BOXING'S 10 DEADLIEST PUNCHES — By Ray Miller

Bluebook

ADVENTURE IN FACT AND FICTION

25c
JANUARY

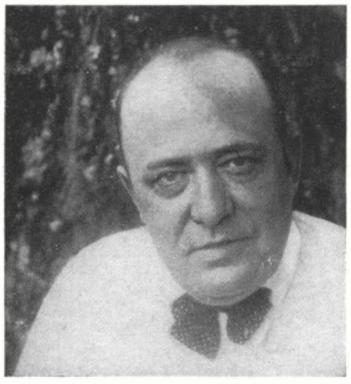
They're still fighting
The Oldest War In The World
See Pages 6-12

Who wrote what in this month's Bluebook

Purely Personal

When he first began to bang out some of his wonderful *Bluebook* fiction, a year or so ago, **Tom Roan**, author of "Whippoorwill Calling" (pages 38-44), told us he was a "rambling fellow, whose longest stay in any one place was six months."

This month's news is that, for the first time in close onto 60 years, Thomas has found a spot in which to roost for what is now almost a full year. The



name of the lucky town is Sea Bright, New Jersey.

Believing this was news fully as earth-shaking as anything about the atom or the length of next year's hemline, we put in a call to Tom, at Sea Bright, to find out what it was about the Jersey shore he found so alluring. The climate, probably; or maybe living conditions, the kind of neighbors, or, at long last, accumulated weariness? It was none of these.

"My wife's been sick," Tom said, and hung up.

* * *

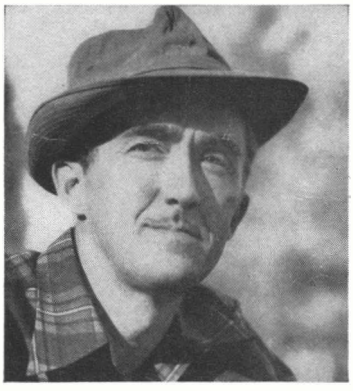
Calvin Clements, author of "The Liar" (pages 36-37), writes that he is "far from being an exciting personality," and then turns right around and says he is, by profession, a New York harbor pilot. These are the buckos who meet the liners out at the edge of the harbor and show the skippers of these great ships how to bring their charges into the dock. And if you don't think this can be exciting, you've never come up New York Bay in a pea-souper, with ferries cutting across your bow, tugs scooting all around, and railroad barges apt to plow through your fo'c'sle at any moment.

Other than that, Cal says he's married, has three kids, lives in Brooklyn, and likes to play the horses. How much excitement can a man want?

* * *

As might be expected from a guy who wrote "Barbed Wire Kingdom," this month's book-lengther (pages 94-128), **Chet Harrison's** hobby is the West, in which he lives, and which he has criss-crossed so many times in his 40 years in the stirrups that he literally can feel the things of which he writes, despite the fact that the orange juice stand had taken the place of the Last Chance Saloon long before Chet bought his first typewriter.

Having worked in Yellowstone Park,



in the motherlode country of California, and in Arizona, New Mexico and West Texas, Chet now sits down to his vittles in a place with the improbable name of Loma Linda, Calif., where he has a wife, two children, and a large passel of undisturbed contentment.

* * *

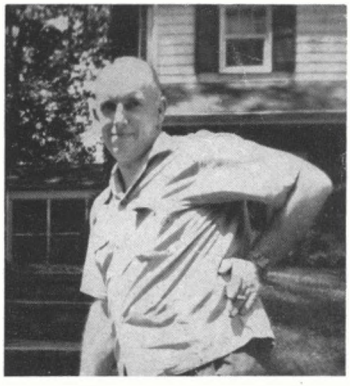
When **Lester David** came in suggesting a piece called "What Are *You* Afraid Of?" (pages 45-49), the first question we had for Les was "What Are *You* Afraid Of?" Turned out this kid isn't afraid of anything.

"Couple of years ago," he told us, "I was assistant city editor of a daily newspaper in a city here in the east. I felt I was riding high. Then, one night, my wife said to me, 'Look, junior, you want to be a city editor all your life?' I told her I didn't. So she told me to quit city editoring, and start writing. At first, I was scared to death. Then my writing began to sell. And since then, I've never been afraid of anything."

* * *

No stranger to veteran *Bluebook* readers is **Harry Edward Neal**, who wrote "How To Pull Hats Out of Rabbits" (pages 60-65). A veteran of many stories for our little publication, Harry has been with the U. S. Secret Service since 1926, and, altho he writes every night and every weekend, and has had articles and stories in literally all the top magazines, he never has written a piece about—of all things—the Secret Service.

Harry likes to recall especially one novelette he sold us which was published in the May, 1952, issue. This one was called "The Ragged Rebellion" and is especially high in the Neal memory book because the locale was the Berkshire Hills country around Pittsfield, Mass., where author Neal was born 47 years ago. Now the father of two growing teen-agers, Harry swims, fishes, plays the



piano (when no piano players are around), and, above all, writes. His home is like that of all Washington government workers. It's in Maryland.

Bluebook

ADVENTURE IN FACT AND FICTION

January, 1954 **MAGAZINE** Vol. 98, No. 3

Trademark Reg. U.S. Pat. Off.

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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Bottle Baby

To the Editor:

In your September issue, you say "Nobody ever has been able to solve the 'satori' puzzle of the Zen Buddhists. It is, 'How can you get a goose out of a bottle without killing the goose or breaking the bottle?'"

What interests me is, how did the Zen Buddhists, or anyone else, get the goose *into* the bottle without killing it or breaking the bottle?

Donald D. Gaston.
Amarillo, Tex.

To the Editor:

I would like to know, too.

A/3c Donald Ross.
Pepperell A.F.B.,
St. Johns, Nfld.

To the Editor:

1. There was no mention of the size of the bottle neck.

2. If the neck was smaller than the goose, how did he get in (was the egg placed in the bottle)?

3. Ask the Zen Buddhists.

Jack Jacobs.
Hackensack, N. J.

Point well taken. Next question. —Ed.

Wild Bill

To the Editor:

I read George Scullin's "The American Toreador" (October), and found it an interesting and accurate saga of the rodeo world. I can buy all of it except the statement that "Wild Bill Hickok followed Buffalo Bill as the second great western showman."

I saw Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show as a boy in Pocatello, Idaho, about 1910. He was associated at the time with Pawnee Bill, and the show was billed as "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show combined with Pawnee Bill's 101 Ranch Show."

Buffalo Bill presented his first wild west show in the spring of 1883, at Omaha, Neb., and the last performance at Denver, Colo., in 1913, where the show was attached for debts. Perhaps Mr. Scullin meant Pawnee Bill instead of Wild Bill Hickok, who, as any raving idiot knows, was shot in the back of the head and killed by Jack McCall, at Deadwood, S. Dak., in either 1875 or '76, making it practically impossible for him to follow Buffalo Bill as the second great wild west impressario.

Glenn H. Hobbie.
Boise, Ida.

Raving we are, Glenn; don't know how we missed that one. —Ed.

Fairer Warning

To the Editor:

Guns and hunting are a passion of mine, therefore I enjoyed the story "Fair Warning" (October) very much.

If the story is true, as I think it is, I surely would hate to be the accused. If it's fiction, it should really put across the point of safety in the woods to the careless ones in the ranks of hunters. Either way, it really packs a wallop.

I also want to say here that I enjoy your fine magazine, and will continue to do so.

Carl E. Wendell, 3rd.
U. S. Marine Corps.

Fanning Bee

To the Editor:

After reading Harold Keith's "Iverson's Idiot" (August), I began to wonder just what town the Blue Sox—the major league baseball squad in the story—were supposed to represent.

To answer this question for myself, I went back and listed all the towns in which the Blue Sox played, and, lo and behold, all eight towns of the National League were mentioned! Yet, since the Sox definitely were a National League team—having played in Cincinnati and Pittsburgh, two towns that have no American League team—I am now more curious than ever as to what town the author had in mind.

To further confuse the issue, Mr. Keith has the Sox playing an exhibition game with Louisville, across the river from, I presume, the Sox' home

town. Yet they end the season with Brooklyn, a town some 1,000 miles from Louisville, whereas any fan knows that the schedule is so set that all eastern teams end the season in the east, and the western teams in the west. And, if the Sox come from around Louisville, they hardly could be called an eastern team. I'm confused.

James J. Lummis.
Miamisburg, Ohio.

You were meant to be confused, Jim, it being Mr. Keith's purpose to so becloud the issue that no reader could identify the actual team he had in mind. Apparently, he did right well. —ED.

Happy Talk

To the Editor:

A bit late, perhaps, but a few random thoughts on a swell August issue.

Charles Samuels—a nice guy, a nice chunk of biography, after doing the niftiest job of ghosting in years on the Ethel Waters book. Keep Charlie busy; he has much to say.

New York—well, you've heard it all by now, but I have one point of disagreement. The city's beautiful from a distance, like a carnival, but also like a carnival, under some conditions, fun to visit.

"What's A Man"—well done indeed. A few excellent thoughts on the subject of fidelity and fertility. One item here that's not quite within discoverable fact by any competent, careful investigator; that a man's wife has had a child doesn't necessarily mean, often doesn't mean, that he has proven his "manhood"—only that his wife is fertile.

Bob Arentz.
Salt Lake City, Utah.

To the Editor:

Being incarcerated isn't much fun, at best. About all there is to do in a county institution such as this one is talk, play cards, or read.

Reading material, however, is rather limited in variety. Thus, the lone copy of *Bluebook* came as a great Godsend to me. It is the August, 1950, issue.

The variety of stories, the lucid writing, have been enjoyed time and again by all of us who spend time here. This issue, in fact, has been read so many times since it was secured about a month ago, it now has become dog-eared, and the print has faded from the handling it has received. But we all thank you for a very fine magazine.

William Kasey.
Boone, Iowa.

Pieces of Eight

To the Editor:

I think the readers of *Bluebook* who read "Eight Against the Enemy" (September) would like to know what happened to one of the men—my uncle, Ben Pizion—who bailed out before the rest of the crew crash-landed.

My uncle is alive. As it said in the story, my uncle thought that Schuffert motioned him to jump, not sit down.

After he jumped, he landed in a field and broke his leg. Then the Germans captured him, held him briefly; and then turned him over to the Rumanian military. He was held for another month, and hospitalized during that time, and was freed when Rumania went over to the side of Russia. He then was returned to Italy and sent home.

Theresa Sprangle.
Jackson, Mich.

To the Editor:

I've never written to any magazine before, but reading your wonderful story, "Eight Against the Enemy," I felt I had to let you know how much I enjoyed it.

Everything in your fine magazine is always good, but this one story tops them all for real reading enjoyment.

Robert C. Karlstromer.
Savannah, Ga.

The Cocoon

To the Editor:

Ever since reading "The Cocoon," by Sidney Rogerson (June), I've been wanting to congratulate you on capturing the work of this fine writer. While this story is, of course, fantastic, it plants an idea in the mind—"As a man eateth, so is he." Which may be applied to human beings as well as animals.

A very good story.

Victor H. Gurney.
Redondo Beach, Calif.

"Ah-ha-a-a— I see you, Mrs. Leslie!"

Thinking Out Loud

For more years than he cares to remember, this lackey has been approached every January by a pleasant party from the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, who asks in polite tones what we can do to help the Foundation in its annual March of Dimes collection. And, because this is one of those worthy causes which you want to help without thinking much about it, most editors shell out a couple of dimes themselves, and promise to give the drive as much white space in their magazines as the printer will permit. And that's that for this year.

But . . .

Have you ever stopped to ask yourself what this crowd does with the dimes they collect every January? Oh, sure, they use it to build hospitals, and buy iron lungs, and pay doctors. But, let's put it this way—suppose a guy came down with polio. What then?

Good question. I've never come down with the stuff myself, but last summer I had a kid sent home from a camp where they had polio. Maybe our kid had it, and maybe he didn't, and his mother took on around the joint as if he'd already been ticketed for the undertaker. It was a bad time for all.

Worse, it was a Saturday evening in July, with the thermometer near 90, and all intelligent people off someplace with a cool drink. You'd have had to be dying to have flushed a third-rate intern in an off-limits hospital.

So I looked up a number in the telephone book, and called the nearest representative of the Foundation. I was ready with a stout argument that for years I'd helped these people, now what were they going to do to help me.

* * *

Well, sir, I still don't completely believe what I saw and heard. First, a lady answered the phone and said she was the polio worker's mother, and that the polio worker was out on a case and would call back later. More amazing than anything else, the polio worker *did* call back later, told us precisely, in calming tones, what to do and how to do it, and insisted we keep in touch with her until we were satisfied our own particular crisis had passed.

Next morning—a warm, bright Sunday, don't forget, with most people galloping off to the beach—another Foundation worker telephoned, identified himself, and offered *his* advice and good cheer. It was advice, incidentally, which was correct and proper, too.

All of which is one way of saying that the March of Dimes folks are collecting again this month, and it probably won't mean much to you unless you've had some contact with this dread disease. You'll be generous, of course, as Americans always are—but you're more so when it has hit home. In at least one editorial office, however, the Foundation representatives this year are going to get the welcome of their lives.

How about you—can *you* spare a dime?

* * *

For the one or two malcontents who asked, in saw-edged voices, why we ran such an old-hat story as Rene Belbenoit's "Forbidden Trails," in last July's issue, we present the following excerpt from a news story that appeared just a little more than a month ago:

"For the first time in a century, there were no prisoners last week in Cayenne Penal Colony, the equatorial prison long known as 'Devil's Island.' The last 58 beaten, broken convicts were transferred from the South American swamps to a Paris jail, and with that France brought to an end a prison more infamous than any crime it had ever punished."

As they say in Hollywood, how timely can you get?

* * *

A kind gentleman of the cloth, from down Sou'f, has written to congratulate us for our stand on the Kinsey report, and for being the one magazine that stayed clear of this interesting subject.

"I've read *Bluebook* for a very long time," he writes. "It was always safe to recommend it for family reading, although there is nothing sissy or prissy about it. By not giving Kinsey the publicity he looks for, you do all decent people a great favor."

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

"What part of Japan does your tribe come from?"

And there, in a paragraph, is pretty much the explanation of what we've been trying to do on this little monthly handbill for the past several years. In other words, get out a decent magazine of adventure for men, without being either limp-wristed or vulgar. Anybody can write a curtain line that depends for shock value on a string of swear words. But it takes a real master to get over masculine shock value, and yet offend no one.

We like to feel we've done just that.

* * *

Well, the Peary letters still are coming in, and they continue to range from casual vituperation to fulsome praise, with still no evidence of anyone in an official capacity coming out and admitting the truth, namely that Peary never reached the North Pole or any other pole.

One gent writes that Peary *must* have reached the Pole because, says our correspondent, "I saw his ship come in, and the North Pole flag flew from its mainmast. It was a streamer flag, and it had the words 'North Pole' printed on it."

Ridiculous as an argument, of course. Yet Peary North Pole flags seem to be erupting all over the place of late, and even the staid *New York Times*—which brags that it handles "all the news that's fit to print"—didn't feel our proof that Peary hadn't been to the Pole was worth printing; yet it has run several lengthy pieces about this flag or that which "Admiral Peary carried to the Pole."

Which is so much blah. We still say Peary never got to the Pole, and we can prove it. Come to think of it, we already have.

* * *

About this month's cover:

As you will note, the gentleman looking ferociously out at you is not the chairman of his local P.T.A. He's a member of a tribe of rascals known as Pathans, who have been making a living out of fighting in the Khyber Pass since a couple of thousand years before the time of Christ.

Which, with a little calculation on the finger tips, will convince you that this is just about the oldest war in the world—which is precisely what Keith Monroe calls his story about the situation, beginning on page 6. And before you grab your pen and start telling us we don't know what we're talking about in these matters, bear in mind that author Monroe didn't make this up in the leather armchair in his den; he actually visited the Khyber and saw exactly the things he writes about in his sparkling little essay.

Is the war still going on? Well, read what Brother Monroe has to say. Then be glad you live in Upper Sandusky or Terra Haute.

Nice, isn't it?

MAXWELL HAMILTON

What Next!

NO FAIR SAYS FARE . . . In Washington, D. C., Banks S. Ross charged in a lawsuit that when he woke up from a nap in a taxicab he had hired and opened the door and stepped out, he suffered injuries to the head, face, ears, arms and legs. The cab had been hoisted six feet on a grease rack for repairs.

BY ANY OTHER NAME . . . In Hollywood, after the Breen office refused to approve release of the British film, *The Captain's Paradise,* because it shows star Alec Guinness bigamously wed to two women, slight changes were made in the dialogue and the Breen office gave its approval. The change: now Guinness has only one wife, is merely living with the other in adultery.

TIME TESTED . . . In Peru, intrigued with the success of ancient Incas in brain surgery, two surgeons used 2,000-year-old Inca techniques, found that an Inca-style tourniquet made operations bloodless, an improvement of modern scalp surgery, usually very bloody.

TACT . . . In Omaha, Neb., a notice on the menu of one restaurant states: "We will serve your drink in a coffee cup if your boss or client is at the next table."

END OF A LEGEND . . . In Houston, Texas, Sheriff C. V. Kern has issued an order saying that cowboy boots may no longer be worn by deputy sheriffs, states: "They don't go with our citified uniforms."

THE NAME'S THE SAME . . . In Milwaukee, Wis., Fred De Vorse asked for a divorce, charged his wife kicked him, threw an iron at him, hit him with a bucket and called him names—just because he locked himself in a trunk to get away from her.

SITUATION NORMAL . . . In Fort Lee, Va., Lillian Beloin, army civilian employee, was told in the morning she had received a pay raise, was told that afternoon she would be fired because of economy layoffs, next morning was told she had been named the camp's outstanding employee, five days later was told that economy layoffs were to be less drastic than predicted and she was to stay on the job.

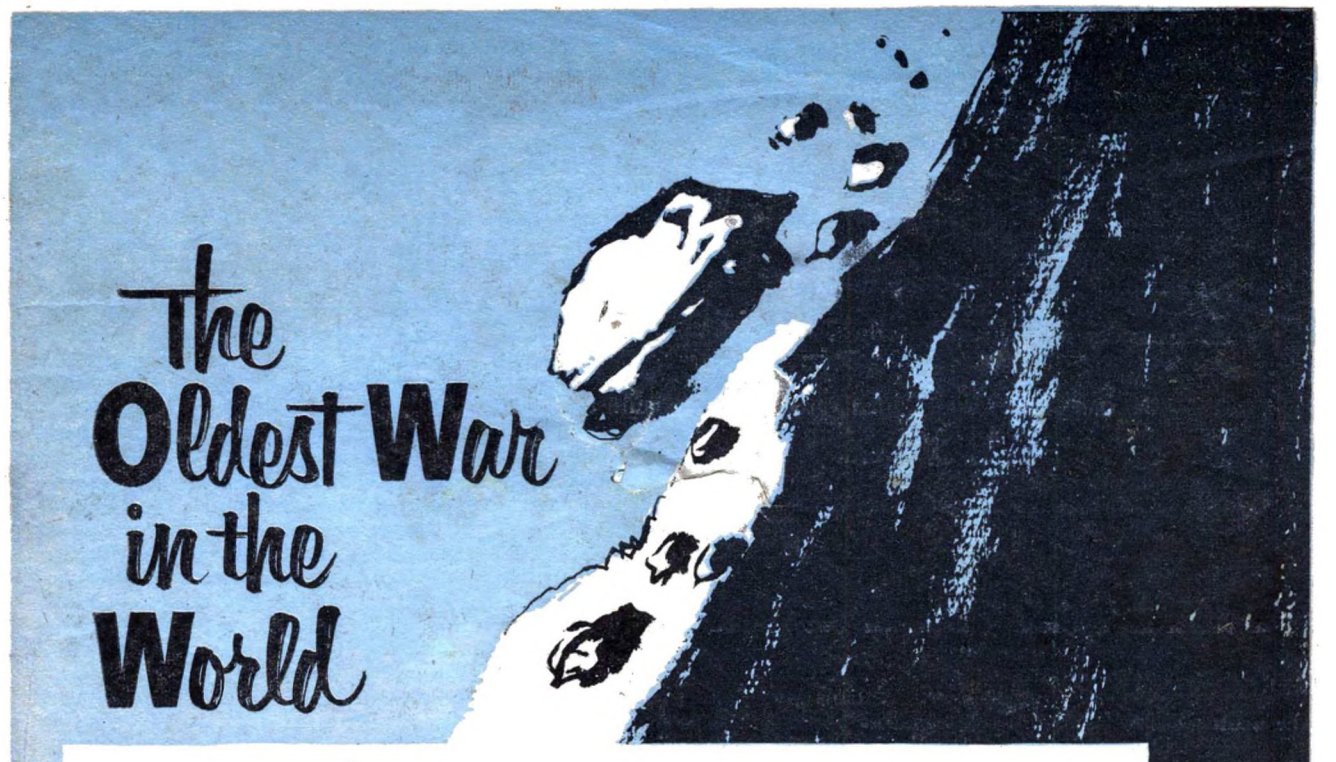
GOING, GOING, GONE . . . In Cleveland, after being rebuffed when he asked for a free bottle of beer, a thief waited until the driver of the beer truck made a delivery, stole the truck and began auctioning off cases of beer to enthusiastic bystanders.

MARRIAGE PUNCTURED . . . In Bristol, England, after his wife punctured his bicycle tires fifteen times, Ronald Alfred Scadding won a divorce. The charge: cruelty.

SIZEABLE ACHIEVEMENT . . . In Moscow recently it was announced that Soviet scientists have developed "a giant 12-inch television screen."

WATER, WATER, EVERYWHERE . . . In Indianapolis, firemen stood by helplessly and watched a house go up in flames because the nearest fireplug was across the railroad tracks and a speeding passenger train had chopped their hose into three pieces.

the Oldest War in the World



FACT THAT RIVALS FICTION

It started 3,000 years before the birth of Christ, and there have been few moments of peace since in the blood-soaked Khyber Pass.

By Keith Monroe

A strange story is told by Justice William O. Douglas, of the U. S. Supreme Court. It happened on his recent trip across Central Asia, which took him through the Khyber Pass.

He met a fierce-looking old tribesman alone at a water-hole. Douglas, assuming that a proffered cigarette would be understood in any language, held out his pack. The native took one. "Thank you, Mr. Justice Douglas," he murmured in English. "I think the last time we met was in Washington."

The "tribesman" was an American secret agent. There are others like him (only the Pentagon and the CIA know how many) among the Moslem warriors who live in the craggy wilderness around the Khyber, along the boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

There are also British and Russians there. They speak the hard, guttural, Pushtu language like tribesmen; they have the dusty-brown skins, yellow teeth and chocolate-colored eyes of tribesmen; they wear turbans and lice-infested garments. To the outward eye they are like all men in the Hill tribes. But they see and hear more than other men. They are cunning at dropping a few words of propaganda into the right ears. These agents are among the newest soldiers in the oldest war in the world.

In the battleground of the Khyber Pass, there has seldom been real peace since 3000 B.C. There has been no peace at all for the last four or five centuries. This narrow slot through the towering mountains of the Hindu Kush (which means Killer of Hindus) is the main gateway to India. Every invader of the subcontinent has had to pass through it—and has had to fight the tribes for every mile of its thirty-mile length. There are defiles where it is only forty feet wide. The thousand-foot-high Khyber walls on each side are studded with rocks and caves which give perfect protection to snipers. No canyon could be more ideal for ambush and massacre.

The Pass, and the whole surrounding region which used to be shown on British maps as the Northwest Frontier, is inhabited by some 500,000 gentlemen of alleged Jewish extraction who call themselves Pathans and insist that they are descended from one of the lost tribes of Israel. Like the pirates of the old Spanish Main and the mobsters of recent American history, they fight an endless guerrilla war against all comers.

Because they inhabit grassless mountains where no crops or flocks can prosper, they have always made a living by raiding the lush basins below them, or by looting and kidnapping those who travel through the Pass, or by making them pay for "protection." As long as anything has been known of the Pathans, their economics have been based on extortion. They have demanded and taken toll from every conqueror who has come to shake the gold-mohur tree of India, and from every beaten army on its way back into the Middle East. In between times they fight each other in inter-tribe and inter-family vendettas.

It was through the Khyber that the Aryans poured, from 3000 to 2000 B.C., sometimes bribing the tribes and sometimes battling them, as they moved down to conquer Persia and India. When Alexander, on the greatest raid of all time, crashed through the Khyber looking for more worlds to conquer, his Macedonian phalanxes were cruelly cut up by the tribes until he paid bullion for safe-passage in 327 B.C.

The Khyber Pass, and the Hill tribes who lived above it, were made legendary by Kipling. But Kipling's British were latecomers in the Pass. They first arrived in 1839 and—like no other conquerors before them—tried to stay. They built forts and kept patrols circulating through the Northwest Frontier. But they paid heavily to keep this back door to India barred. The Pathans never, through the entire 108 years of British occupancy, acknowledged British rule.

For decade after decade, British Tommies died on duty along what was always called, with a capital letter, "the Border." They died under a terrible sun, among boulders where Pathans lay waiting silently for days to ambush them. They died one by one, in their own camps and cantonments, as bullets flicked down from the crags seven hundred feet above. On route march they saw nothing of the enemy except a vicious puff of smoke from a faraway rock. Tommies fell as they did sentry duty or changed the guard. When columns ventured up into the Hills to try to punish a tribe, they often were surrounded and wiped out before relief could reach them. An Englishman who was taken alive would die slowly on a rock, with his eyelids missing and his eyes turned to the sun.

The old British forts are empty now. The Union Jack no longer flies in the Pass. The troops marched out in 1947, when Britain gave India its independence. The splitting of the Empire of India into two separate and self-governing dominions—one still called India, the other now called Pakistan—put the Khyber and the Hills under the flag of Pakistan.

Pakistan prudently left the Hills ungarrisoned. But this did not bring them peace. The tribesmen still must live, and there still seems no way to scratch a livelihood from their barren rocks. So they continue to live by banditry.

At least this brings them part of their income. Another part comes from the Pakistan government, which has been paying them the equivalent of a thirty-million-dollar yearly subsidy to keep them quiet. Now that Pakistan's budget is squeezed hard by military preparations for a war with India, there is less subsidy money for the tribes. So they are looting more determinedly lately.

Every widely-travelled observer who has seen the Khyber and its people in recent months is agreed that they are uniquely dangerous. Justice Douglas wrote in his newest book, "The Pathans still like to fight. The annual list of killings along the Khyber remains high . . . The Khyber is one of the hottest funnels, perhaps the most dangerous one, the world has known." Julian Duguid wrote last year, "Along the Border, such murders as there are, and they are many, are purely private affairs." Lowell Thomas wrote, "Roam the world, you can find no men more worthy of the title desperado than the Pathans, who live among these jagged mountains of the Afghan frontier. They obey neither god nor man. Their only law is the law of the rifle and knife."

These observers' emphasis on lawlessness, on murder as a private affair, is due to the peculiar governmental system in this part of Pakistan. Only the paved road through the Pass is subject to Pakistan laws. The mountainous wilderness for a hundred miles on either side of the road is officially designated as a "tribal area"—something like an Indian reservation in the United States—where tribal law, rather than federal law, is the rule. There is no tribal law against murder. Nor are there any policemen, any jails, or any courts.

Recently I visited the Khyber Pass to see what it is like at present, now that it has become a strategic spot on the chessboard of world power politics. First I visited Peshawar, the 4000-year-old walled city in the valley just below the Pass. This city has been sacked several times, and would have been sacked again in the British era, had not the Tommies held the Pass.

For Pathans, Peshawar is the navel of the world. Its bazaars are famous throughout Asia. It is a caravan crossroads, a meeting-place for merchants and adventurers. I saw camel men from Sinkiang, and traders from Samarkand, who had journeyed through the Iron Curtain to haggle with hide merchants from Bengal, and shawl makers from Kashmir, and even an occasional purchasing agent from Europe or America.

When I strolled along the wide Street of the Story Tellers, or entered the Bazaar of the Coppersmiths, I saw the open-front shops of dealers in porcelain from Japan, alarm clocks from the United States, astrakhan from Morocco, Bokhara silks and Turkestan carpets. But when I turned off these spacious central streets, I found myself in a maze of dark alleys, barely wide enough for three men to walk abreast, slimy with filth from the houses on either side.

After nightfall, these houses were blank and shuttered. I could not see one glimmer of light through the chinks in their old brick walls. There is good reason for this blackout. A few tribesmen in the Hills occasionally bicycle down the Khyber and look for excitement in Peshawar. The new authorities have given up the British policy of disarming them as they enter the city. Therefore the townspeople have adopted a seven o'clock curfew by unanimous consent. Roaming Pathans find the streets empty and unlighted, the bazaar shops barred by iron grilles, and the houses dark.

There are no lights in houses because tribesmen sometimes take a notion to break into a home which shows signs of life, then bar the door again behind them while they persuade the occupants to give up whatever money and valuables are in the house. Since cruelty is a virtue among Hillsmen, they have preferred houses where they could find someone at home, and perhaps indulge in a little rape or mayhem. Now that all houses are dark, Pathans occasionally try to enter one anyhow just on the chance of meeting someone—but this is less and less frequent, because nearly every dwelling is now firmly-fortified.

There is plenty of light, and tourists are safe enough in Pashawar's international quarter, of which the center is Dean's Hotel. At first I thought the hotel must be nearly bankrupt, because there seldom were any guests in its dining room and lounge. But I learned that, behind the doors of its private rooms, there always are a number of people who prefer meals served in their rooms. There usually are a few Englishmen and Americans with diplomatic pouches, stopping off on their way to or from Kabul, the forlorn little capital of Afghanistan, on the other side of the Pass. There are young Czech and Polish soldiers of fortune, fugitives from their own country—or ostensibly so—who are looking for jobs in the army or air force of almost any government. There are a few smiling Chinese and perhaps a bullet-headed, slab-faced Russian or two. Inasmuch as the Pakistan government is on friendly diplomatic terms with the Red countries, as well as the democracies, men of many nations are welcome.

The maharajahs who rule various Princely States, in both India and Pakistan, also have agents passing through, in search of information or women or armaments for their masters. Even Afghanistan and India, toward whom Pakistan is cold and suspicious, have consuls who give parties in suites at Dean's. All these people, in their ways, are parts of the confused and many-sided war which never ends on the Border.

The bazaars of Peshawar, the 4,000-year-old walled city below the Khyber Pass, reflect its age-old position as the focal point of the bloody tug-of-war that never seems to terminate.

Peshawar is believed to contain invisible command posts for spies and agitators operating in the Hills. It is the city where Mrs. Khairunnisa Dass, famous secret agent of India, was stabbed on the stairway of her own home after she had bought hundreds of rifles from the Khyber tribes, to be used by Hindus on Moslems in the massacres of 1947. It is the city where a business man known as Mr. Ajmer, said to own half the nearby town of Nowshera, maintained a mansion which was the center of all Hindu conspiracies in Pakistan.

Before I drove up the Khyber Pass, the Pakistan government sent word to tribal chiefs that I was coming, and placed me under their protection. Part of the Pathans' code is to defend (with their lives, if need be) any traveller who comes unarmed and asks hospitality.

The Khyber road winds upward from the grim old fort of Jamrud, in the bottom of the Pass. The road climbs and drops again like a roller-coaster, twists like a corkscrew. On either side are steep, bare, yellowish hills. Along the skyline are little watchtowers, built in Victoria's day to cover the passage of troops on their slow advances through the Pass. At many turns in the road are regimental crests, cut ten feet high in the rock, to commemorate a regiment which fought some engagement at that turn. The 13th Frontier Force Rifles; the Sussex Regiment; the Khyber Rifles; the Guides, and Probyn's Horse were a few of the famous old names I saw.

As my car kept grinding upward along the hairpin turns, through the choking dust, it often swerved to avoid the downward traffic. There were topheavy blue buses from Afghanistan, loaded with passengers and cargo. There were camels and donkeys, and dozens of foot-travellers going down to market. I could recognize the Pathans by their turbans, baggy white trousers, embroidered velvet vests, and rifles slung over their shoulders. One of these tribesmen carried a juicy-looking red apple in each hand. I stopped and asked him, through my interpreter, where I could find apples like them.

"Take these," he said with a friendly grin. He tossed them to me, and passed on his way. I was sure he had nothing else to eat, but I knew better than to refuse him. He might have felt insulted. His high code includes generosity—and also includes putting a bullet or knife into anyone who wrongs him.

Our car passed several autos which had stopped to repair flat tires. The road is strewn with coarse tacks which fall from the sandals of the thousands of men who walk it. This is the main highway for the gypsy nomads of Central Asia. In the winter they walk down to the plains of India. In the summer they go up to northern Afghanistan or the Moslems' "earthly paradise" of Kashmir.

Since the road belongs to the government, and not to the tribes, it is considered poor taste and even risky to shoot or kidnap anyone on the road.

This would be poaching, so to speak. It might mean a fine, or possibly jail. Therefore most of the intramural warring among the Pathans is law-abidingly kept off the road; there were only six fatal shootings reported there last year.

Because of this unique code, some Pathan villagers have dug tunnels from their central watchtower to the roads, so that they can cross the intervening fields safely. Travellers go through the Pass unmolested—if they travel in groups, stay in their automobiles, and leave before nightfall. At sundown the pace quickens along the road. Everyone, including goats and cattle, must be indoors by dusk. Otherwise they may be anybody's prey, even on the road.

PATHANS find kidnapping both profitable and enjoyable. When they capture a woman, they usually keep her for purposes of pleasure or breeding. When they capture a man or boy, they send one of his fingers to his friends as proof that he is in jeopardy. If the friends aren't sure about the identity of the finger, they receive an ear next, with a final warning that the captive will be roasted alive if ransom is not received by a given day.

They are not bluffing. Mohammed Ikram, a Lahore overseer who was a prisoner of the Pathans and wrote a book about it after he was ransomed, actually saw less fortunate hostages being baked at a slow fire. The technique is to truss the victim up near a large sheet of tin near the fire, which acts as a reflector oven. . . .

There are three main tribes of the Pathan people—the Mahsuds, the Waziris and the Afridis. The Mahsuds are the great kidnappers. They are the people by whom Ikram was held. The Waziris and the Afridis are the great thieves. When a baby boy is born in these tribes, the mother prays to Allah that her son will grow up to be a brave man and a clever thief. British soldiers in Waziri or Afridi country used to sleep with their rifles chained to their beds to prevent them from being stolen. Old-time British frontier fighters told me stories of Afridi raiders who took the bedclothes from under a soldier without waking him. . . .

Waziri territory extends for a hundred miles south of the Khyber, and surrounds the little mud-fortress towns of Bannu and Kohat. These two towns live in fear of raids. During the British regime, a band of kidnappers under a noted raider, Ajab Khan Kalai, stole into the Kohat bungalow of Major A. J. Ellis, while he was away in the Hills on duty. Without awakening the guards posted around the bungalow, the tribesmen murdered Major Ellis' wife and abducted his 18-year-old daughter Mollie.

The High Commissioner of the Northwest Frontier Province, Sir John Maffey, knew that if he organized a rescue party to track the kidnappers into the mountain fastness of the Tirah region, they would probably murder the girl before help could reach her. So he called in a fearless medical missionary, Mrs. Percival Starr, who still lived in Kohat, although her husband had been killed there by tribesmen five years earlier. She offered to go alone in search of Ajab Khan Kalai.

She found him. He and his men were so amazed and delighted by Mrs. Starr's courage that they gallantly allowed her to take Mollie Ellis back unharmed.

My first night in the Khyber was spent on the flat roof of a chieftain's house. On the floor of the roof was a carpet which probably had been brought back from the great 1948 raid into Kashmir, and which might be worth a small fortune in New York today. There were silver water vessels for our washing. We definitely needed to wash, especially after eating, because we ate with our fingers. A vast platter of rice was set before us, and buried within the rice were two big chickens, dripping with oil. We tore the chickens apart and ate them, meanwhile rolling the rice into balls and popping it into our mouths. Coffee was served in crimson cups made in Czarist Russia.

OF course there were no women in sight. Like most of the Moslem world, this was country where every woman lives in purdah. No man except her own husband or father may gaze on her; she lives out her life behind screens and locked doors, in a separate part of the house. Elopement or adultery is very rare. They are forbidden by tribal law. A man who breaks this law will be hunted by the girl's tribe, and his own will refuse to protect him.

The chieftain's home, like all those in the Hills, was made of mud plaster, with one big timber door built to defy a battering-ram. The roof had a high parapet to shield a sleeper from snipers in the mountains above. In a corner of the roof was a tower, with ledges for riflemen, and flat stones embedded to shield their heads. The windows were slits just wide enough for a gun-barrel.

Similar houses are plastered about the overfrowning mountains like wasps' nests on a wall. These houses were not built against the British. They were designed against neighborly feuds, which were ancient long before the British and may outlast them for centuries.

Pathans cannot afford that expensive luxury, the prison. But they can afford guns and knives. So each man makes his own law. If he disagrees with his neighbor, he knows only one way to settle the dispute: fight it out. The winner still must cope with the sons, nephews, and friends of the loser. Blood feuds in the Hills sometimes last for a century. Every family is carrying on at least one feud, and must live as a garrison.

This is why every tribesman is well-armed at all times. He buys his armaments over the counter, at the strangest munitions factory in the world. I saw it for myself the next day.

TWENTY-SIX miles southwest of Peshawar, there is a cluster of mud hovels called Dera Adamkhel. From the road it looks the same as a hundred other villages in the Hills. But if you walk a few yards down a littered alley, you find a seemingly blind passage that turns sharply and opens onto a large courtyard of dingy shops, in which no less than three hundred men are hard at work making revolvers and rifles by hand.

This is the legendary tribal arms shop, which the British tried unsuccessfully to find for seventy years. Now that the liberal new Pakistan government is in control, the tribesmen make no secret of the factory. Anyone who wants a gun can buy one for a few hundred rupees.

The guns are such amazing copies of machine-made arms that only an expert can tell the difference. The illiterate tribesmen stamp "Made In U.S.A." or the British crown in the identical designs used by the factories—and even put factory serial numbers on them.

I watched the native craftsmen making guns. Their raw materials were railroad tracks and axle-trees stolen from train yards. These were heated in mud-beehive forges, fanned by bellows made from goatskin. Soon long steel bars about half an inch in diameter came from the anvil. Then the bar to be bored was fastened into a simple machine designed by some long-forgotten Pathan genius.

Two wheels were joined together, about four feet apart. They were set at an angle to the floor, and the higher wheel had a handle on it. The bar was held in a vise which turned when the wheels were spun. In the middle facing the barrel was another vise, which held a thin steel chisel of the same bore that was needed, but longer than the barrel itself. As the bar was spun by the wheels, the chisel was rammed into it. Soon steel shavings curled out. The robed and bearded manufacturer who was operating the gadget stopped it, emptied

out the filings and poured oil into the barrel, then started it again. He finished several rifle barrels while I watched.

For accuracy of aim, guns made in this "factory" are as good as the originals from which they were copied. But the metal is too soft for rapid fire, and loses its reliability after about a hundred rounds. Therefore a different kind of gun, which is turning up here and there in the Hills, is the envy of all the tribesmen. The gun is an automatic rifle—an M-1940 Tokarev, made in Russia. I saw a few Tokarevs, and asked their owners where they got them.

"A friend gave them to us," was the usual answer. What kind of friend? Oh, another tribesman, one who had walked over into Russia.

Nobody knows how many of these second-hand Russian rifles are in Pathan hands. Some estimates run as high as fifty thousand. It would be easy for Russian agents to smuggle them into tribal territory, because only a narrow and lonely strip of Afghanistan desert lies between Russia and the Khyber Pass. In fact, a tribesman in the Khyber can walk, without straining his legs, to China, Tibet, India, or the fiercely-disputed state of Kashmir, as well as to the Russian cities of Stalinabad, Samarkand, and Bokhara.

"Why should Russians give away rifles?" I asked the chieftain who was my host.

He gave me a hard look. "Since the Americans will not help us in Kashmir, we take help from where we can get it." This did not answer my question, of course. But I knew from the chieftain's face that he did not intend to answer.

I saw part of the answer for myself, later in the morning, when we drove on up the Khyber Pass. Here and there beside the road were huge concrete road blocks, ready to be dragged into place any day to seal the Pass. Farther along I saw tank traps. I saw the entrances to subterranean fortifications. All these are left-overs from World War II, when Britain expected Japan to try to send an army through the Pass against India.

At that time, the Pass was made virtually impregnable against even modern armored columns. It is still impregnable today—if the men who hold the Pass choose to keep it so.

Since the days of the Czars, Russia has coveted India. The only route through which the Russian armies can pour is the Khyber. No wonder the Reds are working hard to win the friendship of the tribes which control it.

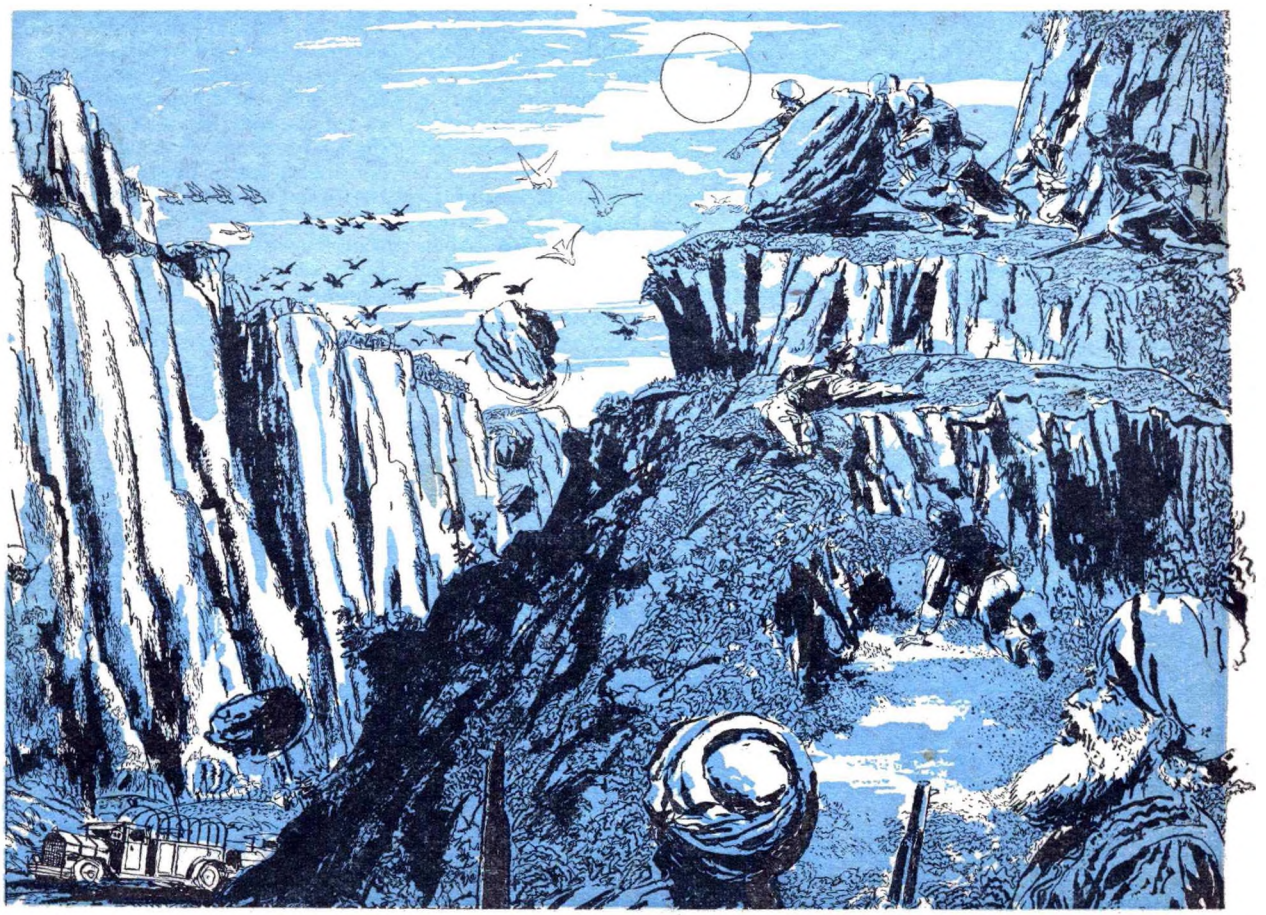
DURING the morning drive, I stopped to see an exhibition arranged by my host: a shooting match among Pathan boys, who were shorter than their rifles. These 8- and 9-year olds banged away at tin cans fifty yards distant, and scored hits about once in every four shots.

"I have heard that all Pathans are great knife fighters as well as marksmen," I remarked to one of the older youths afterward. "Is there one particular dagger thrust which is their favorite?"

He nodded. "I will demonstrate."

Like lightning his fingers stabbed at my shirt, about an inch below my breastbone, then slashed downward and sideways. If it had been a knife instead of his finger, it would have ripped through my stomach. This stroke is part of the artistry of the Pathans, and is said to be one of the deadliest in the world.

Farther up the road I saw another unexpected sight: a school. Whenever British schools had been built in tribal territory, Pathans had burned



The tribesmen who live in the hills above the Pass have to eat, and the only way for them to do it is by continuing their lives of rapine.

them. But now, in an abandoned British barracks, I saw not only children but bearded tribesmen, with rifles slung on their shoulders, learning to write with chalk upon slabs of rock. The teachers were Pakistan federal employees. Evidently Pakistan, too, has much at stake on the Border, and is maneuvering—with noticeable success—to make friends with its piratical citizens there.

Beyond the immense red fortress of Shagai, which blocked the Pass like a stopper in a bottle, we came to the village of Landi Kotal, almost at the frontier of Afghanistan. A little group of tribesmen was waiting solemnly beside the road when I drove up.

That morning they had sent word inviting me to be their guest at a ceremonial noonday meal, and had received my acceptance. These were chiefs. Their bushy beards were dyed red or orange. They wore the usual loose cotton trousers, and coats or robes under which were cartridge belts and revolvers.

These were grave and dignified old men, but they moved with the smoothness of panthers, as they led my interpreter and me to the seats of honor in a circle of chairs near the road. I couldn't forget that they were leaders of some of the most famous fighting men in the world. Even the most supercilious British officers have a grudging respect for them. I remembered the words of one retired general, Sir Andrew Skeen:

"The Pathans are really formidable enemies. They have great mobility on cliffs and steep slopes, marked ability to use ground to hide their movements, and very great patience. Mobility is a weak word for the tribesmen's power of movement. They come down hillsides like falling boulders, not running but bounding, and in crags they literally drop from foothold to foothold."

We ate Afghan style, passing roasted goats and lambs from hand to hand around the circle, and shovelling up rice and peas and carrots by curving the right hand into the shape of a scoop. The chieftains somehow pushed this food, shiny and sticky with oil, into their mouths without staining a hair of their beards. Afterward they wiped their lips with hunks of bread from a four-foot loaf. Then they sat back and waited for me to speak.

"I have heard that your tribes may soon invade Kashmir," I said. "Why should you do this?"

As soon as the Pushtu translation left my interpreter's lips, all eight Pathans began talking simultaneously, with scowls and gestures and watchful glances at me. Whenever one paused for breath he nodded vigorously as he heard what his neighbor was saying.

After several minutes, the interpreter broke in. "They say," he told me, "that nearly all the Kashmirians are Moslem, like the tribes and all Pakistan. They say that India is the real invader—that the Kashmirians must be rescued from the tyranny of the Indian troops who now occupy Kashmir."

My mind skimmed back over what I knew of recent history. Before the Empire of India was liquidated in 1947, Sir Pertab Singh had predicted that if the British pulled out there would not be a rupee or a virgin left in Bengal. The bouts with the British had kept the tribes busy, and oddly happy, since these campaigns were considered holy wars and every tribesman killed in them was believed to go straight to Paradise.

Sure enough, the tribesmen grew homicidally-restless as soon as they lost their British sparring partners. They began planning one of their great mass raids into the fertile Indus Valley, below them in Pakistan. They had made these raids every decade or so, whenever ransoms and women were too scarce in the Hills.

But this time they changed their minds. Somehow word flew through the tribes (doubtless helped along by Russian agents) that their brother Moslems in Kashmir were cruelly-oppressed by a Hindu maharajah. So the raid they might have made inside Pakistan was deflected instead into Kashmir, a state which both India and Pakistan wanted.

The tribes had a glorious time in Kashmir. They burned towns, killed Hindus and took loot. One tribesman told me of a Kashmirian woman he eventually carried back with him. "How she fought! How she scratched my eyes! May Allah cover me with boils if I lie, but she almost snatched my knife and stabbed me. After the first hour with her, I said to myself, 'I must marry this woman. She will bear me sons who will fight like lions.'"

By the time a UN commission negotiated a cease-fire agreement in 1949, the Pathans had taken one-third of Kashmir. Ever since, India and Pakistan have teetered on the brink of war over possession of the state. The tribesmen went back to the Hills with their booty, leaving the Pakistan army to hold the cease-fire line. But now they are restless again.

"India has a large modern army in Kashmir," I said. "How can you hope to force her out?"

The tribesmen smiled in their beards. "The Hindus might be a match for us on the plains. But in the mountains, never! We will drive them mad with sniping. We will raid them, kidnap them, harass them till they dare not sleep."

"How can your men be transported to Kashmir?"

"Ha! We are modern. Each tribe owns a few buses or lorries. We have been saving our petrol for many months—as we have our bullets."

We talked for a long time. I knew that the tribes had been threatening ever since 1949 to go back into Kashmir, while agents of America and Britain strove to dissuade them. The war which Pathans have waged for millenniums against neighbors and travellers seems to be dying down lately. It needs fresh fuel. Will this be the year when it bursts into flame again, with a jehad—a new holy war of looting and "liberation" in Kashmir? The grandiose words of one chief echoed in my mind after I left:

"Presently, the Khyber will be a roaring river of men pouring into India, as my father's father told me it has often been. India shall bleed in these days."

Just what did he mean? Why should the river pour into India, rather than Kashmir? Perhaps this is the key to the puzzle of the Russian guns. Perhaps it explains what international agents hope to do among the tribes.

Suppose the tribes invade Kashmir again. Instantly, both India and Pakistan will throw their armies into the fight—their governments have sworn it—and this time will advance on a wide front clear across the subcontinent, each hoping to conquer the other nation and absorb it.

Meanwhile, if the tribesmen think that Russia is on their side, they can open the Khyber to the Red tank columns. Under the excuse of "pacifying" the subcontinent, Russia can overrun not only Kashmir but all India (and all Pakistan) before the UN can even pass a resolution.

As I rode back down the Pass, I recalled the words of a diplomat in Peshawar. "India is the last of the three great peasantries of the world," he had said. "Now that Communism is entrenched in the other two—China and Russia—it is jockeying for a chance to take the third. What better chance than an Indo-Pakistan war?"

The tribes can start an Indo-Pakistan war. The agents of the democracies want peace. The Russian agents want war—and are arming the tribes to help them start the war. No one knows yet which side will win this undercover struggle in the mountains. The world's oldest war may continue to smolder in its original furnace, the Khyber, or it may set India aflame again as it has in ages past. Which will it be? We may see the answer soon. •

The New Year's Blues

Players are given watches for playing in Bowl Games, but Rusty already had a watch — sixteen of them, in fact.

By FRANK O'ROURKE

January 1st, 1954. *Good afternoon, sport fans everywhere! Here we are in the Big Bowl, the great day has arrived, the teams are warming up on the field below, this huge holiday crowd has packed into the stadium and waits expectantly for the clash of Titans. Some sixty-odd eager young men are waiting for the kickoff gun, and the consensus of expert opinion is that today's game, the thirty-fifth in this time-honored series, is apt to come out of the hopper with more explosive dynamite, more action, and a tighter finish than any in past years. We have two magnificently coached teams, the State Cougars with their great running back, Al Rosinski, playing host to the midwestern invaders, the powerful wrecking crew from the University, led by their three-time All-American fullback, Rusty McGonigle, who seems destined to go down in football history as a fullback whose power and speed ranks him with the immortal Bronko Nagurski. We talked with Rusty just an hour ago, and he is eagerly awaiting this game, to test his unbeaten Wildcats against this Cougar team. And now, the teams are filing off the field for last-minute talks, so let's look around this cosmopolitan crowd while Joe Beggs, my good right hand, gives us a final rundown of the present lineups. . . .*

University City, December 3rd, 1953. He was sitting in the student lounge with Kathy that night, boning for tomorrow's test, when the radio loudspeaker system blared forth the magical news. Immediately, the lounge became bedlam as snake dances formed and wound into the night upon the uproarious campus. The school band burst into the fight song in the quadrangle, car horns tooted and moaned, everybody turned out for the celebration. McGonigle slammed his book and looked helplessly at Kathy. An integral part of this outburst, he wanted none of it. He was in his senior year, this was the first week of December, footballs were packed away. He wanted to study, and be with Kathy, and tonight the Big Bowl plum had just been given to the U.

"It seems," Kathy said, "you are taking another trip."

"Trip!" McGonigle said. "You know how I feel about trips."

"What good does that do?" Kathy asked.

"None," McGonigle said, "and me three months behind in everything."

"But think," Kathy said. "Another month of invigorating practice, a train ride, meet all those starlets, play the big game, see the sights. Doesn't it thrill you?"

McGonigle saw the gleam of laughter, touched with her own anger that understood and shared his own. She was remembering four years of trips and games and bruises. He'd seen the beauty queens and the games and bands. He was twenty-three years old, he'd seen it all, and he wanted no more. Yet this fall, with a senior team finally become great through four years of work, that bid had marched inexorably into their laps as surely as they racked up the nine straight victories, the conference title, half a dozen All-American berths, not to mention Coach of the Year honors for Nate. He'd sat tonight with Kathy, fooling himself, saying that committee of hard-headed businessmen would pick the southern team; and all the time it was the U.

"Sure," McGonigle said dryly. "I'm thrilled to death. Let's go home, Kit."

Dropping the tan topcoat over her shoulders, walking through the deserted lounge, he thought, "Here comes the All-American, where's the key to the city?" and slapped his open palm against the door casing as they stepped into the chill night. They walked under the elms on the quiet street that had known a hundred such falls, and McGonigle gave her a quick kiss and said, "See you at noon, huh?" and turned across the campus toward the football dorm. The phone was ringing when he entered the room and he said, "Hello?" and heard the line coach's husky voice coming from the fieldhouse. "Hear the news, Rusty?"

"Yes," he said.

"We're in," Henrickson remarked. "Don't you feel great about this?"

"You want my bruises," McGonigle said, "my ankle, the bumps on my head? You want to make up my work? Do I feel great? Hell, no!"

January 1st, 1954. *State wins the toss and elects to receive. Rusty McGonigle will kick off for the University. He's adjusted the ball stand, now he's back . . . and there it goes . . . everybody is up, Rosinski takes it on the goal line . . . watch him cutback, folks, we told you about that earlier today . . . a nice return and it is State's ball, first and ten, on their own twenty-three yard line. . . . Oh, thank you, Joe . . . this note is from Al Jope and he'll be with us at halftime . . . Rosinski is back and . . .*

University City, December 10th, 1953. Nate DeLong watched the new play run off dry against a dummy line for the fifty-third time in two days. This play, designed for one moment in the coming game, against a west-coast team scouted by every school in their conference, was not clicking. Nate DeLong blew his whistle and called Larson and McGonigle to him.

"Look," DeLong said patiently. "Everything depends on that time count, Rusty. You've got to hesitate one while Larson goes past and fakes the take from Caldwell. Remember, one count for the handup, one count while Roberg passes, one count while Larson passes, then go in and hit that hole. All right, try it again."

DeLong watched them run the play for the fifty-fourth time, saw them move with the skill of four long years; and saw in the same all-sweeping gaze the first tiny signs of over-training. DeLong silently cursed post-season games and shivered in his storm coat. They'd have to move into the fieldhouse tomorrow, then practice would be a joke until they reached the west coast and got into the open air again. DeLong prayed, "Don't let them go stale, it isn't asking much, just my legs and my arms and next year's contract. Let them be halfway decent at least." And praying to his own personal deity, he knew that two thousand miles west, on another campus, his opposite number, a rotund gentleman with a smiling face and cantaloupe-size ulcers, was driving a Cougar team through similar workouts and uttering similar prayers.

"All right," DeLong called. "Knock off . . . specialists get moving. Linemen to the practice field. Rusty . . ."

His pride and joy, his meal ticket, trotted off the field and stood beside him, puffing white breath in the cold air. DeLong said casually, "How do you feel?"

"Lousy," McGonigle said.

"Stale?"

"I don't know," McGonigle said. "Fed up, I guess."

"Ease off then," DeLong said. "I

"Hey, Joe! How much is three fingers of ice cream?"

don't blame you. But it'll be a nice trip and you'll have some laughs, a couple of watches, and so forth."

"I need another watch?" McGonigle said soberly. "My last count was sixteen."

For a moment the coach and the player matched gazes, then the coach said, with something of a sigh, "I've twenty-two of the damned things . . . you've got a few to go, Rusty."

"Yeah," McGonigle said. "I guess you're right."

January 1st, 1954. *University takes time out, folks. Take a look down there at that water cart going in. We inspected it this morning, and it's the doggonedest water cart we ever saw in our lives. Filled with water brought from University City, especially for those kids down there . . . Well, we're midway in the first quarter, no score, University has the ball on their own twenty-eight, second and seven. The way we see it from up here, the way you are seeing it, too, is that both teams are wary, feeling one another out. Rosinski hasn't broken loose, Rusty McGonigle has yet to show his pile-driving form. But it is only a matter of time for these superbly conditioned boys. I can truthfully say I've never seen two teams in finer condition, brought to a razor's edge for this all-important game by their coaches . . . time is in and here we go . . .*

University City, December 14th, 1953. They stood apart from the crowded station platform, holding hands amid the folds of her tan topcoat. McGonigle towered above the jostling throng, face shadowed under his broad-brimmed hat. He saw DeLong bustle down the line of cars reserved for the team, confer with the student manager, and glance around angrily. McGonigle said, "I'm missed, Kit."

"Think of that," Kathy said. "Who would miss you?"

"You," McGonigle said. "You darn well better."

"I will," Kathy said, and then became solemn. "Rusty, you feel all right?"

"Sure," he said.

"Ankle?"

"It'll last."

She said, "Straight between us, stupid . . . how do you feel?"

McGonigle said wearily, "I'm beat, Kit. Whole damned team is stale. Maybe we'll snap out of it in the sunshine. I don't know . . . all right, coach, all right!"

"One minute," DeLong shouted. "Come on, Rusty."

He bent down self-consciously and kissed her, and felt her hands tight on his forearms. He said, "Be good, ugly-face," and walked rapidly to the near step and swung aboard the train. He waved and saw her arm lift in goodby, then she turned off into the crowd. McGonigle entered the car, found a seat on the offside, and closed his eyes. Nothing like a trip, he thought, to make a fellow feel bright and eager and happy.

January 1st, 1954. Private Box. They had arrived early and spent the two hours from noon until kick-off watching the crowd, the vendors, the field, every part of this monstrous establishment which had evolved from their minds and plans some thirty years ago. The parade was over, a success, now they saw every seat filled, saw the precise way in which the human parts of this machine handled the crowd. They took their seats and lit fat cigars, and hunched forward to watch the kickoff. In two hours time they would know how their selections fared for this year. If the score was close, if the play was wide open and exciting, they could go home and break an arm patting themselves on the back. If it turned into a one-sided debacle, well, the best men sometimes guess wrong. They favored one another with quick side glances and, as the first quarter passed scorelessly, they relaxed somewhat and lit second cigars. It was a tough game, the teams seemed evenly matched, and the show was always better when the action came in the second half. One of them, a little fellow with a pug nose, pushed nervously at his black bomburg and said, "Rosinski looks better than that big moose so far."

"So far," another sage answered. "But that McGonigle is the biggest, toughest-looking ape that I ever saw. Where did they get him anyway, out of the jungle?"

"Farm," another man said. "I hear he took the place of the tractor that took the place of the horse."

They all laughed appreciatively and turned their attention to the game. Sometimes they wondered at the oddity of it all: twenty-two boys down there on a hunk of expensive grass, running, tackling, and going through mysterious motions; and a hundred thousand people packed their concrete-and-steel box to see that. Verily, human nature was strange.

"Listen," one said. "Did they get everything they wanted?"

The harried-looking man in charge of that small detail, catering to the visiting team, nodded his head. "Yes," he said, "and they got plenty. Shut up, let me enjoy the game."

Big Bowl Special, Gallup, New Mexico, December 15th, 1953. Here the sky was far away and blue, the air was sharp and thin in their lungs. They strolled the platform and watched the blanketed Indians and the locals in cowboy boots and tight pants and big hats. Photographers were busting bulbs in a mad race against time, DeLong was talking with the local Chamber of Commerce people, they were all a little weary of the train, with another night's journey before they reached the promised land. McGonigle wandered into the adjacent station hotel and looked at a display of Chimayo blankets, turquoise bracelets and rings, and Navajo rugs. He liked one rug and said, "How much?" and the boy answered, "Eighty dollars, Mr. McGonigle."

McGonigle said, "You know me . . . eighty bucks!"

The boy smiled. "Sure, we get papers here. This rug is called a Two Grayhills, very fine, very hard to weave."

"I like it," McGonigle said.

"Most people do," the boy said. "People who can really appreciate beauty."

"Thanks," McGonigle said. "You're a good salesman, but I'll tell you a secret. I've got thirty bucks to my name. Otherwise I'd buy that rug."

"I'll save it," the boy said. "Maybe you can buy it on the way back?"

McGonigle looked at the boy and framed words on his lips, and then thought, "Now here is a well-kept secret," and turned away to the train. Walking, he looked around and called, "You hold it, son, maybe I can . . . on the way back."

January 1st, 1954. It was deep into the second quarter now, the cameras were following play like great-eyed owls, swinging with the movement of man and ball. It was scoreless, two minutes remaining in the half, and University had the ball on the State forty-two, third and eight. In the huddle, dirty-faced and breathing hard, the University quarterback called the trick play, the one they had run off two hundred times. They came out over the ball, the handup was effected, McGonigle remembered his count, hit inside the right guard with the ball slapped neatly against his right hip by the quarterback, broke through to the thirty, spun off one man, ducked his head and bulled to the State eighteen before three men rode him down. He felt the ankle pain him a little beneath that weight, then they were on the fifteen, third and seven, on the twelve, fourth and four, and DeLong sent the kicker in. McGonigle blocked on the left side, heard the thud of special toe against leather, and heard the rising groan from the partisan crowd. Three points for University. Walking back to kick off, McGonigle wondered if

Illustration by BOB RIGER

he could last. Once, tackling Rosinski in the second quarter—these two All-Americans, the Polish kid from Fresno and the Scotch-Irish farm boy from the back woods—he had grinned faintly, caught Rosinski's return smile, and knew that he wasn't the only weary, stale man on this expensive turf. McGonigle kicked off, time ran out, and the half ended.

Larson held his arm as they moved down the tunnel into the dressing room. "We got 'em," Larson said. "I think they're folding a little."

"And us?" McGonigle said thinly. "We're fresh, alert, brave, clean, and reverent?"

"Aw," Larson said. "You know what I mean?"

"Sure," McGonigle said. "But I was a junior like you last year. Help me up on this table, huh?"

Big Bowl Special, between Siberia and Barstow, December 16th, 1953. The magazines were dogeared, the train was getting dirty, the desert landscape had become tiresomely monotonous to eyes that did not understand its beauty. McGonigle slouched in his seat, staring dully at cactus, sagebrush, sand, and sky, Larson and Caldwell returned from the diner and dropped into the seat facing his. Larson said, "Not far now, huh?"

"No," he said.

"How about it," Larson said. "The big one coming up!"

"You know what I just heard," Caldwell said. "The whole student body is hitch-hiking out to see the game."

He had roomed with these two, eaten with them, gotten to know them like brothers. They had all come to the university fresh from the small towns, with a fine innocence that overrode a great many unnecessary sophistries. He had watched them change — and himself too — through these years. The simple things had become boring; they had been fattened on the pap that made so many of their breed emerge from their four-year nest with wet ears and wetter brains. Now they were emulating the veriest freshman, hugely excited over another game. McGonigle stared at them dully. He felt that he was surrounded by strangers.

"Man," Larson said. "I've been waiting for a shot at this State outfit. We'd never know who was best if we hadn't got this chance."

"Does it matter?" McGonigle said. "Will it matter next year. To us . . . to them?"

"What's the matter with you?" Larson said. "You fight with Kit . . . that it, boy?"

"Sure," McGonigle said. "I always fight with Kit. Go away, let me sleep."

January 1st, 1954. . . . *Thank you, Buster Jones. Folks, that was Buster Jones, head coach of Siwash University, and we want to thank Buster for his fine comments on this first half play and wish him all the luck in the world for next season . . . and now, I see that Al Jope has worked his way through the crowd and is entering our booth, and I want him to sit down here and tell us how he feels about this game . . . hello, Al . . . Hi, Bill . . . Al, we want to thank you for fighting your way up here, because it is a fight. Well, how do you like the game thus far . . . Great, Bill, simply magnificent, wonderful bunch of boys down there; that McGonigle finally broke loose . . . Would you care to venture a prediction, Al, concerning the final score . . . Well, you know me, Bill, words come cautiously from this mouth, but I'll have to stick with State . . . All right, Al, we'll soon know how accurate you are . . . I see our time is getting short so thanks a million for coming up, Al . . . Pleasure, Bill, always a pleasure . . . Good-by, Al . . . So-long, Bill . . . Friends, that was your friend and mine, Al Jope, who can currently be seen in his latest picture, Son of Dogface, in all your local theatres . . . now the teams have returned to the field. and we're ready for the second half kickoff. We can see, and you, that both clubs look fresh and eager, they're ready for this last all-important half, and we may be sitting on a volcano . . . and here comes the kickoff. . . .*

Placid Heights Hotel, December 27th, 1953. McGonigle stood in his window and looked down upon the six acres of tennis courts, swimming pools, rose gardens, glass-topped supper rooms, and young girls in shorts and bathing suits. He saw a goodly number of his teammates lounging about the largest swimming pool, and noted how the girls apparently were drawn to that vicinity as if by magnets. Practice was finished for another day. Christmas was gone with packages from home and synthetic snow and multi-colored Christmas trees. Four more days and they'd have at it, thank God. No more pictures, no more interviews, no more starlets and parties and well-wishers and fans from home. He turned from the window as the phone rang, answered it, and heard Caldwell's voice,

"Busy, Rusty?"

"No," he said.

"Listen," Caldwell said. "You know this big party tonight, the one coach okayed, this local bigshot is giving it for us."

"Yes," he said.

"Well," Caldwell said. "The bus is waiting. Are you going or not?"

"No," he said.

"Boy," Caldwell said. "What's the matter? You broke?"

"No," he said.

"Then come on. We'll have some fun."

McGonigle said, "You run along, son. I'm going to read a book."

He hung up and returned to the window, and wished it was January 3rd, and they were on the train for home. He was stale, he knew it, DeLong knew it, he wondered if the others were as flat as himself. Well, he thought, that State outfit can't be fresh as morning dew. Rosinski took a beating this year, maybe he won't be Galahad on a cleated horse either.

He counted the money in his pocket, plenty of it now, and looked at his watch—his seventeenth. It was six here, eight in University City. He went to the phone and placed his call, and when the connection was made he said, "Kit, just sit there and tell me what it looks like outside. And no wise-cracks. I want to know."

January 1st, 1954. *That was a beautiful play . . . McGonigle hit that State line and came on through like a rocket, did you notice the fine block by his right end on the State halfback that gave McGonigle ten yards more before Rosinski brought him down . . . It is first and ten for University on their own forty-five, they lead three to nothing and we're one minute from ending the third quarter. The pace down there has not been slackened. They are still driving and hitting as they did in the opening minutes. Now the play. . . .*

McGonigle blocked the State end and felt Larson's left leg brush his side as Larson turned the end and made ten yards. They were running well now, the blocks were going on, State seemed to be softening up. McGonigle moved with his team as they carried down to the State thirty-four, and there Rosinski recovered Caldwell's fumble, and it was started all over again. McGonigle limped into position, favoring his ankle, feeling the bumps and bruises, thinking of the shower and that soft hotel bed. Rosinski was running, behind good interference, and made twelve before McGonigle dropped him. They rolled and sat up, and Rosinski said, "You're a tough farmer, boy," and McGonigle said softly. "You're not bad yourself, Stash."

. . . . This may be the turning point for State, folks. Let's watch this closely, watch that University line. Rosinski is showing his great speed and drive. . . .

The comedian with the shovel face, sitting in the front box on the fifty-yard line, huddled into his polo coat and glanced at the clock. He was

tired and dry and bored. He had watched so many of these games from this box, gone up to the broadcasting booth and spoken so many of those same old words, that he was becoming weary of it all. He turned to his wife and said, "Warm, baby?"

"All right," his wife said.

"Grit your teeth," he said. "One quarter to go."

"And then that traffic," his wife said. "I'd like to be home, soaking my feet."

. . . . Second and six, State's ball on the University twenty . . . watch Rosinski, folks . . . that was a good play . . . fourth and one on the University fifteen and we're all wondering what the State quarterback will do . . . put yourself in his shoes, folks, what would you do with a yard to go against that big University line. Try for that yard, or kick a goal and tie it up . . . now for the kick, watch the angles in these lengthening shadows . . . it's good, folks, this ball game is all tied up at three-three and there's the gun ending the third quarter. . . .

Walking out to kick off, McGonigle poked Larson and said, "You all right?"

"Sure," Larson said. "Let's get that one back."

"They're not so soft after all, eh?" McGonigle said.

"We'll take them," Larson said grimly. "Come on, Rusty, we'll open the holes, give us that drive."

. . . . A good kick. . . .

Outside the stadium, on the littered pavement, the pennant hawker conferred with the man who sold canes. The barker said, "How'd you do?"

"Fair," the cane man said. "But money's tightening up. You can tell it."

"Yeah," the hawker said. "Well, somebody must be digging up the grass in there."

They listened to swells of sound that rose from the stadium. The fourth quarter had begun and was running swiftly through the big clock.

. . . . Rosinski for five that play. . . .

"Have another drink, kiddo."

"Joe, put that bottle away, you've had too much."

"Nah, another li'l' one won't hurt . . . who's ahead, kiddo?"

. . . . Six minutes to go, folks, and neither team can dent the other's stone-wall defense. . . .

In the private box, the little man in the homburg hat turned to his friend and said, "We'll retire the balance of the bonds this year. Next year we should be completely in the black."

"Yes," his friend said, "but look at those elephants. A tie score, what we don't need most of is a tie score."

"Now," the little man said, "a tie means they gave their best, nobody gets whipped, everybody goes home happy."

"Yes, that's true."

"Of course," the little man said.

. . . . Three minutes to play, folks. This may be State's last chance. . . .

McGonigle was weary to the bones. He glanced at the clock as the time out ended and they took the ball on their own thirty-three after the missed field goal by State. He was bushed, the team was bushed, State was hanging on by a tongue and a knee. Rosinski was so tired he couldn't flex his knees over there across the line. McGonigle battered through for six yards, he went for eight, he drove for ten, there was a minute left and the crowd was roaring and his ankle was burning with fire and his head felt like an old man's cane with knobs all over the handle.

. . . . Thirty seconds, time for about two plays, so watch for a University pass, they're on the State forty-one . . . no, it's McGonigle into the line and he's through and he's running and watch that block, this may be it. . . .

He came through and had just enough strength to buck off the linebacker's tackle, and then he was in the clear and Rosinski was angling over, he was at the twenty, the fifteen, the ten, Rosinski's face was contorted with effort, they came together on the five and slid gently against the goal line mark board and lay there while the official marked the spot of out-of-bounds, on the three, and the gun sounded and Rosinski grinned and shook his hand and said, "That finished me, farm boy."

"Me too," McGonigle said.

They shook hands again, and helped each other up, and Rosinski said, "How about getting together after supper, huh. I'll come down to your hotel, we'll have a beer."

"Yeah," McGonigle said. "That's the word I want to hear . . . we'll have a beer."

. . . . Greatest game we've seen in years, these fine boys, fighting to the last drop of their energy. Superb to the last play. And now for the recapitulation. . . .

The little man slammed a fist into his homburg and spoke with quiet fury. "One lousy yard, think of it; one stinking, lousy yard and he had it. And it ends a tie."

January 3rd, 1954, Big Bowl Special, west of Barstow. He lounged in the seat, feeling very clean all over, and very much alive to the passing desert outside his window. Larson came from the diner and sat beside him and said,

"Good to be going home."

"Yes," McGonigle said.

"Some party the other night."

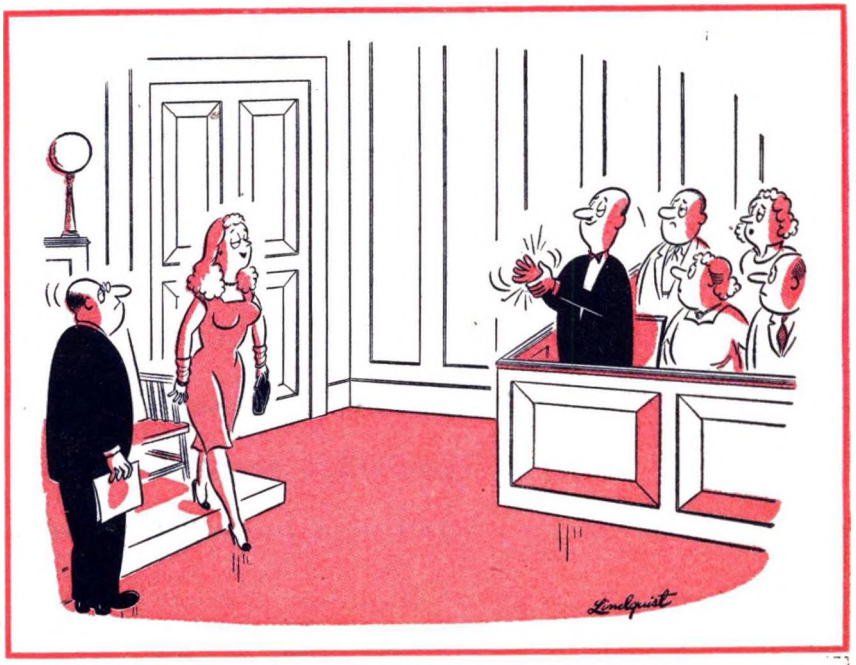
"Yes," McGonigle said. "Some gal you had. I heard about her."

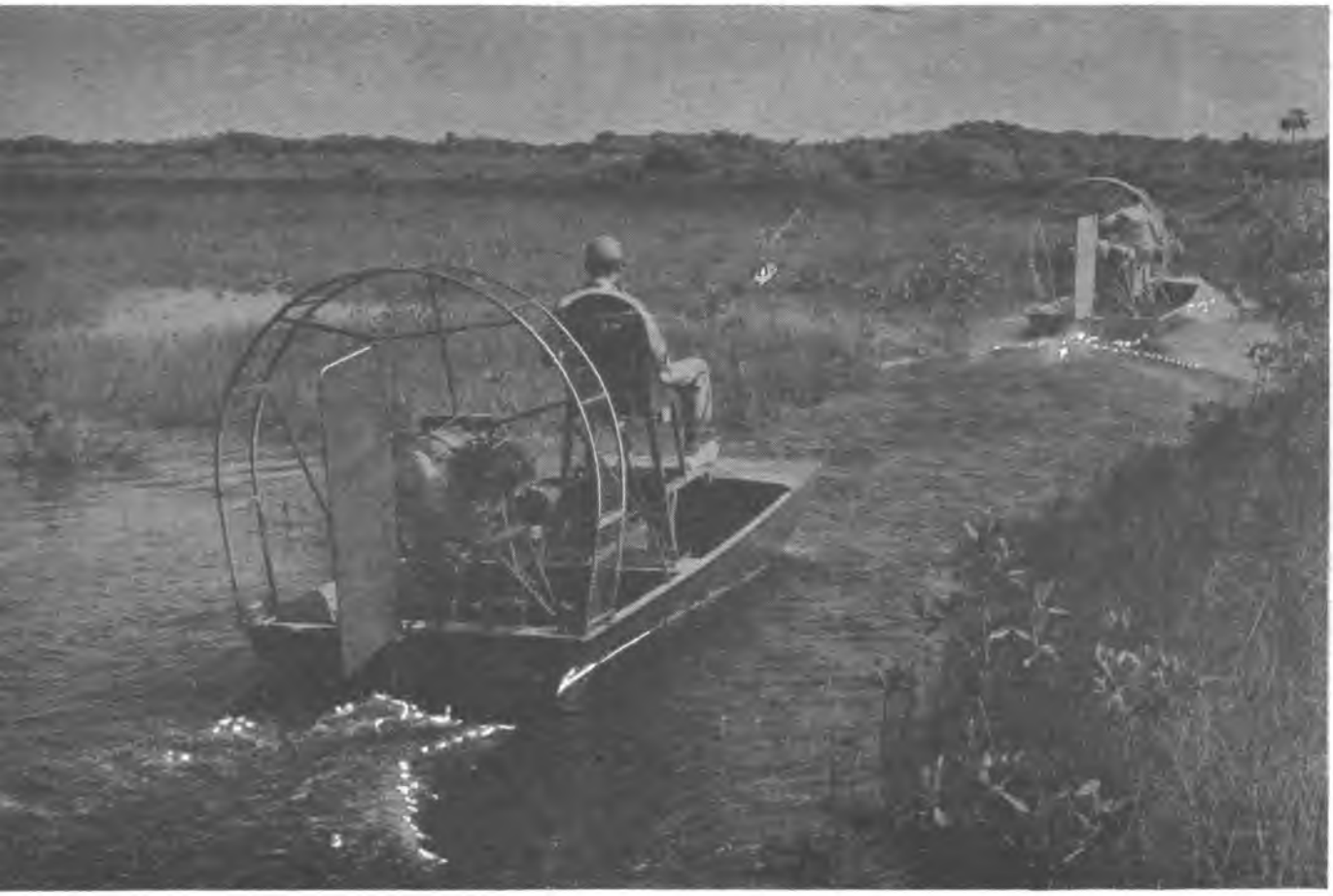
"Sure was," Larson said. "She promised to write."

"She won't," McGonigle said. "Unless you come back next year."

"Yes," Larson said. "I suppose you're right. Well, what are you gonna do now?"

"Why," McGonigle said innocently. "I'm waiting for tomorrow morning. I want to buy a rug." •





Night Riders of the Florida

The most dangerous transportation in the world is the airboat, driven at night through the Everglade swamps at speeds up to 100 MPH. If that doesn't get you killed, there are snakes and 'gators and bootleggers and men jacking deer who shoot first and ask later.

