 miles long.

But what are they? They don't cast shadows, so they must be level with the landscape, yet they cross chasms and mountains and even other rays without deviating a hair. They drive astronomers nuts. There's nothing down here remotely like them.

The theory now is that they really are splashes from a metallic meteorite that liquified on impact and shot molten metal out with such force that it sliced right through landscape features. It's nice-sounding, until you try to visualize a meteorite with enough metal to splash 1,000 miles in all directions.

The theory is as full of holes as a bachelor's socks. But it's not only the best theory we have. It's the only one.

Then there are the rills. They are deep clefts, some a half-mile wide, running hundreds of miles across the lunar face exactly the way rays do but without the silver filling. Nobody can explain them, nor can anyone explain the strings of small craters that overlap or are connected by rills, and run in straight lines.

AND there are deserts that aren't deserts, and great round domes unlike anything on earth. The largest is in the crater Darwin, near the southeast edge of the moon. There's a whole cluster of domes east of Copernicus, toward Mare Vaporum.

But at least these features have the decency to stay put. That's more than you can say for some of the weirdies on the moon.

Such as Linne.

This Linne is, or was, a crater that stands, or stood, all by itself and prominent on the vast flat Mare Serenitatis. Until some 80-odd years ago it was a black crater and reasonably well-behaved as lunar craters go.

Then one night Schmidt, of Athens, caught Linne changing from a black cone to a white pyramid edged with black. Then it just went away. A few nights later that whole area was as empty as a politician's promise. Next, while astronomers were blowing their corks right and left, Linne calmly reappeared in the same place.

That crazy mixed-up crater went on playing hide-and-seek. Once it stayed missing so long they left it off the lunar maps, so Linne popped back just to make the new maps wrong. Once, at the end of an eclipse, it blazed out like a lighthouse. One night, when that area was in darkness, a white spot was seen slowly climbing up its slope.

As this is written, Linne has turned into a large gray spot that changes shape and size. Heaven only knows what it will be by the time you read this. . . .

Early in the last century the astronomer Schroeter was studying the moon's wobble by the advance and retreat of the sunlit rim. For a reference point from which to measure, he chose the 23-mile crater Alhazen in Mare Crisium because it was near the northeast edge and stood out prominently as a bright gray object. It worked out fine for his purpose.

Recently H. P. Wilkins of the Royal Astronomical Society was hard at work on his magnificent eight-foot detail map of the lunar surface. He started to include Alhazen and almost swallowed his bubblegum. Alhazen wasn't there any more. A 23-mile

crater had simply vanished like last week's paycheck.

Wilkins is a resourceful, no-nonsense sort of chap. Alhazen, he said, was still there. The bloody thing had simply changed color until it camouflaged itself by blending into its surroundings. But he didn't get around to explaining how Alhazen manages also to camouflage the long black shadow its rim should throw.

Then there is Hyginus N, which is the cause of more chewed fingernails than a Marilyn Monroe calendar.

It started back in May, 1877, when Dr. Klein suddenly saw a large and conspicuous object in the crater Hyginus. Nobody could identify it, but nobody could miss it, either. It was given the name Hyginus N and carefully watched. A month later it was the most outstanding feature in a wide area. Two nights later it was gone.

A year passed and suddenly there was Hyginus N again, even bigger and bolder. It went, it came, it went again. It hasn't shown up lately, but that's been no comfort. Instead, a big black gash has suddenly appeared in Hyginus where there was none before.

When observers get tired of watching that, they can swing their telescopes a few miles north of Hyginus and swear at a beautiful *spiral* mountain that could only have been formed by a berserk tapeworm.

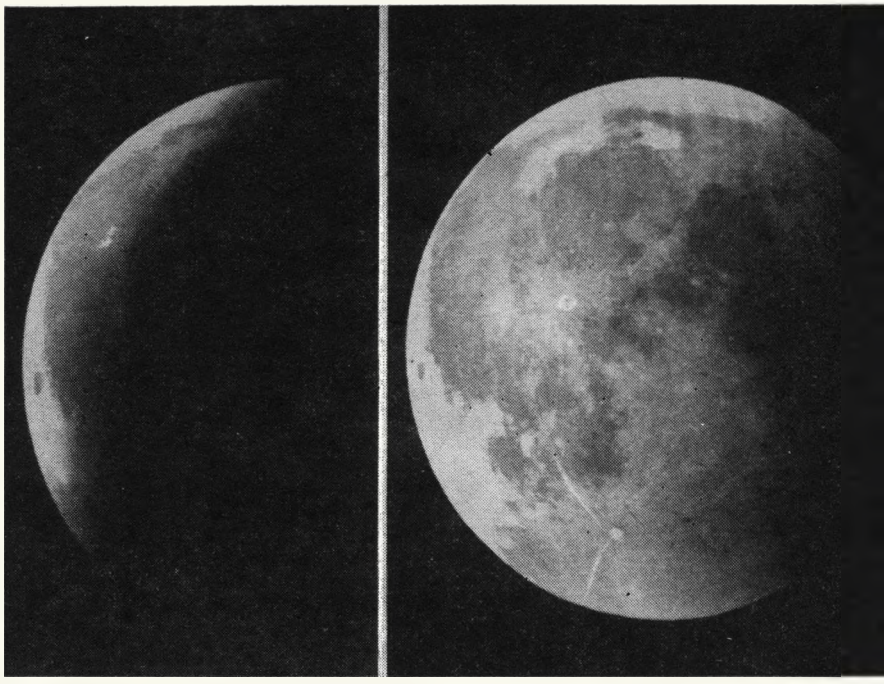
But a new show is about to begin. At the moment, Proclus is busy changing from dusky gray to pure white, with brilliant streaks. It, too, may be getting ready to do a vanishing act.

Then there is a whole catalog of crazy spots on the moon that grow and shrink and change color. Some selenographers think they may be patches of vegetation.

You can see some for yourself with nothing more than good binoculars. Find Eratosthenes, the huge crater on the south shore of Mare Imbrium, and look inside. You will see several large spots that change size and shape from one night to the next.

There is one near the center of Ptolemy. Spots in Plato, Aristarchus, Schickard, Hyginus and some others go through a regular schedule of changes. With the naked eye you can see a large dark patch east of Aristarchus. Photographed by blue, infrared or ultraviolet light, it shows up as a vast Black Desert. Photographed by yellow light it disappears completely.

Walter Haas thinks the patches are not vegetation but spots of radioactivity caused by a direct bombardment of unshielded force from the sun. During the eclipse of August 26, 1942, he set a team of observers to watching for a possible change in the patches when the earth cut off the sun's rays.



Stages of the total eclipse of the moon on January 29, 1953. This one went according to astronomical predictions. Not so the strange, unexplainable ones of 1848, 1903 and 1930.

He got results, and proved himself a smart cookie indeed, but some of the results strain even a theory of radioactivity.

During the eclipse two dark patches popped up in Atlas and remained for four hours afterward. A cloud in Conon got smaller and good old Linne seemed to get smaller and brighter. Patches in Firmicus and Webb got darker, but in Grimaldi one darkened and one got lighter. A dark spot in Pico became darker and then vanished completely for an hour. Changes in the crater Ricciolo lasted three and a half hours.

Aristarchus waited for the eclipse of 1949 to put on a solo act of moving spots and glowing light and all sorts of crazy antics.

The radioactivity pitch has its points. It might even take some of the rap for earth shine. Astronomers always figured the faint glow that sometimes lights the dark spots of the moon was due to sunlight reflected back from earth. Some of them took it pretty hard when they found the same glow clear out on Venus.

Surface temperature of the moon during the darkness has been measured at 250° below zero. But during the eclipse of October 6, 1949, Haas turned a thermocouple on the craters and found that some of the patches in Eratosthenes and Grimaldi were a good bit warmer than the surrounding surface. Some were dark spots, others light. Haas said *radioactivity;* rivals yelled *volcanoes.*

Dicke and Beringer had been doing some temperature-taking by radio and they weren't happy. Their radio readings didn't at all agree with the standard infra-red thermocouple readings. They agree perfectly anywhere else in the universe. But the moment the moon gets into the act, so does chaos. Now nobody knows whether the blasted thing is hotter or colder or why.

Things that might seem farfetched in a science-fantasy magazine actually happen up there. Take the Year of the Ink. Spots like a sprinkle of ink appeared in Plinius and Copernicus on the same night. A few weeks later a huge object as black as ink perched itself on a rampart of Gassendi, above one of the city formations, stayed for a few nights and then vanished. Presently another ink spot appeared in Plinius, this one surrounded by a border of dazzling white.

Or the shadows. We have been brought up to think there is some kind of scientific law that says you can't have a shadow unless you have something that casts a shadow. They seem to have different laws on the moon.

In October, 1916, a weird, red-tinted shadow was seen to sweep across Plato, and similar red shadows have hovered in Hercules and Gassendi. Two British astronomers on an expedition in New Zealand looked up at the moon and saw "a large part of

it covered with a dark shade, quite as dark as the shadow of the earth during an eclipse of the moon. One could hardly resist the conviction that it was a shadow, yet it could not be the shadow of any known body."

ON another shattering occasion, two intensely bright triangles appeared on the moon's lower limb. They vanished, and three minutes later two vast black triangles, obscuring almost a fourth of the lunar surface, appeared like notches on the limb. These crept slowly toward one another, met, and vanished. Shadows? Shadows of *what?*

A badly shaken man was astronomer Dr. F. B. Harris who looked at the moon on the night of January 27, 1912, and wished he hadn't. He saw what he reported as an "intensely black object" whose size he estimated at 50 by 250 miles. "The object," he wrote, "resembled a crow poised, as near as anything."

On two occasions Professor John Haywood has seen the whole dark disc of the moon glowing with a weird, misty light that bears no resemblance to the familiar earth shine. Reverend Rankin and Professor Chevalier, respected astronomers, saw it swirling with a dizzy kaleidoscope of lights and shadows.

Almost 200 years ago Sir John Herschel reported a dozen or more very bright lights on the moon during eclipses. He thought they were active volcanoes, but he was sorely puzzled by some that appeared to be above the moon. In his day such observations were not considered naughty. Nobody asked him what he was drinking these days, or did he sniff it or smoke it? In fact, a few bold spirits even went so far as to look up and see the lights for themselves. There's a lot to be said for the Good Old Days.

Until the drink-your-beer-and-shut-up school took over astronomy there were enough lunar lights reported to fill a theater marquee. And, like the observations of spots and shadows, a good proportion of them came straight from that same Royal Society who today wouldn't even say "moon" in mixed company.

A bright light in Aristarchus and one at the eastern base of the lunar Alps have been seen frequently for more than 100 years. One of Gruithuisen's winking lights shows up occasionally. Others seem to have fallen victims to lunar bulb-snatchers.

One 4th of July the whole plain of Mare Crisium celebrated with a spectacle of dots and streaks of light. Messier has blazed up with two bright lines separated by a very dark band dotted with luminous points. Eudoxus and Aristarchus have displayed long lines of light "like luminous cable or shining wall." Moving lights have been frequently seen.

The lunar lighting industry seems to hold some pretty lively conventions in Plato. Strings of moving lights have been watched there, and one night a triangle of light blazed on the floor for a while.

But the Big Show in the crater Plato opened in 1869 and played to packed houses for almost three years. At that time 30 bright lights broke out on the crater floor all at once and went into a dizzy routine. They rapidly sorted themselves into groups. Some groups would blaze up simultaneously, at the same moment other groups faded to a dull glow. This continued in a symphony of lights, as if they were all being manipulated from a master keyboard.

It was so sensational that the Royal Society instituted a group observation. Until April, 1871, when the display died out, the group recorded 1,600 observations and drew 37 graphs of the light fluctuations in hopes of establishing some sort of pattern.

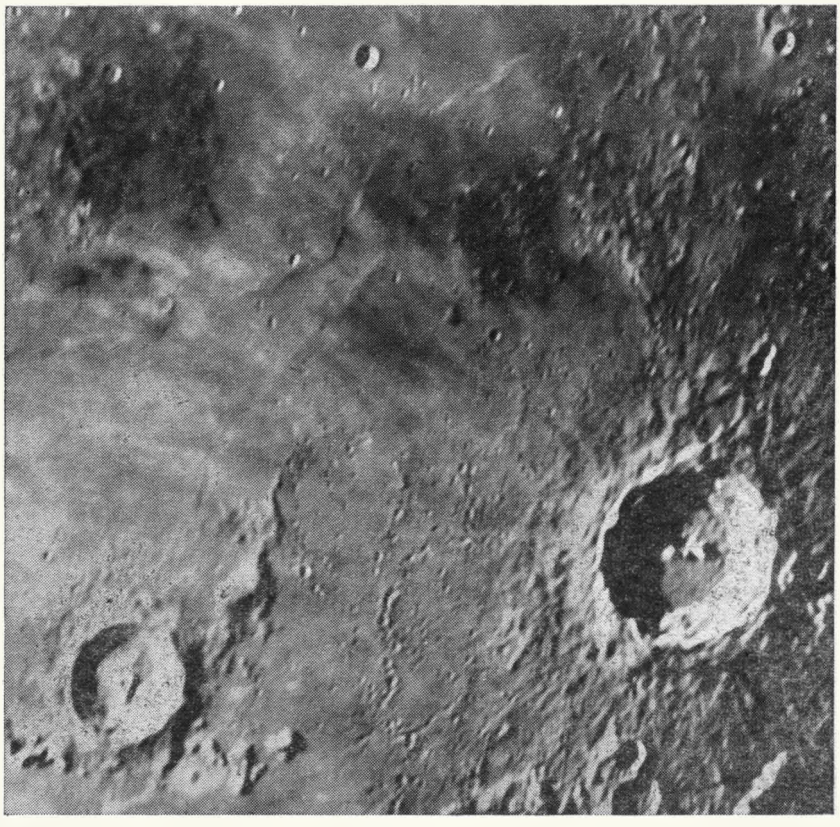
There was open talk then that this inexplicable phenomenon represented an intelligent attempt to signal the earth. The bulky mass of observations is now gathering dust in the Royal Society files, along with the spirit that inspired it.

Shafts and horns of lights projecting from the moon's rim are often seen during eclipses, as are squadrons of bright and dark bodies that seem to maneuver in the lunar sky. During the eclipse of November 16, 1910, a bright light shone on the moon and observatories at two widely-separated points saw a ball of light shoot out from the disc.

Not much of this sort of brain-cracking stuff slips out these days. You'd almost think the moon had turned respectable and promised to obey the laws.

But there are hints from behind the Silver Curtain that Luna's slip is showing. Walter Haas says he knows of cases where a noted astronomer has seen things on the moon and flatly refused to either report them or discuss them.

C. Stanley Ogilvy of Trinity College has reluctantly admitted that lights have been seen around the moon, but he feels the usual astronomical compulsion to minimize them. Most probably, he says, what observ-



Closeup of the moon. The huge crater at the right is Copernicus—which may or may not be an extinct volcano. This photograph was made in December 1952 with the 200-inch Mt. Palomar telescope on one of the rare occasions when conditions were favorable for such a shot.

ers saw were tiny uncharted asteroids passing in front of the moon.

Brother, if there are that many asteroids gamboling around between us and the moon, you can book my order for a deep bomb shelter right now. On the other hand, if there are asteroids cute enough to follow the moon night after night in the same relative position, a bomb shelter won't be of any help.

LATELY Mount Piton, in the northeast section of Mare Imbrium, has taken to lighting up like a love-sick firefly on occasion, and even sending out beacon-like beams of light. A moon group may be preparing for the landing of the first rocket ship from earth. "Follow the beam in to Runway Seven, boys, and don't hover too long over the Lunar Nudist Convention in Cassini."

Curiously, the astronomers who won't look at this side of the moon any more are chewing their fingernails to the elbows for a peek at what's on the other side. The rate of the moon's revolution and rotation keeps one face turned forever toward us. About 41 percent will remain a deep, dark mystery until we can send an instrument-carrying rocket around behind. That day is closer than you may think.

The moon isn't content to just hang in the sky and insult astronomers. It also reaches down to exert a staggering amount of influence over earth and the people on it. Some of the discoveries in that direction are so staggering that any day now the same security lid might be clamped on those reports.

We've known for centuries how the pull of the moon causes ocean tides. Because tides are vital to seamen, fishermen, and blondes on Miami Beach, their rise and fall has been calculated up to the last inch and last second.

But when the moon gets going, things have a nasty habit of coming uncalculated. A year or so ago in Tampa, Florida, it was discovered that the government tide tables for the Gulf Coast had gone completely haywire and have to be refigured. You just can't trust the moon.

The drag of tides is slowing earth's rotation by an infinitesimal amount, but that's nothing to what earth's greater gravity has done to the moon. We've pulled the side of the moon toward us out into a bulge 2,100 feet high. Maybe the lunar shenanigans are the moon's way of getting even.

This bulge is much greater than it ought to be. Astronomy chewed up a few gross of pencils and finally decided the only answer is that once upon a time the moon was only 70,000 miles away from the earth. This statistic is of enormous importance to practically nobody.

A lot more important was the discovery that the whole crust of earth is pulled by lunar tides. For years nobody could figure out how the moon could bollix up the time signals between Greenwich and Washington. Now they have found that the high-tide bulge in the earth's crust actually pulls the two cities 63 feet closer together.

Professor Harlan T. Stetson of the Cosmic Terrestrial Research Laboratories of M.I.T. has accumulated volumes of evidence to show a relationship between the position of the moon and the incidence of earthquakes. He is making a similar study for volcanoes and working on a theory that the moon reflects rays of invisible force from the sun to cause weird and inexplicable effects on earth.

For some unknown reason, the moon raises the devil with shortwave radio. Three to four days after each full moon and each new moon, the shortwave band shrinks by an average of 1.7 megacycles. Over Peru, for a puzzler, the band-shrink is more than 2 megacycles.

Astronomy's pet hate of all hates is astrology and the belief that any heavenly body outside of Hollywood can influence human lives. They really blew a fuse a few years back when California almost passed Assembly Bill No. 1793, which would not only have legalized astrology but set up a licensing system, a state board of examiners, and a compulsory five-year college course. For once, all astronomers united to slap down a common enemy but good.

Imagine how they love the moon, then, for handing astrologers the first sound scientific support they ever had.

Man has always blamed the moon for the messes he got himself into. The word *lunatic* comes from Luna. Planting and harvesting had to be done by moon phases. So did murders and conceptions. Back in the 18th Century, England legalized the full moon as an excuse for violence, and the day may not be far off when we'll have to take some similar step.

Duke University's and other research bodies have piled up a mountain of evidence to show that crime, violence, and emotional upsets rise sharply during the full moon. Police departments of many large cities have an automatic stand-by order to reserves during that period. The records of insane asylums and the larger police departments show a definite relationship between trouble and the full moon.

Morea Iridoides, a South African Iris, opens its first bloom on the first day of the moon's first quarter. That blossom drops the day before full moon and a new one opens with full moon. No amount of scientific trickery can fool *Morea* into jumping the gun.

The sea worm *Eunice Viridis* spawns only during the full moon, as do the Hawaiian *Palolo* and the California grunion.

Contrary to Tin Pan Alley, it isn't done with moonlight either. The same effects go on in total darkness in a laboratory, or when the moon is densely clouded over. Moonlight has only 1/300,000th the intensity of sunlight. This is something a whale of a lot stronger.

Professor Harold S. Burr of the Yale School of Medicine hooked electrodes into a maple tree and measured the potential of the electrical force that is generated by all living things. He reported a "tremendous and very sharp rise" in electric potential at every full moon.

Down at Duke University, Dr. Leonard J. Ravits carried the experiment one step further. He hooked his electrode onto a group of students of various ages and sexes and began taking daily readings of their electrical potential. From the first whirl of the moon, he saw that the worms and the maple tree had something. With every full moon there was a clear and definite change in life force from every student.

BUT naturally, the moon couldn't make it that easy. For a majority, the life potential rose sharply at both full moon and new moon. But for others, it dropped just as sharply, and for no apparent reason. External influences like temperatures and humidity and emotional problems have been eliminated. But whichever the moon does, it seems to do everybody one way or the other. Next time your wife finds a blonde's phone number in your pocket, just point to the calendar and explain how you're not responsible because the moon was full. If it works, let us know.

If all this arouses your curiosity and you decide to spend some time snooping at the moon yourself, just be careful. Astronomers may have a good reason for their attitude. Richard Burton, famous as translator of *The Arabian Nights*, and a respected scientific observer, reported several cases of natives in Africa driven mad by the light of the full moon. One of his bearers had his skin completely bleached on one side by sleeping in the bright moonlight.

You can laugh if you want to, but where the moon is concerned, don't take anything for granted, no matter how screwy it may sound.

Some exceedingly strange things are happening up there. •

The Inspector

By EDWARD S. SULLIVAN

They say you can tell a cop a mile away; he has that certain look about him. Joe Kelly had it, and made it pay off—though he'd never been near the police force.

A Short-Short Story
Complete on these Two Pages

I understand things are supposed to be different now, but in those days police reporters were traditionally broke, and this Saturday night was no exception.

I was desperate. I was due to meet Molly when I got off work at midnight. For weeks I'd been promising to take her to Skid Mahoney's after-hours joint, and we'd made it definite for this night.

It wasn't that the visit to the little upstairs dive was so important in itself; Molly was just curious to see the place where I spent so much of my spare time when she was asleep. The thing was, I couldn't admit to her that I'd lost my paycheck again in the press-room stud game.

It wouldn't do any good to tell her I'd learned my lesson this time. She'd make it clear that there was to be no next time. She meant it. This was the end of our pink-and-white dream about the little apartment on Telegraph Hill, the home-cooked meals, and all.

I couldn't raise a dime among the flinty hearted press-room crew. And there was no use trying to get Skid Mahoney to cooperate. He was a nice enough fellow, but we didn't always see eye-to-eye on matters of credit.

I left the Hall and walked down Kearny Street like a man walking the last mile.

It was then that the big idea hit me.

Joe Kelly was leaning against a lamp-post, talking to a detective. Joe was an old-time hanger-on around the Hall, a minor political fixer, bail-bond runner, and what-not. He'd do anything for a drink. A good guy, for all that. He'd give it to you if he had it. Only he never had it. He was always as broke as I, or worse.

Looking at them, I noted with amusement that Joe Kelly looked more like a cop than the detective himself. I guess it was his years around cops. He weighed about two-fifty, mostly fat. His hat was pulled low over a broad impassive red face. The bay-window was in the authentic tradition. The huge high-topped black gunboats on his feet were made for pounding pavements. Everything about him screamed copper a mile away.

My thoughts swung back to my own troubles as I passed them with a nod. I thought of Skid Mahoney's place, of Skid and the money he took in, of his relations with the cops.

Then I did a double-take. I stopped with one foot off the curb. The whole thing came to me in a beautiful blinding flash.

I hurried back and disengaged Joe from his cop friend. I told him the spot I was in and explained the idea. He was all for it, when he saw it meant free drinks.

"All you have to do is keep your hat on, and let me do the talking," I said.

We had no trouble getting a police car to drive us. We used to call them the Blue and Gold Taxi Service in those days.

We picked up Molly. I introduced Joe as Inspector Kelly, an old pal whom I'd invited along to Mahoney's with us. He bowed gravely and made room for her.

Molly didn't know whether to be suspicious or impressed. I kept up a running patter so she didn't have time to ask any questons. But I knew when she leaned close to me that she was smelling my breath.

I could see Skid Mahoney peeking from behind the blinds as we pulled up in front of his place on Turk Street. I waved airily.

"Skid's suspicious of cops, you know," I explained to Molly. "He has to pay off a dozen of them, to run all night, and he never knows where he stands. But he'll let us in."

Skid Mahoney's perpetually harassed expression was even more so as he passed us in.

His smile was sickly as I introduced Inspector Kelly.

He grabbed my arm as the others walked up the stairs ahead of us.

"What do you mean," he hissed in my ear, "bringing a—"

"Take it easy, Skid," I reassured him. "Inspector Kelly's okay. He's an old friend of mine. He's a big shot in the department—he doesn't bother about little things like closing-hours. He's just out to have a good time."

Still a little dubious, Skid hurried ahead and showed us to a table. I didn't breathe easy till I was sure Joe was going to keep his hat on. Skid's Celtic intuition would have tipped him, if he'd taken it off. Skid had been around cops all his life, or rather they'd been around him.

THE place was pretty full, but Skid had no eyes for anyone but Kelly. He hovered around, smiling uncertainly, as the bartender came over and we ordered a round.

"This one's on me, Inspector," he hastened to make clear, as I'd known he would. "I think I'll have one with you." He sat down gingerly on the edge of a chair.

Joe Kelly sat back expansively and surveyed the crowd with his boiled-fish eyes. Automatically he felt in his vest-pocket for the cigar that usually wasn't there.

"Here, have one on me," Skid urged, producing a couple of ten-centers. Joe took them both.

Skid ordered another round.

"What detail are you on, Inspector?" he finally asked.

Joe look at him for the first time, smiled cryptically, and looked away.

"We don't talk about that," I explained. "You see, the Inspector just handles big stuff. You don't hear much about his work."

"I see. Undercover stuff, huh?"

"Yeah. Out-of-town gangsters, big dope rings, and so on."

One word led to another, and the drinks kept coming. While Joe Kelly sat placidly sipping and smoking, looking over the room and now and then voicing husky confirmation, I enlarged on the details of his career. It got better as I went along.

"Did you ever hear of the Spagnoli case?" I asked Skid. "No? Probably not. There are a lot of things that don't get into the papers, you know. That's the one where the inspector took on five Chicago killers, single-handed, in a rooming-house up the street here. Took their tommy-guns away. Remember, Inspector?"

"That's right," Joe husked.

I could see Skid was fascinated with his new friend. A couple of times, when he excused himself for a minute, I saw him pointing Joe out and whispering to the other customers.

Everything continued to be on the house.

It got to be about four o'clock, the customers were thinning out, and I was getting ready to suggest we break it up. Although Molly and Skid didn't notice any difference, I could tell that Joe had about reached his limit. He was practically boiled. He probably couldn't have spoken in more than a monosyllable if he'd wanted to.

It was then that the big redhead came in. He was alone. The bartender had let him in.

He didn't even look around. He rolled uncertainly up to the bar and took a firm grip on it. But one glimpse of his face had been enough. I'd seen him before, in the line-up.

The sudden silence at the table told me the others had recognized him too.

It was Red Scanlon, the bank-robber whose picture had been in all the papers for days. He'd celebrated his parole by sticking up three banks in a row. He'd wounded two cops.

The cops had turned the city upside down for him. At the latest reports, he was supposed to be on his way to Mexico.

But there he was, across the room from us, hanging onto the bar.

Molly's fingers were biting into my arm. Skid was breathing heavily. Joe sat gripping his glass, staring a little stupidly at the man at the bar.

"It's the redhead," Skid whispered.

For the first time, Joe's eyes watered. He looked at the three of us in turn, then back at me. I opened my mouth to speak, then shut it again.

Skid leaned over the table.

"You gonna take him, Inspector?"

Joe looked at me again. There was no expression on his face—just the look. Words stuck in my throat.

"Let's get out of here," Molly whispered.

But I didn't move. I was watching Joe. He was getting up. It was like a slow-motion nightmare. He had to lean on the table for a second, but he made it. As an afterthought, he picked up his drink, finished it, set the glass down. Then he started across the room.

I didn't know what to do. There wasn't anything I could do. I moved so that my body shielded Molly, and we sat gripping hands. Skid was leaning forward with his mouth open.

The other customers had recognized Red and moved away from him. They were all watching paralyzed. The bartender had squeezed himself into the far corner.

There wasn't a sound in the room but the measured squeak of Joe Kelly's big shoes.

HAVE you ever seen the death scene in *Carmen*—where the girl walks to her killer with slow, regular, ritual steps, while they play the Toreador song? That's what I was thinking of, as Joe crossed the room.

Red Scanlon was still gulping his drink and holding onto the bar.

Joe Kelly stopped a foot behind him.

"Hello, Red," he croaked.

The redhead swung around. He took in Joe's bulk, his hat, his flat feet, in a single wild glance.

They stood that way for seconds, both weaving a little.

Then Red broke. He dropped his glass and started to cry.

"Okay, you got me, copper, take me in and get it over with. I can't stand it any longer. Hunted like a rat —I haven't slept for days—"

We watched, fascinated, as he threw his arms around Joe's shoulders and dropped his head on Joe's chest, shaking with sobs.

"Jeez," Skid Mahoney breathed in religious awe. "The inspector didn't even pull his rod!"

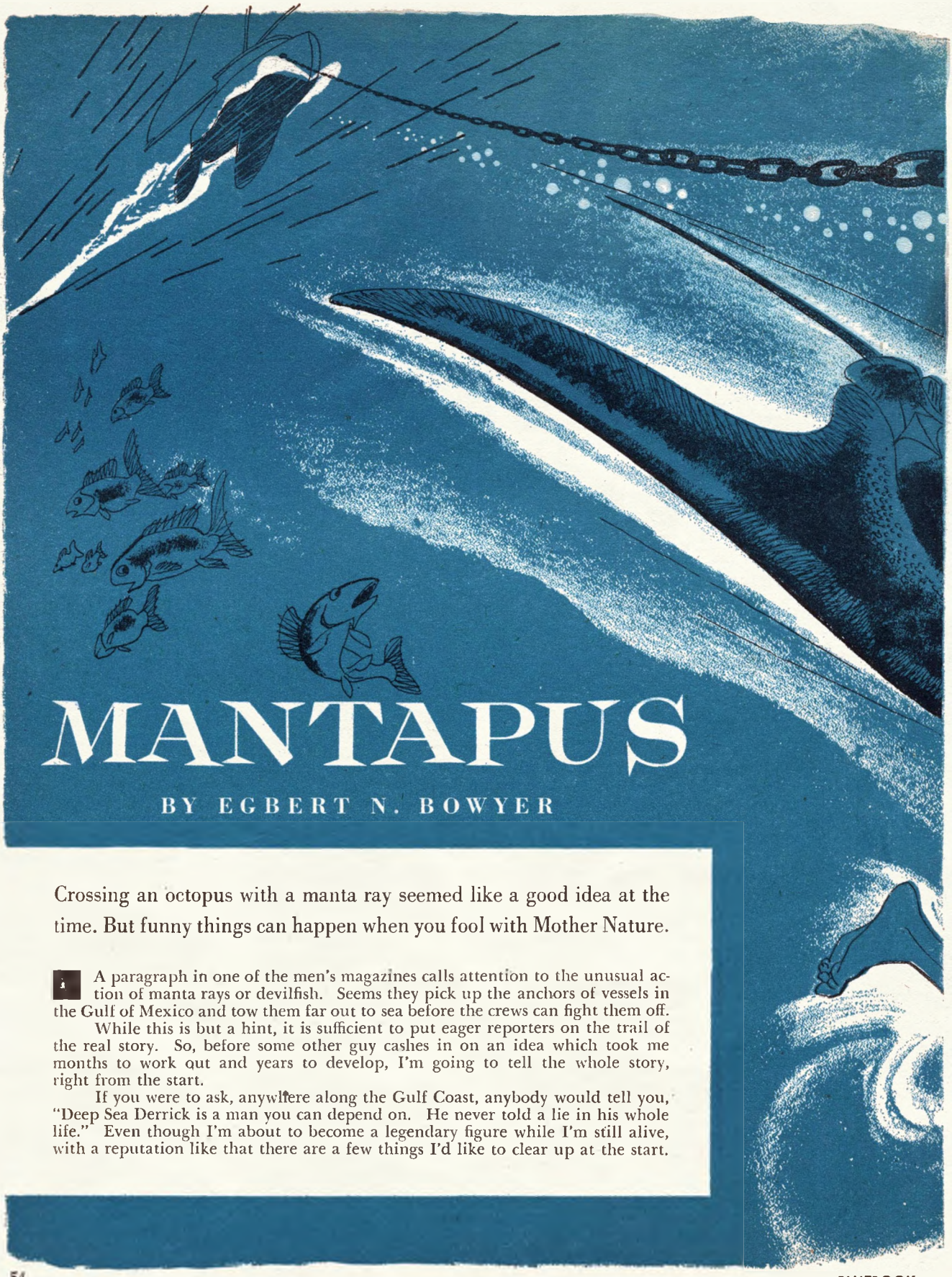
We left Molly there while we took Red to the Hall in a Blue and Gold.

When we'd turned him over to the booking sergeant, Joe Kelly fell flat on his face.

Later, Joe insisted on splitting the reward with me. He said it was all my idea, which was true in a way.

Skid was a little puzzled when the papers didn't identify Joe as a cop, but I reminded him that the inspector worked undercover.

Molly was a little annoyed when I told her the truth. But the reward money got us the pink-and-white dream, so it wasn't too bad. •



MANTAPUS

BY EGBERT N. BOWYER

Crossing an octopus with a manta ray seemed like a good idea at the time. But funny things can happen when you fool with Mother Nature.

A paragraph in one of the men's magazines calls attention to the unusual action of manta rays or devilfish. Seems they pick up the anchors of vessels in the Gulf of Mexico and tow them far out to sea before the crews can fight them off.

While this is but a hint, it is sufficient to put eager reporters on the trail of the real story. So, before some other guy cashes in on an idea which took me months to work out and years to develop, I'm going to tell the whole story, right from the start.

If you were to ask, anywhere along the Gulf Coast, anybody would tell you, "Deep Sea Derrick is a man you can depend on. He never told a lie in his whole life." Even though I'm about to become a legendary figure while I'm still alive, with a reputation like that there are a few things I'd like to clear up at the start.

It isn't true that my papa was Davy Jones and my mamma the Queen of the Mermaids. And it isn't true, either, that I have webbed hands and feet, and gills like a fish. That is just legend.

I'm just an ordinary guy, seven feet tall, weighing two hundred and ninety-five pounds, and a wee bit stronger than three or four other ordinary guys. It isn't true that I owe my strength to vitamin pills, a special diet, exercising with bar bells, or eating my Wheaties every morning for breakfast. I was just a normal child and grew up like everybody else.

The way some folks tell the legend, I was washed off my papa's side-wheeler, when it turned turtle in a hurricane between Mobile, Alabama, and Tampa, Florida, and was taken to raise by a mamma porpoise whose baby had been eaten up by a shark. The way others tell the legend, I was washed down the Mississippi River on a raft during a flood, and the raft got swamped out in the Gulf of Mexico and I was taken to raise by a porpoise. Other folks tell other variations of the legend but all of them have me being taken to raise by a porpoise before I had even cut my milk teeth.

The truth of the matter, I don't really know, myself. All I know for sure is that until I found out different, far as I know, I had always been a porpoise. Whether I was taken to raise as a tiny baby or a big baby or a little boy, I don't really know. From the time I begin remembering things, I was swimming and living with a school of porpoises, talking their talk, catching my own fish to eat, and having fun just like they did. Which probably explains why I can swim faster and stay under water longer than other ordinary men.

I might never have known I wasn't a porpoise if I hadn't been caught in a mullet net and dragged up onto the beach one night, when I was about ten years old. But I was.

Longshore Derrick owned the net and he knew, as soon as he saw me good in the moonlight, that I wasn't a porpoise. Right at first, he thought he had caught him a mermaid, my hair being kind of long. But my having legs instead of a tail, and the fact that mermaids are girls and I was a boy, soon put that notion out of his head.

So he tied a rope around my waist to keep me from flopping back into the water and, always having wanted a boy but never having had one, he decided to take me to raise if nobody else claimed me as their boy. Nobody else claiming me, he took me to raise, and put clothes on me, and fed me fish and grits regular and, after he had tamed me down some and taught me to walk and talk a little, sent me to school so I could learn things different from what I already knew.

Learning to talk words instead of just thinking thoughts like porpoises do was the hardest thing. But I caught on, after a while. And learning to stand up and walk where I wanted to go instead of swim there was the next hardest. But Longshore Derrick was patient and understanding, and he encouraged me to keep trying to be a boy instead of a porpoise. Far as I was concerned, I was satisfied being a porpoise. But he was so nice, I did it for him.

Before I was twelve, I was tame enough and wanting to be a boy instead of a porpoise enough that it was safe to let me get near the water again. So, when I wasn't in school, I was helping Longshore pull his mullet nets. And I had been named Deep Sea to distinguish me from Longshore. I kept helping him with his kind of fishing until I got to be about fifteen and was getting some of my growth and learning the practical side of fishing.

As soon as I found out they paid Longshore for his fish by the pound, it didn't take me long to figure out you could make an easier living bringing in the big ones. So I quit pulling a mullet net, which was work, and started swimming out into Tampa Bay and the Gulf and catching the big fish barehanded, which was fun.

When the Second World War started, and before we got into it, I was a senior in high school, having been promoted kind of fast because I was a natural born athlete and the high school needed me on its teams. By the time we got into the War, I had finished with school and was bringing in so many big fish Longshore was thinking about selling his mullet nets.

Wanting to do my bit, I volunteered for the Navy. At the recruiting station, I explained that I was just an ordinary guy but that I had an edge on other ordinary guys when it came to swimming. They said they'd like to have me but, me being seven feet tall and Navy regulations being what they were, they just couldn't take me.

It was the same story when I tried the Coast Guard, the Marines, the Army, and the Air Force. Even when they drafted me they wouldn't let me serve. It seems I was just a little bit too tall.

But, with a war going on and me wanting to be helpful, I got to thinking there was bound to be something I could do.

So what I finally struck upon as the best thing that I could do to help my country won't come as a surprise, let me back up a little, to a time when I was about fifteen. I was still a growing boy with a wee bit of deviltry in my make-up. I had two other things in my make-up, too. I wanted to be helpful to others, and I wanted others to be happy all the time, like I was.

Now Longshore Derrick had a daughter about four years older than I was. Her name was La Paloma and she kept house for us, her mother having died before Longshore caught me. La Paloma was as pretty as a spotted pig, as cuddly as a spaniel puppy, and as popular as pop corn at a drive-in theater. And while she could have married any one of a dozen guys, she wanted a guy that didn't seem to want to get married. To her or anybody else.

Harry was a nice guy but not the marrying kind. Great on courting La Paloma, but shyer than a baby octopus if matrimony was mentioned, even casual like. Harry was a mullet fisherman, like her papa, and La Paloma wanted him bad.

So I suggested to her to talk him into taking her sailing out in Tampa Bay and see what would happen. "Nothing like being alone on the water with a guy to make him feel romantic," I told her.

So they sailed out into the Bay and pretended to fish while doing what most courting couples do under such circumstances. I used to see them out there when I'd get lonesome for my sea-friends and swim out to pal around with them. But it looked to me like it was going to take more than a romantic setting to get Harry to pop the question.

My first idea not working out so well, I got the idea that if I could just get La Paloma and Harry into a compromising situation, then Harry would have to marry her and she'd be happy again like she used to be.

So, knowing their habit of sailing out into the Bay to do their courting, and knowing Longshore Derrick had a lot of old-fashioned ideas, I schemed me a scheme.

I talked it over with a big manta ray who hung out in Tampa Bay and asked him to cooperate, explaining to him how happy it would make La Paloma if Harry had to marry her. He told me he was willing, if I would just show him how. I explained to him that all I wanted him to do was mosey over to where their anchor lay hooked in the bottom, pick it up, tow them about forty miles out into the Gulf and, then, turn them loose. I explained, too, that their sailboat

Illustration by DENVER GILLEN

was only a sixteen footer, that it wouldn't be much of a load, and, the weather being good, nobody could get hurt.

From any angle, a manta ray is big, with a "wingspread" of about twenty feet, a length of about twelve, and a weight of about two tons or more. But they don't have arms to pick things up with, like octopi do. And manta rays have a little bitty mouth located way down underneath the middle of them, about where the bomb-bay is on a bomber. Some of my best friends are manta rays so I know all about them.

In case you have never seen one, up close, a manta ray looks like a flying-wing jet plane that had learned how to swim. Only, instead of being jet-propelled, like an octopus, a manta ray travels by waving his wings and seeming to fly through the water. And, at times, when they're playing tag or making love or just helling around, manta rays get up tremendous speed under the water and then fly right out into the air like a flying fish does. I have seen them get up to a height of ten or twelve feet above the water and fly two or three hundred feet before they splash back in again. And, when they splash back in, you don't want to be underneath them.

As I said, the manta ray I was talking to was willing but uncertain. This was a completely foreign idea to him but, if I'd just go along with him and show him exactly what it was I wanted him to do, he'd do it for me, us being pals.

So we swam out there together and I pointed out the anchor to him. He tried to pick it up in his mouth, but it was no dice. He could have done it, I believe, all by himself, if it hadn't been for just one thing. Every time he would slide into position with his mouth just about ready to grab the upward fluke of that anchor, the anchor line would tickle him and he would get the giggles and do some of the darnedest contorting you ever saw a manta ray do. His little bitty mouth being almost in the middle of his bottom side, there was no way he could get it over the anchor without the anchor line tickling him. But he was still willing, if I could just get that anchor into his mouth without tickling him nearly to death.

So I picked up the anchor and carefully inserted the clean fluke into his mouth, with him hanging there in the water kind of on his side so the anchor line wouldn't tickle him. I hadn't got the anchor's fluke into his mouth good before he spit it out. He told me it hurt his mouth worse than a shark hook he had latched onto, by mistake, before he learned better. And, if it wasn't for us being pals, he wouldn't do it. But, for me, he would. Only give him time to get that anchor's fluke kind of comfortable in his mouth, before I turned it loose and let its full weight drag on his tender mouth.

So, when he opened his mouth again, I slipped the fluke of the anchor in and waited for him to chew it around until he had it kind of comfortable. Then I turned it loose and swam away from him, holding the anchor line clear so it wouldn't tickle him.

But, about the same time, he started turning over right side up, and the anchor line tickled him, anyway, and I almost got killed in the rush. Because, when that line tickled him, he took off like a rocket.

After I got over being dizzy and seeing stars from being bumped on top of the head by the centerboard of the boat as it went zooming over me, I surfaced and looked out toward the Gulf. And there they were, La Paloma with both her arms wrapped around Harry's neck, Harry holding on to La Paloma with one arm and the boat with the other, and the boat tearing out to sea like a speed boat. And, up ahead of the boat, the manta ray jumping clear of the water about every hundred yards when the anchor line tickled him again and acted on him just like a spur does on a horse.

When the manta ray came swimming back, alone, five hours later, he told me he would never do anything like that again. Not even for me. And no matter how happy it might make La Paloma or anybody else. He told me that anchor had made his mouth so sore he wouldn't feel like eating again for a week. And that anchor line darn near tickled him to death, long before he got forty miles offshore. But, having promised, he had kept his promise. But never again!

So I told him how sorry I was his mouth was sore and slipped him a couple of fat mullet I had caught for him as a reward, and thanked him, then swam ashore.

When Longshore Derrick asked me where La Paloma was, when supper time came and there wasn't any, I told him that the last time I had seen her, she and Harry were headed out into the Gulf in Harry's sailboat, and that, from the rate they were going, we might just as well cook our own supper or go down town and eat, because I didn't look for her back before morning.

The next morning, when La Paloma and Harry sailed back up to the dock, Longshore and I were there waiting for them. After I had helped Harry moor his boat and they were on the dock, Harry tried to explain things to Longshore.

"The reason we are a mite late in getting home," he said, "is because a big manta ray picked up our anchor and towed us forty miles out into the Gulf. La Paloma will tell you the same thing; we could see him, plain as day, every time he jumped. And bucking a head wind and an outgoing tide, it took us a while to sail home."

Longshore Derrick smiled kind of polite and gentle and understanding like. "Why sure, Harry," he answered him, soft and polite like. "I don't need La Paloma to back up your word that a manta ray picked up your anchor and towed you out into the Gulf forty miles before turning you loose so you could sail home. It happens all the time, I guess. Only you're the first guy that ever came right out and admitted it. But, just so the neighbors won't talk, maybe you and La Paloma better get married, anyway."

Which they did, Longshore Derrick having a reputation for being quick on the trigger and that shotgun he was carrying when they landed having both barrels loaded.

With my manta ray friend telling me, and all the other manta rays, that he was through having anything more to do with boats' anchors because they made his mouth so sore, and their lines tickled him almost crazy; I saw I'd have to make other arrangements if I was to have any more fun, and help other courting couples get married.

So the next time I noticed a courting couple out in the bay making lots of love but little progress toward the altar, I appealed to an octopus friend of mine. He was a big, bashful guy with a leg-spread of about eighteen feet who could jet himself along like all get out when he wanted to. Since we were pals, he was willing to do most anything for me.

We swam out to where the boat was anchored and I showed him the anchor and told him what I wanted him to do. With all those legs or tentacles of his, it wasn't a bit of trouble for him to latch onto that anchor. But, once he had it off the bottom and tried to take off with it, it unbalanced him and, after describing a backward flip, he would bump his head on the bottom.

He was willing but he just didn't have the power. So we had to call it a day. I caught him a couple of mullet out of a passing school and you should have seen him blush when I offered them to him. He told me he was just doing it for me, not in hope of a reward. But I told him he had earned them so he took them and thanked me.

There I was with an idea which would help no telling how many courting couples get married. And with a manta ray who wouldn't help me and an octopus that wasn't strong enough.

Then, one day, I had me a real bright idea. What I needed was a sea-creature as big and powerful as a manta ray but with arms on his back like an octopus' tentacles so he could hang onto an anchor and still keep the anchor line from tickling him. So I worked up a love affair between an octopus and a manta ray.

Might not happen again in a hundred years, but before long I had me just what I wanted. A little hybrid sea-creature the size and shape of a baby manta ray but, on his back about half way between his eyes and his tail, four of the cutest little octopus tentacles you ever saw.

I named him Mantapus and hand-raised him from a pup, playing with him and educating him as he grew up. Took me a year of waiting before he grew big enough to do me any good, but it was worth it.

Finally the day came when a courting couple was anchored out in the Bay, courting heavy but not even talking about getting married. So I explained to Mantapus what the score was, and what I wanted him to do. He had a wide streak of deviltry in him and thought it would be fun. Besides, he was hankering to try out his arms on something that would really give them a work-out.

Mantapus hadn't reached his full growth then. He was only about twenty feet from wing tip to wing tip and his tentacles were only about eight feet long. But I had been exercising his tentacles regularly, and I felt he was ready for the try-out. I told him if he got tired, just to drop the anchor wherever he was. I didn't want him to develop sore arms and get disgusted and quit.

So we swam out together, and I showed him the anchor and told him to do his stuff.

Mantapus sidled up to that anchor; reached out and latched onto it with his four tentacles, lifted it clear of the bottom, winked at me, then checked out.

When he came swimming back, about five hours later, he told me there wasn't anything to it. That he could have picked up an anchor ten times that heavy and dragged a boat ten times that big even a hundred miles out into the Gulf without working up a sweat.

I told him not to strain himself. There would be other times.

And there were, lots of them. Mantapus and I must have married off at least twenty couples in the next year or so, besides having us lots of fun with a couple of tug boats and four bay steamers. But by that time, Mantapus had got some growth and was over fifty feet from wing tip to wing tip, weighed about ten tons, and had tentacles that were eighteen feet long and stronger than I was, any one of them.

I had finished high school by that time and was fishing on my own, although I shared my check at the fishhouse with Longshore Derrick just like always. He had always treated me fine, ever since catching me in his mullet net, and I'm not a man to forget a favor. If it hadn't been for Longshore, I'd have always thought I was a porpoise. And a boy going on eighteen is big enough to notice that girls are even prettier and nicer to play with than porpoises.

But I guess I was wrong, really, in being so generous with Longshore. Few commercial fishermen can stand prosperity. Any fishhouse owner can tell you that.

But with me bringing in the big ones on which the price was highest, Longshore had so much money he quit rolling his own cigarettes and quit drinking beer and even went and bought himself a beat up Model A to ride around in on shore. Because the horn on it wouldn't blow, when he drove it he always took along the fog horn off his boat to blow if he had to.

One foggy night, Longshore must have got mixed up when he got close to the draw in Gandy Bridge. Thinking he was in his boat instead of his car, he tooted three blasts on his fog horn. So the bridge-tender lowered his warning gates with red lights on them and started his sirens to screaming and opened the draw of the bridge. Because he couldn't swim a stroke, that was the last of Longshore.

And the beginning of my wanderings around the Gulf Coast until I got to be better known than hurricane warning flags.

Like I said, earlier, about the time I got my full growth, the war came on and I tried to volunteer and they wouldn't have me. And when they drafted me, they wouldn't have me, either. So I was on my own, and we were at war, and I had never learned how to be a riveter. So I got to scratching my head and wondering how I could do my bit.

Of course commercial fishing was essential industry, and I was a commercial fisherman. But, long about those days, it wasn't really safe for an honest-to-God commercial fisherman to be out in the Gulf. Not with all the landlubbers who flocked to the waterfront and bought boats and claimed they were commercial fishermen so they wouldn't be drafted. And, besides, commercial fishing is kind of tame at a time like that.

We hadn't got into the war good before I began reading in the papers and hearing along the waterfront that it wasn't safe for a ship to sail the Gulf, much less sail up the Gulf Stream along the East Coast, with submarines torpedoing them to Kingdom Come.

Now these submarines, from all I could learn, would disappear somewhere during the daytime where they couldn't be spotted, not even from planes flying high in the air. And, then, at night, they'd rise to the surface and do their dirty work. And, for some reason no one could explain, between Miami and Charleston, seemed to be the worst place for submarines and the hardest place to spot them.

I got to thinking. And, knowing the water like I do, it didn't take me too long to figure out what those submarines were doing. It's funny, about water. Out in the Gulf or the Atlantic the water is almost as clear as air. But, in bays and rivers, the water is dark and muddy and hard to see through. What those submarines were doing was finding them a deep hole where muddy or murky water from bays or rivers came out into the Gulf or Atlantic and kept planes from seeing them on the bottom or close to bottom.

Then I remembered Mantapus and the fun we had had with courting couples and with those tugs and bay steamers, and I looked him up.

Mantapus had his full growth by now, just as I had. He had a "wingspread" of a hundred feet and his tentacles were thirty feet long. I explained to him what the situation was and that we both ought to be doing our bit for our country. I tried to explain to him, when he asked me, what a country was and why we ought to be doing something for ours. Mantapus wasn't dumb, he just lacked the ability to understand about imaginary lines and boundaries and political states and nations. But when I explained about submarines and how they torpedoed ships, Mantapus caught on quick. One of his girl friends he was chasing happened to swim too close to a steamer one night just when it was torpedoed. So Mantapus had a personal account to square with submarines that made more sense to him than doing something for his country.

I told him to swim around to Miami, from Tampa Bay where he usually hung out, and that I would meet him there in a few days; out in the channel leading from the Atlantic into Biscayne Bay. He wanted me to swim along with him, even offered to

give me a ride, holding me out of the water with his tentacles, if I wanted him to. But I told him I had some unfinished girl business to tend to, on land, on the way. Being an understanding creature, Mantapus wished me luck.