Swamps

By LIONEL WHITE

It was almost midnight. The heat given off by the tiny lightwood fire made the damp air sweltering and oppressive. But the thin flickering pitch-pine flame was welcome and offered at least some symbol of civilization and comfort in the wilderness of strange crying sounds which had turned the sub-tropic night into a weird fantasy.

Then, suddenly, far to the southeast, there was another sound, an alien noise in a nightmare of strange and unreal noises. Gradually this new sound took precedence over the normal night cries of the marshes and I knew almost at once that it was the deep throbbing roar of an airplane engine.

The man across the fire from me shifted his position and in the dim reflection of the

blaze I could see him lift his leathery face and cock his head as he listened.

"It's one of them," he said at last, his voice a soft, southern drawl.

"Frogger?" I asked.

The flames shot up suddenly and the fire cracked as a pocket of pitch opened. There was an amused expression on the deputy game warden's face.

"Who knows?" he said. "Could be and could not. About forty percent of them airboats belong to froggers. Fifty percent are either bootleggers or they're out jacking alligators."

"And the other ten percent?"

"The other ten?" The game warden laughed. "They're crazy, too," he said. "Probably the craziest of all, because they do it for sport. Some to fish, some to hunt in the season, and some just for the hell of it. But there's one thing you can be sure of, anybody who gets into an airboat, for any reason at all, legitimate or otherwise, and starts out after dark across the Everglades at anywhere from sixty to a hundred miles an hour, is crazy!"

I nodded.

I looked away from the fire to where the strange, outlandish looking contraption lay beside the ditch. The airboat that Jim, the deputy game warden, and I, were about to board and take off into the swamps. I shuddered and suddenly the fire looked very cheerful and even the booming chorus from the frogs, the screaming, crying night birds and the grunting of crashing alligators, seemed momentarily friendly.

JIM shifted his position again and lighted a cigarette.

"We leave in a few minutes," he said. He laughed, for no reason that I could understand, and then added, "There are three ways you can get killed tonight."

I started to laugh, too. It wasn't much of a joke, but I put it down to this thin, sardonic man's odd sense of humor. From the very first, when I had met him the day before and asked to be taken for a night ride out into the glades in his airboat, he had seemed extraordinarily amused.

But a moment later, as he continued to talk, I suddenly stopped laughing. He wasn't making jokes.

"Three ways," he said. "First there are the snakes—cottonmouth water moccasins, rattlers and coral snakes. You don't have to worry about the wildcats and the 'gators. There are plenty of them, but they're pretty harmless unless you go out of your way to ask for trouble."

I automatically began to shake my head. I wasn't going out of my way to ask for any trouble at all. Apparently, in asking to take this trip, I'd already asked for enough trouble.

"That's one way," Jim continued. "The second way," and he looked over at the craft which was to take us deep into the swamp lands, "is the airboat. We hit a stump, or maybe a big 'gator, and the boat stops. We keep on going. Or maybe we stop, and the boat keeps on going and the propeller gets you. Chance you have to take."

I felt a chill go up my spine and I couldn't help looking at the knifelike blades of the short propeller, unprotected at the rear of the engine some five feet from where I would be sitting.

"The third killer," Jim said, "is man. More than half of the boats out on the glades tonight are being driven by men who are there for no legal reason. The bootleggers, I'm not interested in. That isn't my department. The froggers know me and most of them are my friends. But the alligator hunters and the boys after illegal game are the ones I want.

"The only trouble is, we might accidentally come up on a still and a lot of these crackers shoot first and ask questions afterward. It's pretty safe to kill a man out here. A lot of these boys, the ones you met awhile ago, don't consider murder much of a crime. To them it's just an occupational inconvenience." . . .

It sounds fantastic, almost childish now, as I write the words. But as I sat there with Jim and remembered back over the last few hours, it didn't sound at all fantastic. It sounded quite believable.

The whole thing had started as a result of a conversation with a neighbor of mine. I live down in Florida, in a nice, quiet little resort town on the eastern coast. To me, and to the northerners and midwestern, middle-class, middle-aged people who visit this town, Florida is largely considered a pleasant, sun-drenched vacationland where oranges sell for a penny apiece, the dog tracks and night spots offer sophisticated entertainment and the long sandy sweep of the beaches offer health and rest.

But there is another Florida, some dozen or so miles to the west of these pleasant, palm-lined, well cared for streets of low modern homes and motels and tourists rests. This Florida is a vast, never ending wilderness of unbroken swampland and uncharted miles of jungle grass. A wild, untamed savannah of reeds and stunted palmettos, cypress and bamboo and cane. Most of it is between six inches and six feet under water.

This neighbor of mine, Tex Warrington, who combines his duties as the high school football coach with Everglade ranching, put it this way:

"You say you're a writer. Well, you should get out west of town. See something of the real Florida. Get hold of one of the game wardens and have him take you out in an airboat—that's the only kind of transportation which has ever licked the glades. Go over to Fellsmere and talk with the froggers. Fellsmere—that's probably the toughest town for its size on the North American continent!"

I figured Tex knew what he was talking about. He's pretty tough himself. An ex-professional football player, an all-around athlete who had run for sheriff down in Indian River County, which is a job that no insurance company wants anything to do with, and a rancher on one of the most treacherous and difficult pieces of land in the world, Tex knows his way around.

I FINALLY found my deputy game warden, who, because he has a lot of friends among the froggers and probably more than a few among the part-time froggers who do a little distilling on the side, didn't want me to use his name. We met just after dusk in the dining room of a boarding house in Fellsmere, a town of weather-beaten, sun-bleached shanties, one bar, two or three general stores, a few neat cottages and the shattered, stuccoed remains of a real estate development left over from the boom days of 1926.

There's nothing in Fellsmere but a sugar mill, which operates with imported Cuban and Jamaican labor for two months each year. Nothing but a few ranchers and the froggers, who make the tiny village a headquarters.

They're a tough, silent, violent breed of men, these froggers. Dour and uncommunicative, they are almost without exception wool-hatted crackers from Georgia or Florida—and proud of it. They don't take to strangers; they don't even take to each other. They're loners—they frog by themselves, hunt and fish by themselves and live alone or with their faded wives and scrawny young in small shanties out in the marshlands. But each night before they take off for the dark trails of the water jungle, they come into Fellsmere and have supper and a few drinks.

Because I was with Jim, who most of them knew and whom they seemed to tolerate and trust, they curtly nodded when I was introduced. But there was no camaraderie or hail-fellow-well-met atmosphere about it and each man bought his own whisky and paid for it and later drifted off into the damp, heavy, blackness of the night.

Jim and I had frog legs which were as big as the drum sticks from full-grown chickens, swamp cabbage and hush puppies for dinner, followed by coffee which was blacker than the heart of a Havana harlot, and then we went to the bar and downed two shots of bourbon which was one hundred

proof and slid down like carbolic acid. Later we drove over a one-lane sand levee for several miles to the southwest of town until we came to a dead end beside a slough.

There was a small shanty at the end where Jim parked his jeep and beside the shanty was the airboat. Jim opened the Yale lock on the shanty door and took out two five-gallon cans of gas and filled the tank in front of the motor, tossed a gas lantern, a flashlight, a .30-30 rifle and a gallon jug of water into the hull.

The airboat lay in a small, shallow pool of water, completely surrounded by endless stretches of sawtooth marsh grass. It was about fourteen feet long by six feet wide, with a depth of twelve or fourteen inches.

Built like no other water-going craft in the world, the airboat is the only vehicle in the country which can race at a hundred miles an hour and for which you need no license—not even a driver's. And yet it is probably the most dangerous speed conveyance ever constructed by man.

The bottom is made of a single sheet of very light metal alloy, less than a tenth of an inch thick, which is normally used as sheathing for airplane wings. It is mirror smooth to slide over the grass and the water. Actually, it works almost as well on land, if there is any moisture at all.

The engine itself is a small four-cylinder Lycoming airplane motor, set up on a tripod at the rear of the boat. A short plane propeller is driven from the rear of the engine. Behind that is a four-by-six foot, iron pipe-bound rudder. An Army surplus jeep tank holds the high-octane fuel.

The bow of the boat is square, as is the stern. In the bow, which raises slightly in order to knock down the three-foot-tall grass as the boat rushes forward, is a four-foot-high stool, built of iron piping and holding a small seat with no arms or back. Here's where the driver sits. In front of him is a stick which he uses for steering and his right foot rests on an old door hinge which has been rigged up for a throttle. There are, obviously, no brakes.

I climbed into the boat and Jim tells me to squat between the braces of the driver's seat.

"And hang on," he warns. "This thing really takes off."

A moment later and he is at the rear of the craft, slowly pulling the prop over. It takes several minutes before the motor catches and he has to be extremely careful to duck back each time he jerks it over. More than one airboat man has lost an arm when he was careless.

The motor itself runs from a magneto and there is no battery, generator, self starter or muffler. Everything has been sacrificed to keep the weight down.

The only light comes from the single bulb headlamp attached to Jim's hat, from which twin wires lead down his back to a pair of dry cells.

As Jim guns the motor, the sudden roar drowns every other night sound and a moment later I feel the movement of the boat as it surges forward.

And then I had it!

At one time or another during the last thirty years I've driven racing cars, motorcycles, speed boats, hydroplanes. Not too long ago I was the passenger in a jet which dove through a bank of cirrus clouds at better than six hundred miles an hour. But up until this moment, I had never really known what a thrill speed really was. All those other deals were strictly for children and old ladies.

We left the pond doing about twelve miles an hour; by the time we had travelled over a small bank and onto an endless plane of marsh grass, the craft was doing around twenty-five. Jim pushed the steering stick and the boat took a neat turn, just missing a clump of knee cypress. Then he opened her up.

A blast of hot wind took my breath away, spray blinded me and an avalanche of bugs, spiders, twigs and just plain hunks of muck battered my face and body. I felt like a man riding an insane surf board across an infested prairie in front of an atomic bomb. There is nothing else like it in the world.

Suddenly a knoll, covered by a thick growth of straight pine, loomed up directly in front of us and I could sense it as Jim pulled the rudder far to the left. But the airboat didn't turn. It went into a sliding skid and for a matter of some two hundred yards we took off at an unbelievable oblique, a sheet of moss-laden water curving high into the air as the sharp side of the boat dug in. We missed the knoll by inches and Jim throttled down the motor to a slow chug-chug and leaned down and yelled at me.

"Get wet?" he asked.

Wet? I was drenched.

His light outlined my sodden clothes and he laughed. He headed for the knoll and pulled up to dry land and cut the motor. I started to get out.

"Stay where you are," he tersely ordered. "These heads," he indicated the knoll with his hand, "are the most dangerous spots in the glades. This is where you find the rattlers. They crawl up on the heads to get out of the wet."

The moon had come out and there were a hundred thousand stars twinkling in the arc of the heavens and it was possible to see almost as well as in daylight. As I stood up, Jim suddenly leaned forward. He had a stick in his hand and with one end of it he dug at the bottom of the boat, less than a foot from where I stood, dripping wet. He jerked the stick, and a two-and-a-half-foot snake sailed through the air and out into the water with a soft splash.

"Probably just a little old water snake," he said casually. "Must of picked him up on that turn. Gotta be careful, however," he said. "Get a moccasin in every now and then."

Suddenly I was as cold as I was wet.

He had a rubber poncho wrapped up in the small box bolted to the side of the boat and he took it out and gave it to me.

"Those snakes," he said, "don't let 'em worry you too much. I have a snake kit on board."

The idea, somehow or other, failed to comfort me.

We had on high boots and a few minutes later, Jim handed me a long flashlight and suggested we look over the knoll.

"Like to show what a real rattler looks like," he said. "But just be careful where you walk. Stop the second you hear a rattle and back slowly away. They get up to ten and twelve feet long around here and they're as big around as your leg. They got a head like a closed fist and when they strike they can knock a man down."

We each carried six-foot-long clubs, which Jim said are better weapons than a gun when you suddenly come on a rattler. But we were out of luck—or in luck, according to how you look at it. If there were rattlers on the head, they didn't show themselves.

"It's the moccasins which are bad," he told me as we made our way back to the airboat. "They give no warning and often they climb up into the trees and hang down and hit you as you pass underneath a low hanging limb. Got to watch the moccasins."

Later he told me about the coral snake, a small, eighteen-inch reptile with multi-colored rings completely circling its body.

"Look just like garter snakes," he said. "But really bad. Their venom doesn't enter the bloodstream; it hits the nervous system. Only good thing about them, they have no fangs so they don't actually strike. What they do is bite and hang on and as soon as the skin is punctured the venom flows into the wound through their hollow tongue. You have exactly seven seconds from the time they get you until the poison enters your body. If it does you are dead within a half hour and no one yet has found any way of saving you. Biggest danger is at night

when you might not see or feel one until after you're hit."

I stepped back into the airboat.

"Mind if I just stand up in back of you and hang on to your seat?" I asked. "I'd feel a little happier."

"O.K.," he said. "But be sure to hang on."

He didn't have to tell me. I was frozen to the iron rungs of his driving chair as we again took off.

That next hour was an experience which I shall never forget. During the few brief intervals when I was able to take my hypnotized eyes from the racing contours of the swelling marshes into which we raced at what seemed an unbelievably fantastic rate of speed, I looked up at the sky and from the position of the stars we seemed to be heading due south. How Jim kept a course, without compass or any light or landmark from which to make a reckoning, I shall never know. And yet he seemed to know what he was doing and just where he was going.

The rich, heavy night air of the glades billowed out my poncho and the roar of the engine drowned out all other sounds. Several times I felt low hanging branches crash against my head and body; Spanish moss hit my face and the wind tore it away within a split second. We drove headlong through swarms of mosquitoes and bugs and spiders, although what the spiders were doing in mid-air I'll never guess.

TIME after time we caught up with convoys of startled duck, and several long legged herons screeched and spread their wings barely in time to keep from being slaughtered.

The knowledge that at any second our shallow craft could tear its bottom off on a concealed stump or cypress knee kept me in a constant state of suspense. I knew only too well what would happen if it did.

With luck, the best we could hope for was to be stranded somewhere in the heart of the Everglades with a gallon of fresh water and two sandwiches. Getting out on foot would be an utter impossibility. The planes, and other airboats, after twelve or fourteen hours, would come out and look for us. If we were lucky, exceptionally lucky, we might be alive by the time they found us.

Once during that hour, Jim cut the motor and swung the boat in a wide arc. As the airboat came to a standstill beside a growth of tall, rank green saw grass, Jim leaned back to speak to me.

"That there," he said, indicating the grass in front of us, "is an alligator hole. You ever going walking around in this part of the country, stay clear of that tall, dark green grass. Beneath it is water which may be twenty to fifty feet deep. Either that or quicksand. And that's where the alligators hang out. The really big ones."

Later he told me that the idea that only crocodiles are dangerous is so much eye wash.

"Sure," he said, "a crocodile will attack you—and kill you—as soon as look at you. But don't think those 'gators won't give you trouble, too. They're meat eaters. You bother one of 'em, or just happen to walk past one when he's hungry, and he'll grab you and pull you under quick as lightning."

There was no alligator in sight at the hole and after a minute or so Jim gunned the engine and we were off again.

It must have been around two o'clock when we finally saw the flickering lights of a fire far off to the south. Jim headed the airboat in that direction, alternately flashing on and off his own cyclopean beam. Soon an answering light signalled back.

"Froggers," Jim yelled back over his shoulder as he started to slow down after cutting the motor.

There were four airboats pulled up around the small hammock and the drivers sat on their haunches around the flickering blaze. Tin cups in their hands held black coffee and they stared at us wordlessly as we approached.

Jim spoke under his breath to one of the men and a moment later we each had a cup of steaming coffee. It tasted a little like turpentine but it was certainly welcome. After a few minutes, talk started up and the men discussed the night's catch.

The froggers use a long-handled gig—a sort of two-pronged fork on a ten-foot bamboo pole. They spot the frogs in the moonlight by the sparkle from their eyes as they stare out just above the water line. The big frogs, the ones worth catching, usually measure about an inch and a half between the eyes, although often the eyes of large spiders look exactly the same. As the frogger approaches, he cuts his speed to about twelve miles an hour and leans to the side and spears the frog on his hook as he goes by. He quickly jerks it off the gig and dumps it into a long tin can which is nailed to the underpart of his seat. The tin can is opened at the bottom end, which is attached to a gunny sack.

Later, when they get back to their shacks, the frogs are skinned and the heavy meaty legs and part of the backs are sold. They get from a dollar to a dollar and a half a pound for the meat and a good man, on a lucky night, may take as many as sixty or eighty pounds.

Sounds like nice money? It's the toughest dollar you could ever earn. Outside of the work and the strain, the only thing you risk is your life.

The Floridians get green frog, which are very similar to the northern bull frog. They also get the grass and the leopard frog, but the huge jumbo frogs which are taken in the Louisiana swamps have all been gigged out.

Frogs come and go and there doesn't seem to be much sense as to when they might be around. As a result, the froggers have no special territory and no special runs. They try different locations each night and must have an absolutely perfect sense of direction in order to avoid being lost.

THE routes they travel are unmarked and the froggers can follow neither roads nor streams. As a result, they never know exactly what sort of terrain they may be driving over. Able to see only between fifty and a hundred yards, at best, and driving snorting, speeding demons which take at least two or three hundred yards to bring to a stop at high speed, they are in ever constant danger of crashing into trees or stumps.

The only break they get is the fact there are no fences or houses or barns to watch out for. No man has yet figured how to fence in the Everglades.

It has only been within the last few years that the froggers themselves have been able to get deep into the swamp lands. Before the advent of the airboat, the sole means of travel was by poling slow, flat-bottom barges or the use of impossibly expensive wide-tracked swamp buggies.

There was a low, desultory conversation between the four men as they drank the remainder of the coffee and after a few minutes they got to their feet and started for their boats. They muttered muted goodbys as they passed. As the small fire began to die out the last of their engines roared to life and they left us.

Jim turned to me.

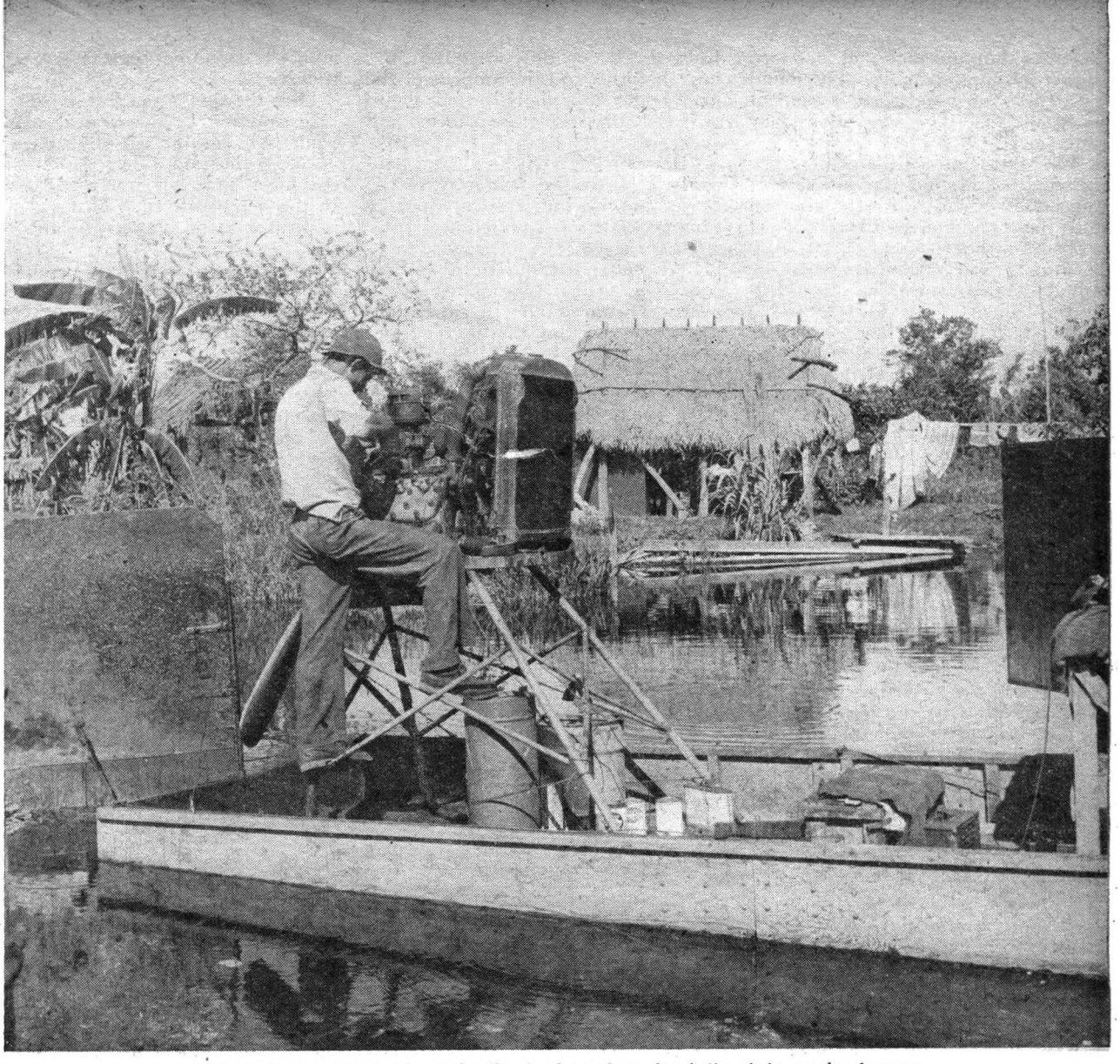
"The fat one," he said. "Notice him?"

I nodded. One of the froggers had been a huge, six-foot-three giant with a girth like a beer barrel. His feet, like those of the others, were bare. He wore a torn black felt hat and he had the same half sullen, half alert expression as his companions.

"He was no frogger," Jim said.

"How could you tell?" I asked.

"Well, in the first place, I was watching when he got into his boat. He didn't have a gig. Another thing, that boat of his. Must have been about a hundred and forty horse power engine. That sort of job costs too much for an honest frogger. Also he had a couple of rifles strapped to the legs of the seat. Isn't unusual, of



Airboats have a casual, almost fragile air about them that belies their speeds of up to 100 MPH. Most are home-made and look it (note the rudder), but are rugged and serviceable.

course, for a frogger to have a gun along. Most of them do. But they don't carry a pair of guns."

"What was he then?" I asked.

"Could be a bootlegger," Jim said. "But probably not: probably he was out after either alligators or deer. They jack the deer and sell the meat around some of the fancy clubs in Palm Beach and Miami. If he's only a bootlegger, I'm not interested. But if he's jacking game, then he's my boy."

Jim stretched to his feet and said, "Let's get going."

I thought of my nice soft bed in a nice quiet town some many miles to the northeast of us. I thought of those two rifles strapped to the legs of the chair of the fat man's airboat. I felt very chilly.

This time it was different and Jim didn't drive pell mell into the night at top speed, crashing over the tall grass and ducking madly around heads and hummocks. Instead, he would travel forward for several minutes in a straight line at medium speed, and then cut the motor and sit for minutes and listen.

Each time after we stopped there would be a dead silence for several moments. And then it would start up again, the weird, nightmarish cries of the birds, the screams of the loons, the grunts of the alligators. The night was alive with animal life. Several times I thought I heard the distant sounds of a motor and once I was badly startled when, just after the boat stopped, I looked up to see a pair of wide yellow eyes staring at me from a clump of brush several feet away.

I tapped Jim on the shoulder and he looked in the direction I pointed.

"Wildcat," he said, bored. "Won't hurt you." He picked up a stick from the bottom of the boat and threw it in the direction of the eyes. In a second they disappeared.

It must have been around four o'clock when Jim finally heard the sound he'd been listening for. We were floating in the center of a shallow pond and he had taken a couple of sandwiches from a cellophane bag. We munched them and drank a couple of cans of beer to wash them down. I was just about to puncture tri-cornered holes in a second round of beer when it came.

It was thin and high and far away. But it was unmistakable. The sound of a rifle shot. And then, a moment later, the first shot was followed by three more.

Jim had the propeller turning within seconds. He loosened the flap of the holster at his hip as he climbed into the seat and yelled back for me to pick up the .30-30.

"Don't," he screamed above the sound of the motor, "use it. Just keep it handy."

We took off once more, and this time we didn't dawdle along at any half speed. Jim opened the throttle full and we headed in the direction of the rifle shots.

How he managed it, I'll never know. Although the moon had begun to wane and there was still a lot of light, actually, at the speed we crashed through the night, you couldn't see more than a couple of hundred yards at best. On all sides were clumps of trees, low growing palmettoes, high swamp grass, knolls, heads of pine and now and then wide stretches of clear water.

But Jim avoided all obstructions and headed the airboat as though he were following a radio beam. Within ten minutes we were able to make out the flame of a camp fire far ahead.

He must have heard us coming downwind almost as soon as we sighted the fire. For a moment, as we closed in, the searching beam of a large searchlight flashed across the swamp and then went out. The boat was between us and the fire itself and even as we came within shooting distance, we could see its outlines as it suddenly started up and then turned off into the black of the night.

We were some hundred yards behind the airboat as we passed the fire and our own craft must have been doing at least ninety miles an hour.

It wasn't hard to follow. The driver, in order to see at all, had to use his own headlight. Once, as we closed in toward him, we were near enough to see that there was only one man aboard the craft. He loomed up gigantic in the blackness of the night and as his airboat screamed across the tall grass, he looked very much like some grotesque dervish astraddle a step ladder, racing madly into purgatory.

Suddenly the light ahead went out, the man and the boat as quickly disappeared into the blackness of the night.

Jim cut the engine at once and in the dead silence which followed, I listened closely for the sound of the other motor. There was nothing but complete stillness.

For minutes on end we stood there in the boat, tense and still, as we listened. It was only after the frogs and the birds and the animals of the glades once more took up their nightly chorus that Jim turned to me and spoke.

"He can be anywhere," he said softly. "Maybe fifty feet away; maybe buried in some hideaway on a nearby hummock. There's no telling."

He shrugged.

"We better get out of here, anyway," he said. "Sometimes when they get your silhouette just right against the horizon, they'll take a pot shot."

He started the motor and the airboat swung around. Minutes later we were back beside the camp fire where we had first sighted the man. Jim held the butt of the gun in his right hand as he stepped ashore. I was following closely as I heard him suddenly whistle softly beneath his breath.

At first I didn't see what it was, and then, as he tossed a log on the fire, I looked down and for a second I thought I was going to faint.

It was still alive and moving and it looked exactly like the half skinned body of a man.

I retched and looked away and a moment later I was sorry I did. The ground seemed covered with them. Later, we counted seven in all.

We had come up on the alligator hunter as he was in the midst of skinning the last one. The one I had first seen. The others he'd already skinned and as we found no trace of the hides, he must have had them in the airboat when he took off. The final one, the one we had interrupted his work on, must have been about six or seven feet long.

There were a series of bullet holes neatly drilled across the wide forehead. The poacher had tied the mouth shut with a heavy cord, laid the animal on its back and started to peel it from the tail up. He'd gotten about half way through. But in spite of the bullets in its head and the hide half off its body, the great saurian still had a breath of life and still struggled. Jim finished him off with a dum-dum from his .45 as I went over to the edge of the water and lost my dinner.

Later we made a second fire some fifty yards away from the scene of the slaughter and Jim took a brandy flask and handed it to me. After a long slug I felt better and I walked over the small knoll as the deputy game warden searched it. He came across a discarded deer skin, the head of which carried a small pair of antlers.

"Our baby goes in for a little of everything," he said. "Those 'gators —he didn't get them all tonight. You can be sure of that. Probably been hiding them out here for a week or so and was skinning them all at one time."

"But the shot we heard?" I asked. "He wouldn't be shooting off a gun while he was skinning, would he?"

"No," Jim said, "that was just his bad luck. Probably some other jacker in the neighborhood. This guy just happened to be between us and the shot."

There was a small lean-to on the hummock and behind it was a large copper pot and several pieces of coiled brass piping.

"This guy," Jim said, "was an all-around boy. Must have been doing a little bootlegging on the side when the hunting got slow."

Later, he told me that the Everglade bootleggers have become very modern. They no longer use wood fires to heat their mash, but bring out drums of bottled gas from their homes. What with the skyhigh federal tax on whisky, plus the extraordinary high state tax, they do pretty well.

"They do well," Jim said, "but God help the customers. Most of the stuff they distill would kill anyone but a field hand or a cracker."

The wind had died down and the vermillion yellow rim of the sun was just beginning to show over the eastern horizon as we finally left the hummock. Jim brought along the alligator skin as well as the pieces from the still.

"He won't be back for them," he said, his soft voice sardonic. "By next week he may be five miles away or he may be two hundred miles away. But you can be sure of one thing—he'll be back in business."

Racing smoothly across the endless marshlands into the morning sun and the startling, almost shockingly beautiful crash of a new dawn, I felt a strange sense of exultation as the roar of the airplane motor reverberated in my ears. I tried to remember the weird, unholy sounds of the night, the strange unreality of it, the sense of fear and lostness which had surrounded me.

It all seemed like some fragment of of a nightmare which had never really happened at all.

Later that morning I lay in a pair of shorts on the white sands of the beach not many blocks from my home and I watched the figures of the tourists from the north as they walked by in their gaily colored shirts, their beautifully revealing bathing suits and their fresh sun-tans.

They were under the illusion that they were visiting Florida. But they weren't. Florida lay, grim and monotonous and dangerous, stretching for mile after weary mile, not far to the west of them. •

The Guy with Celery in his Ears

The latest boff in the story-telling dodge is the shaggy dog joke or the bop joke, both of which are sweeping the country. For example, listen to this one . . .

By HAROLD MEHLING and HARRY KURSH

A Fellow came down the balcony steps of a big New York movie palace one day and, as he headed toward the street, he stopped and talked to the ticket-taker at the door.

"Do you know there's a bear up there in your balcony?" he said.

The ticket taker sneered and went back to his ticket-taking. "Damndest business for screwballs I've ever been in," he growled to himself. A few minutes later, a woman emerged from the balcony; she looked frightened.

"There's a big brown bear up there!" she wailed.

After two more such reports, the ticket-taker summoned the manager, and the latter, accompanied by a posse of armed ushers, headed for the craggy fastnesses of the gallery. Sure enough, there sitting in the second row, fourth seat in, was a big brown bear, his thighs crossed comfortably, a cigar in his mouth, and his front paws clasped benignly across his hairy paunch. He was watching the screen and talking occasionally to a man at his right. The manager and the ushers addressed the latter.

"Is that your bear?" they asked.

"Well," the man answered, "he came in with me."

"But," the manager spluttered, "you can't bring a bear in here!"

"Why not?" the man said.

"Well—well," the manager stuttered, "it's just not *right*, that's all. After all, how do you know he likes it?"

"Oh," the man said, "he likes it. After all, he liked the book."

That, friends, is known as a shaggy dog joke.

You've probably heard it, or its counterpart, yourself many times lately, and you probably have your own favorite shaggy dog story which you'd tell right now, if we'd let you. For the shaggy dog story, and the bop story, are America's current favorite forms of humor, the successors to the ancient Pat-and-Mike chestnuts which delighted our parents.

Who originated the shaggy dog story, or precisely when it took over as the nation's leading laugh-getter, isn't known. There is even mystery as to the first genius who told one of these things and managed to get a laugh.

For a shaggy dog yarn is tricky that way; it either brings the house down, or leaves its hearers stupified, and wondering if maybe they've suddenly lost their senses of humor. There are those who say, in fact, that you have to be a little bit shaggy yourself to get a real yack out of a shaggy dog anecdote.

For example, take this one:

A FELLOW was riding the subway and minding his own business, when a greasy and thoroughly-repulsive gent at his left poked an elbow into the first man's ribs and, with a snarl, growled: "Hey, whassa next station?"

"Twenty-third Street," said the first man, haughtily, pulling himself away slightly.

In a few moments, there was another dig in his ribs, harder this time, and again that growl: "Hey, whassa next station?"

"Twenty-eighth Street," the man said.

A minute later, jab, and "Hey, whassa next station?"

"Thirty-*fourth* Street!" By now, the respondent's ribs were raw and aching, and he seethed like a sunken hot spring. Once more the jab came, and the growl: "Hey, whassa next station?" The man wheeled and literally shouted at his tormentor.

"Forty-second Street—*Will ya!*"

Now the narrator of the above, an editor named Burtt Evans, admits that he prefaces it with a warning; this, he tells his hearers, is a story so shaggy, so completely from out in left field, that you either break up the crowd with it, or leave your hearers with one eye cocked, as they edge slightly away from you and toward a position of safety.

But it's still a shaggy dog story, which, in essence, doesn't have to involve an animal of any kind, and rarely a dog, shaggy or otherwise. All a shaggy dog yarn does do is build up a highly-improbable set of circumstances, lead them to a climax—and then set the whole mess right on top of its head. Like this:

A lad went to the race track one afternoon, and bet on eight straight beetles, all of whom staggered in last. Yet, next to him, was a crummy little character who couldn't even read the tote board, and yet who had the winner of every single race.

"How do you *do* it?" he finally asked. "Here I stayed up all night doping out the odds on today's card; I bought every tip sheet I could lay my hands on, and I had my bets down to such a science I just couldn't lose. But I did—and you've won every race. How? I don't get it."

"Well," the little man said, "it's simple. I prayed. Before I come to the track each morning, I stop in at that little church on Beckley Street, and I pray. And my prayers are always answered; I win every day."

So the guy figured he'd try the same thing. And the next day, as he headed for the track, he saw a little white church on a hill, and he went in and prayed, just the way he'd been told. Then he went to the track—where he again lost every single race.

He was walking dismally toward the train back to the city, when he spotted his friend from the day before. He almost leaped on him. "I did it just like you said," he screamed. "I went into church and I prayed as I never have before—and I still lost. You tricked me!"

"Now, wait a minute, pal," the little man said. "Did you go to the little church on Beckley Street, like I said?"

"No," the other guy said, "Beckley Street's outa the way for me. But I *did* go to church. I went to the one on Carmer Street."

The little man groaned and rolled his eyes. "Well, no wonder!" he said, "You went to the wrong church—the Carmer Street one's for the trotters."

ONE of the nice things about the shaggy dog story is that you don't have to be particularly good at story telling to put one over. You don't have to be good at accents, or at acting out a sequence, or spell-binding your hearers with your golden voice. All you have to do is state the case; if your hearers are shaggy, you're in. For example:

The one of the man in the bar is getting pretty tired now, but it's still good if you find someone just in from Outer Mongolia who isn't hep. Seems the man came in and promptly ordered two martinis, one of which he drank himself, the other he tossed into his vest pocket. Finally, after he'd done this five times, the bartender got curious. "What's with the drink in the pocket?" he asked.

"None of your damn business," the drinker said, staring at the barman belligerently. "I've paid for my drinks, and I can do what I want with them. Now scram, before I bust you one."

Just then a mouse stuck his head blearily out of the man's vest pocket, and, in a high, squeaky voice, said, "Yeah, and that goes for your damn cat, too!"

Another veteran bar story concerns the man with celery in his ears. Seems this fellow came in the saloon one night with a stalk of celery sticking out of each ear. The bartender, however, probably the one who got his come-uppance from the mouse and his friend, knew enough to ask no questions.

The next night, the man was back, still with the celery in his ears. And a third and a fourth night, and the business was repeated. On the fifth night, the man came in—and he had no celery in his ears. This time he had a banana protruding from each ear. The bartender's patience was at an end.

"Look," he groaned, "every night you come in here with celery in your ears, and now you come in with bananas. What's it all about? Why the bananas?"

The drinker looked up blandly. "Why, it's simple," he explained. "The market was all out of celery."

GET it? No sense to it at all. Just the improbable set of circumstances, and the ridiculous, no-explanation ending. The kind of story your grandpappy, who probably felt he had a hell of a good sense of humor, would look at you if you told him one and start thinking seriously about changing his will. So you want to watch out for these grandpa types, if you start telling shaggy dog yarns. For, sure as blazes, they'll let your punch line die like a speared cod if you give them half a chance.

Maybe, in fact, speaking of cod, you might use the one about the twins who went fishing, in order to separate the shaggy dogs from the statues among your hearers.

The twins were identical, but, as they stood along the bank of the stream, it was the first brother who landed all the fish: the second guy couldn't even get a nibble. Finally, after three days of the first lad reeling in trophies as fast as he could bait his line, the second brother was livid. That night he got an idea.

Waiting till his brother was fast asleep, the fishless twin got up quietly, and just as quietly put on his brother's clothes. Then he took his brother's rod and reel, his line and his lures, and sneaked out to the stream. He even wore his cap at the same jaunty angle his brother had. And he threw in his line.

Illustration by LOWELL HESS

Four hours later, he still hadn't caught a fish, or even gotten a bite, and he was furious. He decided finally that he could stand it no more, and he reeled in his line, deciding to go home and take up golf or tennis. Just then a big trout flipped the surface, and smiled toward him.

"Hey, buddy," the trout called, "what happened to your brother?"

Shaggy fish story.

But, though they don't have to involve dogs, or even, as we've said, animals, it is possible that the shaggy dog business did originate with a cartoon that appeared some years ago and which had all the shaggy dog characteristics. The cartoon showed a sandy desert whose whole surface was dotted with ostriches, all of whom had their heads buried in the sand. But away off on the edge of the desert was another ostrich who stood, looking forlorn and perplexed.

"Hey," he is saying, "where *is* everybody?"

It's the reverse twist, you see, the philosophy that makes a fellow tell you about the frog who reported, hoarsely, to his mate that he thought he had a man in his throat. Or the philosophy behind the yarn involving the kid in the bakery.

The kid came in the bakery with only a penny to spend, so, to be sure of getting his money's worth, he tested everything in sight by sticking his fingers into it. But he'd hardly put a dirty forefinger into a cream puff before the baker clobbered him across the ear. The kid fell to the floor sobbing, as a huge truck-driver came into the shop.

"Hey," he said, "what's going on here? What's he doing to you, sonny?" The kid cried out that the baker was hitting him for sticking his fingers into the comestibles.

"Oh, he *is*, is he! Well, listen, kid, you go ahead and put your fingers into them pies and cakes as often as you want." And the truck-driver glowered at the baker.

So the kid poked a finger into another cream puff. And the baker promptly flattened him with a cuff across the ear. Again the truck-driver stuck out his chin and told the kid to go ahead and punch the foodstuffs to his heart's content. The kid did it a third time, and again the baker floored him with a punch to the side of the head. The kid lay on the floor weeping and wracked with pain.

At this point, the truck-driver stepped forward vigorously. "You know, kid," he said, "maybe you better stop, at that. If you don't, this guy's apt to kill you."

The switch. The reverse twist.

There is also the cute shaggy dog, the one that's best told by and to the ladies. Like the one involving the Park Avenue dowager who was subletting her apartment, and was showing the new tenant around the place prior to a summer in Europe. In the bathroom, she carefully pointed out the tub, in which were swimming all kinds of beautiful guppies and tropical fish.

"These I'm leaving here till I come back," she explained. "You'll be sure and feed them, won't you?"

The new tenant said sure, he'd feed them, but what did he do with them when he took his bath?

"Oh," blushed the lady. "Well, I don't think you need be embarrassed, but—well, I've always blindfolded the males, so you can just blindfold the females." . . .

Getting back to mice, there's also a television shaggy dog joke involving mice. Fellow came into a booking agent's office and said he had a great act for TV, a full, one-hundred piece orchestra all made up of white mice. The booking agent sighed wearily and told the fellow to put them on.

So the guy opened his bag, and out tumbled a hundred white mice, all in white ties, tails and boiled shirts, and with their claws neatly manicured. They immediately set up their music racks, tuned up, and launched forth on "Poet and Peasant." They switched then to "Twelfth Street Rag," and wound up with a stirring rendition of "Stars and Stripes Forever." The guy turned to the agent and waited for his ecstatic applause.

"Get 'em out o' here!" the booking agent snarled instead. "Get 'em out o' here, fast!"

"But . . . but, *why!*" the fellow wailed. "Don't you think they're terrific? What's wrong?"

"I'll tell you what's wrong—three of them violinists can't be a day more than a month old. You wanta get us all thrown in jail for violatin' the Child Labor Act?" . . .

You don't like mice? How about cockroaches? The two, for instance, who were talking one day while the first one was having his lunch in a cupboard. While the latter was munching away, the other one told of the kitchen he'd been in once that was all stainless steel and chromium, and "as clean as a whistle."

"*Please,*" said the other roach, pausing in his chewing, "not while I'm eating."

Don't like roaches? All right, how about horses, since horses seem to be the subjects of more shaggy dog stories than any other animal. In fact, the horse that tried out for the Brooklyn Dodgers could be one of the first shaggy dog yarns we ever heard.

This horse was terrific. He could shag flies in the outfield, gobble up grounders in the infield, throw beautifully to first, and even take a turn on the mound if called upon to do so. Charlie Dressen was so impressed he decided to sign the horse to a contract.

"There's just one thing," Charlie pointed out. "This is a running ball club, so I'll have to see you run the bases before we make a deal."

The horse was amazed. "Run!" he screeched. "I can't run! If I could run, I'd be at Belmont Park."

Second horse joke. Fellow went to a riding academy, rented a chestnut colt, and set out for a canter around the park. After he'd been riding awhile, the colt suddenly leaned around and said, "You know, mister, I wasn't always a riding-academy nag. I once won the Kentucky Derby."

The rider gulped, turned white, and headed back for the riding academy. There, bug-eyed, he leaped from the saddle, and ran to the owner, panting, "That horse! He was talking to me—I'll *swear* it."

The owner sighed. "Really?" he said. "Well, don't worry about it, mister, you're all right. He was telling you he won the Kentucky Derby, eh? Well, he's a liar—he's never been in Kentucky in his life."

Third and last horse joke. Man went in a bar for a pick-me-up, and was astonished to see the bartender was a horse. The latter stood back and was busily polishing glasses, and finally he came over, wiped his forepaws on his apron, and leaned across the bar confidentially.

"What'll it be, mister?" he asked.

The patron finally got his mouth closed, gulped, and stuttered out a reply. "N-nothing," he said. "I was just wondering what had become of the cow who used to work here."

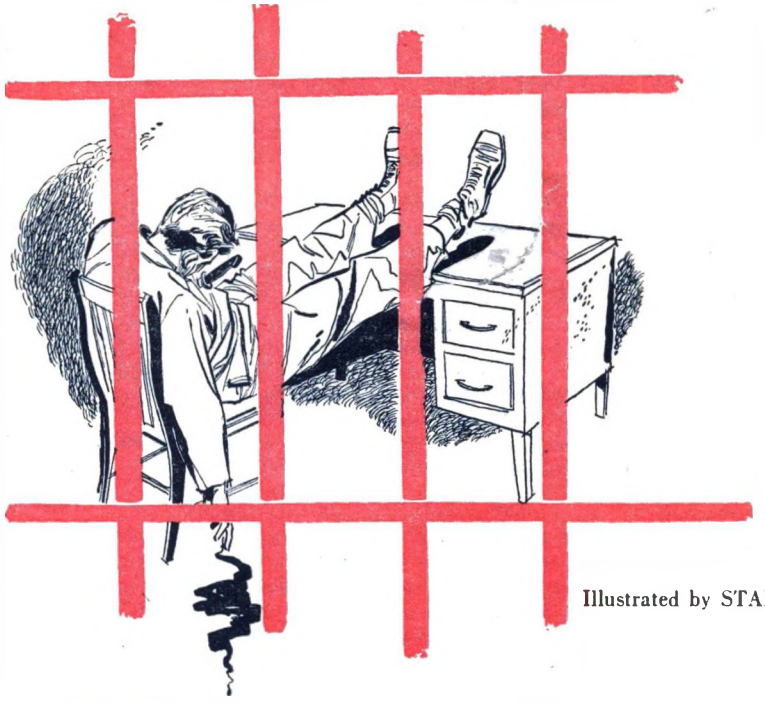
You get the idea. All you need to tell a good shaggy dog story is a good audience, plenty of time, and a working set of improbables. Now, how about—how's that? What? Yes . . . yes . . . yes! . . . No kidding!

Neighbor, that's the best we've heard yet. •

ONE-FOOT PUNT

The shortest legal distance a football ever has been punted occurred in the Navy-Michigan game of 1952. Michigan's end, Flora, rushed in as Navy was kicking from behind its own goal and snared the ball just as it was leaving the kicker's toe. Flora hung onto the pigskin, scoring a touchdown . . . exactly a foot from the point where the ball had been kicked.

—Ray Ferris



Illustrated by STAN DRAKE

Murder on the Inside

Jail usually provides the closing chapter in a murder case. But, in this prison, murder waited till the cell doors clanged shut.

By M. E. CHABER

The State Prison had been built on the edge of a hill. It loomed over the river like some gray monster, and wisps of fog struggled up from the river to obscure its outlines. I'd been there often but this was the first time I'd come to help someone get out.

The guard at the gate looked at my identification and picked up his phone.

Blair Lawton was the warden. He'd been there about six months, having come from the West Coast, where he'd helped to set up one of those model prisons with no walls and no bars. He hadn't gotten around to knocking down the walls at State yet, but he'd done almost everything else. State Prison had always been a tough place. Every prisoner was at least a two-time loser, and about half of them were lifers. There had been three major breaks in the year before Lawton arrived.

"Lieutenant Shaun Bradley," the guard was saying on the phone.

That's me. I'd been on the Broadway squad for ten years, and had sent a lot of men to State in that time. It was for both reasons that Warden Lawton had sent for me shortly after he took over. He had explained what he wanted to do, and asked me to help. I was willing to listen, and after that I was hooked.

Lawton wanted to interest the prisoners in trades and arts so they could become useful citizens when they came out. He counted on me to work some outside interest in his best men, and, since Lawton struck me as being on the level, I played along. There are plenty of wardens who are sob sisters when they're talking to reporters, but grab a big club the minute they're alone with the prisoners.


GUARD

When that happens, the warden is only making more work for the cops.

Six months wasn't a very long period by which to judge Lawton. But there hadn't been any breaks. And he'd uncovered one convict with a lot of artistic promise. Ramon Aranda. Doing one-to-ten for armed robbery. Lawton had given him clay to play around with, and discovered he had a talent for sculpture. I'd gotten some Broadway people interested, and several of Aranda's things had been shown in an art show. The critics liked them, and for the first time there was some favorable publicity for Lawton's methods.

THEN, the night before, Lawton had called me. He'd said he had a little surprise for Aranda, and he wanted me to come up. I had a day off coming to me, and I finally agreed. Anyway, I was curious about the two-time loser who had become a sculptor. That's why I had suddenly shown up at State.

"Okay, Lieutenant," the guard said, putting the phone back. "The warden said for you to come up to his office." A nod of his head indicated the direction. There was a broad gravel path with flower beds on either side. A convict was on his knees, weeding the flower beds.

"Thanks," I said.

"Just a minute," the guard said. "I'll have the trusty show you the way." He raised his voice in a wordless shout.

The convict looked up. He was young, maybe in his late twenties, with a pleasant, dark face. He stood up and brushed the dirt off his faded brown denim. He walked down to us.

"Show this man the warden's office," the guard said.

"Sure," the convict said. He turned and started up the gravel path. I followed.

When we were out of earshot of the guard, he lagged back until he was almost even with me. "You're Lieutenant Bradley?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said. I took another look at him, but I'd never seen him before. Still I wasn't too surprised. Convicts have a way of knowing all about cops they haven't even seen.

"I've been waiting to see you," he said, "ever since you started helping me."

I got it then. "You're Ramon Aranda?" I asked.

He nodded. "I wanted to tell you how grateful I am for your help, Lieutenant."

Like I said, this was a new role for me. I knew what to do when a crook shoved a gun at me, but not what to say when he thanked me. "That's all right," I said. "I didn't do much. If your stuff hadn't been good, I couldn't have done anything about it."

"Maybe now I'll really be able to do something good," he said. He looked around without really turning his head and his voice dropped. "You see, I know the warden's got a surprise for me today."

I had a pretty good idea what the surprise was, but it was up to the warden to tell it. "Oh?" I said. "What kind?"

"Maybe I'd better not say," he said. "If I did, I guess it wouldn't be much of a surprise, would it?"

"You lost me back there somewhere," I said drily.

He gave me a friendly grin. "That's okay. But just to keep things even, I've got a surprise for the warden."

I wondered if he were being mysterious on purpose, or if this was merely his natural attitude. "I suppose," I said, "if you told me what it was, it wouldn't be a surprise either?"

"That's right," he said with another quick grin. I decided I liked him, even though he was obviously screwy. We stopped in front of one of the large, main buildings. "Here we are, Lieutenant. The warden's office is right inside. First door to the right. And thanks again, Lieutenant." He waved and was gone.

I WENT in. The warden's secretary knew me, and sent me right in. A moment later I was shaking hands with Blair Lawton. He was a big man, with a friendly, intense face. In the few months I'd known him, I'd come to like him and respect him.

"I'm glad you could come, Shaun," he said. "I wanted you to meet Aranda, and I knew he'd like to have you here when I spring my surprise on him."

"I've already met him," I said. "He escorted me to your office. Seemed like a nice guy. What's the surprise? A pardon?"

He nodded. "I've been talking to the governor about Aranda for a month. I'm convinced the reception given to Aranda's sculpture provided the final push to straighten him out. I suppose we could have gotten him a parole, but I felt that a pardon would seem more like a vote of confidence to him. The governor finally agreed to give it a try my way. He made one condition. But I don't think Aranda will mind."

"What is it?"

"Aranda should go to New York to live—where you can keep an eye on him for a while."

"All right," I said.

The warden glanced at his watch. "He's to be here in about a half-hour. In the meantime, I'd like to talk to you about some of the other work we're doing."

I nodded and he started to pull files out of his desk. I had to grin at the enthusiasm he displayed.

He'd accomplished a lot in the short time he'd been at State. Apparently he'd impressed the governor, too, for he had okayed an increased budget for a psychiatric staff. But Lawton was still skating on thin ice, and we both knew it. One slip and everyone would start yelling about coddling criminals, and Blair Lawton would be out.

THERE was a knock on the door. The warden looked at his watch.

"That must be Aranda," he said. He raised his voice: "Come in."

The door opened. It wasn't Aranda. It was a heavy-set, red-faced man in the uniform of a guard. A gun was strapped around his waist. Then I caught sight of the bars on his shoulders. He was the guard captain.

"Oh, come in, Mitch," Lawton said. "Shaun, this is my second-in-command, Captain Harry Mitchell. Mitch, this is Lieutenant Shaun Bradley, New York Police."

"The King of Broadway," he said with something like a sneer in his voice. "Kind of a long way from your kingdom, ain't you?"

I wondered why he was unfriendly. The "King of Broadway" had been tagged on me once by a newspaper columnist after I'd given a couple of tinhorn gamblers twenty-four hours to get out of my precinct. But the people who used it were generally the ones who didn't like me. I glanced at the warden and saw that his face had tightened imperceptibly.

"Hello, Captain," I said evenly. I looked him over again and thought I got it. Mitchell was an old-time cop who believed in ruling with a nightstick in one hand and a gun in the other. He probably hated everything that Lawton was doing, and included anyone who was helping him. Maybe he also felt that he should have been made warden when there was a vacancy.

"Come up to inspect our model prison?" he asked. He made "model prison" sound like an obscenity.

"Yeah," I said.

"The lieutenant," Lawton said coolly, "is also here to see Ramon Aranda get his pardon."

"You turning that convict loose?" the captain asked.

"After today he won't be a convict," the warden said. "Aranda's an artist. He's got plenty of incentive to keep out of trouble now, I'm convinced—so is the governor." There was a warning in his voice.

"He's still a convict," Mitchell growled. "And we'd do better to make him remember that."

"That will be enough, Captain," Lawton said. He looked at his watch again. "Aranda is late. He should have been here ten minutes ago."

"Just make appointments with these boys," the captain laughed. "If you wanted him here, you should've sent one of the boys after him. I saw him going into the Examination Building maybe twenty minutes ago."

"He works over there when he's not tending the flowers," the warden explained to me. He stood up. "It's next door. Let's go over and see what's delaying him."

We left his office, Mitchell trailing along after us. We walked out of the building and into the next one. There was a strong smell of lysol. The building seemed to be deserted. We walked into a large room with whitewashed walls. Our heels rang hollowly on the cement floor.

"Aranda," the warden called. There was no answer.

"There ought to be somebody in here," Lawton muttered.

There was. We'd just been looking in the wrong place. There were a desk and a chair in one corner of the room. Just the feet were sticking out from one end of the desk. The toes pointed toward the ceiling.

"Somebody's here," I said, "but it doesn't look like he's receiving." I pointed in the direction of the shoes.

We hurried over. It was Ramon Aranda. He wasn't going to care much about the pardon from the governor. The front of his prison suit was now a dark brown. The handle of a knife stuck up from his chest.

WHILE the warden bent over the body, I glanced at Mitchell. He looked pleased. When he spoke, it was obvious why.

"Warden, if we'd been smart," he said, "this wouldn't have happened. I don't want to say I told you so, but you can't treat a gang of criminals like a troop of Boy Scouts. It just won't work."

"Why do you think Aranda was killed, Captain?" I asked.

"It's simple. Somebody found out he was getting a pardon and didn't think he deserved it. That's all it takes in here."

"That's impossible," the warden snapped. He stood up and glared at his guard captain. "No one knew he was going to get a pardon. Even Aranda didn't know it."

"I'm afraid he did," I said. "When he was showing me where your office was, he told me he knew you had a surprise for him. Said he had one for you, too."

"What?"

"He wouldn't tell me."

"Maybe he'd made a sculpture of you, Warden," Captain Mitchell said. He grinned openly. You could see that Captain Mitchell was taking the murder of Ramon Aranda as a personal triumph. In a way, considering what he stood for, it was.

"Get some of your men in here to take over," Lawton said firmly. "We're going to my office. Come on, Shaun."

He didn't say anything until we reached his office. "Mitchell will push this for all it's worth," he said quietly, "to try to discredit my program. Aranda's murder will have to be solved quickly or he might succeed. Will you help, Shaun?"

"All I can."

"Good," he said. He picked up the phone. "This is Warden Lawton. Give me the mill. . . . Carter? Bring Carl Barton up here." He replaced the receiver and looked at me. There was a sheepish expression on his face. "This is something I don't approve of, but we've got to get some information —if there's any to be had."

"A pigeon?" I asked.

He nodded. "Barton always seems to know everything that's going on and he's always eager to tell. I believe the prisoners call him Carl, the Canary."

"Don't look so bad about it," I told him. "It's not quite the same thing as beating information out of him. If it weren't for informers, we'd all be out of business."

"I don't like it," he said.

A moment later, the door opened and Captain Mitchell came in. He was carrying something in his hand, and he tossed it on the desk. It was a knife. *The* knife, for there was dried blood on it.

"How'd this knife get in here?" he said. "If you hadn't stopped us from shaking the cons down every few days, we would've uncovered this before it was used."

"Is that the murder knife?" I asked.

"That's it, all right."

"Did you check it for fingerprints?" I asked.

"Don't worry, there ain't no prints on it."

"There are now," I said. "Yours."

His face got darker with anger. "I don't need any fingerprints to break this," he said. "I'll get the truth if I have to beat the hell out of every con in here."

"We'll handle this my way, Mitchell," the warden said.

"We've been handling things your way," the captain said.

For the first time, I saw anger on Blair Lawton's face. But before he could say anything, the door opened and a guard looked in.

"Here's Barton, Warden," he said.

The guard stepped to one side and a convict came in. He was a little guy, with a dried-up, leathery face. His gaze darted rapidly around the office without his head moving.

"The screw said you wanted to see me, Warden," he said. He sniffed loudly.

"That's right," the warden said. "Barton, did you know that Ramon Aranda was being pardoned today?"

"The guy with the statues? No kidding?" He sniffed again, his face twitching at the same time. He'd been a cocaine addict.

"Know anybody who wouldn't like to see Aranda pardoned?" Lawton asked.

"Who wouldn't want to see a guy get a break like that?" the little convict asked.

"Somebody didn't," Lawton said. He picked up the knife on his desk. "Aranda was murdered with this knife. Did you ever see it before?"

BARTON sniffed again. "You know me, Warden," he said. "I wouldn't lie to you. That's Larry Johnson's knife—or it used to be. He was keeping it in his mattress, but somebody swiped it a couple of nights ago."

"You're sure?"

He nodded his head. "Larry told me himself yesterday. I wouldn't lie to you, Warden. Is that all?"

"Just a minute," Captain Mitchell said roughly. "Has Johnson been at his machine in the mill all day?"

"I guess so. I didn't see him leave."

"All right, Barton," the warden said. "You can go."

He shuffled out.

Captain Mitchell started sounding off again about how he thought it should be handled, but Lawton wasn't listening. He started calling in guards from various spots. Several of them had seen Aranda going into the Examination Building, but they hadn't noticed anyone else entering or leaving.

We were questioning the fifth guard when the phone rang. Lawton answered it. He listened a minute, then replaced the receiver. His face was pale.

"There's a riot in the mill," he said. "Carter says he doesn't know how it started, but it's big. They've got guns. Luckily, the guards got out before they could grab any of them for hostages, but Redding was wounded."

As though to make it official, a prison siren started to wail.

"That's no riot," snapped Captain Mitchell. "It's a break. I knew it. Sooner or later, it was bound to happen. Lawton, you're directly responsible for this. You've mollycoddled a bunch of killers until they've gotten the idea they can get away with anything."

"Shut up," Lawton said. "We'll argue about the cause later; now we've got to try to stop the riot. Come on."

"Where?" I asked as we raced out of the office.

"To the main building," Lawton said. "There's a two-way hookup in there to every part of the prison, so we'll be able to talk to them. Maybe we can reason with them."

"Tear gas is the only reason they'll get," Mitchell said.

Outside, the siren was a shrill screech. We ran across the yard and into another building. Guards were running to join us from every direction. One guard who was already in the building came to meet us.

"It's worse than I thought, Warden," he said. "The riot in the mill was only a blind. Some of them made it into the boiler house, then through the back way to the arsenal."

"The arsenal," the Warden exclaimed. "Did they get in?"

"Yeah. They must've had a key. They're out in the yard now and they've got plenty of guns."

"I told you it was a break," Mitchell said. "You better let me handle it, Warden."

"No," Lawton said. "I want to talk to them. Give me the microphone."

"Here it is, Warden," one of the guards said. He handed over a hand-mike. We were standing in front of an elaborate communications set-up. There was a loudspeaker above it.

Lawton held the mike up to his mouth. "Attention, men! This is Warden Lawton. I don't know what started this, but you're making a mistake. It's a long way to the main gate. You'll never get that far. I'm asking you to back out now before it's too late. You all know that I'll listen to you. Who's going to speak for you?"

He lifted his finger from the trigger on the microphone and there was a hum of power from the loudspeaker. Several voices could be heard yelling, but the words were unintelligible. Then one voice came in strong.

"I am, Warden. Big Jim Hackett."

I knew him. I had arrested him about a year earlier. This was his third time in the Big House.

"All right, Hackett," the warden said. "Can you speak for all the others?"

"You're damn right I can," the voice said. It faded a little and I knew he'd turned to look at the other prisoners. "Right, boys?" There was an answering shout over the loudspeaker, and Hackett continued. "We don't care what your game is, Warden. We ain't playing ball. So save your breath—for running." There was a chorus of tiny laughter.

"You'd better think it over," the warden said. "Here's what I want you to do. Come out, one at a time. Lay your guns down and line up facing me. You have my word there'll be no gunfire."

"Nuts," said the voice from the loudspeaker. "When we're ready, we'll come out, and there'll be plenty of shooting—we'll be doing it. So here's what we want *you* to do. Duck. And if you don't want your pretty guards all chopped up, keep 'em out of the way."

"I've heard enough," Captain Mitchell said harshly. "Warden, you've got to listen to me whether you like it or not. I've got three heavy machine guns in the north tower, and plenty of ammunition. That's enough fire-power to cut that whole mob down. Tell them to come out right now with their hands empty, or we open up."

"No," Lawton said, "I think we can still reason with them."

"You're a fool," the captain said. "They're cornered now, but in a minute they'll come boiling out of there and then a lot of my boys will be killed. What about that?"

Warden Lawton's indecision showed on his face. I knew what he was feeling. The way Mitchell was putting it, Lawton was going to lose no matter what he did. A jail break or a mass shooting would set up such a howl in the papers it would be the end of the model prison—and of Warden Lawton. I decided to interfere.

"There's one other way of handling it," I said.

They both swung around to look at me. Lawton with hope on his face and the captain with nothing but more anger.

"What is it?" Lawton asked.

"I know Hackett," I said. "I know a lot of the other men out there, too. I put them there. I'll go in to talk to them."

"You're nuts, too," the captain said. "They'll cut you to ribbons before you get ten feet inside the yard."

Lawton was shaking his head. "I can't let you take the chance, Shaun . . ."

"I can handle them," I said. "It's either me or the captain's machine guns. Which do you want it to be?"

"Little tin hero," muttered Mitchell. This time there was no mistaking the sneer in his voice.

I think it was that that decided it for Lawton. His shoulders suddenly straightened. "All right," he said crisply. He touched the switch on the microphone. "Hackett, do you know Lieutenant Shaun Bradley, of the New York Police?"

"I know him," Hackett said, making it sound like a curse.

"He's here with me," the Warden said. "He's coming in to talk to you."

"Better keep him there unless he's bullet-proof," Hackett said.

Lawton looked at me, weakening again. I nodded. "He's coming in," Lawton said. "I want you to listen to him."

"No more talking," I said. I reached up and cut off the power. "Tell the guards to let me through."

"Want a gun?" he asked.

"No," I said. I'd left my own gun back in New York. "If I need one, I'll take Hackett's."

"King of Broadway," said Mitchell.

I looked at him. "Don't be so impressed by those two bars you wear, Captain," I said. "It takes more than that to make a cop. This might be your chance to learn something."

His face turned red, but I didn't wait for an answer. I walked across to where a steel door opened out into the yard. The guard swung it open for me. I stepped through and heard the door clang shut.

The prisoners, maybe two hundred of them, were at the far end of the yard in a group. Even at the distance I could recognize Big Jim Hackett standing in the center of them. He had a microphone in one hand and a gun in the other. I started to walk toward them.

They didn't see me at first. Hackett was still talking into the microphone and the others were yelling at him. Then one of them must have caught sight of me, for suddenly they all quieted down and turned to face me. There wasn't a sound in the yard except my heels on the concrete.

As I drew near them, the circle of men split open, leaving a clear path to the center. Nobody said anything, but the menace was there; it didn't have to be put into words. It was in the frozen expressions, the wary set of their bodies, the almost careless display of weapons.

There were three men in the center, facing me. One of them was the little stoolpigeon I'd seen in the warden's office. Another was a tough-looking man, an automatic clutched in his hand, whom I didn't know. The third was Hackett. He was a big man, well over six feet tall, and looked tough enough to take on a whole regiment. I knew Hackett. He *was* tough. But he had his weak spots. I was counting on the fact that he had once come out second best with me. That should slow him up a little. And the others would be looking to Hackett for their cue.

I stopped in front of him and looked at him. His face was frozen in an expression of triumph, but his eyes weren't so sure.

Carl the Canary sniffed loudly. Somebody else shuffled his feet, the leather grating over the concrete.

"Well," said the third man, "what're we waiting for?"

"Yeah," said the little stoolpigeon. His eyes were so bright I began to think that more than guns had been smuggled into the prison. "He's a copper. Why don't you let him have it, Big Jim?"

"Shut up," Hackett said, without even looking at the little informer. "I want to hear everything Lieutenant Bradley has to say. Okay, hero, speak your piece."

"Who's your friend, Hackett?" I asked, jerking a thumb toward the third prisoner.

"Larry Johnson."

"The guy with the knife?" I asked.

"It was my knife, but I didn't use it," Johnson said. He wasn't frightened; he was just stating a fact. I believed him.

"Tell your men to put down their guns, Hackett," I said. "You haven't got one chance in a hundred of getting out of here alive if you make a break."

"Hey, copper," somebody yelled from behind me, "ain't you got that backwards? We're the hundred; you're the one, remember?" The cons all laughed. I didn't look around, but I liked the sound of it. Laughter is one good way of milking off some tension.

"You were always a sucker, Hackett," I said, "but you shouldn't try to make suckers out of all these other men."

"What do you mean?" he growled. "I don't get you."

"I'll spell it out for you," I said. I kept looking at Hackett, but I was really talking to the prisoners crowding around me. If I could swing one of them, I might swing all of them. "You all know Captain Mitchell."

"We know him," somebody said. He added a few choice judgments of the captain. I was inclined to agree with him.

"The captain," I went on, "has three heavy machine guns up on the north tower. There's no way you can reach them and they can mow all of you down the minute you start for the wall. Captain Mitchell is just itching to use those guns."

"He would," somebody said.

"What you don't know," I said, "is that there's only one reason any of you are alive right now. And that one reason is a man—a man who wouldn't let Mitchell fire. A man who thinks you're also men with names—front, last and sometimes middle names—not just numbers stenciled over a breast pocket."

"He's right," one of the prisoners called. "We'd all be chewing lead if Lawton wasn't the warden."

"Hold it," Hackett yelled.

"It's your choice," I said. "Go on with this and you'll have to deal with Mitchell and his machine guns. Stop it and you can deal with Warden Lawton—who's treated you decently. Put your guns down and it'll be all right."

I looked at Hackett. "The captain," I said, "has three heavy machine guns up on the north tower. There's no way you can reach them, and they can mow all of you down the minute you start for the wall. Captain Mitchell is just itching to use those guns." They began to waver.

"Wait a minute," Hackett yelled. I was still looking at him but I could tell by his face that the men behind me were wavering. "Are all of you nuts?"

"Yeah, nuts, Hackett," a man behind me yelled. "Nuts about livin' to be an old man. Count me out. I quit. Gun included."

I heard the solitary gun hit the concrete. There was a long moment of silence. I could feel the sweat sliding down my spine. Then suddenly other guns were dropping and a dozen voices were agreeing.

"Well, General," I said to Hackett, "it looks like you're losing your army. Might be a good time to surrender."

"And get slapped into solitary for six months? No sale, copper."

"Yeah, what about that?" Johnson asked. He and Hackett were both keeping their guns not far from my stomach. "What's the current rate of exchange, copper?"

"Even," I said. "You know your warden, Johnson. Nothing will happen to any of you—with one exception."

"What's that?"

"The murderer of Ramon Aranda."

"*If* he's caught," Johnson said.

"He'll be caught," I said. I was still watching Hackett. "What are *you* doing, Johnson?"

There was another long pause. "I'll go along with the boys," he said. "The warden's always been okay."

"Barton?" I asked the stoolpigeon.

"I quit, too," he whined. "I ain't no troublemaker. I only joined Hackett and Johnson because—"

"Because you were the one who got the keys to the arsenal," Hackett snapped. "We can all make a noise like a canary, don't forget that, bud. Just as loud and clear as you can."

"Maybe," the little man said. He sniffed loudly. "But I'm the only one who knows it was Aranda—Ramon Aranda, the perfect prisoner—who got the guns to us in the first place. And that ain't all I know."

I was surprised, but not too much. I'd been remembering that Aranda told me that he had a surprise for the warden. This had probably meant information. And that was a good motivation for the murder. But there were other interesting angles to what the stoolpigeon had said. Hackett saw one of them, too.

"Maybe," he said, "if you're the only one who knew that, you're the guy who got mad because Aranda was getting a pardon."

The stoolpigeon's face went white. "No," he said. "I didn't—"

"Shut up," Hackett said. His eyes came back to me. They were filled with anger and frustration.

"What about it, Hackett?" I asked. "You going to play a lone hand?"

"Maybe," he said nastily. "I still got you in front of me, copper. Maybe it would be a good idea to pull the trigger."

"Maybe," I said. I took out a cigarette and lit it. I pulled on it once, then flicked it straight into his face.

He bellowed with pain and both hands went up to his face. I hit him in the belly. His hands came down. I hit him in the face as hard as I could. The gun dropped. A moment later, Hackett followed suit.

I turned around to face the other men. "All right," I said. "Move out into the center of the yard and line up. You'll have to be searched, but I give you my word that none of you will be punished."

They shuffled their feet uncertainly for a few seconds, then moved away. Hackett stumbled to his feet and went along with them.

The guards must have been watching, for the door swung open and they streamed out into the yard. I walked to the room where the warden waited.

"That was a wonderful job, Shaun," Lawton said. "I know I don't have to tell you what it means to me. Thanks."

"Don't thank me until it's finished," I said. I told him what I had promised the men in the yard.

"I've already ordered Mitchell to see that no one is punished," he said.

We waited there in the building for another half-hour. While we waited, I told Lawton the rest of it. He was upset to learn that Aranda had been smuggling in guns, but he took it in his stride. I'd just finished outlining my ideas when Captain Mitchell appeared.

"All right," he said. His face was sullen, but once more he had given in to the warden's authority. "The arsenal's secure again. All the prisoners are back at work."

"Good," Lawton remarked briskly. 'That's the way I want it. Now, tell your men that Lieutenant Bradley is to have free run of the prison. He's going to get at the bottom of the murder."

The captain didn't like me stepping in and doing his work, but he didn't argue. "Yes, sir," he said.

Warden Lawton walked me over to one of the cell blocks and explained to the guard what I wanted. Then he went back to his office. The guard showed me Aranda's cell, and left.

It was a regular cell except for a few things. Lawton had let Aranda keep some of his work in the cell, and there were a number of clay figures scattered about. There were also two boxes of clay which had not yet been unpacked. That was what I was looking for. I wanted to check on what the little stoolpigeon had said.

I opened the first box and started digging in the clay. It wasn't long before I struck something hard. I dug it out. It was a .38 automatic. The barrel had been stuffed with cotton so that none of the clay would plug it. I dug in deeper and found more guns.

There was a click behind me. I whirled around. The cell door was closed. I walked over and pushed on it. It was locked.

All of these doors were electrically controlled. Someone had locked me in Aranda's cell by throwing a switch somewhere outside of the block. There was only one thing anyone could expect to gain by that. Time.

I tried shouting, but nothing happened. If the doors were electrically controlled, then any kind of a short should sound an alarm somewhere. I fished around in my pocket and found a penny. Then I pulled a box of clay over until it was beneath the single light in the cell. I climbed up on the box and unscrewed the bulb. I balanced the penny on the end of the bulb and screwed it back in. The light flared briefly and went out as a fuse blew.

I sat down on the edge of the bed and waited.

In about ten minutes, I heard footsteps hurrying along the block. The guard came into sight. The warden was with him.

"Shaun," Lawton said. "What's happened down here?"

"Somebody locked me in," I said. "I put a penny in the light, figuring the blown fuse would bring you."

"Newton," the warden ordered, "go throw the switch."

The guard left at a run and a couple of minutes later the cell door swung open again. The warden and I went back down the block together. I told him what I'd found in the boxes of clay.

"If this ever gets out," he said ruefully, "it will be the end of any further art work in here."

"No reason why it has to get out," I said. "But you'd better set up a closer check on supplies."

He nodded in agreement. The guard was waiting to let us out of the block. Lawton told him about the guns in Aranda's cell and told him to bring them to the office.

"Just a minute," I said as the guard started off. "Did you see anyone who might have thrown that switch?"

"No, sir," he said.

"Could it have been thrown from any place else?"

"No, sir. But I could swear that nobody's been around."

"Somebody was," I said drily.

"It's easy enough to check," the warden said. "If anyone is missing from his work, a guard will have to know about it." He went to the wall phone near the switches and started phoning. After the third call, he turned around. His face was tight.

"Hackett isn't at his machine," he said. "Carter says that he got a phone call—he thought it was from me—saying to send Hackett to the office."

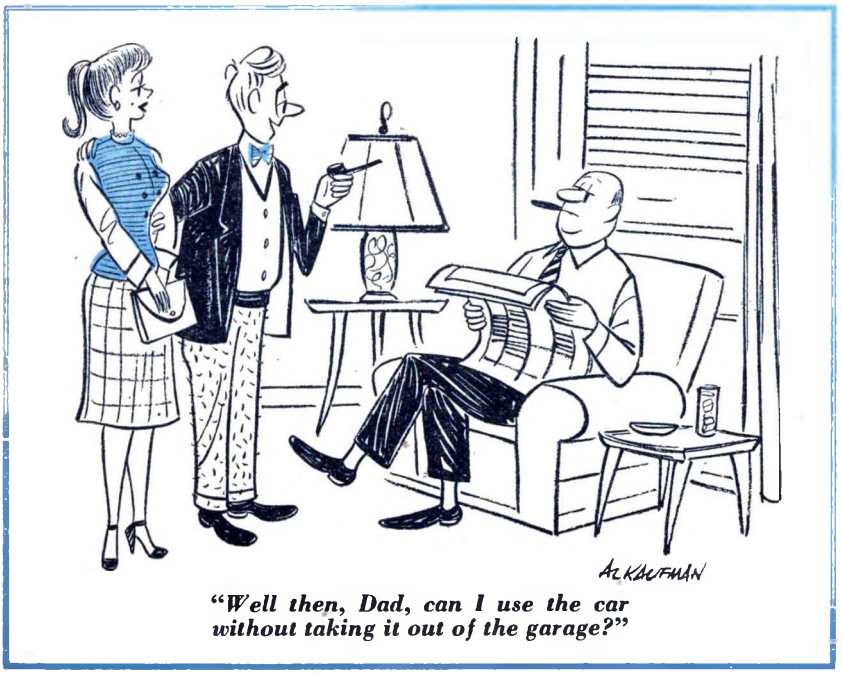
"He must have got one of the cons to make the call for him," the guard said.

"Could they?" I asked.

The warden nodded. "A number of them could. The men who work in the library, the hospital, or in the administration offices. I'll start checking them. Newton, you get those guns."

We started back toward his office, but we hadn't gone far when I stopped him. "What's that?" I asked pointing to a door in the corridor wall.

"A supply closet," he said shortly.



"Well then, Dad, can I use the car without taking it out of the garage?"

"What kind of supplies?" I asked. I pointed with my other hand to the dark stain beneath the door. He looked and cursed beneath his breath. Even he recognized it as blood.

I strode over and jerked open the door. There was a clatter of mops and buckets as the doubled-up body of a man rolled out. It was the little stoolpigeon. There was a knife in his back.

"Barton," the warden said, in a shock of recognition.

I stood there and cursed to myself. I should have expected this; in a way, I had, but I hadn't expected it to happen so fast. Looking down, I saw a muscle quiver in Barton's face.

"I don't think he's dead yet," I said. I knelt swiftly and felt for his pulse. It was thin and ragged, but it was still there. I put my arm under his head and lifted it up. His eyelids flickered and came open. His thin mouth twisted with pain.

"Barton," I said loudly. "Barton. It's Bradley and the warden. Who did it?"

A red froth bubbled from his lips. He opened his mouth twice before he could get a sound out. "That—doublecrosser," he said. His voice was so low I could barely hear it. "Hack—doublecr—" His head flopped back and he was dead. I put him down and stood up.

"Hackett again," the warden said bitterly. His face was pale. "Shaun, maybe I've been wrong—maybe I ought to turn Hackett over—"

"Hold it," I said. "Don't say anything you'll regret. Tell me, where could somebody hide around the prison with the hope of not being found quickly?"

"A prison is hardly a place in which to hide easily," he said drily. "No, Shaun—"

"Don't I remember," I interrupted, "reading that when this prison was first built there were solitary dungeons? The place where they kept the so-called incorrigibles."

"That was almost a hundred years ago," he said. "Down in the basement. Those cells were turned into storage space a long time ago." He got it then. "I guess that somebody could hide there. But not for long. We make several trips down there every day."

"He wouldn't need long," I said. "Let's go. And hurry."

WE hurried. On the way, the warden called one of the guards, who opened up the doors for us. We went through a short corridor, then entered a narrow, half-concealed doorway. With the guard in the lead, we went down a flight of crude stone steps—old and worn.

We reached the bottom of the steps and went along the corridor. Storage rooms, which had once been cells, opened off on either side. I had already warned the guard and the warden, and we went quietly. After a few feet, we heard a voice coming from one of the rooms.

"—your plan, is it? Well, I ain't having any of it." There was no mistaking that voice.

"Hackett," Lawton said in a whisper. "Who's he talking to?"

"Wait," I whispered back.

"Not a chance," Hackett went on. "Big Jim Hackett may be dumb, but not soft. So you can forget any ideas about getting a phony written confession out of me before you shoot. Just go ahead and shoot."

"All right," said another voice. "I'll do it your way, Hackett. And still get away with everything."

I heard Warden Lawton gasp beside me. The guard stiffened and looked at us questioningly. The second voice had been as recognizable as Hackett's. It was Captain Mitchell.

"I don't need your confession," Mitchell was saying. "I can knock you off and say you made a break for it, after confessing to the murders of Aranda and Barton."

"Maybe," Hackett said. "But maybe somebody'll guess it like I did. Sooner or later, somebody will get the idea that you arranged to smuggle the guns into the prison, and made Aranda help you. You wanted a riot so the warden would get kicked out, and you'd get his job. You killed Aranda because he was going to tell the warden."

"I'll still get his job," Mitchell said. "They should've given it to me in the first place instead of dragging in that egg-head. I been here thirty years. I know how to run a prison better than any of them overgrown college boys."

"You couldn't run an egg-beater," Hackett said with scorn. "They'll get you, Mitchell, and I'll be laughing in hell."

"No," the captain said. "You're the last one, Hackett. I got the guns in through Aranda; I used Barton to get the arsenal key to you. If you hadn't lost your nerve, this wouldn't be necessary. But now you're my pigeon, Hackett. Nobody else will ever know."

"Want to bet, Mitchell?" I asked, stepping into the doorway.

He whirled around. For a minute, the gun in his hand shook like a leaf in a windstorm. Then it steadied on me.

"Bradley," he said. Suddenly he looked pleased. "This is good. I'm glad you came, Lieutenant. You're going to catch Hackett and the two of you will kill each other."

"You're forgetting a little something, Mitchell," I said. "You can't point the gun at Hackett and me both at the same time."

Hackett had already thought of that and was stepping toward Mitchell. The captain was torn with indecision. Then he must have heard Hackett moving, for he started to whirl back. I stepped in fast. Hackett and I both swung at the same time. We both connected at the same time—one on each side of his jaw. The captain went down like a bag of empty clothes.

Hackett grinned at me. "Never thought I'd be glad to see a copper," he said.

WARDEN LAWTON and the guard came in. The guard took charge of Mitchell. Lawton looked shaken, but he was recovering.