Once we got together in the ship channel at Miami, it didn't take us long to prove I had been right. Nor much longer to understand why the submarines menace was an almost unbeatable proposition unless we did something about it. The first day I located three submarines in deep water at the ocean end of the channel leading into Biscayne Bay from the Atlantic past the south end of Miami Beach.

Going up to the bow of the outside one with Mantapus, I explained what it was I wanted him to do. Soon as I got through explaining, he grinned and winked at me, being a kind of devilish devilfish and liking to play tricks on unsuspecting people in boats, and then latched onto the bow of the submarine with his tentacles and started off with it.

I swam over to Miami Beach and told the Life Guards to get all the bathers out of the water because a submarine was going to be beached soon and it might be dangerous. The Captain of the Life Guards looked at me kind of funny, like I might not have good sense, and then waved, friendly-like, to somebody behind me. The next thing I knew, I was surrounded by a bunch of armed Coast Guardsmen commanded by a Lieutenant (J.G.) wanting to know what I meant trying to scare folks.

"Scare folks, hell!" I answered him back. "I'm trying to save their lives. Now, in about five minutes, there's a German submarine coming helling out onto the beach and, if those bathers aren't off the beach, some of them are liable to get hurt or even killed."

"Who are you?" he asked me.

I told him I was Deep Sea Derrick, and even if he didn't know me by sight, he ought to know that when I told a man anything he could believe me. So, knowing my reputation, he ordered all bathers out of the water.

Good thing he did, too. Just about then, the conning tower of that submarine broke water about a half mile offshore and came in toward the beach a-helling. I caught a glimpse of Mantapus' wing tips a couple of times but to other folks it was just waves.

About where the water shoals to four fathoms, Mantapus had that submarine going about twenty-five knots, so he turned it loose and swam off to one side. Moments later the submarine was sliding up onto the beach, hard aground, and the Lieutenant (J.G.) was ordering his men to surround it and take it prisoner.

Then he came back to me and wanted to know again how I knew so much. I told him beaching submarines was just my way of doing my bit for my country and that, in a little while, there would be another submarine on the beach and, after that, a third. And so the Coast Guard would know it was me responsible for them being there, I'd ride the third one onto the beach. But I warned him I wasn't to be taken prisoner or shot at and that I didn't want any pictures of me in the papers. Because mine was a one-man campaign and might be ruined if the news once got out I was doing it.

He was still shaking him head and making signs to the Captain of the Life Guards that I had wheels in my head when I walked off and swam back out into the channel to get Mantapus started on the second submarine. And to praise him for doing such a fine job on the first one.

It had taken Mantapus about twenty minutes to beach the first submarine. Once he had the hang of it, it didn't take him quite as long to beach the next two. In just a little less than an hour Mantapus and I had eliminated the submarine menace, for the time being, at Miami.

GREENER FIELDS

"I cannot mow the lawn, my pet.
I wish I could, but it's too wet."
An hour later he'll be seen
Teeing off the second green.

—*Mary Alkus*

You should have seen the face on that Lieutenant (J.G.) when I climbed down off that third submarine, just as I had told him I would, and stepped onto the beach.

But since I had asked him to, he kept my part in it quiet and tried to take all the credit himself. Which was all right with Mantapus and me because we didn't need our pictures in the paper. After that first one, I never rode another submarine ashore because the Coast Guard already knew about me and nobody else ought to.

Mantapus and I cleaned up submarines as far north as Charleston, then worked our way back into warmer water. That cold water inshore of the Gulf Stream up the Coast gave Mantapus cramps in his tentacles when he was hauling heavy loads.

Altogether, we beached eighty-seven enemy submarines during the war and, if it hadn't been that Mantapus couldn't work in cold water without getting cramps in his tentacles, we might have gotten more.

With the war over, Mantapus and I came back to Tampa Bay and settled down to peace-time pursuits. The war had sobered me enough so I forgot all about playing boyish pranks on courting couples.

Besides, I was too busy commercial fishing and trying to keep the dozen girls I was courting from marrying me to even be studying such antics.

One afternoon, I was courting the one I was least afraid of being married to, anchored out near Egmont Key and doing the things courting couples do at such times. All of a sudden, we were being towed out to sea at a speed that made my eyes pop out. And, up ahead of us, every once in a while, I'd get a flash of one of Mantapus' wing tips.

I knew, from way back, I couldn't swim as fast as Mantapus so I relaxed and held on to Dolores with one arm and the boat with the other while Dolores hung onto me with both arms. I wasn't worried any because I knew that, just from force of habit, when he got us out into the Gulf forty miles, Mantapus would turn us loose.

So, when we began slowing down, I dived overboard and caught up with Mantapus and explained to him that playing tricks like that was liable to get a good man like me shot, or married. And so, for him to latch back onto that anchor of ours and tow us right back to Tampa Bay because there was no telling what Dolores' papa might do if we weren't back home on time.

And Mantapus just winked at me and made a disrespectful sign which, in a man, could have been likened to thumbing his nose. Then he swam off and left us out there.

When we finally sailed into town, just before noon the next day, having met an ebbing tide coming up the Bay, and I saw Dolores' papa waiting for us on the dock, leaning on a double-barrelled shotgun, I knew my single days were over and gone.

When he asked us what had kept us out all night, I told him our anchor line had frayed through on a piece of coral and we had got caught in an outgoing tide and a stiff east wind, and nothing we could do about it. Except announce our engagement and wonder if he would let us get married, now we were back, so the neighbors wouldn't have any cause to talk.

He congratulated me and wished us luck and said he thought, under the circumstances, a long engagement was not in order. I agreed, and we were married almost immediately.

So there's one thing I want to put you straight on. From now on, if any boats are towed out into the Gulf, it won't be my idea. It will just be Mantapus acting his age and having a little fun with unsuspecting people in boats. •

PRESENTING:

BY WILLIAM H. DILLINGHAM

It's all yours—21 million dollars in gold buried hundreds of years—and we know exactly where it is. The trouble is, those who go trying to get it usually wind up dead.

The World's Richest Treasure

I was within a few miles of the greatest lost treasure on earth—and couldn't get to it. Usually, with buried treasure, the trouble is to find out where it is. But in this case the location of the hoard has been known for over 200 years—the difficulty is, how to get at it. Although not more than a hundred miles from a railroad, the place where it is concealed remains almost as inaccessible today as it was a thousand years ago.

The treasure, of pure gold of incredible value, lies on the slope of a snow-clad peak, just off the Equator, in the wilderness of the eastern Andes in South America. There it was thrown away four hundred years ago by the Indians, and there it lies today, unfound and undisturbed, beckoning to the lucky adventurer who eventually will penetrate to it.

It is richer than Arizona's Lost Dutchman Mine, more valuable by far than Captain Phipp's find of gold bars in the West Indies, richer even than the reputed wealth of Cocos Island, for which poor misguided men have dug in vain for centuries. It is approached, if at all, only by the wealth lying in the seventeen hulks of Bobadilla's ships rotting in the coral deeps off Haiti, the whole treasure of the plate fleet bound for Spain. The value of *one item alone* of the Andean hoard is estimated at 21 million dollars, and that's only part of it.

It is the richest trove that ever awaited a finder.

It waits for one who can defy the curse that rests on it. Through the years, the story of the seekers for the Incas' wealth has been a record of disaster.

In my time I had enjoyed the privilege of listening to numerous versions of the treasure story. Anyone who had knocked around the inside of Latin America for the years I had couldn't escape it. Every old timer in South America has his own account of the golden hoard, and most of them have either tried to reach it or are willing to get up an expedition to do so at a moment's notice. And then, finally, I found myself, on quite other business, in the very region where the great treasure was supposed to be secreted. I saw parties of treasure hunters passing back and forth before my very eyes. And then I discovered that there was actually in existence the ancient map and guide, left by "the dying man," that is absolutely required in all buried-treasure stories. I defy anyone not to have been infected.

All the stories agreed that the history of the treasure began when Pizarro's ragged band of desperadoes, the conquerors of the New World, captured the Inca king of Peru and shut him up in a narrow room in the highland town of Cajamarca. The imprisoned Indian promised his captors that he would fill his cell full of gold as high as he could reach, if they would arrange to release him. On this promise, he sent his emissaries forth.

Soon the gold began flowing in from all directions. Mostly it was in the form of objects of art, curiously wrought, or of household utensils—for the Incas did not use gold for money and valued it only for its beauty and ductility.

Under the astounded eyes of the Spaniards, the golden hoard continued to mount, apparently without limit, brought in from the mountains around by laboring trains of slaves carrying it on their backs. But as the pile of wealth rose in the cell nearly to the height that the Inca had promised, the fears and cupidity of the Conquistadores mounted also. They grew impatient for a division of the incredible spoil, and more and more fearful of turning loose a being who plainly might arouse against them, isolated in this lonely land, the savage people of the whole countryside. Regardless of the fact that he had faithfully produced the enormous ransom they had demanded, the men of Pizarro decided that the Inca had to die.

Accordingly, the story goes, with mock trial and false accusations, the wretch's life was sworn away, and he was garroted in the public courtyard. Quickly and greedily the Spaniards fell upon the treasure. Its division and total value are matters of public record. The royal archives of Spain show the exact weight and value of the share assigned to each knight and commoner, not forgetting the "royal fifth" reserved for the Crown.

The total worth, in today's money, of what came out of that small room has been calculated at nineteen million dollars!

It seems probable that this is an underestimate. It has been said that all the gold now in Fort Knox is sufficient only to fill a room approximately 33 feet in length, breath and height. The cell at Cajamarca has never been authentically located or measured; but its height, at least on the evidence, was such that a tall man could not reach the roof with outstretched arm. It is likely that the actual wealth concentrated in the one room in that obscure Andean hamlet represented a value that would stagger the imagination.

But Pizarro's men, in their haste, had committed a terrible error. The treasure they got by their act of treachery was only a *fraction* of what they could have secured with a little more patience. Up to the very night the Inca was killed, there still were numerous trains of Indians on their way into Cajamarca from the hills, all carrying burdens of fabulous value. The news of the emperor's death, carried by fast runners, met these out in the mountains. There they at once turned and fled with their loads, determined that the Spaniards should not get that part at least of the unearned ransom.

Reports have been found ever since that the treasure thus lost to the Conquistadores was much more valuable than that which they seized. Works of art of great price, which were the subject of common talk among the Indians both before and after the prisoner's death, did not turn up in ransom and never were found by the Spaniards. The big golden images of the Incas, which had been described to the Conquerors in meticulous detail, never appeared. But there was one item missing, of far greater value than any of these, the existence of which was more emphatically sworn to by the Indians than was that of any other part of the Inca's treasure. This was the famous Golden Chain of Huascar.

Huascar, half-brother of the young emperor killed by the Spaniards, had been the favorite son of the old Inca. His name in the Indian language connoted "rope" or "chain." Accordingly, the old king, on his son's coming of age, caused to be made, in honor of the occasion, a chain—but what a chain!

This article, according to the Indians, was intended to be carried in triumphal procession around the great plaza of the capital, and was constructed in the barbaric and magnificent style traditional with the Incas. Each link, of solid gold, was a load for a single man. Each was so made and of such a size as to slip readily over a slave's head and rest securely on his shoulders. The weight of the individual links was determined by the amount of load usually assigned to a porter carrying burdens—that is, about seventy-five pounds per link. The number of links, and the length of the chain, were so calculated that this would stretch, when fully extended, around all four sides of the plaza!

What a spectacle this gift of kings must have made, when on state occasions five hundred slaves trudged in lock step around the square under their great burden, like a giant golden caterpillar, with the painted and feathered warriors of the Inca marching alongside, and the hordes of dancers in leopard skins prancing about and tossing their spears in the air, the musicians with their coiled conch horns sounding the weird and wailing tunes of the high mountains!

But what is of greatest interest to treasure hunters about this princely object is the wealth that must have been embodied in it. Taking the present day worth of a pound of gold, multiplying this by 75 pounds to the link, and this again by the number of links required to circle the approximately 600-yard perimeter of the plaza, we have, for the value of the chain, the staggering sum of twenty-one million dollars.

This, on rather good evidence, was *one* of the objects that the Indians were bringing in to Cajamarca when met by the appalling news of the Inca's murder. This, then, is one of the items that lies hidden out in the hills, still waiting to be found by the fortunate searcher.

There have been different reports as to where the Indians finally concealed this treasure. Tales were told out in the hills of its having been thrown into one or another of the deep lakes that dot the highland plateau of the Andes. Gold objects of considerable value have in fact been dredged up from some of these. But the most persistent report, and the one best authenticated, tells of a hiding place in the remote fastnesses of the mountains of eastern Ecuador, in an almost impenetrable region of snow peaks and terrible cliffs and gorges.

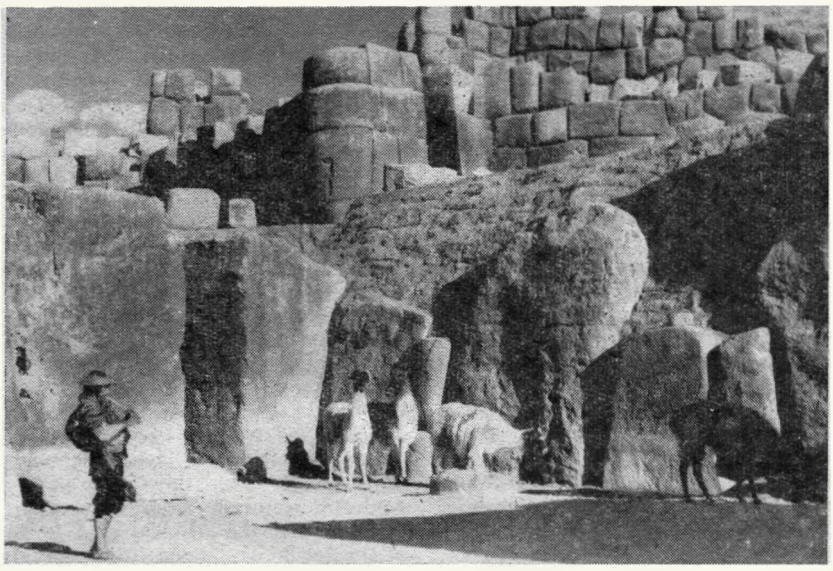
This report had its origin when,

some little time after the Conquest, one of the descendants of the original Conquistadores died in a little town in Spain. This man, Valverde by name, had come back to his home country from Ecuador, wealthy from some undisclosed source. To his deathbed the priest, after listening to the old man's wild story and inspecting some strange documents that he displayed, summoned in haste the messengers of the King.

To them Valverde explained how, living in the town of Latacunga, in Ecuador, many years before, he had taken unto himself an Indian concubine, descendant of the Incas, and very faithful: how she, loving him and because he had treated her well, finally revealed to him the hiding place of the treasure of her ancestors. The dying man went on to tell how he had visited this place many times and taken out much gold; but that now, in his last hour, his conscience had come to trouble him that he had concealed from his King, the defender of the faith in which he was dying, the source of his wealth, and had cheated the Crown of the share that rightfully belonged to it. He now enjoined upon the authorities present faithfully to convey to the King the map and guide that he entrusted to them. These, he said, indicated in full detail how to arrive at the place where the treasure was buried.

It may be imagined that these documents made fascinating reading to the bearded courtiers of Castile. Copies of these papers survive to this day, by a fortunate series of accidents, and still will stir the blood of adventurous hearts. The map pictures, in the quaint but graphic style of the old times, a wild region of smoking mountains and great lakes. It gives, even to modern eyes, a vivid representation, almost like a photograph, of the desolate and savage country in which the treasure must be sought. It exhibits plainly all the landmarks and indications described by its companion document, the guide.

This too must have proved enthralling material to the court of the great King. The Inca hoard, it declared, had been thrown away by the Indians, and still reposed, on the slope of the Llanganatis Mountains, a snow-clad range in the wilderness of eastern Ecuador, vaguely known by report but never visited by the Spaniards. The document contained directions to a high spot near Pilaro, in the center of the country, "standing whereon," it said, "thou shalt perceive the three Cerros Llanganati, in the form of a triangle, on whose declivity there is a lake, made by hand, into which the ancients threw the gold they had prepared for the ransom of the Inca when they heard of his death."



A llama shepherd plays immemorial tunes outside the walls of the once-impregnable Inca fortress at Curzo, in the Equadorean Andes. Far greater obstacles guard the lost Inca treasure.

It went on further to describe "a cascade which descends from an offshoot of the Cerros Llanganati and runs into a quaking bog on the right hand; and without passing the stream in the said bog there is much gold, *so that putting in thy hand what thou shalt gather at the bottom is grains of gold* . . . and on the left-hand side of the mountain thou mayest see the Guayra (for thus the ancients called the furnace where they founded metals) *which is nailed with golden nails* . . ."

The reaction of the Crown to this circumstantial report of so much wealth in its dominions overseas was prompt. His Majesty's Corregidor of Latacunga, in far-off Ecuador, was directed urgently to organize forthwith an expedition and make immediate attempt to penetrate to the spot indicated by the guide.

The map led the expedition into what was then, and still is, one of the wildest and roughest portions of the American continent. This is the mountain country on the eastern edge of the Andean plateau, in Ecuador, just before the bleak upland drops off in steep declivities to the lowland jungle of the rain forest. It is a high, cold country, swept for most of the year by mist and rain.

Most of it is plateau, where the grass grows breast high and continually wet, and wild cattle roam, savage and dangerous. The plain is interspersed with treacherous bogs. There are numerous lakes of considerable extent, some reputed to be bottomless and all deep and with ice-cold water. Here and there tremendous mountain peaks loom up through the fog. Some of these are bleak and bare, others dazzling white with perpetual snow.

Several are volcanoes, mostly cold and dead, a few only dormant, with the fires banked but liable to burst forth at any time, and one or two still violently active. The mountains drop to the east in *quebradas*, yawning chasms a thousand feet deep or more, with their margins concealed by the high grass. It is a land inimical to human life.

Into this region penetrated the first expedition seeking the lost treasure of the Incas. For four days' journey they went on confidently, finding the landmarks each day exactly as specified in the map and directions. They went past the twin lakes "looking like a pair of eye glasses;" found traces of the old Indian road—"the way of the Inca," as the guide calls it—came upon the deep morass and the Great Black Lake, ". . . the which leave on thy left hand." They glimpsed the "Hydro Volcan" of the map, throwing steam and water into the sky. Finally, on the fifth day, they stood at the foot of the Margasitas Volcan, a great peak glittering in the sun with the mica and pyrites—"fool's gold"—that lined its sides.

The directions had specifically cautioned them against this mountain "all of margasitas" ("I warn thee that thou must go around it in this fashion") and then followed a curious hieroglyph shaped like a concentric, or whirl.

But what the meaning of this mysterious indication was—which was intended to be the starting point, and

which the end of the circuitous path—they never succeeded in determining; and it was precisely here that they came to grief. They worked around the peak in some fashion and went on, only to become involved in the abysmal *quebradas* on the other side. The Padre Longo, the leader, fell over one of the concealed cliffs and broke his neck. The rest of the party became hopelessly confused in the canyons. The survivors finally made their way back to civilization, half starved and demented, and determined never to enter that region again for *any* treasure.

The adventurous spirit of the Conquerors, however, was not to be daunted by this experience. Several further attempts were made by other parties to reach the Beautiful Mountain and the "lake made by hand." But the record of all these expeditions was a story of debacle and disaster. There seemed in reality to be a curse upon the land.

The Indians, who never went near it unless forced, had wild tales of ancestral devils lurking in the high peaks and passes, waiting to destroy any who attempted to enter there. Whether it was from this or the more substantial menaces of cold, wet, hunger, storms, cliffs and canyons, most of those who went into the Llanganatis found not gold but a burying place. After several expeditions had gone in not to return, the fever for the treasure of the mountains died down. The copies of the documents left by Valverde were neglected and finally lost altogether. . . .

The next record of these dates from almost three hundred years later. At that time a local official, digging around in the ruins of the same town of Latacunga, found a strange paper in a niche of the crumbling adobe walls of the ancient Prefectura. It was labelled "Guide or Route which Valverde left in Spain, where Death overtook him, having gone from the Mountains of Llanganati, which he entered many times, and carried off a great quantity of gold." Attached to this was a map.

Here then plainly were copies, miraculously preserved, of Valverde's original papers, which had been sent over to America by the Spanish king to guide the first treasure expedition. These documents, some time later, were shown to an English explorer who happened by. The Englishman was so taken with the story, and so persuaded of its veracity, that he transcribed the map and guide into his notes. He even took the trouble to trace on the old map, from information acquired on the spot and stories handed down, the supposed routes of the several lost expeditions, with notes as to where and why they had gone astray, and marked with crosses the location of their final resting places in the lonely hills. All this was reproduced in a book of his travels finally published in the early 1900's.*

These fascinating documents, thus laid bare to the whole world, have been the cause in subsequent years of one expedition after another into the eastern Andes. Several of these have been serious affairs, well equipped and financed, and some of them quite recent. But every one of them has ended in grief.

My first visit to the treasure region came when I and another wandering gold-seeker, poling by native canoe up the headwaters of the Amazon, disembarked at the head of navigation in eastern Ecuador. Here, at the little town of Tena, the slopes of the Andes descending from their great heights meet the tropical rain forest of the lowlands. Tena itself, though nothing more than an outpost village of less than 500 souls, is the official capital of the vast province of Napo-Pastaza, a jurisdiction comprising thousands of square miles of wilderness as unexplored and unbroken as any on earth.

My friend Slim and I landed to find the town in a blaze of excitement over the arrival of the latest band of unfortunates from the treasure mountains. The "Anderson party" had just emerged from the jungle, after being given up as dead.

It appeared that a man named Anderson, an American engineer, some four months before had led a large expedition from Quito into the eastern mountains in search of the Inca gold. The remnants of his party had just now been found wandering hopelessly in the jungle above Tena, a band of ragged skeletons reduced to about a fifth of their original number and in very bad condition generally. The Teniente Politico of the jurisdiction, after listening in horror for a whole day to the story told by certain ones of this crew of haggard ghosts, had hastily summoned into session the Court of the First Instance.

Hints of the sensational nature of the disclosures to be expected had leaked out, and the sitting of the court was enthusiastically attended by the whole population of the town, including Indians, dogs, and the two newly arrived Gringos. The revelation that Anderson had carried along, on the first part of the journey, his own private harem of no less than four beautiful girls of the first families of Quito, was an intriguing tidbit, but only a minor item compared to the real nub of the matter. This, it speedily appeared, was the question of whether certain of the survivors had, as was charged by the remainder, in the extremity of their distress, summarily shot and eaten their missing companions.

From the nature of the circumstances, concrete proof of the crime, in the form of a corpus delicti, could not be produced. The audience, being of a cynical nature, indicated with considerable relish their appreciation of the unusually complete method of disposing of the evidence that had been used. The verdict was inconclusive. Among the populace, though—who knew what it would be like to wander lost and starving through these mountains—there was not much doubt of the truth of the charges.

Slim and I stayed around Tena, panning gold, for about six months after this. We were consequently right on the scene when the next apparition from the Llanganatis materialized from the jungle. This was a Captain Locke, of the British Army. We picked him up, in late 1937, wandering around on the upper reaches of the Jatunyacu with two men, at a point about twenty miles across country from Tena.

The story of his trek had been much the same as usual—the setting out from Quito with high hopes, getting lost and wandering among the margasite peaks, cold and hungry, working down into the jungle for a desperate way

*Richard Spruce, "Notes of a Botanist on the Amazon and the Andes."

Direct descendants of the old Inca warriors perform a ceremonial dance as part of the centuries-old Sacrifice of the Black Llama.

out, falling over cliffs, men drowned in the river, final starvation and near death for all.

Thinking over the successive failures of all these expeditions coming in over the mountains, it occurred to me that perhaps these seekers for the Inca's wealth had gone at this thing the wrong way. It appeared impossible to reach the treasure by the usual route from the West. But perhaps one could get at it from the East—come on it by the back door, so to speak.

And here I was in Tena, at the very spot ideally situated to launch such a new line of attack! From Tena, the rivers ran five hundred miles eastward to the great Amazon, and from there two thousand more in the same direction all the way across the continent. But to the west, above the town, the waters of the river were cold; it was obvious that they came from off the snow mountains, and that not very far away.

TEN miles in this direction, emerging from the deep jungle, you could gaze across the river from a high point at a wide expanse of flat land, backed by towering cliffs that seemed to reach the very heavens. These were the ramparts of the Andes. The lowland lying at their foot was wash-down from the heights above. Here the *hacienderos* dug out from the gravel banks of the river ornaments and articles of gold, fish-hooks, awls and pins, curiously wrought in archaic style. Plainly these had come down from above along with the detritus that filled the flood-plain.

We had heard strange stories, too, of mysterious journeys by the Indians into the region behind those vertical rock walls. Every now and then a party of these aborigines would suddenly disappear, to come back weeks later, bringing with them lumps of raw gold of a size and type not found in the lower rivers. Generally they would not reveal where they had been.

But occasionally one would talk. Then this one would tell extravagant stories of marble-walled canyons a thousand feet deep, straight up and down, in those cliffs above; of how at times these would fill nearly to the brim with whirling flood waters. He would describe how, perched on top of the cliffs, he and his companions would wait for days for these torrents to recede; would tell how, when the waters were normal again, they lowered themselves with fear and trembling into the awful gulfs, on ladders made of vines; how they would reach out and pluck lumps of solid gold from the clefts in the rock walls, where these had been deposited by the receding flood.

Plainly awed by the nature of the country into which they had penetrated, these men would speak of their ventures into this region with many gestures and obvious bad recollections. They bore in their hands, however, plain evidence of a rich and mysterious source of the precious metal up above!

We gazed with fascination upon those mighty battlements rising up out of the jungle. There was *something* up there, and we had to go and see. The Llanganatis, we knew, lay in that general direction. The very stream by which we stood, making its way through those straight walls, might drain from the slopes of the treasure mountain itself!

We had a hard time getting carriers for our venture. The Indians did not like the region, be it ever so rich. There were spirits up there, they said, *bad* spirits.

But finally we were off. Our route, the first day, lay across country, straight through the forest, following tangled Indian trails. The path was narrow, with thick undergrowth and giant, weird looking ferns on each side. The branches of the trees met overhead, so that we travelled as if in a tunnel, and did not see the sun all day. Finally we came out onto a wide and swiftly-flowing river and began to follow its bank upstream.

This was the Verde Yacu, or Green Water, and its course led, according to the Indians, directly toward the great snow mountains. Its valley was at first broad with sandy "playas" backing onto low jungle wall; then soon high bluffs and hills began to close in on either side. By noon of the second day, it was evident that we were getting up into the region of the great rock walls.

Late on that day, we came to a strange formation where the river narrowed between two enormous white boulders. Others, big as houses, lay scattered around in wild confusion. All were of a uniform and ghastly white. These great stones bore no relationship to the country rock, but sat there strange and alone, huge unformed anachronisms, looking as if they had been strewn about the scene by some giant hand.

"Amaron Cachi" the Indians told us the place was called—"Salt of Boas." The "salt" alluded to the dazzling white of the great boulders; and the spot itself, they explained, was well known to be a favorite nursery and habitation of the great serpents. These they dread, almost alone among all the animals of the forest, and they have fearsome tales of how one of these monsters, lurking in the water, will suddenly uprear alongside a canoe and snatch a luckless victim from the midst of his fellow paddlers.

Our men made haste to pass the strange scene, skirting the *playa* well back from the river and eyeing the rocks with every evidence of distaste and uneasiness. Once past, they hurried us on; but as we rounded the next bend in the river, I stopped and took a look back at that strange amphitheater. There, among the rocks on the far side of the current, did I or did I not see in the gathering dusk a dark and malevolent form of awesome length dragging itself along the sand, with raised and misshapen head?

I had time for only one glimpse, for the Indians would not stop. It was evident that, in addition to their physical fear of the big snakes, they had a superstitious dread of the whole locality. They made camp late that night, being careful first to put a good distance between themselves and the haunted spot; and they talked of nothing all the way but that fearsome shape, the "Yaccu Mama"—Mother of the Waters.

All the next day we advanced between steadily-narrowing canyon walls. Just at noon, however, we came upon a spot where the hills fell back a little from the river, and there was room for a small space of high level ground between the stream and the cliffs.

Here to our astonishment was evidence of human habitation. A ruined palm shack stood in the midst of the high grass. It evidently had been there a long time; the fronds of the roof and walls were sere and dry, and stirred in the wind with a harsh and rasping sound. I walked up to the narrow door and looked in. The interior was dark; but not too dark to see what lay on the low sagging pallet there in one corner.

These were bones; and if I knew anything, human bones!

AFTER a moment's stupefaction, I mustered up courage enough to step inside and take a closer look. No doubt about it now; there they lay, disposed in perfect order as if in sleep, the skeleton of a tall man; and at the head, a grinning skull looking up at me.

One of the Indians had come up behind me, looking over my shoulder. I heard him draw in his breath with a moaning "Ai!" and back precipitously out of the place. An excited conversation now ensued outside the hut, from which it quickly became evident that the Indians knew who the dead man was.

Finally I managed to make out what they were saying. "El Aleman." It was the German, Schweitzer, they said, who had come in here to seek the gold also. That was five years ago, and he had never been seen or heard of since. But now he had come to his final resting place; died of fever, or starvation, most likely.

There were no breaks in the bones, and no evidence that he had been injured or hurt in any way.

We left the bones undisturbed, their grave the ruined shelter the dead man must have built himself; and turned to hit the trail. It was not easy, however, to shake off thoughts of the poor old man dying there alone in the midst of that encircling forest. Recollection of what we had seen gave a cast of gloom to our reflections all that day, and made the dark woods seem darker still.

It was certainly a singular country into which we were penetrating. The valley now narrowed to a deep defile with vertical marble walls, between which the river swept with dizzy speed. Here was no bank on which to walk; the stream too deep and swift to wade; and certain death waiting if you were caught in the canyon by rising waters. There was no way to advance but by climbing one after another the tremendous mountain spurs around which the river swept.

Above the cliffs, the hills were covered with deep forest. It was hot in the daytime; but, as night fell, the air would become chilly. The frogs would croak all around in the woods and pale mist would rise from the river. Later on, quiet would settle over the jungle; and a ghostly moonlight, filtering through the branches of the trees, cast strange shadows in the clearing.

At intervals, far off in the woods, you could hear some animal calling, weird cries that not even the Indians could identify. Later still, in the absolute dead silence of the middle of the night, you would swear you heard human voices talking to each other across the canyon. There was no one except us in all that wild region, but the impression of some one talking there in that hushed stillness was very vivid. And the Indians heard it too, to their manifest uneasiness. It was a strange region.

For four days more now, with infinite toil, we climbed ridge after ridge and clambered through the deep valleys in between. Finally, after a long hard climb, we came to the top of the highest mountain we had yet encountered. Wearily surmounting the summit in the lead, I looked out through the branches of the trees and off to the west.

There in front of me were more ridges like those we had climbed for days, lying in parallel rows, their flanks and tops clothed in heavy jungle.

But what was that there beyond the last ridge? There, above the forest in the blue sky, shone a gleam like alabaster. I caught my breath and looked again. But my eyes had not deceived me. It was snow—the snow of the Andes!

There over the last ridge loomed a tall white peak. Its shape was that of a perfect cone, and its slopes glinted in the sun like ivory.

After days and weeks in the jungle, steeped in the moist and humid air, and seeing nothing but the everlasting monotonous green of the tropic bush, the sight of that fair and radiant shape sitting there so clean, so cool and virgin white was like a vision of Paradise. It seemed to me the most beautiful thing the eyes of man had ever gazed upon.

But I had other thoughts than those of its loveliness about this figure in the sky. A wild surmise began to go through my mind as I gazed upon it, fascinated. I looked at Slim and could see that he was thinking the same thing. The peak in front of us was exactly in the direction in which the Llanganatis were supposed to lie; and surely every contour of that perfect and symmetrical shape met the description of the Cerro Hermoso.

Could it be possible that we were looking at last upon what we had come to find? Gone in a moment were all the gloomy thoughts and premonitions acquired from Schweitzer's lonely cabin and the ghostly voices in the night. You may be sure we pushed the Indians hard the rest of that day.

When finally we came close to the top of the next ridge, there was a rush to attain it. Breathlessly, we threw ourselves down on the summit, and looked out to the west. Sure enough, what we had seen before was as nothing to this. From here we could see over the tops of the remaining spurs. Beyond the last of them, a vast high plain swept away far to the north, utterly devoid of trees; and on its near edge rose, not one, but four great peaks. From one of these, standing a little apart, smoke and vapor issued up into the sky.

The other three were close together. Their tops were covered with snow; the one in the center, higher than the others, was the same perfect cone that we had glimpsed before, faultless in beauty and dazzling white. And the three were set in the form of a triangle!

There was no doubt about it; we were looking at the peaks of the Llanganatis. The one with the smoke was the "Hydro Volcan;" the center one of the three, so white and lovely, was the Beautiful Mountain, whereon was the chain of Huascar and the door "nailed with golden nails." It was as if Valverde's map was unrolled before us there high up in the sky. Even the Indians were excited, and chattered and gesticulated violently.

With renewed hope, we plunged down the mountain side and up the opposite ridge. A cold night was spent on top of this, and the next morning we descended again into a narrow canyon with an exceedingly deep and swift-flowing stream filling its bottom. Here the current slid smoothly between vertical rock walls with the speed of an express train, to break into foaming falls a little further down.

Opposite to where we struck the stream, a huge boulder reared itself above the water on the far side. We attempted to cross here by felling two big trees that stood on the near bank. This done, two of the Indians stepped cautiously out onto the swaying structure, feeling their way carefully with the long poles they always carried. Each bore also his usual load, a seventy-pound pack resting against the back and supported by bark straps running across the chest and forehead. The foremost of the two got as far as the rock, and started to clamber up on it. Apparently it was wet and slick; for the next we knew, the native had slipped and started to slide down its side, at the same time attempting to grasp for support at his companion, just behind him. This resulted in knocking the other Indian off balance, and in a second both were in the rushing waters.

We had seen that the current was strong, but had not realized how strong. In a moment it had snatched both men away from the rock and was hurling them downstream. Though both were good swimmers, they were almost helpless in the water on account of being entangled with their heavy loads. There were numerous other boulders in the river, some protruding and some covered by the water.

We saw both men slammed with force against one of these that was visible, and then they were sucked under, where they were certain to strike against other hidden snags. One other glimpse of them we caught as a boil in the current cast them up for a moment—dark confused heaps, whirling over and over and looking like limp sacks—and then the waters tumbled over them again and they were lost to sight.

There was not a chance of rescue in that narrow canyon. The Indians ran desperately along the bank as far as they could go, but they were blocked almost immediately by the steep rock walls closing in on the deep waters. The men were gone. And, no matter that we had finally sighted our goal, nearly gone also was the expedition. As soon as we looked at the Indians remaining we knew it. Their hearts had turned bad when they had seen their comrades die.

The event proved to them what they had believed before—that the whole region was filled with evil spirits who would wipe out any party that dared venture further into it. Worse was ahead—undoubtedly demons dwelt on the mountain top, guarding the treasure of the ancients, more fearful yet than the spirits of the forest. They flatly refused to go any further, and wanted to start the return journey at once. We spent the remainder of the day trying to prevail on them to go at least to the edge of the high plateau. But it was in vain; and night found us still on the margin of that ill-fated stream.

I MORE than half expected the sight that greeted my eyes when I woke up the next morning. The Indians were gone. Following their immemorial custom, when they feel themselves abused, they had set the packs in a neat circle near the campfire and silently departed in the middle of the night.

Slim and I sat down beside the dying fire and considered the situation. Most of the food had been in the two packs that had gone down the river with our poor carriers. And game was scarce here and would be scarcer higher up. There was only one gun left, anyhow, and precious little ammunition for it. Gone also were most of the medical supplies. There was exactly one box of matches remaining between the two of us.

Undoubtedly we were in bad shape, both mentally and physically. Yet neither of us felt like turning back now, with the thought of that bright and shining mountain just behind the hills. So, after a short discussion, we packed up what we could carry of the remaining packs and started out. We negotiated the perilous passage across the river with care and trepidation and began the long climb up the next ridge. From its top we could see again the golden peaks, still beckoning us on.

Then, going down the other side, it happened.

Slim, in the lead down a particularly steep slope covered with thick underbrush, stumbled and suddenly disappeared from view. There was the noise of a crashing fall, and the sound of a weak voice hailing me from far below.

I finally reached him, lying at the foot of a fifty-foot vertical drop. He had, as others before him, stepped off one of those infernal concealed cliffs that abound in the region, its edge completely hidden by the high grass. He lay with one arm twisted under him, but otherwise apparently unhurt.

I knelt down and examined the arm carefully. Broken in at least two places. The injured man, although obviously in great pain, was game enough to point out how fortunate we both were that it wasn't a broken leg. I had to agree with that thought, for the only probable result of that would have been another grave in the dark woods. Nevertheless, the meaning of what had actually happened was plain to both of us. There wasn't any question now of not turning back.

The Llanganatis had won, as they had won over all the others who had sought to discover their secret. We had to get out of this haunted region now, and fast. It was going to be touch and go anyhow, whether we could make it without bad complications setting in from the injured arm, to say nothing of the possibility of starving to death.

I set and splinted the arm as best I could. The sufferer got through the first night with the aid of plentiful administrations of morphine, of which providentially we had some left. I lay awake and watched, and thought of all those who had come in here so confidently, and of the fate most of them had suffered—old Padre Longo, and the horrors of Anderson's trip, of Schweitzer dying alone, and Locke, and now our own trouble. It did seem as if there must be something in the Indians' beliefs.

The trip out was not pleasant. Going back over the second ridge, we took our last look at the great snow mountains. There in the distance, beautiful as ever, but mocking us now, stood the white cone of Hermoso. We left it guarding its treasure as it has done for so many long years, and sadly plunged down into the jungle again.

Here it had come on to rain, and the forest and thick brush was soaked in moisture all day long. After the first few days, we ran out of food entirely. Slim had by then acquired a raging fever, and had to be practically hauled up the cliffs and over vertical bluffs. It was not easy, that task of shepherding a sick and raving man out through that weird and gloomy forest; while your own stomach turned weak and your head was going around in circles.

Soon it was obvious that I was beginning to get a touch of fever myself. At night I heard the voices again, talking more and more now to each other across the valley. On the march I would catch myself looking at my bare arm and thinking how good a mouthful of that nice white meat would taste. Finally, when I had begun to feel that we had been wandering in the mountains for years and would never get out, we ran into some Indians coming up the river. Actually we were by then only a day's journey above Tena. They took us back into town—just another party of living dead from the Llanganatis.

We stayed around Tena a couple of weeks, while I filled up on food and Slim recuperated. The arm knitted perfectly. Of course there wasn't any chance of going back into the mountains then, or soon. With the news of our experience abroad in the land, no Indian would go in there for any persuasion. We went down the river, to look for alluvial gold on another tributary—and found it, too. One thing and another came up, and we never did get back to the high peaks and the region of the glittering hoard.

But still the secret beckons, and the dream will not die. Even yet there are those who find irresistible the shining vision of the treasure hidden on the mountain side. There have been expeditions into the Llanganatis every year since we came out. There was one in there last year—headed by a woman. None has reached the treasure mountain, or even glimpsed it. All have been failures and most have ended in disaster.

But still they try; still they believe in the fair promise of old Valverde's map, that some day they will reach to see, high up on the mountain slope, the stream of clear water with yellow nuggets lying on the bottom and the golden chain a quarter of a mile long. And we are of this band—my companion of the first trip and I.

VERY soon we hope to be heading back again through those ghostly canyons to attempt once more to reach the high plain and the three peaks set in the form of a triangle. For we believe the story yet—and on the best of evidence. After all these years, the mystery is not solved, and the source remains. Reports continue to come out of that region below the great rock walls, of things as hard to explain as when we first went in.

Still, they say, the Indians make their secret trips with fear and trembling into the awful gorges, and return with lumps of gold as big as a fist. Still the *hacienderos,* sifting the gravel of the flat-land, report finding in their pans the fish-hooks, the golden artifacts of the ancients, that by no chance could have originated where they are discovered.

Still these relics of a culture old and rich, of a treasure located far up above, come down as they have for years immemorial from the hidden land behind the mighty ramparts. Up there, we are convinced, still waits for its finder—waits, we hope, for us—the princely hoard, the forfeited ransom of Atahualpa; waits to be seen by man for the first time since the old Spaniard and his faithful guide visited it there and "took away many loads." •

The Great Beer Well

By JOSEPH MILLARD

In all the romantic history of the Pennsylvania oil fields, there'd never been a well like this—it pumped wonderful, thirst-quenching lager.

In the course of a long and fruitful lifetime in the Pennsylvania hills, Old Charlie had helped drill many wells, both for salt and for oil, and had watched some of the greatest blow in or blow up. He knew the oil boom of the 1860's as only an old-timer could. But when he reached the autumn of his life, and was ready to retire on a richness of memories, there was only one well that filled his nostalgic thoughts, haunting him like a youth's first kiss.

Officially it was Point Hill #1, an important well because it opened a rich new producing area and substantiated a theory that long had been derided. But to Charlie it always would be "The Great Beer Well."

And, mind you, not just ordinary beer but delicately-lagered brew, with a collar high enough to tickle the nose and exactly the degree of coolness for peak flavor.

But you'd better get the story from the beginning, so you'll understand why a rough, tough knight of the tem-

Illustration by HANK BERGER

per screw like Old Charlie never could hoist a stein of Grossman's Perfection without brushing away a tear.

Old Charlie—he was Young Charlie, then—was drilling salt wells for Peterson, at Tarentum, that August day in 1859 when the news came. Crazy Drake's well, over at Titusville, had tapped an ocean of oil. Uncle Billy Smith who had drilled the well for Drake, and who had given Charlie his first lessons in tool-dressing, flashed the word to Peterson: "Come quick. There's oceans of oil."

Peterson didn't go right away, being busy with his salt wells, but Charlie and a lot of other fellows packed up and went to see for themselves. The oil was sure enough there. Charlie watched it pulsing out of the pump line and foaming into the great wooden tank and decided there might be quite a future in it.

He was there the night Uncle Billy blew up the whole Drake outfit with a lighted lamp, and he worked for a month with the crew that put up the new rig. After that he started drilling on his own and worked for Rouse and Abbott and the Heydricks and a lot of other big producers in the field, sometimes for cash, sometimes for part cash and a share of the oil if they hit. Charlie did all right and built a name, and that was how he happened to drill The Great Beer Well on Point Hill.

Right at the beginning Charlie needed a new reamer, but all the blacksmiths along Oil Creek were up to their ears in orders.

Finally somebody suggested Jim Evans, the blacksmith down at Franklin, where French Creek joins the Allegheny. Charlie went down and found Evans and his oldest boy, Henry, out in the back yard, taking turns hand-pumping an oil well and standing off visitors with a shotgun. Their oil was something extra-special, being so smooth and heavy that the refinery was paying a 50 percent premium on every barrel.

Charlie watched a promoter give up trying to get close and finally yell in, "I'll give you $50,000 cash for a half-interest in your well."

"You go to hell!" Jim Evans hollered back, without missing a stroke of the pump. "This here's my well. Go drill your own."

Everybody wanted an oil well, and Charlie stuck around to help. He turned drill for the Franklin Mining well that went down 20 rods below Evans' and brought in a steady 15 barrels a day. By spring there were over 200 derricks scattered through the town and along the creek.

About the only spot nobody wanted to try was Point Hill, or The Point, as they called it generally. This was a high, flat triangle of rock just across the creek from the Evans well, steep-sided and covered with a jungle of scrub evergreens. Lowry DeWoody, who owned it, had tried vainly to sell the whole 40-acre tract for $1,500. Nobody would even listen to him.

"I tell you," he would argue earnestly, "there's no law says oil has to be under just the low places. Sure Drake and the rest are finding it on the flats along Oil Creek, but nobody's even tried the hills. Why, I wouldn't be surprised if The Point was practically floating on oil."

"Yeah?" was the answer he always got. "Then why ain't you drilling on your own Point?"

That always squelched DeWoody.

Finally, Colonel Bleakley and Doc Egbert decided to risk it, and bought Point Hill from DeWoody for

around $800 cash on the barrelhead. They hired Charlie to put down the first well. . . .

Charlie was on the rig the day it happened. He was perched there with his sensitive hand feeling the jars.

These jars were two great links of iron, sliding together with every impact of the drill. As long as the bit chunked down on rock, the jars didn't crash to their fullest length. When they did that, it meant the drill had slipped into a crevice and the owner could begin to think about where to spend his money. But this well wasn't yet down to the first sand rock so there was no sense in expecting anything, for a crevice *above* the first oil sand shouldn't mean a thing.

Suddenly the drill went down and the jars gave a clanging crash that almost knocked Charlie off his perch.

Charlie yelled for a shut-down and started turning the temper screw, a kind of turnbuckle gadget that let the driller drop his drill a few inches or take up cable slack without resetting the whole rig.

He let the drill down six inches, and there still was no bottom. Charlie's hands started to shake. A six-inch crevice usually means you've got the bull by the tail and the world in your pocket. Charlie let out eight inches, ten, and still no bottom.

The rest of the crew came up and Sam Walson called, "What the hell's the matter, Charlie? She stuck?"

"Stuck, hell!" Charlie yelled, his voice quivering. "We're in the biggest damn crevice in the world. Get on that bull wheel."

They horsed the drill down a good *six feet* before the jars eased, and by then nobody could talk. Charlie made feeble motions, and they backed the engine until the tools came snaking out of the drive-pipe, wet and slick as they'd never be out of rock alone. A little foam was breaking silently in the joints and the drip from the bit was a clear, dark amber.

Sam Walson bent and sniffed at the drill. "Hey, that sure smells like *beer!*"

"You're crazy," Charlie snapped. He sniffed, and a queer look slid over his weathered face. "Now, damn if she don't. Or leastwise she don't smell like no oil I ever smelt."

Buster Kingan, who'd try anything once, slid his finger up the wet iron and licked it cautiously. A beatific smile spread over his features. "She's just precisely beer and not nothing else, man. *Good* beer!"

It hit them then, and they started to jump and yell. "A beer well! We've hit us a beer well!" Charlie got in the loudest roar. "Dang it, get a sand-pump down there. We can't quench a thirst lickin' iron."

They reaved a light line through the crown block and hooked on the sand-pump, a copper tube five feet long, with a flap-valve in the bottom. Rammed down, the valve opened in to let the tube fill with muck or oil or rock soup; pulled up, the valve closed to keep the tube full. Now they dropped it once, hard, and then drew it up as fast as they could.

It was full to the top with rich, dark, foaming lager beer!

There was no longer doubt or question. They tested it with thoroughness, passing the sand-pump from hand to hand until it was empty, then whipping it down for a quick refill. Ten times they checked their findings, and then it was that Sam Walson made an observation.

"Seems to me," Sam said, smacking his lips thoughtfully and squinting at the well, "she's a leetle mite green."

"Green?" Charlie snorted in outrage. "That's the damndest dumbest observation I've encountered in all my years. *Green?* Nature lays by a storehouse of treasure fer the delectation of humankind maybe a million years ago, and along comes some hammerheaded engine swipe and says she's a leetle mite green. Gahh!"

By then Charlie began to remember he was boss of the crew, and accountable to the men who paid the bills. He pointed a horny finger at Buster Kingan. "You larrup down and tell either Doc Egbert or the Colonel what we got here and ask 'em what we should do."

"Don't you guzzlers drink her dry while I'm gone," Buster warned, and lit out down the hill, bounding like an antelope. In due time he found Colonel Bleakley and described their strike in loving detail. "Charlie wants to know what we should do."

"*Do,* you dang idjit?" the Colonel yelled, snatching at his coat where it draped a chair. "Run in the casing and hook on a pump. I'll be there as soon as I can hitch a horse."

Up on the rig, Charlie and the crew waited in the shade and discussed the miracle, pausing at intervals to recheck their findings. Sam Walson was still chewing on his doubts. "Charlie, it just don't stand to reason there's such a thing as a beer well. Beer ain't something you find in the ground. It's malt and hops and barley and a little bit of heaven all whipped together and treated with respect and skill by Dutchmen."

"And where," Charlie demanded icily, "do you figure them Dutchmen ever got the idea in the first place? Why, it's plain to see that one of 'em sometime, somewhere, run onto a beer well like ours, and that's how he got the sense to make it himself when the well run dry."

"My Gawd," Bert Forsman blurted, sitting up. "You figure this one might run dry, Charlie?"

"If it don't," Charlie said in a sour, sad voice, "it won't be that dumb Buster's fault. Look!" He pointed down to where a stream of human ants were pouring from the rigs along the flats and from the town itself, swimming the creek and swarming up the slope of the Hill. "The durn fool's told everybody in Franklin by now, and they're comin' with barrels and buckets."

Charlie was doling out samples, just enough to squelch any doubters, when Buster and the Colonel arrived. They drew up enough for the Colonel to exercise his rights, and went to work running in the casing.

Finally the pump was connected and clean barrels lined up. The Colonel lifted his hand high and brought it down fast. "Let 'er rip, Charlie."

At that moment there was a high, shrill bleat of anguish, and the crowd parted violently to let a short, fat, purple-faced man in a striped apron burst through. He ran up to Charlie and the Colonel and the rest of them, waving his arms.

"GOTT IN HIMMEL!" he shrieked. "Get your *Gott verdammt* pipes out of Philip Grossman's beer vault!"

And that was it—the awful moment of realization—the sick shock that comes with the end of a beautiful dream. They all knew, and remembered then, that 100-foot tunnel, cut into Point Hill down below by Philip Grossman, the brewer, as a cool place to age his beer. The drill, striking down from above, had penetrated the roof and broken through into a tun of lager.

Charlie was a man you could depend on. He stayed on the job while they squared things with Grossman and got the beer casks moved so the drilling could continue. He stayed, in fact, until the day they struck oil, two weeks later and a lot further down. Then he was seen to smell and taste the smear on the drill. A moment later he went tramping off down the hill and never returned.

They took a million dollars worth of crude out of Point Hill in the next few years, but Old Charlie had no part in it. He moved on to Bradford and Cherry Run and Pithole, but he was a changed man. The minute the sand-pump brought up oil traces, he was through and gone. He never came back to see his wells brought in.

A long time afterward, they say Old Charlie got drunk one night and admitted what was really eating him out. It was the bitter, galling knowledge that Sam Walson had been right from the first taste.

The damn beer *was* too green. •

The Framed Hand

It wasn't even a poker hand—it didn't figure in the betting. But he had a reason for framing it.

By AL SPIERS

If you can bamboozle a dozen secretaries and assorted flunkies, and reach the inner sanctum of J. Q. MacNamara, you'll find a curious memento on the wall.

I'm MacNamara, oil tycoon, up the hard way from rig boss, via a lucky hole. Sometimes I'd rather turn the clock back.

But that memento has nothing to do with oil. It's a poker hand—five cards, under glass, in a nice gold frame.

It ain't much of a hand—a deuce, six, eight, queen and king of assorted suits. The week I framed and hung it, Jack Mathers, my lawyer and an old friend, came by. He squinted at it a long time, then asked: "One of your hands, Mac?"

"Yep."

"You must've run one helluva bluff with that one."

"Nope—didn't even try to bluff."

"You couldn't have won anything with it."

"Didn't win a cent."

"Who beat you?"

"Nobody."

He couldn't figure it, so he got up and peered at the hand, nose to the frame. Like me, he's an old poker hound from way back. Presently he mused:

"Long ago you might've played with grubby cards. Not now. You've got enough mazuma to buy a fresh, clean deck for every hand."

"One of the few nice things about bein' rich," I allowed.

"These cards aren't clean," he went on, frowning. Then he got it: "By God—they've been sweat on!" He turned back to me, sputtering with curiosity. "Mac, you haven't sweated at poker for twenty years. It must have been some hand, some pot . . ."

"It was—but I wasn't even in it."

"Then what the hell?"

"Sit down and stop muttering like an impatient gusher, and I'll tell you all about it."

I buzzed my gal, managed a stern, business-like look, and told her, "In conference—no calls, no visitors."

"Big deal," said Jack, eyes twinkling. "He's going to tell me all about it."

I winced at the crummy pun, but I told him the story.

ABOUT two years ago, a few of us shaped up a dandy little private game. At first there were five of us—Joe Freeland, a retired brain surgeon; Bill Ferguson, a railroader; Ed Hudson, who had run a high-powered insurance agency until he took a hard look at his own actuary table; Ben Peshel, a tough old truck magnate, and me.

We had a lot in common. All of us had too much money and too many miles on our frames to enjoy it. We loved poker and shared an abiding contempt for peanut limits and newfangled wild games. Poker should be like good bourbon—straight and biting.

We played once a week—straight, old-fashioned draw, jacks or better, $5 ante, size of the pot limit. If that sounds mild for a bunch of loaded old tycoons, let me refresh your arithmetic. In a hot hand, the limit can double with every bet. If you open for $25 the next man can bet $50, the next $100, the next $200. That's action.

We really needed six to make a good draw game, so one night Bill Ferguson fetched Mike Mallory.

As introductions made the rounds, we all sneaked frowns at Bill and made our eyes ask, "Have you gone off your rocker?"

This Mallory was just a kid—clean-cut, nice manners, direct, friendly eyes, but just a kid, barely pushing 30. Worse, he didn't look like he could afford to get hurt in a game like ours. His clothes were good and tasteful—but store-bought.

And the first thing he said, kinda shy-like, was, "Gentlemen, I must confess I'm not in your money class."

Ferguson chuckled softly. "That's partly true," he said, straight-faced. "He's got a little factory on the edge of town—just starting, pouring everything back into the business. He won't draw more'n about $10,000 a year out of it—enough to keep his wife and kids comfortable."

Joe Freeland looked at me. I looked at Ben. Ben looked at Ed. Then we all glared at Bill. Why the hell had he ruined our game? Sympathy and poker never mix. It's gotta be dog-eat-mongrel to be fun. We couldn't harpoon this kid.

The atmosphere became pretty strained.

"Suppose we ante $1 and play $5 and $10 limit tonight," said Ed, trying to clear the air.

Bill shook his head, grinning wickedly.

"You may wish you had—but it's not necessary," he said. "Same game, same limits, same rules. Mike knows the setup; I've told him." He paused, glanced at the kid, then added: "We must make one small concession, however. We all play wide open—no stake limits. Mike will have a limit."

"How much?" I asked, still skeptical.

Mike's smile was friendly and mildly apologetic as he took a small slip from his pocket and put it on the green felt table.

"I'm good for $14,875," he said quietly. "You're welcome to it."

"If you can get it," said Bill.

"One other thing," said Mike, still slightly apologetic, "I always quit at one A.M. Poker isn't my business. Manufacturing is—and I like to work at it with a clear head."

"A wise rule, son," I said.

"Shall we begin?" purred Bill.

We played. My first cards were pretty sour. I didn't mind. In fact, it was a good thing. My mind was on the kid, not the game.

If he had a small business and thin capital, and only drew $10,000 a year, how the hell could he calmly toss $14,875 at a tough poker game like ours?

And why the odd sum? Why not $14,000 or $14,500? It didn't figure.

Joe and Ed and Ben were having the same kind of distracting brain waves. It showed in their play. After 15 minutes Bill began to chuckle anew.

"Mike—you're taking advantage of these old coots," he said.

Illustration by RAY HOULIHAN

It startled the kid. Seemed to worry him, too.

"I am?" he murmured. "Gee, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. In what way?"

He was plainly sincere. That floored me. Seemed to me a wet-nosed kid would need all the advantages he could get against seasoned old cutthroats like us. But obviously he wanted no advantages.

Bill spoke again.

"They can't figure you out. Better tell 'em about your poker fund before they start absent-mindedly drawing two cards to two pair."

THE kid seemed relieved. "Oh, that! It's really quite simple, gentlemen. I love poker. I started playing for cigarettes as a dead-end kid. But I hate the ups and downs and emotional grief of winning one day and losing the next. I refuse to subject my family to it.

"Long ago I found a way to win or lose without caring. I set aside a fund. When I lost, I drew on it. When I won I added to it. I swore I'd never touch the fund. But—"

"He touched it just once," Bill put in, grinning. "He tapped it for $35,000 to buy a business after the war." He saw the surprise in our eyes. "Mike was a war pilot. Two combat tours—B-17's in Europe, B-29's in the Pacific. They played a lot of poker in the Air Force."

That left only one question which Bill quickly cleared up, to Mike's mild discomfort, since he had to listen.

"Strictly on the level, too," said Bill. "I had him checked. He's never rigged a deck or dealt seconds or marked a card in his life." Mike fidgeted and blushed a little as Bill finished.

"He doesn't have to. Now my advice to you, my crusty old curmudgeons, is to blow the fog out of your heads and oil your brains. You're going to need 'em."

That put the kid in a new light. We began to size him up, and he us. He was a pleasure to watch. I admire genuine artistry, and Mike was a true artist, in spades. He was calmly relaxed, unperturbed. He grinned delightedly when he won—and as delightedly when he lost.

The first hour his play was cagy, cautious and withdrawn. All the time his eyes and ears were busy. He measured us, one by one, and when he got the feel of the game he went to work in earnest.

With a busted flush and a bold, $300 bet, he made Joe fold a set of threes and give up a $750 pot.

"I must confess I stole that one," he said mildly, showing the hand. Joe got a little red in the neck, but I did some fast figuring. He didn't

have to show the hand. He wanted us to know he'd bluffed Joe.

"He won't do that again," I told myself. "He wants us to tag him as a bluffer, so we'll call when he's loaded."

But he did do it again—to me, an hour later, smooth as silk and bold as brass. He grinned and showed me that hand too.

He stood pat on a puny pair of queens to bluff another—and did exactly the same thing the very next hand. Who dared to call that second one? He had to be loaded.

But he wasn't. Except with skill and artistry. After the third hour we didn't even mind the beating he was giving us. You pay to watch Hogan golf or Mantle bat or Helen Hayes act, don't you? And at golf you get a bigger charge out of beating Hogan than some Sunday hacker, don't you?

That's how it was with us.

We were lucky, at that. The cards weren't running with Mike. Over the long pull his hands were indifferent. We clouted him good a few times.

Precisely at one A.M. he cashed in. Despite cards which were never better than fair, he had won $580.

"It's been an honor and a real pleasure, gentlemen," he said, shaking hands around. Funny thing, but the words didn't sound like the polite cliché they formed. Instinctively, I knew why. They were sincere.

I glanced quickly at the other old bandits. Joe winked. Ed nodded. Ben came right out with it.

"Hell yes," he said, reading my thoughts.

"The pleasure has been ours," I said. It was another cliché, but as honest as Mike's. "We hope you'll come back and give us a crack at our money."

"I'd like to."

"Oh hell," I said, laying it on the line. "We play once a week. We need another regular. We're a bunch of old crowbaits, but—"

"I hoped you would ask me," Mike said simply.

He came back the following week. Sitting down he declared his limit as $15,455, the original $14,875 with the precise addition of the $580 he had won from us.

That night the cards crossed Mike. He had a rush of those murderous second-best hands and dropped $1,670. Nevertheless precisely at one A.M. he cashed in, grinned and said: "Like MacArthur, I shall return."

He did, and like MacArthur began to out-general all of us as the weeks passed. We soon discovered that behind his shy nature and amiable grin was a bear trap mind that juggled odds like an electronic brain. He had a psychiatrist's perception, my wife's intuition, and a con man's sly tongue. His face was a mask, and his eyes could heckle, freeze or get opaque on command.

In self defense, I began to search him for weaknesses—the sub-conscious quirks, gestures or nervous habits that often give away even the best players.

I found none.

Dame Poker is capricious. Sometimes Mike lost. But he always quit exactly at one A.M., and always paid up with a happy grin. More often he won, and in three months his fund edged slowly but surely up to $18,975.

Then we got saddled with Jack Bullard.

It was Ben Peshel's fault. He apologized to all of us privately. But it was too late. The damage had been done.

Bullard is a fat, pompous jerk—a second generation jackass who is doing his best to ruin a $3,000,000 foundry his father left him.

Ben's trucks haul Bullard's castings. It's a big chunk of freight that Ben can't afford to lose. So he has to coddle Bullard.

Among other things, Bullard fancies himself a poker player. Somehow he got wind of our game and began dropping broad hints to Ben.

"I stalled the slob as long as I could," Ben told us abjectly. "But when he found out Ed was going to Florida for a month, his hints changed to pure business blackmail. What could I do? I had to invite him as a guest while Ed was gone."

For Ben's sake, we tolerated Bullard. It would only last a month. Then Ed would be back and Ben could plead a full game.

Bullard's natural stupidity killed that naive hope. At poker, like everything else, he was doltish, dull and dim-witted. In four sessions he dropped $5,200—and sprayed us with a wail, bleat or tear for every lost buck.

When Ed got back and Ben gently suggested to Bullard that the game was full again the jerk snarled:

"Whadya mean, full? You can play seven-handed draw. You got a lotta my dough. I want a chance to get it back."

"But—"

"You want my truck business or don't you?"

So the slob stayed with us. Ben was miserable. He even offered to put up $5,200 the first night after Ed's return.

"We'll lose it back to him," suggested Ben, "and that will be the end of it."

Mike shook his head. "You'll never get rid of him that way," he argued. "No—let's ride along. Maybe something will turn up—"

There was a curious electric nuance in Mike's tone, and I peered at him sharply. But his face was bland, his eyes opaque. If there was something in that bear trap mind it didn't show. I could only guess.

This I do know: By the time that session ended Fatso Bullard had wholly forgotten all the rest of us. His mind was full of pure, drooling hate for Mike and an atom-sized explosion had been fused.

I saw it start. In fact, I dealt the hand. Twice no one had opened so there was $105 in the pot as I distributed cards. Mike, under the gun, checked. Bullard opened for $100. Ed called and so did Ben. The rest of us quit—except Mike. He called the $100—and raised it $5.

It didn't make sense. I couldn't figure it. Neither could Bullard. But he could figure the three fat aces in his hand, so he called Mike's raise and boosted it the full $510 limit.

That disposed of Ed and Ben. Mike just shrugged and called.

"How many cards," I asked.

"None," said Mike calmly.

"Two," snarled Bullard. I could see the red creep up his neck. He figured Mike had baited him with a pat hand. He didn't like it a bit.

Then the red receded as fast as it had risen, and Bullard literally reeked with smug content. He had drawn a pair of treys. His greedy eyes counted the pot quickly. He pushed in $1,500 and said:

"Maybe you would like to raise *that* $5."

Not a muscle flickered in Mike's face. His eyes were cool as glacier ice. He said:

"To tell you the truth, Bullard, I *should* raise it $3,000. But I won't. I never rob widows, orphans—or imbeciles like you. I'll just call."

Smug and gloating, Bullard went for heavy humor. "This imbecile," he said, showing his hand, "has an acefull."

Mike was unperturbed.

"A correct confession," he said. "You *are* an imbecile." He spread his own hand under Bullard's nose—four snuggly sevens.

Bullard couldn't believe it. "You stood pat," he sputtered. "You checked. You didn't even open. Everybody might have passed and—"

"That's a play you wouldn't understand, Bullard," said Mike coolly. "It takes guts."

It took awhile for the full impact of that hand to seep through Bullard's slow, oafish brain. But it finally did—even the subtle, pride-shattering insult in Mike's refusal to raise with a cinch hand at the end.

Pure venom flowered in Bullard's eyes, and the feud was born. Mike

did nothing to avoid it. In fact, he seemed to enjoy it.

They tangled a dozen times that night. With uncanny instinct Mike called or raised Bullard's bad hands and faded like a wispy wraith when Bullard was loaded.

Near quitting time, Mike capped the evening by standing pat, driving Bullard out of a good pot with a limit raise, and then showing a ten-high nothing.

Bullard went home hurt and fuming. It was the same story the next week, and the next and next. I almost felt sorry for the fathead. And I almost began to wonder about Mike. I never thought he'd pick on a cripple.

It came to a head the night Ben had to leave town to untangle a truck wreck. Bullard brought a friend to fill in—a house guest, he said, an old college chum now a Midwest doctor.

He looked and acted like a doctor—quiet, polite, conservative in his play. He had a doctor's sensitive, well-groomed hands.

We began to play. Mike seemed preoccupied at first, but he soon resumed baiting Bullard. It was getting a little tiresome. My own cards ran sour, and I was soon bored and drowsy.

I woke up abruptly near midnight. Someone had slipped a marked deck into the game.

It was a slick, professional job. I hadn't seen one like it in years. The deck was exactly like those we used, and the marks were so cleverly worked into the backs that only sharp, cynical old poker eyes like mine could spot 'em.

Before I could figure what the hell was going on it was too late. Bullard's friend dealt, and as the cards went out, one by one, I realized that he was a doctor all right—a card doctor, with a scalpel poised at Mike Mallory's throat.

This was the loaded deal. Bullard aimed to tap Mike Mallory the only way he could.

They had picked a good spot. We'd had four hands without openers so the pot started with $175 in it.

Mike was next to the dealer and opened for $100. Ed called, and Bullard raised $300. Joe Freeland threw in his hand. I passed, too—but palmed my hand and kept it out of sight. I figured I might need it later to prove something.

The "doctor" passed. Mike eyed the $705 in the pot and raised it $700.

"Too rich for me," said Ed. "You two can fight it out."

Bullard raised $1,000—and Mike raised $2,000. That many calls and raises had put $6,405 into the pot. There was a wicked smile on Bullard's fat face when he called Mike's raise and said:

"Okay, punk—you've been asking for this a long time. I raise the limit—$6,400." He didn't have that many chips, of course, so he quickly wrote a check and tossed it in.

I had read both hands as they were dealt. I knew the top card on the deck and could guess the second and third. Mike was hopelessly trapped. I itched to shout a warning. The kid must have sensed it. For the barest instant his eyes flicked to mine. I got a glimpse of something cold, flinty and merciless, and I got a wordless message: "Keep quiet. Stay out of this."

Then Mike was smiling at the doctor and saying softly:

"It's pretty obvious that this is strictly a two-man hand, and a pretty big one. Would you be offended if I asked you to put down the deck so we can draw our own cards?"

"Frankly I'd be relieved," said Bullard's suave friend.

Sure—the rat! His work was done. He put down the deck and carefully placed a single chip atop it. Mike then called Bullard's $6,400 raise with a check of his own.

"Draw your cards," snapped Bullard.

"I'm not sure how many I want," said Mike mildly. "You know, it's a funny thing. This reminds me of a remarkable hand I saw played in the Air Force."

"You bore me," sneered Bullard.

"Perhaps not," Mike went on, his eyes distant. "We had a game like this one. Exactly like it, in fact—down to the three-card draw limit we play—"

"The hell with that," snapped Bullard. "Draw!"

"Please, Jack," reproved Mike gently. "Hands like this are rare. They should be savored." His voice was purring now, and something rippled my spine because it was the purr of a stalking jungle cat. He continued his story imperturbably.

"We had an old major in our outfit, a retreaded Reservist from War I. He loved poker and played a great game. Won a lot of money, too. So a couple of punks rigged a crooked deal on him, with marked cards. The man who dealt gave the major four aces and his pal an open straight flush in spades—nine to queen. It raised quite a rumpus before the draw."

Bullard was mildly startled. He should have been. He was looking at the nine, ten, jack and queen of spades, and he knew Mike had four aces. So did I. Bullard also knew what was coming off the deck. So he sneered again and said:

"You still bore me."

"I'm sure I do—so far," replied Mike. He went on: "The major was under the gun, so they had the draw cards rigged, too. The king of spades was on top, the eight next. 'If the major stood pat with his four aces, or drew one he'd lose, either way, to a straight flush. Worse, the third and fourth cards were also spades—just in case he got wise and broke his aces to beat the setup. He'd still lose to a flush. It looked pretty hopeless."

"I'm sure it was," growled Bullard, beginning to fidget.

"On the contrary," said Mike quietly. "You see, the punks had made one small mistake. The major had a fifth card, of course, with his four aces. It wasn't supposed to figure in the hand, so they hadn't bothered to stack it. The major's fifth card was a meager little deuce—but it was the deuce of spades."

I almost gulped visibly, and Mike shot me another warning glance, saying quickly:

"That's right, Mac—you got it fast. The major outfoxed 'em. He discarded the aces of diamonds, hearts and clubs. The three cards on top of the deck made him a flush, ace high. It won the pot." Mike turned to Bullard. "Still bored, Jack?" he asked.

Bullard obviously wasn't. He was peering at his dealer friend and finding no comfort in the doctor's uncertain frown.

"Shall we draw now?" Mike purred.

"Go ahead," mumbled Bullard, licking dry lips.

Mike's hand was neatly stacked in front of him. One by one he flicked the top three cards face up on the table—the ace of hearts, the ace of diamonds, the ace of clubs. Then, with slow, deliberate movements, and infinite care, he took three cards off the waiting deck and placed them atop the two he'd kept.

"Your turn," he told Bullard. Those two words were icy and charged with compressed contempt.

Bullard was staring at the three exposed aces. Savagely he threw away his odd card and took the waiting spade on top.

Mike was merciless now. His eyes bored into Bullard and he said: "You've been wanting to tap me out of this game for a long time. You'll get your chance right now."

He glanced at the swollen pot, then at the slip that always lay in front of him. "I've got $10,875 left in my stake. I've declared that my limit. It's all I can bet. I bet it."

At that point the doctor made a good try. He picked up the discards and nervously fumbled them. Some spilled face up, some face down. Mike smiled.

"I'll save you the trouble, doctor,"

he said quietly. He turned up all of the cards and spread them out. "You won't find it."

Bullard's eyes were racing over the exposed cards. We all knew what he was looking for—the deuce of spades. It wasn't there.

Abruptly Bullard rose, his chair spilling backward. Raging, he tore his hand into pieces and flung them in the doctor's face. Without a word, he stalked out. His friend followed—fast.

Mike grinned like an urchin who has found a buck in the gutter. His eyes, warm and merry, found mine.

"Okay, Mac," he said. "You can show the rest of the boys that hand you've been hiding so carefully."

I unpalmed the hand I'd held out of sight all the while. It was sweat-soaked and soggy—the same hand I've got framed in my office, a deuce, six, eight, queen and king.

Joe Freeland took one look at it and gasped:

"What the hell! *You* had the deuce of spades."

"Mike has good eyes and a better memory," I said, grinning.

It got through to Joe then. With wide eyes he reached across the table and turned over Mike's hand—the ace, king, eight and four of spades, and the useless trey of hearts.

"I'll be quadruple damned," he sputtered. "You *bluffed* him."

"What else could I do?" asked Mike reasonably.

"You *knew* the deck was marked and the deal rigged," Joe pointed out. "You could have passed."

"But we wouldn't have gotten rid of Bullard," said Mike. "Now we can enjoy our game. I don't think he'll be back."

The following week when we convened—without Bullard—I noticed that something had taken a big bite out of Mike's poker fund; so did Joe.

"You find a tougher game?" Joe asked.

"No," grinned Mike. "This is how much I had the first night Bullard played. I said I don't pick on widows, orphans or imbeciles. The Red Cross was pretty good to me and the boys overseas. So I sent 'em a check in Bullard's name. A rather large check, I might add. You're welcome to what remains, gentlemen. Come and get it."

We've been trying to get it ever since—but futilely. Mike's poker fund keeps growing, slowly but surely.

"Maybe I'll quit when I get a million," he told me once.

It's okay with me—even if he gouges a big chunk of that million out of J. Q. MacNamara, oil tycoon. He's an artist, that boy—a pleasure to watch and a joy to beat—even if it doesn't happen often. •

TWIST OF FATE

TAUGHT BY A TEETER-TOTTER

René Théophile Hyacinthe Laënnec, as he ambled slowly through the gardens of the Louvre that bright spring day in 1819, was a man with a problem. It had to do with etiquette and the branch of his profession to which he was fanatically devoted. For the slim, thoughtful little doctor pacing the flower bordered paths, though still in his thirties, was chief of staff of Paris' Necker Hospital and his special field was tuberculosis.

Three-quarters of a century was to elapse before the discovery of the X-ray, today's greatest aid to medical men in the diagnosis of TB. And Dr. Laënnec was extremely unhappy with the only means of trying to discover what was happening within a patient's chest wall—tapping and listening, tapping and listening. Or, he mused, *trying* to listen. Not only were results uncertain; it was an era of extreme modesty and more often than not the patient suffered from acute embarrassment. Many individuals would not permit such auscultation, which made diagnosis doubly difficult.

There had been, that morning, far more than the usual number of suspect cases at the clinic. Thwarted, frustrated, young Laënnec had finally fled the hospital, walking aimlessly through the lovely gardens, trying to calm the chaos in his mind.

Unconsciously, as he passed the playground, he stopped to watch a group of youngsters laughing and shouting as they whipped up and down on the seesaws. His depression lifted as he observed their obvious good health—until the ever recurrent thought intruded: how many of them would, at some time in their lives, contract the dread tuberculosis?

And at that moment he snapped to alert attention. He had been, absent-mindedly, watching a pair of small boys who were not riding their seesaw. One moppet had his ear pinned to his end of the teeter board, the other lad was scratching and tapping on his. Then they reversed the process. Those children were, obviously, sending each other codes, messages which were being carried along the board!

René Laënnec turned and ran back to his hospital. Out of breath he dashed through the entrance room, coat tails flying, leaving a group of attendants, patients, nurses, nuns staring open-mouthed at his retreating figure.

Nearing his office he grabbed an interne by a coat sleeve and pulled him along. Inside, the startled young assistant found himself brusquely backed against a wall by his chief. Laënnec, without a word, snatched up a magazine, rolled it tightly, placed one end of the makeshift cylinder against the young man's chest while he listened at the other. . . .

When Laënnec finally straightened up he was smiling delightedly. He gazed at the crude hollow tube in his hand—the first stethoscope.

—*Mary Alkus*

Do big muscles make you strong, healthy, attractive to women, a winner in sports?

who needs muscles?

By LESTER DAVID If you are not built like Tarzan . . . If your biceps don't bulge and your muscles don't ripple sleekly along your thighs and back like a weight-lifter's . . .

If, as you scan your image in the mirror, you conclude ruefully that you look like the guy in the advertisement before he took the physical-culture course . . .

Congratulations! You've got physical advantages over the muscle boys that you've probably never suspected.

Hard to believe? Certainly—because we've been led to accept through the years the gospel that the bigger the muscles, the better the man.

But recently armed-forces doctors, scientists in various fields, physical-education teachers, and psychiatrists have been making important new findings on the subject of male musculature. They've been busting a lot of illusions about enormous physical development and its relationship to strength. Their studies reveal that Herculean muscles:


LAUALLI

Don't give a man more endurance in most sports and actually handicap him in many.

Don't make him more attractive to women. In fact, immense physical development is considered repulsive by most females.

Don't make him sexually more virile.

Don't make him healthier or likely to live longer.

Don't last in the majority of cases. They turn into dangerous, life-shortening flabbiness in time. And they make him liable to develop troublesome varicose veins as he grows older.

Take the matter of muscles and endurance. Prof. Roscoe Brown, director of the research laboratory of New York University's physical ed department, declares after many years of observation:

"Bulging muscles are not essential to over-all bodily fitness. They are not a sign that a man possesses greater stamina in many specific events."

Carl Rees of the Columbia College physical education department goes even farther. Big muscles, he asserts, are a detriment in virtually every sport except wrestling and weight-lifting and a few isolated field events. "Massively muscled athletes," he says, "are unable to relax and to start and go properly. They have a terrific problem in keeping their muscles limber. They get knotted-up very easily and their performances suffer markedly."

INTENSIVE studies of the power capacities of athletes are under way at the University of Illinois. Here Dr. Thomas Kirk Cureton, Jr., and his associates at the physical fitness research laboratory are carefully watching the boys in action. Not long ago, the experts made a series of test runs on track champ Craig Dixon of the University of California. Dixon broke the record for combined agility and muscular endurance, doing better than the 7,000 others who had been tested —including some 70 record-holders in various types of athletic events.

And yet, by the generally accepted age-height-weight table, Dixon is 22½ pounds underweight!

What makes a good athlete? Investigators at the University of California spent a long time trying to find out. They have just come up with some interesting conclusions. These tie in squarely with the entire misunderstood subject of big muscles vs. strength and endurance.

Dr. Anna Espenshade reported that a good athlete must have the following basic qualities:

1. A strong grip. It's the best measure of an individual's overall physical condition.

2. An unwavering sense of balance. The best athletes, it was discovered, could walk straight lines without wobbling and were able to pass similar tests better than poorer performers. Linked to this was Dr. Franklin Henry's "sway test" for stability. Blindfolded men were observed closely, and it was clearly noted that those who did the least swaying were those who performed best on the athletic fields.

3. A good sense of aim or direction. Subjects were blindfolded and handed half-pound sandbags which they were told to toss a distance of a dozen feet onto a target on the gym floor. The results again were highly revealing. A few of the men were able to score bull's-eyes nearly all the time; others went wide of the mark at every toss. The good marksmen, it was noted, were invariably the good athletes. And none of the poor ones excelled in any sport.

4. A sense of force. It's essential for a good athlete to know exactly how hard or how easy he is hitting or throwing. Lacking a sense of force, a football player can never be an accurate passer, a basketball player can never pass or shoot well, a golfer will greatly overdrive or underdrive.

These four things, then, make a good athlete. But there is one glaring, conspicuous omission. Nowhere on the list are big muscles either mentioned or implied! In other words—you don't need 'em to make good on the playing fields.

Consider what science has found out about the sport where big biceps are a necessary adjunct to outstanding performance — weight lifting. Dr. Henry, in extensive interviews, has found that there is a definite relationship between an individual's personality and the sport he chooses.

Baseball players, for example, are speed types—they like to get their work at the office and their chores at home done in a hurry, they are impatient with dawdlers and are themselves rarely lazy or slow-moving. Fencers are domineering people who like to exhibit their superiority. Trackmen are also quick in their

"Never mind that, 'We dont want any' stuff. Tell my daughter I'm here!"

movements, are restless, energetic and ambitious, and are inclined to worry and brood. Football players, on the other hand, are generally happy and good-natured.

But the strongboys who go in for weight lifting? Declares Dr. Henry: "Weight lifters often tell us frankly they suffer from an inferiority complex—and that's exactly why they are tossing weights around. . . . They admit they feel insecure and want to do something about it. They want to feel stronger."

Time after time, military and naval authorities have found out that muscles don't spell physical or mental strength. One former Army psychiatrist told me: "The strength of a man's body has no relation to the strength of his mind, to his courage in combat or to his staying power when he finds himself in a tough spot that tests his mettle."

By and large, average guys were more valuable to the Army in combat than the Herculeses. Says Maj. Gen. Norman T. Kirk, U. S. Army Surgeon General during the last war: "Many men who can play hockey or basketball for an hour would break down in a long march, carrying a heavy pack. Some football players who are excellent guards and tackles have such limited mobility in their shoulder joints that they would be at a great disadvantage in hand-to-hand combat."

THE ability of the human body to withstand grueling punishment does not depend on powerful muscular development. Scientists at the Air University at Maxwell Field, Alabama, have been the latest to come to this conclusion. They studied thousands of survival reports to determine just how much battering a man can take under extreme circumstances. They found that men with no particular muscular endowments endured raging fevers in the wilderness, interminable days in freezing weather, long stretches of hunger and thirst and prolonged immersion in water just as well as the Atlas types.

One case that demonstrates this is the astonishing saga of two British seamen who shattered all known laws of survival in an adventure virtually unparalleled in modern times.

The year was 1940 and the freighter *Anglo-Saxon,* torpedoed by a German submarine, churned in its death throes in the North Atlantic. Robert Tapscott, Wilbert Widdicombe and five others managed to escape in a 16-foot open boat which was stocked with a small supply of food and water.

Day after day the boat drifted on the broad ocean. Storms lashed down and sent the tiny craft skittering like a toothpick. There was no cover—the men were soaked to their skins, then dried out under the sun's rays. They sang and told stories to keep up morale, fruitlessly scanning the horizon for oncoming ships. They knew, however, that the prospect of rescue was slim, that it wouldn't be long before their food and water gave out.

By strict rationing almost to the starvation point, the food lasted 50 days. The last drop of water was gone a week later. Still no rescue was in sight on the broad ocean's face, and still the small craft drifted on.

The first 50 days were tough enough; what happened afterward was madness. One by one the survivors perished, driven insane and diving overboard, burned by fevers, killed by starvation. The days wore on . . . and then only Tapscott and Widdicombe remained in the small boat.

For almost three weeks after the food and water had given out they drifted on, through storms and mountainous waves which threatened to plunge them into the sea, under broiling sun which beat down mercilessly. And finally, 70 full days after their freighter had sunk, they were cast ashore in the Bahamas, bone-weary, emaciated, sick—but alive. And after long periods of hospitalization, both recovered.

Yet both had been far less muscular at the start of their incredible ordeal than some of the five crewmen whom they buried at sea.

Many are the tales that can be spun of no-muscle men whose endurance has astounded the experts. There was the slender navigator, sole survivor of a bombing plane crash in the Far East, who was lost for 67 days in jungle land. He subsisted on fruits and berries as he crawled and stumbled to eventual safety.

There was the 20-year-old, 125-pound youth who was lost in freezing temperatures in Alaska for days with no protection but a windbreaker jacket. He survived despite science's assertion that less than a day's exposure in below-zero cold would kill a man.

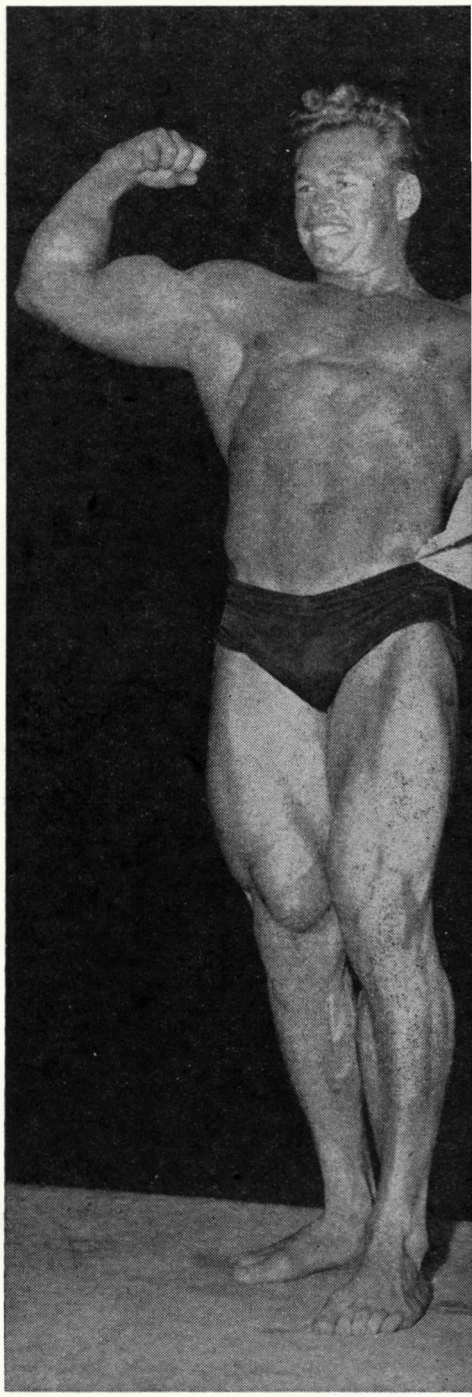
And there's the bizarre, almost unbelievable story of Mike Malloy. In the underworld they speak of him as "Durable Mike"—and for excellent reason.

In the early 1920's, Mike was a well-known figure in the Bronx, N. Y., speakeasy circles. Mike was strictly a bum and a drink-moocher. He was so thin, so scrawny, so weak-looking that no one knew how he remained in the world of the living.

One day, a few speakeasy hangers-on looked at Mike and hit on an idea of making some easy money. They would take out life insurance on him and then collect by the simple expedient of letting Mike drink himself to death. They felt they wouldn't have a long wait.

The first stage of the plot went fine. With the help of a crooked doctor, they swung a deal for an $1,800 policy. Then they started to work on Mike. For days they poured firewater down his gullet, the pop-skull Scotch and panther sweat that marbleized men's insides in those days.

It's effect on Mike? He got cock-



Muscles like these on Roy Stanley, the 1951 Mr. America, look fine, but they tend to cause varicose veins, later turn to flabbiness.

eyed more frequently—but that was all.

The plotters decided to give him a stronger libation—oysters soaked in wood alcohol. Mike just hiccuped, and asked for another round.

Durable Mike, it seems, needed rougher treatment. So on the coldest night of the year, they renewed Mike's jag, bundled him in a car, drove miles into the country and divested him of all cover except his undergarments. Then they shoved Mike out and left him there to sleep off his drunk in the freezing cold.

Then they had a brilliant thought on how to insure the successful termination of the expedition. So they went back and poured gallons of icy water all over Mike as he lay sleeping.

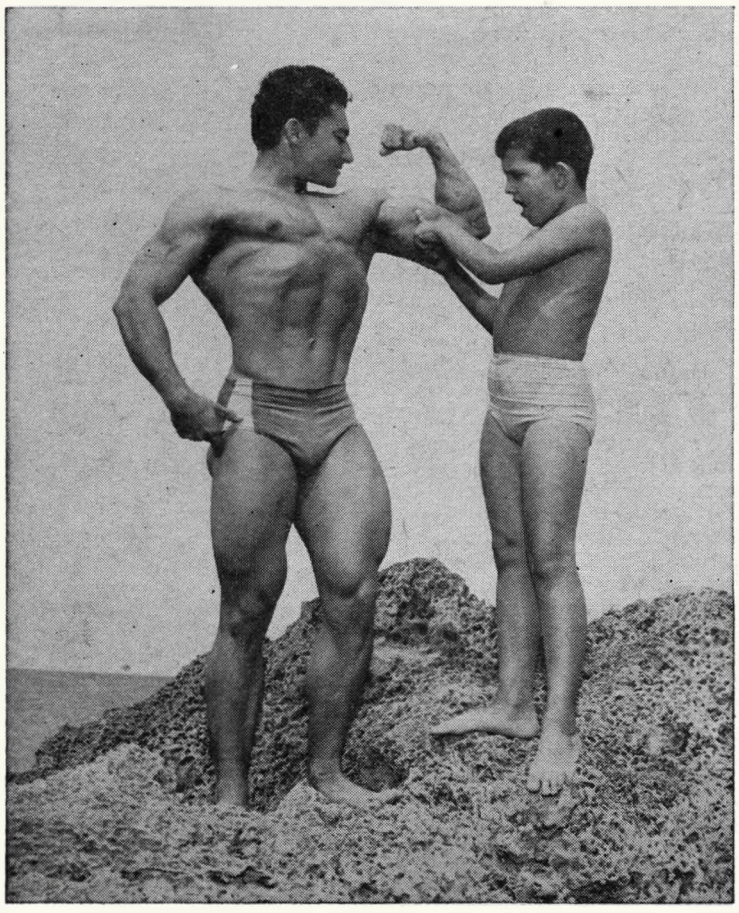
Next night, Mike shuffled into his favorite speakeasy and asked the bug-eyed boys if they could fix him up with a strong shot of something. "Must've caught a cold somewhere," he said hoarsely as he blew his nose.

The gang tried some more. They tried running over him with a car. Mike just got up and sauntered away. They hired a cab to do the job more efficiently. The only damage to Mike was several busted ribs. Finally, patience exhausted, the boys kidnaped him, held him firmly, and inserted a tube into his mouth. They then poured illuminating gas into him until he was ultimately dispatched.

They got him—but you'll agree it took a bit to do away with the skinny, wraith-like hunk of human flotsam they called Durable Mike. No, the human body doesn't need huge muscles to withstand considerable punishment.

Now, how about muscles and sexual virility? Doctors and scientists tell you there isn't the slightest connection between the two.

Probably the supreme authority today on the subject of sexual performance is Dr. Alfred C. Kinsey, who says flatly in his "Sexual Behavior of the Human Male": "There is no invariable correlation between sexual and physical activity." He goes on: "The list of top athletes includes persons with both low and high rates of sexual outlet."



Mr. Puerto Rico—high-school chemistry instructor José Avila—shows a bicep. Such muscle is essential for weight-lifting, but a handicap in general athletics.

And declares Dr. Louis I. Maraventano, a noted anatomist and sexologist: "Virility has nothing to do with muscular development or brawn. In fact, although no categorical statement can be made for lack of conclusive evidence, it certainly would appear that thin men are more apt to possess greater potency than the huskier types."

On what, then, does virility depend? It's a question, says Dr. Maraventano, of the "inherent quality of the gonad glands." Kinsey points out: "On the whole it is evident that general good health, and therefore the physical activity which engenders good health, may contribute to an increase in the frequency of sexual performance." But he also offers this caution: "Physical exercise which is carried to a point of exhaustion interferes with sexual as well as other sorts of reactions."

What do women think of the overly muscled male? Does he rate as high with them as you've been led to believe?

Psychiatrists say no. Authorities on sex matters say no. And women themselves say no.

In "Sexual Behavior of the Human Female," Kinsey asserts that women get no particular reaction from the sight of nearly nude, heavily muscled male figures. In fact, they scarcely glance at them. Many photographs and magazines are published portraying young Goliaths in various poses which accent muscles, but, says Kinsey, they are produced for male audiences. "There are almost no male or female nudes which are produced for the consumption of females," he asserts.

WITHIN the past five years, nine public-opinion polls have been taken on the question of what women actually want or desire in a man. All types of females in every section of the country were canvassed by such outfits as the Institute of Public Opinion (the Gallup poll); Gilbert Youth Research Organization, the nation's largest agency devoted to fact-finding among young people; and the Institute for Mass Motivation. Those interviewed ranged from high-school and college co-eds to middle-aged women, and the total number of subjects ran to well over 10,000.

What did they say?

Well, they wanted such attributes as kindness, charm, the ability to make a good living, a good sense of humor, reliability, an easygoing disposition. These, apparently, are the qualities that capture women.

But get this: In seven of the polls, physical attractiveness was mentioned so infrequently by the women that the poll-takers did not even give it a

percentage rating! It was simply lumped in the miscellaneous column. And in three of the polls, it ended far down on the list.

Just for the heck of it, I spent an afternoon calling up pretty girls I knew—secretaries, students, housewives—and asking them point-blank: "Does a man with big muscles attract you?" I kept count of their replies.

Of 43 girls questioned, only two said yes.

Here are some of the other answers: "Those knotty things? They're repulsive." "A man built like that probably spends most of his time working to maintain his physique and is probably extremely vain. That's not for me." "Women don't like smooth-bodied men. They should be bumpy and irregular. But those physical culture specimens are carrying things too far." "Physically, big muscles don't attract. Esthetically, they rate low."

Bolstering this general attitude is comment from Hollywood by one Margie Connolly, a pert blonde stenographer who is president of the Southern California *Mr. Peepers* fan club. *Mr. Peepers,* as you doubtless know, is the title of a TV show starring meek and skinny Wally Cox. Says Miss Connolly:

"It's definitely not true that only men with bulging muscles command the cream of the feminine crop. Muscles belong in a prize ring or as part of a life-guard's equipment. Most women want their men to be mild-mannered or even shy. It's the maternal instinct."

Women, Miss Connolly continues, are realistic. "Life with a human dynamo would be too hectic for most of us. We might like to watch wrestlers crush one another, but it would be terribly wearing to marry one. A meek man is constant, dependable and certain not to have a roving eye—mostly because he doesn't believe enough in his own potentials."

There must be something to it. The meek and muscleless Mr. Cox gets a larger percentage of marriage proposals in his fan mail than Rudolph Valentino ever got.

Who needs muscles? Many millenniums ago, man had to be physically powerful in order to battle wild animals, forage for food and protect his spouse from marauders.

Well, there aren't any wild animals closer than zoos, food foraging is fairly simple in supermarkets unless you go on Saturday mornings, and nobody can drag my spouse off by her hair without incurring the risk of extended penal servitude.

It would seem that in this day and age, great big muscles on a man are about as useful as his vermiform appendix. •

WORDLY WISE

BANGS

Economic disturbances in the middle of the 19th century played havoc with rich sportsmen. Some of them even had to sell their stables. Others merely reduced their staff and kept their blooded animals.

Short-handed stable bosses found it impossible to groom horses so carefully as in the past. It had been customary to spend hours in trimming the tail of an animal; now grooms frequently whacked the tail off square, or "bang off."

Bang-tail animals won several major races and attracted wide attention. Designers took note, and by the third quarter of the century many fashionable women were wearing their hair in *bangs.*

—Webb Garrison

By GEORG NELSON MEYERS

THE PIONEER

They tried to tell him a man with an axe and a strong back could no longer fight his way through in Alaska. Lee saw they were right . . . then took another look.

It was a cool, clear morning in late spring. Lee Simms, heading for town, found it hard to accept that it was different from any other trip he had made in the past seven years.

It was the same old G.I. surplus ambulance that he had driven over the Alaska Highway a year after he got out of the Army. It looked the same, except for the latest coat of bright-blue paint. The engine sounded better than when he first had bought the rig, Lee thought with pride. He had an understanding with engines.

The highway was blacktopped now. It had been gravel under snow, packed solid as glare ice, when he first had driven it, all 1500 frozen miles of it, with his wife, Ellen, and Mike, not yet a year old.

Lee smiled. Alaskans then did not want to believe that he had dared to make such a trip with a woman and a baby. It had been a murderous win-

ter. Ellen had gasped when she saw a thermometer reading 57 degrees below zero.

Now honeycombed snow lay at the bases of the spruces and birches fringing the road. The trunks appeared to be growing out of misshapen pillows.

Lee glanced back at his cabin on a rise through the woods, a quarter-mile off the highway. He thought without satisfaction:

I drive away and it's mine. The next time I see it, it won't be mine.

The chimney of small boulders rose over the roof. Smoked plumed and the sun behind it turned it purple. The world was scarlet around the edges.

I cemented every one of those damned rocks into place with these big bare hands, thought Lee. If I thought Del Spade was going to touch one of those rocks, I'd let him whistle.

Or would I? he thought. Fifteen thousand dollars will soothe a lot of bruised pride in a man's handiwork.

Fifteen thousand dollars would buy a new car, a station wagon, probably. It would pay for the drive back home to the Sacramento Valley and make a down payment on a farm—the farm he never had been able to turn his land into, 140 miles south of the Arctic Circle.

Fifteen thousand dollars would buy him out of his brightest dream and make Ellen smile as though she liked it. But it couldn't touch his son, Mike. Mike knew that in California he couldn't wake up in the morning and see a moose grazing a hundred yards from his window. He couldn't trap muskrat and beaver with his dad. He would get no rifle for his twelfth birthday, as promised, and go gunning for his first caribou.

Fifteen thousand dollars could not make Mike think his dad had pulled a good deal.

Del Spade, thought Lee Simms, you'd better make my place into the best damned roadhouse in Alaska or Mike and I personally will unzip your hide and tamper with your innards.

Spade had said the cabin would require very little remodeling to make a first-class drink-and-dance place.

"That big room there, the long one with the windows," Spade had said. "Perfect for a little dance floor with tables around the rim. We'll fit the bar right around this doorway—U-shaped, see?"

Spade's eyes had swept the cabin.

"We won't have to touch the kitchen. Need a bigger stove, that's all. Got to have lots of stove top to fry steaks. The bedrooms there, they'll make fine private dining rooms. Some of my customers like their privacy on a Saturday night."

Lee grimaced as he drove. The big room—he had built it last. It was long and wide, the ceiling held up by

solid spruce beams he had felled himself. Ellen needed the room and the big windows. She liked to dabble with paints. The light was good there most of the year and you could see the river out of the window. And all the extra space gave Mike some place to swing his elbows in winter, when he couldn't be outdoors.

Spade, thought Lee, tell your customers not to spill their drinks on that floor. I laid it, and not to catch whisky.

There's a tank car of my sweat in that cabin, thought Lee. It holds the place together.

Too bad. Seven years out of the huskiest years of his life, and what he had to show for it was not the farm he and Ellen had dreamed of—king-size potatoes and blood-red strawberries and cabbages the size of basketballs. Seven years and the same old rumble-buggy, a few acres of logged-off flatland, a curving access road of gravel and a damned fine log cabin that the biggest night-club operator in Alaska thought was worth 15,000 dollars.

"It'll cost another 10 grand to fit it out," Spade had said. "But she'll be a knockout. Just far enough out of town to keep out the small-change sports."

Spade's last out-of-town roadhouse had burned down. He had two places in town that catered to the small-change sports. But he liked the bigger money that drove its own cars or hired taxicabs to get his five-dollar steaks and dollar drinks in country-club style surroundings.

"We'll save that little room on the end for the card tables," Spade had said.

That almost had put Lee on his hind legs. The little room was something special. Lee had added it when little Patty was on the way. But little Patty had not made the grade. She had lived a week.

My God, thought Lee, what a farmer failure will do for 15,000 bucks!

LEE SIMMS was glad that Ellen's father, whiskery old Mart Pennock, had not lived to see what was happening to the place he had homesteaded and let go to jungle in a respectable, shiftless way.

Old Mart had put his stakes on the 160 acres during a period when he had sworn-off panning the creeks and decided to settle down and bring his family north. But Ellen's mother would not take the bait. She had Ellen at home and two grown sons to plow and milk and a truck to haul vegetables to Sacramento. And she had lived so often and so long without Old Mart that she was not sure living with him steadily would be an improvement.

Ellen's mother had died just before Lee got his discharge. Ellen had a little girl's excited memories of her wandering father and envisioned him as a brawny carver of empire in the Far North. When Old Mart had written, inviting her and Lee to help him in another try at putting his homestead into shape, she couldn't wait to head north.

The first sight of Old Mart's homestead had been a shock. It was a piece of indistinguishable wilderness recognizable as human habitat only by a shanty built of scrap timber and gasoline cans smashed flat. A few souring logs soaked up water near the riverbank, and a coughing, rusted donkey-engine feebly spun the burrs of a makeshift sawmill.

Old Mart had been grubstaking himself for intermittent prospecting trips by chopping and sawing firewood for cash-and-carry customers.

Lee had started building the cabin the first winter. The first room was the kitchen. All four of them had lived in the one room, sleeping in tiered bunks near a second-hand iron cook stove Lee had bought in town.

Lee had patched up the donkey engine and enjoyed doing it. He found customers for wood and delivered it in the ambulance. He and Ellen hiked the boundaries of the homestead, pointing out where they would lay the trees down to plant in the flat and where they would cut a road to the highway.

"Lee," Ellen had asked, "are you disappointed?"

The thought never had occurred to him. "Disappointed? Darling, I wouldn't change it. What else is a big lug like me good for except to push things down and do heavy lifting?"

Ellen had clung to his arm, walking with big steps, and they were a happy pair, full of love and grit and ready to take on hardship together.

The memory let a droplet of pain into Lee's bloodstream. He thought of Ellen then, a small girl, but strong, with shining blue eyes and a smile that a man would fight hard for, to keep it on her lips.

Ellen still smiled, and the work of the years had made her body a good deal stronger. And the light in her eyes still was there—or had been until he told her about Spade's offer.

Lee had tried to make it sound sensible. He took the blame, as he had to. What had he been able to do for her and Mike? Ellen was a pretty girl in fine clothes, and he had not been able to buy them for her or take her places where she could wear them. She liked gayety and crowds of friends, and he could provide her neither. A woman needed leisure and time to enjoy comforts. Ellen had her paints and brushes and Lord only knew when she found time to dabble with them.

And then there was the trouble Lee had had, trying to get the school bus to come far enough out of town to take Mike to school. The problem could come up again.

Ellen had listened quietly, saying, "Lee, you do what you think is right."

LEE had known then that what Ellen wanted was what he was willing and able to provide her—anywhere, anytime. It eased him to know that it was cutting her to leave the home, however inadequate, they had made for themselves and that she knew it was bruising him badly, too, and that both knew there really was no other course.

"Times have changed," Lee had said. "In the old days, a fellow with an axe and a strong back could come into a country and make a start for himself. Let's face it. I'm not pioneer stock."

Remembering the speech reminded Lee of the first time he had heard it, from Sam Wardell, the banker.

They were in their third year on the homestead then. The cabin had three rooms. Old Mart had given up the pretense of enjoying woodcutting. He borrowed airplane fare and flew to the Koyokuk River, north of the Arctic Circle. Old Mart knew there was gold there. In leaving, he made out a deed for the homestead and handed it to Lee.

"I want you and Ellen to have it," he said.

Cutting and hauling wood had provided enough money for food, Lee had laid aside the choice timber for the cabin. He had hunted gravel the way Old Mart hunted gold, hauling it in the ambulance to ballast a road from the highway to the cabin. But the land he had been able to clear was too small for potatoes and yielded a meager crop of strawberries.

The Simms' nearest neighbor was Darrell Geoghegan, a red-faced ex-G.I. His homestead was five miles closer to town.

"You're breaking your neck," Geoghegan had told Lee. The only way to clear land is hire a bulldozer and have at it."

Lee laughed. "Sure—at 25 dollars an hour."

"I know," said Geoghegan. He, too, had come to Alaska to make his own farm. After a year he had taken a job driving a truck on a construction job at a government air base.

"Any time you're ready, let me know," Geoghegan said. "I can get

Illustration by HOWARD WILLARD

you put on a truck at three and a quarter an hour. That ain't hay."

The homestead deed in his hand had given Lee confidence. He had gone to the bank and asked to see Wardell, the manager.

"I'd like to borrow $5,000 on this," Lee said, showing the deed.

Wardell was a young man, almost as big as Lee. He would have looked like a banker in dungarees. His manner was direct and courteous. He smiled and shook his head.