"Thanks, Shaun," he said. He looked at me curiously. "You didn't seem surprised to hear Mitchell's voice."

"I wasn't," I said. "I suspected him from the beginning. When the guards reported that nobody had entered the examination building except Aranda. Who are the invisible men of a prison? The warden and the guard captain. No guard would even remember seeing you enter a building; they're trained to remember every move of the prisoners, but not yours.

"And he was too anxious to pin the blame on you," I said. "But the clinchers were there—who could easily arrange for guns to be smuggled in, hidden in Aranda's clay? Mitchell. Who could furnish the key to the arsenal? Mitchell. What about the knife stolen from a prison cell? It had to be a guard. Again it was Mitchell who had the best chance to lock me in Aranda's cell. And the little stoolpigeon furnished the final clue."

"But he said Hackett," the warden protested.

"No," I said. "He said 'that double-crossing hack—' and then he died. But in prison slang, a hack means a guard. I knew he still had to find a fall guy, and when we learned that Hackett was missing, I knew we had to move fast."

Lawton shook his head. "I knew that Mitchell thought he should have been made warden, but I never thought he'd go that far . . ."

"He wanted to sit in your chair," I said drily, "but now he's just going to sit in a chair. Well, let's get upstairs. I've got to go."

"Why?" he asked.

I glanced at my watch. "Look," I said. "I've been here less than three hours. In that time, there've been two murders and a riot in this model prison of yours. I'm going outside—where it's safe." •

Sure we knew the old man's stories were tall tales. But that was no reason to call him a

LIAR!

By CALVIN J. CLEMENTS

A SHORT SHORT COMPLETE ON THESE 2 PAGES

IT IS ANYBODY'S GUESS just when Pop Orfelloer took to buffing for the tug skippers during the night hours they were waiting for their next assignments. No one remembers when he started keeping the old pot-bellied stove going in the wooden shack off the coaling terminal in Mill Basin, or hoisting storm warnings on the flagpole he erected outside. It seemed Pop was always there, a frail little gray man, either sitting by the stove and swapping a story of his sailing days with us, or limping over to fill a mug of coffee for a skipper who had just come in from a tedious wheel-trick.

And, of course, he would take the man's cap when handing him the coffee—a long-established ritual.

"Evening, Cap'n," he'd say, and faded blue eyes that had seen eighty-odd years would lift to the skipper's cap.

"Just telling the lads here"—he'd wave a thin hand to take in the other skippers sipping coffee and sprawled comfortably in ancient chairs Pop collected from somewhere—"of sleet off the Madagascar coast. Sleet, mind you, off Madagascar! Tearing our rigging, it was—

"Oh, yes. I'll jus' put this up here. . . ." And he would carefully accept the skipper's cap as if it were something precious, taking his time setting it on the rack with the others while his bony fingers strayed hungrily over the tarnished bit of gold braid above the visor.

Though most tug masters on the job feel naked without their slouch caps, no one ever gave Pop a growl when giving theirs up, not after once seeing the reverence with which he handled each one. It reminded them of the prestige behind their calling; it took care of their ego, you might say, as well as their comfort.

IT was good having the old man around, and the towing companies got to accept Pop the same as we did. Years before, they had installed a phone in the shack, a direct wire from the dispatchers, knowing they could depend upon him to send a man to his tug with the proper instructions. Occasionally they sent over a box of cigars, but these Pop would dole out on his bedside visits to ailing skippers. For himself he asked nothing; although we sometimes slipped a bill in his pocket that he'd be scratching his head over for days afterwards. He seemed contented taking care of the shack, quite happy sitting there listening to us rehash a tough towing deal, then adding a story of his own when we had talked ourselves out.

These stories Pop told of his sailing days were pretty fantastic, but they were never boring. He knew so

much of the sea, of marine lore and customs, you could relax with your feet up on the heavy oak table he claimed came from his first clipper command, sip coffee and let your ears take over as a blow off Hatteras that "yanked the sticks out of 'er" was recounted, or of the bushmen boarding his sloop as he lay becalmed off New Guinea back in '97, and how he had amputated his own leg below the knee after a spear had smashed the shinbone, or of the record run when he skippered a clipper between Norfolk and Cape Town, a record they hadn't bothered to list he always insisted. Listening to Pop you could almost see the brass hurricane lamp he'd suspended from the overhead swing to and fro, almost hear the gale outside, the roaring sweep of a wave boiling over the forepeak, and the soft rumbling wash of the sea running off.

Then he'd fall asleep. Toward the early morning hours, sometimes right in the middle of one of his stories, he'd fall asleep, leaving us stranded, perhaps, with a fire raging 'tween decks.

It was during one of Pop's longer accounts of being trapped in an Arctic ice floe while hunting seals that Cutrie, a Stevens Towing skipper, interrupted with a question.

Cutrie was new in Mill Basin. He was much younger than any of the rest of us, a handsome boy, just twenty-one, likeable enough but a bit on the cocky side; a little smug, we always felt, at having a master's license so young. For the better part of a week he had been listening to Pop's stories with a sort of condescending smile that would have rubbed anyone else except the old man, whose dream-shrouded eyes saw nothing at these times except tops'ls swaying and racing scud in a hurrying sky.

This night, with Pop on the bridge of the ice-bound frigate *Seagirt* and shouting orders to his crew who were dragging kedge anchors across the ice, Cutrie threw him the question that froze us all tighter in our chairs than Pop's *Seagirt* was frozen in that ice floe.

"You were the skipper, Pop?"

Pop came out of it, blinking his weak eyes in surprise. "Why sure, son. Just told you—"

"Talking to a friend of mine in the license bureau the other day." Cutrie leaned forward, smiling indulgently. "He said there's no record of a ticket being issued to Aaron Orfelloer. Now out with it, old-timer: Have you ever been to sea, any farther out than a Sandy Hook excursion boat would take you?"

Pop's wrinkled mouth worked soundlessly as he kept blinking at Cutrie. He wet his lips before he finally got it out. "No record? Well, sure not, son. Sat in Frisco for it. They'd have it out there—"

Cutrie was shaking his head. "No good, Pop. He had a book listing every license ever issued. No Aaron Orfelloer as a master, or even as a mate."

Pop opened his mouth. He closed it and swallowed, his dimmed eyes moving guiltily from man to man. In the feeble light of the hurricane lamp his cheekbones shone sharp, accenting the hollows in his seamed face, and you saw suddenly how very old he was, something we'd never thought much about before.

Cutrie noticed each of us looking at him. Maybe he had expected a general chuckle at the old man's expense but it didn't take long to penetrate he had just jammed both feet in the bucket.

He got up, looking a little sheepish. "Guess I'll ankle up to Mike's for some butts."

We caught up with him along the coaling bulkhead, and Olaf, a Moran skipper, said it for us. "Pretty proud of your ticket, aren't you?" Olaf snarled, his beefy-red face within an inch of Cutrie's. "Well, the old man would have been just as proud of his, prouder maybe, if he'd had the chance to set foot on a deck. Sure he never went to sea! And neither would you if you had run into the same tough luck. No spear in New Guinea, Cutrie; just a kick from an old farm plow horse while he was still in britches. Too bad you didn't know about that. Maybe you could've tossed it in his face for a laugh, too. Maybe. . . ." Olaf tapered off when he saw how thoroughly humbled Cutrie was. . . .

At midnight the next night, Pop didn't take our hats when we all came in together in a body, but stood in the back near the stove, giving us an uncertain smile as he pretended to fuss with the coffee.

Olaf made a little speech, telling Pop how we'd consider it an honor if he'd accept the title of honorary skipper of all the basin tugs, and that he could ride on any of them any time he wanted. Not that he never could before, Olaf said, but this kind of made it official. Then he held out the box he'd been holding behind his back.

Pop looked a little sad as he took the box. Slowly he opened it and lifted the tissue back. When he saw the new dark-blue slouch cap with the traditional insignia of braided gold gleaming above the visor, his fingers trembled. But he didn't touch the hat.

For a moment we were afraid we had made the situation worse, that presenting him with the hat had, in effect, pulled the last chock out from under his pride. And it would have done exactly that but for Cutrie, who had been skeptical of this hat business from the start.

He stepped forward and removed the cap from the box, his manner as cocky as ever. He placed it on Pop's head, tilting the visor to a nautical rake. "Pop, you got a heck of a nerve falling asleep right in the middle of using kedges to pull you out of that ice floe!"

Cutrie reached for the coffee pot. "Off you went, snoring your head off, leaving us right up in the air." He poured his coffee, looking over at Pop. "Come on now, just how do you cut a wooden hull out of an ice floe?"

Pop looked at Cutrie a little timidly at first, as if expecting to find himself being kidded; then he began blinking in surprise.

"Asleep?" he faltered.

Cutrie nodded. "And mumbling about your name on a license list in Frisco. Who cares where you sat for your ticket? What we want to know is how anyone could kedge a wooden vessel through ice. Right, boys?"

We all sat down, agreeing that was so and admiring the way Cutrie had taken over a tricky helm. In the distance a tug sounded off. A deep-throated reply rumbled from a freighter. From the ceiling of the shack the hurricane lamp swayed slightly. We waited, hoping, with Pop still staring at Cutrie, his hand wavering near the cap, as if he might take it off.

But, instead of removing it, he suddenly tugged it down firmly, drawing himself up straight, his wrinkled eyes looking youthful and commanding under the visor. "Thank you, lads." He cleared his throat. "Just like the one I had once. About that ice pack. We just coppered our stem. That's what we did. Coppered it from jib to three feet below the waterline, then pulled right through that ice with them kedges. . . ."

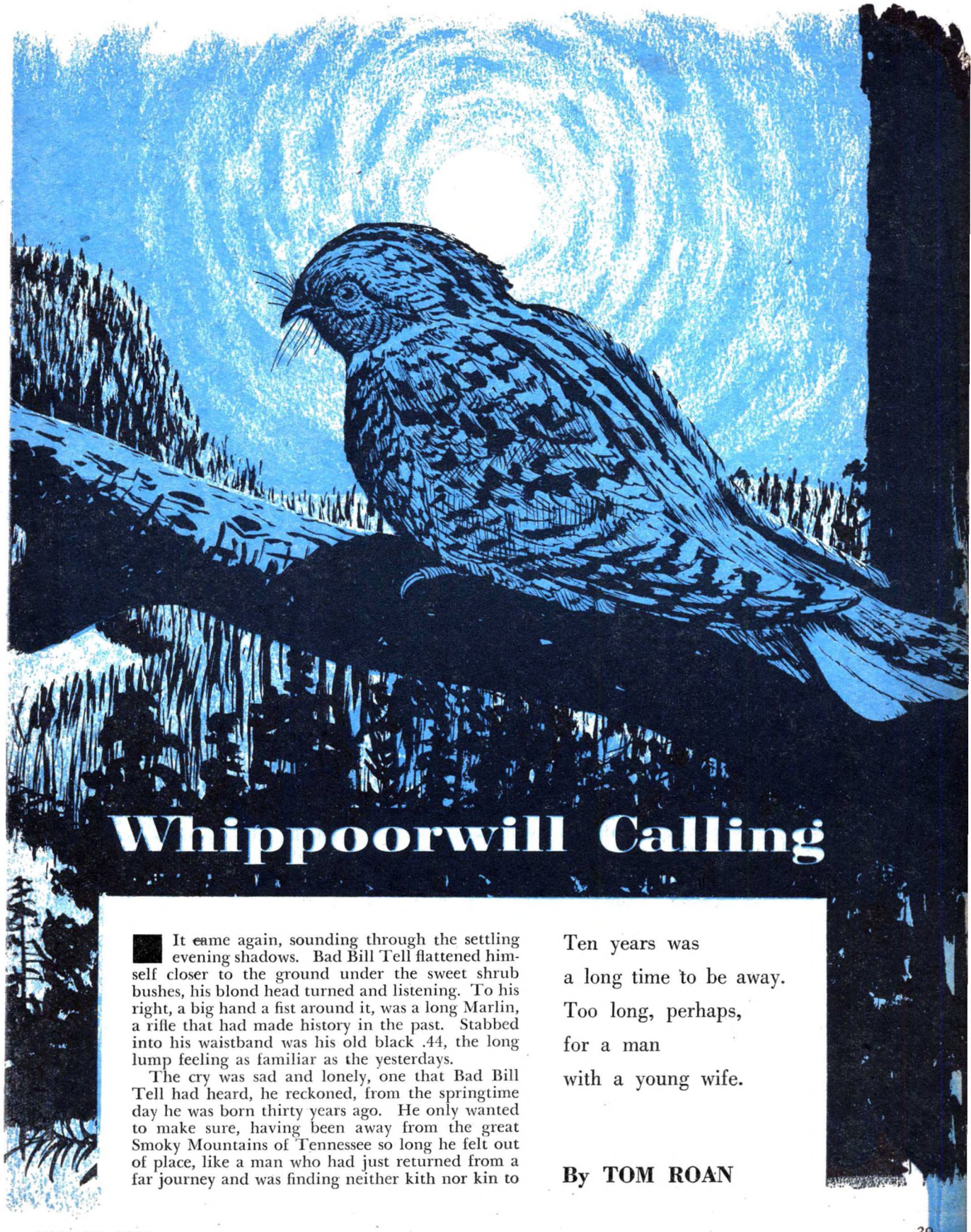
He looked again at Cutrie, who was listening as attentively as any of us. "Dangdest dream," he muttered, rubbing his chin slowly. "Getting old, I guess."

There wasn't much change in the routine at the shack after that night. Once again it became a comfortable place to be between tows. Pop tarnished the gold braid on his cap by hand-rubbing it, so it would seem he'd been wearing it a long time, which, in a way, he had.

About the only thing that changed was we wore our caps in the shack, the way skippers like to do, keeping them on our heads the whole time we were sitting around.

Same as Pop did. •

Illustrated by DAVE STONE



Whippoorwill Calling

It came again, sounding through the settling evening shadows. Bad Bill Tell flattened himself closer to the ground under the sweet shrub bushes, his blond head turned and listening. To his right, a big hand a fist around it, was a long Marlin, a rifle that had made history in the past. Stabbed into his waistband was his old black .44, the long lump feeling as familiar as the yesterdays.

The cry was sad and lonely, one that Bad Bill Tell had heard, he reckoned, from the springtime day he was born thirty years ago. He only wanted to make sure, having been away from the great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee so long he felt out of place, like a man who had just returned from a far journey and was finding neither kith nor kin to

Ten years was
a long time to be away.
Too long, perhaps,
for a man
with a young wife.

By TOM ROAN

greet him in his own house and old haunts.

From this point he was less than an hour's walk before he would be home. *Home!* He rolled it in his thoughts and let the word whisper from the side of his mouth, a sparkle coming to his eyes. Fronie would be there with her big blue eyes and pale hair that would hang wave on wave to her thighs. There would be Annie, named for his mother, and the boy he had never seen because he had come into the world four months after they had sent his father to the pen, damning him to hell for killing a man he had never known.

Every step of the way now could be a step into danger or sudden death from a rifleman behind a rock or tree. It was the reason he had walked twelve miles out of his way to go by the Sam Clark place, his brother-in-law's house and forty acres, just to pick up the rifle and the old five-shot .44 Smith & Wesson. Neither Sam nor his Katy had been at home, but Bad Bill Tell had known where to find the weapons carefully greased and hidden in the barn loft.

THE Finleys had known he was getting out, and must have thought it would be sooner. They had sent him their first warning more than a year ago. Four more warnings had come after that, getting through from mouth to mouth when letters from Fronie couldn't for more than two years now. They were waiting up here, those Finleys. There would be old one-eyed Buck, daddy of the lot, and Jim, Shade, Elijah, Rube, and Tump. The Dukes would hang with the Finleys, the Gauls, the Birds and the Chumleys. Roosters too young to fight ten years ago would now be big enough to click their spurs and droop a deadly eye along a rifle's barrel in some good hiding place. One might pray with all his heart and mind for peace, but he could never really hope to find it when those killers were waiting to spill his blood.

But he was free now, like the water spilling so merrily over the stones. The one great fear that had struck him as he stepped through the prison gates had been the thought of ever doing anything that would send him back inside those stinking walls. The same fear was upon him here. If only they would let him alone nothing would happen, not from his hand, his thought nor his word. He was through with blood-letting and killing, through with law and jails.

He slung the rifle up and under his right arm as he walked on, his broad shoulders squared. There was a lightness to his walk that made no sound even in ungainly brogans on his big feet. The whippoorwill called a few times more, but the sharpness was gone that had made him stop and drop so suddenly back there.

Once over the head of the hollow he felt better, turning right and going up the steep slope of a ridge until he was on the crest. Scrub-oak and low pines shielded him here, but he still carried the Marlin with its butt under his arm and his hand lightly cupped half-way down the barrel. He had forgotten nothing about that rifle nor the .44, for he had tried them both out in a deep hollow within a mile after leaving Sam's place. A gun carried like this was ready for the slip-drop shot—down, up, and into firing position at the blink of an eye. No man in these Great Smokies had been faster on the gun-throw than Bad Bill Tell.

"But, Lord, don't let 'em make me fight ag'in." He prayed as he walked, closing his eyes as he called on his Maker. "Give me just a few days to get my Fronie an' the children, an' I'll take 'em outa here an' let my name die behind me."

The way pitched downward when he came to the north end of the ridge, most of the scrub-oak and pine thinning out to great rocks and bushes ahead. He picked his way now, making quick turns to the right or left, the wary one who knew the danger of walking in a straight line. Down in another deep hollow the night closed around him like the dimming of the lights in prisons when they turned on the big electric chairs to kill men. Before he had gone another mile the stars were up there in a great blue-black arm of the heavens left by the lean-back of mountain walls at either hand.

He made many turns with all the instinct of a cunning wild animal, avoiding dark spots ahead, taking much longer than he had intended, knowing the Finleys and their intermarried clans would sometimes lie in waiting for days and nights like duck hunters in their blinds. Tonight it would be like them to let him come right on, waiting until he reached Fronie's door, and then blast him down with a hail of rifle balls from their places of hiding, letting him fall dead before the suddenly screaming Fronie's eyes.

Atop the last high slope he hugged the timber, a shadow moving through the underbrush and low limbs without letting hand or shoulder touch them to cause the slightest stir. Now he was coming up on a tall slope west of his house and would soon see it lying a short half-mile below on a flat-topped rise in its little valley. He stopped just before he came to the place, making himself stand and wait.

"Lord, I ain't ungrateful," he whispered, leaning against the bole of a great mountain oak and closing his eyes. "Let me stand an' think an' enjoy the sight I'm soon to see, an' not devour it all at once like the hog rushin' to the trough."

He took it a little at a time. First there was the south rim of the valley, the fields running to the edge of the timber. As he looked at more of it as a thirsty man sipping water he saw the growing young corn not yet higher than his hip. Moving on with his eyes staring at the ground he came to a tall slab of rock, his left shoulder leaning against it. He took one quick look, closed his eyes and held his breath, then gradually allowed his eyelids to open again.

God, what a sight for long-tired and long-hungry eyes!

There it was, right before him in the spreading sheet of gold cast by the rising moon and the starlight. The big log barn, the cow lot, the sheds and the corn crib were just to northward, the lean-to chicken roost and the hog pens behind them. He tried to look at them first, and slowly let his stare drift on to the wide and sprawling old house with its hand-hewn logs and thick puncheon floors, much of it erected many years before the war between the North and South—so far back in the dim past Cherokee Indians had galloped their ponies and horses up to the broad front door to barter for their fire-water from the original Tells.

Except for a few brush-lined gullies, the largest one leading up to a point just below the barn, sixty acres out of the eighty were clean and planted. His eyes lighted with pride for a moment, then dimmed, a thought going through him like barbwire raking a scab from an old sore. Fronie had not done all that plowing and planting, even with Little Annie and young William to do their share.

"There could be another man," he told himself in a whisper, remembering Fronie's long silence to the letters he had never failed to write. "Only—only shorely now, she would have told me, straight an' square to each other as we've been."

WELL, there was a lamp burning in the kitchen with its windows looking to eastward and southward, and he would soon know everything. Not losing caution for a second, he moved on down the slope. He crossed a tiny stream that came from a big spring a few rods behind the barn. The brush-choked mouth of the largest gully was just ahead. He went up its twisting way, the growth at either side a shield. At the barn he slipped along in its shadow, and stepped inside when he came to an opening in the planks.

Looking through the windows he

could see the kitchen. Through a window there he saw her, tall and straight at the head of the table with her back to the stove in the southeast corner of the room.

Fronie! At last, Fronie! She seemed to be alone, but so far he could see only her end of the table. He studied her a long time, making certain she was not talking to anyone else at the table or in the kitchen. Finally, he sent the low yet eery call of a screech owl rolling out in the night.

At first Fronie didn't move. It took a second call while he watched closely before she rocked back in her chair, a coffee cup lowering from her lips. Her head came up, her eyes on the window. He could guess that she had opened her mouth and was holding her breath for the moment with something like fear making her rigid in her chair. He rolled the screech owl call again, and saw her rise slowly and lean forward over the end of the table to pick up the lamp and move toward the living room with the light.

Now that was good! Fronie hadn't forgotten a thing. Another woman might have bounced to her feet to blow out the light immediately. If enemies were watching from a mile away the sudden darkening of the house would mean things to them—a tell-tale that somebody had come or was nearby.

AFTER a short wait he sounded the call again, louder and longer, and strained forward to listen. There was no answer, and a great doubt flooded over him. As a change he sounded the call of the whippoorwill, making it sharp enough to penetrate a rock wall.

"An' now," he finally growled, only silence returning to him, "she's gone an' blowed out the light."

This wouldn't do. This wouldn't do atall! Fronie was in that house. He had seen her with his own eyes. She had moved out of the kitchen with the lamp. In the livin' room she had put out the light. It could mean only one thing. Fronie had something to hide!

Jealousy burned through him. Maybe that something in the house was a man; maybe he had been sitting at the north end of the table where he could not be seen from the gear-room windows. A man would explain these well-plowed and planted fields. Never in the world could Fronie and the children have handled those sixty acres so well. A man had to be around! A man in that house sleeping with Fronie, putting his legs under Bad Bill Tell's table and setting himself up as boss over Bad Bill Tell's children!

Forty men in that house or not, he was soon going forward. If they shot him down as he crossed the eighty yards of open ground between the house and barn they would just have to shoot. Come hell, come the high waters, he was going to see Fronie. She was always first in his mind, the children he really didn't know having to play second fiddle as far as his heart was concerned.

He reached the end of the front porch without the crash of a rifle or the heavy report of a revolver. Now on the planking he could not walk lightly with the iron taps on the heels and the steel caps on the toes of those stiff brogans. Rifle still held for the quick slip-drop shot, he halted before the thick front door of wrought-ironed oak that had stood since Cherokee days. He tried the bolt, and found it locked, then his left fist lifted and fell against the hard-seasoned wood.

"Don't try to open that door!" called a sharp voice inside. "If you do I'll drop you dead with a load of buckshot!"

"Fronie!" His tone carried the weight of great anxiety. "Fronie, you open this door an' let me in my own house!"

"I ain't goin' to stand an' wait all night!" Her voice was rising hysterically. "I aim to shoot if you try to open it just once more! I know who you are out there, Alec Duke! There ain't one of you who can fool me!"

"Fronie," he tried to soften his tone, "it ain't nobody but me. I'm Will, Fronie. I'm *Will Tell,* an' I've come home, full-pardoned an' clear. Honey, don't keep me standin' an' waitin'!"

"You don't even sound like Will!" cried the woman. "You—you ain't goin' to fool me!"

"Fronie, please listen to me," he pleaded. "I'll walk on to the window. I'll strike a match an' let you see my face. If I ain't Will Tell, then, by God, you can shoot down!"

"It—it looks like Will, an' it doesn't!" She was crying on the other side of the window a few moments later while he stood there holding a burning match. "Lord, how could it be Will, an' him off to the penitentiary!"

"My stars, Fronie," he groaned, the match burning his fingers before he dropped it, "I wrote my regular letter last Thursday, tellin' you I'd be set free Monday morning! Here it is Tuesday night."

"I haven't had a letter from Will," she sobbed, "in more than two years, though I wrote to him most times twice a week!"

She let him in at last, but it was a strange meeting between a man and wife. The door was unfastened. Before allowing him to open it she backed away and on to the opposite side of a long old table in the center of the room. In her hands was a double-barreled shotgun, the muzzle toward him, her fingers on the triggers.

"If you've got another match," her voice had steadied, "you can strike it an' light the lamp on the table. The windows are covered. Nobody can see inside. If you're Will you're more'n welcome home. But if you're somebody tryin' to fool me they'll take you out of this room feet-first as sure as these hammers will fall an' this gun will fire!"

"God, Fronie, do I look that bad!"

"No, Will, no!" She told him that five minutes later, still keeping the table between them, his Marlin and her shotgun lying across it. "But—but you ain't the man who went away with little or no beard to speak of on your face. You're my Will. That much I see more an' more, but they must have done some awful things to you!"

"I'M only older, Fronie." He tried to smile. "The first five year' was the hardest, the chain-gang of the rock quarries, then a year on the roads. I got metal poisonin' from the culls on my ankles. They sent me back to the hospital in the big pen. I got in the barber shop from there, an' they say I learned to be a master barber. That's how I could send you a dollar or two in my letters now and then. I'd sometimes get what they call tips from the warden an' the guards, an' save 'em up until I could change 'em to paper money. Now you say you ain't had no letters in so long, an' I swear I've had none from you."

"There was a reason, Will." The tears in her eyes were glowing gems in the lamplight. "Twice a week we walked the two miles to the mail box down on the public road, an' came back empty-handed except for mail-order catalogues an' such. The Finleys an' the Dukes were robbin' the box for mail going or coming, Will. The law caught up with young Johnny Duke last Saturday mornin' just after the rural free delivery man had gone past. Johnny puked up his guts, an' told all. Now the post office folks are after the whole push, an' the Finleys an' Dukes are in the bushes, tryin' to keep out of sight.

"It's caused an awful ruckus, Will," she was going on steadily. "Parson Charley Bell an' his wife come up at daylight Monday mornin'. They took the children back down in the valley with 'em where they'd be safe. I ain't had a dog here in more'n a year without it bein' poisoned or shot while runnin' varmints in the woods off the edge of the place.

"There are times, Will," she took a deep breath, "when I hate myself for the Finley blood in my veins from

Ma's side, but she took no lyin' an' killin' after them, an' hadn't up to the time she was twelve when Pa married her. I—I wish we could sell out or give up an' go away, Will. But—but," she stiffened, "ain't you comin' 'round the table just to touch me if nothin' more?"

"No, Fronie, not right now." His eyes were shining, a trembly smile filling his face. "I want to stand here for a minute more an' enjoy the sight, my woman crost this table from me. My arms have ached so long I dasn't be too quick. Somethin' might bust loose in me like a ragin' bull or a hungry catamount, an' I'd start gnawin' you to death right there. Oh, Fronie, how I've missed you!"

"I'm a stout woman, Will." Her lips trembled. "You can come 'round the table when you're ready, an' I think I'll be full able to hold my yard of the floor."

"Fronie!"

THERE was peace for the night. Hoot owls drummed in the hollows and on the ridgebacks in the timber. The moon was big and bright, and none of his old enemies were going to creep up on a darkened house with Bad Bill Tell inside. Smart young fools who had grown up in the past ten years might try it, thinking of establishing their killer records early in life with the hope of being looked upon as gallant fighting men among the mountain girls. Those were the ones to watch at night.

They slept in the deep feather ticking on the big hand-pegged wooden bed where he was born in a rear room, but it was long before they were settled down, the silence coming as they lay in the warmth of each other's arms. There had been much to talk about, and it would be weeks before they might run out of stories to relate.

"Seems all you've done since I was gone was to get better lookin'. By God, Fronie, you're a woman! You've rounded out an' filled in, the purtiest thing I've ever seen on two feet!"

"Just turnin' to full woman is the cause, Will." She looked at him with those smiling blue eyes. "I was little more'n a child when you went away, an'—an' you was only a boy. I had the eight hundred dollars you'd buried in the fruit jar out in the barn.

"Anyhow, it was life for me an' the children. I've lived off it, borrowin' a little from it when I just had to borrow, an' payin' it back with the things like corn an' taters an' such I sold off the land. I'd say it's still mostabout all there, an' no back taxes due on the land."

"But how," he wanted to know, "have you managed the land, all the plowin' an' such?"

"I managed it with my head," she laughed, "an' the old fruit jar in the barn. Granpa Andy Miller on the old Tolliver place north of us has had one of them new tractor things an' all its plows for more'n five year' now. He comes an' brings his two sons-in-law. They break the ground late in the fall, lettin' it lie fallow through the winter. When spring comes the fields are soft an' loose. They come an' cut it just once with their big cultivators. The grain goes in the ground at the same time. Me an' the children thin an' hoe it when it comes up. With a wide sweep on the plow we take the mule an' keep the grass down. Granpa Andy does all his work for a hundred dollars. Last year I sold nearly twelve hundred dollars off the place. It pays right well doin' it that way, Will."

She leaned against the wall, watching him in the dim light. "The land will feed you when all else fails. There ain't no place closer to Heaven, if we can only live in peace. I hate the thoughts of men huntin' an' hurtin' each other, Will. I don't like the sight of blood."

He nodded. "I'm thirty now, an' a little over. From here on I'll work like a man should, an' keep my mind off of makin' big money fast. You'll do the managin' of the money an' things. If we can't stay here without trouble, then I'll sell out or let Sam Clark an' my sister Kate come an' run things. We'll go to a town with schools nearby, an' I'll open a barber shop. We'll get a place to live where we can still have our vegetable garden, our pigs an' chickens, an' maybe a cow. It ain't hard to live an' be happy if you don't ask for more'n you're due."

The years of doubt were behind them when morning came. The future was settled. The brightest star that ever gleamed on their horizon was in sight if he was not killed before they could step forward to take advantage of it. But his situation would not be helped with simple-minded Johnny Duke nailed by the postal authorities for stealing letters and money from the mail box down on a lonely bend on the old public road. The Dukes and the Finleys would rise to a new and ardent cause for war, the Gauls, the Birds and the Chumleys swarming to them, and Bad Bill Tell hated more than ever as one cause of the trouble befalling Johnny.

It was kinfolk business from the start, and kinfolk falling out with each other could hate more than any breed of man or vicious wild animal on earth. Fronie was half-Finley on her mother's side, for her mother had been the daughter of Devil Phil, and Phil a brother to one-eyed Buck until seventeen bullets from revenue agents had cut him to pieces one night in Black Oak Hollow. The last of the Tells had Chumley, Bird and Gaul blood in his veins, and possibly a cross-strain here or there of the dangerous Finley tribe just to make them mean when once started up with the right lick to get them hopping mad.

Shooting women was not a habit with any of them, and Fronie had been safe enough from that until now. Anything could happen from this point on with Johnny Duke in jail and others certain to go. Fronie Tell was certain to be called into court to tell of her missing letters and help heap the coals of damnation on their heads.

"An' now that you're home," she warned her Bad Bill, "they'll call you to court with me, an' maybe the children. It'll never be safe here night or day after that."

"When we leave," he had nodded, "they'll say a Tell turned coward an' afraid to defend his own house in—"

"You ain't livin' for the Tell record now," she cut in. "It's for me an' the children. Tells always fought. Everyone knows that. But we ain't here to carry on the blood; we'll leave that for the ghosts to mutter an' chuckle over in the chimney corners in the dark an' windy nights. If you stay an' fight, all you can ever look for is to join 'em, and ha'nts make pore fathers an' husbands, Will."

IT was late for mountain people when they were ready to head for the barn at sunrise. Fronie led the way, keeping a dozen paces ahead of him as he ordered and carried one of the milk pails. She had slipped a long old threadbare cape of light material over her shoulders. Under the cape was the Marlin, the barrel downward, the butt in her armpit and held there by the right hand that was holding the pail.

"There's no use in invitin' trouble," she warned. "By walkin' out with a gun bristlin' in your hand it shows in a way that you know they've got their sign on you, an' you're afraid of 'em."

There were two cows in the barn, the one with the young calf in the hallway, and an old brindled muley in a stall. She milked the brindle while he fed a big red mule his morning corn and fodder, then threw shelled grain to the chickens in the lean-to. Fronie took it upon herself to walk out in the narrow lane to the pasture and take the nubbings of corn to the pig pens. Just beyond the pens she opened the pasture gate and propped it back against the fence.

Without bothering the little cow with the new calf, they were soon leaving the barn. Fronie was about to take the lead, the Marlin hidden under her cape. Bad Bill started to bring up the rear with the pails of

milk. Before he could take two paces the milk was spilling in the hallway as he dropped the pails with a startled grunt. Fronie was falling back from the doorway with a gasp of alarm, her left hand flying to her face.

"No!" she cried. *"No!"*

But it had already come, a bullet from the slopes to the west where he had leaned against the rock the night before. Trailed by the report of a powerful rifle, there had been a slapping sound against the thick oak beam over the woman's head, a shower of splinters falling, and the deflected bullet shrieking away in the bright morning sunlight to lose itself somewhere across the fields to eastward.

"They've started it, Will!" Fronie was still trying to hold on to the rifle as he grabbed for it. "Shoot back at 'em, an' they'll jail you ag'in!"

Another shot came, so close to the first that half of Fronie Tell's words had been lost in the noise. There had been a scream across the mouth of the hallway, a slapping and ripping sound against the end of the barn, and the second bullet crying away in the air with the sound of some giant insect. This time it had come from the timberline to eastward, marking riflemen opening up to make it a deadly cross-fire on the barn in which no living thing might escape.

"They saw you, Fronie!" he cried as she still struggled to retain her hold on the Marlin. "They knew it was you, and they tried to kill you! They're here to wipe us out!"

"Don't go back to jail, Will!" She was desperately clinging to the rifle as he tried to twist it from her hands. "You ain't goin' back! Let's die together, Will! Don't let them send you away from me ag'in!"

"I've paid my score, Fronie!" he yelled. "I've paid for a thing I didn't do! I'm through with the law!"

"Nobody's ever through with the law!" she wailed. "Nobody as long as it can come sneakin' up an' nail you!"

A wailing bullet from the edge of the timber to the north made the struggling woman falter and lose her grip on the rifle. The bullet had struck one of the overturned milk pails a yard in front of her feet. It lifted it, bouncing and banging the pail back between her ankles. She screamed and dropped to one knee. At that instant Bill had her off balance and wrenched the Marlin free.

"Get in a stall an' hit the ground!"

The cow and the new calf wheeled to run; lashing their tails and kicking up their heels. Running in a crouch behind them Bill Tell reached the big hog pen, remembering that its four walls were thick stone covered with a shed. At the pen he leaped to his left, a scooting thing going over the wall and down among eight pigs so greedy with their feeding they were ignoring the noise bursting across the fields and rising steadily to a battle din.

He got his first shot in a few seconds. It was at the rump of a man showing as it thrust outward, its owner bending to a crouch on the other side of the tree. At the Marlin's long crash the man in the edge of the timber sprawled backward with a yell, dust and bits of clothing flying as if an explosion had taken place in the seat of his pants to blow the stern off of him.

Another man broke cover a second later, a long, lean and wild thing bolting from one low clump of brush and rocks to another. Bad Bill Tell had the sights of the Marlin on him the instant he appeared. His second shot caught the man on a long and high jump in mid-air. There was a scream that might have come from a fighting panther, and the man turned, his left knee shattered by the bullet and a broken hinge folding under him as he crashed into the rocks and brush.

"The first one was Alec Duke, Will!" Bullets or no bullets, Fronie had followed him, leaping over the wall with the nimbleness of a scared goat. "Lord, it looked like you took the whole hindquarters off'n 'im, an' he had nothin' to set on at the start! The other'n's Pearly Gaul! Don't shoot no more, Will! Please don't shoot no more! If they don't die you won't get more'n a year or two. Lord God, what's that!" Her tone shot to a frightening pitch. "Look at him! The Devil 'imself, astandin' in the bushes!"

It was the Devil—a long and lean old man with his right eye a pale button in the side of the face, the other socket a red and gaping pocket. Faded blue denim covered him from his feet to his waist. Above the waist was a home-made shirt made of blue-striped bed ticking. Jammed on the back of his snow-white and unkempt head was a little blue hat. A mattress of white beard hung to his belly-button. Swung behind him on a strap to his left shoulder was a long rifle. In his long old hands was a repeating shotgun.

"Lord in Heaven, help us!" Fronie was down on her knees and her hands clasped in front of her. "He'll kill ever'thing on the place, leavin' not a blade of corn alive if he can help it! Will, that's Uncle Buck Finley! That —that's my granpa's brother!"

"My God, Fronie," he groaned, "I know all that! I'd know his mean hide dried an' stretched on a hot rock in hell!"

"Look at him!" she gasped. "Will, he's gonna kill Pearly Gaul!"

The butt of the shotgun tilted upward, the muzzle of the long barrel going down. Buck Finley took no time to speak to the writhing man on the ground. The shotgun fired. The thing on the ground and low bushes flattened out with a jerk, and the old man walked on to the tree where Alec Duke was lying and cursing like a maniac on the ground.

Buck Finley must have had several things to say to Alec Duke. Elbows propped under him, Duke lifted his head and shoulders, a buck-toothed and gopher-mouthed young fellow who seemed to be pleading in terror with the old devil standing there so cool and thoughtful. Whatever Alec Duke was saying it had little effect on Buck Finley. Will Tell and his wife saw the old head turn slightly. They saw him spit a streak from the side of his white-bearded lips that might have been tobacco juice if it had not been so bright red.

And then the shotgun's long barrel dropped. Buck Finley didn't show any sign of aiming the gun. He merely pointed it, knowing where he wanted his thundering load to go. Duke's head was back, his eyes glaring, his face yellow chalk. A ring of smoke burst downward. Duke was still there, elbows holding him, but the mouth, the face and head had vanished. A second charge of buckshot caught him in the chest, and his elbows and arms flapped outward as if he had been split in half. What was left of him flattened back in the weeds.

Buck Finley stood there now as if he had all the rest of the day about things. The one pale eye was gandering around. The concern in the old face was no more than that of a farmer looking over a cornfield. He slipped three loaded shells into the magazine of his old pump gun, and leaned against a tree.

The firing was growing heavier, cursing and yelling coming from the

It's a Knack

The circus strong man
does not fail
With hands and teeth
to bend a nail.
I too can bend one—
I've a trick
That does it any time,
and quick.
To bend a nail,
and bend it good,
I start to pound one
straight in wood.

—Richard Armour

distance. Neither Bill nor his wife seemed to notice that only an occasional bullet was coming toward the house and the barn. They were watching the Devil in the edge of the timber. They saw him lift his left hand, pawing it downward from his lips to the end of his beard, the beard going red under the long stroke.

"Don't, Will." Fronie's voice was a whisper as her Bill started to bring up the Marlin again. "He's bad hurt. There's blood runnin' from his mouth. Uncle Buck!" Her voice lifted into a sudden scream that might have been heard all around the fields. "Uncle Buck, you're hurt! This is Fronie! I'm comin' to help you!"

"Stay where you are, young un!" Buck Finley yelled back as she started to lurch to her feet with Bad Bill's arm flying around her to hold her to her place. "Hit ain't done with yit! I'll come to you."

AND, he was coming, walking as straight as a gun barrel, old head up, the one eye glinting. At the north side of the pen he halted, letting his guns down and leaning them against the pen. Then he leaned himself against the four-foot wall of stone, and gandered down inside, old lips parting in a snaggle-toothed grin.

"Eighty-eight, I am now," he told them, his voice tired, his great age upon him. "I've lived a long time. Queer now," he again stroked the white mattress from his face to his belly-button, lifting it and looking at it, "I always wanted me a red beard. Men do have notions, wantin' somethin' all their lives, by Gawd. Soon as they get it then it seems like they die right afterwards without livin' to enjoy it. Like pilin' up money, maybe, an' leavin' it for a passel of young jaybirds an' lawyers to fight over.

"Howdy, Bill." The grin widened. "Glad to see you back to home—sorter. You look well, too, Fronie. Bet you'll be havin' another young un by the time he's home a year. I always did say you an' Bad Bill would have a whole damn barn full of little uns."

"Uncle Buck," Fronie was breaking in at last, "you're hurt!"

"Well, yes, sorter," he nodded. "'Round one o'clock this mornin', 'twas. I've got two little Owl Head pistol balls in my belly. Last night we had a general meetin' 'twix the Finleys, Dukes the Gauls, Chumleys an' Birds. We fell out with the Dukes an' Gauls. Hell fire, there ain't no use in all of us goin' to the jailhouse an' the federal pen just 'cause buck-toothed Johnny Duke was robbin' the mail box.

"We got to thinkin', too, Bill, of how the Dukes an' Gauls swore enough ag'in you in court to send you away. I got to thinking, too, Bill, that Fronie was my brother's gran'chile. It all wound up in a knock down an' drag out. Just as well it did. The law come 'fore daylight. Nigh thirty men this time, they say. With my belly bleedin' an' my mouth tastin' my own blood— Well, hell, I told the law ever' damn thing I could think of, I reckon. The Chumleys an' the Birds fell into it, stickin' by me. Stay as you are an' the law won't ever bother you again, Bill. You saw me kill Alec an' Pearly. Damn good riddance. The law won't bother me for that. I won't be in shape for trial, come court day. Say now," the one eye widened, "ain't you got manners enough to offer a dyin' man a drink of whisky?"

"There ain't a drop on the place, Uncle Bill." Fronie answered him, up on her feet and staring. "There won't be from now on!"

The old face grinned. "If you ain't got some I guess I'll have to drink my own."

His right hand pawed under his beard and inside his striped shirt. It came out with a pint bottle. They watched him uncork the bottle, saw him lift it to his red lips, and drain it to the last drop. He weaved on his feet as he tossed the bottle aside and shattered it against a rock. The hand went back to his mouth, again stroking downward. He lifted the reddened beard, looked at it, the one eye blinking, the snaggle-tooth grin appearing again.

"Purty as hell, now ain't it!"

And then Buck Finley, gun-daddy of the mountain pack, fell backward in the sunlight, a long, loose thing with one set eye glaring aimlessly upward at the morning sky. . . .

The law was coming a few minutes later, lines of men from every side of the clearing, gun barrels glinting and badges shining. Ahead of the guns like driven wolves were Dukes and Gauls. Finleys, Birds and Chumleys brought up the rear, for the first time in years walking behind the guns of the law instead of out in front of them.

And for the first time in years, Bill Tell was not afraid. He had come out of the hog pen with his Fronie, the Marlin left inside the pen. When the fat sheriff and three deputies came up they were standing there beside the body of Buck Finley, the red streaks from either side of his mouth now seeping into a pool under the white head.

"We saw him kill Alec Duke and Pearly Gaul." The law said that later. "There's no reason to think of arresting Bill Tell or his wife. If Bill fired any shots at all they were in self-defense. Leave them here in peace, and we'll take the bodies of the dead where they belong while the prisoners go on to jail."

There was much more of it than that. Bill Tell and his Fronie kept their mouths shut, standing there leaning against the hog pen for a long time. A Finley finally came up and shook hands with them. A Chumley and a Bird followed, then it was a lot of Finleys, Chumleys and Birds. Dukes and Gauls stood sullenly and at a distance, handcuffed to a long steel chain, men with badges and guns watching them.

Peace had come for two lonely people. Bill Tell's coming home had been a beautiful dream. The guns of morning had turned it into a nightmare. Now that was past.

At last Bill Tell and his wife Fronie were alone again, the cooling dark purple settling in the hollows, the timber around their clearing turning to a still square of shadows. The whippoorwills started calling, tonight the sounds floating like gentle chords of music wandering through the air. Bill Tell stood on the porch with his Fronie in the crook of his arm. He answered several times.

"Finleys to the west," he told her. "Birds an' Chumleys to the north an' east. I kinda think it's a Finley to the south, but it must be one of the younger ones. They're lettin' us know they're sorter lookin' out for us to see that some of them uncaught Dukes an' Gauls ain't doin' no sneakin' around."

"But tomorrow, Will?" She looked up at him. "Tomorrow Sam Clark an' your sister Katie will come. You got Tom Finley aside an' asked 'im to go for them. Tom's been there long before this."

"Yes," he nodded, "an' tomorrow we'll take the wagon an' the mule. We'll go down in the valley with a few things in the wagon. We'll get the children, an' then drive on for Gatlinburg. A good barber there can make a lot of money, they say, from early spring to late fall. Sometimes as much as a whole hundred dollars a week. We'll let Sam an' Kate run things until we sell.

"AN' I didn't come home exactly broke, Fronie." He squared his shoulders, proudly. "There's nine dollars I'd saved from my tip money toward the last when I couldn't hear from you. I walked it home, an' only spent twenty cents from the five dollars they gimme. Just enough for a loaf of bread. There was water to drink nigh ever'where I looked at the sides of the roads."

"You kinda forget one thing, Will." She pressed herself in between his arms, worming her body against him, her voice a mere whisper for his ear. "When it comes to money there's still the good old fruit jar, awaitin' in the barn." •

By LESTER DAVID

What are YOU afraid of?

Everybody's worried about something these days—food, overwork, death and taxes. But the experts tell you to forget it, and you'll live a lot longer.

Photo-Illustration by ROY KUHLMAN

■ What the hell is going on around here?

Why is everyone trying to tell me how to stay alive—and scaring the daylights out of me in the process? Why does everyone persist in making a production out of routine things like eating, sleeping and working?

I, for one, am fed up—but good. Let me explain. . . .

It seems that an incredible, and infuriating, trend has been gathering momentum the past few years, and

has now reached a crescendo. It's advice. Tons of advice, hurled at us from every corner. Never before has there been such a concentrated mass of it bombarding us citizens.

It gushes in torrents from individuals of every background and training; it jams the newspapers; it flows from the lecture platform, over radio microphones and from television screens; it's contained in plain and fancy brochures which clutter my mailbox.

Everyone, through every conceivable medium of information, is telling me how to have a healthier, longer, wiser and saner life. I'm all for that. But in the past several years, so many people with special axes to grind have gotten into the act that now it's impossible to winnow fact from fakery, scientifically-proven truth from the bleatings of the causists.

And the net result is that we poor targets of all this well-intentioned advice have become more and more jittery because of the bewildering variety of half-baked, frequently contradictory and occasionally ridiculous "rules" for living fired at us.

Take food. Nutrition "experts," each more clamorous than the other, tell me I eat too much, too little, too often and the wrong things. I am solemnly warned that if I don't get enough of the right viands my skin will shrink, my bones will soften, my teeth will fall out, my tissues will break down and all the signs of degenerative diseases will appear decades before they should. New announcements are made practically every day about what can happen if you don't eat right. One of the latest: If you consume insufficient amounts of certain essential foods, it will cause a marked decrease in sex interest. I won't tell you what the foods are. After all, why should I give you something else to worry about?

The result of all this incessant palaver about how, when, what and how much to eat is alarming. We've become a nation of food neurotics. Vinne Young, a sagacious young woman who has just completed intensive research into the problem of eating, concludes in a recent book: "One out of three Americans has been convinced that he or she eats too much, and because hunger has taken on the proportion of a crime, he or she eats a poisonous load of guilt with every meal."

Miss Young knows whereof she speaks, and I'll carry it even further. At each meal, with practically every mouthful, I now find myself wondering:

"Is this stuff nutritious enough? Am I stoking myself with the proper minerals, vitamins and proteins in their correct proportions? Have I chewed that last mouthful enough—didn't I read somewhere that insufficient chewing might eventually cause cancer of the stomach? Are the French fries—done in deep, indigestible fat, you know—going to upset my stomach? I'd love some ice cream for dessert but I didn't have my daily quota of vitamin C today, so I guess I'll have grapefruit."

I'm not alone, I assure you. One researcher studied the problem of people's reactions to food and concluded, after months of investigation: "Every time they sit down to a meal, millions of Americans stop to worry whether they're eating what they ought to eat in the way it ought to be eaten."

As just one solid example of what the scary advice can do: Not long ago, word came out that certain foods contain cholesterol, a white, waxy substance that oozes through the walls of the arteries, forms hard blobs and ultimately causes them to harden. Cholesterol, we were told, is absorbed from animal fats, egg yolks and brain. As a result, impressionable people immediately cut out cholesterol-bearing foods from their diets.

Then came a reversal. It wasn't at all certain that *all* people who eat those foods would develop hardened arteries, just those whose systems cannot handle excess cholesterol. And nobody could figure out just why it was that some folks could burn up excess cholesterol and some couldn't. So the public was told it was a mistake to curb their diets. Some persons heeded and began to eat egg-yolks and animal fats again; but others were still scared, and didn't. That's how matters stand, as of now.

All things considered, the more advice I get, the less I enjoy eating. So, upset about the whole business of diets, diet supplements, health foods and the dos and don'ts flung at me by the barrelful, I consulted the top authorities for some straight answers. And I got them. The answers blow away the smoke screen laid around the dinner table by the advice boys. They make eating a lot more fun and a whole lot simpler than you've been led to believe.

First, scientists and government food and drug officials gave the horse laugh to all the diet faddists, the health-food purveyors, the strength-through-yogurt lads.

Said Dr. Charles G. King, scientific director of the Nutrition Foundation in New York City, one of the country's best known food research organizations: "You don't have to have any of the faddists' diets, so-called 'live foods' or yogurt for good health." Period.

Declared an article in a publication of the American Medical Association, in discussing wheat germ, blackstrap molasses and the much-touted yogurt: "None of these foods is essential for maximum nutrition or health. All of them can be used to advantage in a mixed diet, but they are no more indispensable than artichokes." Period.

Drink sauerkraut juice all day long, munch carrots for breakfast and lunch, gobble huge doses of honey and you'll live to be a hundred, the pamphleteers holler. You won't, the men who really know the score assure you—it will only seem that long. More, the U. S. Food and Drug Administration is mad as hops at the food faddists because folks rely on them to cure various ailments, instead of getting proper medical attention while there still is time.

Second—and this will knock you flat on your calories—if you're an average, run-of-the-mine eater, a guy who puts away three reasonably-good meals a day, you don't have to do one single lick of worrying about whether you're getting the right nutrients. And that's because the average man, without even realizing it, is eating the foods his body needs.

It's just a matter of common sense, doctors and the real nutrition experts explained to me. Sure, if a guy bolts only coffee and doughnuts for breakfast day in and day out; if he grabs just a quick sandwich and more coffee for lunch every day; if he relies on more sandwiches or hasty meals at night, he's bound to be missing out on the important things. But, doctors told me, most people take time for meals, most eat vegetables, most vary their dishes, most get enough of the right foods without realizing they do.

In other words, chances are you're eating right automatically, and you don't have to add up the grams and milligrams of protein, calcium, thiamine, riboflavin or what-have-you.

Even the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Research Council isn't quite sure how much of what kind of foods you should eat, so why listen to lesser lights? The board asked 50 of the country's top nutrition scientists to submit their suggestions as to what constitutes an adequate diet. And, not much to the board's surprise, there was very little agreement. The board thereupon listed its recommendations—stressing they were merely that—for men, women and children in various age groups and types of activity, but concluded with this admission:

"Inasmuch as some persons who receive less than the recommended allowance of one or another nutrient may remain in good health through

long periods, it becomes apparent that these allowances are not to be used as the sole criteria for judging the state of nutrition of any population. . . . Not all people who fail to reach the goals, however, are necessarily malnourished."

So—go ahead and eat. Enjoy yourself, and pay no mind to the dire warnings. You'll be just as healthy, and meals will be a damn sight more fun.

SECOND only to food are the warnings on the subject of worry. Stop worrying, everybody screams at me. Worry is the big killer. Worry sends up the blood pressure, induces heart attacks, robs you of sleep, destroys your efficiency on the job, wrecks marriages and families.

Beware worry, I hear from all sides. One out of every 20 persons born in America will eventually spend some time in a mental hospital. A famous clinic announces that half the hospital beds in the nation are occupied by people suffering from illnesses induced by worry. Ol' debbil worry, we are told, can bring on a form of arthritis, diabetes, thyroid deficiency and even—hold your breath—toothache!

What's the net result of this enormous howl about worry? I sat in the office of a well-known New York City psychiatrist and he told me this:

"Time after time, patients come to me with the same story. They're ridden by anxieties. They all exhibit the same symptoms—palpitation of the heart, headaches, digestive disturbances, insomnia, tightness around the chest. It would be funny if it weren't so pathetic.

"These people are actually worried about being worried!

"They have heard so much about how dangerous worry is supposed to be, that they are scared to death they are worrying too much. They are afraid that these calamities they have heard about will strike them.

"One man told me he stops working 50 times a day to take stock of himself and ask: 'Am I too tense right now?' If he feels that he is, he worries himself into another stew about it."

What's the answer—what's the real truth?

Let Dr. Charles W. Collins, psychotherapist at the Lafargue Clinic, in New York City, explain:

"Sure, tension can cause harm. But it's got to be an enormous amount of tension, continued over a long period of time. But what most people don't realize is that everybody does a certain amount of worrying, and this kind of worry is perfectly harmless. Look at it this way: Most chest pains do not indicate heart disease. In the same way, most worries don't mean serious illness is on the way."

And then Dr. Collins came out with the clincher:

"I don't know of a single case of so-called nervous breakdown caused by simple worry. There are so many other factors which must be present. I won't list them because impressionable readers might immediately imagine them too. You see, when you go too far in worrying, in the vast majority of cases, natural corrective forces take over and snap you out of it."

The really strange part of the whole business is that worry actually is not only harmless, but beneficial. And the popular psychologists who tell you via their best sellers to stop worrying are being, to put it mildly, unrealistic. In fact, one of the country's most-widely-circulated periodicals recently pointed out in an editorial: "In these menacing days of Communist aggression and American automobile traffic, anyone who actually learned 'how to stop worrying' would be a poor citizen and a bad insurance risk. It's probably about time that some unpopular but really practical psychologist turned out a book of counter-propaganda under the title 'Start Worrying or Stop Living'."

DR. PETER J. STEINCROHN, in a recent book, "Heart Disease Is Curable," actually titles a chapter, "Worry Can Prolong Life." The doctor assails the super-optimists, the never-worry boys, citing the case of a 25-year-old victim of rheumatic fever who was hospitalized for a heart condition. When his major symptoms disappeared, he left the hospital against the advice of the physician, who counselled another several weeks of bed rest. But the young man wasn't worried about himself—and three days later he suffered a fatal heart attack. On the other hand, another heart patient, apprehensive about his condition, actually asked the doctor whether he was allowed to do a cross-word puzzle—it meant lifting a pencil and thus performing some activity, he explained. *This* fellow recovered.

"When illness strikes," Dr. Steincrohn sums up, "a little worry goes a long way in helping to restore health."

Want some more opinion from *real* experts? Then look carefully at these:

Dr. John R. Rees, director of the World Federation for Mental Health, points out: "Worry, in the sense of having to puzzle out the answer to some problem, is a necessity in life."

Dr. C. Charles Burlingame, psychiatrist-in-chief at The Institute of Living, Hartford, Conn., declares: "There is such a thing as a healthy amount of anxiety. If there weren't, we wouldn't look both ways before crossing the street. We wouldn't live long. We wouldn't worry about our youngster who is running a fever, so we wouldn't call a doctor."

Dr. Karl A. Menninger, one of America's foremost psychiatrists, and conductor of the Menninger Clinic, in Topeka, Kan., asserts: "It is not abnormal to worry about things which threaten our safety or our ideals or our plans. It is because of this capacity to see ahead, to anticipate certain dangers and to avoid them, that man has achieved what he has. In this sense, worry is one of the earmarks of civilization."

No, you don't have to worry because you're an average worrier. In fact, take the word of another realistic medical man, Dr. Louis E. Bisch, who tells you flatly, "Be glad you're neurotic!" Dr. Bisch, who cheerfully admits he's neurotic himself, tells you there are untold thousands upon thousands like him and that it's a perfectly fine condition. Most neuroses, he explains, are mild and harmless. Not only that—and this has boosted my morale a thousand percent, as it should boost yours—he says succinctly: "To be normal is nothing to brag about. When I study normal people and compare them with neurotics, I wonder sometimes whether to be normal is not something to be ashamed about."

And just one final word from another authority, Dr. Joseph V. Collins, one of the founders of the Neurological Institute:

"All the greatest things we know have come to us from neurotics. It is they, and they only, who have founded religions and created works of art."

So stop scaring me to death about worry.

LET'S dwell just for a moment on another popular myth, believed by scads of persons and fostered by the advice brigade. It's this: If you work too hard, you'll work yourself into a nervous breakdown.

I know a fellow who got himself a sound idea for a new kind of business. He was a mechanic in a large automobile parts factory, saved some money and bought a small home in a Long Island, N. Y., suburb. The development was miles away from shopping centers and his wife groused about how tough it was to bundle the kids in the car and do the marketing. My friend asked some questions and learned other wives had the same complaint. Why not, he reasoned, get a large second-hand trailer, stock it with fruits, vegetables and groceries, attach it to his car and patrol the streets—not only in his development but in others like it?

He saved some more, took the plunge, and made an instant hit. Housewives were happy to patronize his curb-service, traveling super-market. He was doing fine—and then came the big hitch. It was hard work; it's always hard with a new business. There were long hours of planning, buying, accounting and selling. And he couldn't afford help. In the back of his mind was the thought that overwork will produce a breakdown. He continued for almost a year and then, although still in excellent physical and mental health, sold out the business.

Today he's back at the auto parts plant, while the fellow who bought him out is running a flourishing little enterprise. Belief in a myth had stopped him cold.

He's not alone. There are lots of ambitious men with jobs or small businesses who want to put on the steam but are scared off—mustn't work too hard, they tell themselves; mustn't lay myself open for a nervous breakdown.

But listen to scientific evidence: It's sheer nonsense, the evidence says. Dr. Tom A. Williams, of Washington, has drawn up a list of popular misconceptions about health—and No. 2 on the list (we'll get to No. 1 in a moment) is the widely accepted but entirely baseless belief about overwork leading to nervous collapse.

Dr. John J. B. Morgan, professor of psychology at Northwestern University, also gives you the straight dope:

"It is safe to say," he declares, "that the so-called nervous breakdown is never the result of overwork, although it often is attributed to this cause by the victim. The normal, healthy person need have no fear of work. The sequence of fatigue and rest is thoroughly wholesome, and there is no danger either in fatigue or rest, providing the sequence is maintained and there is a fair degree of balance between them."

It simply means that you can work hard, get good and tired, rest up well, and work hard once again with no ill effects, if there's nothing wrong with you physically.

The advice artillery has another pet target—insomnia. There are more alleged cures for sleeplessness shot at Americans than virtually anything else, not excepting nostrums for baldness and flagging virility. There are relaxation cures by the scores, special foods, beds, pillows, herbs, lights and assorted what-not. And the nonsense written about sleep is staggering.

Take, for instance, that stuff you've been hearing about eight hours sleep. You must have it or you'll lose health and vitality. The maxim is about as scientifically sound as the notions that all fat men are jolly and all blondes are dumb. A bit back I mentioned Dr. Williams, of Washington, and his list of popular misconceptions about the body. Heading the list are these myths about sleep:

"Eight hours sleep is essential to health. All insomnia is dangerous and incompatible with health. Nervous insomnia leads to insanity."

Most folks have fixed ideas about how much sleep they need, and therein lies the root of much trouble. Says Dr. R. Klingman: "Those who sleep eight hours and believe they need ten consider themselves to be suffering just as much from insomnia as others who cannot get more than four or five hours of sleep but who would be satisfied with six or seven."

It's this fear about not getting enough sleep that causes the overwhelming majority of all insomnia cases. Dr. Gudmund Magnussen, a Danish psychiatrist, made the point not long ago, in a report to the National Association for Mental Health, in New York City. He calls it a "chain reaction of sleeplessness" and it works like this:

You have a big day ahead of you and you go to bed with the thought that you've got to get a good night's rest to be especially alert on the morrow. The thought sticks in your mind and, as a result, you sleep fitfully. You're tired next day because you're convinced that you didn't get your full quota of slumber. The next night you tell yourself, "I've really *got* to sleep tonight to make up for last night. The thought burrows deeper. You sleep worse. And so it goes, the third and fourth nights.

By then, you're convinced you can't sleep, that insomnia has you in its grip. You're afraid you can't sleep, so you don't. You start heeding the advice boys, fattening the pocketbooks of the patent remedy purveyors and gadget sellers. You start taking the relaxation cures.

But let me now tell you—you don't *need* their advice nor their contraptions. Less do you need sleeping pills. All you need to know is just this:

You're not sleeping because, basically, you believe you need a certain fixed amount of sleep and you're afraid you won't get it. Understand, though, that your body requires a whole lot less sleep than you think. Listen to what a recent publication of the American Medical Association says:

"A study of body chemistry indicates that four hours will take care of actual repairs in healthy young men who are not engaged in strenuous physical work." The report goes on to say that you need a "margin of safety" to feel tip-top . . . but the fact remains that the body itself needs only those four hours.

Then there is this vital point: Sleep is a natural phenomenon. It's got to come, if you'll only let it. The more you putter around with so-called cures for insomnia, the more sleep, or lack of it, preys on your mind.

Forget the advice. Stop worrying about getting sick if you don't sleep. Dr. James F. Bender, director of the Institute of Human Relations, points out that only one man has ever died from lack of sleep, a thoroughly rare instance in which the victim remained completely sleepless for nine days and nights.

Chances are, too, that you're getting much more sleep than you think. Remember that just ten minutes of fitful tossing at night seems like hours. Hospital nurses are continually being complained to by patients who wail that they haven't closed their eyes all night. And yet the nurses, who have been in and out of their rooms during their entire shift, have observed them honking away peacefully.

Perhaps the most dangerous advice you can take is to heed the host of relaxation therapies that are being offered to you—for a fee—all over the place. Doctors and psychiatrists are really alarmed about this rising menace, chiefly because the "cures," whether it be hypnosis, medications or weird forms of exercise, are guaranteed to help everyone, regardless of age or temperament.

One middle-aged man was bedridden for months with a badly-sprained back when he faithfully tried a set of exercises, which may have worked for a much younger chap. A woman who tried hypnosis wound up in a mental hospital. Prof. Josephine L. Rathbone, of Columbia University's Teachers College, a bonafide expert in relaxation, tells you to forget the panaceas and seek relief in the way you find best, or doing what you enjoy most.

And still the advice flows—

Everyone tells me I've got to have a hobby. Best thing in the world for you, they say. Takes you away from the nine-to-five cares. Refreshes you, gives you an interest, zings up your life.

So I gave in. I got me a hobby. I took up gardening.

I began to work on our lawn. Just got the house, you know. I tended it faithfully, even got up in the middle of the night to water it when the community clamped down on use of the sprinkler during the day because the last summer's drought. It began to look real pretty, and then came mid-July and crabgrass.

Well. Every weekend I was squatting in the broiling sun for hours at a clip—while the family was at the beach—industriously pulling up the weeds. I got a bad case of sunburn, my temper

got short, but I kept on. So did the crabgrass. It was like shoveling sand against the tide. Weekends weren't enough, so I began to steal time out during the week. I found myself studying ways and means of killing crabgrass when I should have been working. My work suffered. So did the lawn, which began looking pock-marked, like no man's land. Along came early September and, after all my man-sized effort, a professional gardener stopped by our place, squinted at the lawn and remarked: "You know, you really should do something about that crabgrass. It'll spoil your lawn in no time, sure as shootin'."

I gave up my hobby. I am seriously considering taking the advice of an editor I know who tells me the best kind of lawn to have comes in large bags, labeled cement. And tinted green.

The point is that too many fellows, blindly accepting the rule that everyone has to have a hobby, pursue theirs grimly, get themselves all worked up and tuckered out, and derive neither enjoyment nor relaxation from them. They won't admit it, but their hobbies, which are supposed to refresh them are actually chores.

I, for one, realized that I did have a few "hobbies" after all. I like to be with the family; I like to play with the kids; I like good company and good talk; I like to read and listen to music. Don't take the advice of the got-to-have-a-hobby band too seriously. Do what you want but for heaven's sake, do only what you like and have fun doing!

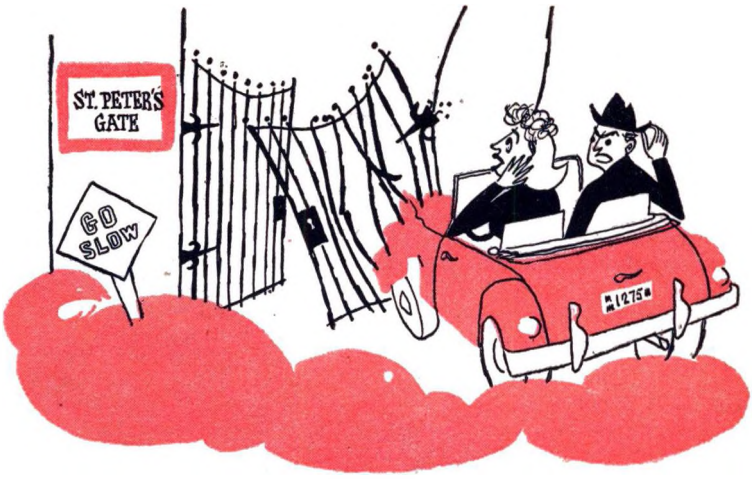
More and more advice. Get lots of fresh air, I'm told. Open the windows. Breathe deeply. Got to do it for health. So what happens? We have a nation of fresh air fiends who shiver, catch cold, get thoroughly miserable but keep the windows open nonetheless. Because it's healthy.

They should hear Dr. Clarence A. Mills of the University of Cincinnati. "Americans," he says flatly, "have greatly overdone the fresh air idea." And the Council on Physical Medicine, of the American Medical Association, says there's no proof that lots of fresh air is at all helpful for acne eczema or rashes, as so many fondly believe.

After looking pretty thoroughly into all the foregoing, all I have to say is this:

Life is a whole lot less complicated than the calamity howlers would have us believe. The genuine experts in these fields say so, and I'd much rather listen to them.

Me, I'm turning a deaf ear to the exhortations of the advice hucksters. They're not going to scare me to death any more. •



MOTOR MIRTH

■ A Massachusetts driver entered St. Peter's gate and still lived to tell about it. His automobile went out of control and crashed through the gate at the home of Nelson St. Peter.

☐ *"The part I don't like about parking," explained the woman driver to a friend, "is that noisy crash."*

■ A gas station attendant on Ontario's busy No. 2 Highway looked out his window, gulped, and looked again. It was an airplane waiting for service.

After filling his tank, the pilot paid for the gas and then took off down the highway. The attendant didn't get his name, but he has a small picture of the plane at his pumps to prove the story.

☐ *A pedestrian is a man who can easily be reached by automobile.*

■ In Salt Lake City, police hurried to the scene of a highway crash, found only tire skid marks, broken glass and a note:

"Everything settled satisfactorily."

☐ *"It's not the work I enjoy," said the taxi driver, "it's the people I run into."*

■ Tagged for overtime parking, a Pittsburgh motorist ripped the ticket off his windshield, tore it up and threw the pieces on the sidewalk. Another policeman passing by arrested him for littering the city streets.

☐ *The old narrow roads on which two cars could barely pass without colliding are being replaced by splendid highways on which six or eight cars can collide at one time.*

■ Doing a "slow burn" because he was unable to purchase a necessary gasoline line for his 1937 automobile, a Massachusetts motorist:

Threw rocks through the sedan's windows, slashed the tires, wrecked the motor, pounded dents in the body, and then walked away with the registration plates.

☐ *It is reported that 25 per cent of the men who get married proposed while driving a car. Which all goes to show that more accidents happen on the road than anywhere else.*

■ When a Detroit traffic cop asked a lady driver why she didn't have a red light on her car, she angrily answered that it wasn't that kind of a car and besides she wasn't that kind of a girl.

—Marylee Kin

Illustration by R. DRANREB

How could any self-respecting man marry this lovely girl and promise to divorce her immediately? It was really ridiculous

The Ridiculous Proposal

By BRIAN MOORE

This is what happened to Harper.

It's the sort of thing that couldn't have happened in Chelsea, but there would have been no need for Harper's kind of bookstore in that quiet region overlooking the Thames. Nor would Harper have considered running a London bookstore to be a suitable occupation, for he was a very vigorous young man. But it was different in Warsaw, on the Marszalkowska. Quite different. In fact, his particular type of bookstore was so successful that he was asked to leave the country.

Not that Harper sold any books in his store. He gave them away. Over the door a sign said, "British Information Service," and inside there were racks of magazines, a big lending library and a sixteen-millimeter projector on which Harper showed British movies. No money passed over the counter. And the place was always crowded with interested Poles.

Her Majesty's Britannic Ambassador had tried to get the Polish Government to change its mind. But the orders came down from the Polish desk in the Kremlin. Mr. Harper was told to pack his books and leave at the end of the month. Meanwhile, the store was to be closed.

Watching a couple of workmen crate books wasn't exactly Harper's idea of an interesting assignment. So, in the last two weeks of his stay, he began to spend more and more time drinking coffee in the *Kaviarnia Hoza* just down the street from the bookstore. He made it his headquarters, stretching his long, tweedy legs under his regular table each morning, his briar pipe clamped in his lean jaw, his rather handsome face hidden behind his copy of *The Times*.

At first, he paid little attention to the girl. But when she passed him, moving gracefully on her incredibly leggy legs, he noticed, with approval, that she was wearing lipstick. The Warsaw newspapers had recently denounced lipstick as a degenerate American habit. Harper rather liked it. He also liked her costume, which was, to say the least, pretty unusual for Poland. She wore a tailored brown corduroy suit with corduroy trousers and her blonde hair was cut very short. She sat down at the table opposite his. A lovely girl, Harper decided, as he returned to his perusal of *The Times*. . . .

The next day his *Times* lay folded on the coffee table when a pair of yellow suede gloves dropped carelessly on top of it. Harper looked up.

"Good morning, Robert," the girl said, smiling. "May I sit with you?"

Harper struggled to his feet. "I'm—I'm afraid I—"

"Please don't get up," the girl said, slipping into a seat beside him. "I'm Stefanie. Stefanie Makowska. I've known all about you for quite some time."

This had gone far enough, Harper decided. He glared at the girl. "Would you please—"

"Yes, Robert. I will have coffee," the girl said. "Strong. A large cup. You'd better have another yourself. We've got lots to talk about."

"Oh? Have we?" Harper's face expressed a profound disbelief. "Perhaps you've mistaken me for someone, Miss er—"

"Makowska. Try to remember the name, Robert. You're Robert Harper. You're twenty-seven and you're not married. Which is very fortunate. Now, I'm Stefanie Makowska. I'm twenty-five-years-old and I'm going to be Mrs. Harper shortly. Until then you must remember. Ma-kow-ska. It's not really very difficult, is it?"

"*Procze Panie?*" It was the fat proprietress of the *kaviarnia*, her order book open, her pencil poised.

"Two coffees. Strong and black," Harper said. "Would you like some pastry, Miss Makowska?"

MISS MAKOWSKA shook her head and pulled out a pack of cigarettes. "Call me Stefanie," she said. "Don't look so shocked. I'm not going to make violent love to you, you know. Really, men are terribly conceited. Especially Englishmen. As a matter of fact, you're not my type."

Harper felt his face go red. "I didn't invite you to sit here," he said rather stiffly.

"Quite right. But let's not have a lovers' quarrel. No need to overplay our roles." The girl put the tips of her slender fingers together and leaned across the table. "You see, Mr. Harper, I want you to marry me. And I'm perfectly prepared to pay you for the privilege. I can pay quite a lot of money. In British pounds. Or dollars, if you prefer."

"I don't prefer." Harper looked round for some excuse to escape. It was his first experience with a crazy girl and he found he was not enjoying it.

"Be reasonable," the girl sighed, flicking her cigarette lighter into flame. "This is merely a business proposition, Mr. Harper. I have been told that you are short of funds. You want to buy a boat when you get back to England and you haven't got the money. Without the boat you can't sail off to explore the North African coastline and do some painting. Am I right?"

Shakily, Harper picked up his pipe. His match spluttered and went out. There was a click and a small flame came alive beside the bowl.

"Thank you," he said, taking the lighter from the girl's hand. "You seem to know a lot about me, Miss, er—"

"Makowska. Try to remember it. It may be worth five hundred pounds to you."

"*Procze.*" The proprietress laid two cups of steaming *espresso* coffee on the table.

"Now, pay attention, Mr. Harper," the girl said, when they were alone again. "I want to leave Poland. I could apply for a visa, but of course, it's impossible. My mother is living in England and she is very ill. She managed to get out by the underground route before they stopped all that. I must see her. If you marry me, I will be issued a British passport and will probably be allowed to leave the country. I will pay you two hundred and fifty pounds on the day you marry me and the rest in England, on the day we get divorced. I will also pay all traveling and divorce expenses. I think that would only be fair."

"I'm sorry," Harper said, "but it's no go. I don't want to get married." Harper could have sworn that she blushed. But her blue eyes were ice cold.

"Don't flatter yourself," she said. "You wouldn't be married. Naturally, you'd have to give me your word of honor that you wouldn't make any advances."

Harper looked at her. She really was a lovely girl, he decided ruefully. He picked up his *Times*. "Sorry, I can't help you, Miss Makowska," he said. "I must go now. Goodby."

OUTSIDE, he dodged two insistent *dorozka* drivers and took an ancient Czech taxi to the embassy. He said hello to a few people and then dropped in to see John Haynes, the Third Secretary, who was his particular friend.

"Got a proposal of marriage today," he said, sitting on the edge of Haynes' desk. He felt quite pleased with himself.

Haynes seemed preoccupied. "Some old countess who wants to go to America, I suppose?"

"Not quite," Harper said. "A beautiful blonde. In fact, a *very* beautiful blonde."

"Well, you'd better make up your mind soon," Haynes said. "I had to sign your marching orders this morning. We've agreed to put you out on the RAF flight to Berlin at the end of next week. By the way, Hank Volstead, the chap at the U. S. Information Office, has been told to pack up too. They closed his place this morning. Seems he showed a movie which said the Americans won the war against Japan. He forgot the Russian have claimed that one."

"I'd better run over and see him," Harper said, forgetting the blonde. "He's a good friend of mine. Helped me out on a lot of things."

But he remembered the strange girl again as he drove back across the Vistula after seeing Volstead. It wasn't fun to stay in Warsaw these days and the girl must have been counting on him. It was odd her knowing about his plans to buy a boat and sail around the Mediterranean. One of the unpleasant things about the Peoples' Democracies, Harper thought, was the way everyone knew everything that you did. It was rather sinister to think that some nameless member of the *Bezpieka*, the Polish Secret Police, knew more about where you went last Thursday than you could remember yourself. He decided he had been a bit rude to the girl. And she was, no doubt at all about it, quite lovely.

WHEN he reached his apartment building he put his key in the mailbox and pulled out a couple of political circulars. There were no letters.

"Too bad," a voice said. "But then, you'll have time to talk to me. Shall we go up?"

She was wearing a huge sheepskin-lined greatcoat, a man's fedora with a feather in it, and a pair of white felt-and-leather boots. She looked very Polish and very attractive.

"Aren't you afraid I'll make advances?" Harper said.

"I'm much more afraid you'll say goodby."

He took her arm. "I'm sorry about this morning. I was very rude. Would you like a drink? I'm afraid my vodka is ordinary State *Monopol* stuff. But I do have a little Scotch."

"You're much nicer when you smile," she said.

Later, when the Scotch had been drunk and the vodka bottle had replaced it on Harper's coffee table, she told him something about herself.

"I'm just a state number here," she said, rummaging in her purse. "Worker in Chemical Factory Number Seven, District of Warsaw. But, believe it or not, I have a family. Here's a photo of them."

Harper looked at the stiff group: the elderly man with three grown-up sons standing behind him, the handsome woman by his side, and the little girl in pigtails and a print dress whom he recognized as Stefanie.

"Maybe I should make it past tense," she said. "I had a family. My brothers were killed by the Germans in 1944 and Papa was killed when we were liberated by the Russians. He taught English at the *Polytechnic* here. Mother's in London, as you know. I had two uncles in Wilno but that's in the Soviet Union now. No chance of seeing them. That's why I

want to leave. That, and what's happening here. Warsaw is a terrible place today."

"I never talk politics," Harper said gently, handing back the photograph. "I thought it wiser not to. But it doesn't seem to have done much good. I found out this morning that my plane leaves at the end of next week."

"Oh?" She looked worried. "I thought you would be here for another month. My roommate works for you at the Information Center. She said you'd have at least three weeks."

Then she opened her bag and pulled out a thick roll of paper. Banknotes spilled over the table. "I sold all of my father's collection of paintings to get this. To a Romanian. He gets the money through the black market in Turkey. I have a little over fifteen hundred pounds, Robert. Will you help me?"

He leaned forward and took her hand. "Put your money away, Stefanie," he said. "You'll need every penny of it after our divorce." . . .

Russian champagne in big black-and-gold bottles stood in solid even ranks on a long table in the British Ambassador's office. When the ceremony was completed, a shout rose up for Harper to kiss his bride. Turning, he took Stefanie's lovely face in his hands and pecked her chastely on the cheek.

"You've got to do better than that, old boy," John Haynes yelled.

Harper put his arms around his bride and kissed her—hard. It was their first kiss.

"I liked that," he whispered.

He felt her shoulders go taut. "This is a business arrangement, my friend," she murmured. "I told you, you're not my type."

Later, when they went upstairs to brush off the confetti, he reached in his pocket and pulled out a little blue book, bright with gold crests.

"Your wedding present." He handed her the passport. "Courtesy of the British Government."

She took the book and flipped over its empty pages. "All I need is one visa," she said. "A Polish exit visa. If only I can get it." She put the passport in her handbag and pulled out a white envelope. "Here's the first installment."

Harper flushed. "Keep it," he said. "I haven't bought you a wedding present."

"It's my dowry. And besides, you'll need it to buy that boat, Robert. If you won't take it here, I'll make sure you get it in Britain. I don't want you to do this for pity. I don't like people who pity me."

"Nonsense. I'd like to get back to my flat now. I'll see you at the Polish Foreign Ministry in the morning. We'll apply for your visa together. I presume you've got some place to stay tonight!"

She shook her head. "Of course I don't have some place to stay. What would my roommate think if I went back to sleep with her on my wedding night?"

"I have a sofa," Harper said, drily. "I suppose I can sleep on that. But I'm afraid I don't have a lock for the bedroom door."

There was a sudden commotion. "Come on, you two," John Haynes said, sticking his head in the doorway. "Enough of this smootching. The Old Man is waiting to propose a toast to the bride. Robert, you should know better. He's liable to regard it as a diplomatic incident. Ambassadors are like that." . . .

In his inner sanctum in the Polish Foreign Ministry, Colonel Grocz turned the passport over in his hands thoughtfully. Then he handed it back to Stefanie.

"Absolutely, categorically and definitely—no!" he said. "The visa is refused."

"May I ask why?" Harper said, in his most icy tones.

"You'd better ask your wife, Mr. Harper.

"I see no reason—" Stefanie began.

The Colonel raised a slender hand. "Please," he said. "We must not allow ourselves to become angry. Your wife, Mr. Harper, is a very highly skilled chemist, one of the best people in her field. Her research in certain problems of inorganic chemistry is now a textbook cliche."

"Impossible," Harper said. "Why, she's only a girl."

"A very reactionary viewpoint, Mr. Harper. In Poland many women work on vital jobs. Your wife is much too valuable here. She will not be allowed to leave. That is all."

"But—"

"You are not the first man to find out that you do not know everything about your wife, Mr. Harper." The Colonel laughed immoderately, exposing his steel dentures. "Good day. The guard will show you out."

Harper looked straight ahead, ignoring his wife, until the guard had finally deposited them outside the ministry gates on *Stalina Aleja*. Then he lit his pipe, using many matches.

"A scientist," he said slowly. "A genius at chemistry. Didn't you know that I loathe scientists? Who'd ever think of taking a chemist on a painting expedition to North Africa?"

"You've been saved that worry," she said, biting her lip. "Oh, Robert, it's no good. They'll never let me out. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have dragged you into this mess."

"The trouble with scientists," Harper said, taking her arm, "is that they've got no real creative imagination. They invent things like bombs and then they don't know what to do with them. Artists are different. We don't believe in formulas and rules. Let's walk over to the Embassy and see John Haynes. I have a horrible feeling we're going to cost him his job." . . .

On the day that Harper's plane left for Berlin, Warsaw airport was drenched in an unpleasant sleet that showed no signs of lifting. Out on the tarmac a Royal Air Force Dakota was tuning up while the local RAF ground crew tinkered beneath it, muffled in greatcoats against the cold and wet.

When Haynes and Harper arrived at the terminal, there were only five passengers checked in for the flight. A Queen's Messenger, a tall fellow,

SMART STUNT

Johnny Longden, who has ridden more winners than any jock who ever lived, used a smart stunt to win a big one a few years back—the $100,000 Santa Anita Handicap.

His horse Thumbs Up was assigned the top weight of 130 pounds. The Santa Anita, at a mile and one-quarter, meant he was carrying 130 throughout a long grind. Longden weighed 113, so the thoroughbred was hauling 17 pounds of dead weight in his saddlecloth. Or he was supposed to be carrying it in his saddlecloth.

Longden's smart, and legitimate, trick came to light after he had taken the race, weighed in and was back in the jockey room, grinning happily over his $8,300 cut (10% of the winning horse's share) for a trifle over two minutes' work. Johnny had a money belt around his waist which he'd filled with buckshot.

"That way," he explained to a young apprentice who asked about the seeming incongruity, "I kept the 17 pounds on my back instead of my mount's." He grinned. "That way, it was live weight, not dead weight."

—*Ray Ferris*

standing close to his official dispatch boxes, a couple of Embassy personnel on rotation leave, an American sergeant who had missed the MATS flight earlier that day, and a London businessman who had come to Warsaw to sell agricultural machinery and had run into a plowed field of red tape. Harper's name was called last for customs examination. He stepped forward to the bench and opened his bags. Almost immediately, an officer, wearing the red-and-black collar facings of the *Bezpieka,* poked his head out of an inner office and motioned the customs official to bring the bags inside. Harper, mystified, followed.

THERE were three *Bezpieka* soldiers in the small office. The secret police officer, a young man with graying hair, sat down at a small bare desk.

"Begin," he said. The men went to work. Suitcases were ripped open, clothes were dumped out on the floor, fingers investigated every pocket and lining. Books and papers were pulled from Harper's dufflebag and stacked on the officer's desk. Then they turned their attention to Harper. He was made to strip down to his shorts; his shoes were offered to the officer for scrutiny; his suit was squeezed and scoured at the linings. The contents of his pockets were examined and rejected in turn. Finally, the officer tossed back his suit.

"Get dressed, Mr. Harper," he said. "And pack your bags. Otherwise, you will miss your plane."

Angrily, Harper knelt on the floor and stuffed the scattered articles back in his suitcases. Somehow, he managed to get them closed.

"What about the books and papers?" he asked.

"Confiscated," the officer said. "We need time to examine them. Now, you will please sign this paper. It is in Polish. It says that you are perfectly satisfied with the treatment which the police and customs officials have given you."

"Wouldn't you like me to add a testimonial to your courtesy?" Harper said drily.

There was a knock on the door. A policeman opened it. It was John Haynes. "Excuse me," he said politely. "Sorry to interrupt you, Captain. But we're holding the plane for Mr. Harper. Will you be keeping him much longer?"

"No," the young officer snapped. "He must sign this paper. He is not co-operating."

"Really, Mr. Harper," Haynes said, staring icily at his friend. "You should know better. Sign it, please. It's just a formality."

Harper reached for the paper and signed. The officer gave Haynes a cold little smile.

"Thank you, Captain," Haynes said sweetly. "Very good of you. Now, I wonder if I could send a couple of our Air Force boys to help Mr. Harper get his bags aboard?"

"Certainly, Mr. Haynes. And thank you."

Haynes nodded and two young RAF mechanics stepped into the room and shouldered the bags. "Goodby, Mr. Haynes," the officer said. "You may put Mr. Harper aboard the plane now."

Harper, struggling into his overcoat, followed the mechanics to the boarding gate.

"'By, old boy," Haynes said. "Roger."

"Roger," Harper answered. They both grinned. Harper hurried after the RAF lads. One of them, a blond youngster, was staggering under the weight of Harper's dufflebag. Harper caught up with him in the sleet and shared its weight. He and the mechanic carried it right into the cabin. The other mechanic hoisted Harper's suitcases into the belly of the plane. The cabin door snapped shut, and the plane taxied out into the sleet. As it lifted into the mist, Harper took the blonde mechanic in his arms and kissed her.

Later, in the crowded bar at Gatow airport, they toasted each other in German *Schnapps.* The mechanic still looked boyish, although she had borrowed a skirt and blouse from the airline hostess.

"I never did manage to read Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,"* Harper said, grinning. "Those sabotage experts in Warsaw are going to find it rough going."

"They'll read every line," Stefanie said. "They're thorough. It's amazing what they'll do as a result of one anonymous phone call."

"What did you tell them?" Harper asked.

"I told them you might have some subversive material in your books and papers. That's all. Then I hung up and got as far away from the phone booth as I could. They check on all calls made to the *Bezpieka.* But I suppose the job of searching you at the airport kept them busy."

"Well, you don't have to worry now," Harper said. "Not any more. They won't trace you in London. It's a big place."

"Perhaps I won't stay in London. Perhaps I will go to France when mother is well again. I don't want to be a nuisance to you, Robert. And, if I'm in France, you can divorce me for desertion."

Harper signalled to the bar. "Champagne," he said. "A magnum." He turned to Stefanie. "We're going to drink to us. There won't be any divorce."

"There *will* be a divorce, Robert, and you'll be paid your money."

"Sorry." He reached in his pockets as the waiter came up with the bottle and the bill. "I don't take money from ladies."

"Fifteen shillings, sir."

"Well, maybe I'll have to, after all," Harper said. "Lend me one of those fivers."

She smiled and produced the thick roll of money. "Here," she said, handing a banknote to the waiter.

"Let's drink to marriage," Harper said. "It's much cheaper to stay married."

"No, Robert. You are just being kind. Much too kind. I have money. I will manage all right."

"*Bitte,"* the waiter said. "But if the *Fräulein* will excuse me." He placed the five-pound note on the table. "I am afraid that this money is not good. You will see for yourself. It is counterfeit." He smiled nervously. "It is counterfeit money made by the Nazis. Examine it for yourself, please."

Stefanie's eyes grew wide. Quickly, she pulled out the roll of money and scattered the banknotes across the table. Harper handed them, one at a time, to the waiter. People at the other tables turned to watch. The waiter went through them with German thoroughness. When he had finished, he shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm afraid he's right," Harper said, turning to the girl. "They're duds, and pretty badly made at that."

She stared at the money, her eyes wet with tears.

HARPER pulled some marks out of his pocket and paid the bill. "I'm not broke," he said. "And please don't cry. I just wanted to make sure. That means you won't be able to buy me off. I'm afraid that Romanian didn't get his money from Turkey. You see, darling, I spotted that the money was counterfeit the first time you showed it to me. But I took a chance on you."

"If I could get my hands on that greasy little man," she sobbed. "I'd never have done this, Robert. I thought the money was real. Oh, that horrible little cheat. I was so happy to get the money, I actually thanked him. I thought it would pay for the divorce."

"I'm a very stingy sort of chap," Robert Harper said. "I won't pay for anything of the sort." He reached across the table and held her by the shoulders. "Don't cry, darling," he said. "Forget about the Romanian. Get your hands on me. I like it."

The British were an impossible people, the waiter decided. They actually seemed pleased that their money was counterfeit. Why, the *Fräulein* was actually smiling as she kissed the *Herr.* •

FIRE!

Fascinating facts about fires, fighters and figures.

JOHN T. DUNLAVY

The worst fire in United States history on the basis of lives lost was one so little known that most standard reference works do not even list it. It occurred at Peshtigo, Wisconsin, on October 8, 1871, the same day the famous Chicago fire began. Peshtigo, a lumber town of 2000 people, was surrounded by a forest tinder-dry from a three-month drought. The fire, which began spontaneously in the forest, destroyed every building in the town, killed a total of 1152 people and consumed more than one and one quarter million acres of forest land.

Primitive man used fire long before he learned how to create it. Forest fires, lava, spontaneous combustion all provided him with fire. Women of the tribes tended the fires, and it was considered an evil omen if the fire was permitted to go out. Historians disagree on what point in history man discovered how to make fire. A North American legend has it that early Indians learned this art by observing buffalo hooves striking flint rocks, thus producing fires among the dry brush.

During an average year there are about 800,000 fires in the United States, 300,000 of which are in homes. They cause a yearly loss of life of around 11,000 persons and a property damage of $815,000,000. Over the past ten years the total number of fires has been increasing steadily. In 1952 there were more than 80,000 forest fires which leveled 11 million acres of forest land.

There are about one million firemen in the United States—but only 100,000 are members of paid fire departments. The balance are volunteers, who fight 70% of all fires in this country. The first paid fire department was established in Cincinnati just one hundred and two years ago. Until 1860 fire engines were pulled by firemen to the scene of the fire. When horses were introduced they required considerable special training to overcome their fear of fire and noise. The sliding pole was invented in 1880 and continues to be the most efficient method for firemen to get to the main floor of a firehouse.

During a recent ten-year period the worst fires occurred in the month of March, with December second, April third, and January and February tied for fourth. Lowest fire losses in the same decade occurred in September but tended to remain at about the same figure for June through October of each year.

One of the reasons why the Chicago fire made such great headway in its early hours was the fact that the city's firemen were exhausted, having spent the entire day and night before fighting a lumberyard fire which destroyed six city blocks. The Chicago fire, 7th worst in American history, accounted for 300 dead, 9800 homeless and the destruction of 17,450 buildings. It cut a swath through Chicago five miles long and one mile wide. Experts agreed that the fire probably did begin in Mrs. O'Leary's barn, caused by careless smoking by men who played cards nightly in the barn. The story of Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicking over a lantern was a fake and so admitted by its author, Michael Ahern, a newspaper man who created the original tale. One of the oddities of the Chicago fire was that Mrs. O'Leary's house and barn were among the few buildings not totally destroyed by the conflagration.

Pyromaniacs, or those afflicted with a mental condition which compels them to start fires, are often quite normal in other respects. They are frequently men of exemplary conduct and are even heroic in helping to put out the fires they started. Many have been arrested while taking pictures of fires, performing daring rescues or even serving as members of the fire department. Despite the opinion of psychiatrists and medical men that the moon has no influence on insanity, records show there is an upsurge of pyromania when the moon is full.

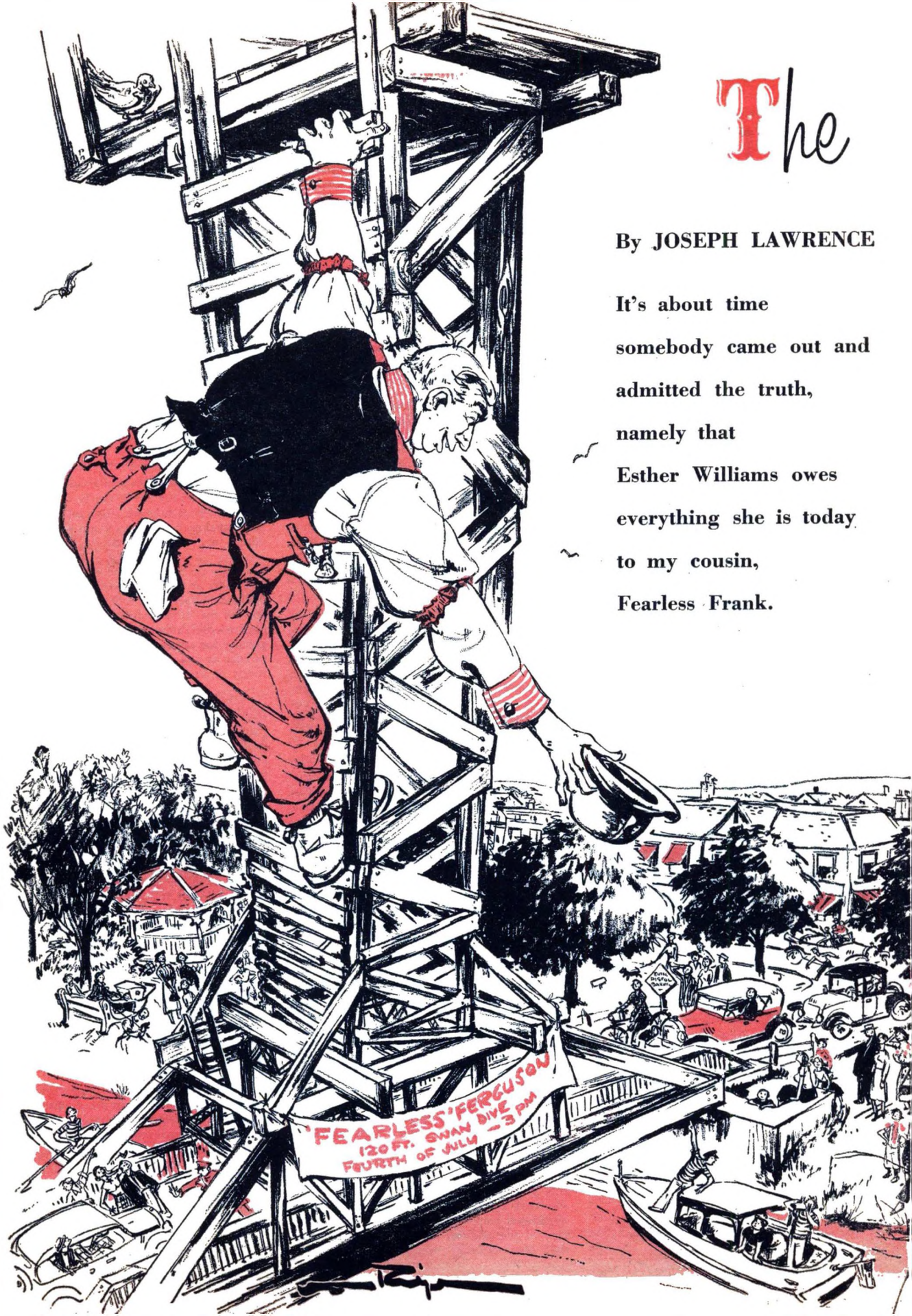
The cause of all fires other than forest fires in the period 1942-1952, as reported by the National Board of Fire Underwriters, were matches and smoking, misuse of electricity and misuse of petroleum products, in that order. These three account for over 50% of all fires. The chief causes of forest fires are, in this order, lightning, careless smokers, fires deliberately set, camp fires and burning debris.

For the past 17 years an average of 500 to 600 arrests are made yearly for arson out of some 3500 fires of suspicious origin investigated each year. An arson school is conducted at Purdue University for insurance company fire investigators. Arson cases are generally the result of the work of juveniles, spite fires or those set by pyromaniacs. Fires deliberately set for profit are few. Arson is one of the oldest capital crimes. From the days of the Romans until 120 years ago the penalty for arson was death. Today the death penalty is sought only if someone dies as a result of arson.

Six months before the disastrous San Francisco fire of 1906, a National Board of Underwriter's Survey of the city predicted it would burn because of fire hazards and lack of fire fighting equipment. The city officials, however, took no action on the report.

The greatest forest fire in North America occurred in New Brunswick, Canada, in 1825, and devastated 4 million acres in an area one hundred miles long. Fire engines were first used in 200 B.C. Fire escapes were developed in the early 1700's. Fire insurance was developed following the Great Fire of London in 1666, a fire which destroyed the entire city of London but, according to records, killed only 6 persons. About 75% of fires that occur in homes cause less than $1000 damage to the house itself but more than double that figure to the contents of the house. The greatest number of fires occur in cities with population of over 1 million. New York City has an average of 40,000 fires a year. Of the 15 worst fires in United States history, 12 have happened since 1900.

The term "buff" is applied to some 50,000 amateur firemen in this country whose hobby is attending all fires in their communities and assisting firemen. Many cities issue cards to regular buffs which enables them to join firemen on the scene of a fire, handle hoses and do other chores. So seriously do some buffs take their hobby that they never miss a fire, winter or summer, night or day and many have signal alarms in their homes, frequently enabling them to beat firemen to the scene of a fire. •



The

By JOSEPH LAWRENCE

It's about time
somebody came out and
admitted the truth,
namely that
Esther Williams owes
everything she is today
to my cousin,
Fearless Frank.

Swan Dive of Fearless Frank

The aquacade and water ballet dodge is pretty well dominated today by Billy Rose, Michael Todd, Esther Williams and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, all of whom are reportedly getting rich on nothing stronger than plain water. And, while I don't begrudge these people their soggy good fortune, I am wondering when at least one of them is going to come forth and acknowledge the fact that they owe their success entirely to a distant cousin of mine, a gentleman named Fearless Frank Ferguson. It was Fearless Frank who originated the idea of staging outdoor aquatic spectacles, and he did it more than thirty years ago in my home town of Pistol Barrel.

It's possible, of course, that the name of Fearless Frank Ferguson doesn't mean anything to you in connection with the spring diving board and the one-piece suit. But, if you're a sports fan, you can't help but recall Frank Ferguson as one of the bright hopes of the wrestling game, back around the time of World War I. He was, in fact, the heavyweight wrestling champion of Pennmar County at the time he originated water carnivals, and it was a particular incident in his mat career that launched him on his way as a merman.

It happened during Frank's match with Gunner Bixby for the championship of the state. According to the wise money around Pistol Barrel, Fearless Frank had this one in the bag, and, as a consequence, most of the regular clientele of Poker Pete Kelly's saloon and billiard academy had backed the local champion with every dime they could scrape together. As Dealer Smith, the unofficial odds-maker of Pistol Barrel, saw it, it wasn't a question of whether Fearless would win but how short a time it would take him to tie the Gunner in knots. As a consequence, when the Gunner pinned Cousin Frank in record time, and thus plunged Pistol Barrel into a gloom from which it has never fully recovered, it was inevitable that the big bettors at Poker Pete's should demand of Fearless Frank that he produce an explanation of the upset.

Fearless Frank did. In a circle around Poker Pete's frost-killer, he regaled the town's leading citizenry with the peculiar circumstances leading to his grappling downfall. In short, he said, he'd been careless, damned careless, and this carelessness, liberally laced with overconfidence, resulted in his letting the Gunner wrap him up almost immediately in a pretzel-like hold from which he saw no possible escape.

"I t'ought I was a goner, sure," he told the fascinated assemblage. "The bum had me twisted so's I wuz breathin' down my own neck. But, alluva sudden, I seen my chanct! Here I am sweatin' and gruntin', and my eyeballs plumb bulgin' outa my head, when Gunner's behind eases aroun' till it's right up smack in fronta my face. So I think fast, and I done it; I give him the biggest bite on the tail I kin manage—and that wuz th' match."

As Fearless went on sadly to explain, the only weakness in this seemingly brilliant strategy soon became apparent to him: "The trouble wuz," he concluded, "it wuzn't his behind at all I bit—it wuz my own."

It was the end of Fearless Frank as a wrestler. That the incident had its redeeming features is seen in the present success of Messrs. Rose, Todd and MGM, not to mention Miss Williams; for Fearless Frank promptly opened Pistol Barrel's first bathing beach, and began an entirely new career for himself in the cool waters of the Pennmar River. That these waters soon were to become as hot as a Turkish bath again was due entirely to the fact that Fearless Frank, like all the members of my family, had become convinced he was a thinker. And all our troubles can be traced inevitably to this single misconception.

Fearless began his marine exploits simply enough. Acquiring a lease on a muddy, block-long stretch of weedy shoreline on the Pennmar, about five miles north of Pistol Barrel, Fearless erected two rickety clapboard structures, one of which he labeled "Men" and the other "Women." Inside these purported bathhouses, he set up a collection of broom closets he called lockers; he built a three-foot-wide dock in front of them, and, after trampling down the weeds along the shore, he announced to the populace that "Ferguson's Beach" was ready for business.

To reach his spa, Fearless acquired a one-lunged inboard motorboat, complete with a tar-paper top, side curtains, and benches for as many as a dozen excursionists. This conveyance he skippered himself, leaving his wife at the beach to run things there, while the populace of Pistol Barrel was urged to present themselves in Washington Park, the community's half-acre public oasis, at any

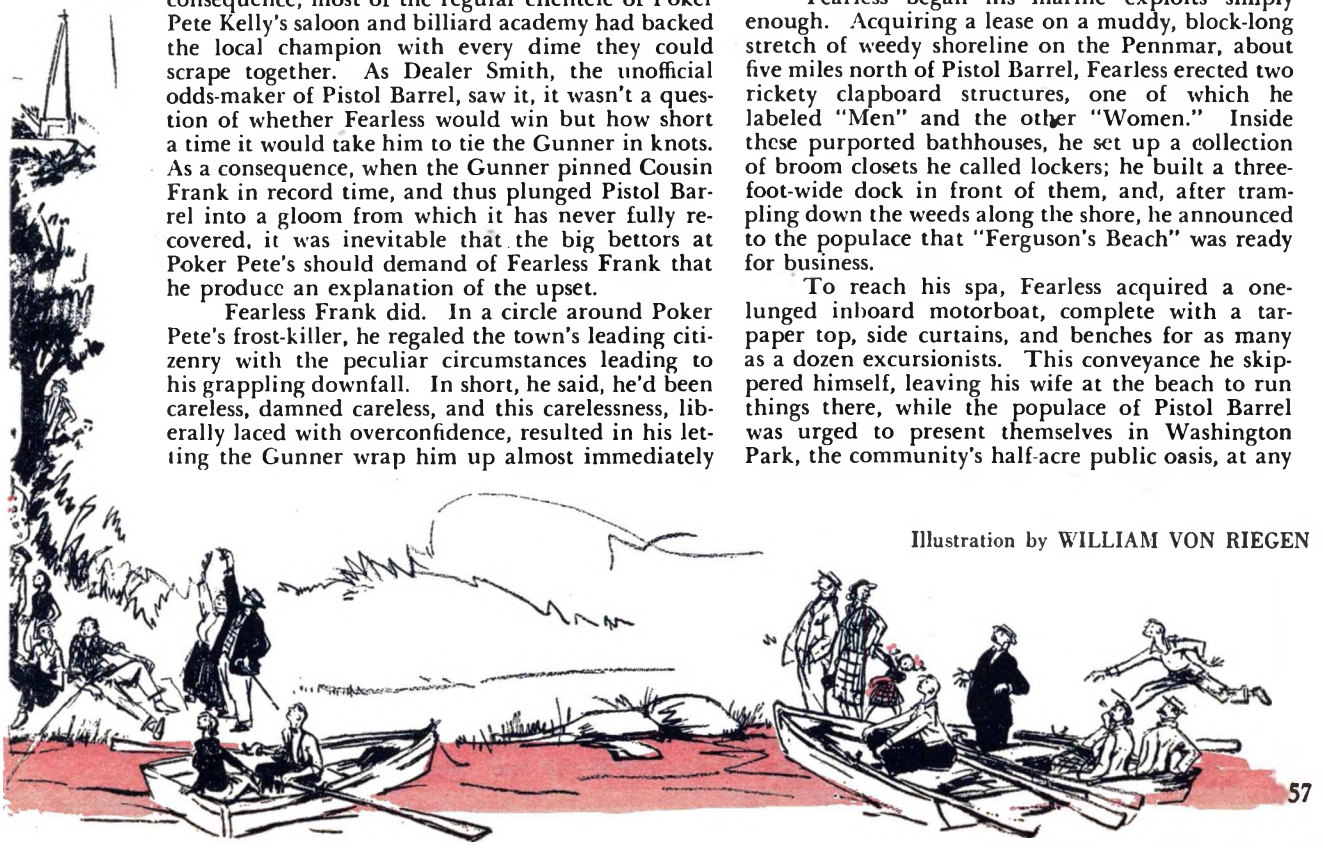


Illustration by WILLIAM VON RIEGEN

hour on the hour for the trip to the baths.

The beach was an instantaneous success, and why Cousin Frank didn't leave it at that, I will never know. He was, however, a thinker, as I've said, and I can but conclude now that he reasoned that, if most of the citizens of Pistol Barrel liked his watering place, there was no reason why *all* of them shouldn't patronize it, including babies in arms, grandmothers, and people like Meany Moe Benson, who never had been known to dip himself in water in all his sixty years. In any case, Fearless decided that what his beach needed was publicity. And what better way to publicize a bathing beach than by putting on a water spectacle?

Right then and there, the idea for the aquacade was born.

The public dock from which Fearless Frank's boat collected its patrons in Washington Park was situated virtually in the shadow of the Bursely Bridge, a one-lane, steel-girdered structure that spanned the Pennmar between Pistol Barrel and Bursely, a small community across the river. The bridge rested perhaps ten feet above the water, and had a latticed steel railing on each side whose top was maybe another ten feet above that. It was the constant sight of this bridge that gave Fearless his great idea.

He would, he announced, erect a huge platform atop the uppermost railing of the Bursely Bridge, a platform which would rise at least another hundred feet into the sky above Pistol Barrel. Then, on the Fourth of July, while the Spanish-American War Veterans were holding their annual flag raising in Washington Park, Fearless would ascend this platform, and, during the day's most dramatic moment, personally swan-dive the 120 feet into the turgid Pennmar.

When the text of this announcement was relayed to the savants, sages and ordinary citizens of Pistol Barrel, and the full impact of Cousin Frank's daring plan had been assimilated, the reaction was such as to send delicious tremors running up and down the spines of such veteran publicists as Ivy Lee, Carl Byoir and the late Steve Hannagan. For, almost immediately, every other topic of public discussion was forgotten—from the high cost of living, to the activities of a new organization called The Shifters, as well as the daily pronouncements of a touring Frenchman called Coué—as the populace absorbed itself in Fearless' projected exploit. And, as usual, nowhere was the Ferguson stunt more fully discussed than in the back room of Poker Pete's.

"He'll be kilt, surer'n shootin'," Foggy McFarnum stated, shifting his plug of Mechanic's Delight to the other cheek.

"Ain't no man kin jump that fur and tell about it," Poonie Altmeyer opined.

"Why's he doin' it?" Moosehead Morgan wanted to know. "Must need a bath purty bad."

Capper Collins, who was rumored to take a snort on occasion, and who had been found one night lying in front of the post office singing *If the ocean was whisky and I was a duck, I'd swim to the bottom and never come up,* vouchsafed that a man also had to want a drink pretty bad to go to such lengths to get one.

And Little Poker Pete Kelly, Big Poker Pete's young son, got a whack across the backside with a pool cue for suggesting that, in view of Fearless Frank's spotted ring career, "it wouldn't be the first time the old fraud had taken a dive."

As for Fearless Frank himself, he was in a seventh heaven. For, almost at once, the curious—who'd seen Cousin Frank almost daily throughout their lives, and rarely had given him a second glance—suddenly began to flock to his dock in Washington Park to discuss the details of his amazing project with him, and many of these even went so far as to take the trip to Ferguson's Beach, just so they could be near our hero at every opportunity.

Only one dissenting voice was raised throughout the land: Tip Feiner, who, for years, had thrilled the Fourth of July festivities with his climactic ascension in a free balloon, obviously resented the attempt of another to detract from his annual hour of glory, and he broached this resentment at every opportunity. But nobody paid him much mind; balloon ascensions were getting pretty dreary now, anyway, what with an occasional real, live airplane actually being seen in the firmament over Pistol Barrel.

So, plans for the great event went on. At exactly noon, about a week after he'd announced his impending adventure, Fearless Frank personally drove the first nail into the two-by-four that launched his platform on its aerial path, and clever timing with the lunch-time whistle at the brickyard succeeded in assembling a sizable crowd for this ceremony. Furthermore, a photographer from the *Barnseville Record,* the county's only newspaper, mysteriously appeared on the scene and snapped several shots of Fearless with the hammer raised, with the onlookers smiling at him foolishly, and with Fearless pointing dramatically toward the sky or gazing thoughtfully—or what was presumed to be thoughtfully—into the river.

When one of the photos—the one with the hammer raised—appeared in the *Record* the following day, Fearless Frank's cup ran over; especially since it was accompanied by a feature story underscoring his grappling career and playing up the fact that Pistol Barrel's greatest modern athlete now was turning his talents to newer, more dramatic fields.

From that day forward, the swan-dive of Fearless Frank grew and grew in importance. As each day saw another ten feet added to the platform, the excitement around Pistol Barrel mounted in direct proportion, and, by the last week in June, even the turbulent Sacco-Vanzetti case, then at the height of its national prominence, faded into obscurity in my home town. Everyone, including ministers of the gospel, the dying in Pennmar County Hospital, the nuns at St. Catherine's school, and a band of gypsies who lived on the dumps west of town, talked of nothing but Fearless Frank and his fabulous and daring dive to fame.

As was to be expected, there were those who came forward to protest the stunt. The Reverend Mr. Pellet wrote a letter in the *Record* demanding that legal action, if necessary, be brought to bear to stop Fearless from his suicidal plan, and Tip Feiner, seeing the tide of popular sentiment about to engulf him, wanted to know what authorities had been greased to get Fearless his permit for erecting his platform on a county structure in the first place (although there were those who said that Tip was something less than vigorous in his protest, since he secretly hoped Fearless would be permitted to go through with his damn fool dive and thus eliminate himself forever from future Fourth of July extravaganzas).

But these timid protests were drowned in the roar of public enthusiasm for Cousin Frank's spectacle, and the end of June saw the citizenry virtually at the peak of its feverish pitch. The platform was within inches of completion, needing only a few final planks to be nailed into place, and no sun set on Pistol Barrel without Cousin Frank mounting the ladder, rung by rung, to test that day's progress for strength, resiliency and whatever remaining shred of publicity remained to be gotten from it.

This latter daily routine never failed to bring out the natives in excited droves, and they came from as far away as Sunbonnet, Pippins Grove, Mustard Flat and Iron Ball, driving buggies, wagons, Model-T Fords and Dodge Brothers touring cars, to sit in Washington Park, smoke their pipes and nurse their babies while Fearless climbed his way to greater and greater glory.

It was becoming obvious that little was left to be added to the saga of Fearless Frank Ferguson, other than the dramatic dive itself, and yet the hero of the day was not one to leave a stone unturned.

On the morning of July 2nd, before a crowd that stopped traffic on Clymer Street, Doc Miller mounted a window in Moe Ellenstein's drug store, waved to the assemblage in the street, and proceeded to bring Fearless Frank to a position of prominence in the showcase alongside, and just abaft, the corn plaster display. Then, while Frank stripped to the waist, Doc plugged his stethoscope into his pink ears, and, still beaming proudly, began to listen in on the courageous heartbeats of Pistol Barrel's most famous son.

After awhile, and after listening to Fearless Frank's chest without his stethoscope—which gave Doc a better and face-to-face view of his breathless audience—Pistol Barrel's leading and only medical practitioner waved his arm to the crowd to signify that Frank was in the pink, and that the Fourth of July program in Washington Park could go on as advertised. The crowd cheered lustily.

THE above weighing in, so to speak, was followed by a brief interlude during which Frank attempted to sell autographed photos of himself in a one-piece bathing suit, using the front part of Ellenstein's as a market place. But, probably because everyone in Pistol Barrel who could possibly have any use for a photograph of Frank Ferguson already had one, there wasn't exactly a brisk turnover in this commodity, the majority of the gawkers preferring to form a shallow circle around our stalwart and ply him with questions. The latter consisted mostly of queries as to what the great man planned to do as an encore, had he been tapped for any vaudeville tours, and was he afraid. To all of which Fearless replied with exemplary modesty and good taste.

By the next day, the eve of the big event, Pistol Barrel was tuned to its finest pitch, and, as preparations went on in every household for the morrow's climactic moment, you literally could feel the tension in the air. On all sides, picnic hampers were being packed; rockets, roman candles and firecrackers were assembled; buggies, surries, jitneys, and even an occasional Buick and Chalmers, were being polished, and every girl in town had her curls up in wrappers in readiness for the impending spectacle.

And that is when the bubble burst. . . .

I doubt it there's a person in Pistol Barrel today who can tell you precisely how it began, who first got the idea, who first passed the electrifying word, or who first saw or heard the news. It just seemed to happen.

I remember I was taking a bath when I heard it, and was sitting in the galvanized washtub in our kitchen, while my grandmother poured in the last kettle of hot water. It was after supper, not yet dark, and a sort of seething twilight had settled over the entire town. Then we heard it.

A more or less muffled rumble, rolling up the hill from downtown, had begun to grow in volume and slowly take shape in a series of yells, hoots and catcalls, when our back door burst open and my uncle, Yockup Tierney, roared in. He was laughing so hard the tears rolled down his face.

"It's—it's Fearless," he laughed, and slumped on a chair and held his sides.

My grandmother put the kettle back on the range and came forward. "What's Fearless?" she wanted to know. My uncle doubled up and laughed all the harder.

"Thomas Tierney!" my grandmother barked, "you stop this nonsense instantly and tell me what all that caterwauling down yonder's about."

Uncle Yockup straightened, dabbed at his eyes with a big red bandana, and eventually brought himself under a semblance of control.

"The—the pla—platform," he said. "Frank's platform—every goddam high school kid in town is climbin' the damn thing and doin' swan dives into the river. They're fightin' to outdo each other, and the thing looks like a rock fulla seals. Oh—I—I—" And Uncle Yockup was convulsed once more in a paroxysm of uncontrolled laughter.

It was true, of course. Somehow, the platform, standing there in all its bunting-draped effulgence, had become too great a lure for the hordes of teen-agers who had flocked around it daily since its inception, and, since no watchman had been thought necessary to guard so seemingly-unalluring a structure, it was only a matter of time until the kids should start climbing the ladder. After that, it was only a matter of a little more time until they should mount to the top of the platform, and a little more until someone should get the idea of diving from it, or should be dared to dive from it. After all . . . well, if he ain't afraid to do it, I sure ain't. And the flood gates were open.

Fearless never made the dive at all, of course. Instead, he took his old Hudson Speedster out of the garage that night, drove to Wheeling, and went on what has been reported as the grandfather of all binges. It was two months before he returned to Pistol Barrel, by which time his great water spectacle had been forgotten, the platform had been dismantled (which occurred when even the ten-year-olds had begun to get ideas about diving from it), and the community was involved in some successor or other to the Ferguson aquacade. That winter, Fearless sold his bathing beach and moved his family to Terra Haute, where I understand he lives today under an assumed name. . . .

On the following Fourth of July, Pistol Barrel went back to its normal Independence Day pursuits, and Tip Feiner, by then the owner of a used World War I Jenny, plus a pair of goggles and a leather helmet, reclaimed some of his previous prominence by taking Pistol Barrelers up for rides from the Fair Grounds, charging them five dollars for a ten-minute spin.

It was while awaiting his turn for this newest of thrills that Dealer Smith let a small cat out of a bag as regards the swan dive of Fearless Frank.

"You gotta hand it to this here Tip Feiner," he remarked. "He seen the flyin' machine was here to stay, and got hisself one first off. He don't like no one to be ahead o' him, Tip don't. Reckon tha's why he bribed them kids last summer to dive off'n Fearless Frank's ladder."

It was a charge that never was proved. Dealer Smith merely said he "knowed" it, and that was that; and Tip Feiner, when asked about it, always managed to change the subject.

I was startled recently, though, to see another picture starring Esther Williams, in which the chorus was made up of handsome blondes in white tights who swam around under water, after first diving from a succession of ivory towers placed at varying heights above the pool. And the second girl from the left was my fourth cousin, Francie Ferguson, or I don't know my own family.

You think my family takes a defeat lying down, do you? You watch—and keep your eye on that second blonde from the left. •

SMOKUS POKUS

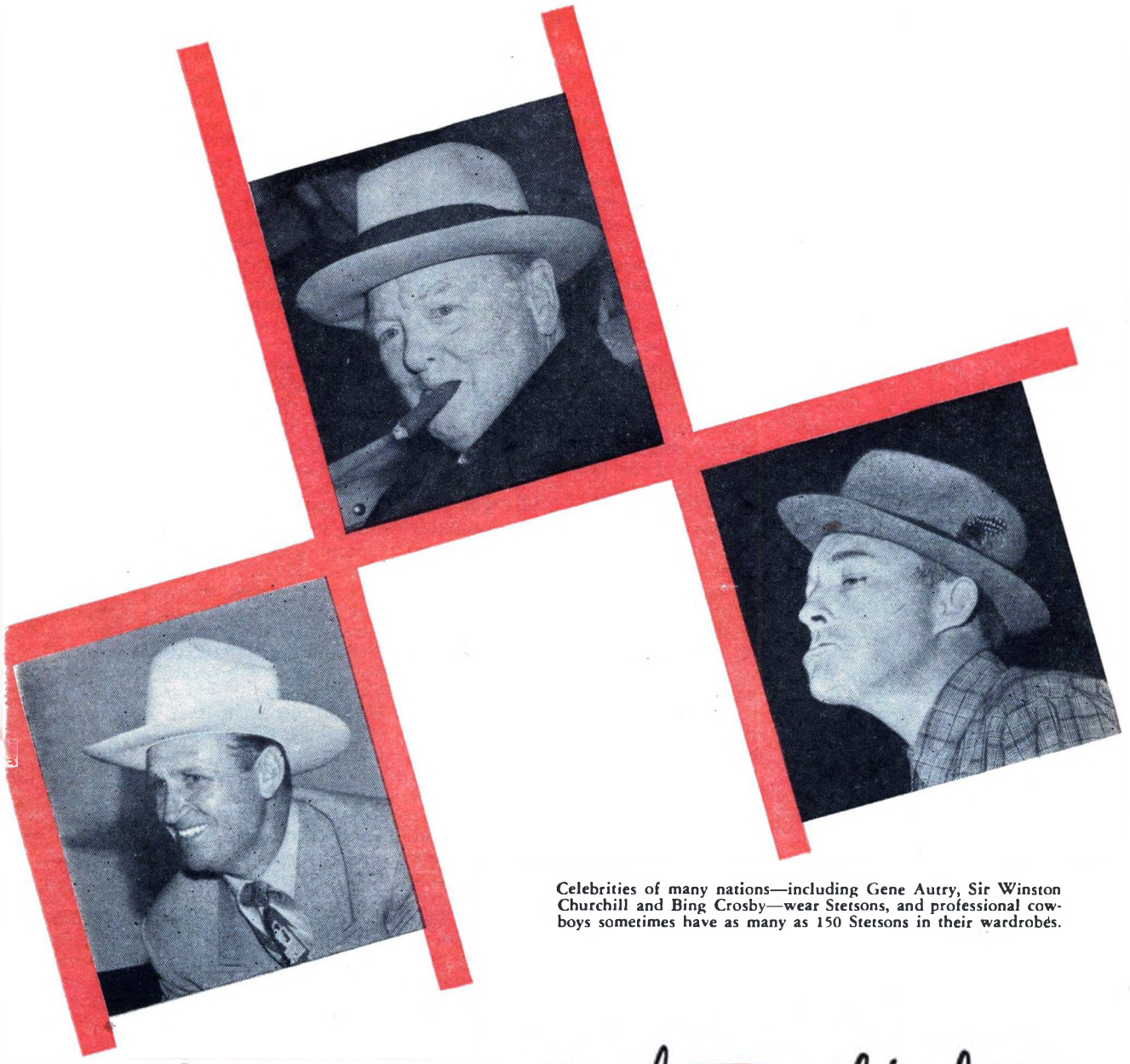
My ash tray has a useful groove
But by the time that I remove
A raffle stub, a candy mint,
A three-cent stamp, a lighter flint,
A pair of dice, a spool of thread,
Two pennies—one an Indianhead,
A peach seed and a pistol cap,
The ashes drop off in my lap.

—Loyd Rosenfield

Crown Prince Akihito of Japan *(above)* Will Rogers *(right)* and Roy Rogers *(below)* are some of the celebrities who have made Stetson famous.

How to

A hat is something the average man wears, the panhandler passes around, the statesman throws into the ring, and the politician talks through. But the big Stetson is more than just a hat.



Celebrities of many nations—including Gene Autry, Sir Winston Churchill and Bing Crosby—wear Stetsons, and professional cowboys sometimes have as many as 150 Stetsons in their wardrobes.

pull Hats out of Rabbits—

By HARRY EDWARD NEAL

In the middle of the roaring forest fire, a forest ranger, alone, stumbled into a small clearing. Gasping for breath he held his hands in front of his face to shield his skin from the blistering heat of the blazing trees and bushes. The flames were all about him, walling him off from every path to safety, and burning branches were dropping into the tiny open space where he stared death in the face. He knew that other rangers and volunteers were fighting the fire from the outside, but he could see no way he could get to them and no way they could get to him in time. He stood quietly because there was nothing else he could do, but his stomach churned and he was frankly terrified.

He unbuckled the hatchet attached to his belt and knelt on the ground, then hacked at the mossy earth and scooped the loose dirt out with his hands until he had made a trench long enough and deep enough to accommodate his body. He sat down in

what he prayed would not be his grave, and began to cover himself with the loose, cool earth—first his feet and legs, then his thighs, his stomach, his chest, right up to his neck. The hollow for his head was purposely left narrow, and he bridged the hollow with his wide-brimmed felt hat so that the edges rested on the ground and the high crown was directly over his face, shielding it from the heat, yet allowing him to breathe. Then he stuck his arms into the soft dirt at his side. That was it. There was nothing else he could do.

Branches crashed all about him in flames, and he could feel some of them jar the earth that protected his body. The crackling of the blaze grew louder, more angry. He lay there praying, sweating, aching, breathing the cooked air for more than an hour before he heard men shouting his name and realized that his buddies had fought through the wooded furnace. As he lifted his cramped arms from the dirt he heard someone yell, "There he is!" and a moment later his friends were scooping the earth away. One reached for the hat that covered the ranger's face. The hat still held its shape, still looked like a hat—except that it was coal black instead of light tan—and when the rescuer tried to pick it up, the hat virtually disintegrated, showering the wet and happy face of its owner with ashes.

Everybody congratulated him on his good fortune and presence of mind. The ranger brushed the char from his face, making long black streaks. Then, looking at his dirty fingers, he smiled and said, "I'm sure glad I had that Stetson!"

A Stetson was also a life-saver to a new father in 1953. The wearer—we'll call him Mr. Papa—rode in an automobile with another couple enroute to a hospital to see Mrs. Papa and her first-born son. Mr. Papa sat next to the woman, who drove, and her husband sat in the back seat. Rounding a corner they were suddenly struck by a station wagon traveling at a fast clip.

"I was wearing a Stetson Stratoliner that I bought in Washington," Mr. Papa said later. "The crash threw my head and forehead into the windshield, breaking it. The hat brim folded over my right eye, giving it protection. As a result of a piece of flying glass which got under the hat, I had a laceration on my forehead requiring fifteen sutures, and four other stitches were needed for my nose. My skull was saved from concussion, break or fracture because the crown of my hat acted as a shock absorber, and the optic nerve, the eyelid, eyeball and eyesight were saved because of the stiff body of felt in the hat brim."

Imbedded in the felt were slivers of glass, and the folded brim revealed a long sharp cut which didn't go all the way through the felt. He sent the hat back to the factory to be refurbished and wrote a letter of thanks saying he wanted to keep the hat to show his son. "My wife and the young potential Stetson wearer are both just fine," he wrote, "and we give our thanks to God and Stetson."

In the American West, "Stetson" and "hat" are synonymous, and Stetsons have come to the rescue of many a cowpoke in trouble. Once an old prospector carrying gold across the Arizona desert fought off two outlaws who tried to steal his pay dirt. In the gunfight the last outlaw bullet tore through the prospector's canteen and the water began to drain away. The miner, knowing that water meant life itself, caught the precious fluid in his Stetson and carried it in the hat until he reached the next water hole, several miles distant.

Today, cowboys on the roundup still find the broad-brimmed Stetsons ideal for corraling "spooky" stock—a cowboy waving his hat at a "bunch quitter" usually drives the beast back to the herd and avoids a hard chase on horseback. The big hat is useful in hazing broncs and it comes in handy for fighting grass fires. If a bunkhouse window pane is broken, the Stetson can be wadded up and stuffed into the opening to keep out the wind and cold. Men who sleep under the stars still use the hats as pillows.

A bronc-buster who holds his hat in one hand as he bounces on a bucking horse gets a lot of balance from that hat, just as a tightrope walker gets balance from a long steel pole. The so-called ten-gallon hat has been a life-saver to many a cowpoke branding a calf against its mother's objections. Sometimes the mother cow gets excited enough to charge the cowboy—but a big Stetson bunched up and thrown into the cow's sad face will usually head her off or make her stop long enough for the waddie to run to safety.

No matter how the Stetson is used, if the felt is intact the cowboy can reshape the hat, brush it a few times and put it back on his head to protect him from the sun and rain as it was originally intended to do.

It has been said that a hat is something the average man wears, the panhandler passes around, the statesman throws in the ring, and the politician talks through, but the big Stetson was more than that. The cowboy's Stetson was made to be highly functional. Its wide brim keeps the sun's glare from the wearer's eyes and also shades his neck. The brim is curved upward and made reasonably stiff so that it won't flap down in a strong wind, or while a cowboy creates his own breeze by galloping after a stray dogie. A brim which suddenly blew down over a rider's eyes as he was about to rope a steer would be a handicap, to say the least.

The very first Stetson "cowboy hat" was never made to sell. It was made by and for the personal convenience of its originator, John Batterson Stetson. If his Eastern doctors had not predicted his early death from tuberculosis he might never have gone West, and the famous hat that still bears his name might never have graced the wide-open spaces.

The story of this hat-maker is an American success story second to none. When John B. Stetson was born in 1830 in Orange, N. J., his father, Stephen Stetson, manufactured hats at his home, as did other hatters of the period. The whole family took an active part in the business, and the mysteries of hat-making were passed along from father to son.

Stephen Stetson amassed a tidy fortune of $50,000 by the time he was fifty, and decided to invest his savings and retire. Unfortunately his investments were unwise, his $50,000 dwindled away, and he died in bankruptcy, leaving the few remnants of his once-successful hat business to his children. John B. Stetson's older brother took control of the business, since John had never gone to school a day in his entire life. His mother taught him to read and write, and he used all his spare time to soak up knowledge from library books and newspapers.

He had little spare time, however, for although his brother had taken charge of the business, John B. had to do all the work. He had to buy furs for the felt, make the hats, market them, and teach the business to new workmen, while the brother took most of the profits. Soon John decided he would go into the hat business on his own, and he broke away from his brother and prepared to set up his own shop. But he began to tire quickly, to cough, to lose weight from his already slender frame, and when he consulted the doctors they told him he had tuberculosis and not long to live.

From his talks with the doctors, and from reading about the illness they said would kill him, Stetson learned that it might be possible to prolong his life if he went to live in the West, where he could stay in the open. He went to St. Joseph, Missouri, and got a job working in a brickyard. In a few months he became manager, then invested what money he had in the business to become part owner. For two years most

of his wages and profits went into the brickyard, which became one of the biggest in the country and had half a million bricks made up ready to be baked and sold. Then the floods came, and the wide Missouri grew wider and deeper and finally rolled over the half million unbaked bricks, washing them all away and with them Stetson's security.

But Stetson was a good loser and a good fighter. "Well," he said after his staggering loss, "let 'em go. I'm not the first man who's made a fortune and lost it."

The Missouri flood was a minor disaster compared to the debacle which hit the entire nation at that time. Fort Sumter was fired upon and the North and South were at war. Stetson tried to enlist, but after one look at his thin body and a cursory examination of his lungs the Army doctors turned him down and he roamed about St. Joseph wondering what to do next.

St. Joe at that time was a trading post where miners and others packed their gear for the long trek to the gold fields at Pike's Peak, 750 miles away. Stetson watched a party of men making ready for the trip and asked if he could join them.

One burly giant with red hair and beard grinned at the young man. "You look like you was hardly able to cross the road," he said. "You mean you want to walk all the way to Pike's Peak?"

"If I don't make it," Stetson said with a smile, "there won't be any trouble. You can bury me along the trail and I'll save the fuss and bother of a funeral."

The redhead laughed and gave Stetson a slap on the back that nearly knocked him down. "You're all right, pardner," he said heartily. "You're all right!" . . .

The overland hike took weeks. At first Stetson found it difficult to keep up, and coughing spasms tore at his diseased lungs. Besides the food he carried and the clothes he wore, Stetson's only other equipment consisted of a shotgun and a hatchet. There was never any closed-in shelter for him—he was out of doors all the time, night and day.

Some of the men, however, killed a few rabbits, coyotes and muskrats and proposed to sew their skins together to make tents. Others pointed out that unless the skins were tanned they would only stink and draw insects, and that the party had neither the time nor the equipment for tanning skins. As they sat soaking their tired feet in a cold stream and talking about shelter, Stetson mentioned casually that it was fairly easy to make a cloth tent with the fur of rabbits, without the skin itself. The men laughed at him.

"A rabbit-fur tent? You're looney!" one said.

"Without the skins?" another asked. "What holds the fur together—glue?"

"Will you believe it if I show you?" Stetson asked.

"Reckon we will," one answered, "but you gotta show us good."

So Stetson showed them the felting process which he had learned from his father. From rabbit and beaver skins he cut off the fur, then he made a kind of bow from a hickory branch and a leather thong. Piling the fur before him, he struck it lightly with the bow-string and kept striking it so that the fur was drawn into the air, where Stetson kept it swirling by waving the bow. Gradually the long, coarse hairs and the dirt in the fur settled to the ground and were cleared away while he kept the softer fur floating in mid-air. Finally he let the fur settle, then he took a mouthful of water and blew a fine spray over the fur, which began to mat together and to form a thin sheet, like soft wet paper.

Gently and skillfully Stetson picked up the wet sheet and dipped it into a pot of boiling water over the campfire, then took it out, patted it with his hands, and dipped it again and again. With each immersion the particles of fur shrank more and more and drew up in tight little curls which wound around each other in interlocking fashion. When the water was pressed out and the fur dried, Stetson proudly exhibited a soft felt blanket which quite astonished his friends. They promptly killed jack-rabbits, skunks, beaver and other fur-bearing animals and, with Stetson's help, made several felt tents which they used for the rest of their trip.

When the party reached Pike's Peak, Stetson felt better than he had in months. His health was definitely improving and he decided to stay in the gold diggings. The high, dry air was delightful, but the sun was very warm and Stetson obtained some beaver fur and fashioned a felt hat for himself to shade his face and neck while he dug for gold. It was an unusual hat, with a high crown which left a cool air space between the hat and the head, and a wide brim which acted both as a sunshade and an umbrella.

Stetson wore the hat wherever he went. One day a grizzled sourdough wearing a moth-eaten Dan'l Boone coonskin cap came through the camp and saw the big hat. "Where'd you get that?" he asked, pointing at the felt sombrero.

"I made it," Stetson answered.

The miner took off his coonskin cap. "The danged fleas get more use out of this than I do," he said, "and I have to watch it when I set it down, for fear some dog'll run off with it. You want to sell that thing?"

Stetson laughed. "I hadn't thought about it," he said.

"I'll give you five dollars in gold for it," the miner said. Five dollars was considerable money for a hat. Stetson took the gold, handed over the hat, consummating the first sale of the first genuine John B. Stetson 10-gallon hat.

Stetson mined gold for about a year. His health restored, he decided to go back East and manufacture fine felt hats. He went to Philadelphia in 1865 with one hundred dollars in his pocket. He bought a few tools, rented a small room at Seventh and Callowhill Streets, purchased $10 worth of fur, and after a study of the types of hats then in vogue, began to make felt hats. He sold only a few, because the retailers were buying the same types of hats from many makers, and Stetson realized that he would have to do something distinctive if he were to succeed, so he made a small hat which was a departure from the style of the day.

He wore the hat himself and visited retailers to persuade them to buy. They laughed at the hat. He changed the curve of the brim, tried again, failed again. He changed the shape of the crown, tried once more, failed once more. After six months of failures he made a hat of pure beaver fur, a hat weighing only two ounces. Wearing it, he swaggered into a hat shop and caught the attention of a customer who heard him explain the advantages of the new hat to the dealer. The customer bought the hat on the spot, and the dealer ordered a dozen more. The style caught on and Stetson was swamped with orders. There was only one difficulty. Folks wouldn't pay more than two dollars for a hat, and Stetson could not make beaver hats for two dollars. Inevitably the day came when he couldn't buy fur to make any more hats.

How could people be induced to pay more than two dollars for a hat? Mulling over his problem, Stetson remembered the miner who had paid him $5 in gold for the hat with the wide brim. Maybe others would do the same. He took all the money he had, and used his credit to the limit, to make several of the high-crowned wide-brimmed hats. He christened the hat "Boss of the Plains," and he sent one to each clothing and hat dealer in the Southwest with a letter asking if they would order a dozen. Then he sat down to wait—and to pray.

Two weeks later he received his first order. "Send a dozen just like sample." More orders poured in, some with cash for preferred attention. Stetson developed three grades of hats —one made from rabbit to sell for $5, one from rabbit and beaver costing $10, and one from pure beaver for $30. The orders piled up and the money rolled in from the rich West. John B. Stetson and his famous cowboy hat were in business to stay.

He soon had to move to larger quarters, so he bought a building at Fourth Street and Montgomery Avenue, Philadelphia, which was then at the outskirts of the city. Today it is in the center of Philadelphia, occupying some 30 acres of floor space in 12 buildings. Now, as in the early days, orders come from all parts of the United States and also from some 31 foreign countries. The company makes officers' caps for the Army, Navy, and Air Force. It also makes TWA hostesses' hats, and one old-timer remembers that years ago he made poke-bonnets for Salvation Army lassies. Since President Eisenhower broke custom by wearing a black Homburg for his inauguration, Stetson dealers in Washington have done a thriving business in Homburgs.

The Stetson is still the official hat of the Texas Rangers, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and practically every State Police organization except in Connecticut, which patronizes its own hat industry. The Indiana State Police wear flat-brimmed Stetsons with the "Montana peak"—four dents in the crown—and are popularly known as "Stiff Hats." People in the Hoosier State have learned to respect the Stetson as a symbol of efficient law-enforcement. One day a State trooper in an unmarked patrol car pursued a speeding truck. When the police siren refused to screech, the trooper drew alongside the truck but couldn't see the driver, who was high up in the truck cab. The trooper took off his Stetson, held it near the open window toward the truck, and sounded his horn three times. The driver spotted the "Stiff Hat," slowed to a stop and took his bawling out and a ticket for speeding.

Memories of those early days are still fresh in the minds of some employees of the company who remember Stetson himself as well as famous Stetson customers like Buffalo Bill Cody, who bought pure beaver Stetsons at $100 each. Major Gordon W. Little, better known as Pawnee Bill, was a regular Stetson customer. So were President William H. Taft, Will Rogers, and "Uncle Joe" Cannon, one-time Speaker of the House of Representatives, whose furry gray stove-pipe hats were a distinctive part of his apparel. Alben Barkley, former Vice President, buys Stetsons regularly at a Washington haberdashery.

Although the company has never used the names of its many famous customers in advertising, it derives considerable satisfaction from the fact that Sir Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister, sometimes wears a broad-brimmed Stetson. A well-known picture showing Churchill with paint brush and easel also shows him wearing his gray Stetson cowboy hat.

Tom Mix, the Western sheriff who became a star of silent movies, bought white Stetsons in wholesale lots at $25 each to present to prominent persons when he was on tour. Old-timers at the factory still recall the delivery of a batch of hats to Mix for his personal use, by a factory representative named Stevenson. When Stevenson arrived at the Mix ranch, Tom was taking a shower, but he asked that Stevenson bring one of the hats to him in the bathroom. As Stevenson watched, Mix donned the hat and stood under the hot needle spray, molding the curving brim upward with his hands, then stepping out and hung it on a wall hook to dry.

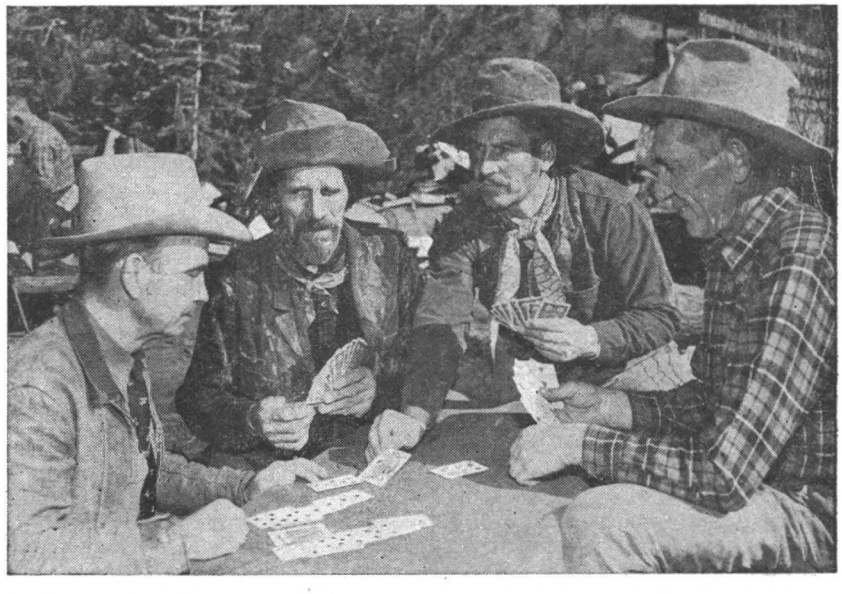
"Sometimes I like a little different shape," Mix explained, "so I fix them to suit myself." When the hat dried it kept the desired shape.

Today's movie cowboys are Stetson customers, too. Roy Rogers, who keeps about a dozen Stetsons in his working wardrobe, uses beige-colored hats for his movie and TV work, white hats for rodeos and other personal appearances. Like Tom Mix, Rogers shapes his own hats and those of his wife, Dale Evans, under a steaming hot shower. He has presented many Stetsons to Chiefs of Police and Sheriffs, and once when it was impossible for him to make a scheduled appearance to lead an Armed Forces Day parade at Decatur, Illinois, he sent the hat he wore in the movie, *Trigger, Junior,* to take his place.

Gene Autry favors white Stetsons, although he has a few gray, brown and tan among the 150 in his wardrobe. Two of Autry's Stetsons are among the memorabilia of the late Franklin D. Roosevelt at Hyde Park, N. Y. Made of pure beaver, they were presented to the late President in 1940 in Washington, where Gene explained the many ways in which a cowpuncher uses his 10-gallon hat. "They're good throwing hats, too, Mr. President," Gene added, "in case you want to toss one into the ring!"

AMON CARTER, famous publisher of Fort Worth, Texas, buys Stetsons to present to his friends at his Shady Oak Ranch. Carter's stock of hats, each stamped with the inscription, "The latch string always hangs outside—Amon Carter," is kept for him at the retail store of Washer Brothers in Fort Worth.

The famous campaign hats worn by the late General John J. Pershing when he commanded American troops in France during World War I were especially made by Stetson to Pershing's specifications. Bing Crosby and Bob Hope, who often wear Tyrolean spectator hats, get them from Stetson. One famous customer is the former King of England, now Duke of Windsor, and another member of royalty,



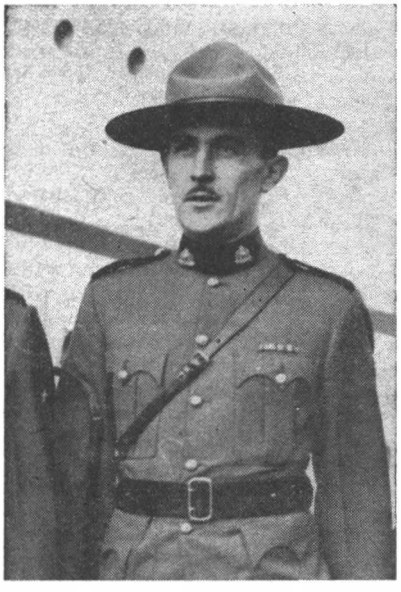
In the American West, "Stetson" and "hat" are synonomous, both in fact and in fiction.

Crown Prince Akihito of Japan, is a Stetson wearer. Stetson hats have, in fact, been sold in every country where hats are worn, and the company says that more people today wear Stetson hats than any other brand. . . .

Today's process for hat-making is basically the same as that used by John B. Stetson, except that modern production methods have replaced his hand operations. One Stetson employee says, "Magicians pull rabbits out of hats, but we pull hats out of rabbits." The manufacture of a Stetson hat has its magical side. It begins in the back shop, or wet shop, with the weighing of the proper amount of fur (usually rabbit, hare, beaver or otter) to be fashioned into a hat.

The weighed fur is sucked against a wet revolving copper cone about three feet high, and is sprayed with hot water which mats the particles together. The fur dunce cap is removed by hand and passed through several more hot-water baths which shrink it to required measurements. If the hat is to be colored, the fur itself is dyed before the forming begins, or the hat body is dipped in hot dye for two hours.

The lower part of the hat body is stiffened by special materials, including shellac. The body then goes through two machines which "pull out" the crown and brim to give it the first recognizable shape of a hat. It is then steamed and blocked to approximately final form. When it dries it goes to a pouncing machine which actually sandpapers the hat to remove any rough places in the fur, and it is then sent to the stockroom where thousands of hat bodies are stored in every conceivable color, weight, quality, brim width and shape. When a dealer places an order, stockroom employees select the hat bodies that meet the requirements and send them to the front shop for finishing and shipment.



And of course the Mounties wear Stetsons.

Hat-finishing at Stetson is a mass-production job on a strictly custom basis. After brims and crowns are ironed to shape, the hats get more sanding and an application of grease and powder. The special grease is applied by hand, followed by the powder which clings to the grease. The brim edge is curled by hand or machine and fixed by heated sand in a sack which presses the hat against a wooden form. In the trimming room the brim is bound or sewed, the lining and leather sweatband are inserted, and the outside band is attached. Before it is packed, each hat gets a rigorous final inspection to uphold the signs displayed throughout the factory—"Stetson Means Quality."

The minimum price for today's Stetson hat is $10. The maximum is $100 for a pure beaver hat, finest that can be made. Sales of the $100 hats are limited, depending upon the amount of top-quality beaver fur available. Each $100 hat is carefully processed by hand throughout and personally inspected by Vice-President Charles C. Kaesshaefer.

"John B. Stetson built a friendly business," Charlie Kaesshaefer says, "and we've kept it that way. Stetson always had the welfare of his workers in mind. He organized a building association to finance the building of their homes. He used to have his personal physician examine employees who were ailing, and then he established a company dispensary and finally the institution which is now the John B. Stetson Hospital. He started a profit-sharing plan when such things were unheard of in industry. He handed out raises when a man got married or became a father. He was a real humanitarian, and we've tried to operate the business according to his original precepts and philosophies."

One part of the business has its disadvantages—the renovation of hats. "Some of the hats we get for renovation," says Kaesshaefer, "prove the old saying that you can wear a Stetson until it rots, but you can't wear it out." A few weeks ago the company received this letter from a customer:

"I am wearing a hat I bought from Lowistean in Nashville Tenn October 1918, the stile Select quality, size 7⅛. I have worn this hat through every winter sense October 1918 and waring it now. Had it cleaned 20 times. When I go into a store, first thing he asks where did you get that rabbit hat and he says, I wish I had one like it. What I want to no what it will cost me to have it Remodled with new sweat and outside Band and blocked and cleaned, otherwise I will have a new hat. I am a old Railroder 81 years old with 45 years RR service.

Every time I put this hat on, my wife says, why dont you put that hat a way or give it a way.

I no you will laugh at this and I want you to. I have nothing to do but make People laugh."

The Stetson "hat hospital," bigger than the average new-hat factory, receives from 500 to 1,000 Stetson hats every week to be cleaned and blocked, but some 30 to 100 of these are invariably returned to the owners because they are so grimy or so old that renovation is impossible.

The famous Boss of the Plains is no longer in production, although the firm retains the original Boss of the Plains die and will make the hats to order. Stetson cowboy hats today carry such brands as: The Open Road, The Pardner, The Lone Star, The Texan, The Fiesta, The Yearling, The Long Horn, The Prairie, The Arminto, The Laloo, The Big Four, The Tom Mix, and The Carlsbad. With each goes the famous name of Stetson, which the Oxford English Dictionary lists as a synonym for "hat."

Apparently Stetson never went back to the West where his success story began, but his name became a part of American history. Charlie Kaesshaefer tells a true story to show what the Stetson name means to a cowboy. A few years ago a rangy buckaroo strolled into a Texas store which sold Stetson hats, and said he wanted to buy one for five dollars, which was all the money he had. The dealer said he was sorry, but the cheapest Stetson sold at that time for $7.50. However, he added, he did have some unbranded Stetson hats which were seconds of regular stock and which he would sell for five dollars. The cowpoke selected one, tried it on, said, "I'll take that one."

"Fine," the dealer said. "And would you like to have your name stamped on the leather band?"

"Yes, sir, I shore would," the cowboy said.

"All right. What's your name?"

The customer hesitated a moment. "Well, now, mister," he said, "do you mean you can put any old name on that there hat-band?" The dealer said he could.

"Well, then," the cowboy said with a grin, "if it's all the same to you, just make it John B. Stetson."

Illustration by TRACY SUGARMAN

There's more to being a cop than just wearing the uniform.

By ROBERT ZACKS

COP ON THE BEAT

SHORT-SHORT STORY COMPLETE ON THESE TWO PAGES

Joe Valenti's face was impassive as he let his policeman's club do somersaults from the attached cord on his wrist. He walked slowly through the crowded street, aware of the three girls in dungarees at a doorway turning to stare, the older people watching from the steps of the brownstone houses. Hostility was in the air as the cop approached the group of teenage boys huddled in a circle on their knees around a pile of coins. A pair of dice clattered on the pavement.

"Break it up," said Joe sharply.

Startled, the boys swivelled their heads. They scooped up the money and hastily drifted in different directions. From the doorway the girls laughed. One spoke mockingly, deliberately loud enough to be heard.

"Say, I was reading in the papers about how gamblers pay off the cops. Nothing like having protection, huh?"

Two of the boys uttered raucous jeers, one of them thumbing his nose at the policeman. Before Joe Valenti could move a step they disappeared into the shadows of an alleyway. The old people were grinning cynically. Joe's face darkened with an unpleasant crimson.

He kept his face expressionless and kept moving. A few feet farther there were two ten-year-old boys busily digging up individual cobblestones from the gutter for some unknown need. Valenti stood over them until they replaced the cobblestones and tamped earth back between them. They sulkily went away, then one wheeled at the corner. "Yah, yah, dirty cop," he yelled, then making his fingers into a gun he uttered a short barking noise. "Gotcha ya, copper!" He then went into a nearby candy store and soon came out with a cone of ice cream which he licked steadily while staring at Joe Valenti.

Joe continued onward, ignoring the amused stares of the residents.

The hours passed, it got hotter, and there were other small chores that were unpleasant. There was the beat-up jalopy parked before the fire-hydrant and as Valenti was about to write a ticket a blowzy woman who was much too stout to be wearing a sweater came running out, her earrings jingling. She had too much pancake make-up on and when she smiled brightly, patting her bleached hair with coyness as she flirted an apology, the make-up nearly cracked. She'd just pulled up for a minute, she said, to get a prescription filled at the drugstore; her mother was sick.

Joe Valenti put his book away and after pointing out the buildings around were firetraps and the need for free access to hydrants, he watched her move the jalopy out of sight.

Ten minutes later, coming around the block again on his beat, Joe Valenti paused in anger. The jalopy again was blocking the fire hydrant. He made out a ticket, left it on the car, then went into the drugstore. Behind the lunch and soda fountain counter the bleached blonde was serving coffee to a grinning truckdriver, smirking at him. When she saw Valenti her smile died.

Joe Valenti slid onto a stool, looking up at the wall clock. It was time for lunch. "Grilled American and coffee," he said to the blonde. She nodded and hurriedly filled his order, her smile returning. When he was through he called for his check. The blonde giggled. "Are you kidding or something?" she said.

Joe looked at the price list behind her on the mirror, counted out the change necessary and dropped it on the yellow counter. "I pay for my mistakes," said Joe pleasantly, "and if you'll look at your car you'll see you're going to pay for yours."

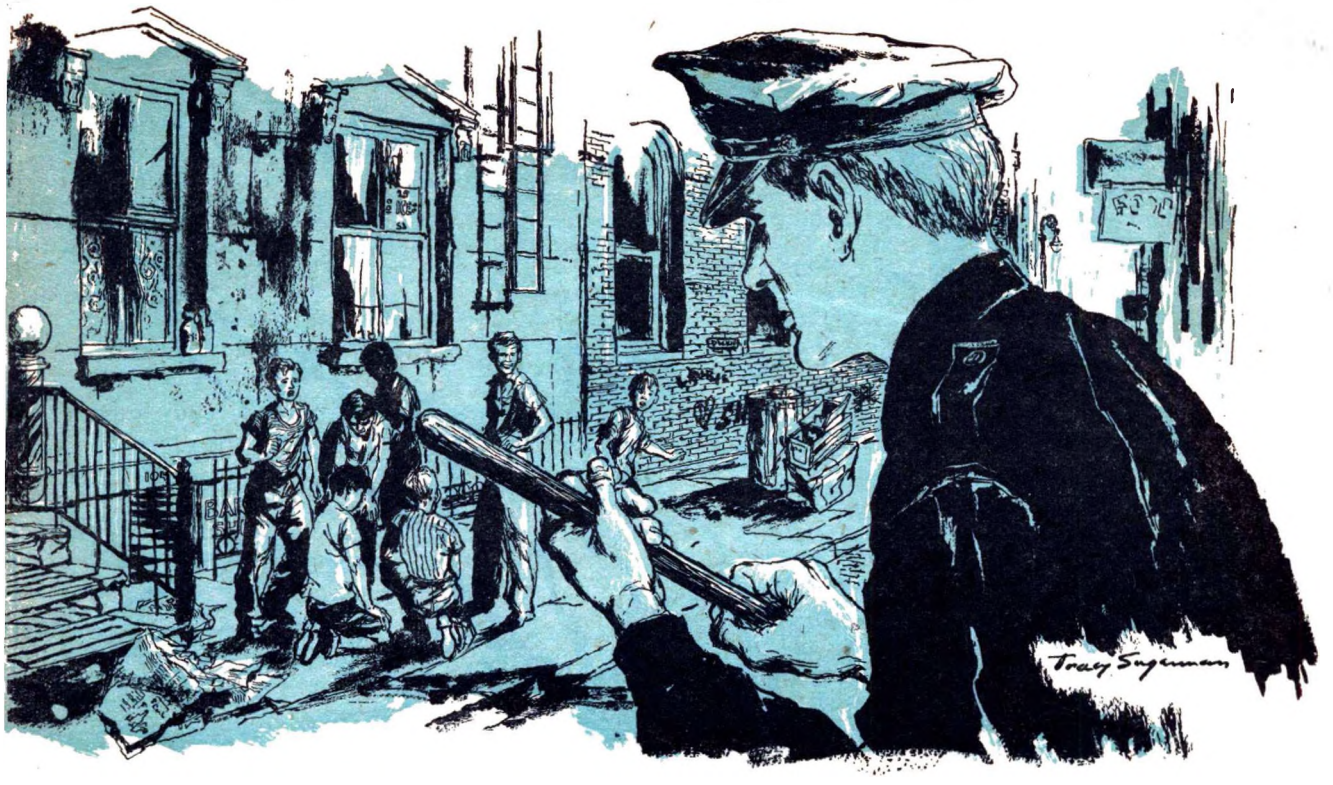
The woman's face hardened with rage. "Whatsamatter?" she said to Joe's back sarcastically, "is the graft too small?"

Joe whirled in fury. The blonde was facing the truckdriver. "Well," she said to the truckdriver with a queer smile, "why don't you answer me, Bill? Is the graft too small?"

The truckdriver kept his face straight. "Nah," he said. "I ain't complaining. It's just my conscience hurts, see?"

The blonde, seeing Valenti standing rigid, turned back toward him. "Something else you want?"

"No," said Valenti thickly, fighting for control. He turned to go. The blonde called after him, "Say, what happened to Officer Peterslee? He used to have this beat."



"I have no idea," said Joe Valenti icily. "Why do you ask?"

"I owe him some money," said the blonde smiling.

Joe walked out, conscious of the truckdriver's smile, conscious of the nausea and overwhelming fury inside him. He stood alone on the busy corner, breathing deeply in a fight to hold his self-control.

Early afternoon came and grew older with hostile minutes dragging. There was the resentment in the eyes of the janitor of the ancient tenement when Valenti made him stop blocking the whole sidewalk with stinking, uncovered garbage cans that gathered swarms of flies. After a while of slamming the cans against the wall and finding the covers to them the janitor suggested a drink, in a sly tone of voice.

"No thanks," snapped Joe. "Just get those covers on."

He walked away, sick with the whole thing, the mood of corruption, the contempt in the eyes of the people, the hostile atmosphere.

There was a scream. Joe whirled. The crowded streets were stilled in an instant as heads turned to stare. It was like a painting of a mob scene —with the only motion the streaking of a man up the fire-escape across the way, toward the roof, as the old woman below him thrust her bruised face from the window wailing.

"My money," she shrilled, unbelievable anguish in her voice. "He stole my money. Help, help!"

Valenti ran up the stairs past astounded residents, and came out on the roof cautiously, his gun in hand. The hot sun blazed upon the deserted, angular roof lifting the smell of tar. From the street came the cries of excitement in a muffled way and suddenly all the adjoining roofs were swarming with people eager to watch the drama—men, children, adolescents, girls—and then as they filled the nooks and crannies the thief was flushed from his hiding place.

He darted swiftly, zigzagging between two small boys, and then found himself trapped in a corner. Bending, he seized one of the boys, held him up as a shield with one hand and with the other brandished an ugly-looking kitchen bread knife.

"Keep away from me," he screamed, his dark eyes glaring.

Officer Valenti put away his gun and moved in fast, diving at the knife arm, seizing it. The boy was dropped. As the kid scrambled in fright out of the way, the thief fought to drive the knife into Valenti's chest. They fell to the roof, rolled and panted, and Valenti sharply twisted the thief's wrist. The knife clattered to the roof tar. The battle was finished.

As the patrol car took the thief away the old lady with the bruised face took Valenti's hand. "Thank you," she whimpered. "My whole savings he found. In the cereal bowl I kept it."

"You'd better put it in the bank," said Valenti.

"I don't like banks," she said suspiciously. She patted his shoulder affectionately and walked away muttering to herself. The people were crowding around Valenti, staring at him, discussing him as if he weren't present. A tug at his coat showed Valenti the boy who'd been seized by the thief. It was the same kid who'd resented being deprived of the cobblestones.

"Hey copper," yelled the kid. "We got him, huh?"

"Yeah, we got him," said Valenti. "Now g'wan, go wash your face. It's dirty."

"So what!" snapped the kid. "So's yours."

Everybody laughed. Valenti went into the drugstore and headed for the washroom. The blonde was staring at him from behind the counter. "Hey, hey," she said, respect in her voice. "Nice going, pal."

"I get paid for it," said Valenti curtly. But a warm feeling coursed through him nevertheless as they smiled at each other.

Afterwards, when the end of his shift came, Joe Valenti went back to the station house. The desk sergeant looked up when he came in, studying Joe wearily.

"Well," said the desk sergeant, "how do you like your first day as a cop, rookie?"

"It's a job," said Joe Valenti shrugging. Then, feeling good, Joe went into the squadroom to see if any of the boys were around. •

A BLUEBOOK NOVELETTE

He had brought the plane down, all right. The question was, could he get it back up? And he had to—for a man's life depended on it.