"We've been wondering when you'd be in, Simms," he said. "If it were up to me, I'd say you, personally, are as good a risk as a man could ask for. But I'm just the man that gets the dirty work here—like telling you that the board wouldn't look twice at your application. I'm not the final authority. But I'd like to spare you the embarrassment of a turn-down from the ones who can do it."

Lee's face must have gone rigid with humiliation. Wardell went on:

"You're the kind of man I hate to say no to. What this country needs is more, a lot more, just like you. But this pioneerig is not what it's cracked up to be. Once a man with an axe and a strong back could move in and make a place for himself. Today—and here—you've got to have money."

Lee swallowed. He tried to keep his voice level. "I know. I thought that's what banks are for."

WARDELL smiled again. "I guess it's just about true, Simms. A bank is a place where you can borrow money if you can prove you don't need it. You say the word, and we'll fill out an application and I'll talk for you."

"No, thanks," Lee said.

"You don't have to go broke, you know," said Wardell.

"I know. I can always go to work at the air base."

Wardell eyed him. "Simms, you've got a sweet little wife. Why don't you and she come into town next Wednesday night and be my guests at the Totem Club dance. It's all old-fashioned stuff, you know—polkas and schottisches. Don't you think your wife would like that?"

Lee studied Wardell. He was smarting with shame and resentment, but he saw that the man meant to be friendly. And he knew that Ellen would be delighted to go to a Totem Club dance. The Totem was the closest thing to an exclusive club in town. All the best people attended the dances.

"Thanks, Mr. Wardell. I'll ask her."

Ellen never had looked prettier than at the Totem Club dance. Hurriedly, she had redecorated an old skirt and done something about a neckline on a silk blouse she had not worn since California. They had a woman in town to leave Mike with.

Lee learned with astonishment that the town's leading businessmen were a cordial, jocular lot. Their wives, in their skirts, rustic for the occasion, had charm, and some had beauty. The most astonishing thing was that almost all of them knew Lee Simms by name.

"I don't know," Wardell had said when Lee introduced Ellen. "It looks pretty foolhardy to turn this big brute loose on all those awe-stricken women. We city dudes are likely to sit out a lot of dances."

In the ambulance on the long drive home, Ellen held Mike, asleep on her lap, and clung to Lee's arm.

"It was wonderful!" she said. "I never had so much fun. Oh, Lee, this is the way I always hoped it would be!"

All the businessmen, from then on, had a hello for Lee on his trips to town. Often they stopped and talked. But no one had invited him and Ellen again to a Totem Club dance.

Lee had gone on, knocking down trees, grubbing out the stumps with the ambulance and using it for a tractor to pull a cultivator. He got in a few acres of potatoes and some more strawberries. At the end of the season he had money enough to buy a good generator plant, and the cabin had electric lights.

But that was also the year of little Patty. They had to run up a bill at the hospital. And little Patty never had come home.

The day after Ellen returned from the hospital, Lee stopped in at Darrell Geoghegan's cabin and asked about a job at the air base. He went to work, driving a dump truck, two days later.

For the first time in their marriage, Lee and Ellen then began to have a little money. It was what he got in return for the time he should have been using to clear the land and plant crops. In the long summer evenings, when daylight lingered almost to midnight, Lee worked on the cabin and helped Ellen with her flowers and Mike with his vegetable patch.

The pansies and delphiniums seemed to spurt from the earth. Mike pulled his radishes and clapped his hands in delight. And the trees still stood where Lee wanted to plow. Lee saw them as the price of a new stove, good dishes on a dining table he did not build, box springs and a mattress, a new radio and the first carpet they ever had owned.

Lee saw himself on a treadmill, earning enough money to buy some of the farming equipment he needed and without the time and strength remaining to use it after earning the money. Farming was a full-time job anywhere. In Alaska, full time almost was not enough.

But the first time that Lee and Ellen had permitted themselves the thought of moving away was a result of Mike's sixth birthday.

Lee remembered the incident with distaste. Mike had turned six in September. Lee had gone to a meeting of the school board to ask for the school bus to drive far enough out on the highway to get Mike.

The president of the board was John Hunt, a frail man with gray hair slicked to his head. He operated a typesetting machine for the town's daily newspaper and had wide reputation for a phenomenal memory.

"Mr. Simms," said Hunt. "We'd like to be able to bring in every child from all the creeks and camps, but we can't afford to do it. The bus already goes 15 miles out the highway, snow or shine, and we have a solid rule that we can't extend the route unless there are five additional pupils to be picked up. Do you have any idea how much it would cost the school district to send our bus 13 miles farther—that's 26 miles on the round trip—every day?"

Lee offered to pay the extra cost. Hunt shook his head.

"It's a matter of principle, Mr. Simms. You may be able to afford to pay. The next fellow can't."

"The principle I'm thinking of," said Lee, "is that my boy is entitled to an education. I pay the school tax, and it doesn't look like I'm getting anything out of it."

"Hundreds of residents of the district who don't have any children also pay the tax," said Hunt. "I'm sorry, Mr. Simms."

THE next time Lee had met John Hunt was five months later. During a week of blizzards, a snow slide had knocked out a bridge on the railroad, 80 miles south of town. An engineer on a northbound freight, running blind in the storm, had seen the break too late. He tried to stop, but the engine derailed and ground to a halt at the foot of a 40-foot ravine. Three box cars derailed behind it.

The engineer and fireman, miraculously, were unhurt. They made their way back three miles to a section house. The blizzard continued. In eight hours, the freight train was buried. Then the storm subsided and the temperature dropped to 50 degrees below zero.

Lee had heard the news on the radio. The important thing was that with the rail line broken, no coal could get through from the mines in the south. The mayor had proclaimed an emergency and rationing of coal. Most of the supply on hand was allocated immediately to the

town's power plant. Homes burning coal would have to turn to wood.

Lee had driven into town to see the mayor and offered to lead a volunteer party of woodcutters. One of the first men to respond was John Hunt.

It took three weeks to clear the railroad wreckage and build a temporary bridge. Lee begged off from work and daily led 50 men into the frozen, timbered hills with axes and saws. He helped to deliver wood to homes that could get no coal.

When the first train-load of coal arrived, a throng was at the depot, cheering. The same day, Lee found at the post office a letter from John Hunt. It said that the school board had reconsidered Mr. Simms' request and was pleased to notify him that the school bus would be routed to Mile 28 on the highway on such date as Mr. Simms might designate.

There also was another envelope. It contained a guest-membership card for Mr. and Mrs. Lee Simms to the Totem Club.

It had been word of the death of Old Mart Pennock that set Lee to taking stock of what he had done with the years that were supposed to transform Old Mart's homestead to a farm. A bush pilot brought the news. Some Indian trappers had found Old Mart on the banks of a creek near the village of Bettles. Old Mart's face was in the water. His gold pan lay under him. The pilot had brought Old Mart's wallet, empty except for a few cards and some snapshots of Lee and Ellen and Mike. The Indians had buried Old Mart on a hill, with his feet toward the Koyokuk.

Lee had pondered then what could happen if he quit at the air base. They had a little money saved, perhaps enough to hire machinery and do a quick job of land clearing. That would leave them broke, with nothing to go on to work the big acreage.

"In other words," Lee had told Ellen, "it's fourth down, and still 10 yards to go."

So, Lee had continued to put his money and spare time into the cabin, with the intention of making his family as comfortable as possible.

Then, six months ago, on a Sunday afternoon, the Simmses had had a surprise caller. Dr. Webster had driven up in his expensive sedan. Ellen made coffee and they sat in the big room, watching the midwinter sun's red reflection in the river's glare ice.

Dr. Webster said: "I've been thinking of getting myself a summer place, away from town. A little fishing and some real rest. I've wondered if you folks might be interested in selling."

Lee and Ellen had exchanged quick, shocked glances.

"Why, no," said Lee.

"Well, I wonder if we could talk about it. I've admired your place every time I've driven by it. Would you like to name a price?"

Lee said, "Doc, I just don't think there is a right price."

The doctor continued. "I've put away $10,000 to buy myself some summer pleasure. I might be able to go a little higher. Not much."

Lee heard Ellen gasp: "Ten thousand dollars!"

Dr. Webster smiled. "I know money doesn't touch what you've put into the place. I could build cheaper, but it wouldn't match this. Just say you'll think it over."

Lee and Ellen still had been thinking it over six weeks ago when Del Spade's roadhouse, The Aurora, 12 miles out of town, burst into flames about five o'clock one morning and burned to the frozen ground.

Del Spade soon had sought out Lee and talked directly to the point. He wanted to buy the Simms place for $15,000. He wanted an answer in two weeks. He couldn't afford to stay out of business long.

Lee and Ellen had talked far into the night. They reminded each other of the sunshine and the gleaming fields of the Sacramento Valley. They said how wonderful it would be for Mike to be out of doors all year round. They thought of driving into San Francisco on week-ends to see a play or hear music and to eat an exotic meal in a gay restaurant. They agreed they were fools to go on living and slaving the way they were, and the reasonable thing to do was sell.

Then they turned on their pillows in the hand-hewn bed that Lee had built and stared into the shadows of the cabin's timbered beams and remembered their bright hopes and let the warm tears come quietly.

Del Spade had an office in the rear of a night club on the main street of town. Lee drove around the block, looking for a place to park. He found a spot, in front of the bank.

For an instant, Lee gazed at the big, plate-glass window of the bank. A daring thought began to take form. He played with the thought while he fished in his pocket for a nickel and put it in the parking meter.

Lee could feel his heart thumping, the power of the pulse beat echoing at his temples. The memory of his last visit there hung like a stone in his chest. He licked his lips and went into the bank and asked for Sam Wardell.

"Sit down, Simms," said Wardell. "We've been wondering when we'd see you in here again."

Lee could not think of a place to begin. "I wanted to talk to you—ask your advice."

"Ask away."

"It's about my place. I've got a chance to sell it. A good offer."

"I heard, Simms. That's fine."

Lee fought to break through the aura of uneasiness and practiced rebuff that the still competence of the bank's activity lay over him.

"Mr. Wardell, I was wondering if I could get you to fix me up with an application for a loan."

Wardell smiled. "Oh—you don't want to sell?"

"No, sir. I sure don't. I still hanker to make me a farm out there. I thought if my place was worth $15,000 to Del Spade, I ought to be able to borrow something on it."

"Del Spade is a smart business man," said Wardell. "How much of a loan were you thinking of?"

Lee felt perspiration on his forehead. "Ten thousand dollars."

Wardell leaned back in his chair. "Well, I don't think there should be any trouble about it. I'm chairman of the board now, you know." Wardell smiled again. "And a lot of us would have hated to see Spade take over your place. It's the show place of the valley. Every one in town remarks on it. You put your signature here and in a couple of days you'll be in business."

Lee asked: "You mean, this is all there is to it?"

"In a couple of days you'll have an account of $10,000. What are you going to do with it, Simms?"

"Grow potatoes." Lee stood up.

"By the way," said Wardell. "We haven't seen you and the missus at the Totem Club dances. You still have your card, haven't you? Come on in. We want you to."

"We will, Mr. Wardell. I promise."

Lee stepped out into the sunshine. He felt as he had the day Ellen had said she would marry him, and the day Mike was born, and the day all their belongings were piled in the back of the ambulance and he had said, "Alaska, here we come!"

He crossed the street, moving toward Spade's office. He saw a pretty dress in a shop window and reminded himself to buy it for Ellen on the next trip to town. He passed a window displaying a small tractor. He chuckled.

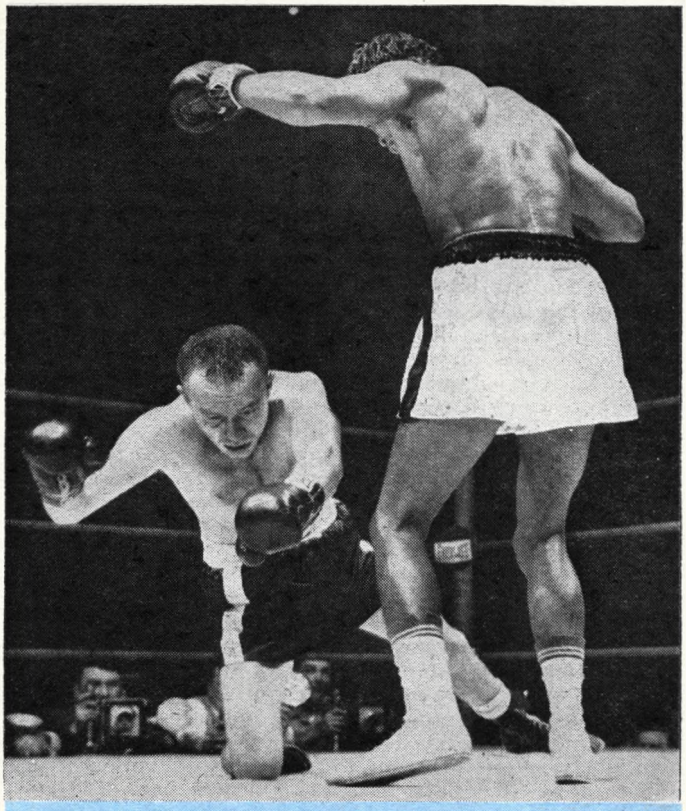
Lee found Spade in his office and gave him his answer. Then he drove home, singing, pushing the good old ambulance too hard. At Mile 28, he turned off and knew Ellen and Mike would hear the gravel under the tires. He got out of the ambulance, patted it on the fender, then strode toward the cabin, his cabin, the Simms cabin—*the show place of the valley*—shouting:

"Hey, Ellen! Hey, Mike!" •

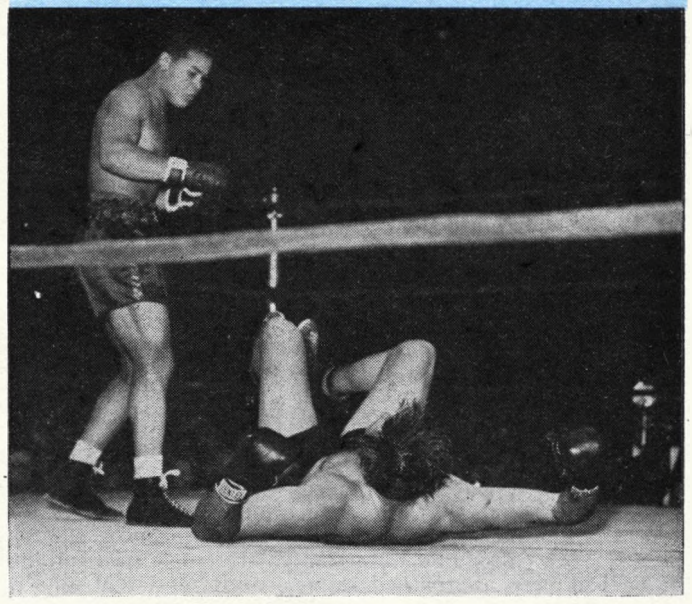
It's All Your Fault

That's what the so-called "boxing experts" say when the battle of the century turns out to be the all-time flop. You, the fans, were the ones who were fooled. And how long are you going to take such unjust criticism?

■ By STERLING RYAN



Above: Chuck Davey goes down for the second time in his bout with Gavilan. Below: Louis knocks out Buddy Baer.



Editor's Note: "Sterling Ryan" is the pseudonym for a well-known sports-writer, a veteran of more than twenty years on the sports desk of a large metropolitan newspaper. Because he has some critical remarks to make about the members of his own craft, many of them his personal friends, he prefers to remain anonymous.

■ A little more than a year ago, Chuck Davey, a young, personable graduate of Michigan State College, the holder of a master's degree in education, and a pretty fair college boxer, fought Kid Gavilan, in Chicago, for the welterweight champion-

ship of the world. The champion, Gavilan, a rapier-fisted Cuban who had taken on all comers in his division in his surge to the title, made mincemeat of Davey, and saved the boy from really brutal punishment only because of Gavilan's own merciful instincts.

Immediately the fight was over, boxing writers from coast to coast began to laugh out loud in print and to claim the fight had taken place only because of the insistence of the television audience, who had built up Davey to the position of challenger for the title. The fight was a fiasco, in other words—which it genuinely was—only because you, the fans, had *insisted* on its being staged. Had any so-called boxing expert been consulted, it was implied, the fight would have been laughed right out of existence.

And in this single instance—a situation which has been repeated many times, after many similar fiascos—you get a picture of your average boxing expert who writes for the newspapers today. He knows little more about the fight game than you do. He will render an opinion and call it fact, and blame you when it turns out to be wrong, as it does in so many instances. He will encourage the build-up of second-rate fights, write reams about each participant before the fight takes place, and, when it turns out to be the flop of the year, laugh at you for being dumb enough to have spent money to see it.

Today's boxing expert is nothing of the sort. He is, in most instances, little more than a fan himself; except that, in his case, he can argue the merits of a fight beforehand, and its lack of same later, and he has nobody to talk back to him. He can, in short, blame his mistakes on you, as he does with regularity, and what are you going to do about it?

For example, just what part did *you* play in building up Chuck Davey? Unless you are among the minority of American citizens who live either in the Detroit or Chicago areas, the chances are you probably never spent so much as a dime to see Davey fight. So you saw him on television.

A New York editor told the writer that he had been approached by as many as half-a-dozen newspaper fight experts all of whom wanted to write stories about Davey for the editor's readers. This fellow had it, they swore; he was a comer, a sensation. Yet, after the Davey bubble had burst, these same experts giggled in their sports copy about the gullibility of the fight fan, who, unlike them, had been unable to see from the beginning that Davey was a flop as a contender for Gavilan's title!

Yet, if the experts believed Davey was a comer beforehand, how was the fan to think differently—the fan who gets his fight information only from his daily newspaper? And if the experts knew *before* the Gavilan fight that Davey couldn't make it—and most of them presumably did, since they established Gavilan as the overwhelming favorite—why didn't they write such information before the fans were led to believe this would be the fight of the century, the battle of brains versus brawn, of the college man versus the boy from the streets?

If the experts knew the fight came as the result of a build-up, in other words, it was their duty to their readers, their *sacred duty* as members of the press, to warn the public before the latter spent its good money to see such a flop. And the experts did know it, as proven by the odds. Why then did they wait until the fight was over to show their wisdom?

It's a question the boxing fan might well ask himself.

In an era before Davey, indeed in an era when there was no television audience to go clamoring into the streets to build up prizefighters, a similar situation occurred with a gentleman named Primo Carnera. Remember him? *Sure* you do—he became the heavyweight champion of the world.

And, according to the experts, you're the guy who made him such.

It only became obvious, years after the huge and amiable Italian lost the title, that he had been cleverly managed by a hoodlum group, who maneuvered him—entirely with the blessing of the boxing experts—into a world championship. It became known that Carnera had established his record toward the title by belting out hopeless stiffs, by flooring the same incompetents several times, under as many different names, by winning phony victories over better fighters who deliberately took dives because the mob told them to.

The experts knew of this situation from the beginning—or, at least, that's what they claimed years later. *But, if they knew it, why didn't they tell their readers at the time?* Why did they let such a situation develop wherein a pleasant but hopeless incompetent went all the way to boxing's top rung? Again, it's a question the fight fan might ask himself; and, if he has the chance, his so-called local boxing expert.

The facts are simply these: There never has been a fight in all of modern boxing which was staged because of "popular demand." This latter, as even high school boys must know, is the invention of a promoter, of a salesman who has some shoddy merchandise to sell and to whose interest it is to create an impression of quality. That nationally-known members of my own profession—*my own friends, in fact*—are a party to this deception makes me wonder occasionally if I have by some chance chosen the wrong career.

You even can see the old selling job being done right now in the case of Rocky Marciano, a great fighter who could, if the wise men don't control it, fight himself right out of opponents. So the wise men take steps to control it; they get out the publicity theme before a Marciano fight that he's nothing more than a wild swinger who can be taken by a clever boxer (his opponent in the upcoming bout). And the experts go along with it. After the fight, they tell their readers they knew it all the time.

In the Davey case, they let the situation get completely out of hand. No less an authority than Nat Fleischer, widely recognized in the beak-busting industry as "Mr. Boxing," and editor of "The Ring" magazine, the game's bible, fell hook, line and sinker for the Davey myth. (And if boxing's top authority, a man who has devoted his life to the sport, can fall for it, why—it might be asked—should you be blamed for doing likewise? But you *were* blamed, publicly and in print!)

The March, 1953, issue of "The Ring," which, pre-dated, came out just before the Davey-Gavilan fight on February 11, carried Davey's picture on the front cover, with the legend "Welterweight Contender." The same issue ranked Davey *fourth among the welterweights in the entire world.*

It was a phony build-up, in other words, a conspiracy on the part of you television fans to put an inexperienced college boy in against a devastating fighter. It was all *your* fault—except that the fight game's own trade journal ranked the pretender fourth among the world's welterweights! Yet, listen to this: In the April issue of the magazine, under Fleischer's byline, was the story of the fight. It began:

"Another fistic bubble has burst, and with it the realization by the victim that there is quite a difference between professional fighting and collegiate boxing. This became evident to Chuck Davey, holder of two degrees from Michigan State University, former amateur and intercollegiate champion, when he faced Kid Gavilan, welterweight champion, in the Chicago Stadium."

A month later, in the May, 1953, issue of "The Ring," under the byline of Ted Carroll, a story appeared which included these lines:

"More people were probably fooled by this one (the Davey-Gavilan fight) than by all the April Fool pranks per-

petrated since time began. Davey, the idol of the television air lanes, numbered his admirers in the millions. All of these were as bamboozled as the most innocent victim of the most ancient April Fool joke.

"Davey himself, carefully coddled along the pugilistic highway with detours past any trouble-making obstacles, was as much in the dark as to his limitations as the most naive of his vast army of worshippers."

The article neglects to tell why so many millions were bamboozled. The reason, of course, was because some boxing experts, including Fleischer, let themselves be bamboozled first, then foisted their own confusion on a public that was looking to them for advice. Other experts, by pointing out the facts, could have broken the Davey bubble long before Gavilan did. Instead, they let the fight fans dig deeply into their wallets to watch an unbelievably bad show. A total of 17,450 fans paid $275,455, an all-time record for a welterweight bout, to see the Davey-Gavilan fight.

But, the question is, *why* did the so-called experts have the nerve to call you, the fight fan, the sucker in the Gavilan-Davey deal? *You* weren't the sucker; you merely accepted the word of the men who were supposed to be in the know, the boxing writers, the experts. They intimated, despite the odds they set against Davey's chances of winning, that it would be a solid bit of fistic entertainment. When it wasn't, no single boxing authority came forth and said he'd been misled; instead, they jumped on the fans for being chumps enough to have believed beforehand that it would be anything but what it was.

The business of making mistakes and then either pinning them on the public or refusing to acknowledge them at all, is an occupational disease among boxing experts. Many consider themselves pundits of major proportions, and these are deep thinkers completely inflated with self-importance. The idea of accepting the thesis that they might have made an error is impossible for them to conceive. Yet, the errors they do make are so glaring that it is almost embarrassing for a member of the profession, to point them out.

Take, for example, Joe Williams, the sports editor of the *New York World-Telegram and Sun*. Williams has conducted a daily sports column for many years, during which time he has often put himself out on a limb, cut himself down and calmly walked away without a scratch.

Back in 1937, just after Joe Louis won the world's heavyweight championship, Williams proclaimed that Louis, as a fighter, was just another guy named Joe. At the time, Louis was meeting Tommy Farr of England, a fair heavyweight with a talent for getting out of the way. The fight, which was held on the night of August 30, 1937, went the 15-round distance, with Louis winning.

In his column of August 31, Williams wrote:

"Tommy Farr didn't win, but he made it powerfully close, made it reasonably interesting—and added further testimony to the fact that Joe Louis, despite all his hitting violence, *is just another heavyweight.*"

Less than six months later, on February 24, 1938, after Louis had made mincemeat of a fighter named Natie Mann, Williams changed his mind. That time, Joe wrote:

"I think Louis can whip any man in the world—and that goes for Max Schmeling, too—simply with a left jab."

Just another heavyweight? But wait a minute! On a day a few months later, when Louis met Schmeling in their second fight, June 22, 1938, the *World-Telegram* columnist had *this* to say:

"Come to think of it, the possibility exists that neither Louis nor Schmeling is a really great fighter."

The next day after that, after Louis had knocked Schmeling out in one savage round, Williams wrote in his column:

"The two added years of hard, exacting experience (since the last Schmeling fight) have made Louis a great fighter."

Fifteen months later, on September 20, 1939, the man who had referred to Louis as "just another heavyweight" and not "a really great fighter" went hog-wild just before Louis' second fight with Bob Pastor.

"Louis," Williams wrote on *that* date, "surely ranks with the great punchers of all time—Fitzsimmons and Jeffries and Dempsey."

The transformation of Louis from bum to baron in Williams' mind was just about completed when the ring savant came up with this eulogy of Louis before the champion's second fight with Arturo Godoy, on June 20, 1940:

"Because we think the 26-year-old Negro (Louis) *is something more than just another fighter,* we look for him to win. . . ."

Are you following this? Here is the sports editor of a big New York City daily, a columnist whose deathless prose is syndicated in papers all over the country, a man who conceivably should know what's going on—and his backing and filling in the case of Joe Louis was typical of what the fight fan has to put up with in his search for inside information.

Williams was a true prophet without honor in his own column. After Louis' first fight with Buddy Baer, who knocked the champion down before being disqualified and losing the fight in the seventh round, the *Telegram* sports editor wrote, with reference to Baer, on May 24, 1941:

"This is a real American boy. He is not another Max Baer. This is Buddy Baer—and in my book, *he is the next heavyweight champion of the world.*"

A few months later, in a Navy Relief bout on January 9, 1942, Louis knocked the same Buddy Baer out in the first round of their return match. Louis gave his entire purse to the Navy Relief fund, and there were impressive ceremonies before the fight. Williams, after devoting most of his column of January 10 to the ceremonies, disposed of his real American boy and future world's heavyweight champion in this off-hand manner:

"Well it was a splendid floor show. It saved the fight. Did we say fight? There was no fight."

During the period leading up to the second fight between Louis and Billy Conn of Pittsburgh, which was held at Yankee Stadium in New York on June 19, 1946, Williams helped the ballyhoo no end by picking the fight both ways.

On June 15, he wrote: "Louis (before the war) was a great fighter, and until later tests prove the reverse is true, we must continue to accept him as a great fighter."

On the 18th, he switched. "Louis," he blared, "is ready to be taken. Conn by a knockout."

Louis chilled Conn in the eighth round, but Williams never did admit that he had made a mistake. Instead, as in the case of his Buddy Baer bloop, he hid behind a heavy cloak of scornful sarcasm. On June 20, he wrote: "The Pittsburgh Adonis was under the impression that this was a dancing contest."

Before leaving Williams to his long-suffering readers, it might be well to point out a remarkable inconsistency in his own paper, which was self-inflicted. On October 23, 1953, Williams and his boxing editor, Lester Bromberg, came up with a startling difference of opinion in discussing Bobo Olson's victory over Randy Turpin for the world's middleweight championship.

After pointing out that Olson won "from here to China on points," Williams wrote, from his perch on Mount Olympus: "The decision was unanimous, though one of the judges, *obviously myopic or incompetent,* called it 8 to 7 for Olson;" in other words, gave Olson eight rounds and Turpin seven.

On the opposite side of the *same*

page in the same edition of the same paper, Bromberg, generally recognized, for better or for worse, as a pretty shrewd judge of fighters, wrote in his boxing story: "I gave Randy the first, second, third, eighth, eleventh and fourteenth, with the fifteenth even, for an 8-6-1 Olson score."

All of which seems to make Bromberg, as far as his own boss is concerned, only one round away from being "obviously myopic or incompetent" himself.

Bromberg, by the way, is far from infallible. On June 12, 1953, the day Jimmy Carter defended his world's lightweight championship against George Araujo, Bromberg proclaimed, with some grandeur: "The world's lightweight champion, facing George Araujo, is in with a legit challenger. It's my opinion the title will change hands tonight in their 15-round fight at Madison Square Garden."

Araujo, the "legit challenger," looked like a six-day bicycle racer all evening. He managed to stay away from Carter until the thirteenth round, when the champion finally nailed him.

BEFORE the Olson-Turpin fight, Bromberg started right out, in his story of October 21, by writing:

"This I remember: Randy Turpin once outstrengthed Ray Robinson and came close in their return. This I predict: Turpin's heavy fists, toughness and unorthodox moves will beat Carl (Bobo) Olson, knowing, busy and fast, but light-hitting."

This gave Bromberg practically a grand slam in the department of wrong predictions for 1953, since, on September 24, he decided, for the benefit of his public, that Roland LaStarza would go the limit in his second fight with Rocky Marciano.

"History will repeat, I believe," Bromberg wrote. "Roland LaStarza again going the distance but Rocky Marciano again winning—and retaining now the heavyweight championship."

He was only half right. Marciano won the fight, but LaStarza didn't go the limit. He was packed away by the Brockton Blockbuster in the eleventh round.

Which makes one ask himself a question—how long could you hold *your* job if you were wrong as often as Bromberg appears to be? Or if you heaved and charged and retreated as often as Williams does? The answer is simple; you'd be out on your ear in jig time. But these boys—and they aren't a great deal more reprehensible than most fight writers—go on and on, and apparently it's assumed the public swallows every word they say.

One of the better-known columnists on the national sporting front, for example, is Harry Grayson, sports editor of the Newspaper Enterprise Association (NEA). Grayson leaves a trail of misinformation behind him and, like Williams, he doesn't bother to go back and pick any of it up.

On June 23, 1937, after Louis had knocked out Jimmy Braddock to win the heavyweight title, Grayson, referring to a previous beating administered to Louis by Schmeling, wrote:

"The Schmeling disaster *did not leave the new champion gun-shy.*"

Two months later, after Farr had gone the distance with Louis, Grayson decided that Louis was quite definitely gun-shy. In his column of August 31, he wrote:

"I am of the opinion that the myth that was Joe Louis, the super-fighter, definitely has been dissipated . . . Max Schmeling is boosting himself when he says that the knuckling and knockout he dealt Joe Louis a year ago last June left the young Negro gun-shy, but the German has been so right on the Brown Bummer *(sic)*—or Bomber —from the outset that *one is inclined to string along with him.*"

Even after Louis tore Schmeling to shreds in their return bout in June of 1938, Grayson refused to be reconstructed. On June 22, he wrote, pettishly: "Louis still can't take a punch."

Nearly a dozen years later, the man who "can't take a punch" was still the heavyweight boxing champion of the world.

It is interesting to note at this point that one of the few writers who foresaw Olson's victory over Turpin last October was not a boxing expert at all, but a baseball writer. Hugh Bradley, who covers the Yankees for the *New York Journal-American,* was assigned to the fight. He hadn't handled one in years, but, in the October 21 edition of his paper, he wrote: "I'm picking Olson to win."

If nothing else, this should prove that you don't have to be an expert to be right about a fight.

Look what happened to the experts on the day of the Louis-Marciano fight, which was held at Madison Square Garden on October 26, 1951. Nine New York writers were polled for their opinions, and seven of them picked Louis to win. Only Ike Gellis, sports editor of the *New York Post,* and Jack Hand, of the Associated Press, picked Marciano. Gellis is not a boxing writer, while Hand divides his time between boxing and baseball.

Marciano knocked Louis out in the eighth round. Anyone who followed the experts that day would have been broke by midnight.

Boxing writers, as a group, are reluctant to welcome newcomers into the exclusive company of all-time ring immortals, which is understandable enough. But few hailed Marciano at the outset, and many still refuse to recognize him as a great fighter, even though he is the only heavyweight champion in history to be undefeated as a professional.

Typically enough, there's a strong tendency to lionize him after every fight, and then sneer at him before the succeeding bout. This, of course, is part of the usual pattern, for any time Marciano fights, his opponent must be made to look good or the fans may not be interested.

One of the few so called experts out side the New York area, Dave Egan, the *Boston Daily Record* columnist, deliberately knocks down Marciano just to attract attention. Egan, writing in the heart of Marciano's home territory, sometimes gives Rocky the best of it but, in general, he can't decide whether the champion is a genius or a jerk. His inclination to the latter opinion is a heavy pose, a vain attempt to fool the fans.

Before the Louis-Marciano battle, in the *Record* of October 26, 1951, Egan, picking Louis to win, set down his personal opinion in this wise:

"He'll (Louis) jest *(sic)* plant Rocky Marciano as he has planted many another before him . . . I cannot pick Marciano to win because he lacks an honest record of past performances."

Three days later, Egan openly belittled Marciano's spectacular victory by writing:

"Louis was an old, old man, with nothing left except heart and pride, and heart and pride are not enough when youth and punch and vitality desert a man."

ON September 22, 1952, the day before Marciano won the title from Jersey Joe Walcott, Egan wrote:

"If Marciano wins, any young man who can strike a fighting pose, take a punch on the jaw, and throw one in return is a logical opponent, for if Marciano wins, he will be remembered only as the poorest heavyweight champion of all history."

The next day, Egan called Marciano "just a strong, awkward, enthusiastic, hard-hitting second rater," and picked Walcott to win the fight.

After Marciano won the title, Egan changed his tune, for a few days, at least. Reporting the fight in the September 24th edition of his paper, he said:

"The new Dempsey was born to America last night when Rocky Marciano of Brockton knocked out the ancient Jersey Joe Walcott of Camden, New Jersey, in 43 seconds of the thirteenth round."

He was still looking at Marciano through rose-colored glasses the next day when he wrote: "He (Marciano) has everything to become the new

Dempsey." On September 26, however, Egan went back to normal. That time, he penned: "The new champion will be no lead-pipe cinch successfully to defend his title."

We can leave Egan with one small footnote. On May 15, 1953, the day of the second Marciano-Walcott fight, the Boston writer picked Walcott again. Jersey Joe didn't last a round. Marciano knocked him out in less than two and a half minutes.

ARTHUR DALEY, *The New York Times* columnist, is normally a pretty conservative writer, but he has been guilty of a turnabout in the case of Marciano. Summing up the Louis fight in advance, in the *Times* of October 24, 1951, Daley wrote: "His (Marciano's) victims include a singularly large number of stiffs and stumblebums. . . . Marciano has only limited experience. Louis has too much."

On the day after the fight, Daley remarked, in his column of October 27: "The Louis of old would have finished him (Marciano) with a punch."

But on September 24, 1953, the day Marciano met LaStarza, Daley commented: "Rocky is all hitter. . . . The heavyweight champion may be the most destructive puncher the game has ever seen."

The business of belittling Marciano, which seems to be the national pastime among the nation's boxing experts, is enthusiastically encouraged by the International Boxing Club, which promotes his fights. The reason, of course, is to stimulate interest in Rocky's bouts, since, with his record intact, he is in danger of running out of opponents.

Red Smith, the able sports columnist of the *New York Herald-Tribune*, sums it up well in his column of September 2, 1953. Reporting a conversation which may have been real or imagined, but, in any event expresses his own views on the subject, Smith wrote: "Somebody said, 'I do not think I have ever seen anything more stupid than the kind of publicity the International Boxing Club has been putting out on Rocky Marciano.

" 'What I mean,' the fellow said, 'is the persistent effort they are making to knock down a guy who is already a fine champion and is on his way to becoming one of the few very great champions of them all.'

" 'I know what you mean,' another said, 'and I agree. Marciano is the favorite over Roland LaStarza, as he should be, and the first and oldest rule in the publicity dodge is that you must knock down the favorite and puff up the underdog if you hope to build up a fight.'

" 'That is the first rule and the oldest rule,' the first man said, 'but does it still have to be the rule today? Must we listen to this same old guff because our grandfathers listened to it?

" 'Look, Marciano is a good fighter and a fighter who is improving all the time. He is, I believe, going to be a great one. What draws customers to fights? Bad fighters? You know better. It is the great fighters who draw. So why shouldn't they be advertising this young fellow as a great champion instead of trying to knock him down?' "

Every boxing expert in America could learn something from that—if he'd bother to try. Most of them think they know so much, however, that they can't be taught.

Take the case of Nat Fleischer, for example. His artistic flip-flop in Davey's case was not his only recent about face. He pulled a beauty in connection with the marathon rivalry involving Sandy Saddler, the world's featherweight champion, and Willie Pep, his predecessor. Here's what Fleischer wrote under his own by-line in the December, 1951, issue of "The Ring:"

"If the International Boxing Club had harbored any idea of throwing Sandy Saddler and Willie Pep into a ring for the fifth time, it has killed the notion before it could start breathing.

"Boxing and boxing regulations could not stand another dock fight between Sandy and Willie.

"The customers could not, and would not, turn out at inflation rates to see still another defiance of the codes of the ring, and sportsmanship, by featherweight heroes.

"The fourth engagement between the pair at the Polo Grounds in New York on the night of September 26, which ended in nine rounds with a knockout decision for Saddler, developed one of the most serious threats to the safety of a sport which has suffered many vicissitudes within the past six months."

Later, in the same story, he said: "Wrestling, heeling, eye gouging, tripping, thumbing—in fact every dirty trick known to the old timers in the days of bare-knuckle bruisers was on display at the Polo Grounds. Both boxers should have been tossed out long before the ninth round."

And still later: "It was . . . the poorest apology for a world championship fight I have seen in close to half a century of attendance at boxing matches. If ever a fight drove a sword into boxing and aided the hue-and-cry among reformers to kill the sport, the Pep-Saddler mill was such. A disgraceful brawl palmed off on the public as a title bout—that's what the fight amounted to."

Those were harsh words indeed. But Fleischer, a forgiving soul, forgot them all while rhapsodizing about Pep only fourteen months later! Again under his own by-line, in the February, 1953, issue of "The Ring," Fleischer wrote:

"Willie Pep, former world's featherweight champion, at an age when most fighters are almost ready to hang up their gloves, has displayed speed, punching power and stamina that is far superior to that of the majority of those who are many years his junior and are aiming to ascend to the top as he did. His recent performances have been superb. Chances are that if he got an opportunity to face his conqueror, Tommy Collins, in a match within the class weight limit instead of over the weight, he would avenge that defeat and stand out as the legitimate challenger for another shot at the world title. And if he were to meet Sandy Saddler, now in the Army, he would regain the crown he lost to the latter."

Selah! Having branded a fight a disgrace to boxing in one breath, Fleischer, in the next, thinks it ought to be repeated!

Fleischer, incidentally, picked Davey for "The Ring's" 1953 Progress Award. Wrote the publication's Nat Loubet, obviously with Fleischer's blessing, in the February issue: "Although he is ranked only fifth (as of that date) among a world selection of welterweights, Davey is an outstanding fighter in his division."

A month later, Davey was an outstanding flop. The winner of Fleischer's Progress Trophy hasn't made any progress since.

Maybe Fleischer is right more often than he is wrong. Maybe Williams and Bromberg and Grayson and Egan and all the rest come up with the right answer themselves once in awhile. Even the experts can't be wrong *all* the time. If it weren't for the fact that the public relies on them, the situation would be funny. Instead, it is a tragic indictment of men who should know what is going on, helping, by accident or design, to dupe those who don't.

WHY, when they are wrong, don't they admit it? Why don't they announce an about-face when they make one? Why don't they tell the unvarnished truth about the fights they discuss? Why don't they show just an occasional grain of honest, old-fashioned humility? And why, when they are looking all around for someone on whom to blame their own mistakes, don't they take a glance at their own bright words instead of excoriating their public, the people who pay their salaries in the first place?

Why indeed?

Because, if things were any different, then the boys wouldn't be experts. •


Bob
Fink

BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

THIS WAS WYATT

By WILL HENRY

Wyatt Earp has been the hero of countless fiction stories. But, as usual, the truth about this fabulous frontier marshal is infinitely more haunting than any fable in fiction.

It lay way down there in the southeast corner of the old territory, sitting up on a 4000-foot bench that fanned down out of the Dragoons. Cross-valley, the Whetstones could be seen pushing their broken backbones up against the sky, and north, up past Benson and the Southern Pacific tracks, the Limestones and the Dos Cabezos doing the same thing.

To start off, there wasn't anything there but good grass and water and some few Chiricahua Apaches. Then, old Cochise up and died peaceful, in '74, and there wasn't even any Apaches there any more. There wasn't really anything there any more after that. Nothing except that good grass and that year-around water in the San Pedro, and maybe plenty of quiet nights and hat-size stars and a handful of lonesome, arguey coyotes.

Those things, likely, and then just one other.

More high-grade silver ore than God Almighty ever crowded in under one piece of greasewood real estate, before or since.

Johnny—that was the kid's name—he wasn't there in the beginning. He didn't even hear about it until two years after Schieffelin hit the Lucky Cuss and pulled that first ton of payrock out of the surface porphyry. That was the ton that assayed $15,000 in raw silver and started the whole thing.

By the time Johnny got there, they were through the limestone caprock, into the quartzite. The Lucky Cuss was down 300 feet, the Contention 550, the Tough Nut and the Grand Central mines somewhere in between, and better than ten miles

of shored-up stopes were drifting under the town itself. They had already shipped $12,000,000 worth of bullion, and they weren't calling the place Watervale or Goose Flats any more.

They were calling it Tombstone.

Johnny pulled in his roan gelding, sat him in wondering silence, staring through the prairie twilight toward the distant, twinkling lights of San Angelo.

He was a ranch kid, from down in the corner of Crockett County, where the Rio Pecos crosses into Val Verde County and the Mexican border country. He hadn't ever been up into Tom Green County before, nor for that matter more than fifty miles from the Pecos, or into any town bigger than Langtry—which was to say one with more than five shacks and fifteen year-around voters. He had about $300 saved up from four years of brush-popping the Pecos pear thickets, and, as he saw the city lights of San Angelo before him now, it was only natural that he figured he had spotted himself a pretty prime hog. And just as natural that he aimed to cut that hog, right proper, before some other sharp country boy from south Texas should beat him to it.

With the eager grin which accompanied the thought, he clucked to the roan, sent him down the slope, and toward the beckoning lamplights of the big city, on a rolling gallop.

THEY'VE got a saying down in Crockett County that a fool shows his money, a monkey shows his backside. The kid wasn't in town two hours before his Levis were clean down around his ankles. By that time, he was $275 in the hole, with his last $25 riding on the case ace. Also, by that time, he was tolerably convinced that the faro dealer in Emmett Slattery's Hairy Dog Saloon stunk as bad as that stuff on a sheepherder's boots. Which smell—when you're bucking the tiger with the last nickel in your jeans—is some stiff. It was on the second card of that tag-end hand that he finally caught the house slicker shifting the pasteboards on him.

He wore a gun, like any fool kid. And like most of them he had some pretty fancy ideas about how fast he could get to it.

A couple of things happened then.

First off, he got his own hardware into action pretty quick.

Second to that, the dealer was close to being as clumsy with his Colt as he was with his cards; and, for a man making his living at faro, being slow with his kicker is one talent he ought not to go into business with. Johnny bucked two slugs in under the dealer's shoestring tie before the man got halfway out of his chair. The sharper fumbled around with his shirt front like he couldn't believe the bullet holes were really there, slid down under the table, and was out of the play for keeps.

Along about then, two tough looking housemen were moving in on the table, and players and onlookers, alike, were fanning out to give them all the room they might figure they would need to gun down this fresh kid. Ordinarily, the boy's next play would have been out the swinging doors, feet first and sagging in the middle like a sack of wet oats. But where card luck wasn't with him, the good Lord was.

The good Lord and a tall, quiet stranger who had been standing back away from the table layout, watching him get cleaned.

Johnny had seen this big cuss with the straw-yellow mustache move up slow on his right side, as he was dropping his next-to-last hand. He had noticed that he was powerful wide-built, tall and cat-easy on his feet, and maybe dressed some shades too natty to be a cowhand or a rancher. Past that, and right now, he didn't have time to notice anything else.

He was still climbing out of his chair, plenty flustered by having just drilled his first man, when the nearer of the two housemen went for his shoulder holster.

The kid should have died quick, then and there. But, just as the houseman was letting his thumb up off the hammer spur, he happened to shift his eyes from Johnny to the big quiet fellow who had moved up to side him.

There wasn't any doubt about the hot-handled way that houseman let go of his Smith & Wesson Banker's Special. He dropped it like he had just fished it out of a red-hot potbellied stove.

The big man nodded real pleasant at him, chucked his head toward where the dealer's boots were sticking out from under the table. "I see Cherokee is still as big fingered as ever," he observed, thoughtfully. "I'm surprised at *you* though, Pete. Wouldn't have thought you'd work a layout with such trash."

Before the unhappy Pete could answer, the second houseman had sidled up to back him. There was no mistaking the way the latter eased his coat back to clear his low-slung belt-holsters. It was equally plain, from what he said, and the way he said it, that he'd never laid eyes on the stranger before.

"You talk too much, mister," he growled, and started for his tied-down Colts.

Illustration by BOB FINK

Johnny saw the houseman's move. But neither he, nor any of the others, saw the big blond man's. He was just one minute standing there with his hands empty, the next thing you knew he had a longbarreled Cavalry Colt laying in his right hand. The houseman's guns hadn't even started to leave their leathers.

The big man turned to Johnny. "How much you drop, boy?" he asked him softly.

"Three hundred," blurted the kid, and had sense enough not to beef the bare count up with any bad loser's tallow.

The big man chucked his head. "You want it back?" he drawled. "You figure you got it coming?"

THE kid had always had to sit back on his temper with a spade bit. "No, damn it!" He backed off a step, began to paw a little ground. "I set here and watched the damn stuff go without any help from you. I reckon I don't need any dude-dressed wet-nurse to bottlefeed it back to me!"

"Big talk, boy," said the tall man, easily. He made the break-in very soft, but he wasn't half smiling any more, nor looking pleasant like before. "Shut your damn mouth and get outside."

He made the call plenty flat and ugly. But Johnny was mad clean through, now. That miserable-bad temper of his, that was to spell out so much of the hell he got himself into later, was already way out of hand. He was embarrassed, too, having that rotten-high kind of pride that nearly always runs with thin temperament and quirky nerves.

He bellied up to his quiet-talking backer, making the most of the fact he was a six-foot-and-then-some boy, himself, and could do a little better than look the big man in the eye on even terms.

"And just who in hell is going to put me out, little man?" he shouted.

The stranger didn't raise his own voice a hair, but anybody other than a paint-green kid could see he didn't cotton to 20-year old cowhands bracing him spit close like that.

"Reckon you're nominating me, son," he nodded.

"And who the hell are you, mister?" Johnny bellowed it like a steer with his tail up, all set for the eye-shut charge.

The big man looked at him a long five seconds, not saying anything nor moving a finger. Then, so slick that only the old hands in the crowd followed it, he palmed his Colt back into its leather. In the same motion, he hooked his thumb into his vest and let the kid have it right between the eyes.

"Name's Earp," he grunted softly. "Might be you've heard of me."

Johnny's throat stuck in mid-swallow. The whole crowd of saloon toughs melted back as though somebody had just dumped a gunnysack of diamondbacks on the floor. There wasn't a sound in the Hairy Dog.

When the pride of Crockett County finally did get his Adam's apple to go down, he simply gulped out, "Good Gawd A'mighty!" Then, using what little horse sense he had left, he crab-backed all the way out the swinging doors, the sudden water on his knees making him feel around for his footing like a payday drunk.

Young Johnny might be all shades of green. He might be 100 miles from the Pecos River for the first time in his life. But the name the tall blond gunman had just given him was as well known in Langtry as it was in St. Louis. And no kid of 10, let alone 20, living south of the Santa Fe tracks, needed to be told what first-name initial went in front of that Earp part of the big man's answer.

This was *the* Earp.

That first-name initial was a big, black W.

Standing for sudden death. And pronounced *Wyatt.*

Chapter Two

WYATT came out of the Hairy Dog unruffled and easy, as though he had no more than dropped into it for his evening's belt of forty rod, and was ready to ride on. But the way he looked Johnny over when he got outside was something else again. The kid thought he'd never seen such a scary pair of fish-blue eyes before. They cut into him like two chips of ax-blade iron flying off a ten-pound grindstone.

"Crawl that roan, boy," he nodded toward Johnny's scrub. "You'd best ride along with me a spell."

The kid knew what he meant, all right. He didn't open his mouth, just jammed his hat on tight and crawled.

Wyatt didn't look back the whole of the way out of town. The kid took care of that department. By the time they had jogged past the last building and were into the sagebrush, his neck was stiff from swiveling back toward the Hairy Dog.

"Why you reckon they aren't coming after us?" he finally blurted out, unable to keep his concern tied down any longer. "There hasn't nobody even stepped out the doors yet!"

For the first time, Wyatt glanced back. "Figures," he shrugged. "I told them it made me nervous to have anybody looking over my shoulder."

He didn't lift his wide mouth a muscle when he said it, but Johnny could see the smile way back inside those pale eyes. It somehow made him feel all at once warm and good, deep down in his belly. And, like if he should have the chance about then, he'd gladly lay right down and die for Wyatt Earp.

"What are we going to do now?" he asked quickly, the relief of the feeling showing in his question.

"*We?*" said Wyatt deliberately.

Johnny flushed. "I mean, what do you think I ought to do?" he muttered awkwardly. "I ain't never been in a mess like this before."

Wyatt slowed his nervous-stepping thoroughbred. He caught the kid's glance and held it. "*You're a killer, boy,*" he said softly, and paused to let it sink in.

Johnny felt sick and cold inside, then. The warmth and the glow of the minute before went out of him like a guttered lamp. And, as it did, the tall Dodge City gunman let him know where he was.

"If you look at the law like it's a line fence, boy," he said quietly, "running due north and south, say, you can see it splits the grass into two pastures. Over yonder, in the east pasture, is the registered stock. They're legal-branded, grazing peaceful and putting on tallow. On our side of the wire, here, the grass gets mean and thin. What few head are cropping it, are all spooked and hoof-split from grabbing their feed in the rocks and on the run. You see that, boy?"

Johnny looked at it, and he saw it.

"I reckon," he said at last, and only half aloud, "that crimping that faro dealer puts me somewhat west of that line fence."

"I reckon," was all Wyatt said, "that it does."

THEY rode for two hours without a word. Then, suddenly, Wyatt pulled his horse up, turned, as suddenly, on Johnny. "You know anything about laying a line of tracks, boy? Or about covering them up?"

"Learned a little," said Johnny, puzzled. "Our ranch set in the brisket of Comanche country."

"Don't turn around. Keep looking west," nodded Wyatt abruptly. "Now, tell me, what kind of prints does this 'Big Red' horse of mine leave?"

"Clean in front, saving for a calk that marks deep on the inside right front. Goes medium wide behind. Left shoe twists a mite and leaves a kind of a smudge." Johnny didn't think about it, just rattled it off like he'd been asked the time of day.

Wyatt narrowed his eyes. "You'll do," he said quickly. "You can look back now."

Johnny took his look. And lost a little color. It was low on the skyline, yet a long ways off and thin-hazy in the clear moonlight. But it was posse-dust, all right.

"Now, don't get jumpy," advised his companion drily. "You see that line of low rocks down south, there?"

Johnny nodded and the big man rapped it to him.

"Well, you hit for that ridge. You'll see it bends around, north, and tails out in that mesa country up ahead. I'll be camped up yonder, back of that fifth mesa to our right. You got that?"

"Got it," said Johnny, pale-lipped.

"That posse," replied Wyatt, straight faced, "will split off after *you.* You can make the odds 100-to-nothing, they won't trouble to run my prints."

"NO bet," grinned Johnny, already beginning to feel immensely better. "Now, where do you and me stand, come sun-up?"

"Depends," said Wyatt slowly, "on what luck you have losing that posse. If there's still dust between us and San Angelo, come daylight, we split up for good."

"Otherwise?" Just in asking it, Johnny lost a little of his cockiness, felt the touch of the fear turn in his belly again.

"Otherwise," answered the big gunman quietly, "I reckon you can ride along with me yet a spell."

The kid's heart jumped at the words. As what ranch kid's wouldn't?

Ride along "yet a spell" with the greatest gun-slinger of them all? Head on west with the man who had pistol-whipped Ben Thompson? Took the guns off Henry Plummer? Side up with him that the likes of Luke Short and Bat Masterson had been proud to wear a badge under? Well, just a little bit more than maybe, by God! You could bet into that all night, mister!

He swung his pony, trying to hold his voice down to where the other wouldn't notice the choke in it. "I'm beholden to you, Mr. Earp. I'll do my best."

"Boy!" The big man's hand shot out, clamping the roan's headstall. "Out here a man doesn't 'mister' his friends. I reckon you ought to know that."

"Yes sir!" stammered Johnny. "Uh, so long—*Wyatt!*"

For the first time, the Kansas gunman brought the grin out from behind his eyes. He swung his dusty hat, whacking Johnny's roan across the haunches. "So long, boy," he called after him. "Look sharp and stay off the skyline."

He sat and watched the roan grow small with distance, his left hand tugging at his sungold mustache.

They were all alike, these halter-broke stud colts. Crazy for a gun,

worshipping anybody who had to use one for a living. Like this kid, now. Tearing along into those rocks, yonder, not thinking about the man he'd just killed, nor the posse that was after him, nor a thing in the blessed wide world but getting the chance to share a little trail with Wyatt Earp.

Wyatt shook his head, quit tugging at his mustache, heeled Big Red into a lope, due west. The brief nod of the massive head went toward the disappearing dot that was young Johnny and his potbellied roan.

"If we get joined up by the company that generally rides along with me, boy," he muttered into the rising nightwind, "you'd be better off if that posse caught up to you—"

The big Dodge gunman was no poet. Nor did he make a custom of letting his imagination work overtime. But he was a far piece from being a simple man. And he knew the shape and shadow of that other horseman who never left his side.

Wherever Wyatt Earp rode, rode death.

One step off the trail.

And always waiting.

JOHNNY had it good. After the first hour, it clouded up and began to sprinkle. Then, just before midnight, it came on to rain for sure, licking his roan's tracks as clean off the rocky sand as top cream from a ranch cat's whiskers. An hour ahead of daylight, he had lost the posse and was skirting the fifth mesa, squinting through the dark for Wyatt's campsign.

Pretty quickly, he caught it—a whisper of cottonwood smoke, thin and ghost-gray against the sky, sneaking out of a cluster of creek brush at the base of the bluff ahead.

Seeing Wyatt's smoke, he wondered that the famous lawman would be so careless. And got himself a cute idea for showing the big man he hadn't made any mistake in giving a green kid the chance to side him. About a hundred yards short of the willows, he slid off the roan, went the rest of the way in with his boots in his hand and a big grin on his face. Still grinning, he stepped past the last of the cottonwoods.

That was all he remembered.

Wyatt pulled the .44 barrel away from the boy's skull, stood and watched him fall, face forward, into the weeds. Shortly, he walked over to the creek, dipped a hatful of water, threw it in the kid's face. Johnny sputtered, sat up, had himself a look around. Spotting Wyatt watching him, he grinned half foolishly, let his apology limp out a little lame.

"Reckon I've been a damn fool, Wyatt. Might have got myself killed coming up on you like that—you not knowing it was me, and all."

"Correct," agreed the latter, unsmilingly. "Saving that I *did* know it was you, boy."

Johnny thought that over, felt the lump back of his ear, decided, big cow-town marshal or not, that he didn't like it. "Knowing it was me," he sulked, "I don't see you had any call to lay a man out that way."

"A *man*, no," said Wyatt Earp, real slow. "But a *mule* never learns anything through mother love nor gentle discourse. You've got a thick skull, boy. Better I should put a dent in it, right now, than that the next man along drills a hole clean through it. You follow me, boy?"

Johnny brought his head back up, awkward and shut up, for sure. "Yes sir," he managed humbly. "I follow you. And I mean to keep following you, just as long as you'll leave me."

"All right." Wyatt chucked his head in that short way Johnny was beginning to know. "What's your name?"

"Ringgold. Johnny Ringgold. And spelled with two g's."

As had any man living up on the Kansas-Missouri border a few years back, Wyatt had heard that name. And those other names hooked up with it, clanwise.

"Don't care how you spell it, boy," he wagged his big head doubtfully, "it won't do. You'll need a new one where we're going. What you got in your family tree outside of Ringgolds and Youngers and Daltons?"

"Ma was a James," the kid said, quick and proud. "Third cousin to Jess's pap, back on the Kentucky side."

"That's one hell of a big help," nodded Wyatt acidly. "Tell you what, we'd better go back to the Ringgold. Shorten it up somewhat and have it to come out more like Ringel, or Ringo, something on that order. Make it Ringo. There's a name nobody ever heard of, either in Texas or Arizona."

"Sounds good," said the kid, getting his freshness back. "Got a nice roll to it. I'll take it."

"How about the rest of it?" asked Wyatt. "You got any natural preference?"

"Always favored John, somehow."

"Keep it, then," said Wyatt, and stood up. He looked at the young Texan a long ten seconds. When he spoke again there was a faraway frown back of his light-colored eyes, and any smile was long gone from them.

"See you don't ever forget it, boy. From now on you've got a brand-new name. One you can make as bad or as good as you want."

"Ringo—" said the kid softly, not even hearing him.

Then, even lower voiced, and looking clear off west to where the last morning stars were winking out over the distant Pinals and Old Cochise County.

"*John Ringo!*"

Chapter Three

THEY were on the trail three weeks, making south and west the whole of the time. Along the way, they camped where the water and grass were good and where high country gave them a long look at their pony tracks, coming and going. They had a mighty pleasant time of it, Ringo thought. Wyatt was a good talker and didn't use the broken down English that most in that country got by on. He could spin words together fine as a new-soaped saddle, had a quiet, salty sense of humor, was anything but mean or poor in his ways, or in his outlooks on frontier life and lawbreakers.

Maybe that was one reason they got along at first, for young John came from educated folks himself and could hold up his end of a civilized conversation without fracturing too many of McGuffy's third-grade grammar rules, when he was a mind to. Which wasn't often.

Wyatt seemed to have plenty of money, staking his youthful partner to the best of everything in the few towns they rode through. Among the things he bought was plenty of pistol ammunition. By the time they crossed into Arizona, he and the ex-Johnny Ringgold had burned the better part of a case of hulls in off-hand six-gun practice.

This would hardly be worth mentioning except that it was Wyatt's way to try the boy out. And more than that, which Wyatt never realized, it was the boy's way of sizing up the old Kansas Coltmaster.

How far apart they were in their separate, and private, opinions of one another told quicker than anything else just how certain it was that they were never made to trot in double harness.

Ringo watched Wyatt handle his gun. He shifted his cud of longleaf Burley, spit into the sagebrush, grinned to himself, began to imagine he was just a shadow faster than Wyatt. And to itch to show him that he was.

For his part, Wyatt would watch the youngster jump his old Colt out of its homemade leather so fast there weren't six sets of eyes in the country trained enough to follow it. Then he'd watch him smoke his lead into whatever target they were blasting at, in not more than half the next eye-wink. He never smiled about it and

he never said anything to him except, "That's pretty good, Johnny. Likely, you'll do."

But what Wyatt said and what he was thinking, were offbrand horses.

The raw kid he'd chaperoned out of San Angelo and renamed John Ringo was, without solitary exception Wyatt could remember, the fastest natural and deadcenter shot he had ever seen.

And more. There were two classes of dangerous gunmen. The man-grown professionals, like himself, and the amateurs—the bad kids who never grew up. These last were the ones who gave an adult nightmares. They were the ones who killed natural and for no good reason. That once they'd downed their first man, the others came easy as a live pigeon shoot—just so many targetbirds sprung out of a fieldtrap, where the main idea was to see how many a man could run out before he broke his string.

Unless thirteen years on the firing line with both kinds didn't qualify him to separate the men from the boys, Wyatt figured he already knew where his young friend fitted. And fitted *natural*.

As the twenty-third day on the trail brought them at last across the Pima County line, down onto Tucson, there was only one question remaining in the big lawman's sober mind.

Was there yet time to make a man of Johnny Ringo?

Tucson was the old Pima County seat, before they broke the county up to make Pima out of the west half and Cochise out of the east, and it was a pretty nice town for the day and time.

Wyatt left Johnny in the first saloon they hit, and rode on. He, himself, never touched the stuff—Wyatt was over forty before he took more than a social beer or light wine—and besides, he had a man to see about a badge.

Down the street, he found the county jailhouse. He legged wearily down off of Big Red, eased in through the open door, casually introduced himself to Sheriff Charles Shibell.

Shibell was a little man, too big in the belly and small in the eye to suit Wyatt. But he clapped the big Dodge City gunman on the back friendly enough, offered him a good Habana cheroot, kept his greeting sensibly short and to the point.

"Glad you could come, Earp. You won't regret it."

Wyatt was himself a man who believed in pointed conversation. He looked at the little Pima sheriff. "Thanks," he said. "What's the deal pay?"

Shibell returned his look, squinting shrewdly.

"It'll pay what you make it pay, Earp." He put a sly wink back of the nod, as though to say Wyatt could guess what he meant. For the record, Wyatt wasn't in a guessing mood. He reached over and got a match out of the sheriff's shirt pocket. He took his time lighting his cheroot and getting a good, hot ash smoldering on it. Finally, he held it up, observing it thoughtfully.

"This is a good seegar. Burns even, leaves a tight ash. Providing you don't want it stumped-out in your mustache, Mr. Shibell, you'd best leave off riddling me."

Shibell's laugh was a little too loud and quick.

"Got a sense of humor, eh Earp? That's good. Come in handy where you're bound for."

"Which might be where?" said Wyatt softly.

"*Tombstone!*" rasped the Pima sheriff.

"I've heard of it," shrugged Wyatt. "What's there?"

"Trouble," frowned Shibell. "And twelve months of back taxes."

Wyatt scowled back at him, got to his feet. "What you need isn't a deputy, Mr. Shibell. It's a tax collector." He leaned over the desk. "Let me give you a little advice, my friend. In the future, you got a job for a boy, don't send for a man. You understand?"

Shibell understood. "I'd hate to be the boy," he said slowly, "that tried riding into that county tax-route down to Tombstone."

Something in the way he said it got to Wyatt. "Make it short," he nodded, eyes narrowing. "Could be I've touched you with the wrong spur."

Shibell made it short.

Tombstone was the richest district in Pima County. Not a nickel in taxes had come out of it since Schieffelin struck the first ledge, and for a simple reason. No local deputy had the guts to go near it. Without any law to protect them, the camp's 4,000 legitimate citizens were beginning to raise a stink. Next thing would be the territorial legislature starting to poke around in Pima County.

That wouldn't do, naturally.

What *would* do would be if Shibell could get a good man down there to start pulling in all those back taxes. Which same money, politics being no different in Arizona Territory than any other place, would go a long way toward plugging up the nostrils of the boys from Prescott. As well as keeping the Pima County Sheriff's office fat and happy.

When he had finished and sat back to look at Wyatt, the latter had to admit Shibell had laid it on the line.

"What's the badge rate?" he asked.

"First Deputy, Pima County, District of Tombstone," said Shibell quickly. "Due and legal and swore out right now."

"Pin it on," said Wyatt Earp. "Tombstone's got a tax collector." . . .

By the time he and Johnny got down to Benson, late Tuesday night, February 19th, Big Red had picked up a bad stone bruise and was going lame behind. Wyatt had ridden the rawboned thoroughbred too many years to think of selling him. At the same time, Ringo's roan was pretty well used up, too. All of which is how Wyatt Earp and John Ringo decided to take the Wednesday morning stage for Tombstone—simply so their horses could trot along tied to the back of the coach.

It's little things like that which file off history's triggers. And keep deputy sheriffs from dying in office of old age.

An hour before stage-time Wyatt, after the habit of old shotgun riders, dropped by the Wells Fargo office to see if he knew any of the local boys. It developed he did. Not only did he know Bill Gray, the division superintendent, he had ridden express-guard for him more years back than either of them wanted to remember. And Old Bill was in bad trouble. The Tombstone run had hit the insurance companies for $40,000 in hold-up losses since the first of the year. One more robbery on his division and Bill Gray was all through as Benson super. In a moment of weak mindedness inspired by the warm talk of "the good old days," Wyatt agreed to sit the driver's box on the Wednesday run to Tombstone—with his boots braced on the Contention Mine payroll trunk—and $15,000 in cold cash.

Thus it was that the paying passengers waiting down the street in front of the ticket office were treated, twenty minutes later, to the sight of the greatest shotgun rider of them all sitting the box of the Benson Stage. None of them, of course, except Johnny, had any idea who Wyatt was. Seeing him now—and nobody could miss the stark bulk of him up on that box—they all sized him up differently. It was one of the strange things about Wyatt. No two people ever saw him alike, and not one in a hundred ever saw him *right*.

To Mrs. Ah Chum, better known in Tombstone as China Mary, slant-eyed boss of that city's notorious Hop Town and the foremost importer of high-class white hustlers, he looked like money in the bank.

To sharp-eyed J. P. Clum, Tombstone's mayor, and editor of the daily *Epitaph*, he looked like just one more undesirable citizen of the gun-toting persuasion.

To smooth-shaven, crafty, Pima

County politician Johnny Behan, he looked like a man Mr. Behan could use in his immediate plans for Tombstone.

To shabbily-elegant Lilith Belloit, the faded "Tombstone Lily" of subsequent dancehall legend, he looked most nearly like what he was: a gaunt, still-eyed, compellingly-lonely figure of a man; fierce and kind and gentle and terrible, all in the same breathless eyeful.

To prim-proper, quality-folk, Evelyn Cushman, he looked just plain frightening.

He was a big man, and big all over. Even his head was huge. His hair was ash-yellow and growing with a stiff-roached sweep to it that put you in mind of a circus lion's mane. His face was broadly massive, highboned under the eyes, the nose large and sharply hawked. The grim line of his mouth was so chopped off by the fall of the fierce mustache that, when put together with those starey, light blue eyes, it gave his whole normal expression a look about as warm as a scum-ice waterhole in October.

Wyatt, glancing down, caught her looking at him. He felt the jolt of that look clear down to his boot-bottoms. Prim-proper, or not, mister, that was some woman, yonder! There was a breath-stopper, brother. And a high-bred, dainty stepper if ever there was one!

The girl colored angrily, broke her glance away in sudden shame. It was not in her kind to look at men that way. Somehow, particularly *big ones* like that hulking brute on the driver's box, men had always frightened her. She was prettily grateful when boyish Johnny Ringo stepped gallantly forward and handed her into the stage.

The other passengers piled in after her, Johnny Behan helping Lily Belloit in last. Wyatt checked the door on his side, nodded a gruff "All set," to the driver. The latter hawked at his cud of Brown's Mule, kicked off the brake, clucked to the wheelers, cursed the leaders, spanked the swing-team with the lines, spit three ounces of amber over his left shoulder, and considered the run under way.

Chapter Four

It was a day-long pull up the treeless valley of the south San Pedro. The early winter twilight was crowding in fast as old Monk Wilson, senior Fargo driver on the Benson Division, headed his horses up the final grade to Goose Flats, and Tombstone.

This was the place Old Monk had warned Wyatt about on the run down. Looking it over warily, now, the big Dodge City lawman figured it was a lonesome stretch of country, at that. About ten seconds after the thought took him, it got considerably less lonesome.

The eight masked horsemen seemed to melt right out of the rocks flanking the grade. Three of them headed the stage, five of them blocked the road behind it.

"Ease off, Monk." The bandit leader's call went with easy familiarity to the old driver. "If that's a new man up there with you, you'd best advise him to toss that Parker down, peaceful."

"I got you," Monk called back. Then, side-mouthing it nervously to Wyatt. "Go ahead, drop the scattergun, boy. These fellers don't play for fun."

Wyatt didn't move. He had been in the business a good many years, knew most of its topgrade badmen by their first names. When the outlaw leader first spoke, he thought he recognized his voice. When he spoke again, now, he knew he did.

"You hear me, mister?" the squat bandit called pleasantly up to Wyatt. "Throw down that shotgun."

"*I hear you, Curly,*" said Wyatt softly, and threw the Parker down.

That is, he threw it down in the Western sense.

The gun was a cylinder bore, loaded with No. 2 goose-shot. The range was not over ten yards. Of the two outlaw riders flanking the leader, the first boy was dead before he hit the ground. The second, nearly cut in two at the waist, was still alive and slumped across his saddlehorn.

Curly, himself, hadn't moved. Recognizing voices works both ways. Looking up into the steady cover of Wyatt's six-guns, he complained with honest indignation. "Damn it, why didn't you say it was you in the first place? You didn't need to gun those two kids down."

"You didn't give me a chance," said Wyatt, with no return of the easy feeling. "But I'm going to give you one—*just one.* Order your boys around here."

When the remaining bandits had moved their horses up through the gathering dark, he read them out, flat-short. "Boys, I'm letting you off with fair warning this time. Listen close to what I got to say, and see it gets heard by all your friends, hereabouts. You're all through in this end of Pima County. The law's come to Tombstone, and I'm it. Move along now and don't bother looking back."

None of the outlaws said a word. They moved, and they moved quickly and quietly and all together. Nobody looked back. The last clink of their ponies' hoofs on the bedrock died away thirty seconds later.

The spot inquest, headed by Wyatt, took just short of two minutes.

He didn't bother looking at the boy on the ground. There was no need. There wasn't much more need to look at the one still slumped on his standing pony. As the coach passengers, headed by Johnny Ringo, moved up through the dark, he waved them away. "Keep the women back," he ordered sharply. "This boy doesn't look too good."

"But he's hurt, terribly hurt!" Evelyn Cushman started to push past Wyatt. "We've got to help him!"

Wyatt grabbed her by an arm, shoved her back none too gently. "Leave him be," he grunted. "He's well past any help of yours, Miss."

Before the indignant girl could reply, Johnny Behan stepped forward and cut in grimly.

"That was pretty close to murder, mister. You had no call to shoot those two boys. You didn't even wait to see what it was they wanted."

"In my business," said Wyatt softly, "you judge a boy by the company he keeps. In case it's any news to *any* of you," he added meaningly, "that was Curly Bill Brocius these boys were siding."

"Good Lord!" said Mayor Clum, but nobody else save the Cushman girl chose to add anything to his startled gasp. "I don't believe it!" she challenged Wyatt angrily. "And *if* it was," she demanded, "why didn't you shoot him instead of these poor boys?"

"He didn't have his gun out," said Wyatt simply. "These poor boys of yours both had their hands full of Winchester. That nominated them."

"I still say you should have waited to see what they wanted," persisted Behan accusingly.

Wyatt eyed him. "When a man," he said slowly, "points a gun at me I never question his intentions. It's what you might call an extra-legal assumption on my part."

"And who are *you!*" cried Evelyn Cushman, high-flushed, "to set yourself up as judge and jury?"

Wyatt looked at her a minute, turned his back squarely on her, spoke flatly to Behan. "All right, you and Mr. Clum can pull that kid off his horse now and get him in the coach. Don't bother being slow about it, he won't know the difference. Back on the box, Monk. Inquest's closed."

The Cushman girl, still pale with the shock of the double shooting, stuck to her guns. "I'm not moving one foot," she declared to her fellow passengers, "until this murderer identifies himself. Just who are you, mister?" she demanded acidly of Wyatt. "A Wells Fargo detective?"

"Not quite, Ma'am," he answered

softly, and Ringo saw the shadow-smile behind his eyes. "But you're getting warm. I'm a deputy sheriff, Miss Evelyn."

He wasn't watching the girl when he said it, but rather Behan. The smooth-mannered politician opened his mouth. "You're *what?*" he blurted incredulously.

"Deputy Sheriff," nodded Wyatt. "Pima County, District of Tombstone."

"*District of Tombstone—!*"

There was no mistaking the way Behan gasped out the repeat. He couldn't have been any more belly-struck if he'd been belted in the brisket with a whiffletree, Wyatt thought.

"Either you got bad ears, Mr. Behan," he observed calmly, "or you're not quite smart. It's your pick."

Evelyn Cushman got back into it before Behan could make up his mind if he wanted to do anything about the insult. "Well, there's nothing wrong with *my* ears, sir!" she snapped. "And you still haven't told us your name!"

"Allow me, ladies!" Ringo stepped forward to do the honors. He was grinning, but there was an edge of sharp jealousy in the way he said it. "Miss Evelyn, Miss Lily, gentlemen—

"Mr. Wyatt Earp, late of Dodge City, Kansas, and other points well past the law!"

Noting the sharp tone in Ringo's voice, but ignoring it, Wyatt watched the others take the name.

To the women it didn't seem to mean anything special. Old Monk Wilson swallowed it like a man who had felt its hook before. Johnny Behan grabbed it in his stumpy teeth, clamped down on it, said nothing. It was J. P. Clum, the cocky little Tombstone mayor, who cleared the air and broke the growing silence.

"Friends," he announced simply, turning to his coach companions, "the law *has* come to Tombstone. Thank God, and at last!"

"THERE'S only one thing to add to that," said Lily Belloit. The dance-hall girl caught Wyatt's eye with a look he felt clean to his saddlebones, before she turned to Johnny Behan and stared straight at him as she dropped the single, soft word. "*Amen—!*"

They pulled the dead boy out of the wagon-ruts, leaving him clear of the roadside brush, where he could easily be found and packed in next morning. Wyatt—Behan and Clum not moving fast enough to suit him—lifted the injured youth off his horse, mighty gentle about it considering the way he'd talked about him, carried him over and put him in the coach. Mayor Clum and Lily Belloit, without being told, got inside to tend him. Responding to Wyatt's terse order, Ringo and Behan swung up on top and rode the boot the balance of the way in, watching and waiting with drawn belt-guns for any return of the bandits.

Inside the jolt and sway of the stage, on the seat across from the dying boy, Evelyn Cushman crouched back in the shadows fighting down the nausea and the tears that rose up in her. By the time the youth had drowned in his own blood, welling thick up inside his punctured lungs, and had died clinging to Lily Belloit's cool hand and crying like a lost, scared kid, the tall brunette girl had but one feeling left for Tombstone's new Deputy Sheriff.

He was a coldblooded, hired, professional killer. And as she hated all he was and all he stood for, so she hated Wyatt Earp.

Chapter Five

EVEN Wyatt's hard, professional eye widened a bit when the stage topped the Watervale Grade to show Tombstone blazing away in all its gaslit glory.

Coming in from the north like they were, down Sixth Street to swing west up Allen, he got to see the most of the names and places that were to give him the best part of the hell he was heading into—the Bird Cage Theater, Cosmopolitan Hotel, Oriental Saloon, Crystal Palace, Campbell & Hatch's Pool Hall, Hafford's Saloon—before Monk pulled up at the stage station in front of the O. K. Corral Stable, between Third and Fourth, on Allen Street.

In that winter of Wyatt's arrival, the mines were running open twenty-four hours a day. And Tombstone was damned if it was going to miss a single minute of any one of those twenty-four hours. The miners were getting $4.00 a day, seven days a week, and the camp's total population was crowding 5,000, with better than ninety percent of that population being hardrock muckers and bull-prod drillers from the silver diggings.

Just his first quick look at the town gave Wyatt a fair idea of what he'd got himself tagged deputy sheriff for. But only a fair one. The big part of the idea and the dirty part of it, hung with the ten percent which took such loving care of the ninety percent—and of its payroll cash.

Wyatt got his first and only visit from the undercover representative of that off-color ten percent less than an hour after he climbed down off the box of the Benson stage and went over on Fremont Street to inspect his office in the city jail. The caller was a shortish, clean-shaven man, with a bad shift of eye and a face as dim and hard to read as the fine print in a fire-insurance policy. He didn't have to introduce himself, for he and Wyatt had already met. And would many times again.

It was Johnny Behan.

TO his credit, the Pima County politician made his point right off. "You're away to a shaky start, Earp," he nodded. "If that *was* Curly Bill, you've made yourself the worst enemy you could have picked in this man's corner of the territory."

"Go on," said Wyatt, not bothering to get up from his desk chair. "You're talking."

"All right." Behan's second nod got into the real meat of his visit. "This town's not ready for the law yet. Not by a far piece. You understand me?"

"I never rush things," said Wyatt evenly. "It will have until daybreak tomorrow to get ready."

Behan watched him a minute, abruptly changed the subject. "Just where'd you get your deputy's commission?" he asked slowly.

"From Mr. Charles Shibell, up to Tucson."

"Charley Shibell! I don't believe it. He'd know better than to send a man down here without consulting me. Try again, Earp."

"I noticed a new telegraph office uptown," observed Wyatt thoughtfully. "For a dollar you can make me out a liar."

"I will, don't worry," said Behan flatly. "But, meantime, get one thing straight, mister. You, nor any other two-bit deputy walks the middle of the road in this town. There are just two sides to Allen Street, ours and *theirs*."

Wyatt nodded. "I suppose," he said quietly, "that that 'theirs' refers to Mayor Clum and his Citizens Safety Committee that Monk Wilson told me about."

Behan, thinking he detected a hint of open mind in Wyatt's disarmingly soft drawl, spoke quickly, lacing what he had to say with his best politician's grin. "You've got it figured, my friend. Clum and his little 'law and order society' are just a shade ahead of themselves, that's all. Me and my boys simply aren't quite ready for wide sidewalks and church suppers yet. You've a sharp eye and a steady hand, Earp. We can use a man like you on *our* side. We need a *good deputy* in Tombstone, and we'll pay high for one. You follow me?"

"Not very far," said Wyatt, and got up.

He moved to the door, held it open. "Good night, Mr. Behan. I've a stomach to fill and lodgings to find. You'll know where to locate me should you

need a 'good deputy' some dark night."

Behan's eyes narrowed. "I suppose you know where this leaves *you* standing, Earp." The threat wasn't implied. It was advertised in loot-high letters.

"I do." Wyatt moved easily in on him with the acknowledgment. "Right square in the middle of Allen Street." He paused, not a foot from his visitor, treating the Tombstone politician to his first look at the famous, frostbitten grin. "But do you know where it leaves *you,* Mr. Behan?"

He moved too quickly for the startled Behan. The latter was still struggling and treading air when Wyatt dumped him on the seat of his pants in the dirt of the road outside. "*Sitting,* Mr. Behan," he finished quietly. "Right square in the middle of *Fremont* Street!"

He stepped back as the whitefaced politician stumbled to his feet. "Now, whatever direction you were headed when you dropped by here," he continued softly, "let me recommend you keep at it. If you're not out of hand's reach down Third Street inside of sixty seconds, I'll lay you out for the rest of the evening."

It was sound advice. Behan didn't linger over it. In somewhat less than the time allowed, Wyatt was standing alone in the middle of Fremont Street. Mr. John Behan was long gone down the gaslit stretch of the boardwalk toward Third and Allen.

JOHNNY BEHAN was a man who went to bed late, slept light, got up early in the morning. And he was a man who was thinking every minute he was awake. He was thinking now, as he spotted Johnny Ringo coming out of Campbell & Hatch's Pool Hall. It hadn't been five minutes since he'd tangled with Wyatt. When he saw the kid, something clicked into place in that sharp mind of his. He went after him, caught him just outside the Crystal Palace. Letting on he was surprised to bump into him, he invited him into the Palace to "have one on me, and meet the boys."

The Palace was something to see, and to be seen in. Pretty soon, what between the dazzle of the rock crystal chandeliers, the hip-short skirts on the house-girls and the 100-proof sour-mash bourbon, Johnny was thinking Behan and his hard-faced friends were some local potatoes. Especially, when Lily Belloit showed up to bolster the fifth round of bourbons and when Behan subsequently suggested Ringo escort her over to the Bird Cage and watch the "Tombstone Lily" strut her considerable stuff.

By the time the kid swaggered out the Palace's cut-crystal doors, with Lily Belloit on his arm and the best part of a quart under his belt, he was all sold on Johnny Behan and his Allen Street boys.

Meanwhile, Wyatt with Big Red was elsewhere in the town, trying his own luck and finding it not too good.

After locking the jail, he followed Behan's course down Third to Allen. At the corner, he collared the first sober citizen, asked him where was the best boarding house in town. Told the Miner's Rest, over on the northwest, respectable, side of town, he sought the place out, got his first jolt of the evening when Evelyn Cushman answered the door.

"Why, good evening, Miss Evvie." He used the familiar name he had picked up from Clum and the other coach passengers, without thinking about it. Wyatt was no fool with women. He had his own quiet way with them. "I didn't rightly expect the pleasure of seeing you again so soon. Is the landlady in, Ma'am?"

"*I'm* the landlady." She broke him off, short.

Wyatt missed the frost in it. "My luck was due to change, Ma'am. I'd like a room for two, please."

"My last room was let an hour ago." He got the frost now. "To that nice boy on the stage—Mr. Ringo. My suggestion for *you,* Mr. Earp, would be the Cosmopolitan Hotel."

Wyatt's face set up. "What do you mean, 'for me,' Miss Evvie?" Watching her, he saw her stiffen as she said it.

"I simply don't take in hired killers, sir. Good night, Mr. Earp."

"Just a minute, Miss." His boot slid into the closing door with the brittle order, the jolt of it breaking the doorknob from her hand, leaving her white-faced and angry. "There's one thing you and the rest of your kind in this town better get straight right from the beginning. I'm an officer of the law, not a *hired killer.*"

"Are you quite done, sir?" she broke in icily.

"No, not quite, Miss Cushman." The edge of iron still showed in his soft reply. "Let me tell you something, young lady. Something *you* wouldn't know, but that you and all your gentle-hearted friends hereabouts better do some thinking on. *I've been indicted for murder in every town I ever wore a star for.* Not by the bad citizens I gunned down, nor by their crooked friends. But each and every time by the good citizens, the ones I'm paid to protect. The high and mighty ones like you. Bear the thought in mind, Miss Cushman, and pass it along to your crowd. I don't like *your kind* any better than you like *mine!*"

It was the first time in her proud-sure, fine lady's life that any man had used that tone on her. She didn't move or say a word as he tipped his hat brim to her, and turned away.

Halfway down the steps of the prim white cottage, he stopped and called back to her. "Did that 'nice young Mr. Ringo' know he was getting a single room, Ma'am?"

"Yes—" said Evvie, not thinking about the answer, but about what Wyatt had just told her.

"He didn't say anything about having a friend with him?"

"No—" The answer was still automatic, not thought about, or deliberate.

"Good night, Ma'am," said Wyatt softly, and touched his hat again, and went away down the boardwalk into the darkness of the street.

HE jogged Big Red down Allen Street, watching the sidewalk crowds and looking for Ringo. He was a long ways from being happy.

Big Red was just pushing the intersection of Sixth and Allen, when Wyatt's frown caught the scuffle going on down by the darkened stage entrance of the Bird Cage Theater. It looked like no more than some drunk roughing up a street floozie, but it would do for a start toward laying a little law down along Allen Street.

He kicked Big Red down Sixth, piled off of him, shoved through the little ring of interested citizens, stepped in close and laid his .44 barrel back of the nearest ear of the gent who was mashing the lady. The tough stiffened up, had the courtesy to fall out onto the sidewalk where the streetlight gave Wyatt his first good look at him.

It was Johnny Ringo.

By that time he was hearing the girl's husky, "Thanks, Mr. Earp," and was staring up into the heavily painted face of Lily Belloit.

"Evening, Miss Lily." The dance-hall girl didn't miss the warm, friendly way he said it, nor, more surprising yet, the quiet, polite way he took off his big hat when he spoke to her. Impulsively, she stepped up to him, dropping her voice. "*I want to see you, Sheriff,*" she whispered. "*Box number ten, after my act.*"

Just as quickly she stepped away from him, breaking out a loud laugh for the sidewalk strays still lingering around. "If you boys want to see the rest of the act, the box office is open right now and I'm on in ten minutes!"

Wyatt watched the men laugh back at her, make a couple of off-color remarks, break up and move away down the street. Watching them, his thoughts were all for Lily Belloit and her odd invite up to box number ten. But after a minute he shrugged, picked the unconscious Johnny up off

the sidewalk, slung him, dead limp, across Big Red's tall withers.

He grinned wearily at the old gelding, whacked him affectionately on the rump, eased slowly up into the saddle. "Here we go again, Red, boy," was all he said, and kneed him around to head up Sixth Street.

Chapter Six

The aisle passing behind the boxes built around the walls of the Bird Cage auditorium was so narrow Wyatt had to turn his shoulders to get their width past its red-hung draperies. And it stank of cigar smoke, cheap toilet water, stale powder and spilled beer, until a man nearly had to vomit with the choke of it. He found box ten empty, went in, turned down the wall lamp, sat back in the far corner to have a cheroot and wait. The cigar had built perhaps half an inch of ash, when the curtains pulled back and she came in. She didn't see him at first and he took the moment to have his first good look at her.

She appeared maybe 30, 35. And as if she had spent the last twenty years of that time caking on the make-up and working every box and backroom from Kansas City to San Francisco.

That was the first look. He had time for a second, and he took it.

She wasn't any 35, maybe not even 30. Her drawn face, white and shadowy under its thick paste of rouge and rice powder, was still strikingly beautiful. Yet, you could see in the same breath that its whole cut and color was one of hard-broken bitterness and high hopes gone out the window.

Her figure, and a man sure hadn't missed that even in the short moment of her entrance, was nearly faultless. She was maybe a shade too thin, but those pointed breasts and the lush curves of those swinging hips were still there. Still there, mister, and still showing plenty wicked. And showing that way, Wyatt knew, for whatever man might be waiting for her in the shadows of the Bird Cage's box number ten.

"Hello, Lily—" He stood up with the greeting, hat in hand and feeling a little awkward.

"I didn't see you, Mr. Earp. You're a pretty quiet one." He could tell she was startled, even though she didn't let on she was.

"Tricks of the trade," he answered uneasily. "What was it you wanted to see me about, Ma'am?" He'd seen plenty of her kind before, but for some reason this girl had him going.

"Not alone, quiet," said Lily Belloit, pinning him with her odd, slant eyes, "but quick, too."

Wyatt thought he'd never seen a pair of eyes just like those. Like cat's eyes, they were. And that steady and spellbinding way they drilled into you, a man knew he had either to quit looking at them, or get the hell out of that box, right now.

Wyatt quit looking at them.

"What was it you wanted, Miss Lily?"

"To be on your side." She was using those eyes again. "And to warn you."

"Warn away, Ma'am."

"It's your young friend, Johnny Ringo. He's mixing with the wrong crowd. Watch him."

"He's being watched," said Wyatt soberly. "What else?"

"Behan."

"Me and Mr. Behan have had our little talk." He lost the slight grin as quickly as he had found it. "What's Behan to you, Miss Lily?" he asked bluntly.

Lily Belloit blushed. A man could see it even through the thick paint, and had to wonder that a girl in her business could still be embarrassed.

"A girl has got to get on," she murmured. "He's big in this town and doesn't bother me too much."

"Meaning you're his woman?" said Wyatt quietly.

"He thinks so."

"How about you?"

"I never had a man, *any* man," she answered, the color still thick and dark under her rouge, "the way a decent girl wants one."

She looked at the massive, sure form of him there in the box shadows, the gas light cutting boldly around his heavy-maned head, and the whole lion's grace and strength of him. *Not like a girl would want you!* she felt like crying out. To know and hold and to have a man like you. One who would look at a girl like she was his woman for life, not his whore for tonight!

But to Wyatt she said nothing, only stood looking at him, letting him guess it from her eyes.

He was a better than fair guesser. He knew what he was going to say to the girl; He felt touched by that inside kindness and gentleness that was always his way with the unlucky ones.

"Sometimes, Miss Lily, providing we *want* bad enough, we get."

She took it for what it was worth, likely no more than a pat on the head for a lonely stray. "I'm beholden to you, Mr. Earp," she murmured. "If there's ever anything I can do for you—"

Wyatt laughed. He said it just to let a little of the pressure off of her and to ease his own way out. "There's something you can do for me right now, girl. Recommend me a place to stay the night."

He saw the little flash light her strange eyes. "What about the Miner's Rest?" she said quietly.

"Miss Evvie Cushman is a *proper* lady," he smiled wryly. "She doesn't take in hired killers."

Lily nodded, the brightness of her first smile for him, touching Wyatt with a nameless unrest.

"You see, Mr. Earp, it sometimes pays a man to know improper ladies." With the words, she held out to him a little padlock key on a crumpled velvet ribbon. "It's the old shack on the vacant lot back of the theater. Not so bad as it looks, either, got a real inside bathtub, and all!"

He didn't take the key. "I'd better not, Ma'am." He wasn't thinking about morals or any of that trash, only about Behan and the girl.

"Don't worry." Her voice was back on its old, hard level. "I was moving out tomorrow, anyway. Three months back on the rent and no chance to make it up. You take the key and go on. I'll be by after my clothes in a bit, and that'll be all there is to it."

He took the key, now, fumbling around for something more to say. "If you're a little pressed for pin money," he started lame, and finished lamer, "I got a few dollars you can—"

It was her laugh which interrupted him. But he saw back of it to the quick tears in her eyes, and caught the choke of it in her voice.

"Money, Mr. Earp? Why, there isn't money enough in the world!" She stepped quickly to the curtains, turned back to him and said it, and was gone on down the aisle before he could move.

"You're the first man in six years, to take his hat off to me!"

That shack was all right. Wyatt didn't know when anything had felt so good as that tarred-wood bathtub. After a long spell of soaking and thinking, he got out, dried himself, started to ease gratefully into the old iron bedstead. He got a second thought, put on a clean set of clothes from his warbag, lit up a cheroot and settled down in the battered rocker by the front door to wait for Lily.

A man had to be sure she had another place to stay the night. And that he hadn't thoughtlessly beaten her out of a decent bed.

It was a good, Christian thought. But ten minutes later his cheroot had gone out in his hand and he was sound from its strap-leather hinges. rocker, sawing away, when something set his jumpy nerves off and he was up and out of the chair pressing against the wall back of the door, and waiting.

He watched the latch lift stealthily, then the door swing in with barely a sound from its strap-leather hinges. The next second he kicked it shut,

grabbed blind, wound up with his arms full of Lily Belloit.

He let go of her like a hot stove lid.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled. "After so many years an old cat gets whippy." The sleep was getting out of his eyes about then. He stared at the girl, his big jaw coming forward. "What happened to *you?*" he growled, and growled it flat and ugly.

She was a sight. Blouse torn, hair bad-mussed, face all marked up. She was shaking like an aspen leaf in a high country wind, too, and not from being scared by Wyatt's grab.

"Lover's quarrel," she grinned, tight-lipped. "I'll get my things."

Wyatt's pale eyes stopped her. "Behan?" he asked.

She knew she shouldn't tell him, but she was tired and hurt, and she was a woman. "Don't make anything of it, Mr. Earp. He just found out about me seeing you in the box. He had a right to be mad, I guess."

"No man," said Wyatt slowly, "has got a right to hit a woman." Then, softly, "You'll need a hot tub and some fresh clothes, girl. I'll heat the water. Get your things off."

"Now, please, Mr. Earp, don't—"

His quiet headshake cut her off. "Get out of your things, girl," he repeated gently, and turned and went out to get fresh wood and water.

When he came back, she had drawn the ragged curtain across the corner where the tub was and he saw the flimsy camisole and the long sheer of the black silk stockings hanging across its rusty draw-wire. They didn't talk much while he was getting the water hot. When it was ready, he handed it in to her through the curtain.

He heard her pouring it and getting into it, and began to get embarrassed by the continuing stillness. He tried whistling and moving around like he was busy with his own doings and not thinking any of what was going on back of that patched old drape. It wasn't any good. She nailed him on it, right off.

"Why don't you give up and bed down, Mr. Earp?" she called cheerfully. "I'm going to soak a spell and I can let myself out."

He felt the blood go up into his face and wondered if a "hired killer" could blush. "All right, girl!" He actually laughed. Quiet, maybe, and some soft about it, but he did laugh. "You caught me. You want the lamp left up?"

"No, turn it down. I've candlelight enough in here. Good night—"

"Good night, Miss Lily." He got in between the worn cotton sheets, feeling the welcome of their coolness hit his skin. And not missing the drowsy-clean perfume of *her* that was on them, either. His eyes were closed, none the less, before the ancient springs quit sagging under his six-foot bulk.

"See you tomorrow, girl—" The sleepy mumble trailed off, unfinished. He didn't hear the low, strangely soft happiness of her answering laugh.

"Tomorrow's a long way off, Mr. Earp!"

Chapter Seven

When he came awake next day, the dance and sparkle of the winter sun was glarey-bright against the cabin window, and Lily Belloit was gone.

He got dressed and walked over to Fremont Street and the jail. He found Ringo still in the cell bunk where he'd left him the night before. The kid was suffering the full hell of the morning after, but Wyatt didn't waste any sympathy on him.

"Pardner," he grunted, "you and me are going to come to an understanding right about now, you hear?"

"Damn you and your lousy sneaking up behind a man!" Ringo blurted it out sullen and ugly, not looking up at Wyatt and not wanting to.

"That's whisky talk, boy," said Wyatt. "But don't try any more of it."

"Kiss my hindfoot!" snapped the kid. "I don't fear you, nor your big reputation!"

Wyatt nodded. "Your mouth was always bigger than your belly, boy. Come on, let's go get a cup of coffee and talk it over. I've got a proposition to offer you and I don't want any sour-mash decisions on it."

"Not interested. Gimme my guns back."

Wyatt looked at him, hard. Nodded again. He got his guns out of the desk drawer, handed them over to him. "You're off on the wrong foot, *Johnny*. Pull back and cheek to the raise, son."

That soft, gentle "Johnny" was the cue. The kid was not that hungover he didn't catch it, either. But his belly was giving him three kinds of hell, and his head felt twice too big for his hat size.

"I'll travel my gait!" he snarled. "You travel yours!" He brushed past him, grabbing his guns and buckling them on. Wyatt followed him out into the street, called softly after him.

"Travel it, then, boy. Yonder's the town. She's all yours."

Johnny Ringo went on walking. He didn't answer him and he didn't look back.

The kid went into the Can Can Chop House, had his coffee but couldn't face the three eggs he'd ordered. Instead, he went back down the street to the Palace and put away three bourbons. That saved his life. He was feeling better and beginning to think about how he was going to make up to Wyatt, when Behan, followed by Frank Stilwell and Pete Spence, walked in.

"Understand your big friend stretched you last night," grinned the politician. "How come?"

"Reckon I was making a hoss's behind out of myself, that's all."

Behan's grin got bigger. "Yeah, I understand you put on a better act than any they got in the Bird Cage."

"Awful damn funny, ain't it!" snarled Johnny, mad right now and starting to push his chair back.

"Simmer off, kid." Stilwell put a big hand on his arm. "John don't mean to ride you. It ain't his fault Earp made a damn fool out of you in front of the girl and all them sidewalk bums."

"Sure, kid, forget it," advised Pete Spence with a friendly grin. "How about another shot, all around?"

The shot was ordered and about to be downed, when young Billy Claiborne, another of the "Behan boys," stalked in through the street doors and made for their table, to toss a crumpled piece of paper in front of Behan. "That new sheriff's a busy little pistol," he nodded. "There's one of these billy-doos tacked up in front of every saloon in town. How you like that for pure brass, Johnny?"

Behan didn't like it. He threw the paper across to Stilwell. Frank picked it up, as Pete and Ringo leaned in to help him look it over. It wasn't any literary masterpiece but it said what it had to say, clear enough:

> *Citizens and others will not wear guns in the city limits unless authorized by the undersigned. As of 6 p.m., this date.*
>
> *W. Earp.*

Stilwell laughed. So did Claiborne and Spence and Johnny Ringo. Only Behan kept quiet. But then he was the only one facing the street doors and seeing who had just drifted in through them to come up and stand tall and quiet behind the happy ones.

"Get up," said Wyatt, soft and slow. "All of you except Mr. Behan. Back off and turn around easy."

Stilwell was the first up and around, and took it the best. "Morning, sheriff. We was just hoisting one to your memory."

"So I heard," said Wyatt. "Who tore the notice down?"

Billy Claiborne flushed, took a step forward. "Me!" he snarled defiantly. "Who wants to know!"

"Pick it up." Wyatt nodded to the crumpled sheet.

"The hell you say!"

Wyatt hooked a big thumb over the double hammers of his shotgun. The twin clicks bit into the stillness. "Pick

it up." With the nod, he reached into his coat pocket, tossed a little dime-store tack hammer and a bag of roofing nails onto the table alongside the torn-down notice. "March!" he said.

Young Billy Claiborne was tough. He was honest-to-God tough, and no two ways about it. But he picked up paper, hammer and nails, and marched.

"After you, gentlemen," said Wyatt to the rest of them. "You stay put, Mr. Behan. We won't need you."

They started off after Billy Claiborne, awkward and sulky as so many sheepdogs caught in a strange cow town. To Behan, Wyatt only nodded.

"Don't ever touch the girl again," he said quietly, and turned and stalked off after the others.

After making Billy Claiborne tack the six-gun notice back up in front of the Palace, Wyatt turned the young tough and his two companions loose with the warning that next time it wouldn't be played for laughs. Then, quietly reminding them of the sunset deadline for arms-bearing, he moved off down Allen Street shoving the unhappy Johnny Ringo ahead of him.

Once back at the jail, he kept it crisp.

"Look, boy," he nodded to the sullen Ringo, "this is the last talk you'll get from me. I allow you'd better listen."

"Save your wind," grunted Ringo. "We got nothing to talk about. You made a damn fool of me twice in twelve hours. You won't get another chance."

"Neither will you, boy. Think it over."

"She's thought!" snapped Ringo. "Damn it, just because you pulled me out of a little hole back in San Angelo don't make me beholden to you for life. Why don't you get off of my back and stay off of it?"

"A little travel certainly broadens a young man's viewpoint," observed Wyatt thoughtfully.

"Lookit here, Wyatt," the kid growled, "I just don't aim to be your slave no more. I allow I can make it from here in, without your infernal wetnursing. And, by God, I mean to give it two hellish big tries!" With the loud-voiced brag, he slapped arrogantly at the leathers of his old-pattern .44's.

"You set your main store by those guns, don't you, kid?" Wyatt said it with disarming gentleness.

"You know it, mister!" boasted Ringo harshly.

Wyatt quit tugging at his mustache. He opened his desk drawer, took out an old, green-tarnished deputy's star. "Well," he said at last, that pale, faraway look in his eyes, "there's just one way you can keep wearing those guns in this town. That's *my way*, Johnny."

Still quiet and easy about it, he tossed the star onto the desktop, toward Ringo.

Ringo hesitated. Wyatt could be a lot of fun, could take a good salty view of almost any trouble that washed his way. But about one thing he was dead set. For him, it was where all friendship shut up shop, and the kid knew it.

You couldn't laugh with Wyatt about the law.

But Johnny Ringo was already a lot closer to where Lily Belloit had pegged him, than Wyatt realized. He showed that now and he showed it in the worst possible way he could have.

He laughed.

He laughed at Wyatt and at the pewter star on Wyatt's desk.

He laughed at the star, and he flashed his wonderful draw and shot it off the desk, to send it spinning with a crazy whine into the wall over Wyatt's head. Then, he blew the smoke out of his gun barrel in that high-school way a green gunhand will, and flipped the big Colt back into his rightside holster with a fancy spin.

Wyatt didn't say a word.

He leaned over in his chair, picked the bent star up from the floor. He held it up, thoughtfully studying the ragged hole with which the kid's off-hand shot had centered it. Finally, he nodded like he was satisfied, and dropped it carefully into his vest pocket.

"I'll save it, Johnny," was all he said. "Some day I'll pin it on you."

"Yeah?" laughed Ringo, breaking out his wild-crazy grin. "Over my dead body!"

"*Maybe you guessed it,*" said Wyatt, plenty soft, and got up, and stepped out and away from behind the desk. "Now, get out, kid. And don't ever look back. You won't want to see what's standing behind you." . . .

Jogging his roan up Allen Street, the main itch that was scratching Johnny Ringo, was money. Sure, he was mad at Wyatt and sure he meant to get square with him for pushing a man around like he wasn't old enough to wipe his own nose. But the first-hand sweat that was lathering him was that he was on the seat of his jeans in a strange town and didn't have the price of a nickel cup of coffee to his name.

Naturally, that sweat put him to thinking about Johnny Behan and his last night's offer of good-paid hire as a gunhand, with no limit on the amount of overtime work to be had. As the thought formed, he spotted Frank Stilwell, along with Pete Spence and Billy Claiborne, riding up Allen toward him. He pulled in the roan and waited.

Stilwell must have been a mind reader. "You by any chance looking for Johnny Behan?" he greeted him.

"I reckon," nodded Ringo.

"Made up your mind, kid?"

"Yeah, where can I find him?"

"You can't. But you're just in time. We're heading out on a little job, now. Behan's up to Tucson seeing Shibell about that tin star he handed your friend, Earp. He said to take

"By golly—you can almost smell *it, can't you?"*

you along with us, providing you was of a mind to go."

"I'm of a mind. What's up?"

"The new sheriff's number," grinned Billy Claiborne, busting into it. "We got orders to rewrite that there little billy-doo of his, come six o'clock tonight."

"It figures," agreed Ringo. "Let's get to it."

Stilwell swung his horse, throwing a quick look across the street to where a handful of sidewalk watchers were staring at them. "Yeah, we'd best. We're drawing a audience. Hold your hoss to a walk."

Ringo returned Stilwell's curt nod, swung his roan to follow their mounts slowly up Allen Street and out of town to the north.

The last spade was out of the faro slot. That bad card-hand begun in San Angelo, and hopefully delayed by Wyatt's three-week, wishful try at settling the kid down, was now fanned out on the table. The dealer's box was empty, the case-ace played and called.

Johnny Ringo was on his way. . . .