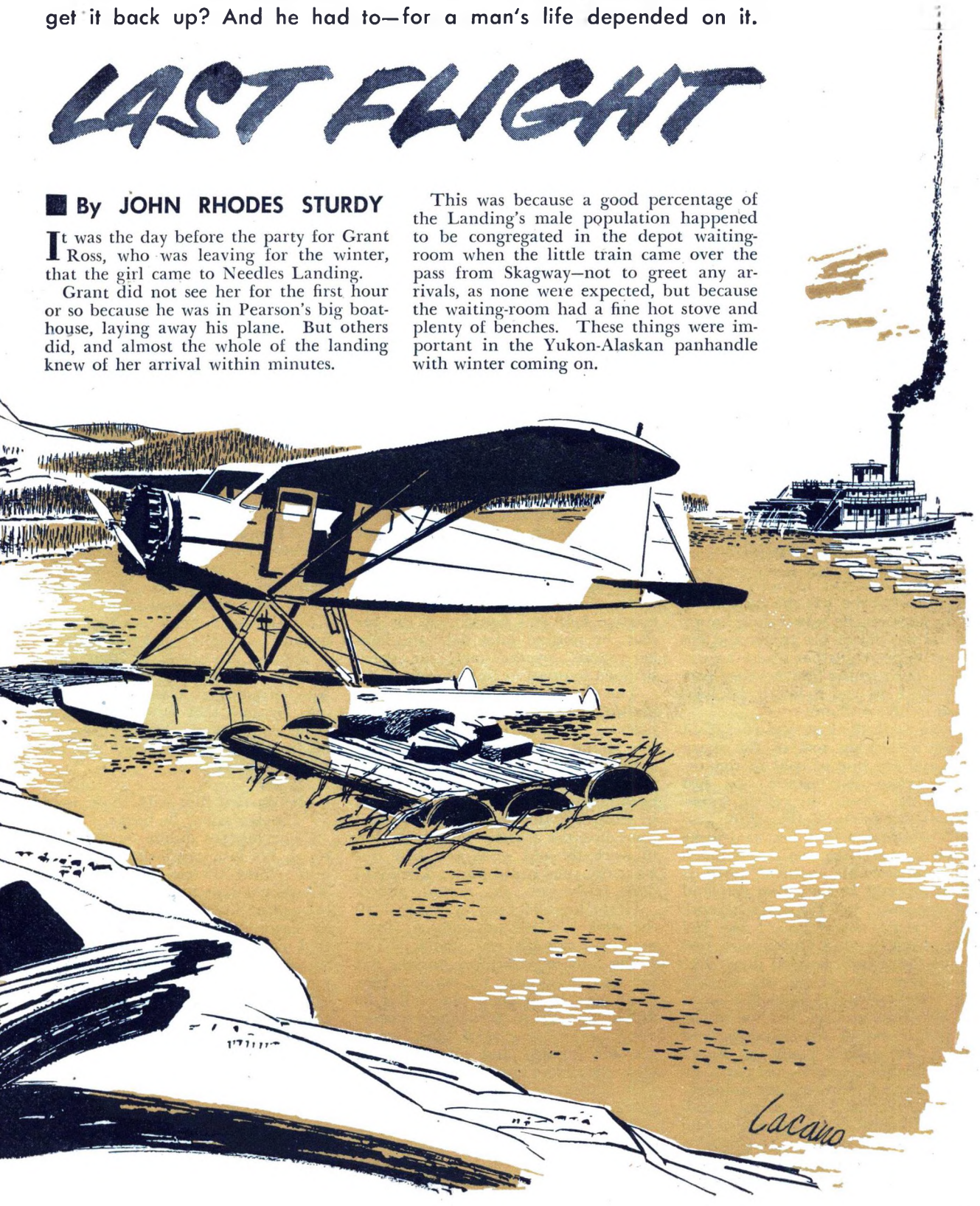
LAST FLIGHT

By JOHN RHODES STURDY

It was the day before the party for Grant Ross, who was leaving for the winter, that the girl came to Needles Landing.

Grant did not see her for the first hour or so because he was in Pearson's big boathouse, laying away his plane. But others did, and almost the whole of the landing knew of her arrival within minutes.

This was because a good percentage of the Landing's male population happened to be congregated in the depot waiting-room when the little train came over the pass from Skagway—not to greet any arrivals, as none were expected, but because the waiting-room had a fine hot stove and plenty of benches. These things were important in the Yukon-Alaskan panhandle with winter coming on.



She was the only passenger to alight from the puffing train. It was a shock for the men in the waiting-room to see a young woman, and especially a pretty one who wore an expensive fur coat that was cut to compliment a trim figure, and who carried a small traveling bag with a label that read, MARY DENHAM, SAN FRANCISCO.

And when she approached Harry Johnson, the stationmaster, and asked, "Would you tell me how I can get to the Turtle Mine on Kulsin Lake, please?" they stopped gaping and almost laughed. Or felt pity for her. Because that was the crazy part, of course, this asking how to get to Kulsin Lake, because everyone knew (or didn't they in San Francisco?) that Kulsin Lake was cut off from the world until after the freeze up.

But she persisted.

"Can't anyone help me?" she asked, and sounded a little desperate.

No, they told her.

She would not be able to return to Skagway, either, until the next train out on Thursday, but Johnson added that, while there was no hotel in Needles Landing, his wife would be glad to give her a room for the next couple of days.

Everyone said she looked like a nice girl, but surely a little touched in the head to be wandering around Alaska and the Yukon, alone at this time of the year, asking the impossible.

GRANT was still unaware of her presence when he left the boathouse. At the moment he was feeling happy that he was rid of his plane, and enjoying the thought that where he was going—south to the States—other people would do the flying if he happened to take a plane.

As he walked along the riverfront he was conscious, too, of the sharp wind and the bite of cold in the air, which meant that winter was just around the corner, or, rather, squatting on the peaks of the white sawtooth mountains that marched away to the sky, waiting for that sudden and unpredictable moment when it would descend and envelop the land and the river, and the lakes beyond.

He passed the berth of the old stern-wheeler *Kulsin Queen*, now tied up for the season, bedded down like almost everything else in the tiny village. And on his left he looked across at Billy's cafe, and saw the face of the fat proprietor in the window, and waved. The back room of Billy's would be the scene of his party tomorrow, and it warmed him suddenly to think that the people of the Landing had thought enough to honor him with a farewell party.

Billy had said the other day, "Even if you shouldn't come back, Grant—even if you found something better to do in the south—there's a lot of people would be always remembering you and that plane of yours, and the things, big and little, that you've done for them."

Grant turned in at the door of the small white house belonging to Captain Wallace, the skipper of the *Kulsin Queen* where he rented a room.

Even standing in the hall he did not see her yet. But he heard her voice.

"But did you see my brother?"

Captain Wallace always sounded a bit like a rusty foghorn. "I saw him nearly every time we made a trip into Kulsin Lake this summer, Miss."

"But the last time?"

"No, not him. Just his partner, the Lawlor boy. He came down to the ship, and that's when he told me they'd decided to stay at the mine until after freeze up. They figured that if they came out with me, they would lose plenty of working days. I think Lawlor said they expected to fly out, with a plane from Whitehorse, after the freeze."

"But didn't Joe Lawlor give you any letters to mail?"

"No, Miss." And then the foghorn voice grew louder. "Who's out in the hall? Is that you, Grant? Come in here."

Then Grant saw her for the first time, seated on a chair in Wallace's living-room, and she was as much a shock to him as to any of the hot-stove league down at the station. Only, after he had admired the attractive face and figure and the fur coat, he noticed how tight she kept her hands together and the tired, strained expression in her eyes.

The white-haired riverman was explaining the situation. She was a sister of Michael Denham, one of the two young men who had been high-grading in the old Turtle Mine during the summer. The Turtle had been abandoned commercially back in 1928, but these young fellows had come into the country with an option to work the old veins and take out what ore they could find. They had done fairly well, the captain added.

Grant kept looking at the girl all the time Wallace was talking. And now the captain was saying, "The young lady expected her brother out the end of August, on my last trip. That was the original plan. But he didn't turn up in San Francisco and she heard nothing from him, and so she got worried and came looking. Only she didn't know that transportation comes to a stop this time of year."

The captain cleared some of the fog out of his voice and turned to the girl. "I'm really sorry about it, Miss. You wouldn't know, back there in the south. But you're just a little too late—or too early, if you put it the other way. After a real solid freeze up it's a simple matter to get in or out of that lake. A plane on skis, or by sled. And a few weeks ago, even after I made my last trip, you could have hired a small boat to take you in. But no man in his right mind would go up the river now in a boat, not knowing when the big freeze is coming. He might never get his boat back."

The old man suddenly uttered an exclamation and said quickly, "Excuse me. I've got some grub on the stove."

And Grant was left alone with the girl. He was still looking at her.

AFTER a moment he asked, "How did you get here?"

She had been staring down at her hands, but now she looked up suddenly, as though surprised at the sound of his voice, perhaps, even of his presence.

"I had some friends who were flying to Juneau," she said. "They took me that far. I got another flight to Skagway. And then the little train to here."

"What will you do now?"

"What can I do?" The words were accented with a note of bitter helplessness. "They tell me I can get a train out on Thursday. So I suppose I'll go back home—and wait."

He found himself saying, "Your brother's all right, you know. There's a regular city back at that mine, hanging on the ledge of a mountain. Not jerry-built. Good, solid buildings, because they never thought the mine would close. Your brother and his friend will have warmth and comfort. He's all right."

"Is he?"

She startled him with those words.

"The captain—" he began.

"The captain didn't see my brother on his last trip," she interrupted him. "And Michael didn't write me. That's not like him. That's against everything in his character. You see, he wrote me religiously all summer—told me what date to expect him back in San Francisco—and then suddenly, nothing."

She rose to her feet and walked toward the window, a little jerkily, while Grant's eyes followed every movement.

"I don't blame the people here for thinking I'm a little crazy," she said. "On the way to this house I saw an Indian working on his boat."

"Patsy Joe," Grant said.

"I asked him to take me to Kulsin Lake. He stared at me as though I were completely insane. I suppose I

Illustrated by FRANK LACANO

can hardly blame him. I didn't know about the season. I just knew that my brother hadn't written, hadn't sent me any word. He's the only one left of my family, besides me, and he would never forget to write. Never!"

Her voice was rising a little. "And now I'm so close, and they tell me I can't go any farther. It frightens me. I have such a feeling of desperation—"

It seemed to Grant that she had suddenly become aware of him again. She said quickly, "Forgive me, and excuse me," and walked out of the room, and a moment later he heard the front door open and close.

He stood in the center of the room, motionless, a little shocked. And then he wondered if she had fled like that because she was about to cry and did not want him to see her.

The captain came back from the kitchen, noticed the girl's absence, and then said, "I don't like it. It's a bad omen."

"What is?"

"Her turning up. I don't like anyone coming into this country, looking for people who are out of touch."

For some reason that made Grant angry. "I don't think it's any bad omen," he said sharply. "I think she's just a girl who's sick with worry and fear over a brother she loves very much. She hasn't heard from him. And she's followed him into a country that must seem terrifying—"

"Oh, terrifying, my foot!" the captain interrupted. His voice sounded a little short, too.

"Damn it, Captain, you've lived here so long you can't remember the first time you came in. But I do. I can remember when I was alone, and afraid."

He started to walk into the hall.

"Where are you going?" Wallace called after him. "It's time to eat."

"I don't know," Grant shouted back.

PERHAPS, at the moment, that was the truth. But afterward, when he had walked aimlessly around town, listening to the people talk about Mary Denham, having a cup of coffee at Billy's and hearing the fat proprietor discourse on the same subject, then he knew where he was going; to Pearson's boathouse.

And late that night when he returned to the house, Captain Wallace saw the grease and oil on him, and knew, too, and when Grant tried to get up to his room without entering into any conversation, the old man stood at the foot of the stairs and said, "If I looked out the kitchen window, I guess I'd see your plane back on the water. Did you tell the girl?"

"Yes."

"And did you also tell her that you had already put your plane away for the winter, and that you were the guest of honor at a party tomorrow?"

"I'll be back for the party," Grant said stiffly. "If there's ice on the lake, and there probably is, we won't be able to land. But at least she can see her brother from the air and drop a message to him. That's not too much to ask, is it?"

"Depends upon who's asked, and who does the asking. Anyway," the captain added, "all pilots are a little crazy." And he went back to his living-room, while Grant escaped upstairs.

SHE had asked Grant, "Why are you doing this for me—for a stranger?"

It was something he could not answer properly. Because he was a sucker for a pretty face? Because he felt sorry for her? Because he remembered, as he had told Captain Wallace, his own first time in this north country? None of it was a whole answer.

So he had merely said, "I guess there are no real strangers up here."

He picked her up at the Johnson house in the morning, where gray-haired Mrs. Johnson had packed a thermos of coffee for them and given the girl a pair of warm boots, and Johnson, the stationmaster, had greeted Grant with a funny look.

Once they were aboard the plane he was keenly conscious of her presence on the seat beside him, a safety belt tight around the waist of her fur coat, her eyes looking straight ahead at the river. She was a trifle pale, and, he knew, a little afraid of this flight into the unknown, and as they started to taxi away from the wharf he caught her eye and purposely smiled.

Out on the river, the silver-and-red plane roared into the wind for a take-off, and seconds later they were airborne and circling above Needles Landing, over the tiny houses and the railroad tracks and then high in the last degree of the turn until the river was underneath them again and falling rapidly away.

He gave a little grunt of satisfaction. The weather was clear and the white topped ranges were etched clearly against the distant sky.

After a time he heard her voice above the sound of the engine. She was pointing out the window and saying, "I can understand now why you have to depend on a plane, or the river. You couldn't walk out over those mountains, could you?"

He shook his head. And then he drew her attention to some fringes of ice on the shores of the river and to where new snow had fallen on the slopes of the mountains, as contrasted to the old snow that was always there, on the higher peaks.

Much later, when they made a turn over the mouth of Kulsin Lake, he could see white and gray below him and he knew that the exit from the lake into the river was already choked with ice—how thick, he could not tell. But from there on, the stretches of blue, which meant clear water, grew smaller, and he thought to himself that it would be only a short time now before the whole lake would be covered with ice—too thin to support any weight, but the definite prelude to general freeze up.

But his eyes were looking ahead now, and he was maintaining altitude, because he was watching for the mine. And perhaps the girl sensed his expectancy. She was leaning forward a little, quite tense.

Suddenly he pointed, and her head jerked.

"There it is," he said.

On the left bank of the mile-wide lake a black mountain rose sharply from the water's edge. It was about two thousand feet in height, and at first glance looked like a solid wall of rock. But as the plane advanced swiftly upon it, a ledge five hundred feet above the level of the lake began to open up and show itself, and within seconds it had widened into a flat shelf with two rows of buildings perched upon it and a kind of street in between.

The girl turned to look at Grant, and her eyes were almost dazed. He could understand that, remembering the first time he had flown over Kulsin Lake and had come upon this dead town clinging to the ledge of a mountain.

"They'll have heard us by now," Grant told her. "We'll buzz them a couple of times so there won't be any mistake."

She had written a note to her brother, and it was now enclosed in a canister that lay at his feet. He had added a few packets of cigarettes and some boxes of matches. Probably the men were well off for tobacco and matches, but these might be welcome.

THE girl's lips were tight as the plane dipped over the rows of buildings, the roar of its engine smashing against the black rock that seemed almost to be touching the left wing-tip.

On that first run, Grant saw no sign of life, and particularly no hint of smoke from any of the chimneys on the buildings. He frowned as he lifted the nose of the plane and banked over the lake.

"Did you see anything?" a faint voice sounded in his ear.

"They're in one of the mine shafts, probably," he shouted back. "We'll give them a real greeting this next time."

When he flattened out so as to barely skim the tops of the buildings, he opened the throttle wide and the fierce sound of the engine battered at his eardrums, making him think with satisfaction that no one within ten miles could escape hearing that roar. The plane trembled and bucked and he felt a slight pressure on his sleeve and was conscious that the girl had almost grabbed his arm. He looked at her briefly and grinned.

But when he came back on a reciprocal run and once again flew over the rooftops, much slower this time, the grin had disappeared. The two figures he had expected to find standing in the road between the rows of buildings, waving at them, were not there. Nothing living was there.

He gained altitude again and tried to glance at the girl without her noticing it. She was staring straight ahead, her face very white, her hands clasped over her knees, and he knew immediately that it would be useless to try to pretend any longer that the men might not have heard the aircraft.

In her silence, in her tight lips, he could read her thoughts; the fright that was still under control, but barely, and the knowledge that down below them, in that dead, deserted town, something was wrong, very wrong.

He lifted the plane high over the lake. The thoughts in his own mind were, for a moment, confused. He was human enough to regret for an instant that he had allowed himself to be drawn into this thing, knowing instinctively now that this would not end as a simple flight into Kulsin Lake and back to Needles, and a party tonight and the train outside tomorrow.

That, just for an instant. But as he banked the aircraft and looked once again toward the mountain ledge, and then down at the lake, he had forgotten the thought and had begun to plan.

Because this was no longer a matter of doing a good turn for a pretty girl. He had failed to make contact with two men who should have been in a certain place. Now he could not turn back.

There was a stretch of blue water near the foot of the mountain. He estimated its length roughly, and he thought it would be enough. Certainly enough to get down, but that was simple. It was the taking-off that was the important consideration; at this altitude you needed plenty of water.

But he thought he could do it. The blue was edged with ice, and between open water and what looked like a wharf at the base of the mountain, about a hundred feet had closed in. But he could see through the ice, and it looked fragile, and at any rate that was a secondary problem.

He did not tell the girl what he intended to do. He did not even look at her face, but glanced briefly at her waist to make certain that the safety belt was fastened securely. Then he put the nose of the plane down and forgot everything but that stretch of deep blue water that was suddenly rushing toward him.

There was no wind into which he could fly. There was no ripple on the water to help him gauge his landing. But when the floats struck the water he had the ship under control, there was scarcely a bump and he was throttled down and stopped with plenty of clear water still in front of him.

"Nice," he heard a voice say.

The sound of the word surprised and pleased him. He turned to look at the girl, and it struck him that that one, simple little word had required a tremendous effort on her part. Her lips were trembling and her eyes blank, and he knew that she was dreading what she might find on the silent ledge of that black mountain. She was keeping herself under control, and yet she had said, "Nice."

He admired her suddenly. In that moment she became more to him than a pretty stranger who had stepped off the train at Needles Landing wearing a rich fur coat.

He swung the ship around and when the floats reached the edge of the blue water and nudged against the ice, the stuff broke into fragments like thin glass and Grant let his breath out thankfully. The ice tinkled and crackled as the plane nosed into the beach and eventually came alongside the wharf.

He jumped ashore, secured a line and then helped the girl down. As she stepped on to the ancient, cracked flooring of the wharf, she faltered a moment and he took her arm and said, "There's some explanation. Maybe a very simple one."

"They're gone, or—"

"We'll see."

At one time there had been a vehicular railway running up the side of the mountain from the wharf to the mine. But it had long been dismantled and only the battered traces remained. But there was a trail, curling snake-like up from the shoreline, and Grant motioned for the girl to take this path and go ahead of him.

He glanced at his wristwatch. He was beginning to think of time, and daylight.

He was almost out of breath when they reached the summit of the trail. The girl had climbed quickly, stumbling now and again on the rocky path, but not waiting for assistance, pushing herself upwards in a kind of desperation.

Grant could feel the cold now, even though he was sweating under his windbreaker. Physical cold against his cheeks and another coldness gripping at his heart, as at last they reached the top, came around the side of an abandoned building and stood suddenly in what had once been the one and only street of this mining settlement.

He could almost feel the silence. He looked down the rows of old buildings, ghosts out of the 'Twenties, black and gray and yellowed white, some of them battered, but most of them standing as they must have stood when there had been life here.

But lifeless now—lifeless and decaying.

It was then that the girl broke. She started to run, and he did not try to stop her. She had unbuttoned the coat and it trailed out behind her as she ran, a gleam of beauty in that dead place, and her voice was calling, "Michael! Michael!"

He followed slowly, watching her. She had gone up one side of the road and was coming back the other, and not until her voice faltered and her steps suddenly grew heavy and exhausted, did he move toward her.

He caught the girl in his arms and felt her head against his cheek, conscious of her hard breathing. He waited until she had regained some of her breath.

"Now," he said softly, "if they're not here, let's find out what we can."

"Do you think," he heard her gasp, "the mine shafts—"

"No," he said. He knew what she meant. There was always that possibility, that the men had been trapped in the mine, but he was not ready to accept it yet.

"Look at me," he said, and she came out of his arms, and he saw her white face and the frightened eyes. But the moment of panic had passed. Her look was steady, and he wanted to tell her: I admire you.

"The first thing," he said, "is to find their house." He pointed to a low, ranch-type building that was a little off by itself and overlooked the lip of the mountain. "I think that might be it."

She started to move, but he held her arm. "Before we go any farther," he said, "there are certain things that you must keep in mind. They wouldn't try to walk out of here. Not now. Because they would have to cross those mountains, and that's impossible."

"Yes," she murmured.

He still held her arm. "If some boat had picked them up, they would have come down the river to Needles.

But there's another thing. Possibly Captain Wallace was wrong. Perhaps they arranged to be flown out earlier than the freeze up—to Whitehorse. Or perhaps some pilot, seeing smoke from one of these buildings, decided to investigate, and they took the opportunity to fly out with him."

She shook her head. "I would have heard. They would have wired me."

"Maybe they did. Maybe you left San Francisco before the wire arrived."

"I don't believe—"

"That I might be right?" He released her arm. "What's your name? Mary?"

"Yes."

"We learn to believe, Mary, up here in this country," he told her. "We follow one trail, and if that's not the right one, we follow another. In this country we never say that a man is lost. That's a city word, lost. Men have the damndest way of turning up, you know."

Her lips were still pale and thin, but there was a sudden difference in her eyes. "You make me believe you," she said.

"All right," he said. "We'll try the big house. It looks as though it might have been lived in."

He was positive of it as they walked quickly toward the building. The windows had been wiped, for one thing, and someone had cut the weeds around the doorway. Furthermore he could see footprints leading toward it; many footprints that had beaten a path over a lengthy period of time.

At the door he stopped the girl. "Wait here," he ordered. "I'll take a look inside first."

Her lips trembled, but she obeyed him.

He went inside. There was a small hallway, with a row of pegs on one wall, and he saw a raincoat hanging from one of them. It was a fairly new raincoat; much newer, at any rate, than the 1920's.

To the left he found a dining-room, or what he took for a dining-room, and beyond that a kitchen. The wood stove had been in use, and there were canned goods on the shelves over the sink. He did not bother to look in the cupboards, but continued through the house, into three completely bare bedrooms and finally, off the hall again, and to the right, into the living-room.

He realized immediately that this was where the two men had camped, using only this room and the kitchen. There were two cots over by one wall, on either side of a giant fireplace, and there were bedclothes on both of them. A few chairs and a table that looked as though they had been part of the original furniture were also

TRANSLATION

It's a tossup whether more tales crop up about Horace Greeley's absent-mindedness or his illegible handwriting. Both were crosses which had to be borne by the staff of the old New York *Tribune* during the days of Greeley's editorship. It was a perpetual problem to keep a printer who could figure out the editor's hand-written copy and set it, as Mr. Greeley didn't care to be asked for a translation. One tramp printer who wandered into the newspaper plant one day seemed to be gifted with second sight; none of the boss' copy fazed him; he was a tramp no longer—the staff kept him, babied him, bribed him.

Now Horace Greeley had a farm and his many country fans used to send him all manner of gifts which he duly carted out to his barnyard—turkeys, chickens, shoats. One morning a crate of poultry arrived at the *Tribune* and a couple of the other printers decided to play a trick on the man who had become Greeley's official typesetter. They inked the feet of a pair of chicks and turned them loose on a sheet of paper. They hopped around until the paper was literally filled with hen tracks. Then, when the fair-haired lad showed up, he was given the sheet and told it was Greeley's editorial for the day.

He looked it over, frowned, turned it this way and that, got out his glasses, shook his head, then went to work.

Half an hour later the editor himself entered the composing room where the erstwhile tramp printer was struggling with the sheet of paper. The printer looked at him, said, "Golly, Mr. Greeley, I hate to have to ask you this, hut I can't quite finish setting your editorial. There's one word here I can't get."

Horace Greeley strode over to the man, looked over his shoulder to the pointing finger, shouted: "Why you blamed dimwit, that's 'unconstitutional'!"

—*Mary Alkus*

near the fireplace, and a stack of wood was piled high in a box.

He noticed other things: A coffee pot on the table, and an old sweater lying on one of the chairs, an empty tin of tobacco—many things that told him that the inhabitants of this house had left hurriedly.

He went back to the front door and looked into the eyes of the girl standing there.

"Come in," he said. "They were here."

She stumbled on the doorstep, and he held her arm tightly and led her into the living-room.

"Wherever they went," he said quietly, "they took things with them. They must have rucksacks or dunnage bags to carry their gear. I can't see any signs of them."

She stood in the center of the big room, looking dazed. He left her there and began to move around, first to the big windows that overlooked the lip of the mountain ledge. Far below was Kulsin Lake and off in the distance the high, white peaks of the sawtooth ranges.

He came around the corner of the room, stopped at one of the cots and ruffled the blankets. Then he continued until he was almost in front of the fireplace, near the woodbox. A crumpled paper on the floor caught his eye. It lay as though someone had attempted to toss it into the fire and had missed.

Grant stooped and picked up the paper, smoothing it out in his hands. It was an envelope, with a letter still inside from the weight of it, and he saw the address:

Miss Mary Denham
12 Heath Street
San Francisco, Calif.

There was an uncancelled stamp in the upper right-hand corner of the envelope.

For a moment he hesitated. He had his back to the girl, the envelope hidden from her sight. Something told him that this unmailed letter was the one she had been expecting, the one that would have told her that her brother and his friend were staying at the mine until after freeze up. Then why was it lying here, crumpled up? Because Michael Denham had forgotten to send it out with the steamer to be mailed?

To Grant that did not make sense, even as he thought of it. A man would not be likely to forget to mail a letter that he had written in his own hand, and to his own sister, particularly under the circumstances that had prompted this one. And then Grant remembered that Captain Wallace had said that Lawlor, the other man, had been the only one he had seen on his last boat trip to Kulsin Lake.

Grant looked again at the crumpled envelope. Twisted and thrown away.

He turned to the girl. "I've found something," he said, and walked across the room and handed her the envelope.

He watched her as she tore it open and read the contents. Then wordlessly, eyes completely blank, she extended the open letter to Grant, and he looked at it.

He read just a few words. ". . . everything is going fine. But Joe and I have decided that the last trip of the stern-wheeler is much too early for us to move out. It runs for tourists, and the Alaskan tourist season is mostly over the end of August. We'd be losing a lot of valuable working days, and so we've made arrangements to stay over until after the freeze up and fly out. So don't worry about us, we're both in great shape . . ."

He returned the letter. She was staring at him.

"Why?" she said hoarsely.

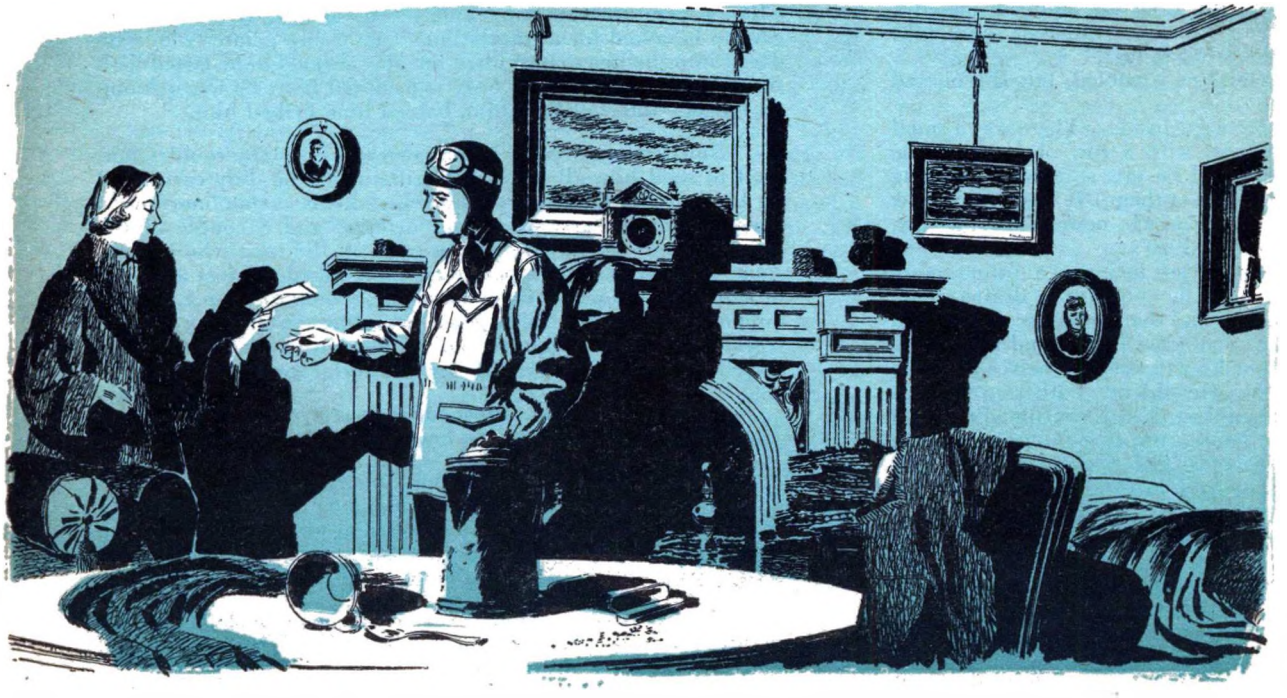
"I don't know, Mary, except that somebody forgot to mail it, to give it to Captain Wallace." His voice changed. "That doesn't matter right now. Look for a note. They may have left a note."

But there was no note. There would have been, Grant told himself, if these had been northern men.

Eventually he stopped her in the hallway. "We're running out of time," he told her frankly. "We'll try to go through as many buildings as we can, and the mine itself."

She nodded almost numbly, hardly conscious of his presence.

And he did not leave her alone very long. Later, when he saw her stumble out of one of the buildings, a rip in the skirt of her expensive fur coat and



Grant turned to the girl. "I've found something," he said and walked across the room and handed her the envelope. He watched as she tore it open and read the contents. Then, wordlessly, eyes completely blank, she extended the letter to Grant and he looked at it.

dirt smears across her face, he stopped her and said, "We have to go now, Mary. We have to get out of here. We have to get back to Needles before dark."

She shook her head. "I'll stay. I'll wait."

"For what?"

"For Michael."

His hands caught the collar of her coat. "He's not here," Grant said carefully, "and I'm sure he's not coming back here. We'll go to Needles. We'll contact people and organize an air search. We'll search again tomorrow ourselves. Understand me, will you? We're getting out of here now!"

She went with him then, perhaps because she did not have the strength to defy him. He helped her down the steep, rocky trail to the wharf, and she did not speak once, but moved almost automatically, stumbling and half-falling and then seeming to right herself in a kind of daze.

When they reached the wharf he said quietly, "You've forgotten that you were to believe."

He doubted if she heard him.

He put her aboard the aircraft and then he jumped back on the wharf to undo his line. For a moment he stood staring at the face of the mountain. He was trying to think, trying to make sense of this.

He turned and something caught his eye on the narrow beach the other side of the wharf. He walked over there and saw a couple of old drums lying on their sides. As he came closer he could make out marks on the ground where similar drums had lain, not too long ago, he suddenly thought. And there were other marks, deep ones, as though something had been dragged into the water, such as a log. A few steps farther and he stooped and turned over a piece of planking—real planking, not driftwood—and he could see where it had been sawed. There was even sawdust on the ground beneath it. Fresh sawdust.

He straightened quickly and went back to the wharf and climbed into the cabin of the aircraft. The girl was sitting with her head in her hands and when he had secured his seat belt, before he had started the engine, he said, "I think I know how they left here."

Her head jerked back. She stared at him.

"I think they built a raft. Out of empty oil drums and timber. For some reason they decided to make a move."

"But, on the way here, we didn't—"

"We were looking at the scenery," he said. "The beautiful scenery."

He started the engine almost savagely and the prop whirled. He swung the aircraft around from the wharf, the floats grating against thin ice, and moved the ship out into the open stretch of blue water.

The girl was sitting up straight now, new life in her eyes. He was glad of that, and afraid of it at the same time. She was building another hope, and he wondered what would happen to this one. If his idea of the raft were correct, he could not even guess as to when the men had launched it. But he did know that they would head out the lake and down the river to Needles. A long, hard journey on a raft. And they had not reached their destination.

He stopped the ship and revved up the motor. Ahead of him the blue water was edged with gray. His lips straightened in a thin line and he said to himself: Well, baby, you'd better get up fast and all on your own, because there isn't any wind to get under you and lift. You'd better get your nose high and haughty and keep it there, my love.

The engine roared and the plane leaped forward. The *karump* of the water against the floats came to his ears and he let it beat until the last possible second. Then he pulled back the stick.

The plane hesitated, as though the burden it carried was too heavy, as though too weary to fly. Grant bit into his lip and thought: How thick is that ice ahead? Will it rip the floats out from under me? And then the *karump* stopped abruptly and the sound of the engine changed.

He pressed back against his seat and blew out his lips. The ship was airborne.

At the moment he had almost forgotten the girl beside him. Now that he was off the water and climbing steadily, two thoughts came to him almost simultaneously: the state of his fuel supply and the daylight. He had little to spare, either way. He could patrol both shorelines of the lake, perhaps once, but no more, and so now, with the engine purring smoothly, he lost altitude quickly, and came down to within a couple of hundred feet of the surface.

On that run he went beyond the ice-choked exit of the lake and over the river, without seeing anything but bare, rocky shorelines, most of it sheer cliffs down to the water, and then he swung around and started to patrol the opposite shore.

He knew that he was losing heart. There was still the river, but it was easier to spot things on the river. He doubted if he would have missed a raft on the way out from Needles that morning.

He had flown for almost two minutes when he heard the girl cry out, almost screaming, "Look! Oh, my God, look!"

She was holding his arm, shaking it, and pointing with her other hand through the window on her side.

"What?" he asked sharply.

"Something on the shore! You've gone past it. Oh, please go back. I'm sure! I'm sure!"

He made a sharp turn over the lake and came back, and this time he saw it. An indistinct shape at first, a black blob against the shore line, almost hidden by the dead branches of an over-hanging tree; something caught in the broken ice, or beached, or on the rocks.

He came in very low, almost dangerously low, and now he recognized the thing as a square raft, packed high with bundles or equipment of some kind. He was over it again before he could make out if there was any life, but he went into another sharp turn and this time he saw a figure standing near the outer end of the raft and something white waving in the air.

The girl had her window open and was waving back. And suddenly she turned, her face flushed, her eyes wildly excited and shouted at Grant, "It's Michael! I'm sure it's Michael!"

He nodded, and started to climb. He levelled off and flew over the shoreline, keeping the raft in sight, and now from down below something glinted, went out, glinted again.

He watched it. Then to his eyes and his mind it began to make sense. Did-dit-dit-dit dit-daw . . . "Hurt bad. Help." The signal was repeated. He waggled his wings in receipt of the message, and the signaling ceased.

He opened his throttle wide and headed for the river.

She banged at his arm. "Where are you going? You're leaving them! Go back, go back!"

He turned to her. "Hold on," he said.

"Hold on! Oh, my God! My brother—"

"Listen to me," he interrupted. "You saw him. He was standing on his feet. Now listen to me. You've been brave and sensible this far. If I got down there, if I could make it, I'd never get off again. There isn't enough open water."

"I—"

"Shut up," he said harshly, "and hear the rest of it. We'd be fools to stay out here. We couldn't save them. If we go back we can get help."

"Help? What help did I get before. Only you, and now—"

"You don't know this country," he said. "You don't know the people. You were just asking a favor before. You said you would believe, didn't

you? Then believe me now, if you ever did. I left that raft because it's the only way to save them—for us to get back to the Landing before dark."

She had quieted down a little, leaning sideways against the door and listening to him above the sound of the engine.

"They saw us. Your brother waved to us. So now they'll have hope. They won't try to move from that spot. They'll wait for help. Nothing can be done at night. They know that. Please understand that I'm doing the best for them that I can."

Suddenly she leaned forward. She looked sick and exhausted, but she said softly, so low that the engine almost drowned out her voice, "I'm sorry. Seeing Michael's face, not being able to talk to him . . . Believe me, I know what you've done for me, for him. I know what you're doing. I'm very, very sorry. I'll try to be sensible."

She turned and looked ahead, to the gaunt white mountains and the vanishing daylight. It was not beautiful scenery now.

He put his arm around her.

"Right," he said.

It was easy to talk. It was easy to tell a frightened girl to be sensible, to say that they would go back to Needles Landing and get help, and that everything would be all right. Would it? In his mind's eye he kept seeing the brief flashes of that light spelling out the words, "Hurt bad. Help." Help for a grounded raft that was caught in an ice-blocked lake. How much help? And how soon?

WHEN he came down to the river in front of Needles Landing the light was fading rapidly. He brought the ship to the wharf beside Pearson's boathouse, and evidently people had heard the sound of the approaching engine, or had been waiting for his return, because there were several men there to take the line he flung out and others standing on the shoreline.

When he helped the girl from the plane he saw Mrs. Johnson among the little cluster of people and he walked toward her and said, "Take Miss Denham home with you. And would you give her something, a hot drink, a real drink? She needs it."

"Yes, Grant."

He turned to the girl. "Go with Mrs. Johnson, Mary. I'll meet you later."

He watched the two women walk away. Then he saw Johnson.

"Where are the rest of the boys?"

"At Billy's. They're starting to set up the party—"

"Let's go there."

He outpaced Johnson on the short walk to the restaurant. When he entered the front door the heat of the room struck him in the face and for the first time he realized that he had been in the cold for hours. The main restaurant was deserted, but he could hear voices from the back and he walked through a doorway into another room—Billy's private salon.

The crowd there raised a roar of welcome when they saw him. A long table had been set at one end of the room as an improvised bar and somebody shouted, "Okay, boys! Here's the guest of honor. Bar's open."

Grant made his voice heard. "I want to talk to you."

They were quick men. They sensed something immediately, and the voices died.

HE spoke rapidly. He told them what he had found at Kulsin Lake, and the message that had been flashed to him. As he spoke he watched their faces, his eyes moving from one to another, until at last they met the steady gaze of Captain Wallace. The white-haired riverman was standing with his back to the wall, his pipe between his lips.

"I'm going to take off at dawn," Grant said. "I'll take my emergency kit and a stretcher. If the man's really bad I'll fly him to hospital at Whitehorse."

"Can you get down to the raft, Grant?" someone asked.

"I think so."

"But can you get up again?"

"No."

He could almost hear them breathing in the room.

"There was a bit of open water tonight," he said. "I'm just hoping that it will still be there in the morning. The raft's grounded near the mouth of the lake, but the mouth's ice-blocked. The river's clear. If we could chew up that ice at the exit and get it moving into the river I could follow out. Once in the river I'm away."

"Is the ice thick, Grant?"

"It can't be very thick. But enough to stop a plane."

Captain Wallace's booming voice suddenly broke over the room. "Denny! Where the hell is Denny? Where's my Chief?"

"I'm over here, Skipper." A little man pushed his way through a group.

"You heard him, Denny. What do you say?"

"Say what, Skipper?"

"Wake up, Chief. You know what Grant means. He wants some ice chewed. Well, who can do that for him? Us. We go astern with the ship and take our paddle-wheel to that ice."

The little man's face blanched. "But, Skipper—"

"Afraid we'll smash the wheel? Hell, the ice can't be that tough. We can try. And the river is free. It's us or nobody."

The little engineer shook his head suddenly. "I'm not afraid," he said. "But our fires are dead. Our boiler—and we haven't got a crew, Skipper."

The captain's pipe swung in an arc. "What do you mean, no crew? Here they are. They'll stoke a fire for us. They'll get the old girl running. Hey, Billy!"

The fat restaurant owner pushed aside the men in front of him.

"Yes, Captain?"

"How would you like to move the bar down to the ship? It's going to be pretty cold aboard until those fires start working. I guess that will be all right with our guest of honor."

Something had happened to Grant. He saw Captain Wallace looking at him, and he could not return the look. He wanted to cross the room to the grizzled old riverman and thank him, but he did not trust himself. It was as though his chest and his throat were full and threatening to flow over.

So he turned away, hearing the voices breaking loose again, hearing the men planning to move from Billy's to the berth of the stern-wheeler, and then at last he got hold of himself and turned again to look at Captain Wallace.

The old man caught his eye, smiled and gave him a little salute.

They understood each other. There was no need for words.

GRANT left the restaurant with Johnson, the stationmaster. As they walked up the main street they could see lights already burning aboard the wooden ship.

"Will it work, Grant?" Johnson asked.

Grant nodded. "I think it will. I think it's the quickest way, and the best way."

"Why don't you let the boat do it alone?"

"Because I'll be there long before the boat. I didn't like the way that message read, Harry. *Hurt bad, help.* It was desperate."

"Look, Grant, there's a chance that you might lose your plane."

"I've been in some bad spots with it before. And there are always other planes."

"Could you buy another one, Grant?"

He made no reply to that question. He let it hang, and Johnson did not repeat it. There wasn't really much point to it when the answer was no.

They crossed the railroad tracks and entered Johnson's house, and in the living-room they found Mrs. Johnson and Mary Denham. The girl rose quickly and Grant smiled at her. And then Johnson said, "Come into the

kitchen, Mom, and let's wrastle up a little food."

Alone with Mary, Grant told her what was happening.

"The whole of Needles Landing is with you tonight," he added.

She walked slowly to the sofa and sat down, running one hand through her hair, looking at him eventually with her eyes moist.

"Your people," she said, "are wonderful people."

"If you asked Patsy Joe, the Indian, now," Grant said, "he would take his little boat out for you."

"I know."

"Do you want to go in the steamer?"

"Are you going?"

"I'm flying."

The expression in her gray eyes changed abruptly. "Then I'll go with you."

"Not this trip."

"You must take me."

"I can't. I'll be able to work better alone."

She rose and walked toward him. "It's dangerous, this trip, isn't it?"

"Not for me."

"I saw your face today when we were taking off from the lake. That was almost touch-and-go, wasn't it? And this place—where the raft is—that will be even worse. There's more ice."

"I'll make it."

"With me."

"No."

"I see." She was standing in front of him. "Grant," she smiled a little. "I had to ask Mrs. Johnson for your first name. Did you tell me it before? Grant Ross. Grant, I believe everything. I'll never stop believing, and I thank you for it."

The tears had fallen to her lips when he kissed them. He heard Johnson shout from the kitchen and after a time he called back, "All right, Harry. We'll come and get it."

THE steamer *Kulsin Queen* was the first to leave Needles Landing. She cast off her lines just before daybreak, smoke pouring from her tall narrow stack and lights gleaming fore and aft.

Standing on the wharf, Grant watched her go, seeing Mary a dim figure at the rail of the upper deck, Billy, Patsy Joe, and others, and hearing the great voice of Captain Wallace calling to him from the wheelhouse: "See you at the lake, Grant. That is, if these rum-soaked amateur stokers of mine don't blow us sky-high!"

Grant waved, and the rusty whistle of the old stern-wheeler broke the air with a blast that echoed and re-echoed back into the far mountains.

He turned and walked slowly to Pearson's boathouse and took the lightweight stretcher down from its storage place and put it aboard the plane. He placed his medical box on the seat next to him and with it a half-bottle of rum that he had obtained from Billy.

When light broke over the river he took off.

Within minutes he picked out the wide wake of the steamer, and a little later she appeared in front of him, her paddle wheel churning steadily and her stack leaving a track of smoke behind. When he passed over her he dipped in salute and she replied with a blast of her whistle. Moments later she was far behind.

He could feel the cold now, and he zipped his windbreaker tight and pulled down the flaps of the helmet he was wearing. The sky ahead troubled him a little. There was cloud formations and it might mean snow, and after a time he found that he was praying silently. Snow would finish him, finish all of them.

If he had really said a prayer, he thought later, Somebody had answered it. Because when he came to the junction of the river and the lake the clouds had retreated beyond the ranges, and overhead the sky was clear and bright.

He could see the ice-choked mouth of the lake. Then, as he came down a little anxiously, he made out the raft. It had not moved. It was still hard aground under the branches of the tree, and almost as he saw the raft itself, he also saw a bit of white waving above it, and he let out his breath with a sigh of relief, realizing then that in the back of his mind had been a fear that the white cloth, or whatever it was, might not have waved again.

He looked below him. There was a strip of blue water close to the raft, but it was small, dangerously small. He could see that the ice bordering it was much thinner than that nearer the mouth of the lake, but he could not tell how thin.

He moved in his seat and checked his belt. This was the time, probably, for a real prayer. Well, he could say one—a brief one—and go down.

Then, God, here goes.

He was skimming the surface at the very edge of the blue water and he put his floats down almost instantly, striking hard, bouncing a little, but down finally and staying down. Still he wasn't going to stop in time and he knew it, even in the flash of that first second.

He hit the far edge of the ice and for an instant he thought he was going over. There was a tearing, screaming sound in his ears and the windshield in front of him was splattered with fragments and splinters of crystal-clear ice. The plane lurched, righted itself, then came to a grinding, roaring stop.

And suddenly he found himself saying out loud, almost in a normal tone of voice: Thanks.

He was within a hundred feet of the raft and he could see the standing figure waiting for him. Slowly and anxiously he turned the plane and pushed forward a little. The thin ice cracked in front of the floats and, gaining confidence, he revved up a little. He edged the ship toward the raft and opened the door on his side and flung a line to the waiting figure.

When he stepped out of the plane, on to the nearest float, and then on to the raft, he was carrying his medical kit and the bottle of rum was in his pocket.

He looked at the gaunt, hollow-eyed, bearded face that faced him.

"You're—" he asked.

"Denham. Michael Denham." The voice was cracked and barely audible.

Grant stepped over a bundle of equipment. And now he saw the

other one, lying on a bedroll with a blanket over him. He heard a moan.

"It's his right leg," the cracked voice said. "Got worse yesterday. Conscious now. Hellish pain."

"Here," Grant said and took the bottle from his pocket and gave it to the figure behind him. Then he knelt beside the figure on the bedroll, pulled back the blanket and saw a bandaged leg. The linen was soaked with blood.

He heard the moan again, and saw the head turn and the eyes open. It was a long time since he had heard that kind of a moan, and the memory out of the war years hurt him.

He opened the medicine box and found the right tin with the codeine pills in it, forcing the man to swallow them and calling for the bottle, using rum to wash them down.

He dressed the ugly wound and only then did he turn his attention to the other man. The boy was sitting on a canvas bag, his shoulders hunched over, his hollow eyes looking at Grant.

GRANT passed back the bottle.

"Take a good drink," he said.

"You know," the boy whispered. "I didn't think you'd make it. I didn't think you'd make it." He shook his head slowly. "You can't get up again, can you?"

"There's a boat coming," Grant said. "In a little while I'll get a stretcher out of the plane and we'll put your friend aboard. When the boat comes and breaks the ice, I'll fly him out. Damn it, drink some of that stuff."

The boy obeyed. "The raft's grounded," he said. "We're on rocks here. I didn't have strength enough to get us off. Four days now, I guess. Yes, four days." He looked at the bottle in his hand and then passed it to Grant. There was hardly any flesh on his palms.

"Give me your hands," Grant said sharply. "I've got some stuff here that will help."

"Yes. I must be crazy, eh? Yesterday, there was someone with you. A girl. I thought it was my sister."

"It was."

"Mary up here?"

"She hadn't heard from you."

Grant began to ease salve on to the boy's hands. "Yes," Denham said. "That was it. I wrote a letter. That's how it started."

"Forget—"

"No." The cracked voice was insistent. "I want to talk about it. You came to get us, and I want to tell you. I wrote a letter to Mary. I told her we were staying on. And I gave it to Joe to put aboard the steamer. He forgot to do that. He just plain forgot."

The boy stopped suddenly and shook his head again. "For three days he didn't tell me. It was natural, maybe, he couldn't do anything about it then, no matter how bad he felt. And so we were sitting down for supper and it fell out of his pocket, and I saw it. My sister—she couldn't know about me, she'd be waiting for me. I went off my rocker. Joe and I had a fight. A bad one."

DENHAM looked appealingly at Grant. "You understand? Everything was changed between us after that. We were alone. We couldn't get out, we couldn't get away from each other. Nothing around us but that big black mountain and that blue lake. Things blew up again. We fought again. On the edge of the cliff this time. You know the cliff. And Joe went over and when I got to him, his leg—"

Grant put the bottle to the boy's lips and made him take another drink.

Denham coughed. Then he said, "The leg got worse. You see, Joe and I were always friends. We were buddies in Korea. Same outfit. And so I built this raft. Will Joe be all right? Are you a doctor, too?"

"No," said Grant. "I'm not a doctor. Just a pilot."

"You're good, though. Both ways."

"Lie down," Grant told him. "Try to take it easy. We have nothing to do now but wait for the boat. And then we'll move Joe."

From where the raft was situated he could not see the mouth of the lake, which was around a slight bend. He looked at young Denham, and he saw the boy's head droop forward. The rum had brought a little color into the ashen cheeks and now the boy slid slowly from the canvas bag and lay on the rough flooring of the raft. Grant rose and bent over him. His breathing was regular and his eyes were closed. He was asleep.

Grant took a blanket from a pile and laid it over the boy and then turned back to the other man, feeling for the pulse. Thankfully he found it.

A drink of rum warmed him a little, and he lit a cigarette. He sat between the two men, looking down the lake, lost in his own thoughts, thinking, strangely enough, of Billy talking about Palm Springs, California.

When young Denham sat up with a jerk, his hoarse voice cried, "What was that?"

Grant rose to his feet slowly. "That was our boat whistling," he said. "I'll get the stretcher. And we'll move Joe."

It took them a long time to get the burdened stretcher into the plane. Denham was so weak that in the end Grant had to finish it alone.

It was then that he heard the paddles. He turned his head swiftly, exultantly, and he waited with his body rigid until he could see the smoke from the stack above the bend, and then slowly the stern shape of the *Kulsin Queen* coming into sight and the big wheel turning, beating the ice to pulp.

"Listen, Mike."

"Yes, sir." The boy stood beside him.

"They'll take you aboard. Your sister's there. I'm taking Joe to a hospital at Whitehorse. I'm not a doctor, but I think he's going to be all right."

"Yes. He's got to be."

"Tell your sister that I'll get in touch with her. Tell her that I'll come back to Needles Landing. We've all missed the Skagway train, anyway."

"Yes. Take care of Joe." The boy shook his head. "That's crazy, isn't it, because I know that you will. You're . . ."

To Grant the little stern-wheeler looked like some giant thing standing out in the lake, the paddle slowly coming to a stop. He heard a booming voice, magnified by a megaphone.

"I can put a boat down here, Grant," Captain Wallace shouted. "I'll send it to you."

Grant waved. He saw the seaboat being lowered, and then start for the raft, rowed awkwardly by men he recognized suddenly as Billy and Patsy Joe and several others. He waited until it arrived and he helped young Denham to get aboard.

THEY transferred as much equipment from the raft as the boat could handle. And suddenly Grant caught an eye, and it was Billy's, and the fat man said, "You'll be back for the party, Grant? We still have to have the party. There's a lady who'll be waiting for you, too."

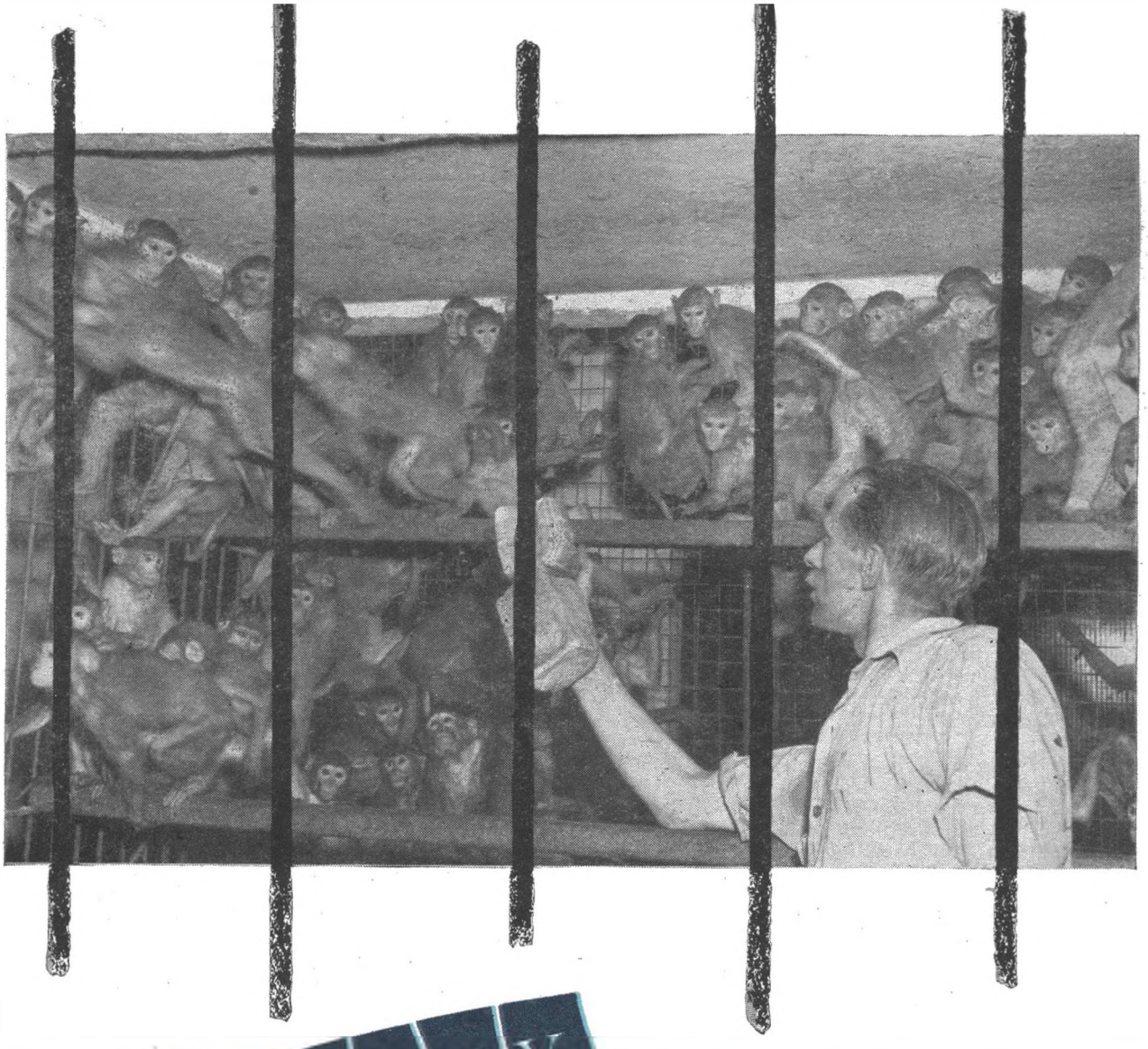
"Yes, Billy," he nodded. "I'll be there."

He waved to the departing boat, to the people on the deck of the steamer. He turned then and untied his line and got into his plane.

He went down the lake well astern of the *Kulsin Queen* and he could see two figures among those crowding the after rail of the top deck.. He was fairly certain that they were Mary and Michael Denham.

He followed the ship into the open river. And then he turned into the wind and revved up and as he took off he heard the old steamer toot her whistle, toot it again and again, until she was far away.

She was traveling in the opposite direction to him now. But he would join her again. And he knew that he really meant the girl, not the ship. •



MONKEY BUSINESS

When a Wall Street banker finds a monkey in his brief-case, he knows just what to do. He telephones Henry Trefflich

■ *By J. R. GAVER*

On an unseasonably warm afternoon one day last fall, the board of directors of a huge corporation, with offices high in a skyscraper of New York's financial district, assembled in their lavish penthouse board room for their regular monthly meeting. The windows were open, electric fans churned drowsily, and the bald and distinguished chairman wheezed perceptibly as he lowered himself wearily into his place at the head of the table.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," he said, somewhat pompously — and stopped right there. For his attention suddenly was riveted on one member of his panel, a stuffy bank president, who was gesticulating wildly at a spot behind the chairman's back. Another of the directors sat bug-eyed and

speechless. And a third gasped as if on the verge of a heart attack. All now concentrated on the top of the chairman's head.

Sitting on the latter, and gazing calmly around the room, was a complacent and cheerful-looking rhesus monkey.

It was a situation not calculated to insure smoothness of operation, even to the best-run directors meeting. To most, it was enough to cause serious fluctuations in the markets, bourses and exchanges throughout the world. In this case, it did nothing of the sort.

Reaching for a button at his fingertips, the chairman calmly rang for his private secretary, who entered a moment later, smiled knowingly at the scene before her, and tranquilly lifted the non-board member from her employer's shiny dome.

"It probably came from Henry Trefflich's place," she explained to the gaping directors, as she cuddled the monkey in her arms and headed with it toward the door. "They break out from time to time and leap all around these buildings. So we're more or less used to it."

THERE was evidence to sustain her statement. In the past few years there have been at least half-a-dozen crash-outs from "Henry Trefflich's place" or its environs, involving monkeys, birds, a bear, a crocodile and an elephant. And virtually every newspaper reader in New York City knows, when he picks up his late edition and sees another shot of a strange animal or bird sitting on a building ledge, that it probably escaped from Trefflich's. There is even a suspicion in certain quarters that Trefflich periodically opens the doors of his cages on purpose, when the sales charts show a need of publicity hypo.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. In fact, on one occasion, Henry Herbert Frederick Trefflich almost had to close up shop and go out of business because his monkeys had escaped and were leaping and chattering wildly and gaily through the financial district. It is not something a man of Trefflich's business acumen would do on purpose.

For Trefflich primarily is a staid and solid business man—a man whose business just happens to be animals. And that the enterprise is a highly successful one is seen in the fact that his shop at downtown New York's 128 Fulton Street does an annual turnover of between $500,000 and $1,000,000, a statistic that just happens to make Henry Herbert Frederick the largest importer of animals in these United States.

When you're in that income bracket, of course, you do not engage in wacky publicity stunts such as springing your animals in order to have them roam the building ledges and get their pictures in the papers. And, even if you were inclined this way, it isn't likely you would turn a crocodile loose, especially when you had been the one responsible for his capture.

The crocodile incident occurred several years ago, on a day when Trefflich had received at least half-a-dozen shipments all at once, from a variety of interesting places such as Africa, India, Europe and the Amazon country of South America. In one shipment was the croc, a 14-foot traveler with a gleam in his eye that would have scarred cast-iron.

So, there it was closing time, and the joint was pretty crowded, and there wasn't an awful lot of space to spare. But the croc was due to be shipped out again next morning to a prospective purchaser, and it seemed pretty silly to board him out in a zoo for just the one night. So Trefflich and his men fashioned a sort of chin strap for the belligerent saurian, and stashed him away over night in the boss' office along with a box containing two monitor lizards. Everyone went home to supper.

Next morning, Trefflich arrived in his office to find a rather interesting contretemps; the croc had slipped his chin strap moorings, had gnawed away rather fitfully at the two lizards—until the latter were quite dead—and now was waiting over near the water cooler for a somewhat tastier breakfast, i.e., Trefflich.

Well, sir, this took a bit of thinking, after, of course, the office door had been hastily slammed—from the outside. It's one thing to have monkeys galloping through board meetings, but it's something else again to have a crocodile slithering up Wall Street and greeting the brokers as they drag themselves to their toil.

Fortunately, all turned out happily. Trefflich and a couple of assistants made a large shield-like framework out of planking, and, shoving this into the office ahead of them, managed to crowd the crocodile to the wall and snap a lasso over the croc's clacking dentures. They got rid of him shortly after, and went back to more normal pursuits.

IN Trefflich's case, more normal pursuits consist of supplying medical research laboratories, zoos, carnivals, circuses, and just plain folks who are nuts about animals with whatever specimens such buyers are seeking at the moment. These endeavors have resulted in a five-floor building at the Fulton Street address, a staff of seventeen assistants, and an inter-office communication set-up that is designed to bring Trefflich on the run from whatever dim recesses of his establishment in which he might find himself when one of his strange charges starts acting up.

There is also, on the first floor of the building, a shop in which one may browse through bird cages, canaries, parakeets, tropical fish, guppies, goldfish, dog collars, white mice, alley cats, dog biscuits, and similar everyday paraphernalia in demand by metropolitan pet fanciers.

In addition, Trefflich maintains a branch office in Africa, at Sierra Leone, and a farm near Accomac, Virginia, which he calls a "monkey reconditioning project." The purpose of the latter is to serve as an interim way-station for simians en route from the jungle to their future habitat.

As Trefflich sees it, a monkey jarred hastily out of his African treetop and, in a matter of days, into a cage at a zoo is apt to show up at his future home in a highly-neurotic state, if not downright ill. Accordingly, the chattering arrivals are permitted a layover at the Virginia farm where, in air-conditioned hutches designed to accommodate as many as a thousand monkeys at a time, they can grow accustomed to the dizzy whirl of life among their civilized descendants, and eventually proceed to their final destinations feeling fit and hale. As a result, specimens from the Accomac set-up are deemed the finest of their kind by researchers experimenting in polio, malaria, and similar human complaints.

But, while life on the farm may sound as tranquil for monkeys as it does for the rest of us, the mad pace of the big city again presents as many problems for the flea-biters as it does for you and me and the heroes of the Horatio Alger books.

THERE was, for example, May 11, 1946, a date in the calendar the recollection of which brings a pallor to the face of the Frank Buck of Fulton Street. It was on that day that a Trefflich employee, neglecting to move smartly enough to close the door on a cage-full of rhesus monkeys just in from India, was knocked on his hip pockets by a stampede of some 100 of the happy little creatures, who trod across the lad's prostrate form, seethed through an open window, rattled down the fire escape, and charged onto front pages all over town. It was a situation Hollywood couldn't have dreamed up in a generation.

Within a matter of minutes, the nearby Washington Market, New York's biggest wholesale and retail produce exchange, was awash with monkeys, who holed up in boxes and cartons, jeered at astonished shoppers,

and bombarded anyone who attempted to come near them with fresh Florida grapefruit, Long Island potatoes, Rhode Island tomatoes, and similar juicy weapons immediately at hand.

A corner saloon near the market was invaded, and midday *bons vivants*, who'd stopped in for a little something to knit the raveled sleeve, blanched and took the pledge as their cups ran over with monkeys. A mission prayer meeting on another corner broke up in a cloud of flying Bibles, heavenly trumpets, and kicked-in bass drums. And idling pedestrians, of whom the district always seems to have more than its quota, either fled for their lives or gained points of vantage from which they could safely watch the show.

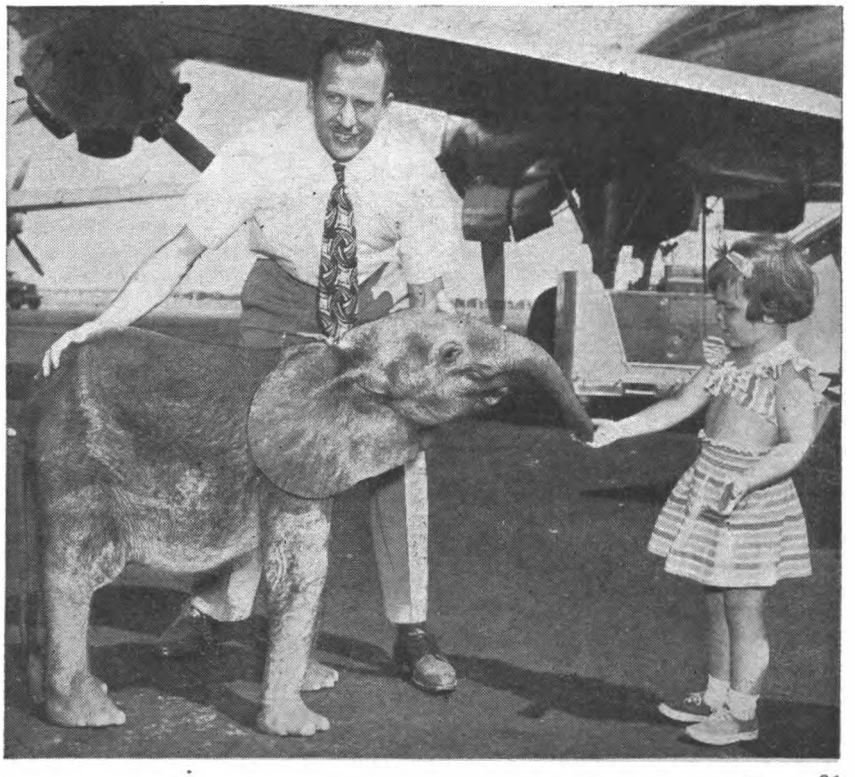
"I thought my business was gone for sure, that day," Trefflich says now, in solemn contemplation of that dreadful experience.

Fortunately, neighboring merchants came to the rescue and, assisted by police, firemen, and agents of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, soon rounded up most of the lamming monks. It was two-and-one-half weeks, however, before the last fugitive had been smoked from his hiding place, and quiet, in its fashion, returned to Fulton Street.

In the interim, Trefflich found himself summoned to court on a charge of violating the penal code having to do with safeguarding animal life, and thereby causing injury to the public, and it was touch-and-go for awhile as to whether he'd be permitted to stay in business or have to get a job in some less arduous calling. But, after inviting the court to visit his establishment and see for itself how things were handled—an invitation which the magistrate, after sober reflection, declined—the charges were dropped, and peace once again was restored to the lower Manhattan bustling animal kingdom.

It stayed that way until the following year, when again it was a case of monkeyshines that led Trefflich toward trouble. While being unloaded from the ship that had brought them from their jungle homes, two monkeys took umbrage at their current situation and went AWOL, heading immediately for the attractive girders and I-beams of the pier. One of the deserters died of pneumonia a few days later, thus proving the legend that New York does not have a healthful climate, at least for the ape family. The other eluded capture in the dim fastnesses of the dock for a solid fourteen months, at the end of which he apparently concluded that he wasn't getting anywhere, and gave himself up.

Latest Trefflich escapee (at press time), a Rufous Hornbill, shown eluding pursuers on the 28th-floor ledge of N. Y.'s Chase National Bank. Trefflich, below, and young friend, greet a one-year-old elephant arriving by air from Africa for local resale.



A blond, blue-eyed, pleasant-faced native of Hamburg, Germany, where he was born 45 years ago, Trefflich neither looks nor talks like a man whose hard day at the office comprises everything from selling birdseed to taming tigers. Married and the father of four children, Trefflich does, in fact resemble exactly what he is, a self-made man who is more interested in his hobby of collecting hand organs (which he occasionally rents out to interested parties, who also may obtain a pet monkey to go with it) than in parading around in a pith helmet and jodhpurs.

It is Trefflich's contention, in fact, that this latter picture of the big game hunter is as out-of-date as the fiction stories that inspired it. Today, the safari, complete with bearers, beaters and number one boys, has been replaced by the businessman, Trefflich type, who takes orders for orang-outangs, jaguars, cheetahs and pythons the way his neighbor does for valve fittings and steel ingots.

You want a pet chimp, a hooded cobra, or maybe a gnu to give Aunt Agnes for her birthday, then all you have to do is call on Trefflich. He will quote you the going retail price, promise delivery in a month, and set out to fill the order. Through his contacts with natives of the various countries involved, he usually has little trouble finding the specimen in demand.

Then, too, Trefflich has in his employ a former sea captain, Reginald Williams, and the latter's wife, Doris, who manage the Trefflich receiving station in Africa. This couple accept orders from the New York office much as would any other field branch of a thriving commercial organization, and they have the shipment on the way within a matter of hours after receiving the original order. In approximately four cases a year, they accompany the shipment to the home office, thus giving them a pleasant sea voyage and an opportunity to check with the boss.

As Trefflich sees it, one of the most popular—contrary to belief—pets he is asked to supply is the snake. There seemingly are scads of folks who like to have a few reptiles around the place, either to train to do simple tricks like curling up in the sugar bowl or warming themselves around the steam pipes, or simply because . . . well, because some people like snakes.

Some time ago, Trefflich even sold a sixteen-foot python to a lady customer—a snake charmer, to be sure—who enjoyed her playmate no end. In fact, she asked Trefflich to stop in any time he was in the neighborhood and see how the arrangement was working out. Trefflich did.

Hardly was he in the door, however, than the python—a big boy now—seemingly recognized his former friend and promptly embraced Trefflich as only pythons can. It was touch and go there for awhile whether Henry ever again would be alive to chase monkeys through Washington Market, but the snake's mistress scolded him for being a bad boy, and Trefflich returned to his invoices and bills of lading.

Trefflich's most recent experience, which occurred only a few days before this was written, involved a form of life known as a Rufous Hornbill—which the bright, gay lads who write for the newspapers promptly christened Rufus. Rufus is a rare species of bird which originates in Siam, and Henry Trefflich had one in his shop one day last August in answer to a query from a customer. Naturally, the bird escaped.

Within a matter of moments, secretaries high in the Manhattan jungle began telephoning the newspapers; there was a strange-looking, long-billed bird sitting on their window-sills, and didn't they want to send a man over to take a picture of it. The newspapers did, at the same time reaching—as a matter of course—for the phones to call Trefflich and ask him what it was all about.

It was two days before anyone was able to drop the net over Rufus. During this period, the usual agencies—police, fire, SPCA, etc.—climbed around the peaks and pinnacles and ledges surrounding the financial canyons, almost had Rufe in their clutches on innumerable occasions, and provided reams of copy and endless telescopic lens photos for the press and the picture magazines. As a change from monkeys, it wasn't a bad story at all.

Because such things occur so regularly, most newspapers, and the police and other authorities, keep Trefflich's telephone numbers—both business and home—posted in a conspicuous spot under the heading "numbers most frequently called." It was this forethought which enabled Hank one day to get back a bear he'd lost.

The bear was being delivered across the sidewalk to Trefflich's emporium, when, for some unexplained reason, the bottom fell out of the carton containing this particular animal. Naturally, the bear being nobody's dope, got out of there in a hurry.

First, he scampered through a nearby florist's shoppe, scaring the hell out of a florid gentleman then in the act of selecting a boutonniere, and galloped around the ice box, through the deciduous plants department, and over an eight-foot back fence to freedom. And while Henry still was tearing his hair an hour or so later, the police telephoned wearily to say Mr. Bruin had been cornered behind a milk bar, four blocks away, and would he please send the boys with the ropes.

The bear incident actually was mild compared to the confusion caused by the monkeys, of course, and in some respects was even less of a bother than the miniature elephant which got away. This latter occurred at Idlewild, New York's municipal airport, while the elephant and his diminutive mate were clearing customs after a journey from their jungle homeland.

Stepping back suddenly, one of the junior pachyderms managed to kick his keeper in the shins, forcing this gentleman to drop the chain which

Henry Trefflich, whose monkeyshines are the delight of Wall Street, holds a new arrival in his New York animal headquarters, an eight-month-old gorilla destined for some local zoo.

connected him to his charge. Immediately, the elephant was off and running, using the field's elaborate runways for an exercise track, and selecting a concentric course—as if he were pursuing his own tail—as his *modus operandi*.

Well, sir, you never saw so much excitement in your life. The control tower had to go into operation flagging down incoming planes; ambulances, doctors, zoo attendants and similar authorities were summoned on the double, and the field soon took on the appearance of an African plateau, as the stalkers spread out fanwise and began closing in on their prey.

They got him.

But such moments as these give Trefflich pause, and make him wonder if the love of animals he inherited from his father might, on occasion, be a mixed blessing. The elder Trefflich had begun his career as an officer in the German navy, but he switched over to being an animal dealer in Hamburg two years before young Henry's birth.

It was perhaps natural, then, that the son should one day follow in these paternal footsteps. Before this was to happen, however, the younger Trefflich was to sign on as a mess boy on a German tramp steamer out of Hamburg, beginning at the age of 14. Two years later found him in New York and working in a restaurant as a bus-boy.

When he could afford to finance his father's passage to New York, Henry did so, and a year later, in 1929, he and the older man went off to India on a hunting trip. When they returned, Henry—at 21 the veteran of a cobra bite and a clawing by a leopard—realized there was a demand among zoos and menageries for the animals he'd brought back, and it prompted another trip to India, for more goods, the following year.

During a third trip, Henry's prelined-up customer in New York went out of business, and the young hunter found himself on the beach in India, without funds or friends, and up to his hips in animals. It was sometime before a sister was able to send him enough dough to get back to New York. He promptly went back to work in order to re-charge his bank account.

When he'd made enough of a pile to start out on his own again, Henry, this time, skipped the traveling in favor of a small animal shop which he opened in the Bronx, and, a year later, moved the business to the financial district, probably figuring the depression had proved that Wall Streeters unquestionably were the softest touches in the world and ideal purchasers for gorillas, okapis, boa constrictors and similar pets. He called the turn, all right.

Today, Henry boasts the somewhat strange-sounding title of "The Monkey King of America," since he began his shop as a specialist in monkeys and only took on other commodities as circumstances demanded. He's still pretty much of a monkey favorer, sells about 15,000 of the things annually, and always has a thousand or so on hand to meet the demand.

In fact, a favorite philosophy of Trefflich's is "a monkey in every home," and he peddles roughly 100 simians a month to folks who come in perhaps thinking of a cocker spaniel and go home clutching a monk. According to Trefflich, these people aren't the slightest bit queer, and he claims they'll get to their homes in New Jersey, Westchester and Long Island with a "watchdog that's better than a dog" and a house pet that, in most cases, is more intelligent than the people petting him.

The only difficulty with monkeys as pets is that—like their brethren, the chimps and gorillas—they are extremely delicate and need as much care by their owners as the youngest of infant humans. They are subject to pulmonary diseases, and must be checked regularly for traces of tuberculosis, and their diet, including generous quantities of vitamin pills, is as rigorous as an invalid's.

As for gorillas, Trefflich has imported 47 of them since 1939, approximately half of which still are alive. One of these—part of a shipment of eight he received in 1939—was the famed Makoko, the star attraction at New York's Bronx Zoo, who fell into the moat surrounding his home two years ago and drowned, thus dashing Trefflich's hope of seeing Makoko mate and produce the first gorilla ever born in captivity.

Gorillas are extremely difficult to capture, and must be caught in their infancy or not at all. You still can drop into Trefflich's and order one, however, and Henry will do his best to fill your order, provided you have the five grand necessary to pay for your pet when and if he arrives.

Trefflich also has imported some fifty elephants in his day, as well as quantities of panthers, cheetahs, freets (a branch of the skunk family), leopards, zebras, and what all else. He can, as a matter of fact, deliver you a specimen of any one of a thousand different species on thirty days notice, and probably can get you the rarer animals within six months to a year. As his motto suggests, "If it's alive, we have it."

Most of Trefflich's imports arrive by plane, and he was the first of the animal importers to make use of air freight. It's expensive, sure, and jacks up the price somewhat, but, for smaller and more delicate animals—such as monkeys, chimps, snakes, rare birds, and similar fauna—it's far superior to a six weeks' trip in the hold of a ship, from which specimens are apt to emerge at very least threadbare and shopworn, if not stone cold dead.

Obviously, nips and bites are the order of the day in the Trefflich menagerie, and a dispensary just around the corner from the shop pretty much stays in the game because of the heavy trade from Henry's employees. But most of the latter are old hands at their trade and take slight pains as a matter of course. Trefflich's own philosophy is that, when an animal bites him, he bites it back, and he says it's amazing how fast they learn to keep their molars to themselves after getting a touch of their own medicine.

As far as the customers are concerned, Trefflich is covered by full liability insurance; but every effort still is made to see that idlers stay away from cages and keep their fingers out of the panther's mouth. One man who bought a monkey later sued Trefflich for $25,000 because his new pet bit him when he got it home. The judge threw the case out of court, though, agreeing with Trefflich that it's up to the customer to know how to handle himself in the presence of a pet, regardless of whether same is a monkey, cat, dog or three-toed sloth.

As the late Lew Lehr used to say, "monkeys is the cwaziest people," and Trefflich agrees, with reservations. His term for "cwazy" more properly might be sense of humor, since he claims it's literally impossible for anyone to be somber in the presence of a monkey. They literally are the jokesters of the animal kingdom.

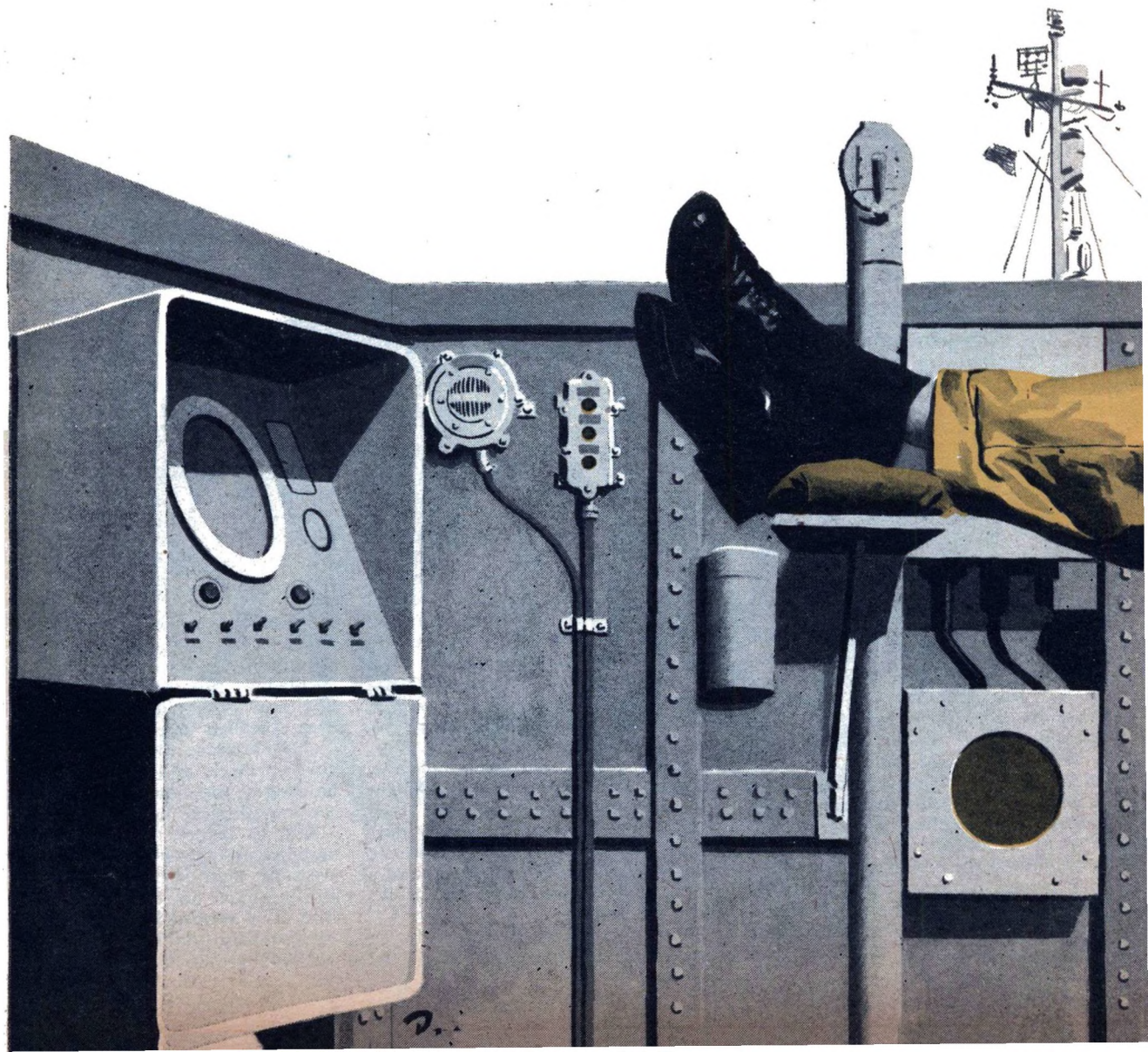
This was brought home to Trefflich forcibly not too long ago. He'd arrived home and tucked himself away for a night's rest from the ardors of the day, when the phone rang. That's right, the cops.