In his first fifteen minutes at the Sulphur Springs Ranch headquarters of the gang, the kid met most of the local wild bunch. The names that went with the round of hard-eyed handshakes rolled out like a badman's Who's Who of Pima County: Tom and Frank McLowry, Ike, Phin and young Billy Clanton, Harry Head, Jim Crane, Pony Deal, a Mexican-Apache breed named "Indian Charlie" Cruz, and four or five others that came so fast he couldn't hang onto their handles.

But the one who stood out, of course, was Curly Bill Brocius.

Curly Bill was dark-handsome, with thick black hair that ringed-up tight and glossy as a carnival gypsy's. He had a quick, good laugh which he used plenty, and he was about as good a natured cutthroat as you'd want to meet. Ringo took to him right off.

Among the others, he took a natural liking only to young Billy Clanton. As to the rest of them, he spotted Ike for a blowhard, Phin for a grouch, and both McLowrys for a grouch, ones you would have to watch, particularly Frank, the older one.

As soon as he'd introduced Ringo to the boys, Stilwell told Curly about Wyatt's six-gun order and about Behan telling them to ride out to the ranch and see what Curly thought of it. What Curly thought of it was first to bust out his big laugh, then go to naming off the hands he wanted to go along back to town with him. "Let's see, Frank," he was talking to Stilwell, "you boys best stay here at the ranch. Ike, you and Billy come along, and Tom, you and Frank." With the Clantons and McLowrys named, he paused. "That makes six, with you, Pony," he pointed to Pony Deal, "but I like lucky numbers so we'll make it seven."

Ringo flashed his bad grin, shoved his roan forward.

"Try me, mister. I'm lucky as a new dog with a warm nose."

Curly looked him over. He saw a tall kid, over six-two. A little narrow and wild in the eye, maybe, but handsome as hell, with his dark-tanned face and sunburned red hair, and with a way about him that got to a man, somehow. The fact that his guns hung on him like he would know where to find them providing he might want to get to them in better than a normal hurry, didn't hurt a man's opinion of him, either.

"All right, kid. Cut yourself a fresh horse out of the corral. We'll see if you can shoot as well as talk."

Chapter Eight

During the rest of that day, Wyatt was fair to middling busy trying to round up a few deputies to swear in for the fun that was due to hit town around six o'clock. But none of the sober citizens of Goose Flats had lost any Sulphur Springs gun-toughs. Result was, the winter sun got down back of the Whetstones while Wyatt was still whistling for his deputies. He was good and damn mad about it when, just before six, the jail office door eased open and Ferd Wagner walked in.

"Ferd!" It wasn't often Wyatt showed any start. "Where in God's name did you drop in from?"

"Just got off the Benson stage." He took Wyatt's hand like it wasn't the second or third time he'd done it. "Heard you was looking for a deputy or two and not having any luck."

"Thanks, old salt." Wyatt left it at that. "You still working undercover for Wells Fargo?"

"Sure. You can't teach an old dog to roll over. By the way, the Company sure is pleased with the way you stretched those two kids of Curly Bill's. Office up to Phoenix wired down that if you ever needed a job, you'd be welcomer than paper money on a passed plate."

"I'll remember it," said Wyatt. He got a badge out of the desk drawer, hung it on Wagner's vest. "You're sworn," he nodded. "Now, mind you, Ferd, you just back me and see I don't take one between the shoulder blades. Leave the forcing to me, you hear?"

"Why sure, Wyatt. There'll be no trouble with you handling it."

"Likely not. Let's go."

They went out the door and off down Fremont. It was already dark as sin, with a driving wind and sleety snow bucketing down off the Dragoons, across Goose Flats. For a night where there wasn't going to be any trouble, it looked uncommon black and ugly.

At the O.K. Stable, Wyatt told Ferd to wait up a minute while he slipped in to check what new horses might be there with lather between their legs. He was back out at once. "Pretty salty bunch," he nodded to his companion. "How salty?" said Ferd Wagner.

"Seven straight," grunted Wyatt. "Ringo, Tom and Frank McLowry, Ike and Billy Clanton, and Pony Deal, plus the old he-coon himself."

"Curly Bill?" groaned Ferd.

"As ever was," agreed Wyatt. "Come on, I got something I want to get over to my shack. Got an idea this is going to be a night for barrel-bending."

At the shack, Ferd held the lamp and watched him rummage in his warbag. He grinned nervously at what he dug out and held up to the light.

"Remember this?" said Wyatt, returning the grin without the nerves.

Ferd remembered it, all right. Once a man had seen the Buntline Special, he didn't forget it. There had been only five of them ever made, all to old Ned Buntline's personal order, way back when he had been authoring the Wild Bill Hickok penny dreadfuls. One had gone to Wyatt, the other four to some brother law officers: Bill Tilghman, Neal Brown, Charlie Bassett, Bat Masterson.

The Special was a regular heavy-frame Colt with an outsize twelve-inch barrel. No better belt gun was ever built for the risky art of buffaloing.

"Well, hell, I reckon!" Ferd broke the pause, dropped the grin. "You allow it's going to be real close work, I take it."

"Likely. Stable boy said they'd been in town since five. That's an hour of whisky any way you cut it. Always like to work inside a man's reach when he's liquored up." He moved for the door. "Douse the lamp. Let's go."

Outside the darkened shack, both men held up suddenly, listening intently. From the direction of Allen Street in front of the Bird Cage, a booming bass voice was announcing to the winter night that it's owner was a kinky wolf from the Chiricahuas, was uncurried below the hocks, didn't mean to have any burrs pulled out of his tail, nor shooting irons lifted off his hip.

"There's the first of our coyotes tuning up," said Wyatt. "We'll go around the block and close in on him from both sides. Leave me have the first whack at him."

Minutes later, they were closing in on their weaving challenger. But Wagner, in his nervousness, had gotten first around the block, and first up to the pistol-waving drunk. *It was Curly Bill, himself!*

It was too late to back off and wait for Wyatt. White-faced, Ferd took a cold drop on Curly, ordered him to hand over his Colt. To his vast relief, Curly laughed good-naturedly, held the weapon out, butt-first.

Ferd nervously grabbed at the offered barrel. As quick as he did, Curly spun it around on his trigger-finger so that the deputy's grab discharged it. The slug took Ferd through the right lung, dropping him for the night and then some.

This was the first use of the gun trick destined to become famous as the "Curly Bill spin." It's introduction took three seconds: Wyatt needed only two more seconds to act on that introduction, one to leap in behind Curly, one to wrap the Buntline barrel around the back of his hat.

By now, several of the solid citizens were nosing up for a look at the shambles. Wyatt deputized one bunch of them to lug Ferd over to his shack and fetch Dr. Goodfellow, the town physician and county coroner. Then, he tossed the jail keys over to a second bunch and told them to drag Curly over and lock him up. The whole outfit of them were still standing there with their mouths open, when he rammed the Buntline Special back in his belt and took off across Allen, toward the Palace.

He was in luck there, catching both McLowrys just coming out the cut-glass doors. He stepped into the shadow of a pile of packing boxes, let them come past him.

Easing out behind them, he fed the barrel to Frank, first. He could tell by the way the steel went home that the first brother was out of it. He had his knee jammed into Tom's kidneys before Frank even started to fall. Tom spun around, helpless with the pain. As he did, Wyatt slashed the barrel alongside his jaw, splintering the bone and laying the flesh open.

To the citizens now running up from across Allen Street, his orders were direct. "Put these birds in with Curly, boys. Keep the noise down, I don't want to flush up the rest of them." He was long-striding for the glass doors of the Palace before there could be any argument. The dumbfounded townsfolk watched him disappear into the saloon, then turned to the work of hoisting the McLowry brothers into a handy buckboard at the curb. They had just time to pick up Frank, when every man of them stopped dead to stare at what was marching back out of the Palace.

Wyatt did it so quick and simple it was all over before the Palace customers knew it had started. He paused only long enough to spot his friends at the bar, moved straight in on them. The first they saw of him was in the backbar mirror, and that was way too late.

He took the two nearest him; Ike and Billy Clanton. Ike went down the first clip he hit him. Billy was tougher. He took three slashes full in the face, before going down clawing at the blood in his eyes and cursing in a split-lip whimper. Ringo and Pony Deal didn't move. The former because he knew better, the latter, because he didn't have the guts.

"All right, boys." It was short, even for Wyatt. "Let's be going."

And go, they went. Ringo leading the way among the hushed, staring tables, Pony Deal following him. Ike Clanton came last, guiding the staggering, blood-blind Billy.

The entire action had taken something like sixty seconds. In all, two minutes could not have passed from the time Wyatt entered the Crystal Palace until he and his captives were back out of it. Which is how come the good citizens over by the curbside buckboard were so flabbergasted they dropped Frank McLowry in the gutter and damn near let him get drowned in the horse-water from the Palace hitching post.

And which is how Wyatt Earp came to pistol-whip five big-time gunmen in ten minutes. And to put Curly Bill Brocius and all six of his Sulphur Springs bad boys to bed without their suppers.

And likewise, without their six-guns.

Wyatt figured things were going to move fast now. They did. For forty-eight hours he held Curly Bill and his bunch in the Fremont Street jail under a charge of carrying "unconcealed" weapons. "*For the time being,*" he added, in a scum-ice way none of them cared for. And with reason. That "time being" had to do with Ferd Wagner.

The Fargo agent was still alive.

He hung on all of the second day, then gave up and went down with the sun that night. After he was gone, Wyatt went back over to the jail. Curly and the Clantons were playing three-toed pete with the jail deck and feeling some better because they'd heard Ferd was improving and likely to get well, after all. But when Wyatt stalked into the cell block, the outlaw leader didn't need more than one look at the set of his mouth to know the card game was over and his luck had changed.

It hit the good-natured bandit hard. A blind man could see that. "I'm right sorry to hear Ferd's gone, Wyatt," he said. He held his head down, along with his words. "Likely, you know I ain't funning when I say that."

"I'll tell it to his wife and those three kids of his, up to Benson," replied Wyatt, pale-eyed. "Maybe they can pay the bills and live fat off the fact you're sorry."

Curly didn't answer. He just walked over to the far wall and sat down on the bunk, looking sick.

"I'm holding all of you," continued Wyatt flatly. "Judge Cartwright is opening a circuit court session at Benson Monday morning. We'll be there. Tomorrow being Sunday, you got some time to guess at what the charge will be."

With that, he went out of the cell-block, kicking the office door shut behind him. It was perhaps ten minutes of silence later that Johnny Ringo, sicker and sorrier than any of them, broke down.

"Wyatt!" he yelled, high voiced, "lemme out! I got to talk to you. I got something to say."

There wasn't any answer for a long time. Then, the door opened and Wyatt walked in. He let Ringo out, led him into the office. "All right, kid," he grunted. "Say it short. It's a little late for long wind."

Ringo wet his lips nervously, had a hard time getting it out. "Wyatt," he began uncertainly, "I've been an idiot. It's the first time I've been sober enough to hit a balloon with a ball bat, since I got to town. So, I reckon you know it's me talking now, not the whisky."

"I'm listening."

Ringo hesitated, looking for a little help. He didn't get it. Finally, he bent over the desk, the rush and tumble of it coming out of him all at once.

"Wyatt, I didn't actually have nothing to do with killing Ferd. God Amighty, you can see that. I'm sorry I turned on you, and I won't do it again, and I want that there star you offered me this morning!"

"That all you wanted to say, boy?" asked Wyatt.

Ringo nodded miserably, stood waiting the long seconds away. He thought Wyatt would never stop tugging at his mustache and staring at the floor in that empty, far-off way of his. But at last, he spoke.

"A man fools me once," he said slowly, "shame on him. He fools me twice, shame on me. You've fooled me once, boy, I'm afraid the rest of it comes out hard-simple."

Ringo cleared his throat. "Uh, how's that, Wyatt?" he finally got out, low-voiced.

"*Nobody fools me twice, Johnny.*"

Wyatt said it soft and unhappily,

and he still didn't look up from the floor. But Ringo felt the bitter end that was in it, knew his last question was only asking the chapter and the verse.

"Where's that leave us, then?" he muttered.

Wyatt's pale eyes came up from the floor. They held on Ringo, deep and still as winter-cold water in a desert tank, when the wind has died at sundown. "It leaves *you*," he said expressionlessly, "facing a hanging charge as accessory to the murder of Ferd Wagner."

At 6:00 P.M., Sunday night, the day stage from Benson and Tucson rolled up in front of the O.K. Stable.

At 6:01, Mr. John Behan got down out of it and headed up Allen for the *Epitaph* office, where editor Clum's light was still showing in the front window. At 6:05, Clum was looking at the legal paper Behan had shoved across his desk, and at 6:10 he was into his overcoat hunching unhappily down Allen Street at Behan's smiling side. At 6:15 P.M. they were in the front office of the Fremont Street jail, with Wyatt studying the paper and not hearing editor Clum's unpublished remarks about the shame and the pity and the pure hell of it all.

A man looked at that paper, he read "Charles E. Shibell" scrawled in ink across the bottom of it, and he knew where he was.

And where he was, was looking for a job.

As of tomorrow morning, Tombstone had herself a new deputy sheriff. His name was John Clarence Behan.

Bright and early Monday morning, Behan turned up at the jail with his lawyer and seven solid writs of *habeas corpus*. Within the hour, the Sulphur Springs gunmen had breakfasted leisurely at the Can Can Chop House, ridden unhurriedly out of Tombstone, free as the Arizona breeze.

Wyatt took the bone of all this in his teeth, slunk over to his shack to chew on it all day. After eight hours of pacing and mustache pulling and growling to himself, he spit out the splinters and started packing.

Like any frontier peace officer, he'd had to put up with his share of shady politicians and hidden higher-ups. Them, and the gutless, sheep-stupid, taxpaying citizens who stood still for them. But enough was too much.

Chapter Nine

SOMEHOW, he wasn't surprised to find Lily there when he returned to the shack for his warbag. It was almost as though he had expected it. What he hadn't expected was the unsettling, warm glow it gave him.

"Hello, Lily." He didn't realize he was using that soft smile of his. "Where you been keeping yourself?"

"Around, 'sheriff'." She gave the smile back to him at something better than six percent interest. "Looks like maybe you're figuring to run out on us." She held up, studying him with those slant eyes of hers. "It's not like your kind, Wyatt. Don't you do it."

"I got to. You know what I was up against here. Behan's hooked to Shibell, and him to somebody in the legislature up to Prescott, and them to somebody else, clean on up to maybe even Governor Fremont, himself. You can fight what's in front of you, but you can't draw a gun on somebody behind your back in Tucson or Prescott. I've been here before, I know what it is. I'm sick to my damn belly of it!"

She looked at him a minute, then nodded. "You want to hear something else that'll make you even sicker to that belly of yours?" She paused.

"All right," he rasped. "Let's have it, girl!"

"You've already had it, mister! Three hours ago the Benson stage was held up at Boquilla Springs. Old Monk Wilson was shot and killed and the Company lost the Lucky Cuss payroll. Upwards of $14,000 in greenback cash! All you need now, boy, is for Behan's posse to ride up outside this shack and feel under Big Red's saddle blanket."

He slid past Lily, grabbed the lamp off the table, blew it out. Next, he took his warbag and threw it under the bed. "Got to travel light," was all he said, before running to the front window. When he came back, he was grinning. But not in a way to make anybody comfortable.

"You'll have to cover for me, Lily girl. Say I was here, grabbed my things and lit out on a high lope. You got that?"

"Sure," she whispered, her face in a hard set. "But never mind that 'Lily girl' stuff, Wyatt. Just go on and run. I owe you a couple, least I can do is give you cover."

It was his second laugh, and it puzzled her. It sounded like he meant it, and was happy about something. He stepped near her, pulling her close. He held her like that a second, then reached down and kissed her light and gentle on the cheek. "You remember me, Lily," he told her. "For I'll promise not to forget you!"

He was easing the door open, then. Taking a last look around. Slipping quickly through it. She was at his stirrup before he could get Big Red turned.

"Wyatt, stay with me! Don't quit like this, boy!"

The third laugh was crisper yet, ringing clean and sharp in the winter air. "I'm not quitting, Ma'am. I was fired!"

"Wyatt, wait—!"

"Back in the shack before you freeze, girl." The laugh was gone now, as he spun Big Red, hard around.

"Don't worry your pretty little head about me, you hear? I'm only off to see a man about *another* job."

The morning stage for Tombstone left Benson on time the following Wednesday—with the Contention Mine payroll once more in its usual place between the shotgun rider's feet. There wasn't a thing to mark that run from the one which had brought Wyatt into Tombstone the previous Wednesday, unless a man happened to be looking for little things.

Like the fact there was a new driver in place of old Monk Wilson. A new shotgun rider alongside of him in Wyatt's place. And only one passenger in the coach itself.

That run even hit the Watervale Grade about twilight, the same as the other one. Even the shadowy horsemen who melted out of the rocks to yell up to the new shotgun rider to drop his scattergun down and kick the cashbox overboard, looked about the same.

BUT from right about there, all similarity to last Wednesday's run folded up.

A double-barreled Parker blasted the night from the near-side window of the coach, and two of the eight bandit riders grabbed their guts and went into the dirt. Before their surviving comrades could lever their Winchesters, the coach door slammed open and the solitary, black-coated passenger was out into the road bucking a cavalry model Colt .44 into the packed mass of their horses. One of the big slugs emptied a third saddle and yet another of them hit the breech of the outlaw leader's Winchester, knocking it spinning out of his hand.

Three down and their leader winged inside of five seconds was too fast and fancy. The would-be road agents got out far and fast, their wing-hit leader not the last, by several, to leave the scene.

At the coach, the brief, wordless rest of it was much the same as last Wednesday. With one exception.

This time there was no need to help any lungshot outlaws into the tonneau where they could stretch out and die comfortable. The three boys sprawled in the dirt of the Watervale Grade were down for keeps. None of them were feeling any pain when the quiet-moving passenger and the hard-swallowing stage crew dumped them into the coach a couple of minutes later.

It was just 6:15 P.M., when the Benson stage pulled the O.K. Stable stop and Tombstone got her first hint that Wells Fargo had hired-on a new express messenger.

He was a big, quiet, pale-eyed man that the boys along the boardwalk in front of the livery barn were certain they'd seen somewhere before. And some recent, as well.

Unless the lamplight was bad, or a man's memory going back on him, that was Mr. Wyatt Earp crawling out of that old Concord and stalking off up Allen Street with the Contention Mine payroll box under one arm, and a sawed-off Parker double under the other.

Chapter Ten

BAD news never was a slow traveler. Word that Wyatt was riding regular shotgun for Wells Fargo got to the right places in plenty of time. For the first full week on record, there wasn't a solitary hold-up try on the Benson-Tombstone run. Wells Fargo was delighted, the stage crews took a new lease on life, the insurance companies were ready to talk about reducing premiums.

Only Wyatt was unhappy.

He had not come back to Tombstone to ride shotgun for Wells Fargo. But in the whole of the nine days he'd been on the run, he'd not seen hide nor hair of Johnny Ringo or any of the other Sulphur Springs boys. Pacing his room at the Cosmopolitan early Saturday night—he had turned the shack back to Lily—he knew his frustration had built up to the point where he would pretty quick just have to cut himself loose and drift until he bumped into something that would ease it off. Shortly, he gave up the struggle, grabbed his hat and drifted out.

The first thing he bumped into was Johnny Ringo.

He spotted him at a front poker table in the Crystal Palace. His eyes narrowed, as he paused on the boardwalk to peer in through the heavy frost on the plate-glass windows. The kid was playing mostly with his left hand, clearly nursing his right.

Wyatt's eyes got ugly. The bad look was still in them when he came quietly up behind Johnny Ringo's chair, inside.

"Why, hello kid," he said softly. "Good to see you out and around again." Before Ringo could move, he reached down and grabbed his right hand in a grinning vigorous shake. The kid went white with the pain of it.

"Damn you, leggo my hand!" He ripped it away from him, leaped to his feet.

Ringo had seen that draw once before, way back in San Angelo. The other boys in the game, hadn't. Their mouths dropped open. Nobody could draw a gun that fast.

"Unhook your belt and let it slide," said Wyatt.

Again, Ringo knew his man. He unhooked.

"Kick them away from you."

Ringo kicked. "All right, big man, now what?" he snarled, the blood thick and dark in his face.

"Now," said Wyatt slowly, "I'm going to give a wetnose kid a licking he should have gotten a long time ago."

"You picked the right time to try it!" grated Ringo. "When I got only one good hand."

"That bad hand of yours is just the little reason you're going to get whipped, boy. In case you've got any lingering doubts about it, you drop around to my room at the Cosmopolitan after you wake up, and have yourself a long look at an octagon-barrel .44-40 Winchester that got left behind on the Watervale Grade a week ago Wednesday night."

With the short nod, he dropped off his own guns and kicked them away from him. "Give it your best try, Johnny. Nobody's coming up behind you with a Buntline Special, this time. And, just for the record, boy—" He paused, holding up his right hand. *"I won't use this one."*

He was through talking. So, for a change, was Johnny Ringo. He growled something bad-deep and without formed words in his throat, and went for Wyatt.

THE next morning around Tombstone, you could get a hundred and forty versions of that famous, one-arm fight. Or, one for every customer who was crowded into the Palace when it got started. Two facts, only, are absolutely certain about it. Number one was the fact that John Ringo was the man left lying in the sawdust when it was all over, beaten into a senseless pulp in one of the bloodiest barroom free-for-alls in frontier memory. Number two was the fact of the point-short speech Wyatt delivered to Ringo's table companions, before picking up his guns and going back to the Cosmopolitan to clean up.

"When he comes around," he said softly to the motionless gamblers, "give him a message from me.

"Tell him the next time I catch him bad-handed following a stage stick-up, he's as all through in Arizona as Jesse James is in Jackson County, Missouri."

So, Ringo was the first thing Wyatt bumped into when he started his Saturday night drift through Tombstone. The next and last thing was a ragged, big-eyed Mexican kid who shagged telegrams for the telegraph office over on Tough Nut Street. The kid told Wyatt that Jake Shagrew, the night operator, had a message for him down at the office. And would he, *"por favor, Senor,"* come right away and get it?

The little Mexican was pleased as spiked punch when Wyatt thanked him in rough-good Spanish. And somewhat more than amazed when the big *gringo* flipped him a whole silver dollar and smiled him a sober, *"Vaya con Dios, amigo."* For Wyatt, it was an even exchange. It wasn't every night in the week that a hired killer got to be a hero for the price of a plate of ham and eggs.

AT the telegraph office, business picked up. The wire was from United States Marshal for Arizona, Crawley P. Dake, at Phoenix. What it said wasn't too much—HEARD GOOD WORK BENSON STAGE TODAY. URGENT SEE YOU AT ONCE—but Wyatt was old enough at the game to guess what it *didn't* say. And to feel the short hairs on the back of his neck go to lifting with the guess. Unless he didn't know Crawley Dake and the long, slow way of the Federal law, the north side of Allen Street was in for the biggest shock of its short life.

He was tugging at his mustache and looking far away, when he gave Jake Shagrew his one-word answer, "COMING," and had him sign it, "WYATT."

Wyatt was gone a considerable time. It was a Saturday night, two weeks later, that Frank Stilwell, saw him riding slowly up Allen Street with a stranger at his side. At the same time, Wyatt spotted Frank, flagged him a wave to wait up. He came on alone, the other rider hanging back. "Frank," he greeted him with a grin, "I'm back to turn over a new leaf. Got some news for you boys. You interested?"

Frank Stilwell scowled suspiciously. "What's your deal?" he demanded bluntly.

"You get your boys together in the backroom, yonder, in about an hour, and I'll tell you." With the widening grin, he nodded toward the Crystal Palace.

Stilwell scratched his head. This was one too many for him. "I'll spread it around," he offered grudgingly. "Some of the boys might show up."

"The more the merrier," said Wyatt, turning his horse. "I've brought a friend of my own who wants to be cut in on the play, too. He's new in these parts but he knows the business. See you later, I got a little something to attend to, meanwhile."

When Wyatt closed the door of the Palace backroom behind him and his guest, he squinted through the cigar smoke and sour-mash fumes, and counted a pretty good house. Only Curly Bill and Ringo, of the outlaw notables, were absent. He didn't wait

to worry about them. "Gentlemen," he drawled easily, "allow me to present to you the new Town Marshal of Tombstone." He paused only long enough for them to stare at the big muscular cuss at his side, who looked enough like him to be his brother. Which, in fact, he was. "My brother, Virgil," he concluded with obvious pride.

Nobody said a word, and he got on with it.

"We've just come from a special meeting of the city council, headed by Mayor Clum and the Safety Committee. They've passed favorably on Virgil's appointment, and on a little set of six civic ordinances which the marshal will now read for your benefit. Virg—"

Virgil Earp stepped forward. Using his big fingers to tick them off, one by one, he recited the new rules for the scowling outlaws, his voice as soft and easy as Wyatt's.

There would be no more riding horses on the sidewalks. Said mounts would no longer be permitted inside saloons, with owners topside. Popping off firearms in the city limits was out. Six-guns would not be worn low on the hip within the corporate confines of Tombstone, Arizona, this season. Gun-racks would be set up in designated places for checking hardware on arrival, claiming it on departure.

Number six was the joker. It just said that unmanageable drunks would be subject to a free night in the city jail. And simply meant that Virgil could arrest anybody he wanted, any time, any place.

When Virgil had finished, Ike Clanton, the self elected loudmouth of the bunch got his feet under him first. "Well, talk don't grade no higher here than it does in hell!" he challenged the Earps. "I reckon now you have made your point, you might as well bow out. Yonder's the door. Use it."

"Thanks," said Wyatt quietly. "I haven't made *my* point yet." He paused, sweeping them with his empty stare. "From the minute I leave this room, I mean to hunt down and kill any man who resists arrest—no matter the charge he's wanted on."

Tighter mouths and better minds than Ike Clanton's were present. Frank Stilwell moved forward. "Wait a minute, Wyatt. What do you mean, *you're* going to? Getting your brother appointed town marshal is clear enough. What I don't see is no new star on your chest!"

Wyatt looked at him. "Sorry, Frank," he nodded slowly. "I must have forgot."

He fished in his pocket, careless as though he was digging for a quarter to pay for his beer. His big fist came back out closed around something sharp-pointed and shiny. He snagged it onto his vest, still careless, not seeming to mind that it hung a little sidewise, or that Stilwell had to twist his neck a considerable bit to see what was fresh-engraved across the face of it. "Read it," Wyatt nodded to the peering outlaw, suddenly hard-eyed, "but don't weep until we're gone."

With that, he and Virgil *were* gone. The door was closed behind them, and Frank Stilwell was straightening out his neck. Straightening it out and feeling around it, maybe, the raspy touch and dead hay smell of the hemp.

The printing on that badge was simple enough for any fugitive from the fifth grade, including Frank Stilwell. It said:

DEPUTY
UNITED STATES MARSHAL
ARIZONA

Even when you read it slantwise. With your eyes full of stale cigar smoke and your uneasy insides telling you that local stars and Pima County commissions had just dropped to a dime a dozen.

The *Federal* law had come to Tombstone.

Chapter Eleven

WHAT followed was the most tense-quiet time, law-wise, in the town's two-year-old memory. For six months Johnny Behan and Wyatt Earp fought it out behind the legal scenes for control of Tombstone. And in the end, federal star or no federal star, it was Shibell's new deputy who stood ahead in the game.

The Pima County machine, with its hidden connections running from Behan, through Shibell, to the territorial legislature at Prescott, proved too much for the stern limits the U. S. put on its badge-toters. And in a "political" war, Wyatt was no match for Johnny Behan.

Behan knew people and how to make them like him. Wyatt didn't. He knew his law and his guns and his gunmen. That was all. He was a poor mixer, was never the one to hand out free cigars or gratuitous pats on the back. Johnny Behan was. The new deputy sheriff was friends with the man who ran the hardware store, the one who clerked in the Cosmopolitan Hotel, the cowboy from the San Pedro, the miner from the Dragoons, the Mexican who swept out the Bird Cage, and the stablehand who swamped manure in the O.K. Corral. He knew Tombstone and what made it tick. Before long, in his slick-smiling way, he had it ticking pretty loudly against Wyatt Earp.

It's a peculiar fact that there still are honest old codgers in Tombstone who will claim that Johnny Behan was the best sheriff the town ever had, and that Wyatt was nothing better than a murdering gun fighter who hunted down innocent boys and persecuted honest, law-abiding citizens until hell wouldn't hold half his meanness. Political times don't change much. Hard-eyed, uncompromising honesty was Wyatt's big burden. It still won't win any votes against a bright smile and a hearty handshake.

The crusher came without warning. About mid-year the Prescott crowd cut old Pima County in two, calling the east half of it, including Tombstone, Cochise County. For faithful services rendered, Charley Shibell got to pick the new county's sheriff. He picked a winner. From six short months after he took over as deputy U. S. marshal in Tombstone, Wyatt had to face up to the nasty fact that Johnny Behan was full sheriff of Cochise County.

Behan's first move was to fire Virgil, replace him as town marshal with a solid friend of the gang's. Wyatt quietly countered by hanging a U. S. deputy's badge on his brother. But both he and Behan knew they were just see-sawing with that sort of thing. Both knew what the real stake was, and who held the hole-card on it.

The real stake was those stage holdups. And Wyatt held the ace-kicker on them.

From the day of his appointment as U. S. marshal, every stage-run carrying silver bullion or mine payroll cash had also carried U. S. mail—even if, as many times happened, Wyatt had to write his own letters! It was a dirt-simple trick but it put a boot on Behan's boys that pinched plenty bad. The mine shipments had all along been the gang's gravy, the real easy money. They did some rustling, true, but that was hard work and didn't pay near so high as the stage jobs. When Wyatt's dodge, of forcing them to make a federal case of any stickup they might try, cut them sharp-off from the main source of their fat living, it meant one thing—war.

It was only a question of sooner or later.

In the dictionary Curly Bill and his wild bunch thumbed through, there wasn't any such listing as "later." Shortly, Behan's chief lieutenant had his restless belly full. He put out the word for the boys to "round up the strays and drift along over to the Sulphur Springs spread." There was going to be a little bunkhouse lecture. Its subject: *"The Preparation and Feeding of Hot Lead to Deputy U. S. Marshals."*

It was a blustery, sand-drifting night in late September that brought Ceferino Sebastiano Jiminez Y Guttierez

dog-trotting through the whirly gusts of Tough Nut Street and shivering up to Wyatt's office door. He went in, after knocking timidly, and stood with his tattered sombrero barred across his skinny chest. *"Dispense me, Usted, Senor. Por favor—"*

"Hola, Chico." No matter the little Mexican's mile-long real name, all of Tombstone's darker skinned children were "Chico" to Wyatt. *"¿Que pasa, compadre?"*

"A small matter, *Senor,"* lisped the boy. "Only a word from the Senorita." Chico ran other messages than Jake Shagrew's. And it wasn't the first time, nor the third, he'd run this particular one for Wyatt. "She would see you in all haste, *Patron,"* he grinned shyly in his soft Sonora dialect. *"Por supuesto."*

"¡Por supuesto, amigo!" Wyatt returned the phrase and the knowing grin. He dug in his vest pocket, flipped the boy his silver dollar, picked up his big hat, gave him a sober-polite flourish with it. "After you, *paisano."*

"Mil gracias, Patron. Id con Dios."

With the murmured Spanish blessing, Chico bowed himself stiffly out the door, tugged on his floppy-big straw, bent his thin body into the whipping dust devils. He was gone in less time than it took his tall host to smile after him.

Pretty quickly, Wyatt dropped the smile, clamped his black Stetson on, headed up Tough Nut toward the rear of the Bird Cage and Lily Belloit's shack.

She stood aside for him, holding the rickety door against the blast of the wind while he slipped inside. He grinned, put his heavy arm around her thin shoulders. "This is a sure-enough roof lifter," he nodded toward the outside hammer of the dust storm.

Lily didn't answer, only snuggled closer to him, holding gratefully onto the little moment of nearness.

Wyatt was a strange one. You knew him all these months, you worshipped him, outright, and he knew you did. Yet in all that time the prayed-for subject of a returned love had not been mentioned.

For his part, Wyatt didn't know how he felt about Lily Belloit. Except that he was uncomfortably certain he didn't love her. Not like a man had always imagined it would be when he finally found the one woman who was supposed to be somewhere in the world, for everybody.

Right now, her clinging embrace made him restless. He got away from her, put his backside to the glow of the old potbellied range, let on like he was all business. "Chico was a mite stirred up," he grunted. "Maybe as if there was something blowing around Tombstone besides the wind."

"I'd say there is, Wyatt—*Johnny Ringo!"*

"Ringo—!"

"It's what he calls himself." Lily's face hardened. "He was just here and left a message for you."

"Go on," ordered Wyatt flatly, his pale eyes going suddenly narrow and far away.

"He said to tell you the boys just had a meeting over at the Sulphur Springs ranch and that you drew the black bean. They mean to kill you, Wyatt."

He let his breath go, eased off the clamp of his jaw. "That all?" he asked quietly.

"Yes," she nodded, "saving this. Ringo said to tell you he reckoned the warning made you and him even for San Angelo, whatever that means."

"It means what it says," gritted Wyatt. "He owed me one from over in Texas. It's his quirky-wild way of paying it off, that's all."

"Quirky-wild, or not," said Lily Belloit softly, "he's paid it off. Likely, I've had the boy wrong, all along."

"You haven't," said Wyatt slowly.

He was at the window, then, staring out into the howl of the night-wind. He shook his big head, his voice of a sudden no longer harsh or bitter.

"When I was a boy," he began gently, "I had a shepherd pup—" He held up so long, she thought he had forgotten to go on. But a man's mind travels the back-years, painful-slow. "I loved that pup," he took up again. "He picked me out from all my brothers to side with. A boy doesn't ask much more than that. Nor," he added wistfully, "does a man."

Again, the long pause. "Shep took to killing sheep before he was a year old," he went on softly. "My father caught him at it and brought him home to me. He got the shotgun out from back of the stove and handed it to me. All he said was, "He's your dog, boy. You got to look after him."

He turned from the window, his pale eyes dark with the memory of it. "It was the hardest thing I ever did, Lily, but I did it. I swore then that I'd never let another living thing think he was my friend, or tag along with me. Then, I found Johnny Ringo under the stove. I called him out and let him follow me off. I patted him on the head and held still for him to lick my hand. Now—"

He trailed it off, cold-soft, and Lily was suddenly, and deep inside, afraid of him. She knew, even before she asked him, what the rest of it would be.

"And, now?" she said haltingly.

"Ringo's my dog," nodded Wyatt wearily. *"I got to look after him."*

The way he said it put the chill again through Lily Belloit. It was the utter hardness of him. The final, terrible strength. Back of it you might see those rare, soft spots of the real kindness that were deep-hidden in him. But before them, and always before them, you saw that terrible, fierce-hard sense of the right and the wrong. It was what set him apart from other men, what made them hate and fear him and seek forever to destroy him.

It was not a pretty thing. Not in Wyatt Earp, or any man. It came too brutally close to treading on range that was fenced off to any mortal. You could love him like Lily did, and worship every inch of God's ground he'd ever stood on. But in the end it *was* God's ground, and not his.

You knew that, now, and you knew you had to tell him you knew it.

"It's not yours to say that, Wyatt," she murmured huskily. "Not yours, nor any man's. You can't just lead Johnny Ringo over the hill and shoot him. That's not within *your* law!"

Wyatt dropped his head. At last, he swung it back up, looked at her a long time.

"And whose law was it within," he asked, deep-voiced, "when John Ringo shot up the Benson stage and killed old Monk Wilson?"

"You know what I mean, Wyatt—" She trailed off, uncertainly.

"No, girl, I don't." There was no uncertainty in his denial. "The fact about Johnny Ringo is that he comes by the bad that's in him through blood and breeding. He's kissing kin to the Youngers and Daltons, up in Missouri. He's got an eighth James blood in him. Like gets like. You breed a vicious stud to a crazy mare, you don't get any sugartit suckers for your foals. Ringo's bred that way. You never handle his kind with an apple and a hackamore."

The force and the thought that were in his words, held her quiet while he finished. When she saw he meant to say no more, she asked him, half in doubt, half in dread, "So, what are you going to do about him, Wyatt?"

"I told you, girl," he said harshly, the thoughtfulness and measured quiet gone out of his voice. "If I ever catch him with the blood of any of my sheep on him, I'm going to kill him."

Contrary to what he'd told Lily, his first thought after leaving her place wasn't for killing Johnny Ringo but for keeping Wyatt Earp alive. He was never the one to horse himself any about the romance of being a famous peace officer. It was hard, dirty work. When the job got tough enough a man didn't hesitate to use back-alleys and brass-knuckles.

He was using a back-alley now—to get over onto Tough Nut Street and the telegraph office without being seen and bushwhacked on the way. Once there, he nodded grimly to Jake Shagrew, sent for his brass knuckles via nine-word Western Union order-blank.

J. H. HOLLIDAY
DODGE CITY, KANS.
DOC. COULD USE TWO DEPUTIES. BRING MORG. NO HURRY.

WYATT.

Jake read it back to him, put it on the key. When it was gone, he squinted up at Wyatt. "Trouble, marshal?" he inquired nervously.

"Likely." His answer was a hard-eyed nod. "It hangs to some like stink to a sick dog."

"I can smell it now," shivered Jake Shagrew.

"Don't smell too hard," advised Wyatt.

"Sure, marshal." Jake got the point. "I don't remember one word you sent. You looking for an answer?"

"Yeah," grunted Wyatt. "Along about sundown Thursday at the Benson Depot, providing Number Nine's on time."

"Number Nine, Thursday? Thought you said there wasn't no hurry?"

"Thought you said you didn't *remember* what I said."

There was a killing frost on it. Jake curled up, wilted, went limp on the stem. "You sure thought right, too, marshal! Uh—er—good night, marshal!"

"Good night," said Wyatt Earp, and went out into the whip and cut of the wind and the sand.

Chapter Twelve

JAKE SHAGREW didn't let it out, that's for sure as water's scarce in Chihuahua. But the Sulphur Springs bunch got wind of Wyatt's going up to Benson. Accordingly, the arrival of Friday evening's stage in Tombstone was covered, blanket-close. The coverers were Pete Spence and Frank Stilwell.

The first man out of the coach was Wyatt. Him, you knew, and expected. The second man out made you blink your eyes and look again to make sure the first one had been Wyatt. He was Wyatt's spit-image twin, looking even more like him than Virgil, and nobody had to tell you who he was. This one had to be Morgan Earp, the *kid* brother.

But the third man out stopped you cold.

He was as winter-thin as an orphan mustang colt in late March. Pale as a new-washed bedsheet. Hollow eyed and sick looking as a wet dog with distemper. But he swept his strange, glass-blue eyes across the little crowd in front of the livery stable bold and flat as any Earp, and he shouldered through it and off after Wyatt and Morgan with the same casual contempt and cat-crouch to his walk that they had.

YOU had time to guess that he might be a medical man, from the little black bag he carried. Or a hired, professional gunman, from the hang and drape of the ivory-handled Colts he wore. And, for sure, a far-gone consumptive, from the rattly, heavy way he breathed. Then, he was going past your hiding place, and the fall of the street light was showing you the flecked-off, goldleaf lettering on that old doctor's satchel, and the time for guessing was way past.

That last one off the Benson stage was Doc Holliday.

Frank Stilwell swallowed hard. Pete Spence said, "Gawd!" and kept it real quiet. Both turned and faded back through the darkness of the O. W. Stable.

One Earp had been a bad batch of slum to begin with. When Virg showed up to make it two, the stew got thicker. When Morg climbed down out of the Benson coach, making it three, the mulligan stuck to the bottom of the pot. By the time that Doc Holliday had swung off the stage, it was beginning to smell burned. . . .

For a solid week the Sulphur Springs chefs stood back from the fire and fought the smoke out of their eyes. In the end, they could see just one clear way of drawing Wyatt out of Tombstone, where they could get at him. It was either mess with his precious U. S. mails, or admit he had them licked.

Curly Bill was not the boy to lie down and get licked. He cursed, called in Johnny Ringo, got ready to mess with the mail. This time, there was no leak to Wyatt. Ringo had warned him once. He wouldn't do so again. The kid was grinning that crazy grin of his when, an hour after his talk with Curly, the frost-clear moonlight saw him heading his four riders across Dragoon Summit and down into the rocks of the Watervale Grade.

With his Winchester shouldered and covering Bud Philpot, the Fargo driver, and Wyatt's friend, Bob Paul, the shotgun rider, Ringo was still grinning.

"Throw down that mail sack!" he yelled. Wyatt had handpicked a steady man, when he'd gotten Bob Paul for that shotgun job. "She's throwed," he called back to Ringo, and tossed him the sack. Then in the same breath to Philpot, the driver, "Lay the leather to 'em, Bud! We got bullion aboard—!"

"Hold up them hosses, damn it!" With the infuriated yell, Ringo cut down on Philpot, drilling him heart-center. Bud spun off the box, fell headfirst down in between the wheel-team. Bob Paul managed to grab the lines, but with Bud's body crashing into the tracechains and the night-dark full of gunblasts and bandit yells, there was no heading the stage horses. It was a full runaway.

Ringo's men got their mounts free of the lunge of the coach only in time to throw a scatter of wild shots after it. It was but a small fact, added to the failure of Ringo's third stage job, that two of those shots smashed into the belly of a boot passenger named Peter Roerig, killing him deader than last year's election. And only a minor addition to that failure, that in the boot with Roerig rode $88,000 in ready-sacked silver bullion.

THE main thing was that Johnny Ringo had crawled over the high fence of the federal law, and snagged his Levis doing it. Killing Philpot changed the whole picture. His death meant Behan would have to put a sheriff's posse into the field. That ended any chance of waiting around to sandbag Wyatt. The healthy direction to lay a line of tracks right now was Old Sonora and the Mexican border. With complete, hard-cursed agreement, Ringo and his boys turned their horses south.

Wyatt, riding with Virg and Morg, was on their trail next morning, before Behan and his official posse got out of bed and had breakfast. But ten days of riding netted them only one of the outlaws—Luther King—trapped at an abandoned line camp on the old Redfield Ranch. Still, after his gentle way with such lads, Wyatt persuaded King to talk. He named Ringo as head of the bunch, identified the rest of the gang as Bill Leonard, Jim Crane, and Harry Head, and insisted they had all headed on into Mexico. Hardjawed and bitter, Wyatt and his little posse gave up, rode back into Tombstone with nothing but one Government witness, four pinched bellies and as many windbroke horses, early in the evening of October 23rd.

After booking King into the Fremont Street jail, they went back to their rooms at the Cosmopolitan. An hour later, cleaned up and heading out to eat, Wyatt walked into the last, nasty-blind trap. It was sprung on him by way of a Tombstone *Nugget* extra edition being hawked down Allen Street by a Pima Indian newsboy.

The fine print read this way:

". . . *Luther King, the man arrested at the Redfield Ranch charged with being implicated in the Bud Philpot murder escaped from Sheriff Behan's office by quickly stepping out the back door while a bill of sale for the disposal of his horse was being drawn up by Deputy Sheriff Wood. He had been absent for a few minutes before he was missed. A confederate on the outside had a horse in readiness . . .*"

But no matter which way *it* read, nor which way *you* read it. Nor how you cursed and clamped your jaw. If you were Wyatt Earp, it all came out one acid, bile-yellow color. Your Government witness was gone and your case against Johnny Ringo was as highblown as a dead cow's belly six days in the sun.

He hadn't been back in his room five minutes, only having time to throw the *Nugget* angrily on the bed and get decently started on his pacing and growling over its lead article, when the door eased open and Doc Holliday walked in. Then, he just had time to grab the paper back up and thrust it at Doc, when the latter was wolf-grinning his own news. It's content shut Wyatt's pale eyes down to a hard slit. "*Say that again!*" he rasped flatly.

Doc said it again. "It's him. In the flesh and right here under our noses the whole time."

"You said the Oriental?"

"In a big game, riding a high streak, and dead drunk," nodded Doc.

"*Doc!*" There was a rare excitement in it. "You know what this means?"

"Yeah," grinned the other. "It can't last. What that boy doesn't know about poker, Hoyle could be lynched for."

"We've got him, Doc!"

THE pull of the sometime Dodge City dentist's thin lips left his gaunt face looking like a skull that had just thought of something funny. They had broken the mold for professional poker players after they'd poured Doc Holliday out of it. He was way ahead of what Wyatt had in mind. When he had used as much of the grin as he cared to, he only let his face go slack, turned for the door.

"How deep you want him cut, pardner?" he grunted.

"To the damn bone," said Wyatt, and reached for his hat. . . .

Ringo cursed foul and ugly. It was the seventh straight hand he'd dropped since Doc Holliday bought into the game—and every one of those seven hands on Doc's deal. The latter's phenomenal "luck" had been too much for the other players. They had all folded as the deal came to him for the eighth time.

Doc riffled the deck, said it quietly. "You want to call it a night, boy? You still got enough for stage fare back to Texas."

"You son of a bitch!" shouted Ringo wildly. "You deal 'em. And, by God, you deal 'em off the top—and slow!"

Many a better man had died for less. Doc only grinned again. "Any tinhorn can win and grin," he nodded. "How'll you have it this time, plain or fancy?"

"Straight poker!" choked Ringo. "Face up and one at a time!"

"Showdown, it is," agreed Doc, and slid him the first card. It was the ace of spades.

To himself, Doc Holliday dealt a small heart.

Ringo's next was the ten of clubs. Then the diamond ace. Doc dropped himself two more small hearts, now had the deuce, tray and six going for the low flush. Ringo's fourth was the spade ten-spot. He was paired-up and sitting on a possible full.

The room crowd pulled in, packing close behind Ringo. There was suddenly no sound in the place.

Doc's fourth card slapped the felt. It was the five of hearts.

Ringo licked his lips. His fifth card slid across the table, wavered on edge, fell, face-up. It was the club ace.

Aces-over-tens, full!

And, with nothing against it but four little hearts to a flush that figured, by more odds than a sick elk had ticks, to go bust on the fifth card.

Doc now dealt that fifth pasteboard into the hole he had deliberately left in his hand for it. The crowd got pale-still. It was the fifth heart—and it was the *four*. Dr. John Holliday had filled his flush the hard way. Inside and straight. The highest hand in poker. And the deadliest to deal yourself in a table-stake game.

Ringo played the hand out just the wild, bad-loser's way Wyatt had gambled he would. He scattered his busted full onto the floor and bet into Doc's flush with a pair of wooden-handled sixes.

His old model Colts flashed out and up. "Damn you!" he snarled at Doc. "I'm cleaning the table. Every mother-frigging dollar on it!"

Doc didn't move. "Houseman," he called pleasantly to the bank. "Cash these chips for the boy. He wins with twelve lead aces."

Nobody said anything, nobody moved. The houseman came over, and nervously counted-in the chips, handed Ringo better than $1800 in greenbacks. "It's your pot, kid," Doc told him softly. "Go along home with it."

Ringo glared at him, but didn't answer. He holstered his lefthand gun, grabbed the thick sheaf of bills, backed out through the Oriental's double-hung doors.

He was still backing, two uncertain steps later, when he felt the twin tubes of the shotgun bite into the small of his loin, square between the kidneys.

"You're under arrest, Mr. Ringo," said Wyatt quietly. "Hand over that money."

There's nothing in the world for getting over a two-day drunk, like a dose of shotgun salts. Ringo was sobering fast, but he had two snarls left in him.

"On what charge, by God!" he demanded with the first one.

"Highway robbery," replied Wyatt straightfaced.

"The hell you say! Who's making the charge?" he snapped with the second.

"*Me,*" said Doc Holliday, easing through the doors behind him. And. "Get going, kid," was all that Wyatt Earp added.

Chapter Thirteen

IT was just short of midnight when Wyatt got Mayor J. P. Clum out of bed. After abruptly telling him he had better get into his riding boots, he put the rest of it to him.

"John—" they'd come to first names those past months—"I've got Ringo in jail, plus a good hunch where the rest of the gang is hid out. I mean to go after them and I'll need every Safety Committee man you can scare up."

"Go on," said Clum, not arguing and already tugging on his boots.

"I don't think they ever got more than started for Mexico; we jumped them too fast. I think they circled back to the ranch. My hunch points to Sulphur Springs and I ride my hunches, sorebacked."

"Good way to get your horse killed," complained the little mayor, testily. "Get on with it."

"John, if we can grab King back, or any one of the others, we've got a man who will turn state's evidence. This is a Federal case; it changes everything. Bucking Uncle Sam's jailhouse is a tiger none of these county boys dares to bet into. It will mean we can keep Ringo back of bars long enough to raise a kid and put him through college!"

"All right, even so," protested Clum, and reached for his sheepskin coat while he was doing it. "Suppose we do convict Ringo? It will take weeks in court. By that time Curly and the others will have the town bled dead."

"That's right," agreed Wyatt softly. "Unless the town bleeds them first."

"How's that, man?" Clum stopped buttoning the coat.

"If we raid the ranch and nab one of them, they'll fight. They've got to. County arrests don't mean a thing to Curly. But the gang can't stand a Federal conviction. It would be the beginning of the end. Curly will know that, and he'll fight it to his last man. When he starts that fight is where we start our bleeding!"

"Wyatt." Clum said it flat, and meant it that way. "You know I won't blunder my men into any showdown fight at Sulphur Springs. Good men would be killed—and for what? To bring in a couple of hangdog stage robbers that Johnny Behan would have out of jail and across into Mexico before court was ever called. It's out, Wyatt. I won't go along with you."

Wyatt grinned. At least it was supposed to be a grin. His lips curled up, anyway. "There'll be no fight at Sulphur Springs. It'll be in Tombstone. And you and your Safety Committee vigilantes won't be within a mile of it."

"Say what you mean, man!" snapped Clum irritably. "Don't circle around it like it was four days old."

"All right, it goes like this. Inside of twenty-four hours after we make our strike on Sulphur Springs, they'll make theirs on Tombstone. When they do, I'll have my own court ready to sit on their case. There'll be no legal delays, no jail escapes, no hung juries. They'll be heard under two judges that haven't failed to pass the death sentence in thirteen years."

As he said it, it looked to Clum like he just shrugged his shoulders, but with the shrug the two big guns were in his hands. "You read my sign any better now, your Honor?" he queried frostily.

The mayor brought his eyes up from the ivory-handled Colts. He looked at Wyatt a long three breaths, said it quietly. "You know I won't go outside the law, Wyatt."

"You won't have to," said Wyatt, just as quietly. "There'll be nothing done *outside* the law."

"Do I have your personal word on that?"

"You have," said Wyatt. "Let's go." Then, slowly, and to himself, and into the stillness of the room, just before he turned to follow John Clum out of it:

"*I am the law.*"

Like most things about Johnny Behan, it was never proved that he let Ringo go deliberately. But also like most things about him, what couldn't be proved could be smelled a mile away on a windstill night.

At one o'clock, word came to the Cochise sheriff that Wyatt was readying a hell of a big posse over in front of the U. S. marshal's office. At a quarter after one, Mr. Sidney Skidmore, Behan's bad legal light, was getting shaken out of his blankets. By one-thirty, sharp, he was at the Fremont Street jail showing Sheriff Behan the fastest writ of *habeas corpus* ever handed out in Tombstone.

Square on the dot of one thirty-five, Johnny Ringo was stepping up on his rat-tailed roan in the alley back of the jail. Five minutes later, he was riding with the gas lights of Goose Flats to his back, hell-for-lathered-leather, up and over Dragoon Summit, on the Sulphur Springs road.

They closed in on the ranch from four sides, coming up on the bunkhouse so close-mouthed that a rat couldn't have gotten out of it without being squashed by a shod hoof. But the only rat left in it was a half-Apache one. And he didn't try to get out of it.

If Indian Charlie Cruz knew anything, he wasn't about to admit it. All they got out of him was that somebody had ridden up an hour ago, and that the boys in the bunkhouse had saddled-up some fast and taken out for parts unknown. Virg and Morg got down off their horses. Virg slashed him across the collar bone with the barrel of his Colt, knocking him to his knees.

"Better speak up when a white man asks you a civil question," he advised him. And, "Get up and start talking," Morg added.

"Don't know no more," muttered the breed. "I never got out of my bunk."

Virg hit him, cat-fast. But not with the gun this time. With his balled fist. Big and hard as a chunk of ore-quartz. Square in the pit of the groin. He was into the dirt again, twisting like a boot-stomped snake.

Morg helped him up, waved Virg away from him. "All right, *compadre.*" His voice was softer, didn't have the iron bite in it that Virg's did. "Start from the jump-off, and don't fight the bit this time."

Cruz shook his head stubbornly. But when Virg started for him again, Morg warned him, short and quick, to leave him alone. Wyatt, kicking Big Red forward, made it official. "Yeah, the main covey's flushed, Virg. No use killing this cripple. Let's go."

Virg looked hard at him, finally shrugged. He knew Wyatt and that dust-soft way he went to talking when the show was over. "It's your posse," he nodded, and went for his waiting pony.

Morg paired-up with him, the two of them hanging back from the main bunch. Virg let the silence hold, watching his younger brother.

The kid was different than him and Wyatt. You didn't need to be Morg's friend, or his enemy. He didn't really give a good damn whose side you were on, providing you left him alone on his. He had no bothersome ideas about the right of the law, either, such as had always plagued him and Wyatt. In fact, Morg was a lawman for only one reason—his famous brother. The kid thought Wyatt weighed 24 ounces to the pound.

"All right, boy," he nodded at last. "What's eating you? You don't like the way your big brother plays with dummied-up Indians?"

"No," said Morg softly. "It's Wyatt, Virg. He's not the same as he was back in Kansas."

"What the hell you mean? He doesn't strike me any different. Still don't drink or cuss much. Can outdeal anybody but Doc across a poker table. Still dresses good as ever, smokes fifteen-cent seegars and never gets a haircut. Where's your big change in all that, boy?"

"I don't know." Morg shook his head uneasily. "All the same I'm going to have a talk with him when we get back."

"You and me both," said Virg, his voice hardening suddenly. "Only I'm going to have mine, right now. Come on."

When they had caught up to Wyatt, Virg crawled him right off. "What the hell was the idea of letting up on that breed back yonder?" he growled. "You getting soft in your old age, Wyatt?"

"Maybe, maybe not. I figure to let Cruz live just about long enough to lead us to the main hatch again. That add up for you?"

Virg thought it over. "Yeah," he grinned slowly. "I reckon it does."

"Morg?" Wyatt put the question to the youngster, just touching its sharpness with that little inside smile of his.

For him, this boy could do no wrong. He saw in him all his own strength, without any of that strength's arrogance and harshness. He saw, still bright and alive in Morg, what he had seen in himself as a boy. And what he had somehow lost, or let die, as a man.

"I don't know, Wyatt," he said at last. "I guess I understand only one thing about your figuring these days. Which is, that if it's up to your new average, *somebody* won't live very long."

"That," grinned Virg, hard-eyed and missing the boy's point a country mile, "is for sure as a wood pussy smells worse on a wet night!"

Wyatt said nothing. Only put the spurs to Big Red and sent him along. *He* hadn't missed the point.

Chapter Fourteen

WYATT was a man of more than one talent. For one thing, he was quite a prophet. It was *just* twenty-four hours after his posse hit the Sulphur Springs ranch that the wild bunch rode into town. The first arrivals were headed by Curly Bill and Ringo. This forward section consisted of about half a dozen of the lesser known of the Sulphur Springs "cowboy" crew, not a name-outlaw among them. Strangely missing, at the moment, were the Clanton and McLowry forces.

Wyatt gave them plenty of time, waiting for them to get all-day drunk and for night to come on to cover his own moves. When it did, he called Mayor Clum and his Citizen's Safety Committee to hard-eyed order.

"Gentlemen," he put it to them, "Curly Bill Brocius and John Ringo are in town. They are drunk and disorderly, armed in defiance of our civic statutes, and are announcing that their purpose here is to do away with certain local peace officers and open Tombstone up wider than a gored bull's belly. Virgil and I propose to move up town right about now and talk them out of it. But we shall not move one step unless we are given free rein and left to go it alone. Are there any objections or questions?"

Significantly, there were none of either. Some weeks earlier the city council had created the emergency office of Chief of Police, appointing Virgil to fill it. This attempt to get around Behan's control of Tombstone would never get a better test than right now—and with both Wyatt and Morgan properly deputized by the older brother, it would be *within the law.*

Twenty minutes after the *sub rosa* meeting was called, Wyatt and his two brothers were moving up Allen Street, *alone.* It was 10:00 P.M., October 25th. As good a night and time as any for killing a couple of "cowboys."

The trouble wasn't with the time, but with loose talk.

Wyatt didn't feel that anybody on the Committee let it out on purpose. But one way or another, Ringo and Curly Bill caught the smell of sudden trouble coming up Allen Street, short minutes ahead of Virgil Earp and his two new "deputies." Ringo later claimed that he and Brocius never would have run out except that the Clantons and McLowrys had failed to show up on schedule and Curly Bill didn't want to tackle the Earps without them.

Whatever the excuse, when Wyatt moved in on the Oriental where he'd been told they were, only to find them gone, he called it a night. To the uneasy "cowboys" remaining at the bar where Ringo and Curly had abandoned them, he only nodded quietly.

"Boys, you go get on your ponies. We don't mean to rush you. The night's young, help yourselves to whatever you need of it. But come daybreak tomorrow, any man of you who rode in with Ringo and Curly had better be well outside the city limits. Any questions?"

He gave them a long five seconds to make sure none of them felt cheated of his natural-born American rights of free speech; then, none of them being moved to take the stump in defense of civil liberties, he turned square around and started for the door. Virg and Morg flanked him, right and left. None of the three looked back. Or felt he had any need to.

It was a rare man who wasn't willing to take an Earp's word for the surest thing ahead of taxes.

Curly Bill's boys were strictly run-of-the-mill.

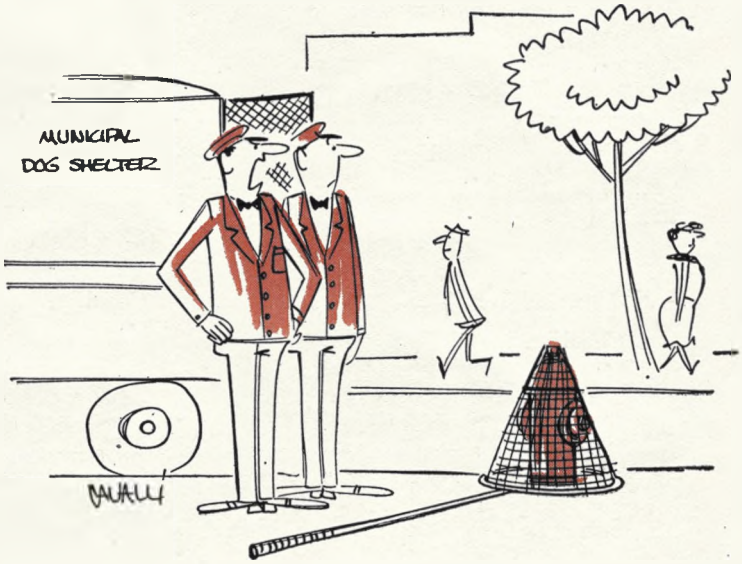
The next morning, not a bonafide outlaw or questionable cowboy roamed the wide open spaces of Allen Street, north or south. Many a marshal in his place would have been saying, "Peace, brother, it's wonderful!" But not Wyatt. He was furious. The big ones had gotten away again. He shut himself up in his office and carried on like a lion in a cage.

When Clum called around to get a Committee report on last night's empty net, he wouldn't see him. He wouldn't even talk to Doc Holliday who came by about noon to cheer him up. Doc, never the one to overlook a qualified excuse for killing a quart, huffed off to Hafford's Saloon to drink his breakfast alone. Even Virg and Morg steered clear of him after checking in to report the town holding millpond quiet.

Along about an hour after high noon, things picked up.

Virgil Earp, coming out of Hafford's, where he'd gone to try and slow Doc's drinking down, thought he noticed something familiar about the two horsemen riding up Allen Street from the south. He did. They were Ike Clanton and Tom McLowry. They hadn't seen him, and he jumped back inside the saloon doors, giving himself a few seconds for a closer look at them. He saw all he wanted to. Ike was wearing two Colts out in the open, had his Winchester unbooted across the horn of his saddle.

The oldest of the Earps wasn't a heavy thinker. He didn't wait to wonder how come the boys had missed connections with Ringo and Curly Bill, or even if they yet *knew* they had. He simply cut back through Hafford's, drifted down the back-alley to beat them to the O.K. Stable. There was no trouble. It was dark in the barn and they had no more than gotten off their horses and begun to blink the sunlight out of their eyes, when Virg stepped up behind Ike. He hit him back of the ear with his pistol barrel, stood back and gave him room to fall. Not even watching him go



"Darn it! Missed him again!"

down, he drawled to Tom McLowry, who was unarmed. "Howdy, Tom. Me and Ike, here, are going over and have a little talk with Judge Barrett. Meanwhile, I'd suggest you give both his horse and yours a shot of hot bran. You'll be wanting to ride them again real soon."

Like Wyatt, Virg proved to be a pretty good prophet.

IRA HENRY BARRETT, the local magistrate, was something of a Behan man. He fined Ike $25.00, set him scot-free. Virg hadn't waited to hear the verdict, was already down the street giving Wyatt the news. He hadn't gotten well started, when Morg walked in from over on the Allen Street beat with the latest edition. "I'll see your two and raise you three." he nodded to Virg. "Frank McLowry and Billy Clanton just rode in, *along with an ace-kicker.*"

He put the soft family grin back of the last part of it, and Wyatt, eyeing him, felt the slow rise of the excitement coming up in him, now.

Virg's word that Ike and Tom had blundered into town hit him good and deep, like a shot of sour mash on a bad-empty belly. Then, Morg's report that Frank and Billy had tailed them in came like a second jolt, welcome and warm and strong, right on top of the first. But he knew young Morg, and the faraway, trademark grin that was so like his own. He called for the third belt, fully aware it was going to be some fingers stiffer than the first two.

"This suspense is killing me, pardner—"

He said it dust-dry and flat, but it didn't fool Morg. He was used to looking back of those pale eyes. He could see the faint grin there, now. "It's apt to, brother." He said it just as dry. "They've got Billy Claiborne out of jail down to Charleston. He's along with them."

Wyatt took it quietly. It was a pretty stiff shot, all right. Barring Ringo, Curly Bill and Frank McLowry, Claiborne was the most dangerous outlaw gunman in Arizona. The thought didn't lift the droop of Wyatt's blond mustache by a hair. He only nodded, stood up, moved around the desk, reached his hat from its wall peg. "What time is it?" he asked Morg, absently.

"Along about one-thirty," offered the latter, digging out his German-silver pocket watch to check the guess. "On the nose," he added, confirming it.

"Likely," was all Wyatt said, "we'll need to be careful."

"Likely," agreed his two brothers with one nod.

They went out into Tough Nut, past their saddled horses, past the silent courthouse, past the suddenly empty intersection beyond it, walking three abreast and dead-march slow, tall and lonely and frockcoat-black against the bright October sun.

They held up at the corner of Fourth and Allen, making silent note of the fact the main stem had not yet taken on the deserted look of Tough Nut over by the courthouse. "Looks as if we've beat your friend, Ike, by a few minutes," observed Morg laconically.

"We can use the time," nodded Virg. Then, to Wyatt: "How you figure to go in from here?"

"I'll drift in alone. You two tail me."

"What's the idea in that?" Morg was quick with it. "Where's the call for you to go it alone?"

"Just don't figure they've ganged up yet, that's all, boy. Still a fair chance I can cut them out of the main herd one at a time. You know my way. Where I can, I'll always buffalo a man rather than shoot him."

"I don't like it," was all Virg cut in with.

Wyatt checked to his older brother. Virg had been a peace officer longer than any of them, knew his way around in a gunstalk as well as any man alive. "How so, pardner?" he asked quietly.

"Too many bets to cover. I'd say a better deal would be to box-in Allen, from here to Fifth. Morg stays here, I drift around by the alley, to Fifth, then you go on in. That way, providing you flush any birds, we've got them nailed either way they fly."

"YOU'D say right," agreed Wyatt abruptly. "Cut your stick." He gave Virg a minute to get started, turned quickly to Morg. "Kid, watch yourself."

"Same to you, in spades."

"Yeah. You feel all right, Morg?"

"Feel fine. How about you?"

"I'll do."

"Shouldn't wonder. So long."

"So long, boy."

That was the extent of the first part of it. Wyatt just chucked his head, sauntered off up Allen like he was on his way to his noon dinner.

The second part went off smooth as steer tallow under a frontwheel brakeshoe. Two minutes after leaving Morg, Wyatt jumped his first bird. And dropped him on the jump.

Tom McLowry had tailed Ike over to the courthouse, seen Virg take him in, hung around a few minutes, then started back to spread the news of his arrest along Allen Street. Ducking in the rear door of Becknell's Hardware, he reclaimed the six-guns he had checked there before following Ike and Virg over onto Tough Nut. Hurrying out the front door a moment later, he bumped into a large, well-dressed citizen just passing by on his afternoon stroll. The citizen didn't bump worth a damn. In fact he took Tom's rudeness so to heart he called him an awkward, discourteous son of a bad name.

Tom was not the one you used such language on in vain. He came around reaching for his revolvers. When he did, he got belted alongside the head with the barrels of a .12-gauge Parker double. And further quieted down with a little soft-spoken legal advice.

"Unhook them, Tom. Pass them over by the belt. Some day you boys are going to learn you can't play with firearms inside my city limits."

Tom passed the guns over. "All right, Earp," he growled sullenly, "go ahead and jug me. See how long the lock holds!"

"Wouldn't think of it. Not what I had in mind, at all," said Wyatt gently. "Run along, Tom boy. Only run *north*. I'm southbound and don't care to see you again."

Tom went the way he was told, Wyatt, the way he had promised. He hadn't taken six steps when he held up, frowning. Some thoughtless cowboy had left a nice bay mare standing on the sidewalk over on the other side of Allen Street. This was a misdemeanor, could not be tolerated, naturally. No matter that in Wyatt's business you knew a man's horse as you did its rider, and that in this case you knew the bay mare belonged to a very salty hand—Frank McLowry.

Frank was in the Crystal Palace sharing an afternoon cup with his good friend and *extra-officio* employer, Sheriff Johnny Behan. He had two guns on and his coat off, but the sheriff apparently hadn't noticed these illegal items. At least, he hadn't up to the time Wyatt stuck his head in at the door and advised whoever owned the sockfoot bay mare out front to get her off the sidewalk. She was blocking traffic and breaking local law.

Frank McLowry stood away from Behan, and away from the bar. He shook out his arms, loosening his wrists, started on the slow walk for Wyatt and the door.

WYATT stepped back out into the street, letting him come out to him. Frank did just that, strutting up to him and sticking his chin in his face. "It's my mare, Marshal, but it's your move. I ain't touching her."

"I'll take your guns before we get to the mare," Wyatt told him quietly.

"You said that right!" snarled Frank. "You'll have to *take 'em!*"

It was a pure-bull bluff, and Wyatt knew it.

He patted the twin tubes of the Parker, grinned, shrugged his big

shoulders, let the muzzle bores steady down on Frank's middle shirt button. "I'll play these," he said. "Pair of twelves with a buckshot kicker. What've you got?"

"You damned fourflusher!" raged Frank. "You've run your last pot with that scattergun. I'll catch up with you on one of these days, by God!"

"You've already used up enough wind to *blow* that mare off the sidewalk," Wyatt told him. "Now, pass over your guns and get her out in the street where she belongs."

Frank folded. He was a gunfighter, not a fool. Wyatt took the gunbelt, draped it over his right shoulder to balance the hang of Tom's irons over his left. He watched Frank move the mare, then stride, black-faced mad, across the street and into Spangenberg's Gun Shop. Wyatt spared another grin for that.

No new gun ever worked as slick as the old one.

With the grin, he was easing on up Allen Street. Since leaving Morg on the corner of Fourth, but six minutes had passed when he ambled up to Virg on the corner of Fifth and passed him the top of a very good afternoon. It was square on the dot of a quarter of two, when Morg drifted up from his station to join his quietly waiting big brothers.

Their subsequent stroll back down Allen to Halford's Saloon, where Wyatt thought it best to hole-up and wait for the next waltz, took less than two minutes. The sidewalks were all at once as clear of obstruction, horse or human, as a Presbyterian front pew with Old Nick standing in for the regular sky pilot. From Fifth, clear down to Halford's on the corner of Fourth, they met just two citizens.

One was a genial drunk who stumbled out of the Palace to ask for a light. He got it, along with some timely advice, Morg furnishing the match, Virg, the friendly counsel. "Spread out, pardner. There's due to be a big dance down the street, shortly. Don't look to me you're in any shape to dig a shin."

The other townsman was a Spanish-American gentleman of some dignity and bearing, but a little young for gunfights.

"*Hola, Chico,*" Wyatt greeted him pleasantly.

"*Buenas tardes, Senores.*" Chico swept off his ragged straw, looked up and down the empty street, frowned thoughtfully. "*¿Es muy tranquilo? ¿No?*"

"*Es muy tranquilo*—yes!" grinned Wyatt.

"Beat it, kid," growled Virg, restless with the delay. "There's going to be big trouble around here."

Chico looked at Wyatt, puzzled. "*¿Como se dice, Mariscal?*" he asked him.

Tombstone's Deputy United States "Mariscal" dropped his easy grin. "*Mucho peligro, Chico,*" he told him. Then, in stilted English. "Guns. Bullets. Much danger. *¿Comprende Usted, paisano?*"

The boy's eyes got saucer-big. All at once, Ceferino Sebastiano Jimenez Y Guttierez comprehended plenty. "*¡Adios, Senor Mariscal! Hasta la vista—*" he muttered uneasily, and turned to run.

"Hold up, little pardner." Wyatt caught him by the arm. He dug in his vest pocket, brought out two silver dollars, pressed them quickly in his hand.

Chico looked at them wonderingly. "*¿Por que dos?*" he asked, not understanding the additional generosity.

"'*Por que*' you might not get another chance at me, my friend," smiled Wyatt softly, and turned and went down the street with Virg and Morg.

Chapter Fifteen

MAYOR CLUM got to Behan's office in the Fremont Street Jail at 1:45. His indignant demand that the Cochise County Sheriff arrest the Clantons and McLowrys and thus ward off the impending clash between them and the Earps was met by the sheriff's surprising statement that he had already disarmed "the boys" and gotten their assurances they would get their horses out of the O.K. Corral, and leave town at once.

"Why, I just saw the lot of them coming out of Spangenberg's Gun Shop!" exclaimed the mayor. "Every last one of them had a gun on! I demand you arrest them at once!"

"For what?" Behan was strangely calm about it. "Buying a new gun? Getting their horses out of a public corral? Be reasonable, John. All you have to do is look across the street. They're over there right now, saddling up." Clum glanced out the window. The O.K. Corral, directly behind the stable on Allen Street, fronted on Fremont. Through its open gate, he saw Tom McLowry kneeing up his cinch, Ike Clanton just pulling his rig off the corral fence. The others were already saddled up but apparently in no hurry to mount.

He turned back to Behan.

"Sheriff Behan," he dropped his voice, letting it come, formal-straight. "I'm asking you to do your duty and arrest those men. The Citizen's Committee will back you on it. I can have thirty men here inside of ten minutes."

"That won't cut it by half."

"Behan! I'm warning you—!"

"Warn the Earps. You're wasting your time on me. This is their mess, not mine. Let me tell *you* something, John Clum!" He ticked it off, laying a manicured forefinger at him with the charge.

"There's more on my side in this thing, than on theirs. Every thinking man in this town knows the Earps have been spoiling for a chance to ride outside the law. They've been the best part of a year trying to smear mud on me and get something on those cowboys, yonder. They haven't turned up ten cents worth of legal proof on any of them, nor hurt me in the least. I'm clean in this whole damn thing, and you know it. Oh, no, don't worry about me! Nor about the Clantons and McLowrys. Worry about your precious Earps, *mister mayor.* Worry plenty—!"

It wasn't just loud talk. At no time during their terms in Tombstone could Wyatt or either of his brothers have touched Johnny Behan in a local popularity contest. They were each and all of them proud, aloof, hard-to-know men, dedicated to their jobs and taking no time from them to make friends or mend political fences. Clum knew all that. At the same time he knew something Behan didn't—Wyatt Earp.

"You're forcing me to go to him," he told Behan flatly. He said *him*, not *them*, and Johnny Behan scowled.

"Meaning exactly what?" he challenged uneasily.

"That I shall back Wyatt Earp, and that the Committee will back him, and that we shall all worry about it later," rasped Clum. "Good day, Sheriff!"

"Good day, Mayor," answered Johnny Behan, and waited only until he was out of sight before settling his Stetson hard-down over his face and stepping swiftly out the door and across Fremont Street toward the O.K. Corral.

For the second time in ten minutes, Mayor J. P. Clum and his offer of Citizen Committee backing, got turned flat down.

"John," said Wyatt, putting his big hand on the little city official's shoulder, "this is nobody's fight but mine and my brothers'. You go into it with a citizen posse, and winning it won't mean a damn thing. The posse will break up and go home after it's over, and by next day will forget the whole thing. The gang will lay low for a spell, get back together, hit you again and give you the same fight to make all over again.

"But regular lawmen, men who have been given badges and a legal job to do, are something else again. If they do what they're paid to do, and do it without any help from anybody, you'll have just the one fight, and that will be the end of it. Those

boys will know that *we* won't break up and go home. They will know we'll be there after it's all over—right where we were before it started—back of our badges and meaning to stay back of them. You see the way it is, John?"

Clum saw the way it was.

He saw, too, that Wyatt was right.

Before Wyatt's time in Tombstone, he and his Citizen's Safety Committee vigilantes had been helpless to even slow the stage robbing down, let alone stop it. Yet, in a handful of swift-bitter months, Wyatt had fought the bandits to a standstill, now had them backed into their last corral, was asking only that official Tombstone stand back and give him fighting room to finish the job.

JOHN P. CLUM was no hero worshipper. But he was human. It made his heart swell just to stand there and look at such a man—to know that he had been your friend and that history had let you live hand-close to him. Yet, in that last moment before he gave his tacit consent to Wyatt Earp, the tough little Tombstone mayor was no fool, either.

He knew that above and beyond the law, or any duty to that law, the lion-quiet head of the Earp clan was a killer. And that he meant to kill *now*.

"You won't see it any other way then, Wyatt?" he said at last, and low voiced.

"No, old friend. Me and Virgil and Morgan will go it alone. I reckon we'll go right about now, too."

Clum only nodded, said no more. But the stillness which followed was not without its croaking dissent.

The objection came from a forgotten back table of the deserted saloon. It came in a reedy, cracked voice which Tombstone had learned to know well those past months, and to listen to when it made its rare orations on the subject of gunplay.

"You may be going right about now," said Doc Holliday, moving out of the rear corner into the sunlight from the front window, "but I allow you won't be going alone."

They watched him come across the room, a skull-thin, parchment-skinned scarecrow of a man, overcoated even in the October mildness against the raging chills of his disease, limping and hobbling forward on the cane he habitually used when the lung fever was high within him and its weakness draining away his frail strength.

"This is our fight, Doc," Wyatt told him gently. "There's no call for you to mix into it."

Doc stopped, leaning on his cane, the pasty sweat of the simple effort to walk, plastering his lank blond hair over the bones of his temples. He just looked back at him and nodded, his voice no more than a harsh whisper. "That's a hell of a thing for you to say to me, Wyatt."

For *you* to say to *me*. That was all. Yet, in those six words lay a lifetime of understanding between two lonely men. An all-night speech could not have twisted the knife of memory any sharper in Wyatt Earp.

"*It was,*" he said softly. "Let's go, Doc."

They went, then.

Wyatt, first, flanked by Morg and Virg. Doc, hobbling off to one side and behind the three of them, using Wyatt's borrowed shotgun for a cane now.

The Earps—strange, implacable men, all better than six feet tall, all looking so much alike in their size and power and cat-easy ways of moving, no stranger could tell them apart.

And Doc Holliday—fence-rail thin but nearly as tall, a walking, living ghost-shadow to the terrible flesh and form of his three friends.

The four of them, coming down Fremont now, walking the middle of the street, not hurrying, not slowing, the gates of the O.K. Corral not fifty steps away. Only Doc Holliday with the shotgun this time. All the Earps, and Wyatt in the lead of them, wearing only their belt-guns, holding their hands slack and free and proud away from them. And Wyatt wanting it that way.

The time for the Buntline Special and the old Parker double was long past. This time nobody was going to jail. This time it would be hand against hand, nerve against nerve. No special weapons, no walk-ups behind, no cold scattergun drops, no Buntline buffaloings.

This time they would see him with *the Colts.*

There would be no room for any man to cry a foul or claim an unfairness.

This time they would get it where they had been begging for it.

In the belly.

AHEAD, scarcely forty feet now, waited the open-swung gates of the corral yard. In the yard, itself, their sweating backs to the wall of the building which formed its north side, waited the five outlaws.

Young Billy Clanton—just turned 17, white in the face and silent, but hard in mind and dangerous in gun-hand as any of them. Ike Clanton—shivering uncontrollably, the fear coming up in his drying mouth thick and dusty as boll-weeviled cotton. Tom McLowry—not afraid and not unafraid, not thinking, even, but watching brother Frank and drawing his strength from him. Frank McLowry—oldest and most ready of them all. Thirty-one, the coming spring, a dark-skinned, highly trained, deadly man. And last—the 21-year old William Claiborne. The boy not yet a man, for all his birthdays. The unbalanced, the twisted youth, who had killed three men in the past four months. Who had but one ambition, and that the crazy one of being called and known as Billy the Kid, succeeding to the title left vacant by the gunfire following Pat Garrett's soft call of the real Billy the Kid, in the darkness of Pete Maxwell's New Mexico ranch-house.

Those were the waiters. Two men, two boys, and a coward. All calling themselves simple cowboys. All dressed to fit the call. Slender, handsome, hard-eyed riders; high-booted, silk-scarved, sleeveless of vest, gay and gaudy of shirt. Ike and Billy Clanton and Frank McLowry, each with a single Colt in a belt holster. Tom McLowry, with a naked .45 stuck handle-high in his Levi's waistband. Billy Claiborne, with two guns worn low and laced down in double holsters. And the cinch-tight horses of all of them standing hard to hand, the jut of the Winchester butts showing above each scarred saddle scabbard.

STILL, the Earps came on. It was thirty feet to the gates now, narrowing rapidly to twenty.

In the last, still seconds, Johnny Behan made his belated play. Wyatt heard the bang of the sheriff's office door as they came abreast of it. He never stopped walking.

Behan was up to them, then, waving them down.

"It's all right, boys!" he shouted. "I've disarmed them. You can let them be. They haven't any guns."

"Did you arrest them?" said Wyatt, not altering the slowness of his stride.

"No, I didn't do that, no need for it. I just—"

"Get out of the way, then!" said Wyatt flatly, and brushed him aside like he would a noisy gad-fly. It was ten feet to the gates then. And Behan was running for cover. And Wyatt was turning, hard left, into the stillness of the O.K. Corral.

With him, right and left, went Virg and Morg.

Doc stopped squarely in the open gateway.

Not pausing, the Earps bore down upon the crouching men along the building's wall. Across from Virg were Billy Claiborne and Ike Clanton. Fronting Wyatt were Billy Clanton and Frank McLowry. Morg had Tom McLowry all to himself.

Wyatt stopped the dead march in the last half breath. They measured it later. It was nine feet from his boot-prints to the building wall.

Nobody moved, nobody made to move.

History handed Virgil, not Wyatt, the opening lines.

"You men are under arrest," said Tombstone's emergency chief of police. "Throw up your hands."

One set of hands went skyward—Ike's.

Four sets went the other way.

Frank and Billy Clanton took Wyatt. Billy was a little wild. His first shot clipped Wyatt's shirt. Frank's first shot didn't even touch him. With good professional reason. Wyatt's eyes had never left Frank. Frank was the *number one* outlaw gun. He had to go first.

He did. His Colt barely cleared its leather. Wyatt's slug hit him three inches above the gunbelt buckle. Frank McLowry grabbed his guts and went down. Wyatt's second shot nearly tore Billy Clanton's right arm off, spinning him clear around and knocking him off his feet. Both of his men were in the dirt. The fight was three seconds old.

Tom McLowry dove behind his saddled horse, firing at Morg. Morg, in a cold way none of the witnesses ever forgot, just stood there and let him shoot, holding his own gun easy and careless, waiting for that one clear shot.

Virg was just as ice-watery. He let Billy Claiborne have three pegs, then threw down on him. But Arizona's Billy the Kid had had all he wanted. He broke and ran, Virg holding up his fire as he did. He saw him dive for the door in the north-wall building. He saw the door flash open to let him in. And he saw who flashed it open for him—*Johnny Behan!*

Now, Wyatt leaped toward the horse behind which Tom McLowry was firing at Morg. He drove two bullets into the animal, having no time to move it in any other way. The horse reared, screaming, and Tom slid out and away from it. Wyatt threw down on him. In the same instant, Ike Clanton ran crazily up and grabbed his gunhand, slobbering, "Don't kill me, don't kill me! I ain't shooting!"

It was all the break Tom McLowry needed. Morg had run over to help Wyatt with the hysterical Ike. As he ran, Tom dropped him with a bullet through the base of the neck. When he saw Morg hit, Wyatt went raging wild.

He kicked Ike away from him, roaring like a haired-up grizzly. "Goddamn you, this fight's commenced. Get to fighting or get out!" Even in the full roll of a boiling mad, Wyatt couldn't shoot a man who wouldn't shoot back. The tiny second he took to spare Ike's miserable life, nearly cost him his own. In its span, Tom had thrown down on him, was letting off with deliberate aim from not eight feet away.

It wasn't Wyatt's fault that aim got spoiled.

Nor Tom's.

It was Doc Holliday's.

For the first time in the fight, Doc had a shot at an outlaw, with no Earp in the way. Tom screamed like a woman as both barrels of Doc's shotgun went into him. He ran ten feet around the corner of the north building, into Fremont Street, and fell stone dead.

As Morg went down from Tom's bullet, Wyatt leaped to shelter him, yelling, "Stay down, stay down! Make yourself small!" The leap turned his back to the wounded Billy Clanton. The youngster, still on the ground, made the border shift, throwing his gun to his left hand, leveling it on Wyatt's back. Morg, his mind a long ways from making himself small, saw him in time. Billy had struggled to his knees to steady his shot at Wyatt. Morg shot him through the belly. He staggered to his feet and Virg, whirling from watching Claiborne vanish into the building, drove a .44 slug into the youth's chest, putting him back down into the dirt.

At this point, Doc dropped his empty shotgun, drew his Colt, ran in toward the Earps. He stumbled over Frank McLowry's crumpled body, stepped on over it, thinking Frank dead and done from Wyatt's first shot. He thought wrong. He heard Morg bellow, "Look out! Behind you, Doc!" then Frank McLowry was snarling, "I've got you by God!"

"Think so?" said Doc calmly. And came around throwing lead. In the same instant, Morg also cut down on the bleeding outlaw.

Frank's one shot ripped across the muscles of Doc's back. He never got to fire the second cylinder. Doc's bullet drilled him heart-center and Morg's smashed the top of his head.

Frank was dead, Tom was dead. Ike and Claiborne were clear out of it and likely still running. Only young Billy Clanton, the gut-tough 17-year old, was still in the fight. Wyatt took him out of it with cautious speed. But not before the young outlaw got Virgil.

Billy got as far as the street corner of the building wall, hunching his bullet-torn body along it, trying to get around it, into Fremont, as Tom McLowry had before him. Virg snapped two shots at him, both misses. The boy fired back, needing both shattered hands to hold the gun up. The hold was good. Virgil Earp was down with a .45 ripping his left thigh to the bone.

Of the law, only Wyatt was still on his feet.

He finished it then, the only humane way he could. Like a man would to a poor, dumb-brute animal that was dying but still highly dangerous. With the first, careful bullet put through the pelvis to bring the boy down and anchor him for the second, merciful one through the side of the head and into the brain.

As of three minutes before two o'clock, the afternoon of October 26th, 1881, the Battle of the O.K. Corral was over.

And Wyatt Earp's War had just begun.

Chapter Sixteen

Wyatt had no more than time to look at Morg's wound, and the handful of citizens who had seen the fight from Fremont Street, to crowd into the corral, than Johnny Behan came hurrying out of the building next door and shouted, "All right, you men are under arrest."

Wyatt just looked at him, too dumbfounded to say anything. The same went for Doc and Virg. But not for a bearded old hardrock miner in the crowd, one Beatty Comstock. By Tophet, Sheriff!" yelled the old man, "you'd best not arrest the marshal. He done just right, and us witnesses will uphold him!"

"You bet we did just right." Wyatt stepped up to Johnny Behan. "But you threw us, you liar. You told us they were disarmed."

"It was murder!" Behan was still talking loud. "You're under arrest—the lot of you!"

"*We won't be arrested,*" said Wyatt quietly. "You'd best get out of our way, *Johnny.*" He put a scathing softness to the name. "You understand?"

There was no doubt Behan understood. He also understood what he saw coming down Fremont and turning in at the corral—thirty men of the Citizen's Safety Committee, Mayor J. P. Clum in charge, and not looking for any backtalk from Johnny Behan.

"We will be responsible for these men," was all Clum told Behan. Johnny bought it and backed off.

With the little mayor giving the orders, the Committeemen picked up Virg and Morg, carried them off down Fremont. Wyatt and the bleeding Doc Holliday walked rearguard. They took the wounded men to Clum's house, guarded them the clock around, waiting for Behan to make his move.

He started it next morning in an unsigned article in the *Nugget,* the newspaper which all along had backed him and the wild bunch. The article charged the Earps with premeditated

murder, claiming all the outlaws had raised their hands when asked and that only two of them, Frank McLowry and Billy Clanton, had guns on them, and that neither of these men used his gun until after he had been shot by the Earps.

Clum and his *Epitaph* did what they could, editorially. *"The feeling of the better class of citizens,"* wrote Clum, *"is that the marshal and his posse acted solely in the right in attempting to disarm the cowboys, and that it was a case of kill or get killed . . ."*

It was a little late in the afternoon for editorials.

TOMBSTONE took the O.K. Corral killings to heart. Before forty-eight hours was up, the town was split wide open. But not down the middle. In fact, way to the left of center—with Wyatt and his handful of eye-witness defenders on the short side.

Sheriff-politician John Clarence Behan and his hand-fed daily, the *Nugget*, were off to a sprint start. They never let up. The slop they printed about the dead stage robbers would have turned a strong man's paunch inside out. But Tombstone proved to have a cast-iron belly for such tripe as the following:

Little Billy Clanton, not yet 18 and a boy known and liked all over the valley, had as his last thought a sacred promise he had made to his dear mother. He had sworn to this beloved lady that he would never die with his boots on. As he lay bleeding out his life, his last request was for his boots to be removed, that he might die with his pledge fulfilled . . .

And then some:

Ike Clanton has been the victim of scurrilous lies. He did not rush up to beg for his own life as reported by the Earps, but to plead for the safety of his young brother, Billy. It was this selfless motive, alone, which led him to dash so courageously, and totally unarmed, through the hail of the murderers' deadly fire . . .

The wonder was that it took three days to have the inevitable warrants sworn out. But Johnny Behan knew just how long it took a public pot to boil. He waited craftily, keeping his nose in the local wind. The third morning after the fight he thought he smelled steam. Within an hour, he had a big posse of ex-stage robbers deputized and out looking for Wyatt and his brothers, with their hip pockets full of murder warrants.

Fortunately, the wind was blowing Wyatt's way, too. He beat the posse to it, surrendering to Judge Wells Spicer and demanding a full court inquiry. That was the 29th. The hearing started the next day with only Wyatt present, Morg and Virg being still bedded with their wounds.

That was some inquiry. It lasted six weeks to the day, and what went on in it would be longer than the rest of Wyatt's life printed in italics. In the end, it all added up this simple: Behan and the *Nugget* could have most of Tombstone believing Wyatt and his brothers were murderers, but they couldn't sell the same hogwash to old Beatty Comstock and a tough dozen other eyewitnesses. Nor to hardminded, stringstraight Municipal Judge Wells Spicer. On December 12th, he closed the hearing by refusing to recommend an indictment to the grand jury then in session.

The grand jury, in turn, refused to make one on its own hook.

For a brief, uneasy twenty-four hours, the Earps stood free and clear of any charge.

Then the lightning struck.

On December 13th, a likely date for such unlucky doings, the wild bunch met in judicial session at the Sulphur Springs courthouse. They sat as their own grand jury, Judge William Brocius, presiding. It took them three minutes to return an indictment for murder against the Earps—two minutes more to pass sentence under the indictment.

It was subsequently told around Tombstone so Tom-Sawyer-silly as to claim the Sulphur Springs riders met in a "secret canyon at the dead of night and signed the verdict in blood." They did no such thing, naturally. What they did do was scrawl out a list of lawmen and others who weren't going to be allowed to leave town alive, Curly Bill drafting the original masterpiece on the back of a tomato can label, Mr. John Ringo, the "educated" partner, making the finished copies on ruled talleybook pages; one copy for each of the condemned men: Wyatt, Virg, Morg, Doc Holliday, Beatty Comstock, Mayor John Clum.

Delivery of the lists, through contacts inside the town, was carried out that same night.

WYATT sat alone in his office on Tough Nut Street. The midnight gas-jet smoked unnoticed on the office wall. His cigar was long-cold, and chewed to a shapeless pulp. Still, he had made neither headstall nor tailcrupper of the whole mess. With some reason.

Virg and Morg were up and around but out of action with their wounds. The worst of the outlaws, Ringo and Curly Bill, were yet at large. Johnny Behan was smarting under his setback, and would never rest until he had gotten out a warrant he could make stick. Doc was a very sick man, would likely go out with his lung fever before spring. Tombstone, taken by and large, was in active sympathy with Behan and his "poor cowboys." Crowds of gullible citizens continued each day to visit boot hill, read off the heroic headboards put up by the sheriff and his heartbroken friends over Frank, Tom and Billy—"MURDERED ON THE STREETS OF TOMBSTONE"—and to come away wiping their eyes and weeping out loud that the Earps were blood-thirsty killers and must be brought to justice.

Cleared by Judge Spicer or not, it looked bad for him and Virg and Morg. And bid fair to look a hell of a lot worse before the new grass came.

About now, a man could give serious thought to getting out of Tombstone and far out of it. *Outlaws* you could handle, *inlaws*, you couldn't. When the citizens turned against you, your choice was school-boy simple—reach for your Stetson or hang around and get indicted. As the old wall-clock behind his desk ticked away toward twelve that night, Wyatt was hand-close to grabbing for his hat.

IT'S the little things which forever trip a man up. Little things with big brown eyes and ragged straw sombreros.

Wyatt heard the hesitant knock. He straightened in his chair, his eyes showing the quick backlight of the old, soft smile. Here, anyway, no matter from which direction the wind blew, *was a friend*. *"Entre Usted, amigo mio,"* he called, low voiced. *"¿Que pasa? ¿Que es este vez?"*

What it was this time, Chico told him, with the usual bow and hat-sweep, was that the Senorita Belloit had urgent need to see him. This was a matter of the supremest importance, and could not wait the night out.

"A man can see that!" Wyatt grinned to himself in English. Then, warmly, to the boy. *"Mil gracias, hombre."*

Chico took his dollar and departed, head high, his heart as big as a Spanish fighting bull's within him. It wasn't the money. Bah! What was *dinero* when such a one as *El Mariscal* had called you *hombre*—a man!

There was no light showing in the shack when Wyatt came up to it. Lily let him in, shut the door hurriedly, re-lit the stump of the candle back of the bath curtain. He could smell the lingering wick-smoke of it, knew it had been blown out but minutes before.

"You're scared still, girl," he growled angrily. "What's the matter?"

"Wyatt, I *am* scared!" she mur-

mured. "This time I'm *really* scared. Look at this!" She held out the grubby piece of talleybook paper.

He took it from her, studied its three lines a full thirty seconds: *"Don't bother to try leaving town. You'll not make it now. You've killed your last cowboy."* Finally, he only nodded softly and asked her. "All right, where did you get it?"

THE softness didn't fool Lily. She knew him by now, could read that strange backlight in the pale eyes for what it was and for what it meant. What it was, was black anger. What it meant, was murder.

"Ringo!" she whispered, and then watched the heatless fire leap higher behind his empty stare. "He said it was for you!"

Ringo again! Wyatt winced to the knife thrust of the thought. God in Heaven, must it forever be the kid? Hounding and pushing and snapping at a man's heels until he got his crazy brains kicked out? Would he never let up on you until you'd grabbed the loose end of his rope and dragged him off into the night like you'd done to Old Shep?

Even as the questions rose wearily in his mind, Wyatt knew their answer.

The kid would never quit until he had killed his sheep. Once he had done that, he knew you would come for him. When you did, he meant to show you what you'd known he must, from clear back in the trail days out of San Angelo: *that nobody named Wyatt Earp could beat him to a gun in a fair-called draw.* In the end, Johnny Ringo could no more keep away from Wyatt Earp than a moth-miller from an open-wick gas flare.

"What else did he say, Lily?"

When he broke the long pause to put the question, Lily sensed the tiredness and the emptiness in it. "Only that you wouldn't lack for company in hell," she replied gently. "You know Ringo, once he's got his mouth open he's got to empty it."

"Such as what company," he asked heavily, "outside of Virg and Morg?"

"Doc Holliday, Mayor Clum and poor old Beatty Comstock," she told him quickly. Then, straight-out and quiet. "What are you going to do, Wyatt?"

"First off," he said at once, "I'll see that old Beatty clears out—tonight. Then, I'll get Clum away on tomorrow-night's stage. After that, I can tackle Virg and Morg and Doc. They won't be so easy, but—"

She broke in on him, shaking her head. "I said what are *you* going to do, Wyatt."

"Me," he said, slow now, and far-eyed, *"I'll stay."*

It was the way of him, Lily thought. And the pride and the worship of him that was in her, put her blood to pounding. *This was a man!* To threaten his kind, was to shout into the thunderhead, calling for the lightning to come forth. And thinking, when it did, to catch it in your bare hands. She spoke her worship, now, her voice fierce and sharp, crying out to him there in the candlelight with all the longing and the love that was in her. "And I'll stay with you, boy! As long as you'll have me, as close as you will hold me! Oh, Wyatt, Wyatt!"

He took her in his great arms, then. Lifting and carrying her light and gentle as a child. Toward the flicker of the candle. Leaning swiftly to blow it out. Moving, then, back through the darkness, to the remembered fragrance of the clean-frayed sheets and the slow, blessed peace of the old wrought iron bedstead.

"Close enough, Lily girl?"

His wide lips were strangely soft with the single whisper. Finding hers in the close-wrapped darkness. Not demanding, nor animal eager. Only asking in a way which held no common coarseness, and taking with a strength which knew no base brutality.

She answered him with her lips. And with the one, wordless sigh which said it all, a million times over, in the last second before their mouths met. After that, there was just the blue wick-smoke of the blown-out candle, and a long time of stillness and contentment in the little shack, behind the brassy glare and gas-lit bedlam of Tombstone's Bird Cage Theater.

Chapter Seventeen

OLD BEATTY COMSTOCK disappeared sometime before dawn of the 14th, fading out like a puff of Apache war-smoke above the warning fire Wyatt built under him. Mayor John Clum, stiffbacked about it but still limber enough in the head to buy Wyatt's advice, boarded the next night's Benson stage, a cautious eight miles outside Tombstone.

Virgil and Morgan would have no part of any retreat Wyatt wasn't party to, and Doc Holliday just laughed. The latter was still sitting in a table-stakes game at the Crystal Palace, long after midnight of the 14th, waiting with his pistol in his lap for the Sulphur Spring boys to put their bullets where their *billets-doux* were.

But the gang had a cushier spot for their lead than the dangerous Kansas dentist. At 11:00 P.M. of the 14th, five hours out of Tombstone and rolling high, the Benson stage ran into a crossbuck of blasting Winchesters. There was no command to halt, the bandits opened up and poured it in.

"Whistling Dick" Winters, the driver, was hit in the leg, his offside lead horse, shot through the throat. A dozen slugs ripped through the body of the coach, making it look like whatever the ambushers were after was *in* the stage, not on top of it. Apparently, Mayor Clum got that idea, anyway.

A mile up the road, Winters pulled his horses up, cut the wounded leader out of the traces, sprang back to the box and got the stage safe away before the bushwhackers could remount and come up to it. It was not until he made his regular stop in Contention City, an hour later, that he found he'd lost his one passenger. Mayor J. P. Clum was gone.

Tough little John Clum was a long ways from getting measured for his pine tuxedo, however. The minute Winters had halted his horses, he had slipped out of the coach and into the brush on foot. From there, he got to the Grand Central Mine's stampmill, borrowed a horse from the superintendent, rode a long circle up to the railhead at Benson. He was there by daylight, and didn't miss his train east.

Before news of his escape reached Tombstone, the Safety Committee had pressured Johnny Behan into making up a posse and riding out to the site of the ambush. He did just that—rode out. He came back into Tombstone without tracking the would-be killers one solitary step.

Meanwhile, Wyatt was reading the sign of that attempted assassination clear as summer-low creek water.

When it came to the time that the highest civic official, of the biggest city in Arizona Territory, could be shot at and run through the brush like a damned rabbit, with the sheriff of Cochise County taking no more action than to amble out and sniff at the blood on the sagebrush, and with the softbellied lawmakers up at Prescott sitting on their legislative backsides and letting him get away with it, it was time and more than time for Wyatt Earp to realize his own number was up, next. And up higher than a gas-bag balloon at the county fair.

He and Virg and Morg redoubled their wariness. But you can't watch all the doorways, all the time.

SHORT weeks later, just after 11:00 P.M., December 28th, Virg was nailed coming out of the Oriental Saloon.

They rushed him to Doc Goodfellow's office, where it was found his left arm had been shredded with a charge of No. 2 gooseshot fired from no more than thirty feet. Dr. Goodfellow's report said it as good as anything: *"Longitudinal fracture left elbow necessitating removal of entire joint."* Tombstone's chief of police

would never use his left arm again. Incapacitated for the job, with elections but a few days away, Virgil Earp was all through as a peace officer in Arizona. His place as town marshal was at once taken by Dave Neagle, one of Johnny Behan's long-time deputies.

Wyatt moved Virg into a room at the Cosmopolitan Hotel, he and Morg taking flanking rooms. A twenty-four hour guard was run by the Safety Committee vigilantes. A flophouse cockroach couldn't have gotten up that hotel corridor without he was stopped and checked for a gun. Wyatt Earp's war was on, the siege of it now shut down tight. Pacing Virg's room, that January night, there was no doubt in his mind where it would all end. They had run Clum out of town, crippled Virg, had him and Morg holed-up. It was only a matter of time.

But time—and telegrams—are sometime things.

MAYOR JOHN CLUM had stuck with that Benson train all the way east to Washington, D.C. He wasn't the little rooster you ran out of his own barnyard, without he scratched up plenty of dust about it. Wyatt found this out through his usual source—Chico Guttierez.

It was ten o'clock, the night of the 25th, when the corridor guards passed the Mexican lad into Virg's room. Wyatt took the wire, read it twice through to make sure, handed it without comment to Virg. Morg moved in to read over his wounded brother's shoulder. It was addressed to Wyatt, didn't waste any word-rates.

FREMONT RESIGINATION ACCEPTED. J. J. GOSPER ACTING GOVERNOR. HAVE ADVISED HIM YOUR OFFICE BE GIVEN SPECIAL AUTHORITY COCHISE COUNTY. AUTHORITY NOW GRANTED. GOOD LUCK AND BE CAREFUL.

C. P. DAKE
UNITED STATES MARSHAL
ARIZONA TERRITORY

It should have marked the beginning of the end for the Sulphur Springs stage robbers. It marked, instead, the end for another of the Earps.

Through early February, Wyatt, with Morg and Doc Holliday as his special Federal Deputies, made seven outlaw arrests. As always before, these arrests fell apart in front of Behan's local control of the Tombstone bench. But to simply frustrate Wyatt's arrests was not enough. Behan knew it. When no court in Tombstone, even his own, would dare issue warrants for the Earps because of their new Federal status, he shortly found a justice of the peace in Contention City, who would. And who did. Trial was set for February 14th. The warrants were for Wyatt, Virgil and Morgan Earp, and Doc Holliday; the charge: the old one of having murdered Billy Clanton, Frank and Tom McLowry.

It was five minutes of ten, the morning of the 14th, when Wyatt and Morg and Doc walked into the Contention courtrooms—each wearing his Federal marshal's star pinned full in the open—each likewise wearing a brace of well-oiled Colt .44's full in the open.

It was four minutes of ten when Johnny Behan and six armed deputies followed them in.

At three minutes of ten the Contention judge began reading off the charge. Sixty seconds later he ran out of gas and started to sputter. For thirty good reasons. It was just two minutes before ten when Colonel William Herring, heading Tombstone's Citizen's Safety Committee in Clum's absence, marched into His Honor's hearing room, with the full membership of the Committee vigilantes behind him. At 9:59, the colonel commenced stating his legal position for the judge's benefit. It took him fifteen seconds.

"We are here," he announced calmly, "for justice or a fight, and we're ready for either. You haven't any more jurisdiction over this case than a jackrabbit. If there's any hearing, it will be in Tombstone. Have I made myself clear to all concerned?"

In the little stillness which followed, there was no doubt that he had. Behan never opened his mouth. The Contention justice only opened his far enough and fast enough to agree in complete legal detail with Colonel William Herring.

It was straight-up ten o'clock when Wyatt and Morg and Doc stalked out past Johnny Behan and boarded their horses without a backward look.