It seems a monkey had sprung himself from his cage and, after prancing around in search of other mischief, decided to turn on the faucet in a sink near his top-floor cage. By the time Trefflich arrived on the scene, the whole place was on the verge of floating away, and the braying and howling of the monk's fellow inmates was something to hear.

But, as before, Henry got things mopped up, the waters receded, and everyone went back to getting himself in shape for the next incident. One thing seemed fairly sure, though—it probably would involve monkeys.

Anybody want to buy one? •

Luke Morley, USN



Virtually everything Luke did violated Navy Regulations and made him eligible for a general court-martial. The only trouble was—he was always right.

By CARL H. AMME, Jr.

When I first saw Luke Morley, he was up on the flying bridge and sitting in the captain's sea-chair like he owned the ship. His small frame hunched forward, his eyes squinted ahead, and his lips were slightly parted, just as if he were getting ready to give orders to the helmsman to "Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!" But there was no danger of that, nor of Captain Somers' catching him sitting in his private sea-chair, as long as the destroyer, *U.S.S. Cannon* was tied up to the dock at Mare Island Navy Yard.

I cleared my throat twice to get his attention. He shook himself, climbed off his perch, and saluted. He was a little man, with a cherub-like face and big round eyes that made him look about 20. Yet the hashmarks on his sleeve showed that he had at least twelve years' service in the Navy. The thing you noticed about him was the serious and intent expression around his large, young eyes.

"You're Lieutenant Huber, the new navigator, aren't you? Welcome aboard, sir. I'm Luke Morley, the chief quartermaster." The way he said it, it sounded like, "I'm Luke Morley, Admiral of the Ocean Seas."

He looked me over carefully, sizing me up. The green vertigris almost dripping from my gold lace belied my seagoing experience. I had just been called back into the service from the tranquil

life of a high school English teacher in Missouri. Hadn't been aboard anything larger than a rowboat in the last five years, and Luke Morley knew it. I felt like a little boy caught telling a fib.

"We're getting underway in two weeks, sir," he said. "That'll give you time to brush up on your star sights. I'll give you all the help I can, sir." The expression on his face seemed to add, "You'll need it!"

And I did. The captain, Commander Richard Somers, was a good C.O., but he was a stickler for perfection. Regular Navy, product of the old school, he ran a taut and efficient ship. He hadn't been aboard the *Cannon* more than a couple of months himself, but everyone had found out already that he would not put up with slipshod work. Try bluffing your way, and you were finished. The answer for me was: learn navigation in two weeks or else.

LUKE MORLEY worked with me day and night, drumming piloting and navigation into my skull.

"Professor, you gotta learn to punch those Nav tables faster," he would say. Then he would patiently take me through the process of looking up hour angles and azimuths in the almanac. Without Luke I would have been lost.

A hundred miles out of San Francisco, on our way to Japan, I had my first chance to show my stuff.

I was pretty cocky over the three-star fix I had just taken. It wasn't a pin-point position but it was the first I had shot at sea, and I figured it was plenty good.

Luke watched me with a sort of indulgent-father look in his eye.

"Don't forget your I.C."

I pretended to ignore him but I went back over my work and added the index correction as if I had thought of it myself.

"Want me to check over those figures, Professor?"

"Don't bother, Luke. They're OK." I was determined to show him I could operate on my own. With a flourish of my dividers, I advanced the position to eight o'clock, wrote it down and stepped out on to the bridge and gave it to the captain.

Luke was standing out in the wings with one hand behind his back, Nelson style, as the signalman flashed the position to the flagship. I could almost swear he knew what was going to happen before it did.

A few minutes later, it came—the signal from the flagship: "Verify your 8 o'clock position. It is 12 miles west of the position of other ships." The old man brought his eyebrows together and glared. I mumbled something and dashed into the chart house and looked out appealingly at Luke. He was still out in the wings with his legs apart rocking back and forth with the roll of the ship. I had too much pride to ask for help.

I worked feverishly for about ten minutes juggling figures here and there until finally I came up with a position about 8 miles closer than the one I had submitted. I scribbled it on a piece of paper and started out to the bridge.

Luke was standing in the doorway regarding me with his serious, Eddie Cantor eyes. "Where are you going, sir?" he asked.

"To give this position to the skipper."

"Oh, no you're not, sir," he said. He always emphasized the "sir" when I was doing something wrong.

"What!"

"You're not giving that position to the captain, sir." He reached over and grabbed it from my hand and began tearing it up.

I was furious. "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

"You give him that position and you're through. Washed up! Give him this one," he said, handing me a copy of my original fix.

"What's the big idea?"

"Do what I say, sir." There was something half-compelling, half-pleading about the way he said it. I had no choice. I went out and gave the captain the same position I had previously submitted. The skipper studied it for a moment, pursed his lips and gazed at me speculatively, then handed it to the Officer of the Deck to be relayed to the flagship. He didn't say a word.

I went out on the wing of the bridge to wait for the ax to fall. Other destroyers were blinking messages now. Someone said, "The flagship is asking all ships to verify their positions." I could feel the net being woven around me, all set to drag me under.

Finally it came, the composite position report from the flagship. The signalman copied it down and took it in to the captain. I figured they would drop me off at Pearl and ship me back on the next boat. Maybe they would ship me to Johnston Island, the salt mine of the Pacific. Why did I leave good old Joplin High?

Captain Somers strode over and pounded me on my back. "Nice going, Professor. It was within one mile of our position." He was pleased as a pumpkin when he went below to his cabin.

Luke Morley explained it all to me in the chart house later that night. "You see, Professor, you couldn't afford to admit you made a big mistake like that—not the first night. And them other ships probably checked their figures and found some errors, too. Only they sent in revised positions. The squadron commander musta figured the *Cannon* was the only one that knew where she was because we stuck to our guns. Psychology, sir. Nothing but a little psychology."

That was Luke Morley.

After that, I never tried to be independent again—not as far as that little man was concerned. I listened to him and I learned. Among other things, I learned that Luke had one consuming love in this world: the *Cannon* and the U.S. Navy. The one was the other.

One early morning, after we had taken the morning star sights, I found out why.

"Professor, all my life I've wanted to be a captain of a ship," he told me. "When I was 17, I joined the Navy and tried for the Naval Academy, but they said I was too short. At first I was pretty broken up about it, but then I got to thinking—most of them guys who go to Annapolis never get much chance to handle a ship even after they get to be four stripers. Too much specializing. I figure they can always use a good quartermaster on the bridge to help them out in a jam, so I studied for the rate."

He put his sextant up on the shelf and went over to check the barometer.

"Besides, who knows? Someday I may get my own ship,—a seagoing tug, maybe." He turned and looked at me intently.

"But right now, Mr. Huber, this is *my* ship. I've been aboard now going on six years. There's nothing going to happen to the *Cannon* as long as I'm aboard."

IT was this same strong devotion to his ship which brought Luke into conflict with Captain Somers. It came initially when we got to Hawaii.

Luke elbowed his way past the Officer of the Deck and stood at the captain's elbow, kibitzing every move the old man made, every order he gave to the helm. As we stood down the channel, Luke sighted along the pelorus.

"I wouldn't get too close to them starboard buoys, Captain. There's a four-knot current setting us to the right, sir." Luke could be pretty blunt sometimes.

The Captain gave Luke a glassy stare and returned his attention toward the bow. I cringed for Luke, but the look didn't phase him.

"If you don't come left a little, Captain, we'll clip that buoy."

The Captain ignored him. Everything looked all right to me, but in a matter of seconds we began to drift

Illustration by MILLER POPE

right, and were soon on top of the buoys. The old man called for hard-left rudder and barely missed number-six buoy, which passed almost under the stern.

The captain was plainly irritated. He chewed his lip and narrowed his eyes. He snapped his orders to the engine-room telegraph and brushed past the Officer of the Deck, knocking him against the binnacle.

"Sorry," he said. But he wasn't sorry, he was irked.

Luke, though, went about his business as if nothing had happened taking cross cuts. He moved in behind the helmsman, checked the heading, and motioned to the leadsman to take a sounding. Everything went along smoothly until the *Cannon* was coming alongside the pier. It was a nice approach, and the skipper ordered all engines, back, one-third.

Then Luke spoke up again. "Better make it two-thirds, Captain, sir."

THE old man gritted his teeth and waited just long enough for him to have to back down full speed to keep from ramming the dock.

Captain Somers was furious. The blood rushed up the back of his neck. He snapped out orders to the forecastle about the lines. He yelled down at a couple of sailors leaning on the life line. Finally, he turned the job of doubling up the lines over to the Exec and stomped down to his cabin.

Luke had the good sense to keep out of his way. I found him in the chart house.

"That wasn't very smart, Luke," I said.

"I know it, Mr. Huber, but I had to warn him, sir. He hasn't been aboard the *Cannon* long enough to get the 'feel' of her," he explained.

It was as simple as that.

You don't explain a man like Luke Morley by the ordinary standards of the Navy. On the bridge, the captain is king. He can do no wrong—or he shouldn't. He has been brought up with years of preparation to shoulder the heavy responsibility of being king of his ship. For anyone to interfere as Luke did is sheer heresy. The navigator and the Officer of the Deck can make recommendations to the old man. But the timing of orders to the wheel and the engine room is the essence of seamanship, and the jealous prerogative of the captain whenever he has the conn.

Luke wasn't dumb. He recognized the fact that he was an enlisted man. But he also knew you couldn't run a Navy with "all chiefs and no Indians." The responsibility he shouldered was as heavy to Luke as the responsibility of being commanding officer was to Captain Somers. It was his surpassing loyalty to his ship and to the Navy that made Luke what he was. . . .

We stayed in Pearl just long enough to fill the bunkers with fuel, and then we were on our way again, this time alone. The rest of the squadron remained behind.

Three familiar "yips" on the siren followed by a blast on the whistle indicated our intention to get underway, and after that things went like clock work. The deckhands singled up the lines forward and aft, the dock crane hoisted away the brow from the gangway, and the Captain ordered one long blast on the whistle and backed the *Cannon* clear of the slip. The destroyer rounded Ford Island and was standing out the channel at 15 knots, when Luke sided up to me.

"I think you better ask the captain to slow down, Professor. They got a dredge out off the west shore and she's liable to snap a mooring with them waves, sir." Luke was following the chain of command this time. He came to me instead of speaking to the captain direct.

I didn't say anything to the old man. Besides, I think the captain heard, only he didn't let on. As we cut through the water, the bow waves reached out and the taut mooring lines to the spuds strained, as the swells lifted the dredge up on one side and then the other. But the lines held.

My smug feeling about not bothering the captain about the dredge evaporated fifteen minutes later when we were rounding Barber's Point. The *Cannon* received a tart message from the Captain of the Port, at Pearl.

"In the future," the message read, "please limit your speed to ten knots while dredging operations are in progress." The call signs in the heading indicated that a copy was sent to Commander, Destroyers, Pacific Fleet, who was Captain Somer's immediate superior.

Luke was right again, and I had let him down. He showed his hurt by sulking and becoming very formal.

"Bearing 343°, sir," he read off the pelorus, emphasizing the *"sir."*

"Past the hundred fathom curve at 1706, *sir.*"

"Sunset at 1853, *sir.*"

The first time he dropped the *"sir"* was when he was taking evening star sights. It was my turn to read the stop watch.

"Mark!" he sang out as he brought the star down to the horizon.

"Sir," I said as I recorded the time. He looked at me and grinned.

"Sir," he repeated with a slight chuckle.

After that he was his old self. But I knew he wouldn't count on me again to act as a go-between from him to the captain.

THE passage to Guam was delightful. The weather was balmy and the nights were clear. I actually looked forward to those early morning watches when Luke and I got up to take star sights. Luke would sit in the captain's sea-chair, while the old man was asleep, and talk to me like a benign old sea captain giving the seagoing facts of life to a young midshipman.

He taught me about turning radius, flying moors, the markings on the lead line, how to clear a hawse, the Rules of the Road,—in fact, everything a seaman should know. Under Luke's tutelage I got my two years before the mast in two weeks.

After we left Guam, we ran into "Gertrude," or rather "Gertrude" ran into us. The typhoon was supposed to pass well clear of us to the southwest. But suddenly it turned and headed northeast and ran smack across our track. There was little warning. The red skies at night, which were supposed to be the sailor's

delight, according to the ancient rhyme, crossed us up. Even the fleet forecasters at Guam guessed wrong on this one. There was a blank of about three hours in the weather sequence, and nobody caught the shift. Nobody, that is, except Luke Morley. How he knew I couldn't tell, but, as we shot the evening stars, he stood out there on the bridge sniffing the air like a terrier.

"Going to get mighty rough tonight, Professor."

The swells were there, but they weren't too big. The wind was fairly steady at about 15 knots from the southeast. I couldn't see it.

"Go on, man. You worry too much. This wind will just rock you to sleep."

"No sleep for me, Professor. With this blow, I've got me some work to do."

I turned in and fell dead asleep. I don't remember how long I slept, but suddenly I was awakened by the bridge messenger. The ship was jerking and creaking with the sea. Luke was right; it was getting rough.

"Captain wants you on the bridge, sir."

When I got there I found the Officer of the Deck and Luke standing stiffly at attention, as well as they could on the unsteady deck. The old man was glowering. I got in at the tail end of the OD's explanation.

"—and, sir, Morley here came up and reported that he had gotten the boatswains mate to haul in the lifeboat and secure it for a storm."

"And did you so order it, Mister Banks?" The old man asked frostily.

"No, sir. Morley here said there wasn't time to get permission. He said the storm was getting worse, and if he didn't swing the whaleboat in right then someone would bust his neck trying to do it later or we would lose the boat."

The wind howled as he spoke, and green water poured over the forecastle. But the Captain could see only Luke's breach of authority.

"Mr. Banks," the old man spoke in measured tones, "*you* are the Officer of the Deck, not Morley. And *I* am the one to judge whether the lifeboat should be secured or not." He turned to Luke.

"And *you* get off the bridge!" he ordered. "Get off the bridge!"

Poor Luke didn't know what struck him. His expression was one of complete distress. He walked off in a daze. Luke Morley, Chief Quartermaster, ordered off his bridge by the captain!

I wanted to intercede, but that wasn't the time. The captain rankled, and kept squirming his neck out of his collar and hitching his shoulders. Then things began to pop.

The sea was becoming mountainous and wave after wave cascaded over the bow and sprayed the bridge. The *Cannon* pitched down the swells, rolled to one side, and shuddered.

"All engines ahead, one-third," the captain ordered. "Come right to heading zero nine zero." The ship eased up a bit, but continued the sickening rolls from one side to the other.

The boatswain climbed to the bridge, drenched to the skin.

"Everything lashed down and secured, sir. What a blow! Good thing we got the whaleboat in when we did."

The captain didn't reply. He just squirmed his neck around. The boatswain went back to the shelter, aft the bridge.

The storm raged all that night, the next day and the following night, before it began to let up. The old man never once left his post, never took a wink of sleep. During the course of the storm, he gradually changed the *Cannon's* heading completely around the clock to make the ship ride easier. It was seamanship at its best.

Three days later, after everything calmed down a bit, I went to see the captain about Luke.

"Look, Professor," he said. "I know he's a good man. You don't have to tell me that. And he was right each time, damn him! But you just don't go around telling the captain how to run his own ship,—at least not the way Morley does. You'd think he was the skipper, the way he acts. Cigarette?" he offered me one from his case.

As I reached for a light, he went on, "Okay, take him back for the time being; but remember, Huber, there won't be a next time."

When I told Luke that he was restored to duty, he just said, "Thanks, Professor," and went up to the chart house and began to work on his charts as if nothing had happened. The only thing that counted was that he was back where he could look out for the navigation and safety of his ship.

We stopped off at the Naval Base at Yokosuka, to pick up our operation orders. The *Cannon* was assigned to the forces west of Korea. As soon as we topped off with fuel, we got underway again.

Then Captain Somers called me to his cabin. "Huber, while we were in Yokosuka, I arranged to have Morley transferred. They have a billet for him right there in the Navy Yard. We will drop him off in about six weeks after we finish this cruise. They will have a relief for him by then."

"But, Captain, that'll break his heart. This ship is his life! He's been on her since she was commissioned in '47."

"That's the whole trouble," said the captain. "He's been aboard too long. Thinks he owns her. Nope, don't argue with me, Professor. There's not enough room for two captains on this ship."

I didn't have the heart to tell Luke. It would have killed him. The ship was going into strange waters, and he was in his glory. If he spent most of his time on the bridge before, he was up there practically all the time now. No ship, no landfall was sighted that Luke wasn't there to see. He studied the pilot charts for currents. He examined the soundings. He was always there dropping a word of advice to the Officer of the Deck. "You'd better report that ship to the captain, sir." "I think you'd better steer about five degrees left for about ten minutes, that's shallow ground you know, sir." "They've moved the position of that light, sir, since the war." I kept putting off telling him, hoping against hope that something would happen.

Something did.

It was the Officer of the Deck at 6:30 one morning, when it happened. We were steaming around the southwest corner of Korea, just off of Kwang-ju, when Luke sighted a fishing boat up ahead flying the flag of the South Korean Republic.

"You'd better report her to the captain, Mr. Huber," said Luke.

I yelled down the voice tube, "Captain, there's a South Korean sampan up ahead. Looks like we will pass well clear, sir."

Luke was examining the sampan very carefully with his binoculars when the captain came on the bridge.

"They're throwing some old crates over the side, sir," Luke reported.

The captain picked up his binoculars to take a look. At that time, we were overtaking the sampan rather steadily; she was about a half mile up ahead, two points on the starboard bow. I figured the *Cannon* would pass well clear if the fishing boat maintained her present course.

Suddenly, the boat veered to the left and began to cross our bow. We were bearing down on her rapidly, but there was still time to swing right and pass astern. Anticipating the turn, I reached for the whistle. Luke was still looking through the binoculars at the sampan.

"Right standard rudder," the captain ordered. I blew one blast on the whistle. That should wake them up.

Luke yelled, "Not right! Turn left, Captain, sir!"

For a terrifying instant the helmsman didn't do anything.

The captain shouted, "Turn right, damn it! Turn right fast! Back all engines full!" He reached for the whistle.

The helmsman came to life then and started to spin the wheel to the right. Instantly, Luke was upon him, bowling him out of the way. He stopped the rudder and spun the wheel in the opposite direction. Slowly the *Cannon* reacted and began to veer with gathering momentum across the bow of the sampan.

The captain was shouting. Someone blew four blasts on the whistle. Collision was imminent. I grabbed the siren. Three natives were running around down below us on the sampan, yelling at the top of their lungs. Two of our sailors on the forecastle were running aft as fast as they could. On the bridge there was chaos.

I braced myself for the impact. The sampan struck us about fifty feet aft on the starboard bow. The destroyer shuddered. The sampan lurched. One of the Koreans leaped over the side. The sampan slipped aft along the side of the *Cannon*. She settled rapidly.

Suddenly, there was a shattering explosion. The deck jerked from under my feet. I was knocked over on top of the helmsman. The captain fell against the binnacle. Everything was in turmoil.

Scrambling to my feet, I looked aft. Debris from the sampan was still falling to the boiling sea. A busted water main near the fantail of the *Cannon* was spouting a ragged geyser into the air. Men were running everywhere.

I saw Luke pull the general alarm and press down on the loud-speaker switch.

"Collision, starboard side, forward! Collision, starboard side, forward!" he announced.

The incessant clanging of the general alarm seemed to restore order to the confusion. This, we knew about. Collision—just like a drill. The men began to close the watertight doors and hatches. The damage-control team moved forward with their equipment. The special sea detail came up to the bridge and plugged in their battle phones. Soon reports began to filter through.

"Magazine A-303-M flooded, sir."

"Small leaks in bulkhead aft of fuel tank A-305-F, sir."

"Water main busted, Captain, sir."

The *Cannon* took on a list to starboard. The damage-control officer came up to the bridge.

"Captain, it doesn't look too bad. Only one magazine flooded. The engines are okay. As soon as we can shore up the bulkhead by that fuel tank we'll be safe. We've got the pumps on the magazine, and we can correct this list anytime."

The captain nodded. The real danger was past, but the damage was done. He snapped his head around at me, and thrust out his jaw.

"Mister Huber, I want you to place Morley under arrest. Put him in the brig for safekeeping." His voice got sharp. "Get him off the bridge! Get him out of here!"

Luke looked up at the captain in astonishment. He opened his mouth to speak, but he could only swallow. He looked appealingly around at the others on the bridge, then turned and stumbled down the ladder to the deck below. Later, I visited him in the brig.

"I'm sorry, Luke. It looks like a general court for you. The old man is feeling mighty bad about the collision. This is his first ship, and he thinks his Naval career is ruined. Why did you do it, Luke?" I asked. "Why the *hell* did you do it?"

Luke grabbed the bars and looked at me in bewilderment.

"Didn't you see 'em, Mr. Huber? Didn't you see 'em, sir?" he asked.

"See what?"

"The mines! Didn't you see 'em pushing the mines over the side?" Luke demanded.

In a flash I saw it all. The explosion of the sampan. The crates and boxes they dropped to cover up their activity. If we had pulled astern of the sampan, we would have been blown to bits! The dirty gooks!

I literally flew up to the bridge to tell the skipper. When I finished, the old man walked over to the port and looked out at the sea. I could see that a deep struggle was going on within him. But all he said when he turned away was, "Then the little runt was right again!"

The captain proved the kind of man he was when he went down personally to the brig to release Luke. This grand gesture tore down all barriers between them. By the time we reached Tokyo Bay, Luke and the old man were bosom buddies.

It was there that the captain did something I had never seen done before. I know it's strictly against Navy Regulations. I know that no one will believe me. But I was there.

As the *Cannon* stood up the bay for Yokosuka, Captain Somers came over and put his hand on Luke's shoulder and said in an affectionate voice, "Luke, take over now, and take her in to the dock. You damn well deserve it!" Then the old man turned and went out on the wing of the bridge.

The inspired look in Luke's face was something wonderful to see. He didn't hesitate. With all the confidence in the world, he ordered all engines ahead full speed. Then he purposefully strode over to the captain's sea-chair and sat down.

Luke Morley had finally realized his lifelong ambition.

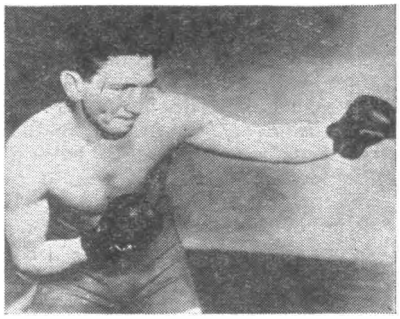
Out on the wing of the bridge, the captain looked thoughtfully down at the bow waves formed as the *Cannon* knifed her way into the harbor.

"Well, Professor, I guess this is one time when there's room enough for two captains on this ship," he remarked. "What do you think?"

I could only shake my head in wonder. •

"I'd recognize you anywhere from Roger's description. Fat, elderly, gray hair, buck teeth, bowlegs—"

ROCKY MARCIANO REVIVED THE ERA OF THE DEADLY WALLOP.



■ By RAY MILLER
Championship referee and former lightweight contender

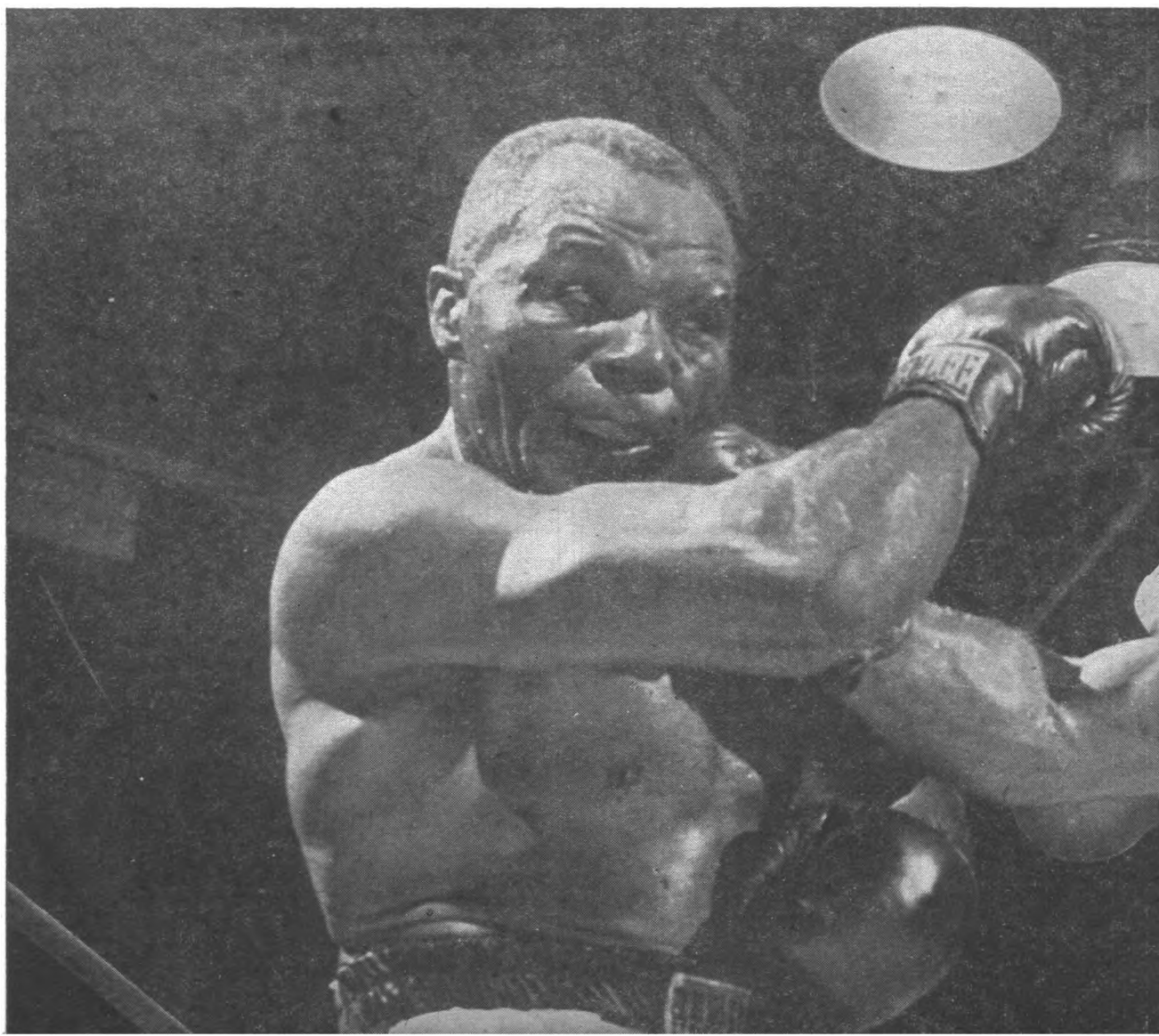
BOXING'S 10 Deadliest Punches

When Rocky Marciano crushed Jersey Joe Walcott with a right hook to the jaw in the thirteenth round of their first fight, September 23, 1952, Philadelphia, he landed one of the ten most vicious punches ever thrown.

It ranks with the greatest, not only because it won the heavyweight championship for Marciano but because its repercussions were so tremendous that Walcott still felt the effects in their second bout which, in the opinion of many, was a fiasco.

There is something about a single decisive punch which is unforgettable. It is like the home run of a Babe Ruth or Mickey Mantle, the tennis ace of a Bill Tilden, the long putt of a Ben Hogan. It is a top thrill in sport.

Rocky has discovered a vital punching secret based on his build. Since he has short arms for a heavyweight and is short in stature, he has trained



himself to punch with his entire body, thus getting all his weight behind his punches. Because he pivots with his hip on nearly every smash, most of the punches that Marciano delivers are hooks. He seldom tosses an uppercut. In his punching style, Marciano is the nearest thing we have had to Jack Dempsey in his prime.

It was lucky for Walcott, in his first battle with Marciano, that up until the time he was stretched senseless, he had been handing out most of the punishment. Otherwise, he might have been dangerously hurt.

I have always said that if I were knocked out when I boxed—and, fortunately, I never was in a couple of hundred fights—I would want to be put away in one round. It is when a boxer absorbs punishment round after round that a damaging punch may be deadly in more ways than one. A boxer knocked out in the first round usually hasn't absorbed enough punishment to be badly hurt.

Among the deadliest punchers of all time, of course, was Jack Dempsey. I have compared Marciano to Dempsey, although Dempsey was not as short as our present champion. But Dempsey fought out of the crouch or weave. When he let one go, his whole body was behind it.

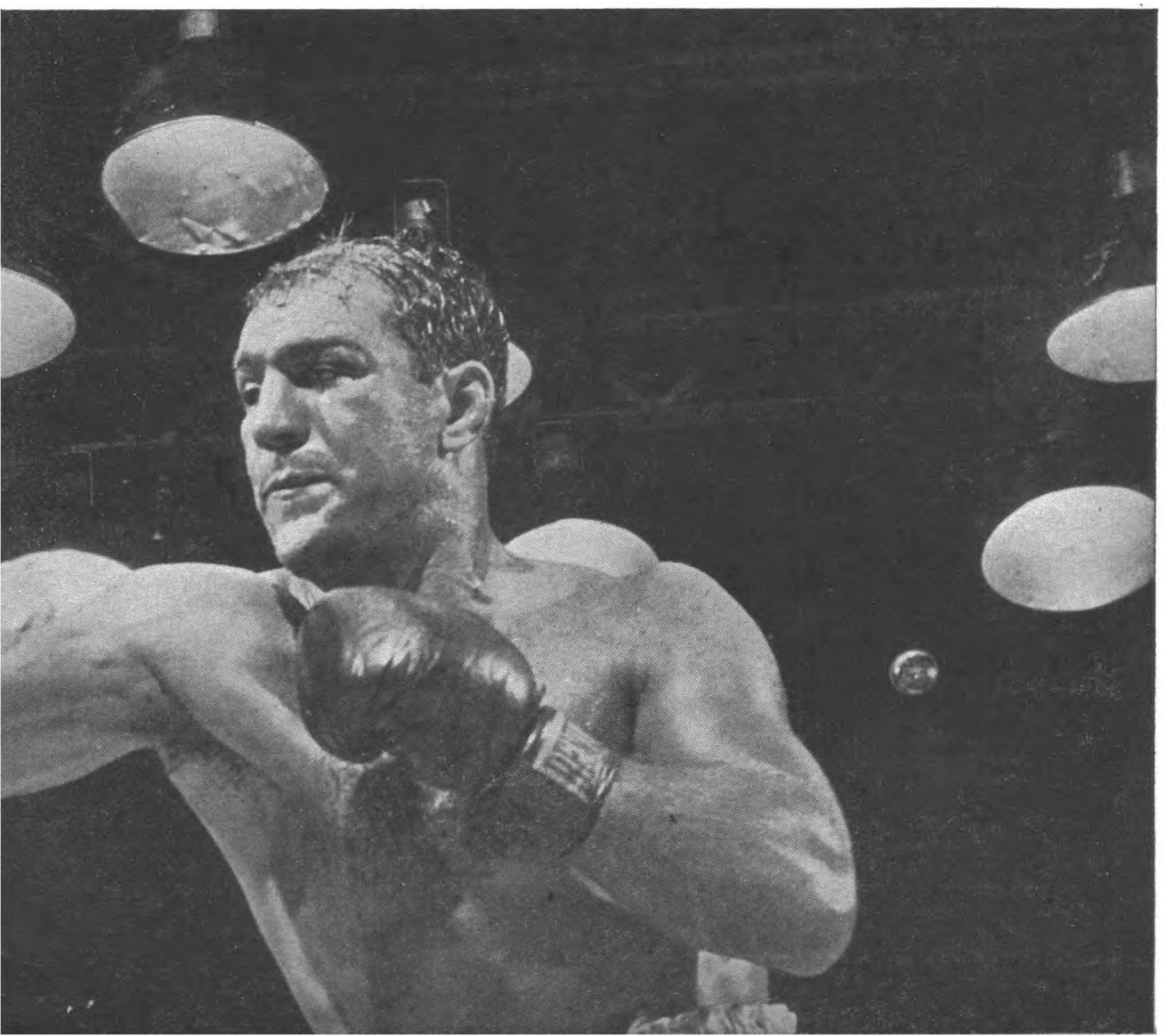
There is a wide range of selection when you seek out the fiercest wallop that Dempsey ever hurled in the pantherish exchanges which characterized his actions in the ring. He drilled the 6 feet, 6 inch Jess Willard so mercilessly at Toledo that Willard was deaf in one ear for the rest of his life. Bill Brennan broke an ankle going down from a blow by Jack Dempsey.

But Jack's masterpiece and the second of the deadliest punches (which we are not naming in order) was the left hook which he catapulted to Fred Fulton's jaw. That victory started Dempsey to the top.

Fulton was a giant of a man and a boxer whose left jab was considered one of the best of his time. Dempsey raged across the ring, uncorked a left to the heart and then a brutal, memorable left hook to the jaw. That was it. Elapsed time for the knockout—18 seconds in the first round.

Personally, I rate the left hook as the greatest punch. I may be prejudiced because that was my specialty and the one with which I was lucky enough to maul Jimmy McLarnin so badly that I halted him for the only time in his career.

Remember this about a left hook. It comes from the side and the other fighter doesn't see it as easily as he



does a right hand. Although it doesn't hurt as much as a right hand, it will, oddly enough, knock a man out quicker than a right cross. A painful punch will not knock out a man—the very pain itself may keep him active. But a left hook which jars and stuns a lighter is the most destructive punch of all.

The third most deadly single punch of all time was the right cross which Joe Louis, a rising challenger, plastered on the face of the Spaniard, Paulino Uzcudun.

Louis ordinarily did not cave a man in with a single punch. His left jab was one of the most brilliant of all time—something like that of my friend, lightweight Joe Benjamin, who used to cut a man to pieces with his jab. The left jab in boxing serves a twofold purpose—it scores points for a fighter and keeps his foe off balance so that he cannot register with hard smashes.

Against Uzcudun, Louis was jabbing all right, but he was making little impression on the boxing rock of Gibraltar. Uzcudun, moreover, maintained a strict defensive strategy throughout, wrapping himself up in a sort of pretzel crouch. Louis had his task cut out for him.

For three rounds, all that Joe could do was peck the Basque. In the fourth, though, Louis actually missed on purpose so that Paulino might open up. The lure succeeded. Paulino landed a couple and then Louis jet-propelled the one-two—left jab and right cross.

The finishing blow hit Paulino along the side of the mouth and a tooth came through the lower lip. He sprawled under the lower rope. Blood spouted from his nose and mouth. He arose miraculously at eight, but the referee stopped it after another few seconds. Uzcudun never fought again.

For the fourth most deadly punch of modern boxing, we must consider Jack Johnson. Johnson was one of the most remarkable *defensive* boxers who ever lived—nevertheless, he struck one of the most telling blows yet recorded. It was an uppercut which loosed Stanley Ketchel from his moorings.

It was a surprise smash by Ketchel himself which led to his undoing. In the twelfth round of his struggle with heavyweight champion Johnson, the ferocious Ketchel, who was a middleweight blessed with the power of a Dempsey, astonished the bigger man by flooring him.

Coming off the canvas, and almost in a single gesture as he rose, Johnson unlimbered a right hand uppercut which almost tore Ketchel's head off. So fearful was this punch that two of Ketchel's teeth were later found imbedded in Johnson's glove.

Ketchel was not only on the receiving end of one of history's deadliest wallops—he also threw one. To his honor goes the fifth.

Ketchel possessed a style which was something like that of Bob Fitzsimmons. He fought in shifts. His favorite trick was to miss deliberately with a whizzing right to lure his man in. Then Ketchel belted either to the body or on the jaw with his venomous left. His body blows often ripped the stomach lining out of his opponents. Many were permanently ruined as first-class fighters.

It was against Philadelphia Jack O'Brien that Ketchel threw his mightiest punch. The boxing master led Ketchel by a handsome margin until eight seconds remained in the fray. Then the left exploded. O'Brien's head lay in a resin box in his own corner and it required twenty minutes to bring him around. Unconscious, he won the popular newspaper decision as he had been so far ahead up until this time. No official decisions were permitted in New York in those days.

Great punchers like Ketchel, Dempsey, Marciano and the rest have flexible, tapering muscles which they intentionally keep as loose as possible. The reason is obvious. If you put a stone at the end of a stick and hit a table, you will do damage—but tie that same stone to a string, swing it, and see how much more damage you can inflict.

You'll notice, then, in training that a fighter will never lift any weights nor do any intensive work with his arms. He'll never wrestle nor do anything of the sort. And, after every training period, he will require a rubdown to keep those muscles loose. I maintain that it is the speed of the punch which makes for the power—Jimmy McLarnin, at 135 pounds, could throw a right cross as hard as a heavyweight.

The original Joe Walcott, a welterweight, threw the sixth deadliest punch when he stopped Joe Choynski, a major heavyweight. Choynski was good enough to give Jim Corbett a whale of a fight and he stopped Jack Johnson in three rounds. Choynski was big, he was strong, he was capable and yet he was halted by welterweight Walcott.

They do not permit any such mismatches any more, and, even if they did, what welterweight would tangle with a ranking heavyweight? Yet Walcott did.

Walcott put Choynski down three times in the first round but the big man was smart enough to learn his lesson and powerful enough to recuperate. In the seventh, however, a right to the jaw toppled Choynski. That right smash was literally dynamite. Not since David buzzsawed Goliath has there been such an outcome.

For the seventh deadliest punch, Bob Fitzsimmons' effort in his fight with Jim Corbett gets the call. Those who have seen boxing in our century consider that Fitzsimmons was the hardest of all our hitters. He stood 6 feet tall, revealed the upper torso of a heavyweight and maneuvered on skinny, knock-kneed legs. He had been a blacksmith in his native New Zealand and, while scarcely more than a middleweight, his strength was enormous. But, at the same time, he was a master boxer.

It was Fitzsimmons who developed the "solar plexus" punch, a rip to the short ribs which is mayhem when correctly applied. Anybody who suffered a drawn-out beating by Fitzsimmons paid for it. One big man, Con Riordan, died shortly after Fitz pummelled him in a savage contest.

But it was the punch with which Fitz hit Corbett to gain the heavyweight title which lodges him in the Hall of Fame.

Fitzsimmons used a rapid shift to start his specialty. The left foot shuffled to the rear, the right darted forward. Then Fitzsimmons' blacksmith shoulders swung the left hand. Here's his own description of how his solar plexus punch paralyzed Corbett from the hips down.

"When opportunity came at the beginning of the fourteenth round, Corbett was fighting a bit wild. He made a swing which I side-stepped. In a flash, I saw an opening on his stomach. I came in with the left hand shift to the wind. Then, without changing the position of my feet, I shot the same hand against his jaw. It was the exact same finish I gave Tom Sharkey in San Francisco."

Once Fitz sank that solar plexus punch in Corbett's ribs, any extra tap was so much window-dressing. This one stands out.

So does that of lightweight Joe Gans, who comes up with the eighth of the deadliest blows. It was an impressive, unforgettable punch which Gans dealt to Frank Erne and demonstrates what strength, coupled with science, will do.

Gans had studied Erne's style and he noticed that Frank had the habit of drawing his head back so many inches, then bobbing forward. So Gans evolved a plan.

He was the kind of a boxer, it must be remembered, who was so adept with his fists that he could pick off blows in mid-passage.

So, in regard to the Erne fight for the title, Gans said afterward:

"I knew just where his jaw would be at a certain moment."

And, in a bout of 1 minute, 46 seconds duration, in which only eight blows were struck, including the calculated right hand to the jaw which lives in ring annals, Joe Gans knocked out Frank Erne with a terrific right that caught Erne's head coming forward.

Jack Sharkey struck a punch in his tempestuous career which qualifies as the ninth deadliest punch. He was opposing that outstanding craftsman, Tommy Loughran. Loughran, who had graduated from the light heavyweight ranks where he had been unbeaten for five years, was a foremost contender for the heavyweight honors vacated by Gene Tunney.

"I was leading," recalls Loughran, "until that punch, which was the turning point for me. Otherwise, I might have become heavyweight champion." Loughran was far ahead on points until Jack Sharkey feinted him with a left to the body and followed with a crashing right to the temple.

Loughran, the ring master, never knew what happened. He was so clever in the ring that he always used to have a round end near his own corner so that his foe would have to take the long walk across the ring. When Sharkey cracked him this blow, Loughran turned to the referee and asked for a chair to sit down.

He was there solely on instinct, the sort of instinct which inspires a fighter to jump off the canvas and fight for half a dozen rounds before he knows where he is. Loughran never realized where he was until he was back in his dressing room. It was one of the most dramatic single punches ever thrown.

You may wonder why I do not rate death in the ring as a factor in appraising the ten deadliest punches. When I call a punch vicious or deadly, I do not mean that it must kill a man. I've seen a lot of boxing, both as a fighter and a referee, and it is my opinion that a fighter killed in the ring is a man who had something wrong with him before he entered the ring.

He was either sick, out of condition, or hurt somewhere in training and he would not tell his manager because he was afraid of the effect on his future. Sometimes, he dies because of the punching he received in a previous fight.

However, the tenth deadliest punch did cause a man's death in a subsequent fight. It was landed by former heavyweight champion, Max Baer, on Ernie Schaaf with eight seconds of the last round to go in their ten-round bout in Chicago. Baer, one of the finest-built specimens ever to grace a ring, landed a desperate right-hand haymaker from right field to whittle Schaaf to the floor.

Schaaf suffered from pinpoint hemorrhages in the brain after that battle. He never should have fought again for a long time, if at all. Instead, he accepted a match with Primo Carnera, the freak who was so muscle-bound he could scarcely have hurt a flyweight.

They met in New York. Carnera's fluffy jab sent Schaaf to the hospital. The knockout looked so ludicrous that one New York newspaper proclaimed boldly the bout was a fake. But Schaaf died—killed not by Carnera but, in the opinion of insiders, from the punishment meted out by Baer.

All of these punches we have been discussing were legal blows. One of the fiercest ever thrown in all boxing was decreed illegal. George LaBlanche, a French-Canadian who sported a mustache, knocked out the original Jack Dempsey, the Nonpareil, in a San Francisco bout with the dreaded "pivot blow."

LaBlanche deliberately missed a left, invited Dempsey's counter and whacked Dempsey on the point of the jaw with the side of his gloved fist. Middleweight Dempsey fell and fractured his nose in the fall. This was an illegal blow, of course, and intelligent work by boxing commissions throughout the country has practically eliminated illegal slugging.

Most men must be born with the innate power to throw the deadly punch—few can acquire it, although there have been exceptions. Benny Leonard and Tony Canzoneri started as boxers and, as they lost their speed, they learned the art of the murderous wallop.

Many boxers throw damaging punches which lack the clean knockout element. Lightweight champion Jimmy Carter recently had Tommy Collins down ten times in a single bout but the blows were not nearly as vicious as they appeared to millions on television. I once fought a boxer named Tommy Grogan who sent me down six times. It wasn't as bad as it looked. I got up and fortunately flattened him with a left hook.

Fellows who throw punches in bewildering combinations like Kid Gavilan and Ray Robinson seldom qualify in the league with the ten deadliest single punches. Robinson was a marvellous defensive boxer and never slugged with the other man until he thought his rival was ready to be taken. Then he was murder, a great finisher. But he was at his best in combinations.

Fellows like Robinson and Gavilan who can left hook to the body, left hook to the jaw, then follow with the right hand smashes, have actually tossed as many as 200 punches in a round. They are smarter than many fans realize. When Kid Gavilan fought Chuck Davey, he walked out cautiously, then started slowly backward, setting the tempo of the fight wherein he counter-punched, rather than allowed Davey to do so. But counter-punchers do not reach boxing's supreme heights of annihilation.

Marciano possesses the knack and that is why he will make a million dollars. Floyd Paterson, the light heavyweight, could potentially reach the jackpot. Boxing's lethal punches have not vanished with the great fighters of the past as Rocky proved in Philadelphia against Jersey Joe.

That's why my present ten deadliest punches will not stand up forever. But they may last a long time. A one-punch knocker-outer, a guy with the deadly punch, like a good man, is hard to find. And they are mighty convenient to have around. Like the time heavyweight Joe Jeannette was fighting in New Jersey years ago and realized the last train home was leaving in a short while.

Jeannette came out for the third round and touched gloves as if it were the last round.

"Why, it isn't the last round," exclaimed his opponent.

"It is for you, brother," said Jeannette and knocked him silly with a left hook to the jaw.

Give me the deadly puncher every time. •

THE DEADLIEST PUNCHES

According to Ray Miller, the ten deadliest punches of all time were delivered in these bouts:

Marciano over Walcott, September 23, 1952.

Louis over Uzcudun, December 13, 1935.

Baer over Schaaf, August 31, 1932.

Sharkey over Loughran, September 26, 1929.

Dempsey over Fulton, July 27, 1918.

Johnson over Ketchel, October 16, 1909.

Ketchel vs. O'Brien, March 26, 1909.

Gans over Erne, May 12, 1902.

Walcott over Choynski, February 23, 1900.

Fitzsimmons over Corbett, March 17, 1897.

Illustrated by CHARLES GEER

Barbed Wire Kingdom

Caught between the ruthless greed of one man and the brutal stubbornness of another, Ross Kennett was the most hated man in the valley. But he couldn't leave until he learned what had really happened that terrible night.

By C. WILLIAM HARRISON

And now he could see the camp. . . .

He lay belly-down on the hard ground, with the Winchester pushed out in front of him and a shell already in the chamber. His finger was on the trigger, and he could see the gunsights dropping into alignment.

He thought it was queer the way the front bead and the notched rear sight seemed to adjust of their own accord. He wasn't aware of deliberately lining up the sights of the Winchester. Nothing was real in this strange black world he was in, not even the rifle.

Only his hatred—that was real. His hatred was the bitter blackness that filled his mind. It was the roaring in his temples, the ache in his throat, it was the sickness that pitted his stomach, and the flame that raged in splintered wildness through his veins. Only the hate was real.

COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

He wished he knew where he was. Somewhere in the New Mexico mountains, he thought. Or in Texas. Or maybe up in the Colorado high country. He wasn't sure, and it did not matter. Only the camp below him mattered, and the men hunkered around the guttering fire. He had traveled a long track to find this camp. He had trailed a million miles and an eternity of days, and in the aching void of his mind he couldn't remember how he had got here or where he had come from. He could only remember Rita, and the bullets that had torn through her body—Rita trying to smile as she died in his arms.

And Rita's whisper. *I love you, Ross.*

He was crying as he lay there on that hard ground with the rifle in his hands. The sobs came tearing upward through his throat, and the tears spilled their burning wetness into his eyes so that the campfire was a glistening red glow against the blackness below him. Men crouching around that red glow. Men without faces.

Rita. Rita, honey. . . .

He heard the gunshot. It split the black silence into a thousand glittering fragments. The shots kept roaring in his ears, huge thundering sounds that kept slamming and crashing and tearing through the rising echoes of a man's scream.

It was his own scream, wild and tormented.

SOMEONE shook him, and the world of blackness he was in cracked and came open. Dim yellow light filled his eyes, and a voice spoke, low and sharp.

"Ross! Come out of it, kid!"

He dropped his feet to the floor, and sat up on the low bunk. His body was wet with sweat. He rubbed the back of his hand across his eyes, hearing the aroused grumbling of other men along the cell block.

"Another one of them dreams, kid?" Whitey Fitzhugh asked.

Ross Kennett looked at the old man who shared this cell in Leavenworth prison with him. He nodded.

"Like to scared me out of my whiskers when you cut loose that yell," Whitey said and grinned wryly.

"Sorry, Whitey."

"Hell, a man can't be blamed for what happens in his sleep, kid. Ain't a man in this hell-hole as don't nightmare himself into an uproar every now and then. One jigger I was celled up with a few years back was quite a shine with the ladies while he was outside, and the dreams he used to have was purely wonderful. Always about gals."

A touch of fear rose in Ross Kennett. "Have I ever acted up in my sleep, Whitey?"

"Like that ladies' dandy I was tellin' you about? Hell no, kid."

Ross Kennett knuckled his big hands together. The thought scared him.

"I didn't mean that way," he said. "Have I ever acted mean? Tried to get rough?"

Old Fitzhugh snorted. "Not once, kid. Now you're talking like a crazy man."

"That's what I'm afraid of," Kennett said. His voice was slow, heavy. "Those damned nightmares. Always the same, Whitey. Sometimes I think I am crazy."

The old man grunted. Squatting on his bare heels, he reached across to the plank bench and dug into his piled clothes for the makings. He built a cigaret, tucked it between Kennett's taut lips, and shaped up a smoke for himself. He scratched a match, held it out for Kennett, and then got his own burning.

"Trouble with you," he said slowly, "is you been cooped up in this hell-house too long. Three years are enough to twist any man's thinking. It's got you so you're beginning to believe what that court said about you."

Ross Kennett closed his eyes. The memory of those dreams haunted him. Always the same, the identical hard and brutal pattern. The stark reality of them tormented him.

He said softly, "I could have done it, Whitey. I could have murdered those men."

"Not unless you were out of your head, kid. Plumb loco crazy."

"Maybe . . . maybe that's how I was."

"Stop thinking about it, kid."

"I only wish I knew, Whitey."

The old man's voice turned short, curt. "Backtrackin' never got any man anyplace, son. Sooner you dab your rope on that, the better off you'll be. What's done is done."

Kennett moved his shoulders, a big-boned man with the pallor of Leavenworth on his face.

"You hear what I said, kid?"

"Yes."

"I'm an old man," Whitey Fitzhugh said. "I've been here so long I wouldn't know what to do if they turned me out—which they ain't goin' to do until I'm wearing a pine overcoat. Not the same with you kid. You've done your time, and three years ain't forever. You're still young."

Ross Kennett took a slow breath. Twenty-four he had been, the day of that trial back in Spurlock, and now the end of three years spent behind walls. That made him twenty-seven, now.

By God, he felt fifty.

Old Fitzhugh said quietly, "Thing for you to do is scratch off those three years, and forget them. Tear the pages out of your mind, kid. They didn't happen."

Kennett drew deeply on the cigarette. He smiled dismally.

"This is your last day here, boy, and you listen to the advice of an old man. When you walk out that gate today, go get yourself the job I've been telling you about. An honest job of work heals more sores than anything else in this world, son. Getting the job is your first move."

KENNETT stood up. He padded across the cold cell floor in his bare feet. He gripped the bars of the door, looking down the dimly lighted corridor. Cells against cells, with forgotten men in them. Hard bars and solid walls. Some man groaned softly in his sleep. Down the way a cigarette winked bright behind the close bars, and faded. The one they called Spanish Joe was singing softly about unrequited love. He was the one who had used a knife on his girl when he caught her with another man—he was the one who never seemed to sleep, day or night.

Old Fitzhugh's question came across the brooding hush. "You going to do what I'm telling you, Ross?"

The harshness echoed through Kennett's mind. "A jailbird like me having an honest job handed to him?"

Sudden anger whipped up in the old man. He stepped close and rammed the heel of his hand against Kennett's shoulder, a hard jolting blow. Crusty temper was in his eyes, and contempt turned his voice thin and thorny.

"You want to spend the rest of your life crying for yourself?" he demanded savagely. "You going to start acting like a whupped pup once you're turned out of here?" he sneered. "You do, and you'll be back here inside of a year. Or rotting in some other jail. Or stretching rope somewhere. I've seen enough to know. Man ain't got enough sense to get off a dead horse don't deserve to breathe clean air. What have you got in you, Kennett—cow water? Are you too yellow to make another start when the chance is handed to you?"

Kennett felt the bite in this old man, and the bitter contempt. The scorn dug into him and hurt. It stung a sense of pride that he had all but forgotten, and made him hold his head a little higher as he met Fitzhugh's brittle gaze. A crooked half smile came slowly to his wide mouth.

"Obliged to you, Whitey," he murmured.

"You damn well better act like it, then," the man grunted. "You've got a chance if you'll forget that crazy-headed dream that's been riding you. Now you listen to what an old man's got to tell you.

"My brother owes me a debt. If it wasn't for me speaking up and taking the jolt for a fool stunt Sam and me pulled off twenty years ago, he'd be rotting behind these bars with me. Sam learned his lesson, and he's all right. He'll pay me a favor when I ask it."

Kennett stood in the dim gloom of the prison cell, feeling the chill of the iron bars against his back. Whitey's voice was short-clipped, crusty, a faded oldster trying to give to another man the hope that would never come into his own life.

"Sam works for the Ajax people, over in Illinois. They make Glidden wire. Barbed wire fencing. Sam will give you a job selling the stuff, when I write him and ask him. Main thing is—will you take the job?"

Kennett slowly nodded. "Thanks, Whitey."

"It won't be easy, kid. No cowman is going to take kindly to a barbed wire fence that will put an end to free range. You'll get kicked out of more than one town before you make your first sale."

Kennett nodded. "I reckon," he said, and his eyes were moody with thought. There was a time when he had seen his own cattle grazing on unfenced range. The picture was always close to him. Free graze was a way of life, and barbed wire fencing would put an end to it. The end of an era that would never be seen again. No cowman would give that up willingly, and only a foresighted few would accept barbed wire as inevitable. Whitey Fitzhugh was right: that damned Glidden wire would make trouble for any man who brought it into a new range.

WHITEY was speaking. "Chances are, Sam will let you pick your own territory, Ross. I'm kind of wondering where you'll go."

The reply came at once, without hesitation or thought. "New Mexico. Town of Spurlock."

"You're a damn fool, Ross."

"I've got to know about that . . . that dream, Whitey. I've got to know if I killed those men, if everything they said about me in court is true."

"Stubborn damn fool. Guess I can't blame you much, though. A man's got some blank pages in his book, he wants to know what is on them."

"Thanks, Whitey."

"Words don't mean a goddam thing in this life," the old man said, and a roughness was in his voice. "You want to thank me, Ross, don't ever let me lay eyes on you again. Not in a place like this, kid. You know what I mean."

Kennett touched the man's arm. "Sure, Whitey. I know."

Chapter Two

OFF there, at last, were the remembered landmarks. He saw the valley as his rig topped the final lift of the divide and rocked to a halt in the shade of the trees that flanked the rutty road. He saw the wide sweep of the valley curving off to the southwest toward the distant mountains, a vast sea of grass that showed the diminished red-brown of grazing cattle. A wide free range that had not been tamed by the barbed wires of any fence—not yet.

The late morning sun had faded the blue haze from the hills, and in that brittle clarity all things were deceptive. Soldier creek glittered in the immensity below, another three hours away by this tortured road. It would take him twice that long to reach the town of Spurlock. Time and distance nagged a man's patience, and the high sun tormented him. Even here in the deep shade of the live oaks and piñons the air was hot and had a moody stillness. Somewhere in the brush a prairie finch fretted.

The man in the dusty rig held in the leggy roan mare with a firm hand, looking off into the valley and remembering. He was lank and full-shouldered, this Ross Kennett, with a young face more taciturn than its years warranted. Trouble had marked him. His mouth was flat-lipped and straight.

He had come across the endless blazing face of north Texas; and farther back he had traveled his rig across the dun plains of Kansas. This was the distance he had put between himself and Leavenworth's bitter walls. But those miles were not enough. He wondered if any man could ever travel far enough to escape from the shadow of three years in prison. Those high, relentless walls had a way of following a man, tormenting his mind. This was something Ross Kennett had learned in his two months of freedom.

He looked off into the valley with moody eyes, and now he was tempted to swing north toward the Nations or Colorado, or turn south toward El Paso where no man would question a stranger's past. For a moment the temptation was so strong it hurt him. But he put it out of his mind. He had committed himself. There were some things that a man could not change.

The oaks pressed close to the narrow road, a thick dust-powdered tangle. His mare needed this moment of rest, but Kennett resented it. He had no liking for the sense of confinement and insecurity the trees gave him.

In this year of 1878 there was still danger from Comanches, and the Apaches ranging out from the mountains to the west were a constant threat. A man traveling alone could not be too careful, and in Ross Kennett was the regret that he had not bought the Winchester that puncher in Tascosa had offered to sell him. But there was a limit to how far he could stretch the meager advance he had managed to wrangle from the Ajax people when he had taken this job. Kennett reached down and lossened the .44 Peacemaker in his holster.

From somewhere not far behind him a voice said with sharp-cold warning: "Don't do that!"

A sudden pressure thinned Kennett's lips, and a quick toughness ran into his eyes. Danger keened him. He bent forward ever so slightly on the rig's seat, an unforgotten instinct balancing him for any test this suddenly tight moment might bring. His hand steadied just above the guttapercha butt of his gun, and his thoughts turned dry and bitter. *A hell of a homecoming this is.*

HE heard the warning again, the taut-throat threat that was so sharp and hard with menace.

"Don't reach for that gun, mister! I'll shoot if you force me to."

Something changed in Ross Kennett's eyes then, a pinching of decision. The tone of that voice—and abruptly he understood. His eyes soured.

"What is this—a hold-up?"

"Don't you dare move!"

His lips twisted. He didn't move, waiting out that last fragment of uncertainty. At first he had thought it was some wild-headed, gun-happy kid who had hidden in the brush beside the road to collect himself a leggy roan mare and a new outfit—the easy way. The range was full of fuzz-faced youngsters trying to walk in the shadow of Wes Hardin or that toothy hellion who was filling so many graves along the Ruidoso—the one they called Billy the Kid.

He sat motionless on the seat of the rig, a man who had looked at trouble in a hundred shapes and knew the merit of cross-checking even the smallest fragment of uncertainty at a time like this.

"Why hell," he said slowly, "if you think I'm going to let any son of a . . ."

"And please stop that swearing!"

So he knew now how wrong he had been. He smiled crookedly. The brittle hardness was not there in that voice, nor the rakehell savagery. There was a difference. *Please stop that swearing!* Kennett grunted sourly, now knowing beyond all doubt. The voice behind him belonged to a girl, and she was scared—which could make this moment all the more dead-

ly. He turned very slowly on the rig's board seat.

She stood at the edge of the road, and fear was in her eyes, a bright, glassy sheen that warned him far more than the nickeled gun she held in her hand.

He said, quick and soft, "Take it easy, miss—go easy on that trigger!"

There was an edge to the moment, a balanced danger. Ross Kennett did not move, nor the girl. They watched each other, and then after a long moment the girl took a deep ragged breath and loosened her finger on the trigger.

The trapped air sighed through Kennett's aching throat, and he smiled. "That's better, miss."

Her voice had a dried-out harshness in it. "Nothing is changed. You stay right where you are, mister."

"All right."

"Don't you dare move."

"Not any, miss. Not at all."

"I'll shoot you if you move." There was a rising tension in the girl's voice, a kind of singing wildness. "You think I wouldn't?"

"No argument from me, miss. None at all."

He smiled, but it didn't get him anything. The girl's face was taut, stony; it was quite pale. She was medium tall, full-bosomed and slim, and the linen duster she was wearing over her dress showed the wrinkles and powdery dust of long traveling. Her eyes were a curious green-blue that was really neither color, and the nickel-plated pistol in her hand followed Kennett as he slowly stood up in the rig.

She said sharply, "What are you going to do?"

Her mouth was straight and quite colorless. Kennett felt the impact of the alarm in her voice, her brittle challenging anger.

He said quietly, "Get out of this rig, miss—that's all." He smiled. "This contraption wasn't built to accommodate long legs. I'd like to stretch a bit, if it's all the same to you."

"Don't try anything!"

"Considering that gun you're holding on me, I sure don't aim to. What's this all about, miss?"

"You know well enough!"

"Do I?"

"And don't try to pretend innocence!"

He shrugged.

"I mean it, mister!" Her voice was like a taut wire that was ready to snap. "Make one move toward me, and I'll shoot."

Kennett's dry lips traced a meager smile. "I reckon you would, lady. But it would sure hurt my feelings a lot if you had to."

He had an easy way of using his voice, with a wry humor in what he said, but he couldn't break the tension that lay so brittle and bright in the girl's eyes.

He said quietly, "Believe me, miss, I mean you no harm."

But nothing changed in her eyes.

He moved with great care, and slowly, wrapping the reins around the whipstock that jutted up from its socket, and then stepping down to the ground. He stood there in the deep dust of the road, a tall and heavy-shouldered man stretching the kinks out of weary muscles.

He looked at the girl with sardonic calmness. She was pretty, but not one he could call beautiful. There were small inperfections that a man saw at once with his first glance and then instantly forgot—the perky uptilt of her nose and the faint freckles across it—the unruly curl of the thick black hair that was pinned up under the somewhat ridiculous little hat she wore. Sunlight filtering through the ancient oaks gave her skin a sort of golden glow. He thought her hair would look better falling loosely down around her shoulders.

She said in a flat, hostile tone that brought his mind abruptly back to the gun in her hand, "Why have you been following me?"

Kennett's eyes widened with surprise. "So that's what is eating you!"

"The tracks of my horse are plain enough to see in the dust of the road," she said frigidly.

He nodded. "I guess—if I hadn't been so busy watching the hills for Comanches."

"You've been following me ever since I left town this morning."

Kennett smiled. "Didn't realize this was your private road, miss."

The contempt in her eyes was plain enough to see. He resented it, and out of his resentment came warm anger. In going back to Spurlock after three years in prison he was inviting enough trouble down on him without adding the unnecessary grief of a fool girl and her scatterbrained ideas about him.

He said curtly, "You want this piece of the road all for yourself, then you can sure have it, lady."

Her eyes widened, and something seemed to change in them. He didn't know what it was. He didn't give a damn. There was no patience left in him.

"I didn't know you were hiding in this brush," he said savagely. "Even if I had it wouldn't have made any never-mind to me. If I was looking for a woman, I sure as blazes wouldn't pick any crazy-headed female . . ."

He jerked his head in impotent wrath, and swore with pure disgust. "Ah, the hell with all this."

He pivoted on his heel, and started to climb back into the rig. The girl's quick voice caught at him.

"Please . . . please don't go."

He swung back, his face wooden. He spoke with intended roughness. "You've got anything to say to me, put down that gun first."

"I'm sorry."

She lowered the revolver, but the angry resentment rolled stubbornly through him. "Sorry for what?"

"Apparently I misunderstood your . . . your intentions."

"Nice of you to say so."

"I . . . I really am sorry."

"All right," he grunted. "So you're sorry. No apologies necessary, lady. We don't know each other, and no harm's done. We'll keep right on not knowing each other, and that will be just fine with me. Adios, *doncellita.*"

He turned again to the rig, his shoulders rigid with anger.

"No . . . please! You can't leave me here like this."

His boot on the rig's iron step, Ross Kennett swung his head and shoulders around, a feeling of rankled impatience rubbing through him. Some females no man could savvy and was a fool if he tried. He took a deep sighing breath.

"I wish you'd make up your mind," he complained wearily. "You'll shoot me if I stay, but you don't want me to leave. Get away closer—is that your philosophy for today?"

Color rose through the pallor of her cheeks. "I told you I was sorry I misjudged you."

"Forget it."

There was a glistening wetness in her eyes, a trapped anxiety that stood bright and sharp against the sheen of defiant pride.

"I was alone here, so terribly alone, and when I saw you stop here naturally I thought . . ."

"Naturally."

She stared at him with rising resentment. "If you have any idea at all that I'm one of those women who imagine that every man who comes along has designs on her, you are quite mistaken, mister."

Kennett shrugged.

"The fact of the matter," she told him stiffly, "is that I need help. When I missed the Tornillo valley stage, I rented a horse to take me on to Spurlock. That's how I got into all this trouble."

Kennett dug into his pocket for the makings. He watched the girl steadily, seeing the rising fury in her green-blue eyes.

"I stopped here to rest a while in the shade, and that . . ." Her anger soared. "That loco, hammerheaded misbred son of a devil the liveryman

rented to me spooked at his own shadow and ran away. I'm stranded, mister. I need a lift into town."

Ross Kennett stared at the girl with astonished amusement. This thing she was showing now was honest and genuine. He liked it. It stripped the illusion of giddy-headed foolishness from her. He was a stranger, and they had met on a lonely road out in the middle of nowhere. She had been afraid of him and probably still was, but she had a right to her apprehensions. He abruptly grinned.

"Why didn't you say so in the first place?" he said. He laughed softly. "I may need a shave and have half the dust of New Mexico on me, but I'm not as mean as I must look. Climb aboard, if you're ready, and let's get on to town."

He chucked her valise into the back of the rig, helped the girl up to the seat, and took his place beside her.

"Name is Ross Kennett," he said, and studied her with an oblique glance.

His name didn't mean anything to her, and he felt oddly relieved. This girl, then, was a stranger to Spurlock and its trouble-torn ranges. And he wondered what she would think when she heard the story the town would tell about him. Too late now to turn back, he thought in a gray, bitter way; too late now to care what this girl or anyone else thought about him.

Chapter Three

By mid-afternoon they were past Soldier Creek, and now the twin ruts of the road curved sharply to make the swing around the gaunt spine of Saber ridge.

This was a part of the valley that put its weight against Ross Kennett's memory. Off there to the south toward that saddle in the low hills was where Charley Higgs had the headquarters of his Fence Rail brand, and farther to the west was Ty McDonogh's Bear Paw. Andy Devore's sprawling Oxbow ranch was up on the bench that shaped the west flank of the valley.

These were the three outfits which threw the bulk of the weight in this county, and Ross Kennett knew that any trouble that came his way now that he was back would stem from one of those brands—or from them all. The scrubby little cockleburr outfits scattered among the rocky corners of the valley would not matter.

Kennett drove the rig at a steady, mile-eating pace. Twice during the last hour the girl beside him who said her name was Ann Jefford had tried to make conversation, but he could not recall what she had said, or if he had troubled to answer. A sense of guilt rubbed into his moodiness now, and he made a definite effort to make up for it.

"I imagine you'll be glad to get to town and be shut of me," he said. "I haven't been very talkative, have I?"

She looked around at him with mild humor. "I seem to recall hearing you grunt a couple times when I asked you some questions an hour or so ago."

Kennett hitched himself around on the rig's seat. He grinned wryly. "Guess I was thinking of something else."

"I gathered as much," Ann Jefford said, and studied him a moment with sober curiosity. Then she smiled. "I translated each grunt as meaning 'Mind your own business, Miss Jefford.' Am I right?"

Kennett chuckled softly. "I wouldn't remember for sure. Why don't you try me again with those questions?"

He liked looking at her. The soft gold of the afternoon sun was in her face, and her smile had a trick of reflecting its own warmth in her eyes. In a gay, laughing mood, he thought, this Ann Jefford would flash with real beauty.

She said, "All right, I'll try you once more, Ross. I asked if this valley was your home."

And that, he thought bitterly, was the blue chip question. The one that hit where it hurt, knifing him with a reply that echoed through his mind, but could not break past the sudden ache in his throat. *It wasn't much of a ranch, Ann, only a two-bit spread. But there was good graze and water, and the cabin I built was a tight one. Rita liked it. And the night she saw it for the first time was when those raiders killed her. They came down out of the hills, and they didn't care who they hit when they cut loose at the doors and windows. I saw her fall, Ann. I held Rita in my arms as she died, and I don't remember what I did after that. They sent me to prison for doing something that I don't remember at all.*

Ann Jefford's voice brought him up out of that aching black pit of memory.

"Must I ask you again, Ross?"

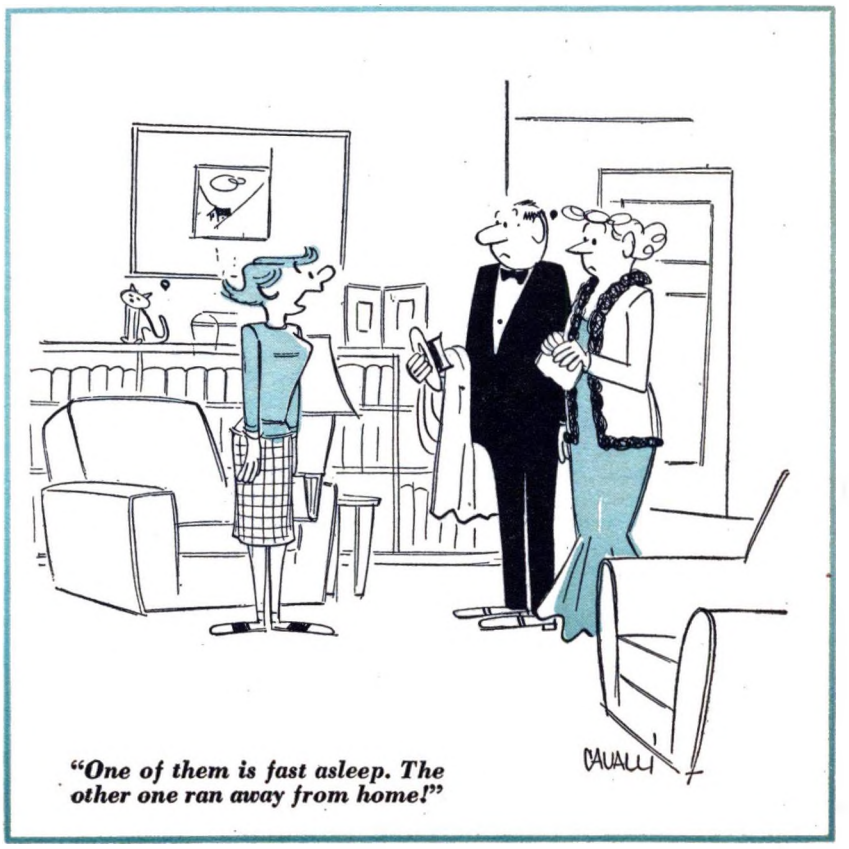
"Once was my home," he said, and his voice was short-clipped, curt.

Ann spoke softly. "Something must have happened. Maybe you'd rather not talk about it."

"Doesn't matter. Not now."

But it did matter, and it would always matter. He knew he would never be able to forget, and would always be tortured by those memories.

The road tipped down into the dry bed of an arroyo that was choked with sage and cactus. It lifted and was again on the grass, swinging once more to the north around the bent elbow of the ridge. They came to a place



"One of them is fast asleep. The other one ran away from home!"

where an out-cropping of granite shouldered up out of the ground, its bare face stained and pocked by erosion. Without thinking, Kennett pulled in the reins, halting the rig.

He could scarcely make out the branching road, now. Three years and more had healed the scar of those old wheel tracks. Grass had seeded in and taken root, and only in the indistinct, shadowy trace that angled across the dun grama grass could he make out the curving pattern of the old road. He turned and looked at the girl beside him.

"Could you spare a few more minutes getting to town?"

A questioning uncertainty rose in Ann Jefford's eyes.

He said quietly, "It's a place I'd like to visit again."

She smiled. "The town can wait."

He loosened the reins, and chucked the mare into movement. It was rough traveling across the bunch grass, the rig rocking and jolting. The road-trace angled sharper toward the crooked arm of Saber ridge and now, less than a mile ahead, he could see the tall stand of cottonwoods. And he could see the place where the house had stood.

The moodiness came down on him, a bitter aching. The trace led up the gentle slope, and he halted it just out from the trees. He didn't climb out. Some day he would come out here, alone. Some day. . . .

The utter stillness of the afternoon silently mocked all the dreams this place had once promised. The heat was a brooding torment. His eyes moved. The well he had dug was caved in now, and weed-grown; the pole corral was in ruins. Those were the small things, the rimming memories that touched his mind with only vagrant impressions. They didn't matter.

Only the house mattered. The barren scar where it had stood. The blown, bleaching ashes, and the fallen, flame-blackened skeletons of the timbers. The crumbled remains of the stone fireplace and chimney that, now, pretended so pitifully little.

I built it for you, Rita. It's all yours.

No, Ross. It's ours—our home after me are married.

You like it, honey?

I love it, darling. And then Rita had laughed softly, her pride and happiness giving her face a sort of golden glow against the deepening dusk of early night. *We'll build on wings, later. I want all this so much that it's almost frightening, darling—this home and the children we'll have, and our life together.*

Seated in the rig, the aching harshness came tearing out of Ross Kennett's throat in a raw and futile cry of hurt and hate. "God damn them!"

He felt Ann Jefford's quick, alarmed glance.

He pulled in a deep breath. "Sorry, Ann."

"What is wrong, Ross?"

"No matter." He was aware that his hands were so tightly clenched that his knuckles hurt. He loosened them. "No matter, Ann," he said again.

Her voice was very soft. "This place, Ross—it was your home?"

"Yes."

He opened his hands and looked down at them, strong, blunt-fingered hands that had built a cabin and held the girl who would have been his wife. Both were gone now.

He heard his own voice as a slow, measured sound, like the echo of something dead. "We had just stepped inside so I could show her the home I had built for us. For Rita and me. And then they came piling up the slope and around the cabin. I don't know who they were, or how many. They shot through the doors and windows, and two of their bullets hit Rita. They killed her that night. They killed Rita."

"Oh, Ross!"

"I caught her as she fell, and she died in my arms. 'I love you,' she said. That was all she could whisper, Ann. 'I love you, Ross.' And then she was dead. Rita was dead."

"I'm so sorry, Ross," Ann murmured.

He couldn't stop the words. They kept tumbling through his mind and out of his heart, and he couldn't stop them.

"I was sitting there on the floor holding Rita when those raiders came in. It was dark, and I don't know who they were. I don't think I ever really looked at them. All I could see was Rita—Rita. And she was dead. I guess that was why they didn't kill me that night—seeing what their bullets had done to Rita Devore."

"But why, Ross?" Ann's voice was a whisper crying out against his tragedy. "Why?"

"Because my father was a Southerner who went over to the North during the war. That was why, Ann. He was a Texan who didn't believe in what the South was fighting for. Ten years after the war was over, and they were still fighting it around here. Bush-whacking, night raids by the Ku Klux Klan, houses burned. They meant to kill me that night because I believed the same as my father. It takes a long time for hate to run down in some men, Ann."

"Oh, Ross!"

"I guess I went loco after that night," Kennett said, and an ache was in his throat. "I don't remember what happened. All I know is what the people in Spurlock told me."

Ann reached across and put her hand on Kennett's. She was silent.

"They told me I came walking into town that night, carrying Rita's body. Then they said I stole a horse and rode out of town. They say I picked up the tracks of some men, and trailed them to a camp back in the mountains, and that I cut loose with my rifle without any warning and killed three of them. Innocent men, the people of Spurlock said."

He looked at the girl beside him. His voice was flat, harsh.

"They claimed I was wrong about the tracks I followed that night. I don't know whether I was right or wrong. I don't remember anything about what they said I did. But they convicted me, and sent me to Leavenworth. That is where I've been the last three years, Ann—in Leavenworth prison."

She pressed his hand. "I'm so sorry, Ross."

"It's all over, now."

"Is it, Ross? Is it really all over?" He jerked his head. "It'll never be over until I know for sure about myself. That's why I came back—to find out if I can."

Ann was looking at the flame-scarred timbers and the crumbling chimney. "And the house?" she murmured.

"They said I burned it down that night. Maybe I did, Ann. I don't know. I built it for Rita, and I wouldn't have wanted anyone else to live in it. Maybe I did burn the house after Rita was murdered."

He looked at the girl and saw the sadness in her eyes. He made a weary gesture with his hand.

"Sorry I saddled you with a stranger's grief, Ann."

"Thank you, Ross," she said softly. "Thank you for telling me."

"It's late," Kennett said. "We'd better be getting on to town."

Chapter Four

Spurlock lay loose-coupled and sprawling in the broad hollow of the valley, with the gaunt hills at its back rising and rolling toward the distant Sangre de Cristo mountains. The sun was red in the west, and the shadows were long. It had been, Ross Kennett suddenly remembered, nearing sunset that day three years ago when he had rolled out of Spurlock in irons, with a pair of armed deputies traveling in the stage with him to make certain that he got to Leavenworth without making an escape.

They had been very careful, those deputies, very cautious. "Keep a shotgun on this jigger all the way,"

Lou Emmett had warned in his thin, malevolent tone. "Give this galvanized Yankee a chance, and he'll kill you without ever remembering it. Loco as hell, he made the court think. But in my book he's just a yellow-dog rimrock artist."

Kennett swung the rig down the slant of the hill, his gaze and his mind reaching out ahead to that scatter of sun-faded buildings. Time had not made many changes. A few new shacks off to the south in the Mexican section they called Chihuahua-town, but other than that the boundaries were much the same.

Spurlock would be like this forty years from now, he thought sourly—if it was here at all. The town would not change for the good, nor the people in it. Growth did not come to a town that nourished its gnarled roots on the rancor and bitterness of a war that was long years dead.

THE mare was jaded from the day's long pull, and Kennett did not push it. With town so close ahead, he found himself reluctant to enter it, and he wondered moodily how much of that reluctance was fear. He had a right to the dread and apprehension that lay so cold and dismal in him. Spurlock held too many memories for him—and it also remembered. It took hate a long time to run down in range towns such as this one.

The rig clattered the loose planks of the bridge across Dry Creek, and the twin ruts of the road widened to the tawny dust of Texas street, which was the town's main artery of commerce. They came abreast of Clint Letham's livery yard and stables, and Kennett pulled the mare down to a slow walk. He looked at the girl beside him, and saw her eyes taking in the town with a woman's searching curiosity.

"Spurlock," he said, and made a gesture at the street and its flanking buildings. No paint there, no color, no warmth of newness or friendly hospitality. "Well, what do you think of it?"

Her glance at him was quick and unreadable. Then she smiled. "You hate this place, don't you?"

He looked at the street with its deep dust and its restless traffic of riders and buckboards, the faded front-flared stores and shops, and the squat red-brick building that housed the court rooms and the sheriff's office and jail. A tough and unforgiving town, this Spurlock.

He said, "I've got good reason to hate it."

They were deep in the town now, and a rising pressure on the street put its weight against Kennett, shutting the girl out of his thoughts. The street was crowded with the traffic of buckboards, heavy freight outfits, and punchers in town for the day's festivities. Men saw Kennett, and memory slapped harshly into their weather-stained faces. A current of hard and thorny excitement traveled up the street ahead of the rig, like a churning flow of frigid water. It had a sound to it, low and sullen with malice—yet it was a thing that was not heard, but felt in the nerve-ends and the dark corners of the mind.

Gus Henderschott, an oldster who ran a shoestring brand up near Dutch Flats, in the valley, came out of Four-bits Alley driving a plank-bed wagon. The wide swing of his team brought him into the path of Kennett's rig. They both drew rein to avoid a collision.

"Howdy, Gus," Kennett said, and smiled. "I can wait. It's your street."