One month later, the night of March 18th, it happened.

IN the remarkable diary of George W. Parsons, that dusty manuscript of the daily goings-on in Tombstone which is the only reliable record left, save for editor Clum's pieces in the *Epitaph*, it was given ten uncolored sentences:

. . . Another assassination last night about eleven o'clock. I heard the shots, two in number. Poor Morgan Earp was shot through by an unknown party. Probably two or three in number, in Campbell & Hatch's, while playing pool with Hatch. Wyatt was there, sitting along the wall watching the game. The shots came from the ground window leading into the alley running to Fremont Street. The second shot was fired apparently at Wyatt Earp himself. Murderers got away, of course, but it was and is quite evident who committed the deed. The man was Frank Stilwell, in all probability. Morg lived about 40 minutes after being shot, and died without a murmur. Bad times ahead now . . .

Bad times ahead *now*?

Well, just maybe! One thing, sure, that has to be handed to those old coolhead mossybacks like George Parsons—nobody could ever touch them for stating a situation six miles short of somewhat. They could be hit in the nose with a sackful of steer manure and never smell anything in it but grass seeds.

The killers of Morg got away into the night as fast as had the wounders of Virg—*but not as far.*

IN addition to the testimony of George Parsons, of pool-hall-owner Hatch and other eye-witnesses, the coroner's jury produced a surprise witness: Pete Spence's wife. Moved toward her outburst of civic conscience by the accessory fact that Pete had broken her jaw in a family discussion, just ahead of helping do Morg in, she testified under oath that the actual killers were Pete, Frank Stilwell, Indian Charlie Cruz, a second breed she didn't know, and a John Doe white man, all acting under the capable direction of Mr. William Brocius and Mr. John Ringo.

On the evidence submitted, the six coroner's jurymen returned their verdict: *"and it is the finding of said jury that the deceased came by his death from the effect of a gun shot or pistol wound on the night of March 18th, 1882, by Peter Spence, Frank Stilwell, one John Doe white man, an Indian called Charlie, and another Indian, name unknown . . ."* And on the same evidence, Wyatt reached his own dark verdict.

He announced it openly throughout Tombstone that he was going after the named killers, both actual and accomplice. He was still Deputy U.S. Marshal for Cochise County, he added, and would arrest them if they did not resist. In a grim postscript, he tacked on the hope that they *would* resist. He did not say, nor did he need to, what he meant to do in case Morg's murderers favored his terminal wish.

This open threat was not typical of Wyatt; still, in making it, he was but paying the hard price of his own incorruptible honesty. Even in the depths of his black grief over the death of young Morg, he could not bring himself to hunt from the shadows as did his enemies. When the lion set out to stalk his prey, he padded full into the middle of the moonlit clearing, put his great head

to the ground, rumbled out a warning that shook the rocks for miles around.

But blind honesty and born courage to the contrary, once he had roared, Wyatt fell as silent as any of the coyote shadows he was tracking.

The first thing to do was to get the crippled Virg out of town. The only limit to Virg's bravery was the same icy sanity which marked the outer edge of Wyatt's. He only looked once at his younger brother, nodded slowly, told him he would get ready.

The plan called for Wyatt to accompany him and Morg's body as far as Tucson, where Crawley Dake was swearing in a special U.S. Marshal's posse to go back to Tombstone with Wyatt. The first part of it went off slick as the seat of a horsehair coach. Or so they thought.

They boarded the train in Benson at 2:00 in the afternoon, Wyatt scouting the platform and the depot while Virg superintended the loading of Morg's corpse into the baggage car. The destination of the dead youth and his maimed brother was the California home of their parents, sometime lately removed from the Missouri birthplace of the boys. The train left Benson on time, was rolling down on Tucson about dusk, and on schedule.

That was as far as the slick part of it went.

Five miles east of the Pima County line, the emergency bellcords jangled, the four-coach train ground to a steaming halt. Wyatt had no more than time to duck swiftly away from his window when the car curtains parted and Deputy Marshal Joe Evans, of Crawley Dake's office, stepped through them. What he had to say to Wyatt took the shine off the horsehair settee, right now.

Frank Stilwell and Pete Spence were in Tucson. Not an hour ago, they had been joined there by an old friend of Wyatt's—Ike Clanton. Shortly after Ike's appearance, the trio had received a telegram from Tombstone —contents unknown. That was all, Evans declared, that he had to report. Wyatt, himself, would have to take it from there.

It turned out Joe Evans was dead right. Wyatt *did* have to take it from there. And not far from there.

Dining cars were unknown west of Chicago. On the S.P.'s run west out of Benson, the last chance to eat, short of daylight and the California line, was Tucson. An hour later, with twilight coming down hard, Wyatt and Joe Evans were standing guard outside the depot hash house while Virg ate his solitary meal.

When he had finished, they herded him back aboard his coach, Wyatt and the Tucson deputy taking up their stations at opposite ends of the car. Nothing happened. The few passengers stretched their legs up and down the depot platform, bought their Indian country trinkets from the stone-faced Papago and Pima women, finished their after-supper cigars, climbed back on the train, and took their seats. Presently, the engineer and his fireman walked across the switch siding, crawled up into the cab. Two short toots from the whistle broke the growing quiet. The S.P.'s Number Nine, westbound for Yuma and Los Angeles, was ready to roll.

Preparing to swing down to the depot platform, Wyatt took a last look around. It was full dark now, the smoky yellow of the coaches' lamps marking their window squares against the unpainted wood of the station walls. Suddenly, he saw something—or thought he did. A man couldn't be sure in that tricky light. But, over yonder there, back of that little string of flatcars on the switch siding—the dull bounce of oil lamplight off of worn metal—smoke blued, scabbard worn metal—gunbarrels, by God!

The old Parker double started for his shoulder, struck ringingly against the forgotten pipe railing of the car platform. The shadows melted away from the flatcars, faded into the night.

Cursing wickedly, Wyatt leaped over the handrail, hit the depot planks on the crouching run. A figure loomed in the darkness. The Parker snapped onto it, dropped back away. It was only a halfbreed peon, scuttling around the corner of the station. But seconds later, he jumped another shadow, halfway down toward Number Nine's chuffing engine. This one was way too tall for a Mexican breed. He ran him toward the head of the train, shouting for him to stop and throw up his hands. He wasn't ten feet behind him when the fugitive cut across the tracks full into the beam of the engine's headlamp.

"One more step and you get it!" roared Wyatt, and grounded the Parker's butt on his hip with the warning.

The fleeing man stopped dead, whirled defiantly around, stood at bay and blinking in the oily glare of the light. It was Frank Stilwell.

He could see Wyatt only as a black shape against the engine's beam. He started toward him, dropping his hands toward his Colts, peering into the glare. When he was four feet away, still squinting to see who it was, he lunged for the shotgun's barrels, caught them by the muzzle ends, threw his whole strength into forcing them upward. The movement brought him face-close to Wyatt.

It has been many times remarked how singularly alike were Wyatt and his dead younger brother. It must have been that, coupled with the bad-smoky light, for there is no other explanation for the strange, last word Frank Stilwell spoke. Eyes wide, desperate grip tightening on the Parker's barrels, face a sudden fish-belly white, even in the yellow stain of the engine's headlamp, he gasped it out.

"Morg!"

His only answer was the twisting heave of Wyatt's great shoulders, forcing the shotgun's muzzles down and into his belly. The first barrel tore his chest away, driving him two steps back and half around. In the time it took him to fall out of the headlamp's narrow arc, Wyatt gave him the second barrel. He was dead before his slack body bounced off the gravel of the roadbed.

Wyatt stood over him, looking down, his dark thoughts drifting upward into the winter night with the slow curl of the gunsmoke from the Parker's barrels. He had caught and killed the first of Morgan's murderers. But in doing so, he had stepped beyond the limits of his, or of any man's, law.

Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord —*and Wyatt Earp!*

From that moment, forward, he could expect no legal quarter from either trusted Tombstone friend or lurking Cochise County foe. He had broken his promise to the Safety Committee to stay *inside* the law. He stood, now, due west of his own harsh line fence of that same law. No one had to tell Wyatt what *that* meant.

Chapter Eighteen

For the better part of the first hour following the departure of Virg's train, he hunted the vicinity of the depot and its spur trackage with Joe Evans. They flushed no further birds from the bandit covey, and when, at the end of the time, Crawley Dake's three special deputies showed up to report the town's temper growing and to advise him to clear out, he gave up the hunt. With Dake's three men, Texas Jack Vermillion, Sherman McMasters and Turkey Creek Johnson, he flagged down the eastbound eight-o'clock freight train, boarded its caboose, and was across the Pima County line before Tucson had identified the body of the outlaw celebrity sprawled in the gravel of its mainline right-of-way.

From that first hour, Wyatt's dark forecast flowered as it had been seeded —in violence.

No town likes to have another's gang killings carried out in front of its Union Depot. Tucson was not Tombstone. It took immediate steps to let the western world know it. The Tucson *Star* plastered the Stilwell slaying across page one. It named it murder, demanded the swift apprehension and punishment of the guilty party, *whoever* he might be.

Wyatt's long years as a professional lawman had taught him one grim truism—when in a spot, three good friends were worth a hundred no-good enemies. Back in Tombstone and holed-up in the Cosmopolitan again, he knew that now, if ever, he was going to find out who those three good friends might be. Still, search his hard mind as he would, he could think of but *two* who might qualify, Lily Belloit always excepted: Mayor John Clum who was 3,000 miles away in Washington, D.C., Marshal Crawley P. Dake, who was near at hand but who had already stretched the limits of his office in furnishing him the special U.S. deputies and the open warrants they held for Morg's murderers.

But there *was* a third friend—one he had long forgotten—ex-Fargo shotgun rider, Bob Paul. He had backed Paul in the last election for Cochise County Sheriff against Johnny Behan. The Fargo rider had lost the election on a crooked ballot count, but he was hardly the man to forget a favor.

WYATT got the reminder of that fact from one of the handful of lesser Tombstone citizens which had never wavered in their loyalty to him: Jake Shagrew, night operator for Western Union and longtime Safety Committee vigilante. He knew, the minute he opened his hotel-room door to see Jake standing there in the hall, that all hell was due to barrel out of Chute Four. And likely bust its cinch on the way. Any message of less than life and death delivery weight would have been brought by Chico Guttierez.

"Thought you had ought to see it first, Marshal," shrugged Jake, and handed him the telegram.

Jake Shagrew had never thought righter. Wyatt's eyes narrowed.

J. C. BEHAN
TOMBSTONE, COCHISE CNTY
GOT WARRANT FOR STILWELL MURDER.
DON'T LET HIM OUT OF YOUR SIGHT.
C.

He handed the telegram back to Jake. "Ike?" was all he said.

"Could be," nodded the night operator. "I took a little company time talking back to Tucson." With the dry grin, Shagrew gave him the rest of the message, free.

The Pima County Sheriff had been out of town the night of the killing. During his absence, nobody had come forward to identify the killer. But on his return the following day, a citizen who knew Wyatt well enough to call him even in the pitch dark had stepped up to put the finger on "poor Frank's murderer." He had named Wyatt Earp, leaving the Pima Sheriff no choice but to issue a warrant for the Tombstone Marshal's arrest. The sender of the telegram might sign himself "C" till Old Nick froze his nose: he was still Ike Clanton.

Wyatt took the information with his usual slow nod.

All that remained was to recall who had gotten to be Pima County Sheriff since riding shotgun for Wyatt and Wells Fargo back in '81. When a man had done that, he remembered *who* his third friend was, and what he *was*.

He was Bob Paul, and he was sheriff of Pima County.

Friend or no friend, Paul—who had been forced to issue that warrant—would sooner or later be forced either to serve it himself, or surrender it to Johnny Behan for Cochise County service. And there would be no beating this warrant; it was the one Behan had been waiting for. It was legal; there was no way around it. To surrender to Bob Paul meant a long trial in Pima County. To surrender to Behan meant a shot in the back "while resisting arrest." Either way, it meant that Morg's killers would get away.

It was a rough-string choice. Bob Paul's grudging warrant would open the season on deputy U.S. marshals in Tombstone, put the law and a legal hunting license at last behind the deadly guns of Ringo and Curly Bill. Every minute now raised the local odds on a bullet in the back for the last of the Earps. But the last of the Earps hadn't survived thirteen years of frontier justice riding gentle horses. If Tombstone's narrow back-alleys wouldn't give a man a fighting chance, the wide open country of outer Cochise County, would. With this swift decision, Wyatt turned to Jake Shagrew.

"You wire Bob Paul that I'll surrender to *him* any time, but that I reckon he and I both understand he won't exactly kill his horse rushing that Pima County warrant over here to Behan. You got that?"

"I got it. Now, how about this wire? I got to deliver it to Behan."

"Sure, Jake, you deliver it." The grin Wyatt gave him took all the heat suddenly out of the stuffy hotel room. "Only don't run all the way. A man your age ought not to strain himself out of a decent lope."

"By damn, you're right, Marshal," said Jake, dead serious. "I allow it will take me all of twenty minutes to trot that block from here to Fremont Street."

"That ought to about cut it, old horse. I'm beholden to you, Jake."

"Sure, Marshal," said Jake Shagrew, and backed out the door with awkward slowness. When he had closed it to turn away down the dimlit hall. he had had his last look at the Lion of Tombstone. He never saw Wyatt Earp again.

It was twenty minutes of ten when Jake Shagrew left the Cosmopolitan Hotel, that night of March 21st. It was nearly a quarter after ten before Wyatt's three Tucson deputies had rounded-up the fourth member of their select little posse and got him back to Wyatt's room.

DOC was drunk as usual, which just suited Wyatt.

"Sober," he always said of Holliday. "Doc was a poor sight. His hands shook, he coughed constantly, and was sicker and grouchier and of less use than a half-potted Apache buck. Properly drunk, he was steady as an old cutting horse, pleasant and gracious as a Confederate colonel, dangerous as a stepped-on diamondback. Taken with just the right amount of bourbon in him," he was wont to add with that warm-dry grin of his, "Doc would go bear hunting with a buggy whip."

His present satisfaction at seeing Doc Holliday properly primed for bear hunting was short-spanned. Colonel William Herring broke into the room right on the dentist-gunman's weaving boot heels. "Wyatt. you're trapped!" he gasped. "Johnny Behan and Dave Neagle are down in the lobby. Outside in the street they've got eight or ten deputies."

"They bother our horses yet?" asked Wyatt quickly.

"No, they're all at the rail out front, saddled and set to go like you ordered."

Wyatt looked around at his deputies. "*Well, boys?*"

Vermilion, McMasters and Johnson were not alone old Federal officers. they were, each in his own professional right, gunmen of reputation. None of them opened his mouth, each, in turn, simply bobbed his head a little. Wyatt didn't bother to look at Doc.

"Colonel," he said to Herring, "you'd better wait up here until this is over."

"Not much!" the Safety Committee leader exclaimed vehemently. "I mean to see *this*, by thunder!"

Whatever it was Colonel Herring hoped to see, it was certainly not what he did see. Wyatt and his men came stalking down the lobby stairs. Wyatt in front, the other four flanking him. All of them had on two belt guns and all of them save Doc,

who never favored the weapon by choice, carried double-barreled shotguns. It went so quickly it was all over before the regular guests in the lobby had more than time to glance up from their evening *Nuggets* or *Epitaphs*.

As Wyatt hit the lobby floor, Behan moved nervously up to him. "Wyatt," he muttered, "I want to see you."

Wyatt, about as nervous as a rattlesnake in a gopher hole, stopped moving. He looked at him a long three seconds, nodded easily. *"Johnny, some day you'll want to see me once too often."*

Behan got gray-pale around his fleshy gills. He stepped hastily back out of the way, deciding then and there that his "want" to see Wyatt could wait.

Outside the hotel, Wyatt halted his little posse, stared at the Cochise sheriff's unhappy deputies.

"If you gentlemen are waiting to see me," he announced courteously, "you can quit waiting."

Like master, like men. Not a deputy moved. Not a one of them but who felt, like Johnny Behan before him, that he could well afford to go right on waiting.

Wyatt turned away from them, Doc and the others following him. They climbed unhurriedly onto their horses, Wyatt reining Big Red back toward Behan's patient boys. "Don't look over my shoulder," he advised them thoughtfully. "It makes me nervous."

He lead his posse only far enough into the Dragoons to be reasonably safe from immediate pursuit. There, he called a halt until daylight. This was not going to be any rush job like that first visit to the Sulphur Springs ranch. This time, starting with the outlaw hideout, he was going to ride it slow, work south from Sulphur Springs, combing every inch of Cochise County if need be, in his last search for the rest of Morg's killers.

With dawn they rode on, reaching the ranch about noon. Again, their only bird remaining in the bush was Indian Charlie Cruz. This time, however, the halfbreed "flushed," making for his ready-saddled pony on the dead fly. McMasters, one of the deadliest men in the southwest with a Winchester, creased him with a snapshot, knocked him sprawling into the dirt of the ranchyard. He wasn't bad hurt and Wyatt soon enough had him talking.

Cruz added some clinching details to the death list already in Wyatt's mind. The actual trigger-men in Morg's killing had been Stilwell and Curly Bill himself. Cruz and Pete Spence had been posted as lookouts front and rear of Campbell & Hatch's, Ringo had held the horses in the Fremont Street alley.

As for the present moment, Cruz didn't know for sure where Ringo and Curly were, but said they had left the ranch the night before with some hard talk about heading for Tombstone to posse-up for Johnny Behan and help to hunt Wyatt down. At the point of being satisfied the halfbreed cowboy had held only a dumb-open hand in the main deal, Wyatt had a last, dark thought.

"Hold on a minute," he said, stepping back toward the breed. "Neither of my brothers nor me ever harmed you, did we?"

"No," muttered the Indian, suddenly and unaccountably afraid. "No, you never."

"Then what made you want to help kill my brother?"

He asked it very quietly and the breed, thinking he sensed Wyatt was about to let him go, shook off his fear and spoke up eagerly. "Well, Curly and Ringo and them other boys, they're my friends. They told me we'd all be making money again if you Earps was out of the way, and Curly, he give me twenty-five dollars right then and there."

"Twenty-five dollars?" said Wyatt, quieter still. "For what?"

"Well, for shooting anybody that made a pass to cut in while him and Stilwell killed you Earps. That's what Curly said, anyways."

Twenty-five lousy dollars! The shock of it leaped through Wyatt's mind. The miserable price of a man's life. A *priceless man* like Morgan Earp. Something happened to Wyatt, then. The look that came into his eyes was frightening to see. With it, he turned to Sherm McMasters, his voice whisper-hard.

"I'm going to kill him, Sherm. You tell him you will count to three, and that I won't touch my guns until after the last count. He's to pull his anytime in between. If he beats me he's to go free. Tell him in Spanish so there won't be any mistakes."

Wyatt spoke some gutter Spanish like most southwesterners but McMasters rattled the tongue off like a native. He nodded now, turned to the anxious halfbreed, repeated Wyatt's offer in harsh Sonoran.

Cruz cried out as though he had been struck in the face with a bullwhip. "Wait! Wait!" he pleaded, starting toward Wyatt. "I didn't do nothing, I—"

"Uno," said McMasters.

"No, no!" yelled Cruz, *"por Dios!"*

"You mean, *dos!"* nodded Sherm McMasters.

The halfbreed made a sound in his throat, a squealing, high sound like a terrified mongrel dog. He lunged on toward Wyatt, pawing wildly for his two Colts.

"Tres!" hissed McMasters, and Wyatt drew and shot.

Cruz's guns were already clear of their holsters and swung onto Wyatt when the single bullet from the latter's .44 smashed through his forehead.

"Let's face it— He just isn't a singer!"

They left him where he went down, crumpled in the corral manure beneath the striking hoofs of his frightened, reins-tied pony. It was significant of a time when the law rode on a peace-officer's hip, and not in the fuzzy minds of twelve good men and true, that none of the deputies looked back, nor thought Indian Charlie Cruz had gotten anything less than a fair trial by a jury of his certain peers.

The results of that trial, if not its methods, were beyond legal argument. The second of Morgan Earp's murderers was dead. His pale-eyed judge and executioner was riding only hours behind the remaining three of the five originally indicted killers.

Chapter Nineteen

BEFORE leaving for Sulphur Springs Wyatt had set up a rendezvous with Colonel Herring at the abandoned No. 1 shaft of the old Lucky Cuss strike. He and his posse reached the hideout about dusk, unsaddled and had a cold supper of shag-beef. They made no fire, were careful with their matches and their smokes. Along about nine o'clock, Herring's contact man showed up. He was Jack Craker, an undercover Wells Fargo agent, well known to Wyatt, unknown in Tombstone.

Craker had some news which didn't settle that cold shag-beef supper any too well.

Cruz had been right. Curly Bill and Ringo, along with Pete Spence and a near dozen lesser-known high-line riders had drifted into Tombstone. To the bad surprise of even Behan's stoutest supporters among the townsfolk, the outlaws had been formally deputized by the Cochise sheriff to join the posse forming up to go out after Wyatt. That posse had split into two sections, one under Curly Bill, containing most of the wild bunch, to comb the west side of the San Pedro, the other under John Ringo, to search the east flank of the valley. Both posses had left town late that same afternoon, with Behan, after his crafty way, finding some last minute urgent business to keep him from accompanying either bunch.

"What *about* that warrant?" snapped Wyatt impatiently. "Did Bob Paul bring it over from Tucson yet?"

"No," said Craker, "Sheriff Paul ain't come over with it so far. But Colonel Herring's been in touch with him and he told the Colonel to let you know he couldn't stall it much longer."

"Good," grunted Wyatt. "That sort of makes it interesting."

"Meaning it's been dull up to now?" drawled Sherm McMasters, the Federal posse's unofficial cynic.

"Meaning Johnny Behan's bit off a pretty big chunk ordering that posse out without waiting for Bob Paul to show up with that warrant for me. It amounts to him ordering a man he's got no legal jurisdiction over shot on sight. That's me, boys, and I say that makes it interesting."

"Yeah," agreed Texas Jack Vermilion. "Especially, when you consider we've got bonafide Federal warrants for three of those men who are posse-ed up on our tails as of right now."

"And more so," added Turkey Creek Johnson dourly, "when you figure they ain't got no legal paper on any of us past the powder wads in their Winchesters."

"Of those three warrants," said Wyatt, thinking aloud and back to what Vermilion had said, "I'll serve every last one in person. I will, if I have to stay in the brush the rest of my natural life."

Doc Holliday knew the five names Wyatt had originally marked in his memory at the time of Morg's inquest, knew, as well, that two of those five were already crossed off for keeps. "Well," he croaked, frog's voice made reedier still by the raw spring night, "who gets the short straw this time? Curly? Spence? The kid?"

"We'll take them in order," answered Wyatt thoughtfully.

"Which is?" asked Sherm McMasters.

Wyatt stood up. He settled his Colts in their holsters, picked up the Parker from its leaning place against a pile of shoring timbers.

"Curly Bill," was what he said, and went off through the dark toward Big Red.

CRAKER had said that Brocius' posse had set out for the Babocomari section of the Whetstones, meaning to make its field camp at Iron Springs. It was getting long-shadow late, the afternoon of March 23rd, when Wyatt and his U.S. deputies rode cautiously down on the springs.

The day had turned off a scorcher. They had ridden an all-the-time watchful thirty-five miles since sunup. Their horses were sweat-caked and heads-down with the daylong heat. They, themselves, were nerve-weary and dangerously off their ordinary sharpness. They had not seen a pony track all day, and a preliminary look at the grove around the springs, from up on a spur of the Whetsones to the south, had shown not so much as a deerfly moving down there. Vermilion, McMasters and Johnson were practically asleep in their saddles. Even Doc, that usually peerless watchdog, was half-drossed off with the sunblaze monotony of the long ride.

Only Wyatt was awake.

Two hundred yards from the grove, he waved his followers to a halt, again studying the silent trees and naked rocks of the spring. It was too quiet up there. A man didn't like things that still. Yet, they had no choice. The horses had been ten hours without a drink, and the next water was twenty miles north.

"Get down and watch the backtrail, Doc," he said at last. "The rest of you follow me on in."

"She's watched," nodded Doc. "See you watch *yourselves*."

They went on then, another hundred yards. Still, the silence held. At fifty yards, Wyatt got off Big Red, motioned the others to slow down and hang back, covering him.

HE looped Big Red's reins over his left forearm, leaving both hands free for the Parker. He took a last look at the grove and at the brushy gully flanking it on the Whetstones side. He could not get the smell of trouble out of his nose. Yet, he went on, hunting-cat slow now, feeling for each advancing foot placement, but not looking down and never taking his pale blue eyes off the grove or the gully brush.

He was into the first of the trees, then, close enough to see the splash and shimmer of the spring water, in its shallow granite basin. Still, nothing. He paused, uncertainly. Started another careful step forward.

That was it.

The man on his right, farthest from him, came up from behind a belly-high boulder, winging away with his Winchester. It was Pete Spence.

The one on his left, no more than six long strides distant, rose up out of the gully brush with a double-barreled shotgun at his shoulder and blasting. This one was Curly Bill.

Pete Spence was forgotten. The sudden rush and stumble of the other outlaw forms now springing up through the trees behind Curly was ignored. Wyatt stood like a rock, feeling the whistle and stab of Curly's charges cut through his coat and vest, bringing their murderous pellets within the last inch of tearing him apart and yet, miraculously, missing him.

He took his time, then. The calculating, cold, impossibly tiny segment of time that only the master gunman understands or can comprehend. Both of the Parker's buckloads, nine chilled shot to the charge, took Curly Bill in the chest. He flopped and went down like a rag doll, the whole left side of his rib cage, with half the heart and lung beneath it, pulverized and blown away in the single, ghastly wound.

Spence had fired three times, all wild misses. Now, with Curly dead before he was down, and Wyatt swinging on him with his Cavalry Colts, Pete broke and ran.

Wyatt slashed three snaps after him, from the hip. He heard him yell, knew he had hit him. At the same time, he emptied the rest of the loads in both revolvers at the other outlaws now dodging for better cover throughout the grove. He heard one more agonized yell, figured he had winged another of them by pure chance.

The whole thing, so far, had taken less than thirty seconds. The unexpected, bloody end of their leader had been the shock which stampeded Spence and the others, making Wyatt's momentary survival possible. But there were seven men back in those trees, not counting Pete. None of them was any part of pea-green. They got over their initial jolt as Wyatt, all guns empty and knowing he was a fine, fat target caught in the wide open, wheeled and ran for Big Red. By the time he had found leather and boarded the nervous gelding, the Colt and Winchester fire was coming out of that grove thick as wet sleet in a late spring snowstorm.

Wyatt was nicked once, his horse, twice. His deputies, mounted when the fight started and too old a bunch of ambushers to try and fire back at dismounted men from horseback, had scattered back toward Doc and the down-trail rocks. Doc, himself, strictly a poker-table-range pistol man, was now fighting his excited horse trying to board him and come up to Wyatt's aid.

It was high time to break off the Battle of Iron Springs.

Sliding Big Red in among the rocks, Wyatt shouted the order to "crawl horse and get the hell out!" Doc objected immediately, wanting to "stay and smoke them out!" But Wyatt knew a bad thing when it was looking at him over the sights of eight model '76 Winchesters.

THERE was no way in the world to get at the outlaws now. They had the only waterhole for miles around hemmed in tight under the cover of their hidden saddle guns.

"Nothing doing!" he barked at Doc. "We're all alone here and they'll have reinforcements coming up any minute. Get aboard your horses."

"Wyatt's right!" yelled Sherm McMasters, ducking free of his granite pile and running, bent-kneed, for his grazing pony. "Quit when you're ahead, Doc!"

"Yeah, pile out while the piling's good!" voted Texas Jack, and legged it for his own mount.

Wyatt led the full gallop retreat, the others pounding their mounts hard on Big Red's digging heels, the cursing bandits lobbing a few long rifle shots after them to sign and seal it officially.

In that they had been driven off from the spring, and had to leave the field without serving one of their warrants, at least on a live outlaw, it could be called a defeat for the Federal posse.

Wyatt knew better.

He had lost a battle, only. And damn near won his war losing it.

Curly Bill Brocius was dead.

It was like breaking the back of a snake.

The gang might still thrash around and strike out, blind, for a short spell. But without Curly it would crawl off and die, come sunset. Riding now, east across the long shadows of the San Pedro, his strange, light eyes hardset and colorless as the bleached granite spine of the Whetstones, Wyatt Earp could see that sunset coming swiftly down.

Chapter Twenty

WYATT's look into that sunset of the 23rd was a fateful one. The end came so quickly after that, and with such a sudden flood of unlooked for outside forces, that none of the Tombstone citizenry, outlaw or inlaw, got a really good idea of what had hit them until the dust cleared away weeks later.

It began by looking bad for Wyatt.

Pima sheriff, Bob Paul, having delayed as long as the safety of his job would let him, climbed down off the Benson stage in Tombstone just past seven o'clock the evening of the 23rd. By seven-thirty, Johnny Behan had the last thing he thought he needed to nail Wyatt—the long-awaited Pima County warrant for the murder of Frank Stilwell. At seven-forty-five, Ringo and his posse rode in to report a blank on their sweep of the east valley. Worn down as he and his men were, and as heat-wilted, the news of that Pima County warrant put the starch back into them stiff as a cemetery headboard. "We've got him!" crowed Ringo. "By God, *this time* we've really got him!"

"Yes," said Johnny Behan, "we sure have. When Curly and his boys get back, we'll make up one big posse and take out soon as there's light tomorrow."

"He can't get away," grinned Ringo, dark face flushing to the wild, quick-flashing smile. "Sooner or later he's got to come in for food and fresh horses."

Sheriff Bob Paul, forgotten in Ringo's entering rush, had been quietly standing behind him and his returned possemen. Now he stepped forward, his soft question breaking past Ringo to reach Behan.

"*Curly?*" he said slowly to the Cochise officer, "You mean *Curly Bill* Brocius?"

Johnny Behan was riding the fresh horse of the long-sought warrant for Wyatt, hard and heavy. "You know any other 'Curly'?" he demanded caustically of Paul.

"You actually mean to say," continued the other quietly, "that you have deputized that outlaw? That he's legal part and parcel of your regular posse?"

"Certainly! Not alone him, but John Ringo here, as well!"

"*Ringo!* Are you crazy, Behan?"

"Look here, Paul. I'm running a law office, not a lonely hearts club. When I've got to go out after killers like Wyatt Earp, I don't mean to do it with these run-down city fathers around here. You understand?"

Paul nodded. "And you're actually expecting me to ride with any posse like that?"

"Ride or don't ride!" triumphed Behan. "We don't need you. We got all we need, or want, right here!" Defiantly, he slapped his vest pocket and the Pima County warrant.

Bob Paul looked around the room, first at Johnny Behan and his fleshy scowl, then at Johnny Ringo and his wild grin. Last, he looked at the hard-eyed riders ranked around the office walls behind them.

"Likely, I'll be going, then," he announced softly, "for any fool can plainly see you've caught and killed your man already."

It was five minutes to eight, when he said it and turned away.

He had just reached the door, when it burst open to admit Pete Spence. Pete was white-faced, showing the yellows of his eyes, staggering with exhaustion. He didn't see Bob Paul, who stepped quickly behind the opened door, and didn't heed Behan's warning wave to look behind him. "They got Curly!" he blurted. "God-damn near tore him in two. Phin got a slug in the leg and I got this one in my arm, here. I rode my hoss dead getting back. God, boys, you never—"

"Shut your idiot mouth!" snarled Ringo. "Slow down and make sense. *Who* got Curly?"

"Wyatt, for God's sake! Him and that blasted shotgun of his. Both barrels. So mortal close the shotwads are still sticking in old Curly. Oh God, it was bad, kid. Terrible bad!"

"*Curly's dead—*" Johnny Behan barely breathed it. The shock of it was too much to soak up. It stunned him, making him forget Bob Paul was still there, or anything else.

"*Dead!*" Pete was still seeing it, six hours and forty miles later. "God!

I never see a man get it so messy. Listen, Johnny!" His voice rose woman-high with the naked fear in it. "You've got to protect me! I'm all done with hunting *him*. I ain't going out no more, you hear. Put me in the cellblock, anything, for God's sake, just so he can't get at me like he done poor Curly!"

"All right, all right!" snapped Behan. "I'll lock you up. Just leave off your infernal bellowing for five seconds. We've got to think, man! We've a hell of a site more to worry about than you, Pete."

"All I want is protection." Pete began his desperate plea again. This time it wasn't Ringo or Johnny Behan who cut him off. It was Sheriff Bob Paul, of Pima County. "It's what you want, my friend," he said, stepping quietly up behind him, "it's what you'll get. You're under arrest, Pete."

"Wait a minute!" Behan was on his feet with the anxious challenge. Putting Spence safely away in the Fremont jail, where he could be turned loose next day, and letting Bob Paul have him to take back to Tucson, were two mighty different-colored cayuses. Pete knew way too much, and Behan was way too scared of what Pete knew. "Just hold up now, Bob. He's already given himself up to me. What's the idea?"

"The idea," said Bob Paul, "is protection. The boy wants it, he's going to get it. About three years of it, in the territorial pen at Yuma."

"*Yuma!*" gasped Behan, unbelievingly.

"As long as we're playing warrants," nodded Paul, "try this one on for size." He threw the document on Behan's desk, eyeing him flatly.

"WHAT is it?" said the Cochise sheriff weakly, not offering to reach for it.

"It's *Federal issue*," answered the other officer, "for the murder of Morgan Earp, or accessory thereto. Good in any county in Arizona, and good," he added, quoting softly, "'for not more than three nor less than two years' in Yuma or any other Federal penitentiary." Jerking his head at Spence, he finished abruptly. "Lock him up, Johnny. And see that he's still here when I come back for him."

Turning to go, he had one last word. It was for Ringo. "Sorry I've got no warrant for you, kid. But I reckon the one Wyatt's got will do."

"What the hell you mean?" Ringo flushed angrily. "Wyatt ain't got no goddamn warrant for me!"

"No?" said Bob Paul quietly. "I think he *has*, boy. The same one he just served on Curly Bill."

Oldhand lawman that he was, the Pima sheriff did not go too far, too fast. In fact, he went only across Fremont, to where the shadows grew good and thick inside the O.K. Corral fence. There he stayed for half an hour, watching the jail office. Well before the time ran out, business got bad-brisk over in front of the Cochise County law headquarters.

Ten minutes after he had left Behan and the others, a rider came galloping down Fremont from the south, piled off his horse and ran inside. It was a frost-clear night, letting a man see and hear perfectly.

To begin with, Bob Paul saw and heard that the newcomer's horse had been plenty used up. The flank steam clouded up off of him into the March moonlight, his blowing heaves to get his wind back carried hoarsely across to the corral. Then, it was Ringo and his possemen crowding out into Fremont, with Behan following them to stand in the jail doorway. Next, came a lot of commotion while the riders scrambled for their tied horses, the rush and confusion making the Cochise sheriff raise his voice to be heard over it, and making Ringo do the same to be heard back.

It all added up to quite an earful for Bob Paul.

"I still say you'd ought to wait for daylight." It was Johnny Behan worrying out loud. "Providing they are holed-up where Judd says they are, they'll not leave before first light. Ike and Phin and the others of Curly's bunch will be along shortly. You'll need every man and ought to wait up for them."

"I'm running this show, now!" Ringo was defiant, his quick, crazy laugh ringing the night air. "This time we do it my way. Like I told you, we'll wait out at Kennedy's ranch till midnight. If Ike and Phin and the boys haven't showed by then, we go on in without them."

"But damn it all, kid, he can't get away. Take it easy. Wait up for the boys, like I say."

"You bet he can't get away!" Ringo snapped back. "By God, I know that Lucky Cuss diggings. It's a perfect trap, and I ain't waiting around all night to spring it. All *you* got to do is see nobody leaves town after we do."

"All right." Behan's decision was made plain by the way he said it. "You go along. I'll guarantee you nobody from Tombstone will beat you out there. Now for God's sake, kid, clean it up for keeps this time!"

Ringo's only answer was another of the cracked, quick laughs and, as the kid galloped his posse off up Fremont, Bob Paul let go the breath he had been holding the better part of a full minute.

Damn the last-end luck!

A man knew Behan could make good his promise to seal off the town. Colonel Herring had told you that, in the past twenty-four hours, alone, the Cochise sheriff had arrested five different Safety Committeemen trying to slip out of Tombstone to get in touch with Wyatt in the field. In a final hour drive like this one, where they knew exactly where Wyatt was hiding, Johnny Behan would stop at nothing to prevent any forewarning word of the approach of Ringo, and his deputized outlaws, reaching the trapped marshal. And once they had grabbed him, Wyatt would never live to share that Fremont Street cellblock with Pete Spence.

And worse luck, yet. Only Bob Paul knew how "final" was the hour for Behan and his dwindling crew of stage-hoisters that late March night.

BEFORE leaving Tucson, the Pima sheriff had gotten new territorial Governor F. A. Tritle—just appointed by President Chester A. Arthur to take over from acting Governor Gosper—to agree to come to Tombstone secretly to see, firsthand, how things went there under Sheriff Johnny Behan's public trust. Tritle was due to arrive the 27th, only three days away, and Paul had his promise that, should local conditions in his opinion warrant it, he would appeal to President Arthur to clamp down martial law in Cochise County. Now, damn the dirty breaks, all that careful arranging was like to be out the well-known window.

But Bob Paul was not the one to sit in the shadows crying over the luck of a lousy calf. Maybe a man couldn't leave Tombstone but there was no law against his getting the hell shut of the O.K. Corral in a tall hurry.

Five minutes later, he was telling the whole story to Colonel William Herring.

Herring figured, as did he, that Johnny Behan could make good on his word to keep any man from leaving town to warn Wyatt. But the colonel was a lawyer by profession, and had a devious mind—if a man couldn't do the job, how about a *woman?*

Well sir, yes, it so developed that the colonel did have a particular woman in mind. A real honest-to-God woman, by the Lord Harry!

He caught up to Lily in the wings of the Bird Cage, just leaving the stage after her final turn. "Got to see you at once," he muttered excitedly, and, "Make it my shack, five minutes," she nodded back calmly.

She was there in five minutes, too, but what she had to say stopped the clock right then. "*I* can't go!" she pleaded. "Good God, Colonel, Johnny Behan will have me watched harder than any *man* in town. It would be the worst thing we could

do for Wyatt, to have me try to get through to him."

"Well," said Herring wearily, "I guess that licks us. If a man can't get through and a woman can't get through, who in heaven's name can?"

When he said that, Lily's restless mind brought up to a dead halt. She swung on him, her slant eyes blazing. "*A child!*" she cried. "That's it, don't you see, Colonel!"

"See what, damn it all, Ma'am?"

"*Chico—Chico Gutierrez!*"

"The Mexican lad? The little urchin who runs telegrams for Jake Shagrew?"

"Yes, of course! Listen, Colonel, it's the only way we can get through to Wyatt—the one way they'd never tumble to!"

"By the Lord, girl!" muttered Herring. "I *do* see. You've hit it, square on. I'd better handle it, though, for they'd spot you. You wait here."

"Better yet," said Lily Belloit quickly. "I'll wait over at the Bird Cage. That'll cool them off on me. And, Colonel—" He held up his stride as she called tensely after him. "Be sure Chico understands that the message is for '*El Mariscal!*'"

Chico understood, all right. He also understood some other things: such as the spider web of back-country sheep trails the Mexican flocks had worn into the hills behind Tombstone. It was one of these trails, faint and twisty and climbing up back of Goose Flats, to follow the base of the Dragoons down toward the Lucky Cuss's shaft No. 1, along which his bare feet pattered now. As he ran, he wasn't fretting any about Sheriff Behan or his hardboiled guards. Even a Mexican boy knew some thing: such as that proud *gringo* deputies would never stoop to watch a despised *paisano* sheep trail.

It is a historical shame that that last "telegram" to Wyatt wasn't saved. It covered three yellow sheets of Western Union message paper, top to bottom, and gave Wyatt every last detail he needed to know—from the makeup of Ringo's posse and its timetable at Judd Kennedy's ranch, to the fact of Governor Tritle's coming visit and what that visit would likely mean to Johnny Behan's long rule of unlawfulness.

But, in raising that sudden hope, it also struck it dead. Tritle wasn't due for three days. Behan and his pack of stage bandit killers had seventy-two hours in which to run out their last hunt for Wyatt Earp.

The only saving part of the whole situation was the time of night it happened to be when Sherm McMasters, on picket down the slope from the Lucky Cuss, threw down his Winchester on little Chico Gutierrez and advised him to try another sheep trail.

It was only a shade past eleven.

It wasn't minutes over that shade, before Wyatt had read his last message from Western Union's night office in Tombstone, had passed it on to Sherm and the others and turned, warm-eyed and soft-smiling now, to its ragged, coffee-colored bearer.

He picked the boy up in his arms, held him there a minute, close against him, patting him proud and awkward as a mother grizzly with a learning cub who had just done a difficult thing the proper way. Then, he put him back down, quick and stiff about it, and they both just stood there not knowing where to begin, the man no less embarrassed than the boy.

During the silence, Wyatt could see his posse had finished the telegram, were watching him and Chico.

He took his small friend roughly by the hand, pulling him away and out of their sight and earshot, back of a pile of shoring timbers. There, he dug out his buckskin coin-bag, made him take the whole of it.

"But, *Senor*—" the youngster protested in his halting English, and Wyatt cut him sharply off.

"But nothing," he growled back at him. "You're a good boy, Chico, and will make a good man. You take the money and get out of here right now. Get the same way you came, and get fast. "*Vaya*," he concluded in rasping Spanish. "*Pronto, ahora. ¿Comprende, amigo?*"

Again, Chico understood. He stepped back, sweeping him the old, ragged hat bow. "*Hasta la proxima, Senor.*" Then, softly, his small form fading into the darkness with the blessing. "*Vaya con Dios, Mariscal—*"

"*Hasta la proxima, hombre,*" Wyatt called after him, low voiced. And knew as he called it, that there would never be another "next time" for him and Chico Gutierrez.

Chapter Twenty-one

It kept coming fast. When Ringo and his posse closed in on the Lucky Cuss shortly after midnight, all they got for their trouble was Doc Holliday's croaking advice that, "Wyatt's not around. He said to tell you he's gone off to see a man about shooting a dog." Since it had only the one warrant for Wyatt and none for any of his followers, the posse could only kick its horses out of there, cursing Behan for somehow letting word of its approach leak through to Wyatt.

For the next three days, the kid and his gun-belted pack of outlaw bloodhounds ranged the Sulphur Springs and San Pedro valleys around the clock. All they had flushed out, when they rode back into Tombstone on the 27th, was half a dozen disgruntled coyotes and two or three indignant chaparral birds. But when they walked their blown horses down Allen Street, they gave Governor Tritle a beautiful chance to observe for himself what kind of deputies Johnny Behan was using to run down a U. S. marshal, whose main crime appeared to be that he had his own hip pocket full of legal warrants for some of the same name-bandits the Cochise sheriff had sworn-in to shoot him on sight.

In that last posse of Behan's, besides Ringo, were known outlaws of the cut of Ike and Phin Clanton, Billy Claiborne, Pony Deal, and half a baddozen others. And Tritle had been well briefed by Bob Paul on their identities and records.

Back in Prescott once more, the new Governor wired President Arthur for permission to raise a company of territorial militia to invade Cochise County and hand it a dose of law and order that would settle it down from then on. The President went him one better. He declared a state of revolt in southeast Arizona, and asked Congress to clamp Cochise County under full martial law, using Colonel Biddle's Federal troops from nearby Fort Grant to apply the clamp.

That did it.

But it didn't do it that day. Nor the next.

The simple announcement that Tritle had gone clear to the President of the United States for help was enough to shake Johnny Behan into calling off his outlaw posse and breaking it up, overnight. But swift weeks passed before Congress got around to making Tritle's threat official.

Meantime, Wyatt still had to stay in the brush, neither he nor his friends inside town considering it anyway safe for him to show in Tombstone until the troops actually moved in. This, because Behan's posse, though officially dissolved, individually stayed on in and close around Tombstone, waiting to see what would happen. Behan, himself, while clever enough to act openly like he suddenly didn't know any of his former business associates, was still sheriff, and only praying and laying for the last-minute chance to grab Wyatt on the Stilwell warrant.

March ran out, April went by, the uneasy spring started on into May. Wyatt still waited in the brush. Behan and his warrant still waited in Tombstone.

It was faithful Bob Paul, finally, who found the way out.

He contacted Wyatt early in May with the information that he had arranged, through Tritle, for him to

take legal sanctuary in Colorado. Governor Pitkin, of that state, had agreed to refuse extradition, should Behan seek it. It was the one, lawful way that Wyatt could beat the Cochise sheriff and his Stilwell murder warrant. There was no other. Wyatt knew that.

He thought about it, long and hard.

He paced the little prospector's shack over in the Chiricahuas where he was holed-up, pulling and tugging at his famous mustache for the better part of an hour. And all the nervous while of it, Bob Paul kept putting the quiet pressure on him to go on and get out while he could. In the end, he had to see it the Pima sheriff's way. No matter which slant of the Tombstone compass you took your bearing from, you had to see the whole sweep of the past months—and to see your own hard, personal part in that sweep.

Curly Bill Brocius, the brains and body of the Sulphur Springs stage bandit gang, was dead. Johnny Behan was all through in Cochise County, could never hope to stay in office past the upcoming elections. Ike and Phin Clanton, Billy Claiborne and Pony Deal, the remaining last of the name-outlaw guns, had, within the past two weeks, left Tombstone to cross quietly into Old Sonora and the benefits of Mother Mexico's gentler climate. Pete Spence was on his way to Yuma Prison, as lawfully dead as one of Wyatt's bullets could have left him. Of the original five of Morg's killers, only Johnny Ringo was still at large.

That last information is what did it.

According to Paul, the kid was not only still at large—he was actually still in Tombstone.

Wyatt stopped his pacing, turned to Bob Paul, gave in abruptly.

"All right, pardner, I'll do it. I'll go on up to Colorado like you say. I got one little matter, though, to clear up before I do. That's no concern of anybody's but mine, however. Meanwhile, you can do me a last favor, if you're of a mind to."

"You've got only to name it, Wyatt. You know that."

"Yes, I know it, Bob. And thanks."

It was all he ever said of gratitude to Bob Paul. Or needed to say. It was a day and time when seven words from certain men were worth a law-book-full of windy depositions from others.

"You tell Lily Belloit I'll be by to see her on my way out. Tonight, soon as the town's quiet, say along after midnight sometime."

"I wouldn't do that, Wyatt." Paul shook his head with the quick honesty of the frown. "It's like to mean your life, man."

Wyatt shook his own head, looking past the Pima officer, his pale eyes seeing through and beyond him and far away. "You tell her like I said, Bob," he nodded softly. "I'll be there."

And he was there.

The late moon was in its one-o'clock cradle over the Whetstones, when she heard the familiar, light-quick sound of his step outside. She listened breathlessly as he led Big Red into the empty lean-to behind the shack, eased its creaking door shut, came sliding along the cabin's east side, and around its corner to the swiftly-opened door.

"Wyatt! Oh, Wyatt!"

He held her there in the darkness a long time, neither of them trying to say what didn't need any saying. He kissed her hair, her tear-wet cheek and, finally, the desperate, clinging softness of her lips.

HE stood back then, and Lily knew as he did what that kiss had meant to him. And what it had to mean to her. It was the way his kind said good-by to hers. Not with cold words or hot promises. But in the only simple, honest way they knew. With a long, soft kiss. And making all the vows they ever would make, just with the way they gave you that kiss, and with the way you took it.

"Boy," she whispered huskily, "be good to yourself. It's all I ask, or ever will. Believe that—for always!"

"I'll believe it, Lily," he said awkwardly. "And I'll believe it for always. Maybe, some day, Lily girl, somehow, some place, things will be different. I just don't know—"

"Sure, Wyatt," she murmured. "Some day, boy, some day—" She broke on it, the quick catch of the sob tearing at his heart. But when she spoke again, her voice was steady, hard-controlled.

"Good-by, Wyatt."

"Lily! Lily!"

He stepped through the darkness with the hoarse whisper, taking her frail form once more in his great clumsy arms. The silence again, long and tense and without words. But this time when he broke away, there was no kiss, no looking back, no tears.

The tears came only after the last sound of him and his soft-stepping sorrel gelding had faded away from the little shack behind the Bird Cage Theater. And the hours and the bitterness and the heartbreak of them were still there when daylight came creeping, gray and dirty, along the deserted mud wheel ruts of Tough Nut Street.

Lily Belloit never saw Wyatt Earp again.

Nor, did Tombstone.

When the murk of that early May night closed behind the remembered, ramrod straightness of his harsh, tall figure, the last of the great lawmen was gone.

He came no more to Cochise County.

Nor again to Allen Street.

They found Johnny Ringo, or the man they said was Johnny Ringo, sitting at the base of a scrub cedar, near Turkey Creek, in the foothills of the Chiricahuas. He was sitting very quiet. Like a man will with a bullet-hole in his temple and the back of his head blown away.

Apparently, he had been carried to the spot and propped carefully up the way they found him. That way may still be read in the records of the Cochise County Coroner's office:

". . . he was dressed in a light hat, blue shirt, vest, pants and drawers. His boots were missing, but evidently he had traveled no great distance without them. His revolver he grasped in his right hand, his rifle rested against the tree close to him. He had on two cartridge belts . . ."

And that was the end of it. The coroner's jury had nothing to do but issue the old reliable "came to his death by party or parties unknown," to write the last word on John Ringgold. But even as they did, fate had to have her last, crooked grin with Johnny Ringo. For the words the coroner actually used were, "Cause of death unknown, but *supposed* gunshot wound!"

To this day, they don't actually know who shot the man they found by that cedar tree. At the time, there was only one clue—a clean set of shod-horse hoofprints coming to the tree and going away from it—and that clue faded fast. An hour after the body was found, a late spring thundershower broke and washed the hoofprints clean away into Turkey Creek. All the coroner's jury could do was listen to Old Man Yoast, who had found the body, tell them those prints were "from a horse that went clean in front saving for a calk inside the right shoe, and traveled tolerable wide behind, with a left shoe that twisted a mite and left a sort of a smudge," and after that to shake their heads, puzzled-like, and allow it was too bad the deceased wasn't able to speak up for himself.

Which a man might say it was—providing he agreed it was really *him* by the tree, yonder.

For there's one thing sure as a blue-nose preacher breathes brimstone on the devil's birthday. And it's the last word in the story and on the subject.

Johnny Ringo would have known that set of smudge-twisting pony prints. •

Fingers to hold

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IN THIS ISSUE: A COMPLETE NOVEL

THIS WAS WYATT

BY WILL HENRY

What lay behind the deadly courage of this marshal with the blazing draw who dared to force order on a wild frontier? In a novel crammed with action, a top author shows a giant figure of the Old West to have been truly greater than the legend about him.