Recognition roiled the man's cloudy eyes and turned his face stiff, wooden. He nodded curtly, slapped his team with the reins and finished his swing into Texas street, his wagon rolling heavily.

Ross Kennett looked at the girl beside him, and his smile was thin and sour. "A coyote would get a more cordial welcome than they'd give a Kennett in this town."

"Who is he, Ross?"

"Name's Gus Henderschott. Runs a few head of cattle in the west fork of the valley, up close to the mountains. Hires out to the big outfits at roundup time."

Ann Jefford's gaze was on the cowman's gaunt back, and a resenting pressure had taken some of the rich color out of her lips.

"He could learn a few lessons in common courtesy, it seems," she murmured.

The Gadsden Purchase hotel was just ahead. Kennett angled the rig toward it.

"Gus plays the best hoe-down violin around here, Ann, and you never saw a bigger cut-up at a party." He felt the silent question in the girl's eyes, and spoke evenly. "Don't judge him too short, Ann. He had two sons fighting for the South, and he lost them both at Sabine Pass in '63. The Kennett name is on the black page in Henderschott's book."

Faded cotton bunting had been tacked along the gallery rails of the Odd Fellows Hall, and a sign said, DANCE TONIGHT. A traveling dentist had set up his portable chair at the corner of Texas and Ute streets, and farther on a red-faced drummer was standing on a packing crate to hawk his stock of toiletries and fancy soaps to a small audience of punchers and townsmen.

A man came weaving out of the Keg House saloon, hauled up sharply and stared at the approaching rig, and then sent out his whisky thickened shout along the crowded street.

"Ross Bennett's back! Damn if that Lincoln-loving killer didn't come back after all!"

All movement seemed to halt, and the street turned suddenly cold. Cowmen and townsmen heeled around toward the approaching rig; hard eyes and stony faces and lips pressed thin and flat with thorny contempt. Anger rowelled Ross Kennett, and he tried to clamp it down. It took everything he had to ignore those harsh faces, and hold back his own thrust of bitter challenge.

Ann Jefford felt the cold sting of those silent stares, and her voice was as soft as a whisper.

"Have you no friends at all here, Ross?"

"A few." His voice was slow and dry. "A very few. And most of them are afraid to admit it."

"You shouldn't have come back," she said swiftly, and touched his arm with her hand. "Why did you?"

"I've got a job to do," Kennett said, and motioned toward the canvas-covered bulk in the bed of the rig behind the seat. "It's that new-fangled barbed wire fencing—I'm here to try to sell the stuff. A man's got to make a living, Ann."

KENNETT drew rein at the hitch rail in front of the Gadsden Purchase, halting his rig near some farmer's flatbed wagon. A crowd was starting to gather, and somewhere on the street an Oxbow puncher was singing out a call for Andy Devore. Malice was riding this moment, like the touch of a chill wind. Kennett felt it, and he knew Ann Jefford sensed it.

Her voice came up to him, soft-sharp. "Is that your only reason for coming back, Ross—your real reason?"

Pressure flattened his mouth. He looked at the gathering crowd of cowmen and townsmen. Their faces were hard-lipped, unfriendly. Men who were rankled by his return and wanted him to know it. They weren't talking. Their silence was a weapon in itself, building its thorny pressure against the man in the dusty rig. For an instant a frosty challenge rose in Kennett's eyes, and then with an effort he clamped a lid on it.

He looked again at the girl beside him. "I spent three years in prison for a shooting that I can't remember," he said, and his voice was low, harsh. "I want to find out—if I can—if it's true what they said about me. If I killed three innocent men that night, I want to know it."

He took a slow breath. He spoke very quietly. "But if those men were part of the gang that murdered Rita, then I want the rest of them. And I'll get them, Ann. I'll track down

every mother's son that's still alive, and make him pay for what he did to Rita Devore that night in my cabin."

Chapter Five

ANN was gone, but the look that had been in her eyes stayed with Ross Kennett as he made his way out of the Gadsden Purchase. There had been a coldness in her voice as she thanked him for the help he had given her. And in her eyes had been a look of pity, a revulsion and condemnation. He thought bitterly: *I couldn't have done a better job of making her think I'm a killer.*

And then he told himself savagely that it didn't matter a damn what she thought of him. She was a stranger. He had given her a ride in to town, and had carried her valise into the hotel for her. That was all. She was only a face and a name to him, nothing more than that, and he didn't care what opinion she had of him. He told himself that grimly, stubbornly, but it was an empty voice that echoed hollowly through the corridors of his mind as he went down the hotel steps. He knew that he did care what Ann Jefford thought about him, and it was too late now for him to do anything about it.

The crowd had swelled along the front of the hotel and around his rig. Most of those men he had known all his life, and had once liked. He saw the liveryman, Clint Letham, and gaunt Sherm Crawford, who owned the feed store. There was bent-shouldered old Chappie Cole, the bootmaker, and Will Hanrahan, whose hands were indelibly stained with the ink of his newspaper press. And there was Charley Higgs with his Fence Rail crew, and Ty McDonogh and his Bear Paw hands, along with several of Andy Devore's Oxbow riders.

Kennett faced them all as he went across the plank walk and stepped into the street. He could feel the acid sting of their stares, the wary curiosity and the guarded wonderment. *He's the one who went loco and killed three men without ever remembering it.*

Kennett walked slowly, with the deliberateness of a man who had traveled this bitter distance a thousand times before in his mind. There was nothing new in the moment, only the final reality of it. He saw an aisle open up for him in the watching crowd, and he moved steadily toward his waiting rig. Some man spat into the dust close in front of him, and he heard the starchy malice in the voice.

"Seems as how they don't care what kind of snakes they turn out of prison these days."

Kennett paused and turned. The man was Ed Harroll, who had spent the best forty years of his life riding for Andy Devore's brand. Rancor was in Harroll's faded gray eyes, the unforgiving hate of an oldster who remembered the girl who had died in a cabin at Saber ridge.

Ed Harroll's voice cracked harshly. "I'm talking about you, Kennett."

Ross Kennett shaped a smile on lips that were tight and dry. He said quietly. "It was plain enough all right, Ed."

"By God, that's how I meant it to be," the Oxbow man said, and the tone of his voice was short-clipped, brutal. "What are you doing back here, I want to know?"

The men around Ed Harroll stirred restlessly. Townsmen began drifting away from him, and several Oxbow punchers moved closer, making their alliance plain in this moment of bitter challenge. Kennett looked at those men, at Bud Creasey, at Little Tex Adams, and at Roy Case. Good boys, all of them, and as honest as the sun. But with the same gall of hatred souring their gaze at him.

Kennett put his words at Ed Harroll, speaking quietly. "The law put me behind bars for three years. The same law set me free again, Ed."

Ed Harroll spat again into the dust at Kennett's feet. "They should have let you rot in prison, damn you."

Kennett's smile slowly faded. "I did, Ed—for three years," he said softly.

He turned away from the Oxbow men, toward his rig, but he knew with dismal certainty that they wouldn't let him go. They wouldn't let him put an end to this moment.

The hate was strong in those men, too strong. It was a flame that demanded release, a cruelness that fed on its own unrelenting fury. It was the pride and the arrogance of men blindly loyal to their brand. They worked for Andy Devore, and it was Andy's daughter who had been murdered that night in Ross Kennett's cabin. That was the core of their hate, and they couldn't forget it. They blamed Kennett for Rita's death, and they always would.

As he turned to the rig, Kennett heard Ed Harroll's hard, gritty oath. "You damn, Lincoln-loving turncoat!" And he felt the jolting impact of the heel-hand blow that slammed him against the rig's high wheel.

He turned, anger rolling deep and heavy through him. He took a slow, ragged breath, fighting to clamp down his temper. He had known it would be like this, and he knew what he had to do if he was to see this job through. Pride didn't count now; it didn't matter.

He looked into Ed Harroll's hate-raging eyes, and spoke quietly. "The War's over and done with, Ed. Let it stay that way."

But it wasn't the War the man had been thinking of, only the excuse it gave him to curse Ross Kennett. Ed Harroll was beyond stopping, goaded by his own malice and the watching crowd of men. His fury kept mounting until there was no longer anything rational in it, a black flame in his

"You sure we're not keeping you folks from anything?"

eyes, his mouth flat-lipped and twisted into sneering contempt.

"Damn you, Kennett—damn a dog like you!" he said, and there was a kind of singing wildness in his voice. "And you had the gall to show your face in this town again!"

The anger, hot and resenting kept lunging up in Ross Kennett, and he kept shoving it back, stubbornly and a little desperately.

"Look, Ed—"

"Don't talk to me, Kennett! You're the one to blame for Rita Devore being killed that night, damn you."

Kennett's voice came quick and hoarse. "No, Ed. No—"

"Andy told you time and again he didn't want you seeing his daughter. It's your fault that Rita was murdered."

"For God's sake, Ed, be reasonable."

"Andy told you, but you wouldn't listen to him. You, a damn Lincoln-loving turncoat Texan that had to keep on chasing Andy Devore's daughter."

Kennett raised both hands in a weary, futile gesture. "I loved her, Ed. Rita loved me. Didn't that mean anything?"

"All you loved," Ed Harroll spat out viciously, "was the size of Andy Devore's ranch. It's the kind of stunt to be expected from a galvanized yankee like you. You didn't care a damn for Rita."

All patience splintered in Ross Kennett, and his voice turned sharp, brittle. "That's enough, Ed."

"Eighty thousand acres, and you were trying to use a sweet girl like Rita to get your hands on them. All those lies you told her . . ."

SUDDENLY talk was not enough. Harroll's rage spilled over with a harsh and savage abruptness, and he lunged blindly at the man by the rig, slugging with his fist.

There was pain in the impact of the blow that raked the side of Ross Kennett's jaw, but he had known pain before. It was the man's words, bladed and brutal, that tore so deeply and cruelly into Kennett. The pain of a blow he could stand, but not the torture of such lies.

Even then, in that last fraction of a second, some unthinking restraint checked the fist he had started toward Ed Harroll's contorted face. He halted the blow, and used the flat of his hand to shove the oldster away from him. Harroll stumbled backward, tripped and fell.

But in that moment of harsh condemnation the judgment of the crowd was streaky and corrosive. They had seen Kennett start a hard, shoulder-driven blow, and they had seen the old man go down. Time did not register any details but that. Somewhere back in the crowd a voice shouted savagely.

"Half his size and twice his age—that's a Kennett's way of fighting!"

And in the flare of that voice the crowd became a surging mob, wild and implacable in its released violence. Little Tex Adams, a towering man of huge shoulders and powerful arms, was the first to reach Kennett. He came lunging across Ed Harroll, who was still on the ground, and looped a ponderous blow at Kennett's face. It never found its mark.

Temper broke loose in Ross Kennett, and the iron in him changed to steel. He stepped aside from Adams' blow and sledged his fist to the man's middle, hearing the explosive bark of the man's breath. He saw pained astonishment strike into the man's face, and crossed his right to the shelf of the jaw. Adams' eyes glazed, and he sagged.

Violence was a storm flaring wild and free through Ross Kennett as the mob surged toward him. He caught the big man's arm, jerked him around, and with a heave of his shoulders sent him ramming into the crowd.

There was, Kennett knew bleakly, no escape for him now. Nor was there any real desire for escape. He was beyond caring. In him was defiance and the streaky wrath that had always come to him in such moments. Not a blind, witless fury, but one that was sharp and sure and brutally efficient. Had he been able to reach the wall of a building, he would have put it to his back. But the mob had him sealed off from the hotel wall. Therefore, he instinctively did the next best thing, which was to step back into the narrow vee between his tied-in rig and the flatbed wagon, and there he made his stand as the crowd closed in on him.

A face, hard-bright with anger, lunged close to him. Bud Creasey's face. He knocked it away from him, spun, and drilled a blow to Roy Case's body, smashing that Oxbow rider away from him. In that wedging space between rig and wagon there was only room for two or three men to come at him at a time, and those men were roughed off balance by the crowding pressure of the mob behind them. Kennett drove his temper at those leaders in a swift and savage attack. He kept slugging at those faces and bodies, feeling the shock of blows striking him, but no pain. Hands tore at him, and voices shouted. He caught the blue glint of a gun barrel swinging close, and rocked his head away from it. He gripped the wrist, twisted brutally with a sharp spin of his body, and heard some man's howl of agony.

The warm salt of blood was in his mouth, and a wet redness was dimming his vision. Somewhere in the mob a man was shouting over and over: "He's only one man! Get him—get him!"

A fist caught him in the mouth, and another drove a deep numbness into the base of his ear. There was no longer awareness in him, no sharp-running current of will and emotion. Instinct ruled him, and desperation. And a deep, dull flow of dismal knowing.

This could not last, and he knew it. He couldn't keep holding off those contorted faces much longer. But he could try. He could give them a fight to remember. Texas had given him birth and New Mexico had given growth to his body, and the desert was imbued in him, harsh and unyielding.

HANDS groped at him, trying to pin down his arms. He tore free, and brought up his knee to the groin of a man he could not see. But he heard the splintered cry of agony, and the hands fell away from him. A sense of rage, a wild and black and unthinking thing now, spilled through him, and he went plowing headlong at the mob, swinging short chopping blows. He felt the crowd fall back from him, thinning momentarily in number, and he knew in a vague, shadowy way that now was his chance, his only chance, to break through.

And he knew dimly that his foot was close against the body of some man who was down in the dust of the street. He looked, and it was Ed Harroll, unconscious from a blow or the kick of a boot, and forgotten by the mob who had fought to defend him. A thought rolled dully through Kennett's mind: he'll smother if they don't get his face out of that dust.

But the mob was blind to all but its own unchecked fury. The crowd came rushing forward, tight-packed and hungry. They came at Kennett from the flanks and from his front, and he drove at them, slugging and chopping. He stooped, caught Harroll's shoulders, and lifted. He was amazed in a slack and distant way how heavy the Oxbow foreman was. He had always seemed such a slight man, thin-shouldered and with only a crusty will to make up for what he lacked in bulk. But he seemed huge now, with ponderous weight.

A blow clipped Kennett's cheek, and another sledged the back of his neck. He kept fighting to get the unconscious man up from the ground, his face out of that thick, powdery dust, and another blow, a thousand blows, were slamming his face and body. He knew he was close to falling, for the earth was tipping and turning beneath him. He tried stubbornly and a little stupidly to steady

his balance, but in his mind was the dismal knowledge that this, at last, was the limit of his endurance.

And in some thin, splintery way he could hear some man shouting in ringing harshness above the beating roar of the mob. It was, he thought dimly, Will Hanrahan's voice.

"Let him alone, you fools! He's trying to save Ed Harroll's life, and all you can think about is tearing him apart!"

Chapter Six

He stood there at the rim of the street with his head down and his big shoulders bowed by weariness and the weight of Ed Harroll's unconscious body. He had taken cruel punishment in those unprotected moments while he lifted the Oxbow foreman out of the dust. His shirt was shredded, showing muscles that trembled from hurt and the reaction of strain, and there was a sobbing agony in the pumping of his lungs. He looked like a man who had been punished to the limits of body and mind, and he was.

His chest bore the marks of the blows that had battered him, discoloring welts and the angry red of bitterly bruised flesh. Some man's ring had opened a raw cut across his temple, and blood was running down his cheek.

The street was silent, staring at him now in a kind of wondering awe. He continued to hold Ed Harroll's lax body during all that long moment. Then after a while he raised his head and looked at the crowd. He held them motionless with his eyes. Presently, then, he turned and with a ponderous effort lowered the unconscious man to the sturdy plank walk behind him.

Released from Ed Harroll's weight, he straightened slowly and turned back to face the crowd. There was something superb and indomitable in the way he stood there, watching the crowd and waiting. Something shining and fine and terrible in the small thin smile that bent and set the shape of his swollen lips.

That was Ross Kennett as he silently challenged the crowd of men on Spurlock's dusty street. A proud man, unbowed by the punishment he had absorbed. A towering man. An indomitable man. He had been torn and battered and beaten—but not defeated.

He took a deep, shuddering breath and spoke hoarsely. "Not done yet." He raised his big hands and waggled his fingers at them. "Come on, boys, there ought to be enough of you."

And suddenly shame was a deep cold tide washing through the crowd of townsmen and punchers facing him through that waiting hush.

A man grunted in soft awe. "He means it, by God!"

And another man swore in corrosive self-contempt. "I never knowed before. It takes something like this to make a man smell his own stink."

Even then the crowd did not break. They were locked motionless by Ross Kennett's gaze and by the grip of their own shame. It was Will Hanrahan who had the words for this moment of ingnominy, and the newspaperman's voice reached sharp and clear through the damning silence.

"The next issue of the *Sentinel* no man in this town will want to buy. I'll have gall in my throat when I write this story, but by all eternal it's going to be published. This town deserves to look at its own blackness. A mob tearing at one man—I was part of that mob—and he whipped us all. Yes, he whipped us. I fought for the South during the war, but right now I'm not proud of it. Not after seeing what happened here today. I think—by God, I think this man Kennett has more Texas in him than this whole town of Spurlock, and I consider it an honor to stand here and tell him so."

Kennett turned heavily. He swayed, and gripped the hitch rail to keep from falling. Sherm Crawford, who carried the livid welt of one of Kennett's blows on his cheek, stepped close and spoke.

"Let me give you a hand, Ross."

Kennett pulled himself erect. He looked at Crawford and his eyes flamed refusal. Straight and indomitable, he pushed away from the hitch rail, showing the steely spirit that had carried him this far and would carry him on.

He walked slowly, steadily, without a tremor in him. He came to the winged doors of the Cattleman's Relief, turned, and went into the saloon. Men followed, somehow unable in that moment to escape the shame of what they had done and wanting in a futile, tortured way to make up for it.

Kennett moved up to the bar and set his arms down on the mahogany, leaning heavily on them. Rudy Dueen came up to him.

"A drink, Rudy."

Dueen nodded. He turned and picked up a bottle on the back-bar shelf, and set a glass in front of Kennett.

"It's the best, and on the house."

Ross Kennett raised his head. "I'll buy my own drinks, Rudy."

Dueen was a gaunt man with not many illusions left in him. He looked at Kennett, and his face slowly reddened.

"I'll have you to know I never left my doors during that fracas," he said abruptly. "Nothing in that to be proud about, but if you reach for your money to pay for this drink it's me you've got to fight, Kennett."

A wry grin bent Kennett's bruised mouth. "I've had enough of that to last me a while," he said.

The sound of running pounded on the plank walk outside the saloon, and a man came banging through the batwing doors. He halted at once, his eyes bright and cold as he surveyed the room and saw Kennett at the bar. He paced forward, halted again, and his voice slapped hard and flat against the silence of the place.

"You, Kennett! I'm taking you in."

Kennett set down his glass and turned deliberately. The shadow of a smile touched his eyes with derision as he looked at Lou Emmett.

He said softly, "So?"

He was a tall man, this Lou Emmett, with beef in his shoulders and the shrewdness of an ambitious man in his small pale eyes. The badge of a deputy sheriff glinted on his vest with polished brightness. He dropped a hand to his gun, and spoke with the thrusting arrogance of a man constantly aware of his office.

"It didn't take you long to make trouble, did it? But we handled you once, bucko, and we can do it again. It's the cooler for you, Kennett, and then you're going to get the hell out of this town and never come back."

His hand was hard on his gun. He raised the weapon half out of leather and held it that way, an invitation and a promise. Kennett looked at the gun, and he raised his eyes and looked at the man.

He said softly, "Get out of here, Lou."

The deputy's face swiftly darkened, and a look of indecision broke at once across his eyes.

"Get out," Kennett said again, softly.

And Ty McDonogh, his heavy face stained with the bruise of a blow, spoke through the hush with a lunging roughness.

"You heard him, Emmett. Go somewhere else and chase rabbits. They're more your style, but you'll find yourself one damn big man to tangle with if you stay in here."

Kennett reached behind him and lifted the whisky glass. He stood there with his back against the bar, as he raised the glass to his lips. He looked across the rim of the glass at the townsmen and cattlemen who crowded the saloon, his gaze cool with irony.

"Gentlemen, how," he said then, and had his drink.

He set the empty glass down on the bar, still looking at the men who had followed him into the saloon. He wanted to remember those faces as

they were now. He wouldn't forget. It was in him to be stone-hard, tough; the men in this room had taught him how, with the three years they had given him behind Leavenworth's bitter walls. And he had learned other things: the deadly little tricks that gave speed and direction to a gun lashing up out of leather, the Apache's skill at reading trail sign, the gambler's shrewd art of measuring the qualities of men.

Kennett had learned these things, and others. Yet beyond and above them was the shadow of Rita Devore, his memory of her warm and strong and aching in its futility. The power was in him to ride the men in this room cruelly with his derisive contempt, to humble and perhaps break them. The desire had been in him, harsh and bitter, that moment he had stood over Ed Harroll's unconscious body and faced them. But he didn't care now. These men and what they thought of him did not matter. They had been for a short violent time a part of a mob's blind cowardice, and they would forever be shamed by it. The shame and regret was in their faces now; that was enough. The silence of the saloon was an echo of each man's self-blaming contempt.

He pushed away from the bar, steadied himself, and moved with the stiff-jointed deliberateness of a man to whom each step costs a definite effort of will and muscle. He went past Lou Emmett without bothering to look at the man. An aisle opened up for him and he moved along it, feeling the eyes of the crowd upon him as he made his way to the door.

Silence followed him as he went out of the saloon. The sun was down, but the heat lingered, still and oppressive at this lagging hour of day. He paused on the plank walk, trying to think, trying to bring some measure of order back into his mind.

He had not eaten since early morning, but he was not hungry. The thought of food roiled him with sudden sickness, and he put it out of his mind. What he needed more than anything was a hot bath in the big wooden tub Art Mifflin kept in the back room of his barber shop. And then a bed. He thought he could sleep for a year, once he had a bed under him. He felt, mind and body, like hell.

Chapter Seven

Ann Jefford saw it all from the window of her room in the Gadsden Purchase, overlooking the street. At first she had felt a deep pity for Ross Kennett as he stood by his rig facing the honed contempt of that crowd of ranchers and townsmen. But when that crowd had changed so abruptly and violently to a shouting, churning mob a flame had run deep and wild through Ann, fascinated by this one man's unyielding stand against such overwhelming odds.

And when Ross Kennett had stood torn and beaten but undefeated at the rim of the plank walk he had made a picture that Ann Jefford would never forget. A picture of bright-shining courage, prideful and unbowed. He was like a drawn blade, tempered in battle, untarnished by fear, unchipped by defeat. There was magnificence in this Ross Kennett, and a thought settled strong and certain in Ann's mind.

He'd fight the world if he had to. Whatever he is, that man is not a murderer.

She stood by the window, watching as he made his way out of the saloon and to the barber shop down the street. Long minutes later she saw him come out of that place scrubbed clean and freshly shaved, but wearing the same ripped and torn range clothes. He disappeared under the wooden awning beneath her window, and she knew he was coming into the hotel for a room and a chance to rest.

He's got pride in him, she thought; *he'll want to be left alone.*

But she couldn't put out of her mind the brutal punishment he had absorbed in that fight. He had been hurt, and badly. She had seen ache and the agony of weariness in the way he had walked. Perhaps, she thought, there was some small thing that she could do for him. He had been kind to her that day, and she owed him anything that she could do.

Yet a sense of uncertainty nagged her. She was a stranger to this town, and she had felt in her first moment on the street Spurlock's rigid and unbending standards of right and wrong. A girl would have to walk carefully in such a town as this one, or be forever branded by her indiscretions, whether real or imagined. And being a girl with a will of her own, the thought angered Ann Jefford, bringing up a sense of rebellion.

Yet, she told herself, she owed consideration to the man she was going to marry. Ward Templin had his own stern pride. In the short time he had been in this valley he had taken on stature. And he had in him the restless, driving ambitions that would give him growth and increased power as the years passed. Nothing would ever keep Ward Templin from reaching the top, and it wouldn't be right for her to do a thing that might hurt him.

And, after all, Ross Kennett was just a man who had met her on a lonely road and been kind to her. She tried to put him out of her mind.

She turned to the dresser beside the window, trying a little grimly to put her mind to the task of combing and brushing her hair. She examined herself critically in the mirror. She was momentarily distressed by the burned redness of her nose and cheeks. Of all times to allow herself to become sunburned!

Wearing that ridiculous little hat in an open ride across this country had been sheer idiocy. She should have worn the one with the flowers around the crown and the full wide brim, with the ribbons to draw down and tie under her chin. It was a far more practical hat for the implacable sun of this desert country. But she had wanted to be gay and impractical and to look her prettiest when she traveled to this distant range town to join the man she was going to marry.

A fugitive thought slipped accusingly into her mind. *He's hurt and alone in a town that hates him, and there's not anybody to care.*

Pity and a deepening sense of personal guilt rubbed roughly through her conscience, and she turned abruptly away from the mirror and went out of the room.

The desk clerk was a small, gray man with shrewd, quizzical eyes and a colorless mask of a face. He had grown old among the currents of prejudice and bigotry that ruled the town of Spurlock, and a vague look of alarmed disapproval stirred in his eyes as he heard Ann Jefford's question.

"Do I understand that you're asking for Ross Kennett's room number, Miss?" he asked.

Ann nodded. "I thought I made myself plain enough."

The man's pale eyes cooled. "Plain enough, I reckon," he grunted, and his tone was sour. "The number is twenty-seven."

"Thank you," Ann said, and started to turn back to the stairs.

"Just a minute, Miss Jefford," the desk clerk said shortly. Ann swung around, and he was watching her with a disturbed frown clouding his eyes. He put down his cigar and fidgeted uncomfortably in his chair, his frown changing to a flushed and troubled scowl.

He dropped his gaze from Ann's, and looked down at his hands, swallowing audibly. Then he spoke curtly.

"Boy and man, I've lived in or around this here valley, Miss Jefford, and in my time I've learned not to push my nose into another body's affairs."

Ann smiled. "So?"

The flush deepened on the old man's face. "It's just that when you registered here an hour or so ago you said that you were expecting to be met

by Ward Templin," he said uncomfortably. "And Mr. Templin stopped by earlier, right after stage time, to ask for you. Mentioned you and him were going to be married."

Ann held firmly to her smile. "That is quite right. And so?"

"So I'd hate to see a nice girl like you get off on the wrong foot in this town, Miss Jefford."

Color rose into Ann's face. The oldster looked quickly away from her, his voice suddenly brusk.

"Don't get me wrong, Miss. It's only your welfare that I'm thinking about."

Ann's voice was cool, distinct. "And I take it that you consider that my going to Ross Kennett's room would be . . . indiscreet."

The desk clerk's eyes flicked up to Ann's, dropped again. "That's about it, Miss Jefford. No offense intended. It's just that . . . well, I thought . . ."

"I understand. But it would be entirely proper for Mr. Templin to visit me in my room?"

Relief flooded into the old man's face and into his voice. "Sure—sure. That's a different matter."

Ann said softly, coolly. "Ward and I aren't married yet, you know."

The man behind the desk colored swiftly. "No matter about that, Miss. Mr. Templin and this here Kennett fellow—they's a difference in men. Mr. Templin is high grade, and that Ross Kennett . . . well, it just ain't fit'n for a girl like you to be with him."

Anger rose sharply in Ann's eyes. "Thank you," she said coldly, softly. "It would seem that is for me to decide. If Mr. Templin comes in, you may tell him where to find me."

She turned stiffly, and went up the stairs. She knew she was being a little foolish in her stubborn defiance of the hard standards of this town, that this thing she was doing might be not quite fair to the man she was going to marry. But she had her own pride and sense of rightness. Indiscreet or not, she felt that Ward Templin would understand.

She rapped lightly on the door of Kennett's room, but there was no answer from inside. She knocked again, and called through the panel.

"I'm coming in, Ross."

She opened the door, then. He was sitting on the edge of the bed, and she had never before seen such a picture of misery. Swift pity welled up in her, and she stepped quickly across the room to him.

He was sitting with his head down and his shoulders bowed as though bent by the dead weight of his arms. She could hear the shallow rise and fall of his breathing, and even that whispery sound echoed its own misery.

"Ross, Ross!" she said.

He raised his head then, and stared stupidly at her. Recognition stirred against the dimness of his eyes, and he smiled vaguely.

"Well, Ann . . ."

Pity came rising up through her, swift and warm through the ache in her own throat. "What have they done to you, Ross?"

He tried to grin. "A mighty good job. I must look like the wrath of God. It's how I feel right now."

"Please . . . what can I do to help you?"

"I'll be all right," he said. His voice was slack again, distant. "I'll make out just fine."

"You're sick, Ross. You've been terribly hurt."

"Ann?" He raised his head. There was fever in his eyes, and beneath that the clenched tautness of a man who could not let go of himself. "Ann?"

"Yes, Ross?"

"I didn't let them know, did I? I didn't, did I?"

At first she didn't understand. Then, all at once, she knew. It was that pride in him, that bright flame of spirit. He was troubled, even now, that he might have in some unguarded moment betrayed to the town how badly he had been hurt.

"No, Ross," she said softly. "You were fine. I watched you, Ross. You walked straight and steady, and not once did you let them know. You were—Ross—you were splendid."

His head was sagging.

"Did you hear me, Ross?"

"Yes, Rita." His voice seemed to come from an incredible distance. He fought his head up, blinking dully at her. "Did I just call you Rita?"

"Yes, Ross."

"Funny I'd do that," he murmured ever so softly. A flame of agony rose in his eyes, and Ann saw it with a swift wrenching fear. He closed his eyes, and all his will to struggle on seemed to drain out of him. He started to sag forward, off balance, toward the floor, and Ann caught him and pushed him back across the bed.

"It hurts, Rita," she heard him murmur. "Hurts . . ."

She lifted his boots, and pulled them off. She lifted his legs up to the bed, and it was all she could manage to straighten the lax weight of his body.

"Rita?"

"Yes, Ross."

"I'm going to build a fine home for you . . ."

"Of course, you will."

His whisper was far away, incredibly far away, a dragging whisper. "We won't ever let them stop us. Not ever, Rita. We'll have our own home, and our own ranch. We've got a right to our own lives, no matter what they say or try to do."

"Oh, Ross, Ross!"

There was a stinging wetness in Ann's eyes, dimming her vision as she worked frantically over him. She pulled off the ripped and torn remnants of his shirt, and saw the raw, livid bruises on his chest and shoulders. She saw the great darkened welt behind his ear where some man's knuckles or the barrel of a gun had struck. She explored that swollen ugliness with her fingers, and heard him cry out softly in pain. Panic swept through her, a swift-flooding coldness that threatened to sweep away her control.

"Don't leave me, Rita," he whispered. Then his eyes came open, and for a moment clarity came up through the raging fever. "Why, you're not Rita," he murmured. "You're Ann."

She tried to speak, but there was an aching constriction in her throat.

He shook his head. "Shouldn't be here, Ann. Not with me . . . in this room. Shouldn't have come here . . ."

A sound brought Ann's eyes around, and it was Ward Templin standing in the doorway, a man of length and breadth and cleanly chiseled features that were stiff as he looked at her, expressionless.

Ann said swiftly, "He's badly hurt, Ward. Please get the doctor."

Templin stood tall in the doorway, not moving. He looked at Ann, and disapproval was sharp and stony in his eyes.

"He'll be all right. All he needs is rest."

"Please, Ward! He needs a doctor."

There was a tautness in Templin's mouth, an edge of anger. He spoke shortly, with a curtness in his tone. "You've no business here with him. Come with me, Ann."

She stared long at him, and silence deepened between them. She shook her head slowly, and her voice came with a quiet firmness.

"He needs help, Ward, and there's no one but me. He was kind to me today. I'm sorry, Ward. I've got to stay and do what I can for him."

For a moment Templin looked stonily at her. Then he bowed, a gesture that acknowledged her decision with dry irony. He smiled, a faintly mocking twisting of his lips.

"Your right to say, Ann," he said. "This fellow has brawled before and he will again, if what I've heard about him is true. You're only wasting yourself and the good will of this town on him. We'll talk about this later."

He turned stiffly and was gone. Footsteps came tramping along the outer hallway and Ed Harroll, limping on his game right leg, stepped into the room. He looked sharply at Ann,

and then bent over the man on the bed, exploring expertly with his work-toughened fingers.

"Takes more than a crack on the noggin to put a jigger like this one under," he said gruffly. He looked down at Kennett, swearing gruffly. "Now don't try to get proud with me, Kennett. I don't like you any more than I ever did. But you did me a turn during that fool ruckus, and now I'm handing it back."

He turned to Ann, a wry smile in his faded old eyes. "Best you go along now, Miss. I'll stay here and see that he's looked after."

The girl left the room. Kennett looked up at the Oxbow foreman, trying to think, trying to remember.

"That fellow, Ed—who was he?"

"Name of Ward Templin. Moved in here two-three years back, and owns a big chunk of the valley, including that strip of grass you used to have. Now stop frettin' and get some rest. I told that girl I'd look after you, and by grief, that's just what I'm going to do."

Chapter Eight

THE voices were familiar, reaching dimly into the half-world of Kennett's consciousness. They touched him, lightly and shallowly, without making any firm impression. They were like smoke drifting across him from a campfire, like shadows sliding across a land that was without depth or reality.

"He was clipped by a gun barrel, looks like," Doc Earnshaw said. "A wonder he didn't get more than only a slight concussion from that wallop."

"Then he'll pull through this?" It was Ed Harroll's voice.

"A good night's rest ought to do it."

"They tell me," Ed said, "that he stood there holdin' me up out of the dust while the mob beat him. That took guts, Doc."

"You'll find," Doc Earnshaw answered, "that the good Lord put just as much guts in Yankees as he did in Southerners, and maybe a mite more in them that was born in Texas. It's something to think about, Ed."

The voices came to Kennett as though from a far distance, touching him but not making their mark. They were a part of another world, one of hate and bitterness, and now they did not matter. He had fought to pull himself back to full consciousness, but now he no longer tried. He let go, letting himself drift. It was easier this way. A man deserved rest and peace, and this was his time for it. The raging hurt slipped out of his head; it was as though a cool, soft breeze had flowed through him, carrying him away with it. This, at last, was peace.

He saw the girl. She came out of the cottonwoods that flanked the creek, riding a bay mare that lifted its white-stockinged feet above the grass with a dancing lightness. The girl was hatless, her rich dark hair fanned by the afternoon breeze that flowed through the valley. She was smiling as she drew close and reined up beside him.

"Rita, I've waited a thousand years this afternoon," he said.

He kissed her, leaning out of his saddle to draw her close. When she drew back from him her eyes were quick and warm, and there was a note of teasing laughter in her voice.

"Ross, in case you don't already know, I rode ten miles just for that kiss."

"You're a brazen woman."

"Yes, shameless."

"I love you, Rita."

"I love you, Ross."

They turned their horses, riding up the long slant of the ridge. They swung their mounts at the crest, picking their way along an old game trail until they came to the grove of live oaks, and there they slipped out of saddle.

It was cool under the trees, the grass as thick and soft as moss. They didn't talk. This was one of those quiet eddies that came rarely to them on this hard, troubled range. The full sweep of the valley lay below them, its scheming jealousies and festering violence remote and apart from them; far away a hawk circled against the high blue of the sky.

"Ross?"

"Yes?"

"I'm sorry I couldn't meet you here last week."

"I missed you," he said.

She was sitting close beside him. He turned and saw the sheen of worry in her eyes.

"I think Dad knows, Ross."

HE felt the quick rise of bitter anger, and looked away so that she would not see it. Far away to the south was the distance-diminished cluster of buildings that marked the headquarters of Charley Higgs' Fence Rail ranch. And off there was Ty McDonogh's Bear Paw; from where he sat, Kennett could barely make out the sprawling house and corrals of Andy Devore's Oxbow, up on the bench.

"When I saddled up last week," Rita said, "I saw Dad give orders to two of the boys. It wasn't until I got to the Forks that I was sure they were following me, and I knew I couldn't come here. So I rode over and visited with Edith Higgs that afternoon."

Kennett said with a quietness he did not feel, "You shouldn't have risked coming here today, Rita."

Her voice cried out at him in protest. "I can't stand much more of this, Ross. I just can't! Dad spying on me as if I was bad—as if I was one of Big Nose Kate's girls . . ."

"But I can't leave my husband and run away with you. You're my husband!"

Kennett said, soft-sharp, "Don't talk like that, Rita."

"I mean it, Ross. I can't help it. Am I bad and to be spied on just because I happen to love a man Dad hates?"

"He's your father, honey. Andy thinks he knows what's best for you."

But Kennett couldn't reach her with his words. The dam had been broken, and all that aching bitterness trapped in her came spilling out.

"I'm not a child. I'm a woman. I want your love, and your children, and a life of our own. Is that too much to ask, Ross? Is it?"

He turned to her, and she was crying.

"Rita, Rita," he said softly.

Her voice rose swift and sharp with despair. "I didn't want to fall in love with you. I tried not to. But it just happened. Is it so terribly wrong, just because our families were on opposite sides during the War, for us to love each other. Is it, Ross?"

"No, honey. We'll work out a way . . ."

"They'll keep on hounding us until they've destroyed us. I know that now, Ross. I'm scared . . . really I'm scared."

Kennett looked off toward the Oxbow ranch buildings, and he hated Andy Devore for bringing these tears to his daughter.

He said gently. "We'll be married, honey. We won't let them stop us. As soon as I've got our house finished —another month now—we'll get married. There'll be nothing they can do to us then."

Her lips were dead under his.

"You don't know Dad, Ross. He can be so hard, so brutal. All these years the War has been over, but still he hates you for being a Texan who fought for the North. Sometimes—sometimes I think Dad is with those night riders who keep raiding you and some of the others in the valley."

KENNETT shook his head. There were times when he found it easy to believe such a thing of Andy Devore. The man was hard enough, his hatred for the North unrelenting enough. But he was not a rustler, a man who would burn good range to drive out his enemies. Kennett shook his head.

There was a flatness in Rita's voice, a harshness. "He'll kill you, Ross. If you marry me, Dad will kill you."

And then her fear and despair broke wild and frantic in her, the utter hopelessness of their dream shattering in her. She caught him with a kind of panicked desperation, and she fell back on the grass, pulling him down to her.

"Please, Ross. I'm so afraid for us. This is our time for love—today—now. There may never be a tomorrow. Whatever they do, they can't take this away from us." . . .

He opened his eyes, and a dim yellowness of lamplight was all around him. For a moment the dream clung to him with all its color and taste and texture, and without thinking he moved his arm around, reaching. But he could not find Rita. She was gone.

He turned his head, and saw Ed Harroll in the chair beside his bed. The man's eyes were alert, a question in them.

"Something you want?"

Kennett shook his head. He closed his eyes. Death was so complete, so final, with only hurt and emptiness in the memories. *It's not right, Rita. It's not quite fair.*

"You were talkin' in your sleep," Ed Harroll said. "Nothing I could make out, only Rita Devore's name now and then."

"You wouldn't understand, Ed."

"I reckon not," the Oxbow foreman grunted. "I'm at the edge of being an old man. Maybe I never was very long on brains. All I ever knew was cows and how to do an honest job of work. I always thought that was all I needed to know, but now I ain't so sure. Maybe there's a few things I've missed in this life."

Kennett opened his eyes. Harroll was staring down at his calloused, work-hardened hands. He didn't look up as he spoke.

"Man wouldn't talk about a girl while he was out of his head, if all he'd cared about while she was alive was marrying into a ready-made ranch."

"Thanks, Ed."

Ed Harroll raised his eyes. His gaze was flat, hard, cold. "But that makes no never-mind with how I look at you, Kennett. I'm telling you. In my book any man who was born a Texan and went over to the North during the War is two stripes lower than a skunk. That's how I read your pedigree. You did me a turn during that crazy-headed riot, and I spent a day and two nights watchin' after you while you was out of your head. You're on the mend now, and as I see it you and me are square."

Kennett looked steadily at the man. "Fair enough, Ed."

Harroll stood up, a short, weather-stained man with a hard trap of a mouth. There was silver in the beard stubble on his jaw, and weary creases in the lines of his face.

"One more thing while we've got this book open," he said shortly. "I seen the spool of bobwire you got in your rig, and I hear you aim to sell the stuff in this valley. You try that, and all you'll get is a load of grief, Kennett. I'm telling you. We don't want any of your damn Glidden wire on this range. We've got open grass here, and it's going to stay that way. You sell a fence in this valley, and there's plenty of men who'll see that it's soon tore down. I hope I've made myself plain."

Kennett smiled. "Plain enough, Ed."

"All right, then," the man grunted. He turned and tramped across the room to the door. He opened it and stood there with his hand on the knob, his stony gaze slanting back across his shoulder at the man on the bed.

"Might be a lot less grief all around if you packed up your gear in the morning, and pointed your rig out of this valley," he said bluntly.

"A lot less grief," Kennett said, and his smile was steady. "But I came here to do a job, Ed. I haven't got started yet."

Chapter Nine

KENNETT drove out of Spurlock early, taking the road that dropped down through the bottomland timber along Dry Creek before making its long swinging rise toward the bench and Andy Devore's Oxbow ranch. Ground mist was a thick sodden grayness on the low places, but once the road lifted the fog thinned out and was gone. Kennett drove briskly, for he had ground to cover this morning.

It was nearing noon when he topped the long ramp of the bench. Here was some of the richest graze in the valley, and Kennett never saw it without giving a mental tribute to Andy Devore's wisdom in picking this range for his home.

Yet now, as he looked out across this range for the first time in three years, a change was at once apparent to Ross Kennett. The grass was no longer as deep and lush as he had remembered it. It was close-cropped now, so thin and sparse that in places he could see the dun soil through it. A scudding breeze gathered a whirling dust-devil from around those denuded roots, and sent it spinning away past Kennett's rig.

"Over-grazed." And the surety of that thought stamped fine lines of distaste around Ross Kennett's mouth. Ambition he could accept in a man, but not when it became greed.

This was not ambition. This was the shortsighted blindness of a man who would unthinkingly destroy the finest graze in the country for the sake of a few fat seasons. This rich grama would never come back once it was destroyed by over-grazing. Only dust and eroding land would remain.

Kennett drove steadily along the twin ruts of the ranch road. Cattle ranged near and far across the bench, heavy-horned, slab-sided animals wearing Andy Devore's Oxbow brand from

flank to flank, their left ear overhacked and their right jingle-bobbed. There was no sleek weight on those animals that would bring a prime price at market. Nor would they pick up much fat grazing on this range.

A rider, looming huge in his saddle, came angling through the herd at a tangent obviously calculated to cross Kennett's path. Kennett drew his rig to a halt, waiting with calm patience. He wasn't sure about this giant of a man they called Little Tex Adams. The fellow had a reputation for enjoying nothing more than a good brawl, and Kennett's memory of him that first day in Spurlock was not a pleasant one.

Adams reined in his grulla, hitched his bulk around in the saddle, and surveyed Kennett with mild curiosity. The bridge of his nose was all out of proportion, and he rubbed it gingerly with one big hand. He eyed Kennett with rising speculation through that long moment of silence.

Then he said softly, "I figure you was just plain lucky."

Kennett shrugged. He smiled. "I'd be the last to disagree with you on that score."

A glint of genial malice rose up in the big man's eyes. "Why, now that's just what I was hoping you wouldn't say. You gave me a mighty sore nose the other day, Kennett. It's a fine big world out here, with no one to crowd us. I was hoping maybe you'd be interested in a friendly little brawl."

"When I fight," said Kennett gently, "there's nothing friendly in it."

THE big man chuckled softly. "Makes me all the more interested, hearing you say that." He appraised Kennett's shoulders, the heft of his body with lazy malice.

"I kind of got cheated when that mob went crazy that day," he said. He rubbed his nose again. "That was a real beauty you landed on this smeller of mine."

"Glad you like it," Kennett murmured.

"I keep wondering if you could do it again."

"No curiosity at all in me, Tex."

"Ah," the big man said, pleased. "Then you're plumb sure you could do it again. Now that is a point we can discuss to our mutual satisfaction, amigo. I admire a man who's always willing to argue a question friendly-like with the knuckles the good Lord gave him. Nothing like a good fight to purify a man's soul, I always say."

Kennett smiled slowly. "My friend, after what happened in Spurlock the other day, my soul is pure enough for the both of us."

The man was ludicrously disappointed. "Then you won't oblige me?"

"Not any, Tex."

"A mite scared, maybe?"

Kennett's smile faded. He said gently, "Take it easy amigo."

A slow flush rose in the big man's face. "Sometimes I talk too damn much," he grunted. "What I just said, I didn't say at all, Kennett. If you was short on nerve you wouldn't be heading over to brace a hellion like Andy Devore. You can do me the favor of forgetting what I said."

Kennett's lips loosened. "I didn't hear a thing, Tex."

"Why, that's fine," the man said, and the edge of that rakehell grin came back to his wide mouth. Saddle leather creaked under him. "Puts us right back where we started. About you and me—some other time, huh?"

Ross Kennett eyed those huge shoulders and powerful arms, feeling the pressure of the man's bland and genial malice. He shook his head slowly.

"Not if I'm in my right mind," he drawled. "Sorry, amigo, but I'd rather stay all in one piece."

The Oxbow ranch house was a sprawling, low-roofed structure, built to meet the demands of necessity, if not comfort. It squatted near the rim of the bench, as if in defiance of the New Mexico sun and the winds that in winter came scouring through the valley.

If there had ever been paint on the place, Ross Kennett could not remember it. As he drew near, the house loomed as drab and colorless as the man who had built it—and as unrelentingly hard. There was no fence to give the house the tempering grace of a front yard, and all life had long ago been stamped out of the bare earth close up to the porch.

The front door banged open as Kennett drew his rig to a halt, and Andy Devore stepped out on the porch, a short, square man with a Winchester snugged up under his right arm. He raked Kennett with his hot, harsh stare, and his voice came as a flat, temper-ridden sound.

"What are you doing here, Kennett?"

"Came to talk business, Andy."

For an instant utter disbelief soared in Andy Devore's pale eyes. He had never been a patient man, and the last three years had only creased deeper into his face the seams of thorny intolerance.

"By God, you've got your full share of gall!" he said heavily.

Kennett smiled quietly. "I didn't come here for a fight, Andy."

Temper flared loose and wild in the cowman, in his eyes and in the sudden lunge of his voice. "It's a fight you're going to get if you don't clear out of here. God damn you for a woman-killing yellowback!" He jerked up the Winchester, his rage blazing along the barrel at Kennett. "This is the one time I'll warn you, mister! I'll give you just three seconds to swing that rig around and lay a whip to that horse."

Kennett stared at the man. Anger came roiling up through him with that old hard edge of stubbornness, and then against this struck a swift and cold dismay. *He means what he says!*

Even then, as the time ribboned out, he could not make himself believe that the cowman would go through with his threat. Yet he read the almost maniacal fury in Andy Devore's eyes, the naked will to kill; he saw the thumb curling back the hammer and the finger taut on the trigger.

He said, quick and hoarse, "All right, Andy . . ."

He heard a door in the bunk house crash open, and a man's thin-pitched shout of protest, a wordless cry. That instant there was no longer anything sane in Andy Devore's eyes, and he was a man caught up by a wild and raging hate. The finger whitened on the trigger.

SEATED in the rig, Kennett twisted around and threw himself to one side. The Winchester voiced its roar. He saw the gouting smoke, and felt the angry wind-beat of the close-passing bullet. Then Ed Harroll was throwing himself across the porch, and tearing the rifle out of the cowman's hands.

"For God's sake, Andy!"

There was the sound of men running across the hardpan, the milling of close violence, the unchecked fury of Andy Devore's shouts.

"Give me that rifle, Ed!"

"Not until you're in your right mind, boss. God's sake, Andy!"

"He's the yellowback who ruined my daughter. God damn that man! I told him to stay away from Rita. I told him and told him to leave her alone."

"You listen to me, boss . . ."

"Give me a gun, someone. He's to blame for Rita being killed. Give me a gun, somebody, and I'll belly-shoot that bastard the way he deserves!"

He was a man without reasoning that moment. He grabbed for the rifle, but Ed Harroll twisted away and sent the weapon spinning out over the porch rail. Devore cursed, and slugged at his foreman, but Harroll caught him around the body, heaved him back against the wall and held him pinned there. Harroll's tortured gaze raked Kennett bitterly.

"You just couldn't let well enough alone, could you? What kind of a dog are you, Kennett, to come here like this? You know how Andy feels about you."

"I know how wrong he was about Rita and me."

There were punchers on the porch near Harroll—Bud Creasey, Roy Case, Lou Danvers. Contemptuous eyes, and hands close to holstered guns. The anger rose sharp and raw in Ross Kennett.

"What kind of a father is a man who wouldn't give his daughter a chance for her own life?" he flared at them bitterly. "You ought to be able to remember Andy Devore's wife. Do you remember ever seeing her smile? Or hearing her laugh? All that woman knew was working in this house, and doing what Andy told her to do, and thinking what he told her to think. That's how he tried to run his daughter's life. He's a little man who built himself up a big ranch, and all his life he's tried to act like God. He tried to rule Rita the way he rules this ranch and half of the county. He told Rita who to see, and who to hate, and if she'd lived he'd have told her who she could marry. And she'd have ended up like her mother, forgetting how to laugh and smile."

He stared at Andy Devore, and his words tore at him bitterly.

"Let me tell you something about your daughter, Devore. There was one time when she begged me to take her as my wife, even though we weren't married. I think I hurt her more by refusing that day than you ever did. But don't blame me for Rita being killed. If you'd given her a chance to live her own life, she wouldn't have had to lie to you and slip away to meet me. If anyone's to blame beside the raiders who shot up my cabin that night, it's you, Devore. You."

Ed Harroll swore in a thick, hoarse tone. "Get off this land, Kennett. Don't ever come back."

Kennett nodded curtly. He lifted the reins, and had one final look at Andy Devore's white face.

He said in a soft, pitying way. "Just a little man with a big ranch—and he really ain't anything at all."

He swung his rig and slapped the mare into movement, not once looking behind him as he drove away.

Chapter Ten

ANDY DEVORE slept late that morning, and when he awoke his mouth was sour with the echo of last night's whisky. A man was getting old, he thought irritably, when he couldn't handle his share of a bottle without paying up for it the next morning. As he stood up from the bed he studied his reflection in the mirror that was mounted on the door of the clothes press. Iron gray hair. No loose flesh around the jowls. Belly muscles as firm and unsagging as they had been the day he had slapped the Oxbow brand on his first cow, thirty-odd years ago. No hint of softness or weakness on that tight, compact body. Yet today, for a reason he could not identify, he felt twenty years older than the fifty-three that measured his lifetime.

He took a deep breath, and locked his mind against thoughts of age. He was not old. He was too tough to get old yet, and there were too many things waiting to be done. At fifty-three he could still work any man on his payroll down to this third britches button.

He combed blunt fingers through his thick hair, and clapped on the range hat that he would not remove until he rolled into bed again that night. He put on the faded shirt and the dusty butternut pants, and then stamped on his boots, stubbornly ignoring the protesting pain of his corns.

At the wash bench outside the kitchen, he sloshed cold water over his face and dried on a towel that showed the grime of a week's-long abuse. He turned then, a short, compact man with a ramrod back and a face that might have been blocked from granite.

The hands, he noted with satisfaction, had hours ago been sent to their day's chores. Little Tex Adams would be drifting the herd farther north along the bench. Not much water there, and the grass was poor, but they would be in a better position for a drive down to that range near Saber ridge, if Devore decided on that move. Such a move, he knew, might be risky, considering Ward Templin's claim on that grass. Andy Devore considered that element of risk a moment, then shoved it grimly out of his mind. Ward Templin wasn't using that grass. He was a newcomer in the valley, and therefore held no priority. If Oxbow needed that grass, then Andy Devore would move out on it, and to hell with Ward Templin and his hard-case crew. In Devore's book, the case was as simple and concise as that.

He turned, shouldered through the door, and tramped into the kitchen. He set himself down at the table, and felt the irritable sting of Gus Lubock's glance.

"Can't you ever come in to eat on time?" the man grunted.

Andy Devore lifted thorny eyes. "First meal I've missed in forty years," he snapped coldly. "I want to, I'll come in at noon for my breakfast. Don't get old and crotchety with me, Lubock."

Gus Lubock had been Oxbow's cook since the first herd was pushed into the valley, and it was his pleasure to never let Devore forget that fact.

"Me old!" he said, and snorted. "I've done half a day's work before you get your back off the mattress. Stop trying to take your gall out on

"That 'Good heavens, it's Marilyn Monroe' routine should be good for another ten years."

me, and pour yourself some coffee. It's hot."

Ed Harroll limped into the kitchen while Devore was eating. He lowered himself into a chair opposite the cowman, and reviewed the orders he had given the crew, his voice dry and matter-of-fact.

"Bud Creasey is cleaning out that brush around Hat Rock, and Roy Case is working them arroyos near the mesa. I set Lou Danvers and the rest to cleaning out Spanish springs."

Devore grunted, and went on with his eating. Harroll gazed morosely at the cowman.

Then he said sourly, "I set Little Tex to drifting the herd up to the end of the bench, like you said. You aiming to push down to that Saber range?"

Devore raised his blunt gaze. "We need that grass, we'll use it."

"Might mean trouble with Templin."

"Oxbow has handled trouble before."

"That's a rough looking crew Templin has."

Thorny intolerance rose in Andy Devore's eyes. "If Oxbow's crew ain't tough enough to handle the job I'll fire them and get one that is."

Ed Harroll shrugged. Gus Lubock lumbered across the kitchen and shoved a cup in front of the foreman.

"Pour yourself some coffee, Ed. He's cranky as hell this morning."

"You can keep your two-bits out of this, Lubock," Devore said.

"Sure—sure. I'm only a cook and got no more sense than a damn good foreman I see setting across from you."

Andy Devore put down his fork and shoved his plate back from him. He dug into his pocket for a cigar, rolled it briefly in his mouth, and clamped it between his teeth, never thinking to light it.

He looked steadily at his foreman as he spoke, his voice flat and incisive. "Oxbow is running a big herd. A big herd needs a lot of grass. There's good graze near Saber ridge, and Ward Templin doesn't own it. And he's not using it. If we need that grass, then we'll move out on it. You know anything better than that I'd like to hear it."

Ed Harroll spilled sugar into his coffee, slowly stirred it. He had worked for Andy Devore too long to be bent by the cowman's iron will, and against it he spoke calmly.

"Maybe not a better way, Andy, but I know one that's a heap less likely to start a war."

Derision soured Devore's tone, "By cutting the size of the herd, I suppose." Ed Harroll nodded slowly. "For three or four years now you've over-grazed Oxbow's grass. Once was a time I wouldn't have thought anything about that. But I've learned to see things different. Grass gone is slow to come back, and maybe never does. You've still got grass on Oxbow. Give it a rest, and it'll seed in again. All you need to do is cut down the size of your herd, Andy."

"A big herd means big profits."

"And maybe a big range war if you step out too far. Anyhow, you can't collect all the money they print in this country, Andy."

"My business is my business, Harroll."

"Yes," Ed murmured, "So it is."

Devore's gaze was flat, harsh. "You scared of a fight, Harroll?"

The foreman raised calm eyes. "Don't talk to me like that, Andy," he said softly.

"All right," Devore snapped. "Then we understand each other. You see that the herd is held on the north range for three or four weeks—as long as the grass holds out. Then round up the boys and move it down to Saber."

Ed Harroll's eyes were impassive. "Is that your order?"

"I'll write it out for you, if it ain't clear. Now ride out and send Tex Adams here. I've got a job for him to do."

Devore was in the corral binding up the injured fetlock of a cutting pony that had stepped into a gopher hole when Little Tex Adams rode in. He motioned the big man to wait, and then went grimly on with his work. The horse had been thrown and tied, but it was a fight to hold the nervous animal down while he tied the binding in place.

Finished at last, he cut the ropes loose and stepped back while the horse threshed up from the ground. Then he turned, wiping sweat and dust from his face, and slid his short body through the corral rails.

Little Tex towered above him, and in Andy Devore was always a short man's rankling resentment for a tall man's height. Devore climbed unceremoniously up to the corral's top rail, and seated himself there, the unlighted black cigar jutting from the hard trap of his mouth. He could look down at the big man now and he did so, his pale eyes reflecting the rash pressure of his will.

He said directly, "Do you know Ross Kennett?"

The big man smiled wryly, and rubbed the swollen bridge of his nose. "I met him once, but it didn't last long. A mob kind of got in my way."

"A pack of hot-headed fools!" Devore said, and a savage scorn was in his voice. "A crowd like that deserves everything Will Hanrahan said about them in his newspaper. They acted like a bunch of spanked pups after that show was over."

Little Tex Adams nodded enigmatically. "He's a lot of man, that Ross Kennett. He made everyone on the street that day feel small enough to crawl under a rock."

Andy Devore spat contemptuously. "A pack of lily-livered fools, that crowd!" And then he drove his brittle stare head-on at the big man in front of him.

"Ross Kennett is your job. I want him whipped."

Surprise widened Adams' eyes, and he shifted his boots uncomfortably in the deep tawny dust underfoot. "Well, that's some job, boss."

"You can whip him, can't you?" Devore drove back.

"Now, that's a question," Adams murmured in his slow, mild way. "I've been curious about it. He's a lot of man, that Kennett, and I kind of like to know about him. But when I met up with him yesterday and suggested that we have a little session just to find out, he said he didn't want any of me. Not any at all."

"Then pick a fight with him," Devore said, and his voice was a harsh, pitiless sound. "Crowd him, cuss him, or spit in his face—I don't give a damn how you do it just so it's done. I want that man handed a beating he'll never forget."

Adams closed his huge hand into a fist, and stared at it moodily. He shifted his shoulders uncomfortably and scraped his boots in the dust, and into his eyes crept a look of acute unease that he could not entirely conceal. Andy Devore saw it, and his voice broke out against the dragging silence with a savage gust of temper.

"Don't get the idea I'm scared of that man. It's myself I'm afraid of. Yesterday I almost murdered him. I'm not sorry. But if that fellow stays in this valley the day will come when I'll throw down on him again and kill him. So he's got to go, and it's your job to make him go. I don't care how you do it. But give that man a beating and drive him out of this valley before I have to kill him."

Adams left and Devore went back to the house and into the room that served as his office. He settled himself down at the big oak desk, and stared morosely at the ledgers and the stack of invoices beneath the ancient Walker Colt that was useful now only as a paperweight.

Desk work Andy Devore hated. A saddle-man wore his backsides down to a nubbin building up his ranch until it was the richest in the county, and then he had to spend his days fighting ledgers, bank statements, and a never-ending flow of invoices.

Time was when it had been in Devore's mind for his daughter to take over these chores. Rita had had her mother's fine skill with a pen, and she would have kept the ledgers neat and easy to read. A woman took naturally to such work, where the handwriting of a man who had spent the best years of his life in the saddle was scrawling and all but impossible to decipher.

Andy Devore scowled down at his desk. There were checks to be written, the ledger to be brought up to date, and a letter to be composed to that Kansas City packing house about the three thousand steers he had promised them after the fall round-up. But he couldn't set his mind to those disagreeable chores.

His head ached dully, and the sourness was coming back to his mouth. Getting drunk last night had been a fool thing to do. But at the time, when he had taken the bottle out to the bunk house, it had seemed like a good idea. The boys had been left wound up by that trouble with Ross Kennett, and for some reason, although he had refused to admit it to himself, Devore had been unutterably lonely in the big sprawling house by himself. Nights had always been the hardest for him to take since Emma and Rita were gone.

He had joined the hands in the bunk house, and when his bottle was empty Ed Harroll had brought out another. Looking back on that bout, Devore thought it was odd that he was the one who had got drunk and the others remained sober.

THAT goddam Ross Kennett! The image of the man rose sharp and bitter in Andy Devore's mind. Kennett and that barbed wire he hoped to sell in the valley! The thought of Oxbow and the rest of the valley being fenced stuck in Devore's throat like gall. That barbed Glidden wire was the worst crime ever invented for cow country. Devore had heard of the stuff. Any cowman with good sense knew it attracted lightning during a storm. Worse than that, cows would get cut on the barbs and end up with screw worms. And there was nothing more intolerable to Andy Devore than the thought of an end being put to the open range. He had fought Indians, buffaloes, and outlaws, and by the eternal no man was going to put up a barbed wire fence to keep the Oxbow brand from the grass it needed.

Just a little man who owns a big ranch—and he's really nothing at all. The echoing memory of what Ross Kennett had said rolled harshly through Devore's mind, and he cursed in a low, bitter tone.

He shoved up out of his old bull-hide chair, nagged by a restlessness he could not throw off. It was big and cool, this room he was in, and it had been a sitting room before he had taken it for his office. Except for the windowed corner where his desk stood, the old furnishings were the same as before his wife's death.

There was the horsehair sofa, and the ladderback chair which had been Emma's favorite. And yonder was the cherrywood secretary Emma had insisted he pack in their wagon the day they were married, thirty-two years ago come next March. It was a delicate and impractical piece for a cowman's home, but it had been freighted from Kentucky to Texas, and from Texas into New Mexico. He remembered Emma crying about the deep long gouge it had suffered on that last haul. Women had the foo'ishest notions about some things. It was something Andy Devore had never been able to comprehend.

HE drifted restlessly around the room, a small man with a ramrod back and a hard trap of a mouth. He looked at the wicker knitting basket still in its old place beside the ladderback chair. He should have packed that away years ago—but somehow he had never done it. Looked out of place in a widower cowman's home. Yet somehow it fitted.

He crossed over to the secretary, chewing moodily on the rank black cigar. He looked down at the picture his wife and Rita had had taken that trip to Kansas City, less than a year before Emma's death. It was difficult, even now, for him to believe it was a likeness of mother and daughter.

There was a sameness of features, the face lines delicately drawn, the rich wealth of dark hair, and the beauty of eyes captured by the lens of the camera.

There was a sameness of features, and yet something that set the two women apart, like strangers. Andy Devore could look at his daughter and see Emma as she had been when they were married, smiling and happy with her world, a kind of inner glow in her eyes.

But in the photograph there was no laughter in Emma's eyes, only a quiet sadness, a look of infinite melancholy. It was strange, Devore thought, that he had not seen those things in her before.

He looked at his daughter, and said softly, "I only wanted what was best for you, honey."

He looked long at the likeness of his wife. "I didn't mean you any unhappiness," he murmured. "Not ever, Emma."

Andy Devore stood there in the empty silence, a small man all alone in a big room.

Chapter Eleven

THERE were men in the town of Spurlock who said that Ross Kennett did not have the sense God gave to a *brasada* steer. A *ladino* you could chouse out of the brush and bust at the end of a good rope, and it would forever after be tamed by its defeat. But this Ross Kennett was whipped before he started, and too stubborn or blind to admit it.

Word had spread swiftly through town of his trouble at Oxbow with Andy Devore. Yet next day Kennett had driven his rig out to Fence Rail to try to sell an order of barbed wire to Charley Higgs, only to be ushered off the ranch by the drawn guns of Higgs' crew. And on the third day he had received the same hard-knuckled reception at Ty McDonogh's Bear Paw ranch.

Glen Sumner was in the livery yard watching Clint Letham pump water into the long wooden trough on the afternoon of the fourth day.

"You say Kennett drove out to talk up his bobwire to Henderschott and some of the nesters?" he asked.

The liveryman nodded wordlessly and went on with his pumping, his face red from his exertions. Glen Sumner considered this information thoughtfully. As sheriff in this town and half a dozen others before it, Sumner recognized the ingredients of serious trouble when he saw them.

That Ross Kennett was a knotty one, all right. *I ought to run him out of town,* he told himself wearily. He had enough worries nagging him, without Kennett sashaying around on a range that already hated him, and trying to sell barbed wire that would mean seven kinds of hell if ever the first fence was strung up.

But you had to admire a man who kept trying even though all the odds were stacked against him. And there was a streak of fairness and honesty in Sheriff Sumner. He had no score against Ross Kennett, not yet. If it was his inclination to read the fine wording of the law, it was the dozen or more men who had headed that fool mob who should be run in for disturbing the peace.

Clint Letham finished pumping the horse trough full, dipped his head into the cool water and straightened, wiping his face dry with his shirt sleeve.

"Never an end to this damn livery business," he said sourly.

"You ought to try sheriffing for a while," Sumner grunted.

He picked up a length of straw, wiped it clean, and began chewing it moodily. He watched Clint Letham steadily, resenting that man's day-by-day peace of mind.

"You hear any talk about Oxbow

planning to move out on that grass near Saber ridge, Clint?"

The liveryman reached for his pipe and began loading it. "What gossip I hear, Glen, I never remember. It's something I learned when I decided I wanted to live to a ripe old age."

Glen Sumner smiled wryly. "You're a big help."

"I sure didn't mean to be. Safer that way, Glen."

Sumner shrugged, a man who was taller than average, and as lean as a scraped bone. A group of horsemen went past the arched gate of the livery yard, and he studied them with eyes alert to the small currents of his town. Part of Ward Templin's crew. Jess Doolin, Clyde Ivy, and Brazil Nasch—as hard-bitten an outfit as he had ever seen. And that halfbreed Apache-Mex they called Pico had all the markings of a top knife artist. It was odd, Sumner thought, that a man like Ward Templin would put such a crew of toughs on his payroll. Yet, he considered narrowly, maybe it wasn't so odd at all—not when you measured the fact that Templin claimed ownership of the grass Andy Devore was rumored making ready to take over for his own herd.

SUMNER cursed softly. He had never felt more completely alone. He was one man with a deputy who wasn't fit to carry water for a drunken squaw—and he could feel the whole world festering under him, ready to blow up.

The creaking of wheels turning on a dry axle sounded on the street, and a moment later Ross Kennett swung his rig into the livery yard. He studied the man's face narrowly, and understood instantly that Kennett had wasted another day.

"No luck?" he asked, as the man reined in his mare and stepped down to the ground.

Kennett's grin was a wry one. "You wasted good air with that question, sheriff."

He stood there, a big-boned man with angled shoulders and long hard lines to the shape of his body. He slapped dust from his clothes, speaking matter-of-factly.

"Saw Henderschott first, but it didn't take long. He met me at his door with a shotgun in his hands, and he was real plain in telling me where I could put my barbed wire."

In spite of himself, Glen Sumner found himself grinning. Yankee Texan or not, this Ross Kennett was all salt. The kind of man you couldn't hate long, if you gave him a fair break.

"You declined, I reckon."

"I've got a delicate sense of comfort, seems like. So I drove on out and had eleven words with Ed Wiggam. 'You need a barbed wire fence to protect your fields,' I told him. Wiggam furnished the eleventh word, and that was all there was to it. So I headed back here."

The humor faded out of his eyes, and he made a sharp, bitter gesture with his hand. "Hell of it is, sheriff, those men need good fencing. Times are changing, and in another few years open graze will be a thing of the past. It's something no one can stop."

"Don't tell me," Sumner murmured.

"I've got to sell the idea to someone," Kennett said. "Andy Devore has over-grazed his range, and so have Higgs and McDonogh. Their cows walk themselves lean hunting grass. If cowmen would fence in, cut down the size of their herds, their cows would grade three hundred pounds a head higher than they do now. And those nesters would save time and half a year's profits if they had fences to keep cattle out of their fields.

Glen Sumner drawled mildly, "You've sold me, mister. Haul out your order book."

Kennett abruptly grinned. "For that, sheriff, I'll buy you a supper, if you don't mind eating with a damn Yankee."

"I've found," said Sumner softly, "that most Yankees are just as human as Rebels."

They had their meal, and afterward Sumner bought cigars. They stood on the plank walk in front of the Odd Fellows Hall, and the sun was huge and red against the horizon. Heat lingered on the street, but the breeze beginning to flow down from the mountains was clean and cool. Someone in the Cattlemen's Relief was pecking on the piano, those tuneless notes falling small and remote against the gathering dusk.

A girl came out of the Gadsden Purchase and turned in the direction of the restaurant, her hand resting on the arm of Ward Templin. Kennett looked more closely, and the girl was Ann Jefford. He thought: *Now, there's a picture.* The easy grace of her walking and the gentle movement of hips and breasts and shoulders, the highlights in her hair and the faint touch of a smile on her lips. . . .

Sheriff Sumner was speaking. "Have you found out anything yet?"

Kennett gave the lawman a sharp, searching glance.

Sumner's smile was cool. "I've learned a few things about men in my time, Kennett. It wasn't just a job of selling barbed wire fencing that brought you back here. It goes deeper than that. It goes back to three years ago."

The easy pleasantry was no longer in Ross Kennett's eyes. "So?"

"Just curious."

"Officially? Or is it something personal."

Sumner watched a cowhand, already more than a little drunk, come weaving out of the Keg House saloon, stare owlishly up the street, and then make his way unsteadily back through the batwing doors.

"A little of both, Kennett. I'll give you this much: I've always felt that you really believed that the three men you killed that night were part of the gang who shot up your cabin and killed Rita Devore."

"I still believe it," Kennett said, flatly. "More than ever, now."

"Any particular reason?"

"Just a hunch."

Sumner said dryly, "It'll take more than a hunch to clear you of that shooting."

"I'm still working on it."

"And yet you don't remember a thing about that shooting?"

"No."

"It's the damndest thing," the lawman said. "I've talked to Doc Earnshaw about it several times. He says it's possible for a man's mind to blank out on him when something terrible has happened to him. Some kind of a complex, he called it. He said you could have wanted so bad to get the men who killed Rita Devore that you shot down those three men without ever knowing what you'd done or remembering anything about it."

Kennett said bitterly, "Did you think to ask if I might have tracked down the real killers without remembering it?"

Sumner nodded slowly. "I asked him that, too. He said it was possible. But damn if it makes sense to me."

Then his tone flattened out. "It just don't add up, Kennett. You testified there were six or eight in that gang of raiders who shot up your cabin that night. But I looked close in that camp you shot up, and there wasn't sign of any more than the three you killed."

KENNETT's mouth was hard. "Maybe the gang split up after they raided my place."

"I've thought of that."

"And maybe the ones who broke away from that camp were careful to wipe out their tracks."

"That's the part that worries me," the lawman said moodily. "I went back to that camp a couple days later with some of Sam Traffner's hounds. They picked up something, all right. Followed it four-five miles through those badlands until they lost the scent in that stretch of malpais north of Eagle mountain."

Kennett gave the man an acid glance. "I didn't hear you tell that in court."

"Nothing to tell," Sumner said wearily. "Traffner's hounds are lion hunters. For all I know they were only trailing a cougar that day."

Kennett said nothing. Darkness was starting to slide in on the town, softening the harsh lines of false-fronted buildings. A man's hooting laughter rose loud and long out of the Cattlemen's Relief.

"That will be Little Tex Adams," Sumner said. "What are you going to do about him, Kennett? I'd like to know."

Kennett looked around at the lawman. The rough edge of worry was in Sumner's eyes, and a note of weary anger was in his voice.

"Always someone to make trouble," he said. "Adams has been making the rounds since noon today, spreading the word about you. Swears he's going to beat hell out of you if you're not too yellow to fight, and if you won't fight he's going to ride you out of town on a rail. I want to know, Kennett—what are you going to do about him?"

Kennett shrugged. He smiled thinly. "Adams is only one man, sheriff, and it takes two to make a fight."

He took a slow breath then, and his voice came flat and cold. "And he's all wrong about who he's going to ride out of Spurlock on a rail. It won't be me, sheriff. You happen to see Adams, you might tell him for me. I'm not ready yet to leave this town."

Chapter Twelve

He moved up the street, feeling the sheriff's brooding gaze on him. The night was turning deep and full. He came to the Gadsden Purchase, and paused. Lamps had been lighted inside that place, flooding the lobby with their mellow glow.

It occurred to him that, considering Little Tex Adams' brash threats, the wisest thing he could do was go to his room and stay there. He wanted no trouble with that Oxbow bruiser, but he would not run from it.

He could feel the malice in the watching eyes of the town, and a weary bitterness twisted through him. Would this town never let him alone? Would the time never come when the people of Spurlock would let him have his peace?

He stood tall and angular in the yellow light that slanted out of the hotel's doors. Men drifted the plank walks or stood half-seen along the darkened fronts of merchandise houses, watching him and waiting.

Andy Devore and his crew would be somewhere on this night-dimmed street, as would Bear Paw and the Fence Rail outfit. Word traveled far on this hungry land, and not many range men would fail to answer the call. Little Tex Adams was the most man in this corner of the Territory, and it would be something to see when he went to work on Ross Kennett.

A feeling of pure disgust broke sharply through Kennett, and he thought: *the hell with all this.*

He turned abruptly toward the hotel doors, and instantly heard the hooting, derisive laugh of some man on the street. Sudden anger halted him. He raked the night, searching for the source of that laugh. No man moved, no voice sounded out against his silent challenge.

That old rakehell rashness began slapping around inside him, and he fought it savagely. Now, of all times, was when he had to keep a lid clamped on his temper, and on his pride.

There was more to all this than merely the goading challenge of a man who found pleasure in a brawl. Ross Kennett understood that. He could see Andy Devore's fine hand behind the festering violence of this night, and he didn't like it.

Something in all this did not quite fit Kennett's impression of Little Tex Adams. That giant of a man was a bruiser and would always be, but there had seemed something amiable and honest in that fellow. A man who would pick a fight for the sheer pleasure of fighting, but who would never be very good at hating.

It's Devore crowding Adams into this. The thought rowelled Kennett's brain, fraying his patience. He could go to his room in the hotel and spend the night there, but he knew Adams would be waiting for him in the morning. He might avoid the man tomorrow, but there would always be another night and another day. Andy Devore would not let this issue die. The hate was too deep in him, a gnawing hunger, an implacable and unrelenting determination to see Kennett beaten and driven out of the country—or destroyed.

The decision settled at last into Kennett's mind, chill and moody. *Might as well have this over with.* He turned in the direction of the Relief, and a woman's quick call halted him.

"Wait, Ross."

It was Ann Jefford. He watched her as she came into the shaft of yellow light, a tall, easy-moving girl whose expression was not quite readable in that diffused golden glow. She stepped close to him, and then he could make out the troubled soberness that was in her eyes.

"You were starting out to meet that Adams man, weren't you?"

He nodded slowly.

"Is your pride so important as that?" she asked.

Something in the tone of her voice censured him, and he pondered it. He hadn't shaped his decision as a matter of pride. It went deeper than that. Defiance, perhaps, but it wasn't pride.

He said, "It's Andy Devore pushing this thing. He won't let it stop, Ann. Sooner or later, I'll have to answer to him and his man."

She was thoughtful for a moment. Then she said quietly, "I suppose you're right, Ross. I suppose I shouldn't have interfered."

"I'm honored that you did."

She suddenly smiled. "Are you in such a hurry to have it over with?"

Kennett's grin was slow and wry. "I'd almost rather put a gun at my head. Tangling with that man is not my idea of fun."

"Let's walk, Ross," Ann said quietly.

Surprise touched Kennett, and he looked into the hotel lobby and along the darkened street.

"If you're wondering about Ward Templin," the girl said simply, "it is still my personal affair who I choose to ask to walk with me. We quarreled that day I asked him to go get the doctor for you and he refused."

Kennett said, "I'm sorry, Ann," and really meant it.

Something close to laughter stirred in the girl's up-turned eyes. "Since then I've had Ward on probation. When I feel that he's repented long enough, I'll accept his ring again."

Kennett shook his head doubtfully. "Taking a walk at night with another man is a poor way of patching up a quarrel."

"Sometimes," Ann said, "I'm not quite sure I want to see things patched up between us."

They were walking in darkness. Kennett looked sharply around at the girl beside him. But he made no comment. She spoke with a troubled quietness.

"There's something hard in him, Ross, and I don't quite know what it is. I've been staying at his ranch, you know. The times we were together while he was in Fort Worth I thought I loved him. He always seemed fine, kind. But since I've been at his ranch . . ."

Her voiced faded. Kennett waited, not wanting to intrude. They were past the merchandise houses now, nearing the edge of town. The night was cool, with a heady keenness in the breeze. The odors of blue sage and dust was in the air. A wren, disturbed by their passing, fretted in the brush.

"It's something a girl feels, senses about a man, Ross," Ann said.

"Folks in this valley rate Templin mighty high," Kennett murmured.

"But I think Mrs. Moynahan hates him," Ann said. "She keeps house for him, Ross, and I have the feeling that she hates him for some reason."

They came to the bridge across Dry creek. They halted. Kennett put both hands on the railing, and looked down into the darkness. There was no moon, only a few scattered stars breaking through the haze, and he couldn't see the rocky bed of the creek.

"Mrs. Moynahan hates all men, as I recall," he said. "After her husband ran away and left her . . ."

"It's something more than that, Ross." Ann's voice was low and sharp, agitated by the uncertainties in her. "There are things that I've noticed about Ward—the kind of men he keeps on the ranch to work for him. I saw Wes Hardin once in Fort Worth, and Clay Allison. Ward's men remind me of Hardin and Allison. They act more like professional gunmen, like killers, than working cow hands."

"This is a rough country," Kennett said. "Sometimes a rancher needs rough men on his payroll."

"Why do you keep defending him, Ross?"

"I don't want to see you make a mistake, Ann."

She said, "There's another thing. Ward told me he moved here from California three years ago to buy his Roman Four ranch. He mentioned that he'd brought his men with him. But one day I asked Jess Doolin about California, and he didn't know what I was talking about. Later I mentioned to Ward that I had an uncle who had once lived in California, a town named Santa Rita. Ward told me that he'd been there often."

"Well?"

"I made up that town, Ross. I don't know why, but I did." Her voice tightened. "What reason would Ward have to lie to me? Why should he, Ross?"

Something moved in Kennett's mind, a deep and heavy darkness.

Then he said, "How do you know he lied, Ann? Maybe there actually is such a town."

She was quiet for a long moment. Then she said slowly, "Yes, maybe there really is." She turned, placing her back to the bridge railing, looking up through the darkness at Kennett. "But now you have me wondering something else, Ross—about you."

He looked down at her in surprise. "Me?" he echoed.

"That first day," she said, "I rather thought you liked me."

"Why, now, Ann . . ."

A note of gentle teasing lifted in her voice. "You're not very flattering, Ross Kennett. All this time you have been defending Ward Templin, instead of . . ."

He turned slowly to face the girl, feeling a stirring of wonderment and

WORDLY WISE

YELLOW

For more than a generation prior to the Civil War, sectional feeling ran high. Agitators on both sides of the slavery question produced numerous pamphlets and broadsides. Printed on rough, poorly-bleached paper, the characteristic leaflet of this sort was an anonymous—and usually scurrilous—attack on some public figure.

Cowardly insinuations and outright lies were the stock in trade of those who produced yellow-paper pamphlets. Though many newspaper editors adopted such practices, public sentiment eventually turned against them. Yellow journalism was condemned as sneaking and mean-spirited. So vigorous was the campaign against it that by the last quarter of the century, any person guilty of low and cowardly conduct was labeled *yellow*.

—By Webb Garrison

warmth that he had thought was years dead in him.

"Instead of what, Ann?"

She did not reply to that. She stood there, slim and straight in the darkness, waiting for him. He reached for her, and she came easily to him. He put his arms around her.

"Ann?"

But the question faded in him. Certainty broke through him, but yet there was no full understanding of this moment. He did not try to understand it. He was at once aware of the pliant pressure of her body against his, the touch of her hands rising to his shoulders. He lowered his lips to hers.

There was a lightness in the kiss . . . and all at once the lightness was lost, and there was the hard and bruising impact of fire lashing through them, a hunger so deep and demanding that it hurt. Ann pressed back from him, a little breathless.

She said softly, "Rita's gone, Ross. You owe nothing to a girl who is dead."

A sudden harshness was in Ross Kennett. "So that was your reason for this!"

"No . . . no, Ross. But I wanted you to know about Rita."

He stared at her.

"And I wanted to know about myself . . . and you."

"One little kiss, and now I suppose you know!"

"Yes," she said, and watched him steadily. "I know now that it isn't Ward Templin."

He swung away from her, clamping his hands on the bridge railing until his knuckles ached. Torment lashed his mind. How much of this thing tearing at him was right, and how much wrong? He still remembered Rita Devore; he would never forget her. But how much loyalty did he owe to a girl who was now three years dead?

He said harshly, "I'll never forget Rita."

"I'm not asking you to, Ross. Would you ask me to forget what Ward Templin meant to me—for a short while?"

He turned slowly, a stiffness in the long lines of his body. Her face was a pale oval against the night, and he couldn't see her eyes.

He said, "You're either very foolish, Ann, or very wise."

She smiled. "It's only today that counts, Ross. Not yesterday. It's only you and me and the life ahead of us that matters."

He shook his head, a bleakness in his eyes. "Rita was murdered, and died in my arms that night. The men who killed her have got to pay. I owe Rita that much, Ann."

"I wouldn't want you to feel any other way about that, Ross."

"They said I went out of my head that night and killed three innocent men," Kennett said bleakly. "I want to learn the straight of that, too."

Ann reached out and touched his arm. "I want to help you, Ross."

He stared at her, not understanding.

She said quietly, "There's something about Ward Templin and his men that isn't right. Can't you see, Ross? I think Ward lied about moving here from California. And he built his Roman Four ranch on the land of men who were ruined and driven out of this valley by that gang of raiders. Maybe it's just coincidence. And maybe it isn't. I'm going to stay on at Ward's ranch until I know the answers."

Kennett's mouth hardened, and he shook his head. "Too dangerous, Ann, if what you think about him is true."

Her smile was quiet, steady. "He wants to marry me. I can manage him all right. What I'm going to do is for you, Ross—to help us."

She laughed softly. "There's no use arguing. You might as well know now that I've got a mind of my own."

Still he stood frowning down at her, troubled and uneasy.

She said, "Ward has heard the talk about Andy Devore planning to move Oxbow cattle over to Saber ridge. For the last several days he's had a man busy surveying the south line of his ranch."

Surprise widened Kennett's eyes.

"The reason Ward came to town today was to order barbed wire fencing from you," Ann said. "I think he's doing that partly to square himself with me. But I believe his main reason is to shut down on Andy Devore. That fence will mean war with Oxbow and maybe some of the other ranchers. But I've got a feeling Ward wants the war. I think it's part of his plan to weaken the others and build himself up in this valley."

Kennett stared off into the night. The upper haze was thinning out, and the sky was a deep indigo, with star clusters standing bright and cold against it. In some saloon in the town behind him, the laughter of men rose high and loud against the night, and all at once Kennett remembered Little Tex Adams and the fight that was waiting for him.

He turned toward the town, and Ann spoke softly. "Wait, Ross."

She moved close to him. She raised herself to her toes and kissed him.

"Now," she said, "I suppose you'll have to go and have your fight."

"Why," said Kennett, and broadly grinned. "I don't think I'm going to mind it at all, now."

Chapter Thirteen

The silence was a dark, smothering thing. As he came to a halt just inside the winged doors of the Cattlemen's Relief, Kennett saw quick surprise touch the faces of the men at the bar and at the tables, as if the last thing they expected was to see him there.

He ranged them with his glance, identifying each man with the brand he worked for. The Fence Rail hands, Ty McDonogh and his Bear Paw outfit, short-coupled Andy Devore and his Oxbow crew.

And off there was the Roman Four crowd, a crew that always stayed close together and were all the more dangerous because of this alliance. Kennett gazed at Jess Doolin, at Clyde Ivy and Brazil Nasch. Tough, hard-lipped men who wore their guns low and laced down. He looked at the half-breed, Pico, and thought, *Never let that one behind your back.*

Kennett smiled, and let his voice ride easy and cool through the hush. "I hear a man's been looking for me."

There was immediate movement throughout the saloon, men sliding away from the bar or leaving the game tables in favor of the distant walls. Then only one giant of a man was left at the bar—Little Tex Adams. He, of all the others, had not turned around at Kennett's entrance. He stood huge and powerful over the mahogany bar, with one booted foot on the brass rail, his back still to the door as he finished off his drink and set down the glass. Still he did not turn.

Someone in the place grunted hoarsely. "By grief, I didn't think he'd show."

Adams turned his head and gave that speaker a glance of pure disgust. He swung his great body around then, almost regretfully. He gave the man in the doorway a long, morose stare, as though somehow holding Kennett to blame for his own predicament.

He said, deep in his chest, "I knew you'd come."

Kennett smiled pleasantly. "What's this all about, Tex?"

The Oxbow man waggled his huge shoulders restlessly. An uneasiness was in his eyes, a sheen that was sour with dissatisfaction.

"I guess you know."

"Yes," Kennett murmured, and knew then that there was no liking in Adams for this fight that was making. Yet he wanted his own position clear to those men who stood watching and waiting.

"It's plain enough," he said. "But I thought we had it straight, Adams. If you think you're the most man, that's all right with me. I told you I didn't want any part of you."

"That makes no never-mind now, Kennett." The big man shifted his boots uneasily on the rough floor. His gaze drifted toward Andy Devore, and he pulled it back. A driven and goaded malice rowelled his voice. "It makes no never-mind at all, Kennett. You and me got to fight."

"Someone pushing you, Adams? Is that how this is?"

"A fight is a light," Adams grunted, and lifted his great head a notch higher, staring at Kennett grimly, waiting.

SOME man lashed out with savage impatience. "Talk, talk!" And it was Andy Devore's voice.

Kennett smiled strangely, and looked across at the cowman. He murmured, "In time, Andy—all in good time."

He stepped toward the bar, a lanky, easy-moving man with amusement standing cool and rash in his eyes.

"A drink, Rudy," he said to the man behind the bar, and felt the harsh sting of the fellow's stare.

"You don't want a drink, and you know it," Rudy Dueen said bitterly. He reached under the bar and brought up a double-barreled shotgun, a sawed-off vicious weapon. "There will be no shooting in this place, men."

He turned his head and glared at Andy Devore. "Any wreckage done here will go on Oxbow's bill. I want you to understand that, Devore."

Adams put out his hand and shoved on Kennett's shoulder. "We've got some fighting to do, mister."

Kennett turned to the big man. He smiled. "And if I won't have any. . . ."

"Then you'll crawl out of this place on your belly, by God!" Adams said, and a goaded fury flared up in his voice. "You're through in this valley, Kennett. You've over-stayed your time, and you're leaving. You and your damned barbed wire! You yellow-backed Texan Yankee! You—"

"I'll make it easier for you, friend," Kennett said, and drove his fist into the man's middle, throwing the full weight of his body into that sledging blow.

Wind exploded from Adams' lungs, and pain spasmed through his face. But he grinned, and it was one of pure gratitude.

"Now this is some better," he said. "I'm obliged, Kennett."

He lunged forward, throwing out a huge roundhouse right that would have dropped a steer. Kennett stepped aside and then closed in under the big man's arm. He slammed his fists to the body, thinking bleakly: *This has got to end fast.*

He knew that, and he tried to do it. He drilled his blows to the heart and stomach, and as Adams kinked forward, clutching for him, he chopped his right and left to the shelf of the jaw.

Any other man would have gone down under that brutal barrage, but not Little Tex Adams. He rocked backward, shaken by the explosive swiftness of Kennett's attack, but still grinning.

"You were right, what you said that day. Nothing friendly in the way you fight, Kennett," he grunted, and pawed the blood from his split lips.

Even then there was no real malice in Adams, only the undiluted joy of a man who liked nothing better than a good fight and realized now that he had one. He lunged forward with surprising speed for a man of his bulk, and rammed his right at Kennett's face. The blow missed. Adams chuckled cheerfully, accepted the jolting pain of two swift body punches, in order to have a closer target for his own fist. This one landed.

Kennett saw it coming, and it seemed only a casual effort, without much power in it. He rolled his head away from it, but he could only partially avoid that looping blow. It caught him on the side of the face, and thunder slammed through his brain. He went down without fully realizing what had happened, and in his ears was the jubilant roaring of the saloon crowd.

TEMPER blazed through him, wild and unchecked in its brittle fury. He got his feet under him, and hurled himself headlong at that huge bulk as Adams came cruising toward him. The impact of his dive exploded a hoarse belch of air from the big man's lungs.

Kennett ripped blows to the mouth and eyes, and felt raw fire spill through his own belly. He was down again, and he didn't know when it had happened. Sickness gagged him, and he sucked desperately for air, but it seemed paralysis gripped his lungs.

He got up, and Adams came at him again, hooking at Kennett's face with those huge fists. Kennett backed away, desperately. He stepped aside, and with everything he had in him, drove a blow to the base of the man's ear.

The big man's rush lost all direction under the impact of that sledging blow. He stumbled and went down, the momentum of his immense body sliding him across the floor and under one of the poker tables. He rolled over and sat up, up-ending the table and throwing the chairs back from him with a sweep of his great arms. He sat there a moment, staring stupidly up at Kennett, his grin now a loose and foolish grimace. Then his eyes cleared again, and he heaved himself up from the floor.

Kennett was there to meet him, clubbing the eyes and mouth, ripping at the body. Little Tex Adams was hurt, and badly. Blood ran from his split lips, and his left eye was all but closed. His breathing was deep and hoarse, as he met Kennett's attack in the fury of that moment.

He absorbed everything Kennett could give him, but he kept stalking forward, huge and relentless in his eagerness for battle.

"C'mon, Kennett," he grinned through his bruised and battered lips. "You're doing just fine."

Ross Kennett knew then with a cold, drenching despair that he was whipped. He could not stop this great shaggy bull of a man. He felt Adams' knuckles rip across the ribs over his heart, leaving a huge numbness in his chest. He gagged for breath, and tried to hold the man off with short, chopping blows to the face and body.

Adams kept coming in. A blow that Kennett never saw sent blinding splinters of pain raging through his brain. He tried to shake his head clear, but could not. Agony exploded in his stomach, and he threw himself against the big man to keep from falling. Adams heaved him around, tossed him away, and then began stalking him again.

Kennett drifted desperately backward from the man. Adams followed, his face a grotesque mask of livid bruises, of sweat and grime, and that bloody gargoyle grin on his battered mouth. Kennett sucked in a deep, sobbing breath, and pawed his right at Adams' face. It didn't stop the man. It didn't even slow him.

Adams laughed hoarsely, and closed in. Kennett stepped frantically backward. He felt some man's boot ram against his knee joint from behind, buckling his legs, and he went down hard. Through the blur of his vision he saw Adams towering over him.

And he heard Andy Devore's harsh, crusty command, a pitiless sound against the awed silence of the saloon.

"Kick him! Stamp him! Tromp the bastard, Adams!"

Chapter Fourteen

THROUGH that raw moment there was no movement in Little Tex Adams. He loomed over Ross Kennett in all his hugeness, looking down at Kennett with that gargoyle grin set on his broken and torn lips.

Then the grin faded. The shape of his mouth changed. It took on a harshness that had never been there during the violence of the fight, shaping to a bitterness and the first real anger Kennett had ever seen in the big man.

The Man on the Barrel

■ It has been all but forgotten now—but America, like Holland has a sort of finger-in-the-dike hero. The primary difference between the American and the little Dutch boy who plugged the leak is that the American used another part of his anatomy to become a hero. He used his hindquarters.

It happened during the Civil War. The Yankees and Confederates were engaged in a sea battle in Albemarle Sound, off the Virginia coast. It was quite a battle and, in the midst of it, the *Valley City*, a Union ship, was hit by a shell. The shell caught the ship squarely, sending sparks and flames in all directions and starting a roaring fire.

The fire alone was bad enough, but there was an even greater threat to the men on the ship. Sitting on deck, fully exposed, was an open barrel of gunpowder. If fire reached the barrel, or even if one tiny spark found its way into the open top, the ship would be spread all over Albemarle Sound.

The Yankee sailors leaped into action and organized fire-fighting teams to battle the flames. But one sailor, a quarter gunner named John Davis, leaped in a somewhat different fashion. He sprang at the barrel and squatted on the opening.

He got there not a second too soon. Sparks were shooting around the barrel by the time he had covered the exposed powder. Within minutes, Davis and the barrel were enveloped in flames. The heat became almost unbearable, and Davis had to fight off a compelling urge to flee. The flames were causing severe burns, and there was every chance that the powder would ignite. If that happened, his chance of survival would be something less than zero. But even though it was almost certain suicide, Davis stubbornly stayed on his perch.

Finally the other men managed to bring the fire under control. John Davis won his big gamble, and in so doing made history. He was awarded the Medal of Honor, and became the only man who ever won that coveted award for doing nothing but sitting still.

He might have become somewhat blistered in the process, but John Davis cannot be said to have had an unhappy end.

—Harold Helfer

Kennett saw the man's head raise slowly. Then Adams was staring at Andy Devore with pure contempt rising in his eyes.

"You want to tromp him, do the job yourself, Devore. And you make your first move at this man, runt or not, I'm going to see how many teeth I can cram down your throat."

Kennett got his hands under him, and pushed up from the floor into a sitting position. He did not have it in him to get to his feet. He sat there, sick and spent, seeing the whiteness of temper that spread across Devore's hard face.

Adams' contempt was a great dark thing that flowed through his face and the lines of his big body.

"Fighting a man for the fun in it is one thing," he said bitterly. "But being ordered to beat up a man is another. I hate my own guts for taking on this dirty job for you. But you rate three stripes lower, Devore, and right now I'm sick of the sight of you. Kennett put the right tag on you: just a runty nothing of a man who happens to own a big ranch."

Devore cracked out, white-lipped. "Adams, you're fired."

"Hell," the big man grunted scornfully, "I quit you when Kennett slammed his fist into my face the first time."

Adams swung his back on the cowman, and in that was the full sting of his contempt. He looked down at Kennett again, a question in his eyes.

"You want a hand up?" he asked.

Kennett smiled. He murmured, "From you, yes."

He gripped the big man's arm, and was hauled up to his feet. A wave of nausea rolled through him, and passed. He leaned against Adams for a moment, steadying himself, then he forced himself erect.

He said softly, "You're a rough one, Adams."

"I feel like hell myself," the man said.

They turned, moved to the bar where Rudy Dueen stood waiting.

"I could use a drink now, Rudy," Kennett murmured.

"I was just working on the same idea," Dueen answered, and grinned. "One thing I'll hand you two. You spend all your muscles wrecking each other instead of wrecking a man's place of business. The drinks are on the house."

They drank, Kennett and Tex Adams, looking at each other as they lifted their glasses. Silence held the room clamped in its thorny grip. A man, somewhere, coughed nervously.

"Some fresh air might help," Little Tex Adams grunted.

"Why," Kennett smiled, "it's going to take me the rest of the night to learn how to breathe again."

They turned together, and walked out of the place. Outside, the night air was cool and sharp, like a polished blade. Somewhere across town a dog was yapping a challenge to the far-distance cry of a coyote.

A movement close to the frontal wall of the saloon caught Kennett's attention, and he turned at once in that direction. It was Ann Jefford, and he knew instantly that she had seen the fight through the window.

She came forward, a slim, proud shape in the diffused light from the saloon, and gentle irony was in her faint smile as she looked up at Kennett and the big man beside him.

"I imagine you gentlemen feel much better now," she said.

"Why, just fine, Ann," said Kennett, and grinned.

He watched her as she turned and crossed the street toward the Gadsden Purchase.

"There," Little Tex Adams said, "goes a lot of woman, my friend."

They were moving down the plank walk away from the saloon when they heard the slapping of the Relief's doors and the call of a man's voice. It was Ward Templin coming toward them, his shoulders swinging with each hard stride.

Kennett studied the man closely as he came forward. This Ward Templin was, he thought narrowly, a man with a well-ordered mind and carefully considered plans for the course of his life. There was a decisiveness in the way he carried his strong body, and a hard, smooth competence in his face, like polished granite. A handsome man, with an easy arrogance touching his quick smile.

"I'd like a word with you, Kennett, if you don't mind."

THEN his smile widened into a wry grin. "Could be you've got a little score against me, and maybe with good reason," he said, and there was an open and easy frankness in his tone. "But I don't mind saying I was a bit put out that first day when I found Ann in your room nursing you. Jealous is a more honest word for it, I suppose. Ann and I are going to be married, you know."

Kennett nodded. "That," he said, "is what I heard."

"I think I owe you an apology for not getting the doctor for you that day, as Ann asked."

Kennett said evenly, "No apology necessary."

"You're a generous man, Mr. Kennett."

The doors of the Relief made their slapping whispers; it was Templin's crew stepping out into the night. They stood there, studying the street with the restless interest of men who were never entirely at ease.

Templin said, "As you probably already know, I am going to fence off the south line of Roman Four."

Kennett nodded. "Miss Jefford told me tonight," he said, and saw something change in Templin's bland gaze.

And the man's tone changed. There was a coolness now, a touch of undersurface steel that Kennett sensed more than actually felt. Yet the warning was none the less definite.

"Miss Jefford is a very impetuous woman, Kennett, and she's grateful for your kindness when you found her stranded on the road that day. She's inclined to let her gratitude carry her away at times, and a man might get the wrong idea about her. I hope I am making myself clear."

Kennett smiled faintly. "You could do a little better."

"I wouldn't want you to misunderstand her . . . her little gestures of gratitude."

"In other words, you don't want me to go walking with her again."

"I think it would be very unwise of you if you did, Mr. Kennett."

Kennett met the man's gaze steadily. "Is that a warning, Mr. Templin?"

"Yes—you could call it that," Templin said gently, and his smile was as thin as a knife blade. "A friendly warning, Mr. Kennett. And now can we get on with our business?"

Kennett nodded dryly.

Templin said, "For the past week I've had a surveyor laying out Roman Four's south line. I'm having fence posts freighted to my place from Ruidoso, and they should be here in another day or two. I've got a crew ready to go to work setting them in for me."

"You work fast," Kennett murmured.

"Considering the rumors about Oxbow planning to move out on my grass, I think speed is necessary. How soon can you get me enough barbed wire for a three-strand fence two miles long?"

"A week. Maybe ten days."

Templin nodded. "The posts will be up and ready by then."

Kennett said quietly, "Your fence is going to blow a lid off in this valley. I guess you know that."

The cowman smiled coldly. "I have men who know how to handle trouble, Kennett. Your job is to see that I get a good tight fence. I suggest that you hire Adams here to help you. He's a good man to have around."

He nodded curtly, and turned away.

Kennett said, "Wait a minute, Templin."

The man instantly pivoted, the swift and balanced movement of perfectly coordinated muscles, and there was a tenseness in the fall of his hand, a pressure in the hard thrust of his questioning stare.

"I have the feeling I've met you some place before," Kennett said.

The tension went out of the man's body, and he smiled. "I doubt that," he said. "Before moving here, I was a California man. You ever been there, Kennett?"

"No."

"Then we've never met before," Templin said, and swung away.

Kennett looked beyond the man, and the Roman Four crew stood balanced and alert on the plank walk in front of the Relief's doors, facing full toward him.

He looked more closely at them, and there was a gun in Clyde Ivy's hand, half out of leather and already at full cock.

Chapter Fifteen

WARD TEMPLIN finished his second cup of coffee, and got up from his chair at the table in Bide Menafee's eatery around the corner from the Odd Fellows Hall. He took his time shaping his first cigarette of the day, realizing full well that Bide was at his money drawer waiting to be paid.

Templin scraped a match into flame on the underside of the table, got his smoke going, then carefully fanned out the flame and deposited the dead match on his plate. This little act of consideration he never failed to remember, for it was the small acts a man did that built his tower of good will in a town.

He turned then to Bide Menafee, and nodded amiably. "You serve a good meal, Bide," he said.

Old Menafee bobbed his white head, grinning widely. "I ain't afraid to eat my own cooking, that's a fact."

Templin dug into his pocket, playing out this ritual that always gave the old man so much obvious pleasure.

"How much, Bide?"

Menafee cackled. "Fair price is two-bits, Mr. Templin, but for you I'll make it thirty cents."

"And cheap it would be," Templin grinned, "at half the price. Good day to you, Mr. Menafee."

He left a half dollar on the counter, and walked out of the place smiling to himself. He wondered how many times the old man had gossiped around Spurlock about this senseless little ritual they played. Templin had heard some of the talk. A fine man was Mr. Templin for patronizing Old Menafee's place when he could get much better food at the Golden Steer. A man was really big when he wasn't too busy or proud to hand a favor and a pleasant word to an old codger like Bide Menafee. Yes, sir, that Ward Templin was a fine, upstanding citizen, and an asset to the valley.

Templin turned the corner into Texas street, feeling pleased with himself and his prospects. His line fence was well along toward completion, and he knew that if his barbed wire brought him trouble—and he was certain that it would—he would have the sympathy and support of the town.

That was vital to Ward Templin's carefully shaped plans. Oxbow was strong, and Fence Rail and Bear Paw would throw their forces behind Andy Devore if there came a showdown.

A man would be a fool to deliberately blow the lid off of a valley without first winning the good will of its trading center; and Ward Templin did not consider himself a fool. The people of Spurlock, not the outlying ranchers, were the real power in this valley.

TEMPLIN moved unhurriedly along the street, nodding and exchanging pleasantries with the townsmen and merchants he passed. He saw Glen Sumner standing idly in the open doorway of the jail office, and on sudden thought angled across the street to where the lawman stood.

"Morning, sheriff," he said, and felt the touch of Sumner's curious eyes. He took a pair of cigars out of his coat pocket, handed one of them to the lawman.

"Obliged, Mr. Templin," Sumner said in his soft-slow murmur.

Templin waited until they had their smokes going before voicing his business, and then it was with a careful choice of words. He had a deep respect for this tall, bone-lean man who wore the badge of the valley's law. He had met Glen Sumner's breed before. Quiet and with that reserved friendliness that identifies a sharply-grooved shrewdness. Not a man to be bought off, or shoved around by the politics of his community, this Glen Sumner, and he had a reputation that had followed him through half a dozen trail towns in Kansas and down into this New Mexico valley. It was these watchful, seldom-speaking men you had to guard against most, Templin reflected narrowly.

Because Sumner was essentially a direct man, Templin knew the wisdom of using the same approach to his own problem.

"I imagine you have heard that I am building a fence along Roman Four's south line, sheriff."

Sumner nodded. "News gets around."

"And. that Oxbow is planning to move out on Roman Four grass?"

"Heard about that, too," Sumner said bitterly. "That's barbed wire for you—raises hell wherever it's strung up. Fence-cutting war in Texas and Kansas. Same in Nebraska and the Wyoming country. And now this valley gets itself turned inside out by the damn stuff."

"Is it wrong for a man to protect his own property by building his own fence, sheriff?" Templin asked in his most reasonable tone.

Sumner shook his head wearily. "I didn't say I was blaming you, Mr. Templin. It's the hell your fence is going to stir up that I'm worried about. It means the end of open range; it gets a man to feeling all crowded and cramped up, just thinking about barbed wire fences."

"Times change, Glen."

"I know that, but I still don't like it," Sumner said, and nodded dismally. "But cowmen will have to change with them, I reckon. As long as you're within your own rights my office will stand behind you, if that's what you're wondering."

Templin smiled warmly. "I'm relieved to hear that, sheriff. I went to considerable expense to have my line properly surveyed. I covet no other man's grass, Glen, and I think it is only right and fair that I take measures to protect mine."

Glen Sumner shifted his shoulders restlessly. A sourness was in his eyes, and a gnawing worry. He drew deeply on his cigar, and stared morosely along the street.

"I'll do my best to talk some sense into Andy Devore."

"That's all a man could ask, Glen. I only hope he's not too hard-headed to listen. These old-line cowmen can be pretty cranky about grass."

Sumner grunted. Then he faced full around toward Templin and voiced a troubled question. "Are you thinking about fencing off the rest of Roman Four this year?"

"Not unless I'm forced to."

"Reason I asked," Sumner told him, "is that your surveyor showed up in town last night, drunk as a barn owl. He kept askin' around for you, like he had something important on his mind."

There was a quick pressure in Ward Templin's lips, and he instantly erased it with a pleasant smile.

"He's been trying to sell me the idea of having the rest of Roman Four surveyed and staked out for fencing. But I told him it was no-go at this time."

He laughed softly, shaking his head. "Charley was drunk, you say? A fool and his money! Still I suppose I'd better hunt him up and set him straight. He seems to be a hard man to discourage."

"Like as not you'll find him sleeping it off in one of the saloons," Sumner said, and turned back into his office.

Ward Templin moved steadily along Texas street, purpose now in his walking. Sun's warmth was a constant pressure on his high, flat shoulders, and only with an effort of will did he manage to keep the easy and open friendliness in his eyes as he nodded to passing townsmen.

Anger coursed through him in hard, chopping waves. That damned whisky-lapping Charley Ingalls! He had paid off the man every full dollar due him when the survey was finished, two weeks ago. He had squared his debt to the surveyor, got him cordially drunk, piled him onto a good horse, and suggested pointedly that Colorado would be a good place for him to exercise his talents thereafter.

But Charley Ingalls was back, and that fact drove its brittle meaning deep into Templin's mind. Ingalls had drunk himself broke, and now he was back to fatten his wallet again. Ward Templin cursed softly, and strode on.

He found the surveyor in the Keg House, face down on a table and snoring in a pool of spilled whisky. Abe Ganz, who stood behind the long bar, slanted Templin a gaze of sly amusement as he moved across to the sleeping man.

"Friend of yours, Mr. Templin?"

Templin smiled wearily. "An old friend of the family, Abe. Charley would be a good man if he could stop looking into bottles." He looked down at the surveyor, shaking his head slowly. "You pick them up and set them on their feet, and they fall right down again."

"Ain't that the fact, though," Ganz said. He frowned uncomfortably. "There's a little bill he run up last night, Mr. Templin . . ."

"Of course, Abe."

Templin put a greenback down on the bar, turned back to the table. He shook the man's shoulder.

"Come out of it, Charley."

THE surveyor came awake, his eyes red-rimmed as he looked up at Templin and slowly grinned.

"Howdy, Mister Templin. Temp, ol' friend, I hadda come back to talk to you."

"Feeling better now, Charley?"

"I'd like to bite the dog that bit me, you don't mind. You don't mind, do you, ol' friend."

"Bring him a drink, Abe."

Templin watched as Ingalls tossed off the whisky and shuddered, then pulled himself together with a visible effort.

"Thanks," he said.

"Let's go some place and talk, Charley," Templin said, and there was a cool pressure in the quiet tone of his voice that seemed to startle the man at the table.

Ingalls looked up sharply. "You're not sore, are you, me coming back?"

Templin's smile was a pleasant one.

"Not sore at all, Charley. We all have our failings."

"Why, so we have," Ingalls murmured, and the alarm slipped out of his eyes. "After all, I only came back to do you a favor."

"We'll go some place and talk about it," Templin said, and touched the man's arm again.

They moved together along Texas street, and at the edge of town they halted. Templin waited, the cold and brittle fury thrusting through him, hard and savage.

Ingalls turned and looked at him uncomfortably. "You're sure you're not sore at me?"

Templin smiled. "Stop worrying about it, Charley. You got drunk, and came back to see me. Nothing for me to get sore about, is there?"

The surveyor wagged his head uneasily.

"The favor you mentioned, Charley?"

Ingalls licked his lips. He swallowed, glanced nervously at the rancher again, and then set his stare fixedly into the distance. He swallowed again, and spoke.

"It's just that I'm going to get out of this country, Mr. Templin. Go back East. You'll never have to worry about me showing up here again."

"Why, that's fine," Templin said mildly. "But I haven't been worrying about you at all."

Ingalls grinned loosely. "Not even that I might take on too much whisky some time, and talk about that line I surveyed for you? Or that maybe I might offer to sell the information to someone?"

"I haven't been worried at all, Charley." Templin took a slow breath, and reached for his wallet. "You'll need some money to get you back East. How much would you say—a couple hundred?"

A touch of fear turned Ingalls' voice a little shrill. "I'd say a couple thousand, Mr. Templin."

Templin looked steadily at the man. "A bit steep, don't you think?" He put the wallet back into his pocket. His smile was a taut, frozen thing building its silent pressure against the surveyor. "A lot of money, Charley."

"But look what you get for it," Ingalls burst out. "You've got a line fence right where you wanted it. It takes in a nice piece of grass, Mr. Templin, and if I do say so I did a real job for you on that survey. A man could ride that line all his life and never see anything wrong with it. Ain't that worth something to you?"

"We made a deal," Templin reminded softly. "I paid you well."

There was a deepening pallor around the surveyor's mouth, a kind of singing wildness rising in his voice. "It ain't that I'm trying to hold you up, Mr. Templin. It's just . . ."

"You're talking too loud, Charley."

Ingalls dropped his voice to a low, hoarse pitch. "I said I'd go back East, didn't I? That ought to be worth a little extra to you. Only a couple thousand dollars, Mr. Templin. Why, that grass you got is worth three times that."

Templin looked at the man through a long moment of sober thoughtfulness. Then he slowly smiled.

"You can't blame me for trying to beat you down a notch, can you?" he said, and his voice was again easy and pleasant. "I don't carry that kind of money around with me, Charley. You don't mind riding out to the ranch with me to get it, do you?"

The release of Ingalls' breath was one of pure relief. "Not at all, Mr. Templin. Only too glad to. I try to be fair and do the decent thing . . ."

"Sure, Charley, sure you do. Let's get the horses, and be on our way. If I can't dicker your price down, at least I can see that you get your money at once."

They took the county road until they came to the badlands at Spanish Forks, and here Ward Templin drew rein.

"Some of the Oxbow crowd have been seen nosing around here. I'd like to look for sign, if you're not in too big a hurry, Charley."

They turned off the road, threading into that tangle of cutbank arroyos. They moved slowly, but steadily. The cuts deepened and narrowed, raw slashes tearing the naked earth, and here the full heat of the day dwelt, heavy and motionless. Their passage pinched down, and Templin motioned the surveyor ahead. He followed close behind.

He drew his gun, holding it under his coat as he leveled it and fired. He was so close to his man that he could see the dust fly from Ingalls' shirt. And when the dust was gone he could see the small round hole his bullet had made. A red-rimming hole near the center of the back.

He fired a second time as Ingalls fell, the cloth of his coat muffling the shot so that the blast was a flat and short-reaching sound, dying swiftly against the walls of the cutbanks.

Chapter Sixteen

The line fence dipped and rose through the deep hills of rabbit brush and grass, and when it reached the flats it traveled straight and true into the lush bay formed by the curved arm of Saber ridge.

It came as a numbing shock to Ross Kennett to see the fence he was building for Templin swallow into the Roman Four the land on which his own brand had once grazed.

Kennett's closest neighbor to the north had been an old cowman named Rufe Corle, and their dividing boundary had never been any more than an indefinite tenuous line. It had been open range, with cattle free to graze on all the far hills. Corle had never felt it necessary to file on his land, nor had Kennett or any of the other small outfits north of the ridge.

Those spreads had been the ones ruined and raided out by the gang of night-riders who had plagued this end of the valley. Corle first, then Hensoldt, Zecca, and old Mort Binfords, with Kennett the last of them to go down. Northerners, all those men, except Ernie Zecca, who had moved into the valley to escape being drafted into the Confederate army during the last tortured convulsions of the War.

And now all their land, and Kennett's, too, lay behind Ward Templin's Roman Four line fence.

It was, even now when the fence was all but completed, a hard thing for Ross Kennett to accept. He bent to the strand of barbed wire Little Tex Adams was stretching taut, and sighted along the cedar posts. The line was there for him to see, pointing straight and true toward the distant high knob of granite that had been the only definite corner marker of Rufe Corle's land.

Kennett turned away, and found Adams watching him enigmatically.

"It's a tough thing to see another man's fence chop off the range you once called your own," Kennett said.

Adams spat on his huge hands and hauled the barbed wire taut again while one of the fence crew moved forward and drove the staples home. The big man stepped back then, staring at the fence with a cowhand's honest disgust.

"These damn fences are going to make more than one change in this valley," he grunted.

He turned then, and looked narrowly at Ross Kennett. "How much land do you think Andy Devore owns?"

"Eighty thousand acres, last I heard."

"Two thousand would be a closer guess," Adams said. "The rest he claims and uses, but he never filed on it legally. Never figured he had to. It was maverick land when Andy came here, and he was the first to put his brand out on it."

There was a short length of barbed wire on the ground. Adams set his boot heel deliberately on it, moodily grinding it into the tawny dust.

"Same with Chisum, Charley Goodnight, and about every other big cowman in this Territory. They maybe own a little chunk of land around

their house, but they lay claim to everything as far as they can see, every acre their herds need for graze. Free grass—open range, and a man takes what he needs."

The big man couldn't grind the clipping of barbed wire out of sight in the dust. It kept twisting upward to the surface. He stooped with a sudden gesture of rankled anger, picked up the scrap of wire, and sent it spinning off into the brush.

"That's where these here fences are going raise hell, my friend," he said dismally. "Open graze is gone—dead. Time's coming when a cow hand won't be able to ride as far as he can throw his hat without having to open and close a bunch of damned gates."

Kennett murmured, "You paint a sour picture, Tex."

"I can paint it worse," the big man grunted. "Big outfits are going to be chewed up by nesters moving in on them. You ought to know. A man has got to own his own land legally before he can fence it off. That's why your range is inside Roman Four now, amigo."

Kennett nodded.

The big man picked up the coil of wire, marched on to the next post. He yanked the wire taut with a heave of his huge shoulders.

"Come on, you barbed wire cowhands!" he yelled. "Let's get this damned job done."

THE fence marched steadily on throughout the day, three taut strands of barbed wire reaching implacably forward toward Saber's gaunt ridge.

Kennett hated the fence. Yet he recognized the waste of the old methods. Over-grazed range and cattle that seldom put on enough weight to bring a top price. Fences would put an end to such waste. A man would graze smaller herds, but his cattle would grade higher. Quality and breeding would build up the profits.

At mid-afternoon the fence was up against the shoulder of the ridge, at last at its end. Kennett stepped down from his horse, and stood at the ruins of what had once been his cabin and the promise of all his dreams, and he looked with moody resentment at the tight strands of wire standing so hard and hostile on the grass.

The fence ended just past the stone foundation he had built for the house, and he remembered the day he had first come to this place with Rita Devore.

"Build our house here, Ross," she had said. "Here is where I want to live forever."

"Forever is a long time, Rita."

"Not half long enough, darling."

He had kissed her, and afterward they had moved into the shade of that towering old cottonwood, and on an impulse he had taken out his knife and carved their initials into that gnarled bark, with a heart around them, pierced by an arrow. . . .

Kennett turned now toward the ancient cottonwood. The few times he had been here before since his return to the valley he had not found it possible to go to that tree.

He did now, scissoring his long legs through the barbed wire fence, and approaching the tree slowly. The initials were still there, softened and rounded by the three years that had passed, and he could see the crudely shaped heart, the piercing arrow.

A thought stirred, deep in his mind. *I loved you, Rita.*

He had loved her, and perhaps a part of her would always be in him. And that was right, he thought, and good. But there was another life for him now and another dream, and he knew that that, too, was right. It was what Rita would have wanted for him.

He heard the sound of approaching horses, and raised his head. It was Ward Templin coming up, and Ann was with him. They drew rein, and swung out of saddle, and Templin's gaze shifted briefly to the initials on the tree.

"I've noticed them before, Kennett. It must be kind of rough on you, this tree being inside my fence now."

Kennett moved his shoulders. "Not so rough," he said. "A man remembers, and he forgets."

Templin looked around, frowning.

Kennett smiled. "I doubt if you'd understand. I believe Miss Jefford does." He looked at Ann, and deep in her eyes there was warmth and a smile.

Some distance away a man suddenly shouted. "Riders coming!"

They came racking along the line fence, Andy Devore and his Oxbow crew, backed by Charley Higgs' Fence Rail and Ty McDonogh with his Bear Paw outfit.

Kennett saw his crew of fence-stringers, none of them armed, break and scatter before that on-rolling cavalcade, and an Oxbow man sent out a long derisive howl after them.

Kennett turned sharply to Ann Jefford. "There may be shooting. Get away from here, Ann."

Templin's voice bit out at him. "She's safe enough here. It's the fence they're after—and you, Kennett!"

He looked around at the man, seeing the jeering shadow of Templin's smile, the opaque coldness in his eyes. *He must know I suspect him. He's hoping Devore will kill me.* And he knew with a deep thrust of dismay that Andy Devore would not pass up this chance to kill him.

He heard the brittle strike of Little Tex Adams' warning from across the fence. "Love of God, Ross! Are you going to stand there and wait for them to take you? Get moving, man!"

Kennett pivoted toward the fence, and instantly heard the strident blare of Devore's shout.

"If he tries to get through the wire to his horse, shoot down that son!"

Kennett halted, knowing then that he could never reach his horse in time. Not with Andy Devore wanting his hide with the same implacable fury that had brought him out to destroy Templin's fence. A coldness spilled through him, dismal with the certainty of Devore's intentions, and then out of that flowed the rakehell anger that always had its way with him in tight and thorny moments. He stepped back a pace, putting distance between him and Ward Templin, for now he knew that man could not be trusted.

THE cavalcade came on at a steady, unswerving lope, an imposing aggregation of riders with their hands near holstered weapons. Quick eyes and hard lips and the set shoulders of men with violence riding strong through them.

Andy Devore rode at their head, his back ramrod straight, a grizzled little bulldog of a man with temper in the harsh thrust of his pale eyes. The men behind him reined in abruptly as though at an unspoken signal, lining out along the fence at bleak attention.

Devore rode on another full rod before halting. His gaze slapped briefly at Kennett, and in that was the full strike of his hating promise.

"You should have made a run for your horse while you had the time, Kennett."

"And get hung up in that barbed wire?" Ross said. "I don't like to bet on such short odds, Andy."

"You've made them shorter yet, by waiting," Devore said flatly. "You're packing a gun, Kennett. Start reaching."

Kennett stared across the wire at the cowman. He said softly, "Andy, you've turned Injun."

Devore's face suddenly blackened with unchecked fury. "I warned you, Kennett," he said, and his voice was a harsh blare of hate. "You've got a gun. Use it, damn you."

In the crowd behind the Oxbow owner, Ty McDonogh raised a nervous protest. "Now, not so fast, Andy."

"You keep out of this, McDonogh. I'm running this show."

McDonogh drifted his horse away from the fence, a gaunt man with strain etched into the lines of his face.

He said heavily, "Tearing down this fence is one thing, Andy. So is driving Kennett out of the country. But I

didn't agree to back you while you forced a private killing."

"By God, McDonogh!" Devore flared savagely.

"That's how it stands," McDonogh said plainly. "You force a shooting here, and I'm pulling Bear Paw out of this."

For a moment Kennett thought the Oxbow owner was going to reach for his gun in spite of Ty McDonogh's ultimatum. Then something changed in his face, and he swung his attack abruptly toward Ward Templin.

"You're a newcomer on this range, mister, and this time you've stepped out too damn far. You put up this fence, and we're here to see it go down."

A feeling of puzzled wariness sharpened in Kennett. He stepped back another pace, and Devore's stare was instantly on him, hand dropping quickly to his gun. Kennett halted, and now the answer was plain to him. *He'll crowd Templin into a fight, and that'll give him his chance at me.*

Templin said coldly, "I want to warn you, Devore. I spent good money to have this fence put up, and it is on my land. You do any damage here, and you'll answer to Glen Sumner for it."

"Do any damage to this fence?" Andy Devore barked contemptuously. "Why, man, we've already ripped down half a mile or more of your wire down the line."

Templin's eyes clouded with sudden temper.

Devore laughed harshly. "Maybe you'd like to see a sample of our work right here! We're willing to oblige, mister. Creasey, Danvers, Case—show the man!"

This, then, was the time. The promise was in Andy Devore's hard face, in the twist of his mouth, in the arrogance and gritty intolerance that stood so tall and plain in his eyes.

Kennett turned his head. Up on the rim of the ridge, a shadow moved. He saw it, and understood. Templin's men up there, staked out and ready. It came to Kennett then that this fight was a thing Ward Templin had expected and prepared for. Had even wanted.

He looked at Ann, and saw the agony of dread that was in her eyes. Her eyes moved, an urgent appeal crying out silently at him. She looked toward her horse, and brought her gaze back to Kennett. She stepped away from the animal, and Kennett understood that she was giving him this thin shard of a chance to escape.

Stubbornness was in him, and hard anger. It wasn't in him to run from any man or any fight, and yet deep in him was a realistic streak that weighed his chances and warned him against the futility of any stand here against Devore. He was a marked man, condemned by Andy Devore's unreasoning hate, and doomed by Ward Templin's suspicions. He knew then that pride would only buy him his grave, that if there was any hope at all for him to survive this day it lay with the horse Ann had silently offered to him.

He saw the three Oxbow riders bend out from their saddles to the fence, wire cutters gripped in their gloved hands.

And up on the ridge a rifle spoke.

He heard, high overhead, the whispery wind-rush of the bullet and then the vicious impact of it striking flesh and bone; and he heard Bud Creasey's torn scream of agony as he sagged and went down.

Those things were the small glittering images of sight and sound that raked a man's mind and slashed steel-sharp along his nerves with their fury. Those were the splintered fragments of knowing and dreading that rode in Ross Kennett's mind as he spun and threw himself toward Ann's horse.

In the blur of that moment he saw Andy Devore's hand stab down, and rise, and flame. He heard the driven anger of the bullet that had been meant to kill and had only narrowly missed him. Devore fired again.

The horse veered wildly to one side in startled panic. Kennett lunged after it, caught the saddle horn with both hands, and felt himself instantly whipped bodily around as the animal spun away in a frantic effort to escape.

His mind was a kaleidoscope, broken chips of violence reflecting themselves with fleeting clarity. A cry of pain . . . gouting black smoke pierced through by swift flame . . . a man's contorted face . . . roiling dust and the senseless pitching of a riderless horse.

Up on the ridge rifles were crashing with methodical deadliness, and he knew some of those slugs were meant for him. But the screening cottonwood made him an indistinct target, and the spinning of the panicked horse protected him from Devore's gun. Along the fence men were shouting their hate into that rising flame of violence. Devore's gun blared again.

A man's full-throated yell broke out. "Give him his chance, Devore! Let him go, damn you!" It was Little Tex Adams' shout.

Kennett closed in on the horse, still gripping the horn, and threw himself up into the saddle. He grabbed for the reins, yanked them brutally, halting the animal's wild pitching. A single bitter thought raged through his mind. *Devore wants this fight, I'll give it to him.* And he raked the fence line for the cowman, but could not locate him in that turbulence of dust and milling riders.

Adams' hoarse shout laced urgently through all that violence. "Get clear, Kennett—get away!"

And he heard Ann's frantic cry. "Now, Ross—now!"

He hauled the horse around, rammed it with his heels, and felt it stretch out in a startled burst of speed. *It's me Devore wants, not Adams and the rest.* He tore through a thicket of brush, and heard Devore's cry of hating rage as he went plunging down

"I can't see why Ward wastes his time up here. He hasn't been outside all weekend."

into an arroyo beyond the reach of the cowman's gun. A pair of slugs whipped past him, slashing the earth in front of his racing mount. *That's from Templin's stake-outs up on the ridge!* He rode low in the saddle, veering his horse as much as possible within the limits of that narrow arroyo. The rifles up on the ridge kept up their slamming racket as he fought for time and distance. A slug struck a rock at one side, screaming. Then he felt, more than actually heard, the meaty impact of a bullet striking home. His horse stumbled in full stride, caught itself, lunged on. *If I can get to the badlands,* he thought, *I might have a chance.* But he doubted his horse could make it.

The racket of gunfire slid away behind him. Silence came, broken only by the pounding hoofbeats of the horse under him and the sound of its strained breathing.

Kennett saw the blood, then. The bullet had struck the animal high on the withers, making an ugly wound as it ranged downward into the body. It had come, Kennett knew, from high above the line fence, from the crew of gunmen Ward Templin had staked out along the rim of Saber ridge.

The animal falted, then picked up its stride again, but weaker now. Kennett looked back over his shoulder, but he was not being followed—not yet. *If I can get into the badlands,* he thought, *I'll have a chance.*

Chapter Seventeen

HERE in this gaunt pocket of the badlands heat dwelt, and danger. The horse was dead, the last threads of its life spent to travel this final brutal mile. The afternoon sun was falling low and pale in the sky.

Squatting on his heels, Kennett poked the stub of his cigarette into the red earth and watched its smoke fade. A man was born and traveled his brief trail across the land, and he ended up squatting in a raw, red-earth badlands pocket watching the smoke of his cigarette fade and die.

He grunted softly, stood up. His horse lay dead where it had fallen in its tracks. Tonight the scavengers would find it, and tomorrow the buzzards would come.

It was a hard and implacable land, but a thrifty one. The dead fed the living, and the droppings of the scavengers were food for the hungry soil. There was no waste in this gaunt land.

Kennett stood tall in the gathering haze of dusk, listening to the silence with a kind of weary resentment. Any sound, however small and meaningless, would have been a relief. It was the silence and the waiting that hurt, not the final fury of a fight.

That he was being grimly and relentlessly hunted, he had no doubt. As long as he lived or Andy Devore lived, Oxbow would hunt him, for on this day Devore had breached the line of which there was no return. He had lost himself to his own hate and blind intolerance, and now he was, if not yet in fact, a killer. Ross regretted that, for there had once been much good in the man.

Inaction dragged heavily on Kennett's nerves, and he turned to the raw earth wall behind him and started climbing. A dozen feet up from the barren floor of the cut the earth gave way under him, and he went skidding down in a cloud of dust.

He moved off to a new place, and tackled the wall again, doggedly. There was only scant vegetation in this gutted badlands, the earth eroded and all but denuded by floods and winter winds.

He fought his way stubbornly upward, digging his boots into the raw earth and clutching at any support his hands could find, tasting the salt of his sweat as he neared the crest.

The hill was not as high as he had thought. It did not give him much of a view. He could look across those knobs and grotesquely eroded spires and shelving cutbanks to the limits of the badlands, less than a mile in each direction around him.

But only in the near distance could he see down into those raw gashes through which so much danger could travel. Nothing moved. He frowned. It did not seem possible that he could have so easily lost the men who were hunting him, or that they had so quickly given up the trail. Yet nothing moved or sounded to warn him of danger.

Then he saw the dust. It was a thin, tawny haze some distance to the south, near where the road from Spurlock swung close to the rim of the badlands.

For a long moment Kennett watched that thin drift of dust, marking its slow but steady progress above that maze of arroyos and red-earth canyons. Not enough dust to be the Oxbow crew, or Ward Templin's outfit, for he knew now without doubt that Templin wanted him killed.

More likely than not, Kennett concluded bleakly, Andy Devore was combing these badlands alone, pinning his unrelenting hate on the maxim that one man on a hunt often killed more meat than a large party.

Or that thin trail of dust could be made by one or two of Ward Templin's hired gunmen. By Jess Doolin, Clyde Ive, or that gun-fast Brazil Nasch. Or by that Apache-Mex they called Pico. It would be like that one to make a lone hunt for Kennett's scalp.

Impatience rubbed roughly through Ross, and a steady rise of rankled temper. He palmed his Colts, and started picking his way down the steep pitch of the hill.

"Might have a little trouble finding me," he murmured bleakly. "I'll make it a little easier for him."

ANN was making a circle around the rim of the badlands for the second time that late afternoon when she cut the all but indiscernable markings of hoof tracks in the loose dry earth. Wind had softened their outlines so that she had missed them the first time around.

They appeared to angle toward the badlands from the direction of the Spurlock road, and this came as a surprise to her. She had expected Ross to make his way into this tangled wasteland from the north.

She turned her horse along those shadowy tracks in the dust, feeling the urgent pressure of time, for the sun was already low in the west. She knew she had to locate Ross before dark, or she might never find him in time.

The tracks pointed into the badlands, and clung desperately to them. She was not good at this sort of thing. Time and again they faded out completely in that loose earth, and she knew the swift chill of despair. But always she managed to pick them up again, reasoning logically that the only possible passage for a rider in this wasteland was along those ever-twisting arroyos and cutbank canyons.

Once she had the impression that she was following the trail of two horses, not one. She dropped out of saddle and studied the tracks closely, without learning any more than she had known before. They were tracks, the only ones she had been able to find leading into this natural hiding place for a hunted man, and all she could do was follow them—and hope.

They threaded even deeper through those narrow cuts. Dust followed her, rising in a thin, powdery cloud behind her walking horse. Gloom was gathering in these deep narrow places, and she was finding it increasingly difficult to stay with the trail.

She came to a place where a cutbank above had broken loose and slid down, blocking off the deep ravine she was in. She forced her horse up over that huge debris of loose earth, but when she was past it she could no longer see the tracks.

She traveled on, but could not pick up the sign again. She turned into a side-cut, bending low from her saddle to scan the earth. But it was a futile search. She had lost the trail.

She turned back, retracing her route

as she had so many times before to the place where the trail had faded out. She back-tracked the trail, but at no place could she find sign indicated that the rider had doubled-off into one of those many little side canyons.

There was no longer any uncertainty in her mind. The trail traveled up to where the upper cutbank had caved away in a landslide—and there it vanished.

She could not understand that. The desire swept through her to call out for Ross through that eternal smother of silence, but there was too much danger in that. She had no way of knowing about Ward Templin and his killers, and that was a danger she dared not risk.

She turned in her saddle, looking up at the place where the cutbank high above had broken away. The thought came into her then, and the swift, dredging fear.

Her gaze kept traveling down the face of that raw scar on the earth—and then she saw the heel of a boot. The scream was in her. It was a bright, glittering thing that spilled through her mind, a rending, tearing echo that clawed upward through her throat without ever finding full release.

"Ross," she whispered. *"Ross!"*

She threw herself out of the saddle, and went scrambling up that loose slant of earth. She tore the dirt away from the boot, gripped it, and pulled with all the frantic power in her body. It did not move.

SHE dropped to her knees, clawing away the dirt with her hands until the man's legs were exposed. And then the hips. And then the back with the ghastly wounds showing between the shoulders. She kept tearing away the earth in a frantic madness of despair, knowing that this was the finality of death, but unable to accept the reality of it. She rolled the body over, and she saw the face.

And she screamed.

She heard her name called. "Ann!"

She couldn't stop screaming.

"Ann—Ann!"

Hands pulled her roughly around so that she was no longer looking at that horror of death. And then she saw Ross, and felt his hands hard on her shoulders, shaking her back to sanity.

"Ross," she murmured, and her voice was a thin, glassy sound. "I thought he was you. I was so sure he was you. I kept digging the dirt away from him, and I couldn't make myself stop digging, and I thought, Ross, I thought . . ."

"Don't talk about it, Ann."

She clung close to him, waiting for the terror to fade.

"I'm better now," she said.

"Who is he, Ann? Do you know?"

Ann nodded. "His name is Charley Ingalls. He was the surveyor Ward hired to lay out the line for his fence."

Pressure thinned Kennett's lips, and he frowned.

"Ross?" Ann said.

"Yes?"

"I think it was Ward who murdered him. Or ordered Brazil Nasch or one of the others to do it. Could it have anything to do with that survey, Ross?"

"I don't know, Ann."

"He was shot in the back, Ross—twice between the shoulders."

Kennett was silent, his gaze hard across the loose earth where the dead man lay. Murdered, yes. Two shots between the shoulders, at close range. A child's hand could cover those two holes in the surveyor's back. That meant careful shooting. And afterward the killer had caved in the cutbank to hide the body.

Ann said, her voice low and quick, "I was hunting for you, Ross. I picked up some tracks near where the road swings in close to the badlands. I followed them. They were never very clear, and several times I had the impression that the trail had been made by two horses. Now I'm sure I was right—the murderer's horse and the one Charley Ingalls was riding."

Kennett nodded grimly. "You're probably right, Ann," he said quietly. "All I know is that you've got to get out of this place, away from me. It's only a matter of time before Andy Devore's outfit or Ward Templin and his crew track me down. When that happens, I don't want you to be around."

"Then you don't know about Devore," Ann said softly. "He's dead, Ross."

Surprise touched Kennett, and a shadowy sense of regret. Hard-willed and intolerant, Andy Devore had been. But there had also been much good in the man, and it had been twisted and soured by tragedy and hate; and in a remote, uncertain way Kennett felt somehow responsible.

Ann said, "That big man who worked for you—Tex Adams—pulled Devore down from his horse to keep him from shooting you. I've never seen such rage as was in Devore's face that moment. He . . . he wasn't sane, Ross. He cursed Adams, and then killed him in cold blood. Devore was trying to get back into the saddle to follow you when one of Templin's men up on the ridge killed him."

A sadness and self-blaming regret rolled heavily through Kennett. Rita was dead, and now her father . . . and Little Tex Adams, who had been a friend.

Ann saw what was in his eyes, and cried out softly against it. "It's not your fault, Ross. You mustn't blame yourself."

Kennett took a slow breath. "I reckon." Then a smile broke the harsh bitterness from his mouth. "Thanks, Ann," he said softly.

The last light of day was fading out of the sky.

"You've got to get out of here," Ann said, and her tone was sharp with urgency. "This is the first place Templin and his men will start hunting for you."

KENNETT smiled stonily. "They're probably combing this tangle right now. Not like that crowd to let me stay alive any longer than they have to."

"Ward Templin and his men are in Spurlock," Ann told him impatiently. "You're not the only wheel on his wagon, Ross, or even the biggest right now. Ward must know you suspect him, or he wouldn't have had one of his men try to kill you today. But you can't prove anything, and he knows that, too."

A lock of hair fell down across her eyes, and she pushed it back with an agitated thrust of her hand.

"When Andy Devore was killed today most of the fight went out of Ty McDonogh and Charley Higgs. If they hadn't called off their men when they did, Templin's guns up there on the ridge would have cut them to ribbons. I think Templin was disappointed the fight didn't last longer. I think it was his plan to weaken Bear Paw and Fence Rail as well as destroy Oxbow. He's a weed, Ross. He's sunk his roots in this valley, and he'll keep growing and spreading out until he has taken over everything. I've learned that much about Ward Templin the last few weeks."

Ross nodded moodily. He echoed Ann's appraisal of the man. There was no lid to Ward Templin's ambitions, and deep below the man's surface candor Ross sensed the honed steel, the hard and gritty avarice. And the sharp-veined shrewdness. Through these mirrors Ross saw a man capable of building up a gang and ruthlessly raiding a few small ranchers until they were destroyed, and then coming into the valley later under the guise of respectability to plant the seeds of an empire. Kennett believed these things, but as Ann had said, he had no proof.

Ann said, "After the fight today, Ward got his men together and rode in to Spurlock. He wanted to be the first to tell the sheriff about that shooting. He wants the law and the sympathy of the town behind him. But they'll be back here tonight, Ross. They'll hunt for you until they find you. And then they will kill you."

Chapter Eighteen

FROM here where the oaks screened the rim of the ridge the valley stretched out in all its immensity, pale white under the full moon, like scraped bone. There was a bite to the night air, the smell of a storm in the fitful, gusty bursts of breeze that came slapping down-valley from the north. Thunderheads that had for the last two hours been building up over the mountains were starting to roll southward, laced now and then by streaky pitchforks of lightning. Not long now, Ross thought, until the moon was swallowed behind those approaching clouds. When that happened he would be able to relax a notch or two.

He squatted motionless beneath the overhang of the oaks, studying the valley restlessly. In this crystal atmosphere a man could read a newspaper under the light of a full moon. From where he squatted the details of the valley were etched sharp and clear to Kennett's gaze, but without the brittle brilliance a day's sun gave to them.

He could make out the pinpoint lights at the Bear Paw and Fence Rail ranch houses, where the outfits of Higgs and Ty McDonogh were rubbing their bruises of the day. Kennett could see no lights at Oxbow. *Those boys will stay in town tonight, with Andy's body.*

It was the badlands, not more than four miles away from the high spine of Saber ridge, that held Kennett's attention. Two hours ago he had seen Ward Templin and his crew poke their way into that tangle to start their hunt. It would take them time to comb those wastes, but Kennett knew better than to build any hopes on that promise. Sooner or later they would pick up his trail in the pale brilliance of this moonlight, and it would not take that halfbreed Pico long to line out the direction of Kennett's flight. Only the storm, if he reached the valley soon enough, could save him from that crew of determined gunmen once they had picked up his trail.

Kennett lifted his gaze to the advancing thunderheads. Another half hour yet, he judged grimly. He drew his Colts, and thumbed a shell into the empty chamber on which the hammer normally rested. After that, he settled back to wait.

He thought of Ann with a steady nagging worry. It had been her idea that she ride to town to get help from Glen Sumner. Whether or not the sheriff would elect to give that help Ross had no idea. A lawman no longer young would know the wisdom of caution in a situation torn by cross-currents of jealousy and hate.

Nothing had been settled by the fight at Templin's line fence. Andy Devore was dead, the power of Oxbow forever broken; but Fence Rail and Bear Paw remained as a strong force to be reckoned with. That Ward Templin had staked his gun-skilled crew up on the ridge where they could command the fence with their rifles—this would carry no weight with Glen Sumner except to tighten his respect for Roman Four. It was within Templin's rights to protect his property as best he could against armed trespassers. And Templin, reflected Kennett bleakly, had done an efficient job of protecting.

Sumner was not a hasty man. As long as Ann could offer no proof that Templin had murdered Charley Ingalls, as long as she could present no factual evidence of Templin's perfidy, then Glen Sumner might refuse to ride with Ann. A prudent man would not leap into the dark without first determining where he would land.

There was movement down there at the rim of the badlands. Kennett got to his feet, his gaze narrowing on that distant place. It had been a brief, shadowy movement, and he could no longer find it with his eyes, for a thin skin of clouds had fanned across the moon, dimming the light.

He waited, a rising tension honing his nerves sharp. A flash of light speared the faraway thunderheads, and a booming rolled distantly. Wind came gusting up the slant of the ridge, smelling of rain. He thought narrowly, *storm may not get here in time.*

He caught the movement again, the slow drift of mounted men across the valley floor, away from the badlands toward the ridge. All doubt dropped out of him. That halfbreed Pico had picked up his trail.

Kennett smiled thinly. The knowing was at least a shade easier to take than the uncertainty of waiting. A sort of hard and thorny impatience to have all this over with rowelled his mind. *Come along, boys; you're doing real fine.*

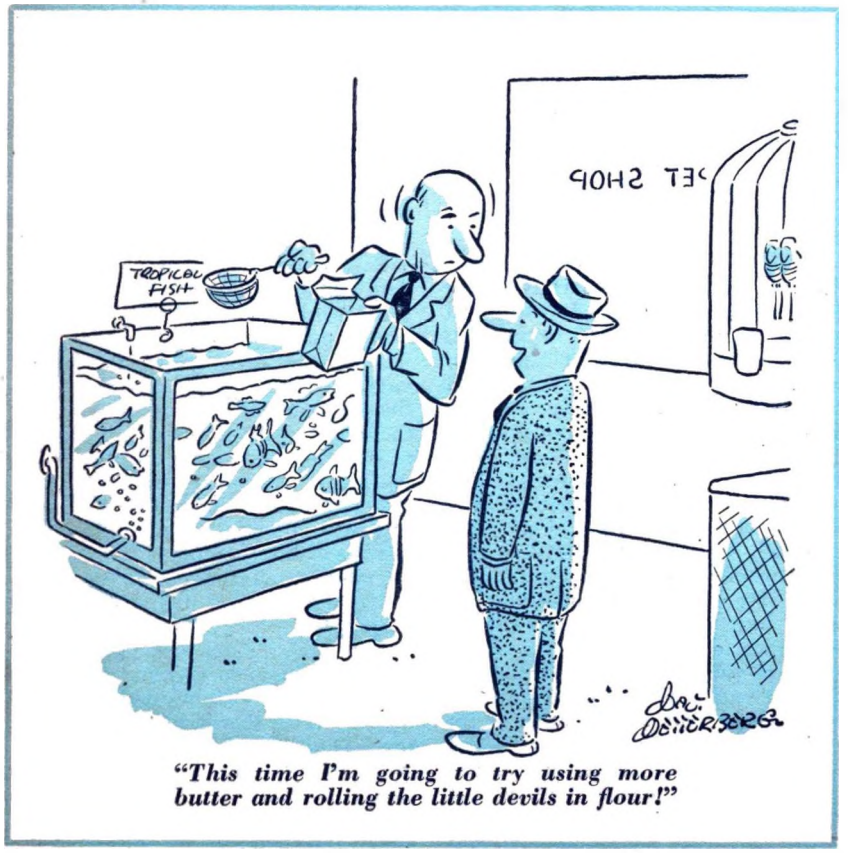
A sound, like the breathy grunt of a straining horse, scraped through the silence. Kennett instantly spun, palming his gun. He caught the movement of riders working their way up the opposite slope of the ridge, and he stepped at once into the deeper darkness beneath the oaks. He raised his gun, calling out a thin challenge.

"*Quien es?* Sing out, fellow!"

The movement of the riders abruptly froze. A man called up the slope, his voice on-edge and querulous.

"That you, Kennett? You damn Injun, we've hunted all over for you." It was Glen Sumner's voice.

A long sigh of relief whispered from Kennett, and he holstered his gun. The riders reined in and dismounted



"This time I'm going to try using more butter and rolling the little devils in flour!"

below the crest of the ridge, wary of the sky line. They climbed the remaining distance on foot, Will Hanrahan, Sherm Crawford, and Ed Harroll, followed closely by the sheriff.

Kennett studied the Oxbow foreman with dry curiosity, and heard Ed Harroll's acid grunt.

"Eight hours ago I was out to nail your hide to the wall, and now I'm tryin' to help you keep it whole. Kennett, you get a man so he don't know whether he's going some place or has already been."

Kennett grinned crookedly. He looked at Sherm Crawford, who owned Spurlock's feed store.

"I'm obliged to you for coming, Sherm."

"Figure I've been owing you a turn," Crawford said, and in his eyes was the remembering shame of the mob he had helped stir up against Kennett that first day in town.

WILL HANRAHAN was too old a man for the strain of such exertions, his thin face glossy with sweat and all color washed out of it. He sat down immediately after topping the final rise of the ridge, a look of sickness around his mouth as he fought for his wind.

"I've always said cowtown newspapering is undiluted hell for an old man," he said, his breathing shallow and hoarse. "Here I tucker myself out getting a story that I can't print for another week—and by the time I publish it this whole end of the state will already know all the details. Seems quiet enough here. Where are the meat hunters I was told are hunting for you?"

Kennett smiled thinly. "Soon enough, now, Will," he said, and turned to meet the sheriff's stone-steady gaze.

"What's this all about, Kennett?"

Ross appraised the lawman's sour and crusty tone with a moment's thought. "Don't you already know, Glen?"

"Don't play any cat-and-mouse games with me, mister," Sumner snapped in a flat, bitter tone. "All I know is what the Jefford girl told me in town. Two hours ago she busted into my office with a story about that surveyor, Charley Ingalls, being murdered and left under a cutbank in the badlands. What about that?"

"He's there," Kennett said.

"Murdered?"

"Two bullets in the back usually mean murder."

"Remind me tomorrow how smart you are," Sumner grunted. "Any idea who put those bullets in Ingalls' back?"

Kennett nodded. "Ward Templin is my guess."

"It would be." Glen Sumner's frown was brooding, thoughtful. "But maybeso you're right. He left town with Ingalls riding out this way that's a fact. Except for Ann Jefford hunting for you today, that body would have never been found. Maybe that means something; maybe not a damn thing. Nothing I've heard yet would prove in court that Templin did the killing."

He raised his eyes and stared grimly at Kennett, a thinned-down man who wore in his face all the worries and weariness of running an honest office.

He said slowly, "The Jefford girl also handed me a scary story about Roman Four being out after your scalp. Since Templin and his men had already left town, I couldn't ask them about the surveyor being murdered or if they were gunning for you. I had to ride all the way out here just because that girl wouldn't let me alone until I did. But I notice you're still wearing all your hair."

"I wouldn't be if you'd got here an hour or so later," Ross said, and led the lawman clear of the oak's overhang and pointed down the slant of the ridge. "One of that crowd put a bullet in my horse this afternoon. I had to hike it here from the badlands. That's my trail that crew is following."

"So what if it is?" Sumner grunted irritably. "Doesn't mean they're out to murder you, does it?"

"Is it that hard to believe Templin is a crook, sheriff?" Kennett asked, softly bitter.

"Takes a lot more than the babbling of a scary-headed female," Sumner said shortly. "This badge I'm wearin' represents the Law. The Law likes to have a little proof before it ties a can onto a man."

The thunderheads were starting to roll out over the north end of the valley. Lightning slashed its blue-white flame through the far blackness; seconds later a cannonade rolled its vast tumbling thunder.

Kennett pointed. Dimly through the failing light of the moon could be seen the line of Templin's freshly-sawed fence posts.

"Look at that, sheriff. From down in the valley the fence looks good. You'd never guess anything wrong about it—I didn't until I got up here. Templin's fence is straight and clean across the flats. But yonder in them hills, before it got to the flats, it takes a nice, long easy swing to the south. You could ride that fence line all your life and never guess how neat Templin stole several hundred acres of the best graze in this corner of the valley."

Sumner stared into the thickening darkness. He cursed softly. "Something to talk to that fellow about, I reckon."

Then his voice roughened on a bitterly savage note. "It's plain enough, and I keep trying to step around it. That's the hell of having your best years behind you. You see a tough chore ahead of you, and you try to close your eyes and back away from it. When a man gets that way it's time for him to turn in his badge."

"You earn your pay," Ross said sincerely. "No one has ever complained."

"Templin tried to steal that grass with his line fence," Sumner reasoned shortly. "He hired the surveyor to make it look good. When Ingalls came back for another bite out of Templin's wallet, Templin led him into the badlands, put a couple bullets in his back, and dumped a cutbank down on him. It adds. Can't dodge it. Templin was the last man seen with Ingalls before he was killed."

"It won't be easy to take that crowd." Kennett murmured.

"There's five of us, ain't there?" Sumner demanded curtly. "Five of them, countin' that Mex-Injun. Let 'em follow your trail up here. If we can't take them easy, then we'll have to do it the hard way."

The rain came, then. It came pelting across the valley and the high spine of the ridge in a long driving sheet, hurled by a sudden gust of wind. The wind instantly died after its brief thrusting rush and the rain was gone, leaving behind it the pungent earthy odor of damp dust. Not far to the north was the sullen grumbling of the storm rolling full forward.

Then they heard the steady pound of a running horse, and faintly through the blackening darkness they could see a single rider angling sharply toward the ridge. Lightning blazed, flaring the valley in blue-white clarity—a girl cut off and trapped by several in-rushing riders.

A thin cold blade drove into Kennett. "It's Ann!"

"I told that girl to stay in town," Glen Sumner said, and spun to throw his savage shout at the other men.

"Bring up those horses, you men—and hurry!"

Chapter Nineteen

THEY rode through slashing sheets of driven rain, and by the time they reached Spanish Forks there was no longer any semblance of a trail. They pulled up at the ruins of the old Rodriguez house, destroyed in '46 during Kearny's march on Santa Fe. They pressed close to the one high wall that remained intact, and wind lunged at the adobe, driving blinding sheets of rain before it.

Ed Harroll squinted up at the sky. "Storm won't last."

"It's already lasted too long," Glen Sumner said bitterly. "We've lost them. There ain't a ghost of a trail left for us to follow."

Sherm Crawford stirred restlessly in his saddle, a gaunt water-logged man with misery in his eyes.

"Seems to me the best thing is to head for Templin's place and wait for him there."

Glen Sumner twisted around in his saddle, mopping rain from his hard face. "Could you testify it was Templin and his men who grabbed the Jefford girl? Could you get up on the stand and say you recognized that crew?"

A gust of wind swirled around the adobe wall, laced with pelting rain. Seated behind Will Hanrahan on the horse that had been forced to carry double, Kennett felt the shaking of the man's body.

Sherm Crawford was wagging his head wearily. "Reckon you're right, Glen."

"We've got to round up that bunch tonight," Sumner said flatly. "For all we know, Templin has moved Ingalls' body and done a better job of hiding it. Even if it's still there where Ann Jefford found it, we've got nothing solid against Templin. And he can claim the surveyor must have made a mistake laying out the line for the fence. A good lawyer can keep Templin clean on those two counts. Only thing we've got against him is grabbing the girl, and that won't be worth a tinkers dam if we don't get him tonight while he's on the jump."

Ed Harroll muttered sourly, "A night like this he's got the whole world to lose himself in. No telling what he'll do to shut up that girl."

Will Hanrahan's thin frame was shaking from wetness and cold.

Ross Kennett said softly, "There's enough dry wood around here for you to get a fire up, Will. This is as far as you go."

He helped the old man out of the saddle, and dug into the litter of rubble for wood. He built a fire close to the sheltering wall, and then swung back into the saddle.

The storm was beginning to lose its power, rolling away steadily to the south. Up-valley, the clouds were showing signs of thinning and breaking. Kennett looked up at the towering adobe wall, and against the screen of his memory flickered the shadowy images of another night. A night of blackness and bitterness and relentless hate.

There had been a wall of adobe before him, and he had bent around it to travel steadily to the west, toward the mountains, following a trail that was not marked by visible impressions on the earth, but by something savage and compelling inside him—an implacable knowing.

"We'll go this way," Kennett said, and turned his horse to the west.

Glen Sumner shot him a searching glance. "More likely they're heading for the malpais, or cutting south toward the border."

"We'll go west," Kennett said, and swung off in that direction without fully understanding why he was doing so.

They breached the foothills of the mountains, traveling steadily. The rain had stopped, and the sky was clearing. Moonlight broke through a hole in the clouds, and detailed the stark notch of a lightning-struck boulder high on the hill above.

There was the sharp vee of a gunsight standing against the sky, and he had traveled through the night below it, crying out for a dead girl as he rode.

The valley they were in forked against a ridge, and Kennett pointed his horse directly up that steep place and down the yonder slope. Glen Sumner called abruptly for a halt, and dropped out of his saddle and scratched a match. He looked up sharply.

"Tracks here," he said, and his voice was softly explosive. "By the eternal, Kennett, how did you know?"

Kennett shook his head. He did not know. There was no answer to this thing so deep and urgent in him, driving him on through the night. He was another man in another saddle on another night, a man whose eyes had been blinded by tears as he rode.

He was a man following a memory that he could not remember.

The tracks, seen once, again faded and vanished on that rain-washed earth. Kennett led steadily to the west, and the land steepened and roughened. The peaks of mountains stood rawboned against the night sky. The moon was again gone. Somewhere on a ledge high above, a mountain lion screamed.

There had been a file of pines on a saddle between two humped peaks, the foliage standing like delicate black lace against the night sky—like the lace on the new dress Rita had worn to that Masonic dance.

Kennett turned his head. He raised his eyes. Up there in the saddle was the file of pines and the foliage that was like black lace.

"We'll go on foot from here," he said.

Ed Harroll stared at him. "You sure you know what you're doing, Ross?"

"Not exactly," Kennett said, and it was an honest answer.

Sherm Crawford wagged his head uncomprehendingly.

"I wish Doc Earnshaw was here," Glen Sumner grumbled. "Maybe he could tell me what this is all about."

They climbed, picking their way guardedly through the rocks and brush, carrying their rifles. Near the crest, Kennett dropped to hands and knees, crawling. A thought drifted through his mind, *This is something I did once before.*

But there was no real memory in him.

Only the shadows of the dream.

And then they were across the ridge, bellyflat on the ground, with their rifles thrust out in front of them.

Down there at the foot of the talus, in that gaunt, rocky pocket, was the camp fire. And the men hunkered around it, the rough murmur of their voices rising up the bony slope. Ward Templin and his men. Ward Templin and his killers. Back there in the darkness beyond the fire was Ann Jefford, her arms and legs tied.

"By God!" Glen Sumner murmured. "Then everything you said that day in court was true!"

The dream that had haunted Ross Kennett those three years in Leavenworth vanished. Memory flowed into him. It was like a door swinging open in his mind, and now he could see into that locked room with bitter clarity.

He shifted his outthrust hand, and a rock went rattling down the steep slope. He remembered another rock rattling down that slope three years ago, and the way the outlaws, instantly warned by its fall, spun away from the fire as those men down there were now doing, slashing up their guns.

The Winchester jarred against Kennett's shoulder, and he saw the half-breed, Pico, spin loosely and go down. Then there was lead screaming around him, and other rifles at his flanks crashing, and he saw Clyde Ivy sag and fall. Jess Doolin went drifting away from the fire, clutching his stomach where a bullet had torn into his body, and Brazil Nasch was leaning against a boulder, staring off blankly into space, and Ward Templin was racing desperately toward his horse.

Then Kennett was running down the loose talus, skidding and sliding, and when he reached the bottom he threw the Winchester to his shoulder. But Templin was down, the horse pitching wildly around his still body. Kennett let his rifle fall.

He pulled away the ropes and helped Ann to her feet, drawing her close to him.

"It's all over, Ann," he said.

She looked up at him, and into her face came the softness of knowing.

"No, Ross," she said gently. "This is only the beginning." •

RELAX and ENJOY

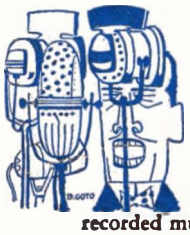
MOVIES

Adventure: ***Sea of Lost Ships*** (Republic). Using authentic shots from Coast Guard files, this action drama of the North Atlantic ice patrols and the men of the Coast Guard is better than average movie fare and has several strong moments, including a ship trapped by an iceberg and its successful rescue by the Coast Guard. The plot is pretty much an excuse to tie the action scenes together and as such it is adequate. John Derek plays the young man who was thrown out of the Coast Guard Academy and is now trying to work his way up through the enlisted ranks to keep alive the family tradition. Wanda Hendrix and Richard Jaeckel have strong supporting roles and play them well, with a minimum of interference to the main action line of the Coast Guard at work.

Sea: ***All the Brothers Were Valiant*** (MGM). Robert Taylor, Stewart Granger and Ann Blyth bring out the best in this story of whaling ships and the men whose lives were devoted to bringing home the bacon of that romantic age—sperm oil. Stewart Granger is the no-good brother whose desire for his brother's bride keeps the action bouncing along by starting a mutiny and then dying heroically as he helps quell the mutiny after he has had a change of heart. There's plenty of exciting action and extremely good Technicolor, and it all adds up to a pleasant evening.

Prison: ***Albert, R.N.*** (Eros Films). A good successor to ***Stalag 17*** (which this column missed until after deadline and which you shouldn't miss if possible), this British film may escape attention because it has few names that are familiar to American audiences. The story, however, is excellent. The scene is a German prison camp during World War II, and the plot, of course, concerns how to escape. The various escape attempts that are made and the last-minute captures combine with an excellent demonstration of the battle against boredom to keep the suspense at a high pitch through the entire film. "Albert, R.N." is the dummy constructed to delay the discovery that a prisoner has escaped, in case you've been wondering.

RECORDS



Jazz: Apparently motivated by the unprecedented success of their Limited Edition release of the music of the late Glenn Miller, and noting with envy the record-breaking sales of Columbia's two albums of the Benny Goodman Orchestra of fifteen years ago, RCA Victor is going back into their copious files of fifty years of recorded music to bring out a series of collections of the best work of the great artists who have recorded for them in the past. You can expect a new anthology about once a month, every one of which will be worth adding to your collection. Since Victor's roster of artists ranges from Nick La Rocca's "Original Dixieland Jazz Band" to Dizzy Gillespie's Be Bop All Stars, there's sure to be at least a couple of releases that will appeal to everyone. We're particularly interested to see what selections will be offered from the repertoires of Hal Kemp, Duke Ellington, Bunny Berigan, and Artie Shaw.

BOOKS

Carny: ***Monster Midway*** (Rinehart, $3.75) by William Lindsay Gresham, with a foreword by Gypsy Rose Lee, is subtitled "An Uninhibited Look at the Glittering World of Carny," and it more than lives up to its advance billing. It's all here—the lights, the thumping music, freaks and mitt camps, fire-eaters and crash divers, grind stores and Ferris wheels. Step right up and shiver at the snake charmers, gape at the blood-curdling banners, thrill to the roller coasters. This is the one, the only, the supercolossal book on the carnival and its history, famous and infamous, by the man who really knows. Bill Gresham's previous book, fictional ***Nightmare Alley***, has been called the best carny book ever written, and this non-fiction treatment is its equal on the same subject.

TELEVISION

Adventure: This seems to be the year for situation comedies in TV. Nearly all of the new shows that have the accent on warmth and lovability—or what passes for that on TV. All of which leaves adventure fans out in the cold. But the situation isn't as bad as it might seem, for there is still plenty of solid action to be found. The good adventure shows are still good. Most of them, in fact, are even better. For example, take our old favorite, ***Foreign Intrigue.*** It's still filmed in Europe, with the matchless realism and atmosphere that have marked it from the start. The stories show a definite improvement, with the situations far more credible than of old, and are somehow amazingly topical, despite the fact that the films are made from four to six months in advance of the TV showing. Another big plus is the addition to the cast of James Daly as the American newsman. He's much more believable than Jerome Thor used to be. Daly even manages to look worried once in a while, leaving the strong, silent stuff to his trench-coated predecessor—which is where it belongs.

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RING AROUND THE SUN, *by Clifford D. Simak* — They begged Bob Vickers to help destroy the "mutants"—a strange new race with mysterious powers. But then Bob found that he himself was a mutant!

THIS ISLAND EARTH, *by Raymond F. Jones*—You're an engineer working on a secret project. When your girl becomes suspicious of your employers, they kidnap her. Then your plane is swallowed up in mid-air by a GIANT FLYING SAUCER.

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